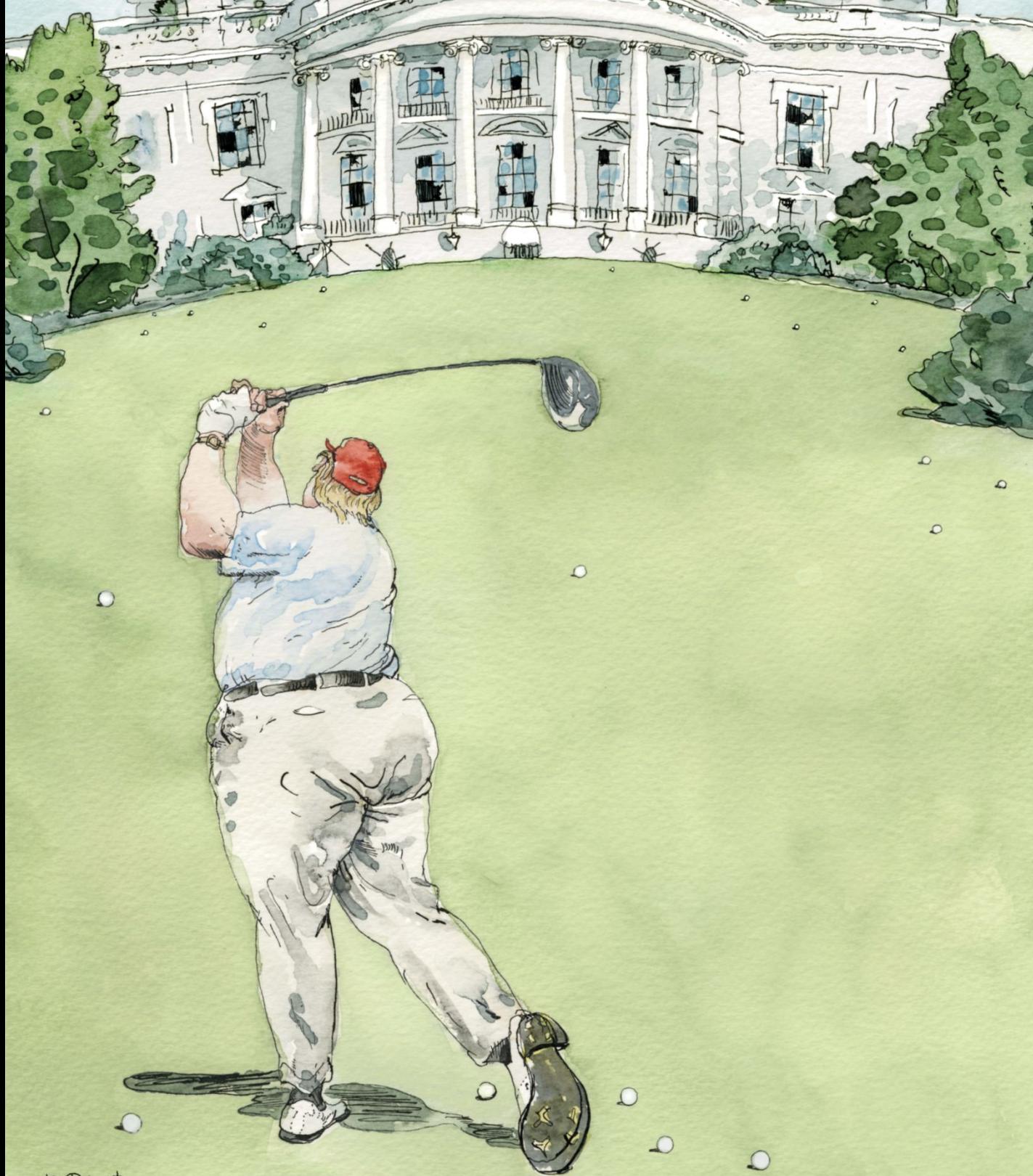


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APRIL 10, 2017

THE NEW YORKER



P. Blitt



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Kristiansand, Vest-Agder Kingdom of Norway

Certificate of Marriage

This marriage certificate authorizes any clergyman within the
Lutheran Church who is in good standing in Kristiansand
Parish in Vest-Agder County to solemnize the marriage of the
parties listed below, after the regulation reading of the banns.

LAURIE

METCALF

CHRIS

COOPER

in the city of Kristiansand, Vest-Agder, Norway
in the presence of

JAYNE

HOUDYSHELL

CONDOLA

RASHAD

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hereunto affixed on this 21st day of December
in the year 1871.

A Doll's House

PART 2

A new play by

LUCAS

HNATH

Directed by

SAM

GOLD

This is to certify that the undersigned unite in marriage
the above named persons, and I further certify that
I am legally qualified to solemnize marriages.

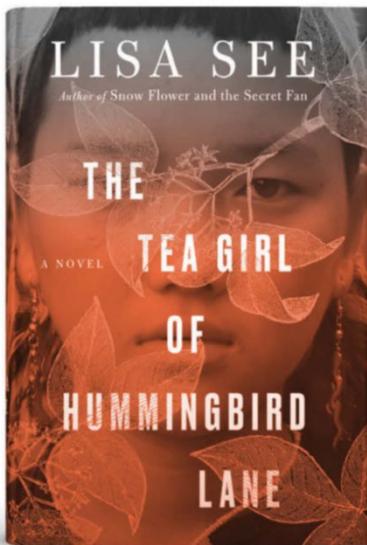
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CONTRIBUTORS

Ben Taub ("We Have No Choice," p. 36) has previously written for the magazine on jihadism, war crimes, and battlefield medicine. Reporting for this piece was facilitated by a grant from the Pulitzer Center on Crisis Reporting.

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VIDEO

Jelani Cobb, Masha Gessen, and others join David Remnick in examining what it means to tell truth to power.

PODCAST

Robert Stavins and Dorothy Wickenden on what Trump doesn't understand about environmental policy.

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THE MAIL

THE BILLIONAIRES' PRESIDENT

As a former corruptions investigator for New York State during the nineteen-seventies, I was pleased to see Jane Mayer's article on the libertarian billionaire Robert Mercer and his family, who spent many millions of dollars to elect Donald Trump ("Trump's Money Man," March 27th). Unfortunately, little attention has been paid to what one Mercer organization, Reclaim New York, has been doing in this state. As Mayer reported, Reclaim, ostensibly a nonprofit advocacy group that opposes government spending, has shared an address with Cambridge Analytica, as well as a corporate officer—Steve Bannon. Reclaim's strategy is to demand extensive data from municipalities and school districts, requests that are used to burden and shame public employees, furthering Reclaim's libertarian and so-called alt-right political agenda throughout the state. The organization has weaponized the state's Freedom of Information Law to "request," and sue for, financial documents from two hundred and fifty villages, towns, and cities in Orange, Westchester, Putnam, and other counties in New York. Reclaim also holds local "workshops" to build a "citizen army" that floods communities with public-information requests. Its ultimate goal is to overwhelm governments and achieve the deconstruction of the administrative state. Through groups like Reclaim, the Mercer family's circle of influence extends far beyond even what Mayer has uncovered.

Joyce St George
New Kingston, N.Y.

Mayer has exposed Mercer just as effectively as she did the Koch brothers, in 2010. But the antidote to all this "dark money" is not the overturning of the Citizens United decision but, rather, the cultivation of increased skepticism and discernment in voters. Birtherism, Holocaust denial, and climate-change denial? The ideological

craziness that reigns today comes mainly from the inability or the refusal to take facts into account. We need to limit our worrying about the power of money and instead figure out how to encourage more well-informed voter participation, which will defeat big money in the long run—and maybe even sooner.

Terry Nienhuis
Williamsburg, Va.

The most disturbing sentence in Mayer's thoroughly disturbing piece is about Robert Mercer's daughter Rebekah, who, Mayer writes, "felt that they needed to investigate why their network had failed to defeat Obama in 2012." Apparently, the fact that the majority of voters preferred Barack Obama was not a satisfactory explanation. In 2016, the Mercers and their associates succeeded in getting their man elected—even though, once again, the majority of voting Americans preferred the other candidate. A handful of billionaires have taken control of our nation, and it seems that we have become a true plutocracy. The Mercers purchase power through lies, which get channelled to the public by way of phony scientists, radio hate-mongers, extremist bloggers and Web sites, and spurious nonprofits with innocuous-sounding names. One falsehood we're hearing frequently at the moment is that America is broke—that we can't afford a safety net for those people who cannot make sufficient money themselves. But, as Mayer points out, there is plenty of money in America—it's just tied up in extravagant homes, luxury yachts, multimillion-dollar model trains, and, now, the government of the United States.

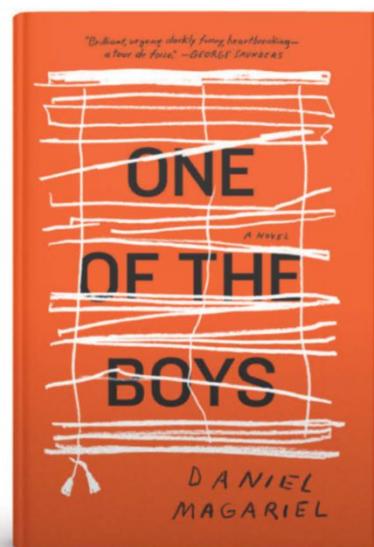
Robert Resnikoff
Stamford, Conn.

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APRIL 5 – 11, 2017

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



Classical-music presenters are placing big bets on new venues, such as Williamsburg's dynamic National Sawdust. But some of the most evocative spaces may be hiding in plain sight—take the Church of the Intercession, a grand Episcopalian pile way uptown on Broadway at 155th St. “**The Crypt Sessions**” (which has hosted the violinist Amy Schroeder, of the Attacca Quartet, above) is drawing capacity audiences; on April 5, it presents “Labyrinth,” a concert by the fascinating Israeli pianist David Greilsammer.

PHOTOGRAPH BY IOULEX

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Anastasia

Darko Tresnjak directs this new musical, by Terrence McNally, Stephen Flaherty, and Lynn Ahrens, drawn from the 1956 and 1997 films about the Russian Grand Duchess. (*Broadhurst*, 235 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

The Antipodes

The playwright Annie Baker ("The Flick") returns, with a piece about storytelling, directed by Lila Neugebauer and featuring Josh Charles, Phillip James Brannon, and Josh Hamilton. (*Pershing Square Signature Center*, 480 W. 42nd St. 212-244-7529. *In previews.*)

Bandstand

Corey Cott and Laura Osnes play a war veteran and a widow who team up to compete in a radio contest in 1945, in this swing musical by Robert Taylor and Richard Oberacker, directed by Andy Blankenbuehler. (*Jacobs*, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Charlie and the Chocolate Factory

Christian Borle plays Willy Wonka in this musical version of the Roald Dahl tale, featuring new songs by Marc Shaiman and Scott Wittman and a book by David Greig. (*Lunt-Fontanne*, 205 W. 46th St. 877-250-2929. *In previews.*)

A Doll's House, Part 2

Lucas Hnath's play, starring Laurie Metcalf, Chris Cooper, Jayne Houdyshell, and Condola Rashad, picks up years after Ibsen's classic leaves off, with the return of its heroine, Nora. Sam Gold directs. (*Golden*, 252 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Gently Down the Stream

In Martin Sherman's new play, set at the beginning of the online-dating era, Harvey Fierstein plays a gay pianist living in London who meets a younger man. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555. *Opens April 5.*)

Groundhog Day

Tim Minchin and Danny Rubin wrote this musical version of the 1993 Bill Murray comedy, about a misanthropic weatherman (Andy Karl) forced to repeat the same day over and over. Matthew Warchus directs. (*August Wilson*, 245 W. 52nd St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Hello, Dolly!

Bette Midler stars as the turn-of-the-century matchmaker Dolly Levi in the Jerry Herman musical from 1964, directed by Jerry Zaks and featuring David Hyde Pierce. (*Shubert*, 225 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

In & of Itself

The magician Derek DelGaudio ("Nothing to Hide") presents an evening of illusions exploring the concept of identity, directed by Frank Oz. (*Daryl Roth*, 20 Union Sq. E. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Indecent

Rebecca Taichman directs Paula Vogel's play, a transfer from the Vineyard, which tells the

story of the controversial 1923 Broadway production of Sholem Asch's Yiddish drama "God of Vengeance." (*Cort*, 138 W. 48th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

The Little Foxes

Laura Linney and Cynthia Nixon trade off roles night to night in Manhattan Theatre Club's revival of the 1939 Lillian Hellman drama, directed by Daniel Sullivan. (*Samuel J. Friedman*, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Oslo

A Broadway transfer of J. T. Rogers's play, directed by Bartlett Sher, which explores how a Norwegian diplomat (Jennifer Ehle) and her husband (Jefferson Mays) secretly helped orchestrate the 1993 Oslo Accords. (*Vivian Beaumont*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

Pacific Overtures

John Doyle directs Stephen Sondheim and John Weidman's musical from 1976, which recounts the opening of nineteenth-century Japan, starring George Takei as the Reciter. (*Classic Stage Company*, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111. *Previews begin April 6.*)

Present Laughter

Kevin Kline plays a narcissistic actor having a midlife crisis, in Moritz von Stuelpnagel's revival of the 1939 Noël Coward comedy. (*St. James*, 246 W. 44th St. 212-239-6200. *Opens April 5.*)

The Profane

Zayd Dohrn's play, directed by Kip Fagan, is about a liberal immigrant Manhattanite whose daughter falls in love with the son of conservative Muslim parents. (*Playwrights Horizons*, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200. *In previews. Opens April 9.*)

Samara

Soho Rep's Sarah Benson directs Richard Maxwell's piece, with music by Steve Earle (who is also in the cast), in which a man braves a frontier to collect a debt from a stranger. (*A.R.T./New York Theatres*, 502 W. 53rd St. 212-352-3101. *In previews.*)

Six Degrees of Separation

Allison Janney, John Benjamin Hickey, and Corey Hawkins star in Trip Cullman's revival of John Guare's play from 1990, about a young black con man who enters the lives of an upscale Manhattan couple. (*Ethel Barrymore*, 243 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. *In previews.*)

War Paint

Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole play the rival cosmetics entrepreneurs Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden, in this new musical by Scott Frankel, Michael Korie, and Doug Wright. (*Nederlander*, 208 W. 41st St. 866-870-2711. *In previews. Opens April 6.*)

NOW PLAYING

Beneath the Gavel

Here's your chance to land a Zeigler! Never mind that Daniel Zeigler is fictional, that his paintings

look like photographs run through the Prisma filter, or that you're using fake dollar bills shot out of money guns. Whenever a mock auction comes up, "Beneath the Gavel" suddenly acquires a pulse. These scenes, though, are all too brief, and the majority of Mara Lieberman's play is a jumble of lectures, interpretive dancing, and bad accents. The show juxtaposes Zeigler's relationship with a benevolent patron with a potted history of the contemporary-art market and a soft-hitting exposé of the tricks that make prices go up during auctions. Under Lieberman's direction, the cast often walks and talks very slowly, perhaps to indicate depth. But it's hard to take seriously a show that pokes fun at conceptual art while regularly indulging in "Sprockets"-type ballet interludes. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. *Through April 9.*)

How to Transcend a Happy Marriage

Sarah Ruhl has a wonderful way of hearing what people can't say even though they struggle to say it. Her latest play has many amusing moments, largely restricted to the first act, which soars. That's when we meet George (an excellent Marisa Tomei), a middle-class mom whose husband and friends think they're getting into a sexy situation with a free spirit named Pip (Lena Hall) and her two male partners, but it might all be in George's mind. She wants to change her life, and the desire may have been so strong that she's invented a scene where she and her stolid set lose control. The director, Rebecca Taichman, has cast the piece beautifully (Robin Weigert, whose befuddled matriarch is a comic gem, and Austin Smith merit special interest), but she can't save the second act, which is filled with too much explication and not enough mystery. (*Metzi E. Newhouse*, 150 W. 65th St. 212-239-6200.)

Latin History for Morons

In his latest comic monologue, John Leguizamo is class clown turned substitute teacher, sprinting from the Aztecs to Sonia Sotomayor in a hundred minutes—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-dives 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. (*Public*, 425 Lafayette St. 212-967-7555.)

Miss Saigon

Here's a musical that always goes for broke. Ballads aren't intimate but belted to the rafters; characters don't just walk off the stage but are whisked away on a life-size helicopter; emotions aren't muted but operatic—which is natural, since the plot transposes key elements from "Madama Butterfly" to mid-nineteen-seventies Vietnam. Yet this 1989 colossus, about the doomed affair between a G.I. (Alistair Brammer) and a Vietnamese girl (Eva Noblezada), moves with remarkable fleetness, especially in Laurence Connor's dynamite Broadway revival. Richard Maltby, Jr., Claude-Michel Schönberg, and Alain

Boubil's blockbuster has been accused of being exploitative, but it's clear-eyed and unsentimental about the impact of colonialism. Embodying the show's critical attitude toward the U.S. is the m.c.-like Engineer, a pimp who dreams of America. Jon Jon Briones plays him with the cunning wink of Sammy Davis, Jr., simultaneously charming and sharklike. (*Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.*)

Picnic

There's a reason William Inge's popular 1953 work keeps audiences interested: the script pushes a lot of buttons, about class, innocence and, foremost, sexuality. Hal (a nuanced and then uneven David T. Patterson) is a drifter who lands in a small Kansas town where his former classmate Alan (Rowan Vickers) is a rich boy who's involved with Madge (Ginna Le Vine, giving a stiff performance in an underwritten role). Madge is a restless, pretty girl whose mother, Flo (Michele Pawk), wants her to marry up. But Hal disrupts those plans; he's sex incarnate. Inge was closeted for most of his life, and Hal represents his longing for a "real" man, so there's a lot of buried desire in the part. But the director, Jack Cummings III, doesn't do anything new with the material. His take is neither avant-garde nor traditional, and the Transport Group production (in rep with Inge's "Come Back, Little Sheba") plays in a kind of intellectual stasis. (*Gym at Judson, 243 Thompson St. 866-811-4111.*)

Sweat

Lynn Nottage's drama, newly transferred to Broadway from the Public Theatre, opens at top intensity in a parole office in Reading, Pennsylvania, in 2008, as two young men, one black, one white, attempt to confront the mess they've made of their lives. But this is really the story of their mothers (embodied with rich authenticity by Michelle Wilson and Johanna Day), who have spent their adult lives working the assembly line of a steel-tubing factory, and whose friendship crumbles the day in 2000 when the plant locks the workers out. By the end, everything is fully explained—perhaps too fully explained, depending on your taste. But Nottage isn't interesting in hinting at what went wrong; she wants to make it known. It's a play that listens deeply to the confounding plight of blue-collar workers in the world's richest country, and which, in a just world, would shake their bosses to the core. (*Studio 54, at 254 W. 54th St. 212-239-6200.*)

ALSO NOTABLE

Amélie Walter Kerr. • **C. S. Lewis Onstage: The Most Reluctant Convert** Acorn. • **Come from Away** Schoenfeld. • **Cry Havoc!** New Ohio. • **Daniel's Husband** Cherry Lane. • **Dear Evan Hansen** Music Box. • **The Emperor Jones** Irish Repertory. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **The Glass Menagerie** Belasco. • **The Hairy Ape** Park Avenue Armory. (Reviewed in this issue.) • **If I Forget** Laura Pels. • **Joan of Arc: Into the Fire** Public. • **946: The Amazing Story of Adolphus Tips** St. Ann's Warehouse. Through April 9. • **The Outer Space** Joe's Pub. Through April 9. • **The Play That Goes Wrong** Lyceum. • **The Price** American Airlines Theatre. • **Significant Other** Booth. • **Sunday in the Park with George** Hudson. • **Sunset Boulevard** Palace. • **Sweeney Todd: The Demon Barber of Fleet Street** Barrow Street Theatre. • **Vanity Fair** Pearl. • **The View UpStairs** Lynn Redgrave. • **White Guy on the Bus** 59E59.

NIGHT LIFE**Follow Ahead**

Nandi Rose Plunkett's freewheeling art pop spends a night in Brooklyn.

IT RAINED IN New York last May 6, and music completists felt the downpour the heaviest. New albums from James Blake, Skepta, Death Grips, Anohni, and Kaytranada all came at once, a spread of vivid artists who had risen from self-contained music pockets as captains of focussed styles and subcultures. "Probable Depths" arrived more quietly that same day, and the cassette might have been lost in the spring shower if it hadn't been for the loyal followers of Nandi Rose Plunkett, a singer and producer known as Half Waif. College-radio jocks and B-side bloggers picked up "Turn Me Around," the record's agile second single, and dished out praise that the ethereal pop song wholly deserved but was too opaque to earn more widely; like Plunkett's path to performance, the track is a study of pivots. A mournful choral intro gives way to a hand-clap bounce fit for a Rihanna song—"I don't even know what I'm here for," Plunkett sings, never letting on where "here" may be.

The twenty-eight-year-old has rarely played it straight. The daughter of an Indian refugee from Uganda and an Irish-American, she grew up

in Williamstown, Massachusetts, versed in traditional *bhajans* and Celtic pop. As a music major at Kenyon College, she inhaled varied forms—musical theatre, classical, folk, world music—and mastered few, instead working through her own experiments with upstart bands and nursing solo material by night. Her ideas jelled best with Evan Stephens Hall, and she joined his band Pinegrove. The group made their way to northern New Jersey after graduation, and became immersed in a close-knit music community that had produced bands like Ducktails and Real Estate—after crashing in Hall's childhood bedroom for a summer, Plunkett found the confidence to pipe up on her own once again.

With Pinegrove, Plunkett helps to broaden the band's blooming alt-country rooted deep in the New Jersey woodlands; as Half Waif, she makes room for globe-twirling prism pop in search of a home. At Silent Barn on April 6, she'll play songs from "form/a," the latest Half Waif EP (which she produced herself), swaying between the electronic bass of new tracks like "Night Heat" and the light step of "Turn Me Around," nudging everyone near her into motion.

—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.

Big Sean

This Detroit representer lives up to his city's history of inventive, dense lyricism, even holding his own alongside Eminem on the icy split-screen "No Favors," from his latest album, "I Decided." But Sean can have a good time, too, and has been a consistent mainstream presence since his shimmering singles with Chris Brown stormed the charts at the beginning of the decade. Tagging along on his latest tour is **Madeintyo**, an Army brat who came of age in Japan before his bubbly trap tracks took off in his Atlanta home town and beyond. With its golden stage curtain and marble trimmings, Radio City Music Hall is a regal venue for such a fun rap show; don't expect to put your seat to much use. (*Radio City Music Hall, Sixth Ave. at 50th St. 212-247-4777. April 11.*)

BLACK NYC

Brands are staying out later: in recent years, blue-chip companies like Red Bull and Vans have invested heavily and creatively in the city's live music and night life, earning impressions on Myrtle Avenue wheat-pasted posters and Times Square marques. Matte, a creative agency, builds out such campaigns for clients like Kenzo and Google; each spring, it hosts "BLACK NYC," an immersive warehouse rave and art exhibit that demonstrates the scope of its work and reach. This year's bill includes Carmine Conte and Matteo Milleri, budding veterans of Ibiza's mega-raves who d.j. together as **Tale of Us**, and **Trim**, an outsider grime m.c. with a cultish following in the insular U.K. scene. (*Brooklyn Hangar, 2 52nd St., Brooklyn. black-nyc.com. April 8.*)

John Mayer

Breakup songs are an alluring challenge for hearts as bleeding as Mayer's. "The Search for Everything," the songwriter and guitarist's tenth album, arrives in four-track "waves" of willowy, pining love notes in the second person, a time stamp for an artist who explains early that he "may be old," and "may be young." One of the first rock stars of the aughts, Mayer debuted in 2001 with "Room for Squares," and went largely unchallenged as a coffee-shop-pop heartthrob; by 2006, with "Continuum," he'd mastered his soft blues and big similes, a polite alternative to "LoveSounds"-era Timberlake. After a brief bad-boy (or just big-mouth) phase and a publicized split with Katy Perry, Mayer embarks on an apology tour of sorts; the charts have changed in his four-year absence, but the sly breakdown on "Still Feel Like Your Man" suggests he wants to make it work again. (*Madison Square Garden, Seventh Ave. at 33rd St. 800-745-3000. April 5.*)

Anoushka Shankar

Shankar didn't have to travel far to realize the sitar's reach. Her father, Ravi, was a global ambassador of the Indian string instrument during the early nineteen-sixties, and he inspired strands of psychedelic rock, most notably in collaboration with George Harrison. Anoushka studied Indian classical music under her father from the age of nine, and released compositions of her own by thirteen. "Rise," her self-produced third album, cemented her as a world-music icon at age twenty, with roots in the U.S., the U.K., and India. She combines traditional Indian melodies with Western structures, while carrying forward her instrument's storied musical legacy: "Land of Gold," her 2016 album,

pulled its sinuous tone into a new age. (*Town Hall, 123 W. 43rd St. 212-840-2824. April 5.*)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS**Eddie Gomez**

On account of his career-making eleven-year run with the trio of the iconic pianist Bill Evans, Gomez may always be thought of as Evans's bassist, but there are worse ways to be recognized. Here, the influential virtuoso returns to the trio setting in the company of the drummer **Billy Drummond** and the Swedish pianist **Stefan Karlsson**. (*Mezzrow, 163 W. 10th St. 646-476-4346. April 8.*)

Christian McBride

Not content with being one of the premier jazz bassists of his generation, McBride also juggles ensembles that highlight his skills as a spectacular soloist, a keen composer, and an adroit leader. His big band, packed with first-rate soloists, is a fitting example of the musician's ambition and accomplishment. (*Dizzy's Club Coca-Cola, Broadway at 60th St. 212-258-9595. April 5-9.*)

"Buddy Rich Centennial: Celebrating the Jazz Drum"

Striving to emulate his virtuosity led the hapless protagonist of the reprehensible 2014 film

"*Whiplash*" to near wrack and ruin, but, in the real world, the percussive wizardry of the drummer Buddy Rich is still to be admired without danger. This centennial tribute, presented by the Jazz at Lincoln Center Orchestra, features reinterpretations of signature pieces from Rich's vaunted big bands, as well as an original work, "*Living Grooves: A World of Jazz Rhythm*," by the drummer and artistic director Ali Jackson. (*Rose Theatre, Jazz at Lincoln Center, Broadway at 60th St. 212-721-6500. April 7-8.*)

Randy Weston

"Do not file this recording under 'jazz,'" the writer and educator Robin D. G. Kelley advises in reference to Weston's recent album, "*The African Nubian Suite*." And, in acknowledging the inclusive breadth of Weston's music in general, Kelley is surely on to something. The ninety-one-year-old Brooklyn-born pianist and composer has been meshing the sounds of the African diaspora with jazz since he began drawing attention in the nineteen-fifties, creating, in effect, a sui-generis fusion. Special guests, including the percussionist **Candido Camero**, the tuba player **Howard Johnson**, and a host of African vocalists and instrumentalists, will be joining Weston's stalwart African Rhythms band throughout the week. (*Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. April 4-8.*)

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA**Metropolitan Opera**

Jürgen Flimm's decision to use a contemporary setting for his 2000 production of Beethoven's "*Fidelio*"—a two-and-a-half-hour paean to heroism and justice in the face of corrupt power—feels more apt than ever these days. Klaus Florian Vogt lends his trumpeting tenor to Florestan, a man imprisoned unlawfully by a political enemy, and Adrienne Pieczonka sings the role of his wife and liberator, Leonore, with warm, poignant tones. Much like his symphonies, Beethoven's opera makes its points in dense and eloquent musical arguments, but its fervor doesn't always come across in Sebastian Weigle's conducting. (*April 5 at 7:30 and April 8 at 8. These are the final performances.*) • Also playing: Sonja Frisell's grand production of Verdi's "*Aida*" is not exactly a shrinking violet on the Met's schedule. It returns with two estimable singers, Krassimira Stoyanova and Violeta Urmana, as Aida and her nemesis, Amneris, and a newcomer tenor, Jorge de León, as Radamès; Daniele Rustioni conducts. (Riccardo Massi replaces de León in the second performance.) (*April 6 and April 10 at 7:30.*) • Anna Netrebko, in the sympathetic role of Tatiana, brings her irreducible vocal glamour to a revival of Tchaikovsky's powerfully lyrical "*Eugene Onegin*," sharing the stage with such talents as Mariusz Kwieciński (in the title role), Alexey Dolgov, Elena Maximova, and Štefan Kocán; Robin Ticciati conducts. (*April 7 at 8.*) • Willy Decker's bracingly modern production of "*La Traviata*" continues its run with a new cast that features Carmen Giannattasio

and Atalla Ayan as Violetta and Alfredo, respectively, and a superstar—Plácido Domingo—in the baritone role of Germont; Nicola Luisotti. (*April 8 at 1 and April 11 at 7:30. (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)*)

Opera Cabal: "Aeolus"

Ken Ueno's experimental opera is named after the Keeper of the Winds from the *Odyssey*, and in it he explores the interpretive possibilities of breath—through the use of throat singing, a megaphone, and spoken word—as he weaves together stories of his peripatetic childhood. The Rome Prize-winning composer performs the piece alongside the vocalist Majel Connery and the Flux Quartet. (*April 7 at 7. (National Sawdust, 80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org.)*)

"Works & Process": "The (R)evolution of Steve Jobs"

The composer and d.j. Mason Bates, known for melding electronic-music sounds and nineteenth-century symphonic forms, has written a "pixelated opera" about Apple's visionary co-founder, eschewing chronological narrative in favor of a nonlinear series of scenes from his life. The Guggenheim Museum's two-night preview of the work, which has its world première at Santa Fe Opera in July, features the cast members Edward Parks and Garrett Sorenson (as Jobs and his partner, Steve Wozniak, respectively) singing with piano and guitar accompaniment. Bates will be joined by the show's librettist, Mark Campbell, and director, Kevin Newbury, for a discussion during the program. (*April 9-10 at 7:30. (Fifth Ave. at 89th St. 212-423-3575.)*)

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES**Cathedral of St. John the Divine: "War Requiem"**

The distinguished choral conductor Kent Tritle leads an ensemble comprising more than three hundred and fifty members—including the soprano Susanna Phillips, the Oratorio Society of New York, and the Manhattan School of Music Symphony, Symphonic Choir, and Chamber Choir—in Benjamin Britten's beloved semi-sacred work, one of the most potent and deeply humane pieces in the twentieth-century canon. *April 6-7 at 7:30.* (*Amsterdam Ave. at 112th St. stjohndivine.org*)

San Francisco Symphony

The three significant mid-twentieth-century works that the conductor Michael Tilson Thomas and his players perform in their first concert at Carnegie Hall—Cage's "The Seasons," Shostakovich's Cello Concerto No. 1 (featuring Gautier Capuçon), and Bartók's Concerto for Orchestra—represent a relatively brief span of years yet could hardly be more disparate in style. In the second program, Thomas indulges one of his specialties: Mahler, pairing the composer's Symphony No. 1 with the Adagio from the unfinished Symphony No. 10. *April 7-8 at 8.* (212-247-7800.)

Handel and Haydn Society

The eminent Boston period-performance ensemble of singers and players makes its first Gotham appearance in more than a quarter century this week, setting up shop at the Metropolitan Museum's Temple of Dendur. The program is appropriately redoubtable: Monteverdi's "Vespers of 1610," conducted by Harry Christophers. *April 8 at 7.* (*Fifth Ave. at 83rd St. metmuseum.org*)

New York Choral Society

The wonderful Brooklyn Youth Chorus joins the conductor David Hayes's excellent avocational ensemble for a concert consisting entirely of a major New York première: that of the "St. Luke Passion," by the exciting Scottish composer James MacMillan. *April 8 at 8.* (*St. Bartholomew's Church, Park Ave. at 51st St. nychoral.org*)

"Wordless Music": "Barry Lyndon"

The Worldless Music Orchestra may not quite be the New York Philharmonic, but it is presenting one of the more auspicious events of the recent megatrend of offering film showings with live orchestral accompaniment: a viewing of Stanley Kubrick's luxuriant 1975 period piece, set in the eighteenth century, which starred Ryan O'Neal and Marisa Berenson. Ryan McAdams conducts the score, which features music by Mozart, Bach, and Vivaldi in addition to traditional Irish airs. *April 8 at 8.* (*Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. wordlessmusic.org*)

RECITALS**Ensemble Mise-En: "Music of Salvatore Sciarrino"**

Italy's paramount composer, who crafts extreme instrumental sounds into elusively elegant works, gets a tribute from this young, expert group, a relatively recent addition to the city's contemporary-music scene. The pieces on offer span the decades, from "Esplorazione del Bianco I" (1986) to "Dialoghi sull'Ultima Corda" (2014). *April 5 at 7.* (*Italian Academy, Columbia University, 1161 Amsterdam Ave., at 118th St. No tickets required.*)

"Not OK: The Music of Phil Kline"

Meredith Monk has curated this concert devoted exclusively to music by Kline, an enduring New York composer whose music combines the ideal-

ism of experimentalism with the gritty intensity of rock. The evening has a special guest: Jim Jarmusch, a childhood friend of Kline's, who plays guitar and contributes film projections for a program that also includes such musicians as the mezzo-soprano Jacqueline Horner and the pianist Kathleen Supové. *April 5 at 8.* (*Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave. roulette.org*)

National Sawdust: Lisa Bielawa

Bielawa, who has spent a good quarter century working as an innovative, exciting, and substantive composer (and as a very busy vocalist with the Philip Glass Ensemble), is one of several talented middle-aged American composers who somehow missed the hype train. It's time for a retrospective, in which Bielawa collaborates with the American Contemporary Music Ensemble in music for voice, instruments, and digital audio, including two arias from her opera "Vireo." *April 6 at 7.* (*80 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. nationalsawdust.org*)

Sarah Cahill

The highly esteemed pianist, a sterling advocate for West Coast composers, comes to Le Poisson Rouge to present a centennial tribute to the late Lou Harrison, whose openhearted yet intricate works only came to broad attention in the nineteen-eighties. A wide range of music is on offer from all periods of the composer's life, along with pieces by such sympathetic colleagues as Cage, Cowell, and Thomson. *April 6 at 7.* (*158 Bleecker St. lpr.com*)

"Three Generations: Arvo Pärt, Philip Glass, and Steve Reich"

The second concert in Steve Reich's triumphant series celebrating the legacy of American minimal-

ism features music by a distinguished Baltic guest. In addition to two works by Pärt ("Für Alina" and the inevitable "Fratres"), the program offers monuments by Glass (the String Quartet No. 5) and Reich ("Different Trains"); the superb performers include the violinist Todd Reynolds, the violist Lois Martin, and the pianist Michael Brown. *April 6 at 7:30.* (*Zankel Hall, 212-247-7800.*)

Nicola Benedetti, Leonard Elschenbroich, and Alexei Grynyuk

Three acclaimed young artists (on violin, cello, and piano) make their débuts this week at the 92nd Street Y, offering a U.S. première by the compelling British composer Mark-Anthony Turnage ("Duetti d'Amore") along with favorites by Ravel, Debussy, and Tchaikovsky (the Piano Trio in A Minor). *April 6 at 7:30.* (*Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500.*)

Chamber Music Society of Lincoln Center: "Wind Variations"

Alongside an impressive cadre of first-call woodwind soloists, the esteemed pianist Gilbert Kalish navigates breezy springtime currents both commonplace and rare in an appealing mix of works by Mozart (selections from "Don Giovanni"), Janáček, Mendelssohn, Ibert, Saint-Saëns, and Martinů. *April 7 at 7:30.* (*Alice Tully Hall, 212-875-5788.*)

Lars Vogt: The Goldberg Variations

The great German pianist, a complex and fine-grained artist never away from New York for long, performs one of the great German pieces in an upcoming concert at Alice Tully Hall. *April 9 at 5.* (212-721-6500.)

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MOVIES

OPENING

Aftermath Arnold Schwarzenegger stars in this drama, as a man who plots revenge on an air-traffic controller (Scoot McNairy) after his wife and daughter are killed in a plane crash. Directed by Elliott Lester. *Opening April 7. (In limited release.)* • **Graduation** Reviewed this week in The Current Cinema. *Opening April 7. (In limited release.)* • **i hate myself :)** Reviewed in Now Playing. *Opening April 7. (Anthology Film Archives.)*

NOW PLAYING

Beauty and the Beast

Back from the drawing board, into live-action, comes yet another version of the tale. Disney has taken its own animated film from 1991 and, at vast expense, tried to keep it real—or, in the case of the actors, half-real. Emma Watson, whose determined air is not matched by her singing voice, plays the book-loving Belle. She takes the place of her father (Kevin Kline) as the prisoner of the Beast (Dan Stevens), who in turn is held captive by a magic spell. Moping and short-tempered, he dwells in his castle, attended by living objects—the clock (Ian McKellen), the teapot (Emma Thompson), the full-throated wardrobe (Audra McDonald), and so on. Belle's task, of which she seems all too aware, is to fall for the Beast and thus restore his proper nature, as a handsome and slightly boring prince. The songs from 1991 are reheated and dished up anew, together with a batch of fresh numbers, by Alan Menken and Tim Rice; the resulting movie, though stuffed with wonders, is forty-five minutes longer than its predecessor and much less dramatically lean.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 3/27/17.) (In wide release.)*

Carrie Pilby

A core of substance and a fine cast are squandered in the relentless hard-sell perkiness of this mild comic drama. Bel Powley plays the title character, a British prodigy who's packed off to Harvard at fourteen by her widowed, wealthy father (Gabriel Byrne). Now, at nineteen, Carrie is adrift in Manhattan, living on her father's dime in a comfortable apartment with no goals, no friends, no job, and no activities beyond obsessively reading and grudgingly keeping appointments with a therapist (Nathan Lane) who is her father's friend. Carrie's troubles emerge in flashback—she was sexually harassed by a professor when she was sixteen (the age of consent in Massachusetts, as she usefully explains), but the movie neither takes her pain nor her mind very seriously. A crew of hip young New Yorkers ranging from kooky to dreamy help coax Carrie out of her shell, but the script could have been written in emojis, and Susan Johnson's flat direction does the actors no good. The formidable Powley, the star of "The Diary of a Teenage Girl," is again stuck playing cute to the balcony.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

The Death of Louis XIV

Coiffed in a huge helmetlike wig of champagne-colored curls, the aged and ailing monarch endures silly ceremonies in bed, receiving applause when he doffs his hat and again when he eats an egg. He

complains of pain in his leg, he can't walk, and his doctor detects a spot of gangrene on his left foot but decides against amputating. Other doctors are called in, differing opinions and treatments are offered, but to no avail—the rot spreads, and the king dies. Albert Serra's flatly conceptual but elaborately decorated historical drama has a short film's worth of substance and action, and its extended death agony is mainly of symbolic import—reinforced by the incarnation of the king by Jean-Pierre Léaud, the former teen star of "The 400 Blows" and a New Wave icon. Doctors' dubious debates about medical practice contrast with the court's attention to music and theatre and evoke a time when art outpaced science. Serra's ideas are serious but simple, and his movie seems to illustrate them in slow motion. In French.—*R.B. (Film Society of Lincoln Center.)*

Frantz

The new film from François Ozon takes place just after the First World War, and the action is shared between enemies; the first part is set in a small German town, and the second is centered in Paris. Reconciliation, however well meant, turns out to be an elusive ideal. Paula Beer, whose performance gains momentum as the plot unfolds, plays Anna, who lost her fiancé, Frantz (Anton von Lucke), in the conflict; she still lives with his parents, the Hoffmeisters (Ernst Stötzner and Marie Gruber). They are visited by Adrien Rivoire (Pierre Niney), a tremulous Frenchman, who says that he was a friend of Frantz, and whose recollections bring solace to the bereaved. As Ozon's admirers will know, however, mourners can surprise both themselves and others, and the telling of tales can lead one down curious paths. Thus, when Anna travels to a still hostile France, all that she believes begins to fall apart. On the surface, the film—shot in black-and-white, with short surges of color—is placid and polite, yet what stirs beneath feels unhappy and unresolved. In French and German.—*A.L. (3/20/17) (In limited release.)*

Get Out

A young white woman named Rose (Allison Williams) takes Chris (Daniel Kaluuya), her black boyfriend, to meet her parents for the first time. They live, in some style, in the country, and Chris, though an unruffled soul, feels mild trepidation. But Rose's father (Bradley Whitford) and mother (Catherine Keener), liberal to a fault, offer a warm welcome; if anything, it is their African-American staff—Walter (Marcus Henderson) and Georgina (Betty Gabriel)—who make Chris feel more uneasy. A party for friends and family, the day after the couple's arrival, deepens his suspicion that something is awry, and the final third of the film bursts into open hostility and dread. The writer and director is Jordan Peele, making his feature-film débüt, and the result feels inflammatory to an astounding degree. If the awkward social comedy of the early scenes winds up as a flat-out horror movie, that, we feel, is because Peele finds the state of race relations so horrific—irreparably so—that no other reaction will suffice. Kaluuya makes a likable hero, for whom we heartily root.—*A.L. (3/6/17) (In wide release.)*

i hate myself :)

Joanna Arnow's personal documentary about her relationship with James Kepple, a musician and

spoken-word artist, is raw in several senses. She depicts James unflinchingly—he's a white guy who lives in Harlem, runs a storefront arts center, is friendly with his black neighbors, but brazenly flings around the N-word and tosses in some anti-Semitic comments for the benefit of Arnow, who is Jewish. But she's vague about her motives for staying with the flippant, remote, and selfish James. She brings the camera into the bedroom for some extremely frank sex scenes and weaves the film-making process into the story, showing her editor, Max—the self-styled "naked editor," whose nakedness isn't edited out—as he helps her to shape the movie while questioning her motives. Despite some memorably painful moments and an underlying artistic urgency, the film's implications remain unprocessed and unquestioned. Trying to get her parents to watch the sex scenes, Arnow is intent on registering their appalled reactions; here, too, she remains the vulnerable but unexamined center of action.—*R.B. (Anthology Film Archives.)*

Personal Shopper

Kristen Stewart, who has made a wise habit of turning to distinctive directors, colludes again with Olivier Assayas. In "Clouds of Sils Maria" (2014), she played the assistant to a celebrated actress; here she takes a similar but grimmer role as Maureen, the dogsbody who runs around buying clothes and bags for a celebrity (Nora von Waldstätten) of no perceptible talent. Any social satire, though, is lightly handled, for Assayas has other zones of obsession and frustration to explore. Maureen is psychic, and desperate to hear from her twin brother, who succumbed to a heart condition from which she also suffers. In that spirit, the movie becomes a ghost story, with the heroine prowling a vacant house in search of the dead; as if that were not enough, death then shows up uninvited, in the shape of a savage murder. Some audiences will doubtless be baffled and annoyed by this mixing of genres and tones, yet Assayas and Stewart just about hold things together, and there are thrilling stretches—Maureen exchanging texts with an unknown presence who could be a killer, a stalker, or a phantom soul—when the movie stops your breath.—*A.L. (3/20/17) (In limited release.)*

Prevenge

If metaphors were movies, Alice Lowe's new film would be a masterwork. Instead, it's just smart fun—as well as a promising débüt. She wrote and directed it, and also stars as Ruth, a pregnant woman in Cardiff, who believes that her unborn baby is speaking to her—and urging her to kill people who need killing, such as a swaggering pickup artist, a heartless human-resources officer, and several people whom she blames for the death of her partner (the unborn baby's father) in a climbing accident. Ruth's grief is further embittered by empty pieties surrounding motherhood and the ills of modern life at large. Ruth suffers from flashbacks and visions that are organized around unanswered questions about her partner's death; the violence (and the explicit, gleeful gore) ramps up along with Ruth's madness, but there's little variety or detail to the cycle of crime. Lowe directs with a spare, clear, brisk style that builds tension and deals death with minimal fuss but displays little imagination; the movie is diabolically clever but it stays within the narrow limits of its cleverness.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Raw

Julia Ducournau's movie tells the tale of Justine (Garance Marillier), who is joining her older sister Alexia (Ella Rumpf) at veterinary school. Jus-

tine arrives there as a hardworking student, a strict vegetarian, and a blushingly timid soul; what we observe, in stages, is the process by which she turns into a lusty carnivore on the rampage. The trigger is the hazing ritual to which she and other novices must submit, which involves, among other delights, a shower of blood and the chomping of a raw rabbit kidney—sufficient to give Justine a craving for flesh of other kinds. She is not alone in her appetites, we learn, and Ducournau does not shy away from detailing the tasting menu that follows. Viewers with nervous stomachs should stay well clear, yet the film, however lurid, is memorable less for its capacity to disgust than for its portrayal of sisterly bonding, and for exploring the extent to which the characters—not merely the young ones, as a late revelation suggests—are both liberated and caged by bodily wants. In French.—A.L. (3/13/17) (In limited release.)

The Seduction of Joe Tynan

Alan Alda stars in this smooth-surfaced, inwardly roiling 1979 melodrama (which he also wrote), as a young, smart, and photogenic New York senator who's urged by an elderly Louisiana senator (Melvyn Douglas) to support a Supreme Court nominee with a disqualifying racist past. Joe travels to Louisiana with Karen Traynor (Meryl Streep), a lawyer who knows where the evidence is hidden, and, in the course of their collaboration, they have an affair, putting Joe's marriage—as well as his Presidential ambitions—at risk. Jerry Schatzberg directs the film with a sleek yet relaxed precision that mirrors Joe's own breezy confidence. The drama's elbows-out swing doesn't shade into swagger, its energy doesn't yield to turmoil—it's very subject is imperturbability. Schatzberg ramps up the drama with his warm depiction of the senator's home life. Joe and his wife, Ellie (Barbara Harris), have a mature, loving, and joyful relationship, but, as the façades of public and private conduct break down simultaneously and Joe has to put the shattered images back together, the movie approaches a drastic resolution that's decades ahead of its time.—R.B. (Metograph; April 6.)

Song to Song

In this romantic drama, set in and around the Austin music scene, Terrence Malick places the transcendental lyricism of his later films on sharply mapped emotional terrain. It's a story of love skewed by ambition. Rooney Mara plays Faye, a young musician who falls into a relationship with a record-company mogul (Michael Fassbender) who can boost her career. Then she starts seeing another musician (Ryan Gosling), who also gets pulled into the impresario's orbit. The shifting triangle à la "Jules and Jim" is twisted by business conflicts and other players, including a waitress (Natalie Portman), a socialite (Cate Blanchett), and an artist (Bérénice Marlohe). Meanwhile, Patti Smith, playing herself, is the voice of conscience and steadfast purpose, in art and life alike. Without sacrificing any of the breathless ecstasy of his urgent, fluid, seemingly borderless images (shot by Emmanuel Lubezki), Malick girds them with a framework of bruising entanglements and bitter realizations, family history and stifled dreams. His sense of wonder at the joy of music and the power of love is also a mournful vision of paradise lost.—R.B. (In limited release.)

T2 Trainspotting

A sad sequel to "Trainspotting," the drug-driven and sidewalk-pounding hit of 1996. The usual suspects have returned for further punishment. Once again, Danny Boyle directs, and the screenplay, adapted from Irvine Welsh's fiction, is by John

Hodge. The plot—or the cracked mosaic of incidents that passes for a plot—finds Renton (Ewan McGregor) coming home to Edinburgh, following his worst instincts, and falling into company with his old pals. None of them are thriving: Spud (Ewen Bremner), a junkie, is on the brink of suicide; Sick Boy (Jonny Lee Miller) is trying to turn a pub into a brothel; and Franco (Robert Carlyle), having sprung himself from jail, is best avoided. There is more fear in the air than there was twenty years ago, and Renton's famous rant—"Choose life"—becomes in part a broadside against social media. The editing is as jittery as ever, and the soundtrack has lost none of its guts, but there is no mistaking the sense that we are watching a pack of rebels, in middle-aged desperation, casting around for a cause.—A.L. (3/27/17) (In wide release.)

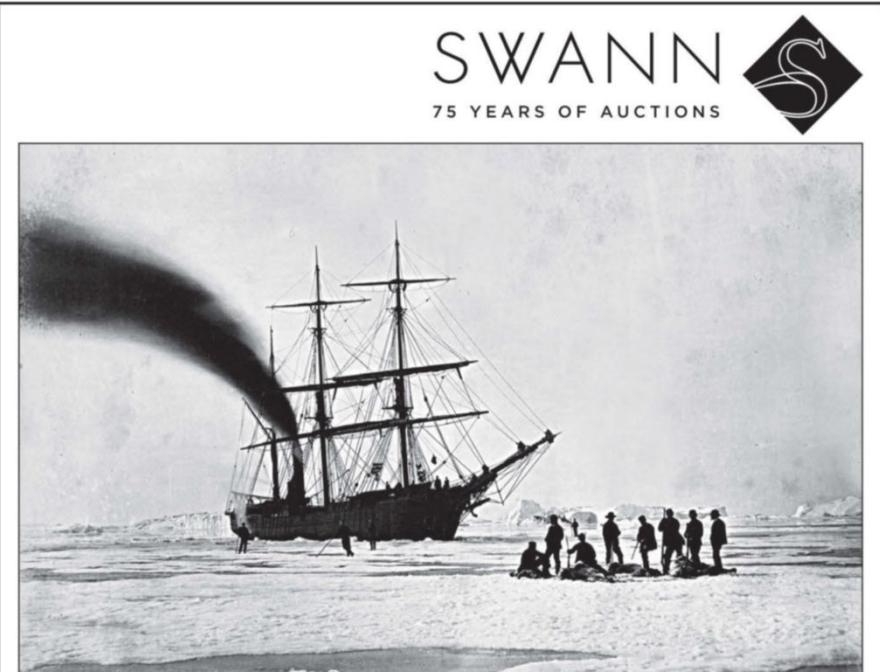
Undisputed

Violence escalates toward a volcanic climax in Walter Hill's ace boxing film about a heavyweight champ named Iceman (Ving Rhames) who gets convicted of rape and discovers that the quickest way out of the slammer is to fight the prison program's champ, Monroe (Wesley Snipes). Drawing on torn-from-the-headlines events and B-movie history, Hill and his co-writer, David Giler, fill out their premise with hardboiled irony and gusto. Iceman's sole article of faith is his rock-bottom belief in his own pummelling strength. Monroe is Iceman's opposite: sentenced to life because of a passion killing he committed with two lethal weapons—his fists—Monroe has survived behind bars by living within himself and guarding his integrity. Hill uses quick-cutting techniques to show-

case his actors and propel the story forward at the same time. Even though this film has relatively few big action scenes and almost no special effects, it plays like one uninterrupted streak of action, because violence menaces the characters like a storm cloud when it isn't slicing through their milieu like lightning. Released in 2002.—Michael Sragow (BAM Cinématk; April 6.)

Win It All

The ambient violence in Joe Swanberg's previous feature, "Digging for Fire," bursts into the foreground in this casually swinging yet terrifyingly tense drama of a compulsive gambler on the edge. Jake Johnson (who co-wrote the film with Swanberg) stars as Eddie Garrett, a part-time Wrigley Field parking attendant and full-time poker player who's constantly in debt. When a rough-hewn friend prepares for a term in prison, he gives Eddie a duffel bag to hide. Eddie finds cash in it, and, despite the best efforts of his Gamblers Anonymous sponsor (Keegan-Michael Key), yields to temptation. Eddie goes to his easygoing but tough-loving brother, Ron (Joe Lo Truglio), who runs a landscaping business, for help; besides saving his own neck, Eddie also wants to save his new relationship with Eva (the charismatic Aislinn Derbez), a nurse whose intentions are serious. With a teeming cast of vibrantly unglamorous Chicago characters who hold Eddie in a tight social web, Swanberg—aided greatly by Johnson's vigorous performance—makes the gambler's panic-stricken silence all the more agonizing, balancing the warm veneer of intimate normalcy with the inner chill of secrets and lies.—R.B. (Netflix.)



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ART



"Beauty (K.T.)" (2002), by Collier Schorr, in the exhibition "March Madness," at Fort Gansevoort.

On the Ball

Sports gets political in a new exhibition.

THE N.C.A.A. BRACKETS have come and gone, but "March Madness" prevails in the meatpacking district, where a terrific group show by that name is installed at Fort Gansevoort, an idiosyncratic gallery (and occasional barbecue joint) in a three-story town house at 5 Ninth Ave. As its title implies, the show's theme is sports, which, on its own, is nothing novel. A quick spin through the Met will turn up figures of wrestlers painted on an Ancient Greek amphora in 500 B.C., a Meso-

american stone carving of a ballplayer made roughly a thousand years later, and mid-nineteenth-century portraits of matadors by Édouard Manet. But Fort Gansevoort flips the script on millennia of male-dominated athletics with art works by thirty-one women made between the mid-twentieth century and now, from Elizabeth Catlett's jubilant 1958 print of a barefoot girl jumping rope to a just-finished collage of a pigtailed boxer by Deborah Roberts, a young artist who borrows the Dadaist strategies of Hannah Höch for the era of Black Lives Matter.

The show (which runs through

May 6) was co-curated by the artist Hank Willis Thomas and the gallerist Adam Shopkorn (who is also a film producer, with a basketball documentary under his belt). The fact that this all-women show is the brainchild of men might have drawn fire for paternalism were it not for the show's persuasive politics, at the intersection of feminism and race. The first sign that we aren't in for a Leroy Neimanesque straight sports experience arrives just inside the front door: a 1:100 scale model of a two-hundred-metre track constructed from two thousand acrylic fake fingernails, painted with stars and stripes and embellished with rhinestones by Pamela Council. The sculpture is an homage to the Olympic gold medalist Florence Griffith Joyner, an insouciant monument to black power and beauty. Nearby hang two elegiac works by Gina Adams, which incorporate vintage photographs of the girls' basketball team at the assimilationist Osage Boarding School, in Oklahoma, where children were forbidden to speak their native language—even denied the right to say their own names.

There are obligatory works by the well-known, including the photographer Catherine Opie's 2008 take on high-school football and a black-and-white gem from 1979 by Cindy Sherman, in Sonja Henie mode as a stocking-capped figure skater. But discoveries—and rediscoveries, in the case of a 1976 series of "video drawings" of televised sports by Howardena Pindell—outmatch the usual suspects. One standout is the Washington, D.C.-based performer Holly Bass, who, like Sherman, suits up for photographic self-portraits. In a quartet of studio shots, Bass styles herself as a posthuman athlete, so at one with her game that a pair of basketballs replaces her derrière. It's a joyous slam dunk of a conceit—a pointedly absurdist sendup of misogynist visual clichés.

—Andrea K. Scott

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Met Breuer

"Marsden Hartley's Maine"

This superb show examines the Pine Tree State's relationship to one of its most famous sons in two distinct phases. In Hartley's early landscapes, Maine's colorful ponds, wildflowers, and hills fused organically with the painter's emerging, sensually expressionist style. "Maine Woods" (1908), a flat, orange-tinged view of birches and fallen leaves, looks like something Gustav Klimt might have done on psilocybin. But in Hartley's later work his focus on a distinct regional identity was a commercial strategy as much as an artistic one, and he made use of tried-and-true motifs: lighthouses, lobsters, and graphic views of Mt. Katahdin modelled after the great Japanese woodblock prints of Hokusai and Hiroshige. In "Logjam, Penobscot Bay" (1940-41), an extraordinary battery of violently clashing white logs, heavily outlined in black, is surmounted by a thin row of green pines in the distance; the edges of "Lobster on Black Background" are fuzzy, and it's the high-contrast colors that make the image jump out. The show's undisputable highlight is a room of portraits in which Hartley treated the markers of hardscrabble New England masculinity with a frankly homoerotic eye, as in the sun-browned body in "Canuck Yankee Lumberjack at Old Orchard Beach, Maine," which also suggests a soft spot for Cézanne's bathers. *Through June 18.*

Whitney Museum

"2017 Whitney Biennial"

The first Biennial at the museum's two-year-old downtown digs, which is earnestly attentive to political moods and themes, already feels nostalgic. Most of the works were chosen before last year's Presidential election. Remember back then? Worry, but not yet alarm, permeated the cosmopolitan archipelago of new art's creators, functionaries, and fans. Now there's a storm. The Age of Trump erodes assumptions about art's role as a barometer—and sometime engine—of social change. The show is winningly theatrical in its use of the Whitney's majestic spaces. The curators, Christopher Y. Lew and Mia Locks, have opted for depth over breadth, affording many of the sixty-three artists, duos, and collectives what amounts to pocket solo shows. The work that you are most apt to remember, "The Meat Grinder's Iron Clothes" (2017), by the Los Angeles artist Samara Golden, marries technique and storytelling on a grandiose scale. Golden has constructed eight miniaturized sets of elaborately furnished domestic, ceremonial, and institutional interiors. They sit on top of and are mounted, upside down, beneath tiers that frame one of the Whitney's tall and wide window views of the Hudson River. Surrounding mirrors multiply the sets upward, downward, and sideways, to infinity. Politics percolate in evocations of social class and function, with verisimilitude tipping toward the surreal in, for example, a set that suggests at once a beauty parlor, a medical facility, and a prison. The shockmeister Jordan Wolfson provides virtual-reality headsets for a video of him bashing the head of another man with a baseball bat, on a street lined with office buildings, to the accompaniment of the sung Hanukkah prayer. How Wolfson made what is in fact an animatronic doll appear real is a mystery typical of new art's galloping technological novelties, and one likely to become old hat in short order. *Through June 11.*

International Center of Photography

"Perpetual Revolution: The Image and Social Change"

A team of curators, led by Carol Squiers and Cynthia Young, have marshalled a bleak vision of contemporary life, filtered through vintage photographs, photojournalism, viral videos, Instagram feeds, and the occasional (and, alas, often superfluous) art work. It's a hard show to love, owing in large part to our times themselves, whose myriad conflicts and travails have been pared down by the curators into six themes: climate change, the refugee crisis, ISIS propaganda, police brutality and the response of Black Lives Matter, L.G.B.T.Q. activism, and alt-right Internet memes. (The latter section, which has the impact of a swift punch in the gut, was added postelection.) The show is low on visual flair, but viewers are likely to leave feeling edified, if not uplifted. Most eye-opening, even for jaded news junkies, are the chillingly sophisticated ISIS videos, which bolster the show's tacit argument that there is an arms race of images being waged between the progressive inheritors of the lineage of "concerned photography," championed by the museum's founder, Cornell Capa, and the rising tide of radical conservatism of varying stripes, which seeks to drag us back into the Dark Ages. *Through May 7.*

Museo del Barrio

"Beatrix Santiago Muñoz: A Universe of Fragile Mirrors"

The Puerto Rican video artist assembles her open-ended cinematic essays from long takes of nonactors in improvised conversation, meditative static shots, and bumpy handheld footage of walks through verdant Caribbean terrain or busy streets. In this transporting exhibition, films play continuously in the dim galleries. "Post-Military Cinema," from 2014, is a haunting portrait of an abandoned movie theatre, part of a former Naval base in Puerto Rico. The structure appears to be under slow siege by the surrounding tropical forest—foliage, tree frogs, spiders, and bees form a lush force of decolonization. "The Head Killed Everyone," also made in 2014, takes a different approach to a similar theme, undermining stereotypes of vodou with its sensual, sardonic depiction of a young woman and black cat casting a spell for the "total and absolute destruction of the machinery of war." Muñoz pairs this group of incisive film works with selections from the museum's collection, highlighting her interest in myth and place with Hector Méndez Caratini's photographs of boulders marked with Taino petroglyphs, and her feminist lineage with Ana Mendieta's jarring Super-8 film, from 1974, in which the artist creates silhouettes of her body in blood. *Through April 30.*

GALLERIES—UPTOWN

Dara Friedman

The experimental filmmaker has a gift for capturing movement, while establishing herself as a vivid physical presence outside the frame, as seen in her stunning video installation "Mother Drum," which features footage of drummers, dancers, and flashlights in the night, shot on Swinomish, Coeur d'Alene, and Crow reservations in Washington, Idaho, and Montana. The German-born artist, who is based in Miami, was moved to make the piece when she learned that real estate was being developed on what was once an ancient village of Florida's Tequesta tribe. "Mother Drum" transcends documentary; the performances were cho-

reographed for the camera, and the elegant use of color-blocks and other impressionistic effects lend the immersive projection about imperilled land a hypnotic artifice that becomes hyperreal. *Through April 22.* (Brown, 439 W. 127th St. 212-627-5258.)

Sheree Hovsepian

These photographic constructions, which may be too smart for their own good, depend, like lingerie, on a shadowy interplay of concealment and suggestion. In "Weight Shift," several black-and-white photographs of a female torso pressed against a mirror have been partially rolled up and bound to a board with strips of brown nylon evocative of panty hose; the multiplication of bodies only underscores the fact that the figure's head is cropped out. In the more straightforward "Floor Work," an image of the same model partially obscures an ambiguous still-life, suggesting that Hovsepian's interest isn't in the human body per se, but rather in form for its own sake. *Through April 22.* (Higher Pictures, 980 Madison Ave., at 76th St. 212-249-6100.)

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Hope Gangloff

The Brooklyn painter has a new trick up her sleeve: bits of cut paper integrated with such finesse into her highly patterned, larger-than-life-size portraits that they become indistinguishable from brushstrokes. In "Ben," Gangloff captures her husband (the painter Benjamin Degen) as if he had just woken up, his hair a tangle of loops that shift from light blue to purplish black, his shoulder a network of green and yellow shadows. "Ryan Hart" has pink lips, light-blue shadows around his eyes, and a bottle of beer in his oversized hands, although most of the portrait is devoted to the currents and eddies of his deep-green sweater. (Inglett, 522 W. 24th St. 212-647-9111.)

Callum Innes

Less is more for the Scottish artist, who achieves the rich but delicate hues in his ongoing series "Exposed" and "Lamp Black" by heavily applying paint to—and then removing it from—his canvases. But it's the large roomful of new monochromes here that steals the show. Using horizontal brushstrokes as fine as wood grain on large, deliberately uneven aluminum panels, Innes offers the pure pleasures of orange, purple, yellow, and blue—a reminder that seeing can be an ecstatic sensation. *Through April 29.* (Sean Kelly, 475 Tenth Ave., at 36th St. 212-239-1181.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Andrea Crespo

In this quietly extraordinary two-part exhibition, the young trans artist explores an unusual, at times distressing personal history. Since childhood, Crespo's body image has been that of a pair of conjoined twins, influenced by a reality-television show about two sisters, Abby and Brittany Hensel. As a teenager, isolated by a secret sense of identity, the artist found solace creating anime-inspired portraits of similarly conjoined characters, and now puts this fan-art style to sophisticated use. In the feature-length autobiographical film "Parapagus," delicate drawings are accompanied by text and ambient sound. Related images appear in works on stretched satin, and in wistful, semitransparent renderings of the Hensel twins through the years, mounted on windows to illuminate them like stained-glass saints. *Through April 23.* (Downs & Ross, 55 Chrystie St. and 106 Eldridge St. 646-741-9138.)

DANCE

Compagnie CNDC-Angers

When the Merce Cunningham Dance Company dissolved, in 2001, after Cunningham's death, its director, Robert Swinston, moved to France to take over this contemporary-dance troupe, based in Angers. Its mission is to keep the Cunningham repertory alive, through meticulous restagings. In CNDC's second visit to New York, it will perform "Place" and "How to Pass, Kick, Fall and Run," both from the sixties, the former vaguely ominous—it includes a dancer thrashing in a plastic bag—the latter, sporty and antic, set to vignettes recited onstage by two actors. "Inlets 2," from the eighties, a product of the choreographer's highly complex mature style, is often seen as a nature study suggesting the landscapes of the Pacific Northwest, where Cunningham was born. (*Joyce Theatre, 175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. April 4-9.*)

Adrienne Truscott

"Asking for It," Truscott's funny and disturbing standup-comedy satire of rape jokes, from 2013, earned her a lot of attention. But her career goes

back a lot farther, balancing dance-theatre works that disguise big ideas in quirky humor with appearances in neo-vaudeville and alt-cabaret. Her new piece, "THIS," mines all that past material for a solo performance that might not always be a solo and will be different every time. (*New York Live Arts, 219 W. 19th St. 212-924-0077. April 5-8.*)

Lily Gold

A standout performer in dances by Vicky Shick and Tere O'Connor, Gold is also a visual artist. In "Good Mud," her first evening-length work as a choreographer, a paper tapestry made by her is not just decoration, helping to produce an atmosphere of ritual; it's almost a member of the cast, which includes the striking dancers Asli Bulbul and Eleanor Hullihan. (*Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. April 6-8.*)

New Chamber Ballet

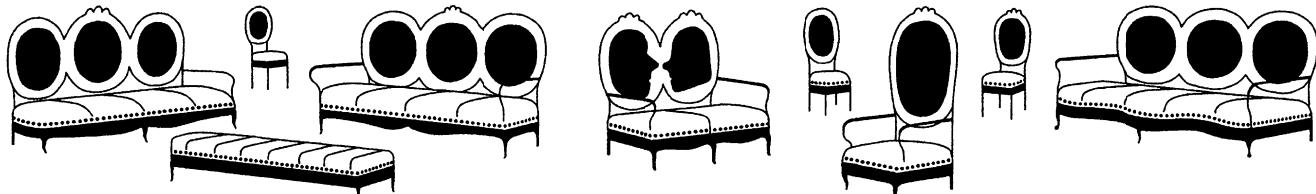
Bare-bones ballet is this ensemble's stock-in-trade. The choreographer Miro Magloire devises inge-

nious chamber works, focussed on the intimate interaction of music and movement, paired with carefully chosen pieces that are played live by the house pianist (Melody Fader) and violinist (Doori Na). The music for this performance includes works by Mozart, Luciano Berio, and two lesser-known composers, the Austrian Friedrich Cerha—who completed the score for the opera "Lulu" when Alban Berg died unexpectedly—and the young American Ryan Brown. (*City Center Studios, 130 W. 56th St. 212-868-4444. April 7-8.*)

"E-Moves"

In its eighteenth year, Harlem Stage's annual showcase slims down, zeroing in on four choreographers. Parijat Desai's "JustLikeThat" lampoons Indian newspapers. Francesca Harper's "(y)ourstory" experiments with audience participation. In Kyle Marshall's "Colored," he and two colleagues reflect on their experiences as black dancers who work primarily with white choreographers. Leyland Simmons's "Traffic," which tackles the heavy subject of human trafficking, features two stars from Dance Theatre of Harlem: Da'Von Doane and Stephanie Rae Williams. On April 8, members of the Bill T. Jones/Arnie Zane Company make a special appearance. (*Harlem Stage at the Gatehouse, 150 Convent Ave., at 135th St. 212-281-9240. April 7-8.*)

ABOVE & BEYOND



Tartan Day Parade

Last year, the actor Sam Heughan, of "Outlander" fame, suited up in his kilt and boots and led a procession through midtown Manhattan for Tartan Day, an annual celebration of Scottish culture and heritage. This year, Tommy Flanagan, of "Sons of Anarchy," will do the honors. A week of events leads up to the official Tartan Day, April 6, before the parade on Saturday, April 8, when bagpipe bands, drummers, and dancers will march up Sixth Ave. from 45th St. to 55th St. (In 2010, the route was shortened from thirteen blocks to ten, to the delight of some bagpipers.) (*nyctartanweek.org. April 8 at 2.*)

The Orchid Show

This edition of the New York Botanical Garden's annual Orchid Show, now in its fifteenth year, focusses on Thailand's rich history and the flower's cultural status as one of the country's leading exports. Held in the Enid A. Haupt Conservatory, the display features blooming orchids by the hundreds in lush tropical environments, leading into an arched installation styled in the manner of a traditional Thai pavilion. The schedule includes several panel discussions, tours, and Orchid Evenings—after-hours viewings with music and cocktails. (*2900 Southern Blvd., the Bronx. 718-817-8700. Through April 9.*)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Swann's sale of African-American art (April 6) contains a significant group of works by Los Angeles-based artists, including three early assemblages by David Hammons. In one, shadowlike outlines of a man and a woman lie against a field of multicolored papers; in another, two faces are arranged to look like a playing card. (*104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.*) • **Christie's** divides its offerings of photographs into two sessions, both held on April 6, starting off with an extensive private collection. (That sale is led by a marmoreal Weston nude.) The big afternoon auction includes twenty-five lots from the collection of the Elton John AIDS Foundation, items which are being sold to fund its activities, with works by Cartier-Bresson, Penn, and Sherman leading the pack. (*20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.*) • A large cache of photographs goes under the gavel at **Sotheby's** on April 5, with lots ranging from mid-nineteenth-century to contemporary works. Among the more striking items is a mural by the Los Angeles photographer Alex Prager ("Simi Valley"), a boldly colored, almost painterly tableau vivant (made using Photoshop) of people waiting at a bus stop. This auction is followed on

April 7 by a mid-season sale of American art from the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, filled with pretty paintings of arbors and majestic Western landscapes. (*York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.*)

READINGS AND TALKS

Merchant's House Museum

By the nineteenth century, migration and commercialization had begun etching out New York City's pulsing nervous system. Families of distinction who gathered around Bond Street, in NoHo, included the Astors, the Vanderbilts, the Delanos, and the Tredwells, whose former home, the only one of its time preserved intact, now serves as the Merchant's House Museum. This hour-long walking tour will map period landmarks and curiosities throughout the neighborhood; the most enticing stops excavate grisly scenes of a city earning its reputation. At Astor Place, you'll hear of the 1849 riot that spilled out of an opera-house dispute and initiated the arming of American police forces with deadly weapons; on Bond Street, you'll visit the location of the brutal murder of Harvey Burdell, one of Manhattan's most scandalous unsolved crimes. (*29 E. 4th St. 212-777-1089. April 9 at 12:30.*)

FOOD & DRINK



TABLES FOR TWO

The Finch

212 Greene Ave., Brooklyn (718-218-4444)

IN 2014, GABE McMACKIN opened the Finch in a former tattoo parlor, on a quiet brownstone block in Clinton Hill. The dining room has an open kitchen, a Carrara-marble bar, and a six-hundred-pound hunk of sparkling quartz in the fireplace. (McMackin, forty-one, hauled the quartz from his family's home in Connecticut; he says it keeps him grounded.) The restaurant's name is a nod to both Darwin's Galápagos finch (and evolution) and the American goldfinches McMackin saw growing up. He loved how they surprised him in early spring, suddenly glittering chartreuse on a still bare branch, and he wanted his restaurant to spark a similar sense of surprise amid the familiar. His experience—at Blue Hill at Stone Barns, Roberta's, and Gramercy Tavern— informs his down-home seasonal American fare, which veers more toward tongues and cheeks than burgers.

Ten months after opening, the Finch earned a Michelin star. For an obscure bistro, the honor seemed implausible. Apparently, McMackin's commitment to being a neighborhood spot appealed to Michelin's judges. (Ironically, the star made the food pricier.) The kitchen can be adventurous, but McMackin also wants to give the people what they want. He takes some off-menu requests, and he offers

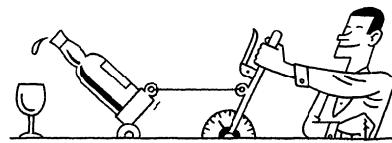
exceptional versions of staples like kale salad, vegetarian lasagna, and flatiron steak.

But it's the intrepid eater who will be most rewarded. The chicken-liver mousse is salty, buttery, slightly tart, decadent. It glides like meat Nutella onto campagne toast. (One diner, trying it for the first time, confirmed that it is the gateway drug to offal-eating.) The grass-fed-beef tartare is light and citrusy, with watermelon radish and paper-thin caraway toasts sticking up like sea fans. The lamb tongue is intense and gamy. When rounded out by pickled red cabbage and mustard, apple purée, smoked egg yolk, and grilled bread, the flavors achieve a rare pentagonal balance.

For an entrée, the juicy, slow-cooked pork shoulder is a safe bet. An otherworldly plate of duck includes a leg confit wrapped in a cabbage leaf and steamed into a little green flavor bomb. O.K., the bird's breast was poached in olive oil with hay that McMackin's mother bought from her neighbor in Connecticut, and that may be T.M.I. But the duck comes with smoked bread pudding, which hits your mouth fire-pit crispy on the outside, warm and soft on the inside—euphoria.

Dessert includes a dreamy chocolate cake, with pine nuts and rosemary butter. Afterward, two friends wander outside. Lights flicker in old houses, an icy gust whirs through ancient trees. For a block at least, they forget that their brains evolved to worry about how the world is evolving. (*Entrées \$26-\$34.*) —Carolyn Kormann

BAR TAB



A Touch of Dee

657 Malcolm X Blvd. (212-694-9530)

The door of this snug Harlem local is often kept locked, even when the place is open. A couple of Wednesdays ago, after a rap on the window, a thin, quiet man wearing a gold cross and wraparound glasses swivelled on his bar stool to unlock the door. In burst a group of young men headed by Frank Nitty, in a red velvet coat. Nitty, who d.j.s smooth hip-hop and R. & B. at the bar every Saturday, was in a celebratory mood. Several flyers, festooned with clip art of champagne bottles and googly eyes, announced that tonight was his birthday ("So When You See Him Bottoms Up"). Nitty plunged in, bumping fists and trading hugs. "Jack, my man," he saluted a sleepy-looking gentleman in a leather coat drinking pink champagne out of a tumbler with ice. Each day of the week has a different server and sound: Crystal usually pours six-dollar drinks to the groove of a funky jukebox on Wasted Wednesdays; on Thursdays, you'll find Joy Juice mixing exemplary eight-dollar whiskey sours (and occasionally partaking in a game of Rummy 500) as Mike P. lays down some old-school classics. Dee, in case you're wondering, is Dolores Tongue Reagans, a former bartender who bought the establishment twenty-four years ago and has assembled a rotating family of regulars. On the walls are cheeky announcements (in the men's bathroom: "Gentlemen Please Move Closer It May Be Shorter Than You Think") as well as thank-you notes from Obama's Presidential campaigns. An ample range of liquor bottles is crowned by a dusty banner that reads "Happy Birthday." But it wasn't there for Nitty; it's up even when nobody's celebrating: every night at A Touch of Dee feels like someone's birthday.—Nicolas Niarchos

Advertisement

HISTORY IN REAL TIME AS TOLD BY THE NEW YORKER

*U-2 Spy Plane • Bay of Pigs • Civil-Rights Movement • Summer of Love
Martin Luther King, Jr. • Bob Dylan • Woodstock • Dwight Macdonald
John Updike • Vietnam War • Free-Speech Movement • J.F.K. • E. B.*

White • Environmental Movement • Truman

Capote • John Cheever • Muriel Spark

James Baldwin • The Beatles

Apollo 11 • William S. Burroughs • Allen Ginsberg • Peter Fonda

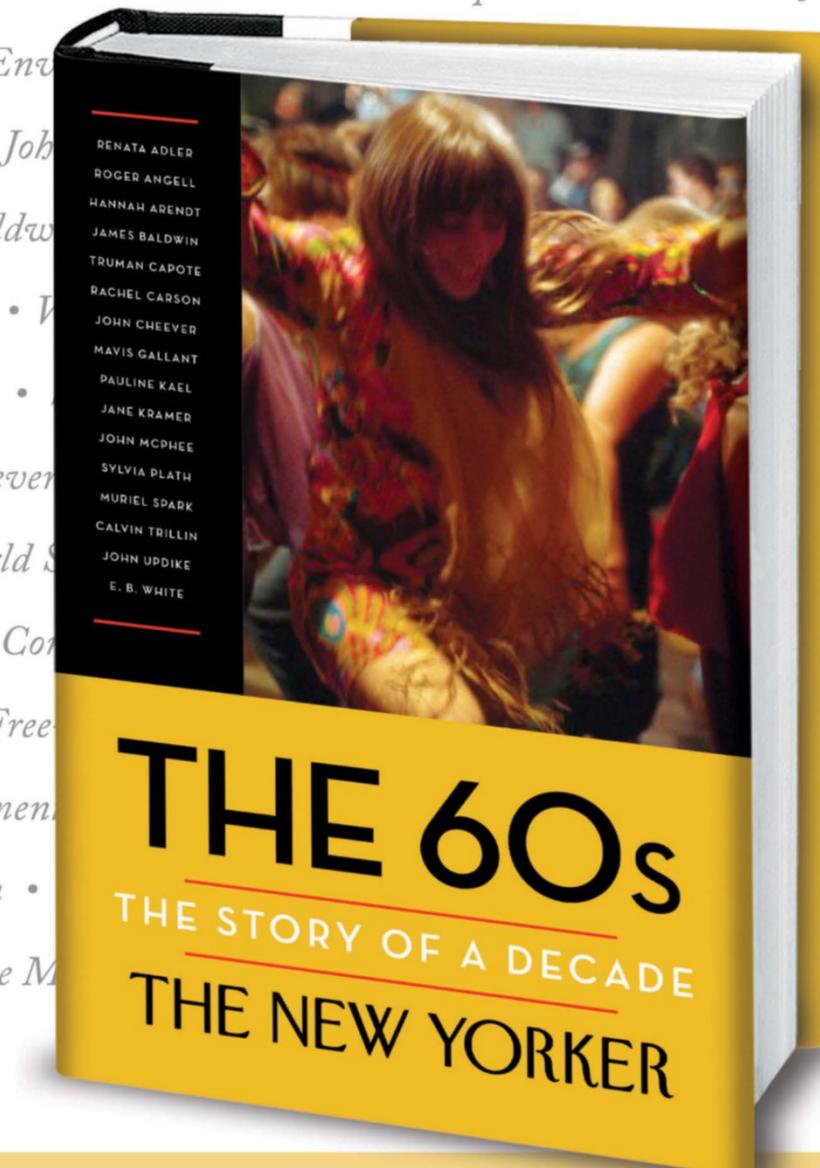
John Cheever • Pauline Kael • & Garfunkel

1969 World Series • Sylvia Plath

Portnoy's Complaint • Cuban Missile Crisis • Desegregation

Environmental Movement • Second-Wave Feminism • Joan Baez

Free-Love Movement • Rachel Carson



WITH NEW PERSPECTIVES FROM
Malcolm Gladwell, Adam Gopnik, Jennifer Egan, Kelefa Sanneh, and many more.



THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT

TRUMP V. THE EARTH

IN LATE 2006, President George W. Bush's Environmental Protection Agency argued before the Supreme Court that it did not want to regulate greenhouse gases, and that no one could make it do so. It certainly had no wish to accede to the desires of Massachusetts, which, with eleven other states, had sued the E.P.A. for failing to establish guidelines on emissions of carbon dioxide, methane, nitrous oxide, and hydrofluorocarbons. The states pointed to the agency's charter, under the Clean Air Act, which instructs it to regulate chemicals released into the air "which may reasonably be anticipated to endanger public health or welfare." They asked why the E.P.A., which had refused even to consider whether greenhouse gases fell into that category, thought that it could ignore the law.

The Court, in a landmark 5–4 decision, written by Justice John Paul Stevens and issued ten years ago this week, agreed with the states. As a result of that ruling, the E.P.A. began the formal process of looking at the science documenting the risks posed by greenhouse gases, and recognized that those emissions had contributed to a public-safety crisis affecting not just the nation but the planet. The E.P.A.'s resulting "endangerment finding," as it is known, was issued in 2009, in time for Barack Obama's Presidency. It became the immediate object of conservative scorn and of furious efforts in Congress and the courts to invalidate it, but it held up, and formed the basis for new standards on auto emissions and for Obama's Clean Power Plan, issued in 2015. More than that, the finding was an assertion of the principle that politicians cannot entirely ignore either science or the rule of law.

We now have, in Donald J. Trump, a President who shows disdain for both. Trump's lack of interest in climate change as anything other than fodder for conspiracy theories involving Chinese hoaxers reached its full-

est expression last week, in a "Presidential Executive Order on Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth." The order asks every agency of the federal government to review its rules and to purge them of measures that inconvenience the fossil-fuel and nuclear-power industries. In particular, it directs the E.P.A. to rewrite the Clean Power Plan, which had called for, among other things, the replacement of old and dirty coal-burning plants. The plan would, it was projected, result in eight hundred and seventy million fewer tons of carbon pollution released into the atmosphere, as many as thirty-six hundred premature deaths in the United States between now and 2030, and ninety thousand fewer asthma attacks in children.

President Trump said that his order puts "an end to the war on coal." In reality, it is a declaration of war on the basic knowledge of the harm that burning coal, and other fossil fuels, can do. Indeed, it tells the government to *ignore* information. The Obama Administration assembled a working group to determine the "social cost" of each ton of greenhouse-gas emissions. Trump's executive order disbands that group and tosses out its findings. Scott Pruitt, the new E.P.A. administrator—who, as

attorney general of Oklahoma, had joined a lawsuit attempting to undo the endangerment finding—announced that the agency was no longer interested in even collecting data on the quantities of methane that oil and gas companies release.

The order also revokes several of President Obama's executive orders and memorandums. One of them, "Preparing the United States for the Impact of Climate Change," sought to remove regulations that deterred private industry from responding to climate change in innovative ways; another asked the military to assess the threats posed by climate-induced upheaval abroad—wars, famines, flows of refugees. Trump further called for a scrubbing of any reports or rules that might have developed in response



to those documents, and thus any insights that might have been gleaned from them. He chooses to cast such worries aside at the Winter White House, Mar-a-Lago, even as that property sinks into the rising sea, a process that has begun and, by many scientific estimations, will result in its grounds becoming one with the Atlantic during Barron Trump's lifetime.

For all the talk of American greatness, Trump's actions regarding climate change represent a historic abdication of leadership. The Clean Power Plan was important not only for its domestic effects but because it was a down payment on America's commitments under the Paris climate accords. If fully implemented, the plan would have got the United States about halfway to the goal of reducing greenhouse-gas emissions by a quarter, from their 2005 levels, by 2025. Without the plan, the goal will almost certainly not be reached, despite the pledges of several states and even some large energy concerns to adopt greener technology. Meanwhile, China, in a reversal, is proclaiming itself to be the champion of Paris, if only as a way of enhancing its own world-leader credentials.

Trump says that he is still deciding whether to formally withdraw from Paris, but it is now clear that if he doesn't it will only be because he can't be bothered with the paperwork. The United States government's meaningful participation in

the fight against climate change appears, at least for the next few years, to be at an end. The Friday before issuing the order, in what looked like an attempt to cheer up Republicans about their health-care defeat, Trump granted a permit for the completion of the Keystone XL Pipeline, which the Army Corps of Engineers had earlier blocked.

Much of this will end up in the courts, as yet another set of Trumpian actions that make the expected confirmation of Neil Gorsuch to the Supreme Court so consequential (and the abandonment of Merrick Garland so tragic). Gorsuch's mother was a notably anti-environmentalist head of the E.P.A., under Ronald Reagan, and Gorsuch would take the seat formerly occupied by one of his judicial idols, Antonin Scalia, who was in the minority in *Massachusetts v. E.P.A.* (In his dissent, Scalia grumpily wondered why the agency couldn't just say that climate-change science was unsettled, and leave it at that.) The Trump Administration has already proposed defunding the E.P.A. by thirty-one per cent and cutting its staff by twenty per cent, raising questions about how it can fulfill its most basic responsibilities. Soon enough, the Supreme Court may be asked, again, what it means for the E.P.A. to be derelict in its duties, and for America to have a President whose main mode of action is reckless endangerment.

—Amy Davidson

LEGACY DEPT. DEM BONES



WE ALL WANT to leave something behind when we go. The architectural historian Christopher Gray, who died this month, at the age of sixty-six, left a richer legacy than most. There is the Office of Metropolitan History, the business he founded, which is dedicated to digging up blueprints for old New York City buildings. And there's the nearly thirty years' worth of "Streetscape" columns he wrote for the *Times*, which chronicled the city's unheralded architectural treasures.

But Gray had one more bequest. Just before he died, suddenly, from complications from pneumonia, his lawyer alerted his family to an e-mail he'd sent to his alma mater, St. Paul's School, in Concord, New Hampshire: "It is my wish, when I die, that my skeleton be flensed (don't ask!) and articulated and given to a worthy institution not entirely embarrassed by its connection with me, for display in the science lab." To sweeten the deal, Gray made a financial pledge

to the school, effective "only if you accept and take delivery of my skeleton . . . and agree to leave it on display for . . . 10 years? Or until it gets stolen by the Sixth Form"—the senior class—"whichever comes first." The school had agreed.

The request took Gray's wife, Erin, by surprise. "This was a relatively new thought of his," she said. Nevertheless, the family wanted to honor his wish. Which left them with an awkward question, in their grief: How do you turn a loved one into a skeleton?

Gray's son Peter took the lead. ("We're nature people. We're science people," he said of his family. "We rejected the cultural associations of skeletons and bones with death as petty.") He called the outfit his father had suggested: Skulls Unlimited International, Inc., in Oklahoma City, which provides skull-cleaning services, mostly to hunters. Skulls Unlimited turned him down. An employee there, Terrisha Harris, explained, "We actually do clean human remains," but only for medical institutions. "Otherwise, you'd have people putting Nana on the couch in the living room." Peter Gray got a similar response from various "body farms," outdoor research facilities where forensic anthropologists study decomposition. Sam Houston State University, in Texas, accepts bodies for dona-

tion, but will not return the bones. The forensic-anthropology center at the University of Tennessee, Knoxville, has a similar policy, although it will occasionally "skeletonize" remains for institutions with which it has a relationship, like the Smithsonian's National Museum of Natural History.

Peter called the Smithsonian. The museum's collection includes thirty thousand human skeletons, most of them recovered from archeological sites. It has a small number of modern skeletons as well. "They're our reference library," Dr. David Hunt, the collection's manager, said. Students use them to study things like how fractures heal and joint articulation. He said that they can learn more from real skeletons, with their quirks and variations, than from replicas made by companies such as Bone Clones, Inc. Many of the donors were friends of the museum, among them Grover Krantz, an anthropologist, who died in 2002. "He told me, 'I've been a teacher all my life, so I might as well continue,'" Hunt recalled. Krantz's skeleton was displayed in a 2009 exhibit, "Written in Bone," along with that of his beloved Irish wolfhound, Clyde.

Hunt and Peter Gray came up with a plan. The family will donate Christopher's remains to the Smithsonian, which

will loan them to St. Paul's on a long-term basis. First, though, the body will decompose at the University of Tennessee. Dr. Lee Jantz, at the school's forensic-anthropology center, confirmed, "Mr. Gray arrived last week," in the cargo hold of a Delta flight. "It takes about eighteen months to get a good clean skeleton," she said. In that time, his remains will be used to train students in forensics. The bones will then be scrubbed with toothbrushes, by grad students, and transferred to the Smithsonian, where they will be rearticulated by Paul Rhymer, a taxidermist for the museum. (Gray's estate will pay Rhymer's fee of around five thousand dollars.) When that's finished, Peter will pick up his father's skeleton and take it on a "road trip," up to St. Paul's.

Last week, the school's biology teacher, Theresa Gerardo-Gettens, said that she was thrilled about Gray's gift. St. Paul's happens to already have a real skeleton, of unknown origins—she thinks it dates to the nineteen-thirties or forties. "When I bring out that skeleton, there is a pause," she said. "I say to the kids, 'This is a real person who had a real life. In those bones is this person's story.' It leads us to all kinds of wonderful discussions. They start to talk about facing their own mortality."

Gerardo-Gettens doesn't know much about Gray, but, she said, "I'm hoping I can learn more about this alum. I want to hear his story, so I can share it with the students. It really makes the science come alive. We're all curious."

—Lizzie Widdicombe

SLIGHT HEADACHE DEPT. I SAY KOCH



MOST NEW YORKERS, according to one poll, didn't much like it when, in 2011, the city renamed the Queensboro Bridge for former Mayor Ed Koch. The response may not have had much to do with their feelings for Koch. The bridge already had a perfectly good name, and a no-baloney alias as well: the Fifty-ninth Street Bridge, perhaps best blurred in the voice of the late columnist Jimmy Breslin. (Breslin, for what it's worth, didn't like Koch. He was more

of a Mario Cuomo guy. Cuomo doesn't have a bridge, or a tunnel, yet.) The new name didn't really stick.

But navigation systems are deferential to the authorities; algorithms are squares. The other day, a traffic-jam aficionado, curious to see how various nav apps would direct a driver who wanted to go from the East Side of Manhattan to Long Island City, Queens, in the shortest amount of time, punched a destination into a couple of iPhones and the dashboard system simultaneously, and let them compete for the driver's at-



Ed Koch

tention. They piped up quick. Evidently, they disapproved of going down Lexington Avenue—"Turn left," "Turn left," "Turn left," each device repeated—and all had the same route in mind, toward the You-Know-What Bridge. But only Apple Maps, as the ramp approached, dared say its name—and got it wrong. It pronounced Koch "coke," as in the Koch brothers, Charles and David, the industrialists and underwriters of right-wing causes—rather than "kotch," as in the Mayor. What a maroon.

Perhaps you could chalk up the app's confusion to the fact that one of those brothers, David Koch, now has his name affixed to two other destinations on the map, an auditorium (formerly the New York State Theatre) at Lincoln Center and the plaza in front of the Metropolitan Museum. And there are so many pronunciations of Koch to choose from. Among the "cokes" are Kenneth, the poet, and Bill, the Nordic-skiing star from Vermont, whose father, Frederick, in 1985, amid his frustration over getting called "kotch" during Ed's term, had his last

name legally changed to Coke-Is-It. (When the Coca-Cola Company sued, he was listed in court documents as "It, Coke Is.") Sam Koch, the Baltimore Ravens punter, is a "cook" (as any Sam should prefer). So was Tom, the *Mad* writer. Pietro Koch, a particularly brutal Italian Fascist feared even by Mussolini, was a "cock." Ilse Koch, the notorious Bitch of Buchenwald, was a "cochhh."

Could there be something political at work? These are volatile times. On Inauguration Day, a protest sign was hung from the bridge which read "BRIDGES NOT WALLS." Ed Koch hated Donald Trump, and vice versa. Trump called Koch a "moron," and Koch called Trump "greedy, greedy, greedy" and "piggy, piggy, piggy." The *Times* recently reported on papers that had been dug up by Pat Thaler, Koch's sister, which contained some previously unpublished remarks by Koch: "Donald Trump is one of the least likable people I have met during the twelve years that I served as mayor. It is incomprehensible to me that for some people he has become a folk hero." The report also contained Koch's reaction to Trump's request to have his name put on Wollman Rink, after Trump had spent three million dollars to renovate it: "I'm surprised he doesn't want Central Park renamed for him."

Of course, many big structures in New York already bear Trump's name, although the number is decreasing, as residents in Trump-branded buildings take actions to remove it. And, given his reputation in these parts, it's hard to imagine any civic structures taking on his name anytime soon. (There seems to be more support, actually, for naming a bridge after Breslin. Eliot Spitzer, to whom posterity will likely grant not even a viaduct or an overpass, recently floated the idea of appending Breslin's name to the White-stone Bridge, or the Throgs Neck.)

You'd think that Trump would be more a "coke" guy than a "kotch," in light of his income bracket and political leanings, but the Koch brothers have been no great allies of his, either. They donated money to his opponents in the primaries, and recently, by way of activist groups that they fund, pledged millions of dollars to support Republican congressmen who were voting against the health-care bill—the very ones whom Trump has vowed to challenge, because

of their disloyalty. Coke, kotch, cook, cock: pick your poison.

In 1908, the bridge, during its construction, was actually called Blackwell's Island Bridge, after the former name of Roosevelt Island. That year, an ironworker conspired to blow it up with dynamite, amid grievances from the workers' union. He balked and removed the dynamite when he discovered that the explosion would likely kill twenty or more firemen. For this pang of conscience, union officials labelled him "chicken-hearted."

—Nick Paumgarten

THE RULES WHAT WOULD BILLY DO?



THE VICE-PRESIDENT CAN'T get a burger with Lisa Murkowski without arousing suspicion or, possibly, himself? After the *Washington Post* pointed out, last week, that Mike Pence once told a reporter that he never dines alone with a woman who is not his wife—a variation of the so-called Billy Graham rule—people had a lot of questions. Are after-sunset encounters allowed if they don't include food? Do canapés count? Pretzels on an airplane? It seemed like a good time to get on the phone, for some perspective, with

Billy Graham's forty-two-year-old evangelist grandson, Will.

"I'm going to give you a little history, is that O.K.?" Will said, speaking from Pachuca, Mexico, where he was preparing to lead a revival. "Think about 1948—the times were different, but one of the things that my grandfather was dealing with was the image of an evangelist, which was kind of synonymous with what you'd think of as a used-car salesman." Will pointed out that two decades earlier Sinclair Lewis had published "Elmer Gantry." His grandfather, fighting that huckster stereotype, asked three male colleagues to help him make a list of things that could hurt evangelism. One of them was sexual immorality. In what became known as the Modesto Manifesto, Billy and his team pledged to avoid any situation that could create even the appearance of impropriety. "When my grandfather would check into a hotel, a man would go inside the room and look under the bed and in the closets," Will said. "What they were afraid of was that someone had snuck in the room, like a naked lady with a photographer, and she'd jump into his arms and he'd take a picture, and they'd frame my granddaddy."

Times have changed, and so has the rule, meaning that today a righteous man must think about how to avoid female company even in scenarios that don't involve a honey trap. But the

jezebel mentality persists. "For one thing, if I'm meeting with a woman, then there's a temptation that maybe it could be something more," Will said, when asked why dinners posed a risk. Another thing, he said, is that "I want to do everything I can to protect my wife and my marriage." He continued, "I think Mike Pence loves his wife so much that he never wants anything to jeopardize his marriage to what he believes is the greatest woman he's ever been with."

In practical terms, this means that if a man and a woman need to ride in a car together someone else should come along. (The collective evangelical sexual imagination accounts for infidelity, but apparently not for threesomes.) Breakfast is out. So is coffee. "We have glass offices, so that you can see everything," Will said. What would he do if he were on a train and the only other person in the car was a woman? "That's why I always travel with a friend," he said. What if his wife is at home and a workman is coming to the house? "I always have someone from my office go there and be with her." There are certain exceptions. "Have I been in an elevator when there's been only a woman? Yes." He went on, "When I'm on that elevator, it's, like, Ugh. Not that I don't want to be around a woman, but, actually, I feel uncomfortable."

Back to Pence. Isn't his line of work a little different from an evangelist's? Isn't it unfair to offer men a point of access that is closed to women? "We believe that a woman could meet with another woman, but a woman couldn't meet with a man, so it would go both ways," Will explained. "Just take another person into the room." Of the Vice-President, he said, "I don't know Mike Pence, but I think he's just trying to protect that nothing could ever be used against him. He's got so many pressures on him that that's the last thing he wants to deal with."

At ninety-eight, Billy Graham is still upholding the Billy Graham rule. "The problem is, he's got twenty-four-hour nursing care at home," Will said. "There are always two nurses, for accountability purposes." Will told a story about his grandfather invoking the Billy Graham rule with Hillary Clinton. In 1989, when Graham was in Little Rock for a crusade, Hillary invited him to lunch.



As Graham recounted in his autobiography, he told her that he'd be delighted, but, he said, "I don't have private luncheons with beautiful ladies." Will said, "I don't think anyone's ever going to suggest that Billy Graham and Hillary Clinton ever tried anything. I heard she was so surprised that he still kept to those rules, but I think she respected that." In the end, Hillary persuaded him to join her in the crowded dining room of the Capital Hotel, and Graham wrote that he left the encounter "greatly impressed by her."

Final question: Is the Billy Graham rule purely about physical proximity—in other words, is it O.K. to have a one-on-one telephone chat with a female reporter (who, incidentally, was quietly eating some salt-and-pepper shrimp at her desk)? "That's why I've got a guy sitting right here beside me," Will said.

—Lauren Collins

THE BOARDS BEAUTY QUEEN BEES



LET'S START THE tour at Frank Campbell," Lindy Woodhead suggested, from the back seat of a limo. Woodhead—blond, vivacious, and ample—is the author of "War Paint," a joint biography of the duelling beauty queens Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden, which has been turned into a Broadway musical of the same title, starring Patti LuPone and Christine Ebersole.

Woodhead, a former fashion publicist who lives in London, was revisiting her subjects' haunts. They dissed each other with a quaint feline ferocity, competed like two cage fighters, and avoided crossing paths. Yet they lived in palatial splendor a stone's throw apart, the approximate distance between their flagship salons, in the East Fifties. Arden kept a chauffeured Bentley ("racing green with pink rugs," Woodhead said, in her Noël Coward accent) that ferried her the few blocks south to work. Rubinstein, a dumpyling of four feet eleven, was never one to pass up a weight-loss opportunity, so she preferred to walk. "She took her lunch in

a brown paper bag," Woodhead said. "To call her a thrifty soul is to put it mildly."

Frank Campbell, the venerable funeral chapel on Madison Avenue, caters to A-list New Yorkers (many of whom have arrived looking pre-embalmed by the city's top plastic surgeons). When the time came, both divas received their mourners there, in full war paint, courtesy of *visagistes* from their salons. "Miss Arden" was laid out in "Arden pink" ruffles by Oscar de la Renta, with matching earrings. "Madame" wore her favorite Saint Laurent, with a priceless triple strand of black pearls. Rubinstein died first, at ninety-three, in 1965; Arden followed, eighteen months later, at eighty-seven. "For once," Woodhead said, "Elizabeth was happy to come in second."

Both protagonists of "War Paint" were immigrants of humble birth who had a genius for branding—themselves, first of all. Arden, née Florence Nightingale Graham, was a farm girl from provincial Canada. Rubinstein, born Chaja, was the daughter of an Orthodox Jewish kerosene dealer in Kraków, who left for Australia to escape an arranged marriage. (She became Helena on the boat.) They parlayed their recipes for creams and potions, and their exercise regimens, into eponymous empires worth billions in today's currency. If you judge their careers by the power they wielded, the conventions they flouted, and the autonomy they achieved, they count as pioneering feminists. If you regard their business as a scheme to exploit women's insecurities (of which they were connoisseurs), they were colluding with the enemy.

Neither was a natural beauty, and their domestic lives were sabotaged by their ambitions. They were both married twice, the second time to dubious "princes." "I think they were pretty sexless," Woodhead said, adding that Arden, an expert masseuse, "hated to be touched."

"625 Park, please," Woodhead said to her driver. Her next stop was a prewar apartment house on Sixty-fifth Street, where Rubinstein lived in a terraced triplex that she called her "castle in the sky." (It is now owned by the financier Henry Kravis.) But when she first applied for a lease, in 1941, she was turned down: Jews weren't welcome. Rubinstein's revenge was to buy the building.

Arden encountered snobbery, too. She had started as the cashier in a beauty par-

lor, and, while the doyennes of New York society were happy to entrust their faces to her ministrations, "their drawing rooms," Woodhead writes in "War Paint," "had rarely been open to her." To them, she was "trade." That didn't stop her from buying a duplex at 834 Fifth Avenue, where she lived facing Central Park, a few floors below Laurance Rockefeller.

There were two more stops on Woodhead's tour: the former premises of Rubinstein's salon, on Fifth Avenue at Fifty-fifth Street, now a Dolce & Gabbana



Helena Rubinstein and Elizabeth Arden

boutique, and a neo-Georgian house, at 13 Sutton Place, that was owned by Arden's devoted friend Elizabeth (Bessie) Marbury, the theatrical and literary agent. In middle age, Woodhead explained, Arden fell in with a coterie of patrician lesbians who had moved to a stretch of what was then still called Avenue A ("the heart of the slums," as the *Times* noted reprovingly, "the Amazon Enclave," said wags of the era). But, as Woodhead put it, "Elizabeth felt she had finally arrived at the pinnacle of society." Her new B.F.F.s—Marbury; Anne Vanderbilt; Anne Morgan (J.P.'s daughter); and Elsie de Wolfe, the interior decorator, who was Marbury's life partner—also introduced Arden to coastal Maine, and when Marbury died she left Elizabeth her estate there, which became Arden's Maine Chance spa. "Bessie was the person who really loved her," Woodhead said.

The Marbury house had a "FOR SALE" sign on it. Rubinstein might have snapped it up.

—Judith Thurman

DEATH OF A DYSTOPIAN

How a Libertarian's film project, and his fate, fuelled the alt-right's deepest fears.

BY ALEC WILKINSON



David Crowley's "Gray State" envisaged an America under martial law.

DAVID CROWLEY BEGAN keeping a journal in April of 2014. He was twenty-eight years old, and he lived in Apple Valley, Minnesota, with his wife, Komel, and their four-year-old daughter, Raniya. The journal was "a life report, since I suspect my feelings right now in nostalgia or reflection might be of value," Crowley wrote. By the time he stopped making entries, seven months later, he had inadvertently created a psychological document of which very few examples are known.

Crowley had been a soldier in Iraq and Afghanistan. Afterward, he had gone to film school, and in 2010 he began writing a script that he called "Gray State," in which a totalitarian foreign regime conquers the U.S. government and

a band of patriots form a resistance. On LinkedIn, Crowley described "Gray State" as "a film about a near future collapse of society under martial law."

Crowley's engagement with "Gray State" was consuming. "Every little part of this project is me," he recorded himself saying. In addition to writing six very different drafts of the script, he made three trailers, for which he auditioned, rehearsed, and directed the actors; drew storyboards; designed costumes; found locations and got permits; acted as the director of photography, overseeing as many as four cameras at once; and composed music and special effects. As if inhabiting the world he was creating, he periodically cut his hair in a Mohawk and wore combat fatigues and body

armor. An actor named Danny Mason, who helped write the first draft, told me that Crowley would take him on hikes through the woods at three in the morning. "We'd come to a clearing and he'd say, 'See that field?'" Mason said. "Imagine there being a convoy there and fires in the distance."

Crowley posted a trailer for "Gray State" on YouTube in 2012. It has been watched more than two and a half million times, and the film has more than fifty-seven thousand followers on Facebook. Its supporters included "conspiracy theorists, survival groups," Crowley wrote, "libertarians, veterans," and "the military," many of whom believe that the government has plans to impose martial law, confiscate guns, and hold dissidents prisoner in camps built by FEMA.

Crowley had a patchwork system of beliefs. He regarded himself as a Libertarian, but he identified with the left-leaning wing of the Party, not the militant one—being a soldier had made him a pacifist. After uploading the trailer, Crowley spoke at a Ron Paul event in Tampa, hoping to raise money. "Gray State," he said, would explore such trends as "the slow yielding of our quiet American towns and streets to a choking array of federal surveillance grids, illegal police checkpoints."

Through a crowdsourcing campaign, Crowley collected more than sixty thousand dollars, much of it after the conservative radio commentator Alex Jones had Crowley and Danny Mason on his radio show "Infowars," in 2012, to discuss "the impressive film you're working on." The world depicted in "Gray State" was already "happening here," Jones said. "The people who have hijacked our country, they're admitting it. They're admitting that we're an occupied nation by foreign banks, they're admitting they're getting rid of the Bill of Rights and the Constitution."

"We have people who are living in the Alex Jones world who know what's going on, and the people who simply don't," Crowley replied. "Gray State," he added, was factual and "could be described as a documentary." (Jones declined my request for an interview.)

In January of 2015, Crowley and his wife and daughter were found shot dead at their home. Reports of their

deaths appeared in the United States and abroad. The Huffington Post called Crowley a military man, and *USA Today* called him a filmmaker. The police determined that Crowley had shot his wife and child and then shot himself, but commentators on the Internet soon began saying that Crowley's death seemed "suspicious" and "mysterious," and that he had likely been murdered by government agents intent on preventing the movie from being made. Among certain conspiracy-minded, anti-government, Libertarian, and alt-right believers, Crowley has become a species of martyr. In January, the international hacking collective Anonymous, which declared war on Donald Trump last fall, posted a tribute to Crowley, suggesting that the government killed him. A spokesman, wearing a Guy Fawkes mask and addressing "my brothers and sisters of the world," said that the circumstances do "not sound right."

On Facebook, there is a page called "Justice for David Crowley & family," which says that its purpose is to "help to clear the good name of David Crowley." The page is overseen by an accountant in Minnesota named Dan Hennen. He and Greg Fernandez, Jr., a tech worker in California, conduct long discussions on YouTube in which they find fault with the police investigation and ask why someone whose future seemed so promising would kill himself.

Hennen believes that the crime scene was staged by Crowley's killer. He mentions a sliding glass door at Crowley's house that the police discovered slightly open—"Very suspicious in Minnesota in the winter," he told me. Furthermore, no neighbors heard gunshots. "A forty-calibre gun, which is what the police found, is so loud that it would have woken up the whole neighborhood," Hennen said. "I believe a silencer, or a suppressor of some sort, was used by the killers."

These theories are contradicted by Crowley's journal, which was given to me, along with videos and recordings, with the permission of Crowley's family, by the filmmaker Erik Nelson, who produced "Grizzly Man." For A&E IndieFilms Nelson has made a documentary about Crowley called "A Gray State," which will have its première in

a few weeks, at the Tribeca Film Festival. Nelson read the reports of Crowley's death, which led him to watch the "Gray State" trailer. "It seemed incredibly well made," he told me. "It was clear this guy was in command of all the skills necessary to his craft." When he read that the police had found hours of videos and voice recordings on Crowley's computer documenting his family and the progress of "Gray State," he thought that they might be the basis for a film. Nelson saw Crowley as a solitary obsessive, fiercely making art in an unlikely place.

The journal is dominated by Crowley's notes as he wrote "Gray State"—what he wished for it to be, his anxieties about whether he could manage it, and the audience he imagined it would reach. He also wrote about his ambitions in general (to have a screenplay produced by 2016, to be a millionaire by 2017), his feelings for Komel ("God I love that woman. Strong, beautiful, ferocious, and deadly intelligent"), and his determination to be a good father. As the entries progress, however, insights appear to arrive unbidden and to impose themselves on him. "I'm expecting to wake up somebody else," he wrote. "Vast personality changes are happening too fast to write about every day." And: "I am being prepped for some slide into oblivion or destiny."

Crowley was losing his mind, and he didn't seem to know it. Journals of people overtaken by psychosis are rare—accounts of madness tend to be written by people in the midst of their illness or retrospectively by those who have recovered. Crowley was handsome, gifted, and charismatic, but he was also deeply unsure of himself. He owned a number of self-hypnosis recordings meant to overcome his insecurities. He thought that the convulsive things that were happening to him were the result of his endeavor to become more confident, poised, and commanding. He thought that he was developing a new self.

CROWLEY WAS BORN on July 7, 1985, the middle child of Dan and Kate Crowley. His brother, Dan, Jr., a personal trainer, was older by three years, and his sister, Allison, an architecture student, was younger by two. The three of them

were brought up in Owatonna, Minnesota. Dan, Sr., is an engineer who has his own company, which makes equipment he designed to coat solar panels and architectural glass. He and David's mother divorced when David was twenty.

In ninth grade, David met a boy named Mitch Heil in a computer class. With friends, they played an army game called Airsoft, which is like paintball except that it uses pellets, and the guns are more realistic-looking. They dressed in soldiers' uniforms and wore helmets and carried backpacks and decorated their faces with camouflage paint. After a while, David began bringing his father's video camera to the Airsoft game. "That evolved to I'm not getting what I want,' and we'd start staging our own little scenes and stories," Heil told me. On weekends, they'd gather at one of their houses and watch the films.

In 2003, toward the end of eleventh grade, David told his parents that he and Mitch were joining the Army after high school. In the real Army, they thought, you also played combat games, but you got paid for it. His parents would have preferred that he go to college, but Dan, Sr., felt that he shouldn't oppose something his son felt strongly about.

In June of 2004, David and Mitch went through basic training at Fort Benning, in Georgia. Eventually, Mitch was sent to Afghanistan, and David was sent to Germany. While the other soldiers went into town at night to drink, David taught himself German and read calculus and chemistry books. In 2006, he went to Iraq, where he was a mortarman. Later that year, he was among the first to arrive after a car bomb killed more than forty soldiers. Dozens of men, he wrote, were "moaning and wailing ghouls, their skin hanging off in gray ropes, one sitting very still in my seat with half his body an oozing yellow mess whimpering 'can we please hurry? Could you hurry, please?'" Toward the end of the year, he returned to Germany "greeted by no one," and "slept with first and only prostitute."

In 2007, David was transferred to Fort Hood, in Texas, and in 2008 he met Komel, at a bar in Waco. The next day, he introduced her to another soldier as his girlfriend. Komel, who was a senior at Baylor University, lived with her mother and father, Naila and Anjum Alam, and her younger sister, Sidrah,

who was in high school. Three years earlier, they had come from Pakistan. There the girls and their mother had each had a driver, and the house was run by servants. In the U.S., they had to learn to manage for themselves.

Within weeks of meeting Komel, David found out that he was being stop-lossed—that is, his service was being extended without his consent. Furthermore, he was being sent to Afghanistan. He immediately asked Komel to marry him.

Komel told her father that she was serious about David. “While I was talking to her, David comes to the house for the first time,” Anjum told me. “He came in and he was ready to fight with me.” Komel said that they were getting married in two days and that David was leaving in two weeks. “I was completely in shock,” Anjum told me. “Finally, I said, ‘Fine. If you guys love each other, who the hell I am to come between you.’”

David so resented being stop-lossed that he told his commanding officer in Afghanistan that he couldn’t be responsible for another soldier’s life, and he was assigned to deliver the mail. Komel got pregnant late in 2008, during one of David’s leaves. When he was finally discharged, in June of 2009, he was disgruntled, and he told Komel not to come to the ceremony for returning soldiers. Instead, he had her wait outside in the car. “I don’t want the Army controlling how I reunite with my wife,” he told another soldier.

Raniya was born in August of 2009. In September, the family moved from Waco to Minnesota, where Komel knew no one. “For the first six months, she was miserable,” her sister said. “She would call crying: ‘It’s so depressing here, and it’s always cold.’”

DAVID AND MITCH had planned on going to film school after the Army. Mitch got out first and hung drywall while he waited for David, and then they enrolled in the Digital Video and Media program at the Minnesota School of Business, in Edina. Komel took a position as a research assistant at the University of Minnesota, while studying for

a master’s degree in nutrition. By nature, she was outgoing, but David discouraged her from having people over. “She really wanted to have couple friends,” a woman named Sarah Johnson, who worked with her at a dietary clinic, told me. “David would always mess it up, though.” Komel and Johnson later began a side business involving nutrition as a healing method. Johnson felt that the closer she and Komel became the more David inserted himself between them. He insisted that they record their conversations, because he wanted Komel to have documentation if there were ever any disagreements.

“Gray State” began in the summer of 2010, when Danny Mason, whom David had met through a professor at film school, sent David an e-mail with links to Web sites devoted to conspiracies and suppressed information. According to Mason, “He came back in thirty-six hours, having stayed up for twenty-four hours, and said, ‘You’re on to something, let’s see where this goes.’”

“Gray State” is a hectic and vengeful fantasy. After the conquering force imposes martial law, soldiers come to Minneapolis—the seat of the government, since the coasts have fallen. Some people submit to the new regime and live as before; others retreat to the hills to gather guns and make a plan.

Before writing a first draft, David and Danny Mason wrote scenes for the trailer, which they shot with Mitch Heil in 2011. It is two minutes and forty seconds long, and it cost six thousand dollars. No scene lasts more than six or seven seconds. A number of scenes were filmed in

front of green screens, which David filled with C.G.I. helicopters, tanks, and other military equipment. The sets are lit somberly, so that the people, the buildings, and the rooms seem cast in shadow. The twilit quality makes it feel as if David were not so much entering a world as trying to get out of it.

The trailer has three acts—origin, resistance, and outcome. It begins with red crosshairs defining an aerial bombing target in a city. A man starts awake, breathing heavily, and shields his eyes from a powerful light just beyond the

drawn blinds of his room. The words “It happened while we were sleeping” appear in white letters on a black screen.

Television news reports show military trucks rolling across bridges and people fleeing. FEMA troops in riot gear advance on a crowd of protesters. A soldier walks along a row of citizens on their knees and shoots each in the back of the head. The city burns. In one eerie shot, Komel and Raniya appear as a mother and daughter watching news reports while light from the television plays across their faces.

To keep track of his story, David constructed a version of a storyboard, taping file cards and Post-it notes and scraps of paper to a wall. The arrangement covered about twenty-five feet, and it looked like the flag of a hapless and turbulent nation. David called it his writer’s wall, and he said that it could be read horizontally for the story or vertically for the themes. He had a friend film him standing in front of it, like a weatherman, while he said that it exemplified his use of “ancient methods of storytelling.”

In June of 2013, David sent a draft of “Gray State” to a script consultant in Colorado named Linda Seger. Seger liked the script’s intricacy, but felt that it had “too much action, too much information, and too many characters.” She also thought that it needed a happier ending. (The main character died.) She suggested revisions, and a year later David sent another draft. Seger remembered the scripts, she told me, even though she has read thousands of them. “It had a nice sense of style, and it had real feeling to it,” she said. “I felt like I was in the middle of the danger.”

DAVID AND KOMEL’S attachment to each other was ardent, but it also had an unrealistic cast. “There was an almost teen-aged feeling about their love, where it’s all-consuming,” Sarah Johnson told me. Komel said to a friend, “David’s the only person that I like in this world,” but on two occasions she thought of leaving him. In 2011, she felt that he wasn’t contributing enough money or time to the marriage, but they discussed it and he agreed to do more. He got work as a cameraman and video editor, usually in advertising, and saved enough money to return to “Gray State.” The second



time was late in 2013. "By then, he was very much living in the world of 'Gray State,'" Mason told me. "My hunch was Komel wanted some form of normalcy, not just the dreary, apocalyptic world vision that David was living through."

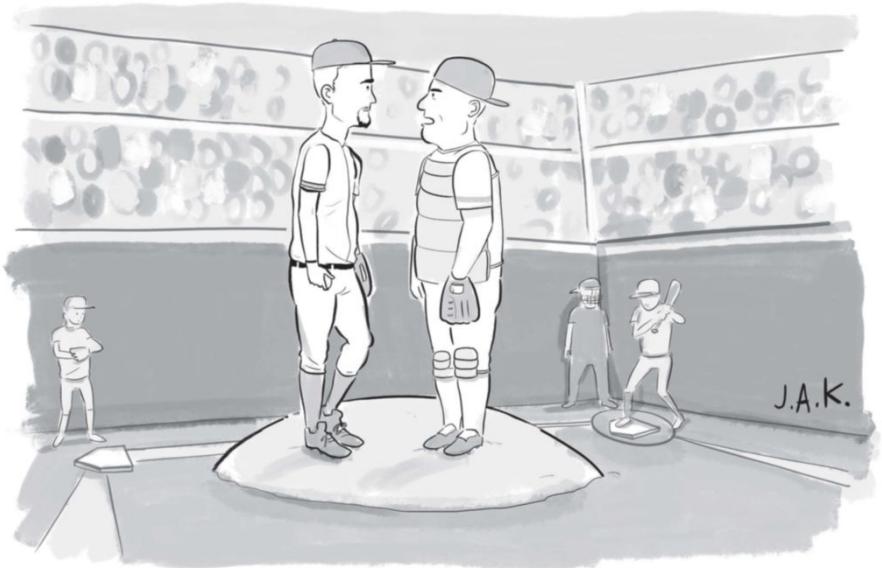
Komel called her father. According to her sister, Sidrah, "She was crying and saying, 'Dad, I can't do this anymore. I want to come home.'" Anjum asked if David was hurting her. When she said no, he was sympathetic but told her, "You have a family. You make it work."

In May, 2014, a month after David began the journal, he flew to Los Angeles, where he had arranged to meet several people who were interested in "Gray State." Among them were two producers, Michael O'Donnell and Mike Boggio, who have a company called Michael Entertainment Group. David called them the Mikes. When they said they wanted to option the script, David wrote that it was one of the most important days of his life.

Believing that she and David would be rich by the fall, Komel quit her job at the dietary clinic and began to plan her own business. Meanwhile, David arranged to meet the Mikes again in Los Angeles. To prepare, he rehearsed. "Mikes meeting two, the outline," he began. "Projecting power, confidence, talk fast. Talk fast, easy, and project." He expected the Mikes to ask how the rewrites were going. "If you want to talk rewrites, I suppose we should talk contract," he said. The imaginary exchange lasted an hour.

The day before the meeting, Komel found David curled on the floor in the bathroom, crying. She comforted him by telling him that he was brave. He worried that the Mikes would regard him as a fraud, but they told him that "Gray State" was their most promising project. "He was totally professional, not quiet, not shy, very confident," Mike Boggio told me. "We left that meeting thinking, We got to have a deal with this guy."

Over the summer, Komel's mother received a diagnosis of cervical cancer. Komel and her father argued over the phone about treatments, and, afterward, she and David decided that her family was trying to manipulate her and that she should no longer speak to them. The following day, though, David heard



"Why do we always have to meet on your mound?"

• •

Komel on the phone talking heatedly in Urdu and became angry. After they argued, she wrote, "I expected him to show me a little more compassion." She told herself that she would feel better in the morning, but she had nightmares. "I start experiencing degrees of separation between David and I," she wrote. "I guess I forgot we were two different people in two different bodies."

A PSYCHOSIS CAN OVERWHELM and disable a person, or it can appear episodically, in the form of disordered thoughts that are themselves an attempt to ward off a collapse. At the end of July, David suffered a psychic crisis that involved a "deep understanding stretching my mind past what my body can tolerate." He went on to write that he had undergone "a 20 minute physical episode of visions of pure deep horror, long insight stretching unbroken like a panorama." The visions subsided, however, and he returned to his regular life, taking Raniya to her sitter, having family dinners, reading and writing, and working out in the back yard with Komel.

In September, David revised "Gray State" for the Mikes. He wrote for thirty-one hours, then Komel read the script, and he sent it to the Mikes so that it would arrive for one of their birthdays, on September 17th, along with a "Gray State" poster. He was unsettled

when they didn't respond immediately.

Reading the journal, one searches for the moment when David became permanently unmoored, when his fantasies eclipsed him, but it isn't so simple. Preparing to write the draft he sent to the Mikes, however, he made an entry that seems to predict his collapse:

The moment of my purpose has arrived. And if the universe awaits my consent for the go ahead then I say do your worst you filthy sticky bitch, I know you're going to reward and seduce me before killing off what I love and burying what I build and destroying me as awfully as possible in horrible retribution for having thrust my ability so far into your black void that generations hence will still be expanding on what I started, settling the void, conquering the dark, until the greater objective is served.

No life has only one outcome, but as David waited to hear from the Mikes he seemed to relinquish ground that he never recovered, or, if so, only intermittently. It is as if the writing and making of "Gray State" were a means of containing the violent fantasies within him, and when the project faltered they swamped him.

The Mikes reacted as producers do, by considering the script's merits and difficulties. "My first pass, from story content, was: This is kind of a road map for the next American revolution," Michael O'Donnell told me. "My second pass was breaking it down to what it costs." When David finally heard from them, on September 26th, they said that

"Gray State" might be better as a TV series. They did not offer him the contract he had counted on.

David was devastated. "Making 'Gray State' was his whole world," Sidrah said. In a Facebook post written after David's death, Mitch Heil said that he didn't think David knew "how to cope with failure on this scale." He went on, "In my heart I feel like the stress, the message, the story, and his thought process caused his world of fiction and reality to blur."

David began to have trouble sleeping, and for an hour one night he lay awake and cried. "I guess the big wait created a lot of anxiety that needed resolution the situation couldn't provide," he wrote. "Hence the bad weather! I'm serious, moment by moment for a long time, the weather has been following my mood."

He stopped saying that he was going to be famous. "He didn't say they were moving to California anymore, either," a friend named Chris Peck told me. "All he said was 'That was a pipe dream.'"

AS IF TO salvage years of work, David put aside "Gray State" for a documentary that he called "Gray State: The Rise," which he assembled from interviews with himself, friends, and Internet commentators; news footage; and a brief interview he had once filmed with Alex Jones. It expresses the belief that the Gray State has arrived. "We are already going into a scientifically designed Orwellian control system that is meant to

use humans up like natural resources," Jones says. David's purposes also shifted. Sean Wright, a friend of his who worked on the documentary, told me, "He was changing his mind from entertainment to waking people up."

David believed that the documentary would establish a Gray State brand, which might one day include video games and combat games. To further the brand, he planned to make the documentary available free. Working on it possessed him as entirely as writing "Gray State" had. Meanwhile, he and Komel stopped returning most phone calls and texts and e-mails. Anjum sent Komel a photograph of her mother, Naila, in the hospital, hoping to provoke her into speaking to him. Immediately, he received a call from David, who said that he and Komel wanted nothing more to do with him or the rest of the family.

Sidrah and her fiancé, Vincent Sotelo, who is now her husband, decided to drive to Minnesota from Waco to check on Komel. A few months earlier, Anjum had lent David and Komel a car, and, as a pretext, Sidrah planned to tell them that he needed it back. She would leave her own car for them.

Sidrah and Vincent left Waco on October 16th and drove for sixteen hours. They arrived at around seven that evening. With Vincent standing behind her, Sidrah knocked on the door. David opened it, and she said, "I'm here to see my sister."

"We want nothing to do with you—I thought I made that clear," he said, and shut the door.

She knocked again. David said, "Go sit in the car." Vincent saw a shadow on a wall behind David and felt sure that it was Komel's. When David came out to the car, he said there was no way Sidrah could see her sister. Sidrah said they had come to exchange cars. David said that he needed an hour to get the car ready but he would return it only if they took both cars, which meant that Sidrah would have to drive sixteen hours to Waco by herself. She said she couldn't. "Fine," David said. "Deal's off." Then he went back into the house.

"Vinny and I looked at each other, like, What now?" Sidrah told me. Vincent knocked on the door again, and David came out. Vincent extended his hand, and David hesitated then shook it. "Her mom needs her daughter," Vincent said. "You said an hour, right?"

When they returned, Sidrah saw David watching them from a picture window beside the front door. The car was on the street, and on the dashboard there was a photograph of Komel, Sidrah, and Naila. Komel had written on the back of it, "I have always loved you and Mom and always will." Sidrah and Vincent decided to leave their car for Komel, in case she ever needed to flee. Sidrah wrote, "I love you, too," on the back of the photograph and left it on the dashboard, and they drove away quickly.

A MANIA SHARED BY two people, one of whom appears to be dominant, is called a delusion by proxy and is rare. The treatment begins by separating the people sharing the delusions. David's entry for October 30th says, cryptically, "Komel got raptured today. She's still here." That morning, he had gone to Home Depot, and when he returned Komel came into the kitchen and asked him to hold her. She said something was very wrong. "Something about, Do not fear, sweet body, for we have felt this pain together," David said in a recording that he made immediately afterward on his phone. He went on, paraphrasing her, "Don't worry about the pain, because you do not know how to feel pain, and you will return to the dust and your dark slumber, and I will be gone."

"I have my mission," she had told



"You all know Bart from public relations."

him. She said she had heard a woman's "scary voice" and asked if he had heard it. Sounding distraught, she reproduced the voice: "I've warned you, I've warned you." Then: "I want you. Please come with me, please come with me, your place won't come to me. . . . There's nothing left here."

David went into his office and shut the door. "This took a lot out of her," he said into his phone. He had held her while she began "to shake and weep and howl," and then she said, "This is what rapture is."

Komel came into the room then and lay down on the couch.

"You said you were Egyptian," David told her. "You said you'd come from very far to find me, and Rani and I need to come with you, and there's not much time."

"The primary emotion was that of, like, desperate, desperate love, like hopeless love," he continued. "And on some level your soul has committed to mine, and we're going to go somewhere and Rani's coming with."

"Those were the last words," Komel said, her voice pitched just above a whisper.

AFTER KOMEL QUIT her job, she told a woman she'd worked with, Heidi Lish, that she was writing a book about eating disorders. "We had coffee around Thanksgiving, and she told me she wasn't writing the book anymore," Lish said. "She was reading a lot of books about religions and people who don't eat for forty days. She said there were people in the world who didn't need to eat at all. Then she started talking about how she never left the house anymore."

The week before Christmas, David and Komel visited their friend Chris Peck. "They were uncontrollably, zealously happy," Peck said. "David gave me some books, one about how to succeed in Hollywood, one about writing, and then he handed me a bunch of notes for a screenplay I was writing, and he gave me back video games I had lent him. He gave me back everything I had ever lent him. Komel wished me Merry Christmas, and, quick as they were in, they were out." High spirits are characteristic of people resolved on suicide—it is why so many

stories of suicide include someone saying, "We thought he had got better." The decision often gives people a feeling of being released from their troubles.

Dan Luttrull served with David in Afghanistan, but he hadn't spoken to him in a while. Then, late one night a few days before Christmas, "I was sitting on the computer, drinking, and I got a message from him," he told me. They discussed the Army, their lives, and "Gray State." "He was drinking absinthe, and I was drinking whiskey and beer," Luttrull said. After about two hours, Luttrull said that he was ready for bed, and David asked him to delete their exchange. "His exact words were 'If you're truly my brother and my friend, you'll do it. I promise you'll understand soon.'"

The last entry in the journal reads, "I am no one. It is everyone else who is someone." On Christmas morning, David made a list of plans for the coming year. "Christmas: 6 day countdown meme: 'It will be a new year,'" he wrote, and he reminded himself that December 30th was the "LAST day to crowdfund!" Then, with a pistol that he kept in a safe in the bedroom, he shot Komel and Raniya as they lay on the living-room floor. Sometime later, he sat down beside them and shot himself.

The next morning, Dan, Jr., left presents for David and Komel and Raniya on their doorstep. The family's dog put its paws on the frame of the picture window and watched him, but he didn't look inside.

A NEIGHBOR FOUND them. On January 17th, after returning from a holiday trip, he saw the presents scattered on the stoop and figured the family was away. He piled the packages neatly, then heard the dog barking, which he thought was strange, if they were gone. Then he looked in the window.

The police found the sliding glass door on the back deck slightly open. A light was on in the dining room; strings of Christmas lights and a synthetic Christmas tree were lit. Komel was lying on her stomach on the floor near the tree, and Raniya lay across one of her legs. David was on his back next



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to them. Komel had been shot twice in the head, and Raniya had been shot once behind her left ear. The dog had scavenged the remains. Komel was identified at her autopsy from a photograph on the Internet, showing a tattoo on her left wrist of a heart with "All you need" written inside it. David was identified from tattoos on his left wrist and shoulder.

Bloody footprints led into the kitchen and down the hall to David's office. A laptop was open on the kitchen counter. When an investigator applied a swab to the keyboard to collect a blood sample, the words "I have loved you all with all of my heart" appeared on the screen. In a window behind it was a playlist that David had titled "Ascent." It consisted of fifty-three songs, most with despairing themes, that he had presumably meant to run continuously—apparently, the batteries on the speakers had died. In the office was an open notebook with dried blood in the margins. David had written, "Open 'The Rise' most recent version," and "Submit to Allah now."

In the living room, David had done something that the police omitted from their incident report and waited months before telling the families. With his hands covered in his wife's blood, he stood on the couch and wrote on the wall, "*Allahu akbar*," which means "God is great." On the floor by Komel, he had placed a Koran, opened to a prayer of forgiveness.

A FEW DAYS AFTER the bodies were discovered, David's father and sister went into the house. The police had told them that they should have it cleaned first, and the cleaners had cut out the floorboards where the blood had warped them, so it was clear where the bodies had lain. On the wall behind the couch was a rectangle of white paint. Otherwise, the house was as it had been. On the kitchen counter, Allison found David's wedding ring, with blood on it. Dan, Sr., tried to imagine what Komel and Raniya had been doing. "Were they reading a book, maybe playing on the floor?" he said. "You think yourself in circles."

A friend of David's, Mason Hendricks, went into the house several times on the family's behalf to sort

through David and Komel's possessions and see what was worth keeping. When he saw the white paint on the wall, he felt certain that something had been written beneath it, because he and David had talked about berserkers and Norsemen and the practice of writing in blood to leave a message before dying.

Last spring, I went to the house with Hendricks. It had been repossessed—the neighbors hope that whoever buys it will tear it down and build a new one—but Hendricks knew the code on the finance company's lockbox. It had been more than a year since the killings. Clothes hung in the closets where David and Komel had left them. The Christmas tree was still there, and there was a small shrine of candles and dried flowers where the floorboards had been cut away. The white paint on the wall was still there, and I wondered if the cleaners had washed the wall or had simply painted over the letters and they were still there.

The electricity had been turned off, and the only light came through the windows. The sense that something terrible had happened was inescapable, partly because the place still looked as it had in the crime-report photographs. It was difficult to decide whether the house felt neglected or preserved. We stayed long enough for me to walk down the hall from the living room and look at David's office, which still had papers in the file cabinet; Raniya's bedroom, with her drawings taped on pink walls and shoes on the floor and loose glitter here and there; David's workroom, in the basement, which had posters for "Gray State" on the wall; and David and Komel's room, with the sheets still on the bed. On the kitchen counter was a small stack of business cards for MindBody Dietician LLC—"Holistic Nutrition Therapy, Food Allergies, Autism, Autoimmune Conditions"—on which there was a photograph of Komel, smiling.

SINCE HER DAUGHTER'S DEATH, Naila Alam has spent most of her time in the hospital being treated for cancer; she is now in hospice care. She would ask Sidrah why Komel hadn't called to see how she was, or why she didn't

answer her phone, and Sidrah would demur. "I would say, 'Why talk about them? It's just hurtful. They don't want to hear from us,' but she would see my expression."

Finally, Naila, exasperated, asked if Komel was still alive, and "it just came out," Sidrah said. "I told her, 'Do you really want to know the truth?'"

Naila asked if Komel had died in a car accident. "I said, 'David killed her.' Is he in jail?' she asked. 'Where's Rani?'"

A few weeks after the deaths, the Crowleys held a memorial for David and Komel and Raniya. Perhaps a hundred people came. In the months following, Dan, Sr., assembled a time line of David and Komel's final year, organizing their e-mails and texts and David's journal onto a spreadsheet. It has five hundred and thirty-seven entries under the headings "Date, Source, and Event." He thinks of it as representing pieces "in a really big puzzle I don't know how to put together." One afternoon, I sat with him and Dan, Jr. "There's this endless list of issues we are struggling with," he said. "They wanted to be left alone. David wanted to get his movie done. He was annoyed with people. I get that."

"I remember you didn't talk to your dad for four years," Dan, Jr., said.

"Five years," Dan, Sr., said. "I didn't kill myself, though." His shoulders slumped. "I figured they'd come through," he said. The thought that it might have been possible to intervene haunts everyone who knew them.

On David's desktop, Hendricks opened "Gray State: The Rise" and discovered that David had left behind a video specifying the order in which files should be assembled to create the documentary. He followed the instructions and posted the movie on Vimeo as "The Rise."

Sidrah and Vincent had their first child, a girl, in August. They had hoped that she would arrive on Raniya's birthday, but she didn't. Danny Mason maintains David's "Gray State" Facebook page, posting videos and remarks every few weeks, usually critical of the government. He and Dan, Sr., own the rights to the concept, and, while Dan, Sr., is uncertain what outcome he prefers, Danny Mason still hopes to make "Gray State." ♦

08:01:30

BY GLENN EICHLER

08:01:30—Oh, hell, it's matinée day. The Lincoln Tunnel's probably stopped dead. Better turn on the radio and catch Traffic on the Ones before I miss it.

08:01:32—I missed it.

08:01:40—Well, the other news station does Traffic on the Eights. That's only six minutes from now.

08:01:55—God, this six minutes is taking forever.

to do in that time. Wash the dishes?

08:03:55—Yeah, but that one pan is really scorched and it'll take at least five minutes to scour. Maybe better to just sit here on the bed and think. Enjoy the silence, like Thoreau.

08:04:10—Of course, it's not really silence with these disgusting ads blaring. No, I do *not* want a permanent solution to my coarse and unattractive leg hair.



08:02:30—Traffic on the Ones ran early. That's what must have happened. Now I have to sit here through sports and tech and business and entertainment and these really disturbing commercials about asthma-triggering mold in my walls, all because some jaded intern couldn't be bothered to stick to the schedule. Do these millennials understand the damage they're doing?

08:03:00—Let's be honest about this. One person's responsible for me missing that report, and that person is me. What did the doctor say about always blaming other people for your screwups?

08:03:10—Jeez, relax, it's just a traffic report. What did the doctor say about beating yourself up?

08:03:45—Only four more minutes. There must be something productive

08:04:15—On the other hand, bathing-suit season is coming.

08:04:50—Why the big rush to get to work, anyway? They've got you so marginalized, they wouldn't even notice if you weren't there.

08:04:55—Of course they would, because it'd give them just the excuse they need to get rid of you.

08:05:05—One mistake. One lousy mistake and you're damaged goods. If millennials crave authenticity so much, if they have to have heirloom tomatoes and Amish quillows, how should I have known they wouldn't buy hog-fat moisturizer? Show a little consistency, for God's sake.

08:05:55—What is *this* ad? Reputation-repair.com? Do people really worry about their "Internet-trustability profile"? Now

I'm glad Wikipedia deleted the page with my bio.

08:06:00—Why did Wikipedia delete the page with my bio? Is it because I wrote it myself? I almost won a Clio in 2002, and people should know about it!

08:06:15—Wait. Did someone at the office find the police report about my fistfight with the Little League coach? Is this not about hog fat at all?

08:06:18—I'll bet it was Matt. He looks like the kind of guy who would Google "dads pound each other." Sick bastard.

08:06:30—I'll just go into H.R. when I get to the office and explain why you don't tell a kid to steal third with two outs.

08:07:00—This is interminable. Who the hell listens to the radio anymore, anyway? There must be a million places to get traffic on the Net. Why are you stuck in the Stone Age?

08:07:10—I mean on the Web! Not the Net. Do *not* use the word "Net" at the office. Damn millennials.

08:07:20—Did my watch stop? How can six minutes possibly take this long?

08:07:28—Why the hell did you move out of the city? We were happy there. Four people can live in a one-bedroom, if they sleep in shifts. Now you're paralyzed with anxiety, unable to move until you find out where they're doing pothole repairs, all because your life is ruled by a *tunnel*.

08:07:40—Although, in a larger sense, we're all drivers headed for the tunnel. Slowly funnelling ourselves into a dark, foul-smelling hole where a cruel destiny awaits. Willing volunteers in the destruction of our own souls.

08:07:50—Well, unless you get off at Hoboken, I suppose.

08:08:00—Hang on. Here it comes.

08:08:30—Damn it. Forty minutes at the tolls. And then another forty tomorrow, and the next day, and the day after that. A living death.

08:08:40—Maybe "living death" is a hair dramatic. I mean, the family likes it out here, and you've got to live somewhere, right? It could be a lot worse. You could be one of those insecure pat-sies they prey on with those ads.

08:09:00—Lose ten pounds in five days without diet or exercise? Gotta write down that number. ♦

TROUBLING PICTURES

Dana Schutz painted a real-life atrocity. She knew it was a risk.

BY CALVIN TOMKINS



DANA SCHUTZ's studio, in the Gowanus section of Brooklyn, may not be as catastrophically messy as Francis Bacon's used to be, but there are days when it comes close. Last July, she was making paintings for a solo show, in the fall, at Contemporary Fine Arts, Berlin, and for the 2017 Whitney Biennial, in New York. Large and medium-sized canvases in varying stages of completion covered most of the wall space in the studio, a long, windowless room that was once an auto-body shop, and the floor was a palimpsest of rags, used paper palettes, brushes, metal tubs filled with defunct tubes of Old Holland oil paint, col-

ored pencils and broken charcoal sticks, cans of solvent, spavined art books, pages torn from magazines, bundled work clothes stiff with paint, paper towels, a prelapsarian boom box, empty Roach Motel cartons, and other debris.

Schutz's paintings, in which abstract and figurative images combine to tell enigmatic stories, sometimes carry veiled references to what's going on in the world. "Men's Retreat," made in 2005, shows blindfolded members of George W. Bush's Cabinet pursuing strange outdoor rites; "Poisoned Man," painted the same year, is an imagined portrait of the former Ukrainian President Viktor Yushchenko,

Schutz's paintings resonate with the contradictions of contemporary life.

who barely survived an assassination attempt, in 2004. Schutz, thirty-nine at the time, with untamable hair and a radiant smile, said that she had been up until very late the night before, watching the Republican National Convention on television. "I remember the second Bush nomination in 2003 and feeling so angry, but this was depressing," she said. "It was like a disaster you can't look away from." When I asked if the rise of Donald Trump might invade her new work, she thought for a moment, and said, "I want to make a painting about shame. Public shaming has become an element in contemporary life. You can take a picture of someone and post it online, and thousands of people see it. We're so ashamed, about so many things, and I think for a candidate to be without shame, like Trump, is really powerful. His lack of shame becomes our shame."

Schutz was also thinking about paintings in which people struggle with giant insects. "Every time that idea comes up, I decide I should give it more thought," she said, laughing. "But my instinct is that bugs could be interesting in a painting. Anyway, right now it's shame and bugs." Somewhat hesitantly, she also said that she had been thinking a lot about Emmett Till, the fourteen-year-old whose abduction, torture, and murder by white Mississippi racists in 1955 kept coming up in news stories about the killings of Trayvon Martin and other African-American boys. Two men, Alton Sterling and Philando Castile, had been killed in separate police shootings two weeks earlier. In the current climate of political and racial unrest, Emmett Till seemed like a risky subject for a white artist to engage with. "I've wanted to do a painting for a while now, but I haven't figured out how," she said. "It's a real event, and it's violence. But it has to be tender, and also about how it's been for his mother. I don't know, I'm trying. I'm talking too much about it." In a later conversation, she said, "How do you make a painting about this and not have it just be about the grotesque? I was interested because it's something that keeps on happening. I feel somehow that it's an American image."

Basing a picture on a real event would be a departure from Schutz's usual practice—and, as it turns out, an incendiary one. She had said early in her career that her ambition was "to paint subjects that

did not exist, or could not be painted from observation or photographed.” With a few notable exceptions, such as Yushchenko, the Bush Cabinet members, and Michael Jackson laid out on an autopsy table (four years before he died), this is pretty much what she has done, starting in 2001, when she was a graduate art student at Columbia, with a painting called “Sneeze.” It shows a girl with long golden hair, sneezing so explosively that the torrential discharge has turned her nose into a piggish snout. “I wanted to paint what it feels like to sneeze,” she said. The sneeze paintings (there were three of them) launched her career. Then came a group of works about the last man on Earth, a nebbishy character named Frank—in one, he poses naked on a beach; in another, he is turning into a proboscis monkey—and a gruesome series on “self-eaters,” an invented race of people who devour and then regenerate their own body parts. They set the stage for a decade of startling, vivid, wildly original, and masterly paintings of people doing weird things—using blood from a live shark to cure the plague, for example. In a 2005 self-portrait, she depicted herself as a thick-skinned human pachyderm.

Schutz occasionally appears baffled by her work—she tends to apologize for not explaining it better. “The thing is, by talking about it you can kill it,” she said. The Whitney curator Chrissie Iles described her to me as an artist who uses painting to bridge two worlds, the analog and the digital. “She emerged at a moment when the Internet was just beginning to affect how we experience images, and she anticipated what’s going on now,” Iles said. “It’s one of those moments of dramatic transition, like the sixties. Everything is fluid and interchangeable, and Dana is telling visual stories that articulate a different sense of what narrative is.”

Schutz’s 2015 show at Friedrich Petzel Gallery, her New York dealer, was called “Fight in an Elevator.” A widely circulated surveillance video of Solange Knowles attacking Jay Z in an elevator had given her the idea of trying to paint “a high-action situation in a very compressed space,” and this led to several paintings of frantically entangled body parts. The beginnings of a new elevator painting were marked out with black tape on a wall in her studio. This one would be twelve feet high by fourteen feet wide,

she said. “At first, I thought, Nah, it’s too big, but now I think it could be interesting. When something is more than ten feet high, it gets beyond being a picture. I want it to look like people trying to climb over each other, and bugs attacking them. But I don’t know. I hope it won’t just look like chaotic wallpaper.”

Schutz’s high, slightly childish voice and her inherent niceness can make her seem unsure of herself, but that impression disappears when you see her paintings. Schutz’s pictorial logic allows her to build pictures that are simultaneously convincing and absurd, troubling and uncanny. Sometimes it’s hard to figure out what’s going on in them, but that doesn’t bother her—she feels that there should be room for the viewer to complete the story. The private worlds that her bold, declarative colors and thrusting forms evoke can be inexplicable, but they resonate with the anxieties and contradictions of contemporary life.

THE STUDIO WAS nearly empty when I stopped by again, in early October. The paintings I’d seen in July had been shipped to Berlin. (The show was called “Waiting for the Barbarians,” a title she’d borrowed from J. M. Coetzee’s novel—which I’m ashamed to say I haven’t read.) A huge, newly stretched canvas hung on the back wall, with indistinct forms brushed on it in an orange-red primer. “It’s kind of like an expulsion scene,” Schutz explained. I couldn’t make out any recognizable images, and then suddenly I could: a man and a woman, close together, moving from left to right. Masaccio’s “Expulsion from the Garden of Eden” (circa 1426), one of the earliest evocations of shame in Western art and probably the most powerful, came to mind. “Yeah, I love that painting,” she said. “I saw it first in an art book when I was an undergraduate in Cleveland, and I’ve often thought I might do something with it. The expression on the faces is so intense. It’s an old theme, but I thought it could be experienced in a contemporary way.”

She had gone to Berlin in mid-September for the opening of her show, bringing along her two-year-old son, Arlo, and her mother-in-law. Her husband, the artist Ryan Johnson, arrived a week later (five of his sculptures were in a group show that opened in Los Angeles on the same day). She and Johnson met in graduate school at Columbia. When he applied for the program, Schutz, who was finishing her first year, was one of three student interviewers on the faculty admitting panel, and, because he sighed audibly before answering questions, she decided that he must be depressed. The applicants and their interviewers all went to a bar afterward, and she and Johnson ended up talking mostly to each other. They started living together soon afterward. In 2005, they moved to Gowanus with several artist friends, and Schutz and Johnson were married the following year. Johnson’s studio is around the corner from Schutz’s, and the building they live in is six blocks away. “I just like being in the city so much,” Schutz told me. “We never really had a home life before Arlo, and now we do.”

I asked Schutz if she’d thought any more about the Emmett Till painting. “That one turned out,” she said, sounding surprised. She had put it in the Berlin show, where it caused no controversy. She found the image on her iPhone, and showed it to me. Based on a widely reproduced photograph of Till’s mutilated corpse in his coffin, the painting was dominated on one side by a mostly abstract, thickly painted head in shades of dark brown and black, and on the other side by his white dress shirt. Till’s mother had dressed him formally for his funeral, and she had insisted on leaving the casket open so that people could see what the killers had done to his face. “This is about a young boy, and it happened,” Schutz said. “It’s evidence of something that really happened. I wasn’t alive then, and it wasn’t taught in our history classes.” She was still uncertain about the painting. “I don’t know if it has the right emotionality,” she said. “I like it as a painting, but I might want to try it again.” All the Berlin pictures were sold (at prices ranging from ninety thousand dollars to four hundred thousand), but Schutz had kept two of them for herself: a painting of two men coping with oversized insects, and the Till painting, which was called “Open Casket.”

SCHUTZ GREW UP in Livonia, Michigan, a suburb of Detroit. Dean, her father, taught social studies and doubled as a guidance counsellor at Dana’s high school, in Livonia; her mother, Georgia, was a middle-school art teacher in nearby

Plymouth, Georgia had studied art at Michigan State. She painted expressionistic landscapes, and there were always plenty of art materials in the house to play with. Schutz, an only child, was naturally curious, independent, fearless, and popular with other kids. "I was happy, I think," she said. "I thought at the time that my parents were very overbearing and protective, but they weren't—a lot of the time, I was just out, away, walking miles to the pet store to buy some little animal to hide in the house." As her father explained, "There was a back part to the closet in her room, another closet, and we discovered after the fact that she hid a rabbit there and showed it to her friends when they came over." Her mother said, "Dana was never very tidy as a kid. I kind of gave up—shut the door on it."

When Schutz was fifteen, she decided she was going to be an artist. Her mother let her have the entire basement and showed her how to stretch a canvas, and Dana took it from there. "It was like turning a switch," her mother recalled. "She would be down in the basement for hours and hours, sometimes through the night. There was no direction from me. She had a very nurturing and encouraging art teacher at the high school, who one day opened up a storeroom for her to paint in, and said, 'This is going to be Danaland.'"

At the Cleveland Institute of Art, which Schutz attended from 1995 to 2000, her love of painting never wavered. The contemporary artists she admired most were Cecily Brown, Laura Owens, John Currin, and Nicole Eisenman—painterly painters, who were in short supply at the time. She also looked closely at Julian Schnabel, David Salle, and other American painters who emerged in the nineteen-eighties; at the contemporary German artists Martin Kippenberger and Albert Oehlen; and at a galaxy of earlier masters, from Pontormo, Goya, Manet, and Picasso to Diego Rivera, whose twenty-seven-part mural in the Detroit Institute of Arts, with its vivid evocations of Ford's River Rouge factory and its mighty workers, had enthralled her as a child. "I still like paintings of people doing things," she told me.



She entered the graduate art program at Columbia in 2000, and during her first year there she had an artistic crisis, the kind that afflicts gifted art students who can't decide what their work should be about. "I was so lost, I couldn't make any paintings at all," she recalled. Earlier, partly as a joke, she had made a number of oil paintings of imaginary partners for her unattached friends. The paintings were fairly small, with a lot of strong colors laid down in thick layers. Klaus Biesenbach, a curator at P.S. 1, the Museum of Modern Art's contemporary branch in Queens, put one of these portraits in a group show in October, 2001. Biesenbach, who is now MOMA's chief curator-at-large, told me that Schutz's paintings had struck him as being "different from anything I had seen recently—not exactly beautiful, but very true. I said at the time, here is an artist who bridges the cartoonist and the social realist, but she does it in a very American way that really captures the human condition."

The terrorist attacks on September 11th made Schutz's anxieties about what to paint seem trivial. She did the sneeze paintings that fall, in her second year. "I needed to make some decisions and not be stuck," she remembered. "I told myself I would just make sneezes, and see what happened." Zach Feuer, an art student at Boston's School of the Museum of Fine Arts who had started a tiny New York gallery as his senior project, put her first sneeze painting

and a few other early works, along with minimalist still-lifes by a young artist named Holly Coulis, in a two-person show, in January, 2002. "Sneeze" was bought by Erik Parker, an artist whose eccentric abstractions Schutz admired. "I thought that was so cool," she said. "It felt like a breakthrough. I had a sense of clarity and purpose, even if it was just an invented one."

Feuer gave her a solo show in November, a few months after she graduated. Called "Frank from Observation," it presented several views of the last man on Earth—clearly not from observation, although the eyes and mouth were based on those of people she knew. The show sold out. "I was amazed that people came

who were not my friends," Schutz recalled. "That was shocking and exciting, and it made life after school less difficult. I'd thought maybe I'd be a tour guide, because that was my job at Columbia, even though I have a terrible speaking voice and no one could hear me. I was really lucky, because now I had enough money to rent a studio." Interest in her work spread rapidly after that—she was in the Venice Biennale in 2003 and the second Greater New York show, in 2005.

ON NOVEMBER 9TH, the morning after the election, Schutz said, "I didn't sleep at all. I stopped watching, but I couldn't sleep." We were in the studio, and she looked exhausted. She and Johnson were about to close on a two-story building they were buying in nearby Sunset Park, where they would both have ample studio space. It was the biggest financial commitment they'd ever made, and now she wondered if it was a mistake. Her fortieth birthday was the next day—they planned to celebrate with a dinner at their favorite Italian restaurant, in Carroll Gardens. She had just found out that she was pregnant again, but I didn't learn this until a week later.

On the studio's back wall—the working wall—"Expulsion" glowed like a furnace. It wasn't finished, but the two figures now stood out dramatically against a blue background—many shades of blue. To their left was a large white shape, which she said was a cloud; parts of it were tinged with gray, but one section was a pure, dazzling white, as though the sun were hitting it. A giant insect loomed in the foreground, a kind of dragonfly with translucent wings, delicately rendered. Petzel wanted to show the picture at the Art Basel fair in Miami Beach, which was opening in two weeks. "I thought the woman's body would go a lot quicker than it did," she said. "Yesterday, I started to like it. You have an idea of what you want a painting to be, and then it goes another way and you have to accept that. This painting had a kind of sadness to it, even before the election, but now I guess there's fear and anger."

Four days later, when I visited again, "Expulsion" was still unfinished. The two entwined figures had a more physical presence, but there were no facial features. Schutz was still thinking about

ARROW

I lived and died like an animal.
If death by arrow, death by feather,
death by sweet spot.
Heel;
rise, red dog.
I see now what you've been sniffing:
wings.
What you've been licking:
all those bright, bright teeth.
You said, *Angel*.
I said, *Anchor*
dragging this body.
The way the sea is
the vein is.
The doctors advise,
Too late now;
you've got to live
with it in you.

—Beth Bachmann

shame and Donald Trump. “I don’t think he has that connection to other people, that social, contagious thing,” she said. “Have you noticed that he never yawns when other people yawn? But what happens if a leader has no shame? Countries have shame—in our country, it’s always been there, connected to killing the Indians, and to slavery.”

When I went back again a few days later, the studio floor was littered with discarded paintbrushes, dozens of them, some still oozing paint—I got bright orange on one of my shoes. “I always go for a new brush when I start a new color,” she said. “I like the floor when it gets this way—it feels like a river or something.” She had managed to get a one-day extension of the deadline, and she’d been working all night. The faces were nearly there. The man’s was twisted upward and back, toward the sky; the woman was looking down. She had a helmet of straight black hair, and her features, in profile, seemed weighted by despair. A long white sash streamed out behind her in the wind.

EARLY SUCCESS CAN derail young artists. The sudden demand for their work puts pressure on them to produce similar work, instead of stretching their talent and exploring new directions; and speculative buying, for quick resale, brings prices that may not hold up. With Schutz,

the danger signals came almost immediately. Feuer told me that soon after her 2002 solo show he sold a painting called “The Breeders” to a New York collector for eight thousand dollars, and within a year the collector had sold it to Larry Gagosian for half a million—none of which went to the artist. “That was a kind of wake-up call,” Feuer said. (“I overpaid,” Gagosian told me recently. “But you couldn’t get a work of hers otherwise.”) From then on, Feuer tried to restrict sales of her work to people who promised, if they weren’t going to keep it, to let him sell it for them, or give it to a museum—the surest way to solidify a reputation, and to ward off the stigma of being a “market artist.” Feuer had some success with this tactic, but it was hard to enforce. Charles Saatchi, the British super-collector, had bought two of Schutz’s early paintings from Feuer; when Feuer refused to sell him any others, Saatchi bought more than a dozen from other collectors, at hugely inflated prices—a million dollars for one, I’d been told. Eventually, he sold nearly all of them, not always at a profit. The hyper-inflated prices didn’t last, but her reputation kept growing.

Schutz tried to ignore her booming market, but in 2004 she started having panic attacks. Once, she passed out on the stairway at a gallery, and another

time at an opening. That was in 2005, the year her self-eater paintings appeared in a show at Feuer called “Panic.” Some of them were pretty brutal—in “Face Eater,” a person has managed to ingest his (or her) whole face—but her subjects go about their gory meals with bland indifference. Although Schutz tends to dodge interpretations of her work, she has said that the self-eaters probably have to do with the artistic process, which cannibalizes experience and regurgitates it as art. Maybe so, but it’s interesting that Schutz, who is so self-effacing in her personal life, would choose self-effacement as a subject. Her fears and worries and contradictions get channelled into the work, and she works virtually all the time. The panic attacks eventually stopped. “Dana has a lot of self-doubt,” Ryan Johnson told me, “but not when she’s painting.”

As Schutz’s subject matter grew wilder, her technique became more assured. In “How We Would Give Birth” (2007), a woman in a hospital bed gazes intently at an old-fashioned landscape painting on the wall while a bloody fetus emerges from her vagina. (This was seven years before Arlo was born; she did a second birth painting, post-Arlo, that was less disturbing and more complex.) “Swimming, Smoking, Crying” (2009) depicts a young woman doing all those things at once, improbably and indelibly. In “Building the Boat While Sailing” (2012), two dozen people are hard at work (people doing things!) on what looks like another metaphor for the creative process. It also channels Géricault’s “The Raft of the Medusa.”

Schutz’s work was appearing regularly, but for several years she was not happy with it. In 2005, a painting of hers called “Coma,” of an unconscious man in a dream world of abstract color, was in a group exhibition at Greene Naftali Gallery, in Chelsea, along with works by Amy Sillman, Jacqueline Humphries, Laura Owens, and other contemporaries. “It was a great show—I was glad to be in it—but I felt that my painting was like a brick, a stuffy little brick,” she said. “Now I like it a lot, but at the time the other paintings in the show felt more expansive—there was air and gesture and fluidity in them. I didn’t know how to do that, but I wanted to try.” She thinned down her medium—until then, she had

been using a lot of oil paint, building it up in impastos so thick they were almost sculptural. The new work looked more spontaneous, like drawing.

For the next few years, she kept on experimenting, not always successfully—a group of paintings with holes cut in the canvas and backed with black velvet now look errant and unconvincing—but by 2012 the power and solidity of her earlier work were back. Bold, clashing colors shape the composition in six paintings called “God” that she did in 2013; in “God 6,” the deity wears flaming-red swim trunks. Why God? After explaining that she was not religious, Schutz said, “I wanted to paint a protagonist, someone who can go through a lot of different situations, but that didn’t

to people with special needs.) Instead of moving to one of the big-money galleries, Schutz chose Petzel, whose galleries in New York and Berlin represent Charline von Heyl, Maria Lassnig, Sean Landers, and other artists she likes. She had her first show at Petzel in 2012. Three of the paintings in it went to museums: two to the San Francisco Museum of Modern Art, and one to the Nerman Museum, in Kansas.

WHEN I WENT back to the Gowanus studio, in late December, “Expulsion” had been shipped to Miami Beach, where it was sold for more than two hundred thousand dollars, to a private collector from Toronto. A new, still unfinished painting hung on the left

it. In real life, he looks so dumpy, like a refrigerator. I’m happy with how the face turned out, kind of like a mask, with something guarded but threatening about it. He’s coming down, taking us to lower levels of everything.”

The painting was for a group show at Petzel of artist responses to Trump’s election, called “We need to talk . . .” The show was opening in about a week, and Schutz kept working on the piece until the last minute. She was two and a half months pregnant. “I feel like a cow,” she said. The elevator painting that I’d seen marked out in tape months earlier was on the back wall, the canvas brushed with the orange-red primer she uses to establish the basic composition.

“We need to talk . . .” opened on a snowy Saturday morning in early January. Schutz’s painting was among forty-seven works, including Sarah Morris’s “Liar”; Rachel Harrison’s sculpture of Trump as a dangling piñata; Jonathan Horowitz’s photographic blowup of a bottom-heavy Trump mangling a golf swing (the title was “Does she have a good body? No. Does she have a fat ass? Absolutely”). Schutz and Johnson came to the gallery with Arlo, who wore a Batman cape and was not thrilled to be there. Schutz explained that Arlo dislikes rooms with a lot of paintings in them. “He says, ‘No, Mommy, no. We go now.’” He’s O.K. with sculptures, but “very negative about paintings.” Her Trump painting sold quickly, to a collector in Connecticut. “That was a shock,” she said, laughing. Like all the artists in the show, she was donating the proceeds to charity.

Mia Locks and Christopher Y. Lew, the two young curators of this year’s Whitney Biennial, visited Schutz’s studio in February to make a final choice of pictures for the show. They picked three: the huge “Elevator,” which would confront viewers as they stepped off the elevator onto the Whitney’s fifth floor; “Shame,” a new painting, in hot, tropical colors, of a woman furiously scrubbing her face with both hands; and “Open Casket.” I went to see the three canvases the day before they left the studio. It was my first look at “Open Casket,” which had just come back from Berlin; seeing the image on Schutz’s iPhone had barely suggested its cumulative power. Measuring thirty-nine by fifty-three inches, it is smaller than most



“Open Casket,” based on a photograph of Emmett Till, is in the Whitney Biennial.

happen. They were just about painting.”

Schutz and Feuer parted company in 2011. “We’d worked together for ten years, and we were kind of getting on each other’s nerves at the end,” Feuer told me. “We’d spend hours on the phone every day—she never needed my advice, it was just thinking out loud. She always wanted to remove the easy things, the popular things, from her paintings, and I’d say, ‘I loved that, it’s crazy.’ At a certain point, it became clear that she needed to be at one of the top galleries, and we both knew I wasn’t going to be a Zwirner or a Hauser & Wirth.” (Feuer quit the gallery business in 2014. He now lives in Hudson, and teaches bike maintenance

wall: Donald Trump, standing on a bright-yellow escalator, glowering balefully as he descends to the lobby of Trump Tower to announce his candidacy for President. I had never seen a Schutz image that was so instantly recognizable. The top of his head was cut off by the framing edge (no yellow pouf). The double-wide red tie extended below his crotch. Trump’s scowl was partly buried in a mass of livid, blood-red and bruise-purple brushstrokes. “I don’t really make super-topical paintings,” she said. “But I wanted to get that moment of suspense, when you know something is going to happen and there’s nothing you can do to stop

of her recent paintings, and more abstract. The buildup of paint on the face is a couple of inches thick in the area where Till's mouth would be. Although there are no recognizable features, a deep trough carved into the heavy impasto conveys a sense of savage disfigurement, which is heightened by the whiteness of the boy's smoothly ironed dress shirt. His head rests on an ochre-yellow fabric, and deftly brushed colors at the top suggest banked flowers.

Schutz had worried that the appalling aspects of Till's murder might overpower any attempt to deal with it visually. I'd wondered about that, too. Violent images have appeared in a number of her paintings, but within a context of humor or irony or inspired sappiness that neutralizes the shock—her self-eaters clearly suffer no pain when they bite off a finger or two. Emmett Till's murder was implacably real. Trying to deal with this atrocity in visual terms had seemed almost beyond imagining, and "Open Casket" is a very dark picture—but it's not grotesque. The horror is conveyed in painterly ways that, to me, make it seem more tragic than the photograph, because the viewer is drawn in, not repelled. "There was so much uncertainty with this painting," Schutz said, quietly. "You think maybe it's off limits, and then extra off limits. But I really feel any subject is O.K., it's just how it's done. You never know how something is going to be until it's done."

THE BIENNIAL OPENED to the public on Friday, March 17th. A number of the works on view dealt with violence. At the press preview a few days before, there had been much talk, pro and con, about Jordan Wolfson's "Real Violence," an immersive, ninety-second staged video of a white man beating and stomping another white man to death, accompanied by an audio recording of a Hebrew prayer. I heard very little comment about Schutz's paintings that day, but at the public opening, a young African-American artist named Parker Bright, wearing a T-shirt with "Black Death Spectacle" written on the back, stood for several hours in front of "Open Casket," making it difficult (but not impossible) for others to view the painting. He was joined from time to time by other silent protesters. That after-

noon, a British-born artist and writer named Hannah Black posted a letter to the curators Lew and Locks on Facebook, demanding not only that "Open Casket" be removed from the show but that it be destroyed. "It is not acceptable for a white person to transmute Black suffering into profit and fun," she wrote.

Her letter quickly went viral. Reactions on Twitter and other social media ranged from fierce approval to incredulous opposition. ("Burn This Shit, Bitch." "White person showing empathy toward blacks is now racist?" "Where are the images of Till's murderers?" "why would you burn art what's next? Books, people?") There were also efforts to address deeper questions of black anguish, white guilt, and who does or doesn't have the right to use certain sacred images in works of art. "Emmett Till died because a white woman lied about their brief interaction," Josephine Livingstone and Lopia Gyarkye wrote, on *The New Republic*'s Web site. "For a white woman to paint Emmett Till's mutilated face communicates not only a tone-deafness toward the history of his murder, but an ignorance of the history of white women's speech in that murder—the way it cancelled out Till's own expression, with lethal effect."

Arguments on the other side emphasized the perils of artistic censorship. "Hannah Black and company are placing themselves on the wrong side of history, together with . . . religious fundamentalists who ban artworks in the name of their god," the performance artist Coco Fusco wrote on Hyperallergic. Whoopi Goldberg scolded Black on the daytime television show, "The View": "If you're an artist, young lady, you should be ashamed of yourself." *New York* and the Huffington Post both published excerpts online from an apology by Schutz, announcing that she would withdraw the painting from the exhibition, but that turned out to be a hoax. Chris Ofili, the British artist whose painting of the Virgin Mary so offended Mayor Rudolph Giuliani that he threatened to remove city funding from the Brooklyn Museum unless it was taken down, sent me an e-mail: "Seeing a painting and talking about a painting are two different things. One should not confuse sharp eyes with a sharp tongue." The media circus waxed and waned, but I saw few references to what seemed to me the un-

derlying issues on both sides. One was a deep frustration among black artists that a theme so central to their history should be explored, in a major museum, by a white female artist. The other was that artists, very often, do not consciously choose their subjects. Emmett Till's sixty-year-old murder took hold of Dana Schutz, and she struggled with (and against) the urge to paint it.

The artist Kara Walker, whose work has explored race, sexuality, and violence, composed an Instagram post last week that referred to "Open Casket" without mentioning Schutz or her detractors. "The history of painting is full of graphic violence and narratives that don't necessarily belong to the artists own life," she wrote. "As are we all. I am more than a woman, more than the descendant of Africa, more than my fathers daughter. More than black more than the sum of my experiences thus far . . . art often lasts longer than the controversies that greet it. I say this as a shout to every artist and artwork that gives rise to vocal outrage. Perhaps it too gives rise to deeper inquiries and better art."

The two Biennial curators met with Parker Bright, and listened to his concerns. They also replaced the wall label next to "Open Casket" with a new one, acknowledging the controversy it had caused, and including a statement by Schutz, which concludes, "This painting was never for sale and never will be." Locks told me that she and Lew were well aware that the painting was challenging, like a lot of other works in the show, and that they would have some difficult questions to face, but, she said, "we didn't think the response would be so absolutist." To Lew, the impassioned response had a lot to do with the painting's being seen in isolation, on Instagram, for instance. "When you're standing in front of the painting, it's a powerful experience—deeply sad, mournful." The museum has been fully supportive of the curators and the artist, and the painting will remain on view throughout the exhibition.

"I knew the risks going into this," Schutz told me. "What I didn't realize was how bad it would look when seen out of context. Is it better to try to make something that's impossible, because it's important to you, and to fail, or never to engage with it at all? I just couldn't do it any other way." ♦

WE HAVE NO CHOICE

The desperate journey of Blessing, one of the Nigerian girls who try to reach Europe.

BY BEN TAUB

IT WAS CLOSE to midnight on the coast of Libya, a few miles west of Tripoli. At the water's edge, armed Libyan smugglers pumped air into thirty-foot rubber dinghies. Some three thousand refugees and migrants, mostly sub-Saharan Africans, silent and barefoot, stood nearby in rows of ten. Oil platforms glowed in the Mediterranean.

The Libyans ordered male migrants to carry the inflated boats into the water, thirty on each side. They waded in and held the boats steady as a smuggler directed other migrants to board, packing them as tightly as possible. People in the center would suffer chemical burns if the fuel leaked and mixed with water. Those straddling the sides could easily fall into the sea. Officially, at least five thousand and ninety-eight migrants died in the Mediterranean last year, but Libya's coastline is more than a thousand miles long, and nobody knows how many boats sink without ever being seen. Several of the migrants had written phone numbers on their clothes, so that someone could call their families if their bodies washed ashore.

The smugglers knelt in the sand and prayed, then stood up and ordered the migrants to push off. One pointed to the sky. "Look at this star!" he said. "Follow it." Each boat left with only enough fuel to reach international waters.

In one dinghy, carrying a hundred and fifty people, a Nigerian teen-ager named Blessing started to cry. She had travelled six months to get to this point, and her face was gaunt and her ribs were showing. She wondered if God had visited her mother in dreams and shown her that she was alive. The boat hit swells and people started vomiting. By dawn, Blessing had fainted. The boat was taking on water.

In recent years, tens of millions of

Africans have fled areas afflicted with famine, drought, persecution, and violence. Ninety-four per cent of them remain on the continent, but each year hundreds of thousands try to make it to Europe. The Mediterranean route has also become a kind of pressure-release valve for countries affected by corruption and extreme inequality. "If not for Italy, I promise, there would be civil war in Nigeria," a migrant told me. Last year, after Nigeria's currency collapsed, more Nigerians crossed the sea than people of any other nationality.

The flood of migrants is not a new phenomenon, but for years the European Union had some success in slowing it. The E.U. built a series of fences in Morocco and started paying coastal African nations to keep migrants from reaching European waters. Many migrants spent years living in border countries, repeatedly trying and failing to cross. Muammar Qaddafi saw an opportunity. In 2010, he demanded that Europe pay him five billion euros per year; otherwise, he said, Libya could send so many migrants that "tomorrow Europe might no longer be European."

The following year, as NATO forces bombed Libya, Qaddafi's troops rounded up tens of thousands of black and South Asian guest workers in Tripoli, crammed them into fishing trawlers, and launched them in the direction of Italy. Then Qaddafi was killed, Libya descended into chaos, and its shores became impossible to police. Europe's strategy had failed; by 2013, smuggling networks connected most major population centers in the northern half of Africa to Tripoli's coast.

As African migrants head toward the Mediterranean, they unwittingly follow the ancient caravan routes of the trans-Saharan slave trade. For eight hundred years, black slaves and con-

cubines were transported through the same remote desert villages. Now that the old slave routes are ungovernable and awash in weapons, tens of thousands of human beings who set out voluntarily find themselves trafficked, traded between owners, and forced to work as laborers or prostitutes. The men who enter debt bondage come from all over Africa, but the overwhelming majority of females fit a strikingly narrow profile: they are teen-age girls from around Benin City, the capital of Edo State, in southern Nigeria—girls like Blessing.

I VISITED NIGERIA last fall, during the coronation of the new Oba, the traditional ruler of the Edo people, who will preside over spiritual matters until his death. The Oba chose the name Ewuare II, in tribute to a predecessor who assumed the throne around 1440. During the reign of Ewuare I, Benin City became the center of a powerful kingdom, which was eventually surrounded by more than nine thousand miles of moats and mud walls. Portuguese merchants traded with the Edo, and the Oba sent an ambassador to Lisbon. European accounts of Benin City, written during the next several hundred years, describe a kingdom rich in palm oil, ivory, and bronze statues, but also one that engaged in slavery and human sacrifice. The Edo, like other groups in the region, practiced traditional rituals involving local gods, which the Europeans called juju, a name that spread across West Africa; as Christian missionaries converted most of southern Nigeria, juju persisted as a set of parallel beliefs.

By the late eighteen-hundreds, the British had colonized much of Nigeria, but the Oba engaged them in a trade war and refused to allow them to annex his kingdom. In 1897, after the Edo slaughtered a British delegation,



Girls from Benin City who set out voluntarily, like Blessing, can become caught in a network of forced labor and sex work.

colonial forces, pledging to end slavery and ritual sacrifice, ransacked the city and burned it to the ground.

Today, Nigeria is Africa's richest country, but the money that is set aside for public infrastructure is often embezzled or stolen by government officials. Benin City has daily power outages and few paved roads. As Nigeria's economy has grown—spurred by oil extraction, agriculture, and foreign investment—so has the percentage of its citizens who live in total poverty. Some wealthy businessmen travel with paramilitary escorts; police officers demand bribes at gunpoint, and crippled beggars crawl through traffic near the Oba's palace, tapping on car windows and pleading for leftover food.

One day, I went to the Uwelu spare-parts market, where adolescent boys lift car engines into wheelbarrows, and bare-chested vendors haggle over parts salvaged from foreign scrap yards. A dirt path at the western end of the market leads to a shack where I saw a middle-aged woman dressed in purple selling chips, candy, soda, and beer. I asked if she was Blessing's mother, Doris. She nodded and laughed, then started to cry.

Blessing's family used to own a house and a small plot of land. Her father was a bricklayer, but he died in a car accident when Blessing was a little girl. The family was close to penniless, and

Doris was left to raise her four children alone.

Blessing's older brother, Godwin, began repairing cars in Uwelu. Her sister Joy went to live with an aunt. When Blessing was thirteen or fourteen, she dropped out of school and started an apprenticeship with a tailor, but he wanted money to train her, and after six months he let her go. She was despondent, and believed that she had no future.

Through friends, Blessing learned of a travel broker in Lagos, who said that he could get her a passport, a visa, and a plane ticket to Europe. Once Blessing found work there, he promised, she would earn enough to support the entire family. "She tell me that she want to go," Doris said to me. "She say, 'Mummy, we suffering. No food. Nothing.'" Doris sold the house and the land, and gave all the money to the broker, who promptly disappeared.

Doris and the children moved into a small apartment without plumbing or electricity and hung a portrait of the father above a broken couch. Blessing, who was tall and slender, with large eyes and prominent cheekbones, helped her mother sell provisions. In the evenings, she took the money they had earned to another market, where everything is a few cents cheaper, to restock the shop. They ate with what-

ever money was left, which meant that sometimes they didn't eat.

Blessing blamed herself for her family's troubles. Godwin told me that, in February of last year, "Blessing just left without telling anybody."

THE MIGRATION OF young women out of Benin City began in the nineteen-eighties, when Edo women—fed up with repression, domestic chores, and a lack of economic opportunities—travelled to Europe by airplane, with fake documents. Many ended up doing sex work on the streets of major cities—London, Paris, Madrid, Athens, Rome. By the end of the decade, according to a report commissioned by the United Nations, "the fear of AIDS rendered drug-addicted Italian girls unattractive on the prostitution market"; Nigerians from Edo State largely filled the demand. The money wasn't great, by European standards, but, before long, parents in Benin City were replacing ramshackle houses of mud and wood with walled-off properties. Lists of expensive assets—cars, furniture, generators—purchased with remittances from Europe were included in obituaries, and envious neighbors took note. Pentecostal ministers, preaching a gospel of prosperity, extolled the benefits of migration.

Women were sending back word of well-compensated employment as hairdressers, dressmakers, housekeepers, nannies, and maids, but the actual nature of their work in Italy remained hidden, and so parents urged their daughters to take out loans to travel to Europe and lift the family out of poverty. In time, sex workers became madams; from Italy, they employed recruiters, transporters, and document forgers in Nigeria.

By the mid-nineties, most Edo women who went to Europe in this way "were probably aware that they would have to engage in prostitution to repay their debts," according to the U.N. report. "They were, however, unaware of the conditions of violent and aggressive exploitation that they would be subjected to." Between 1994 and 1998, at least a hundred and sixteen Nigerian sex workers were murdered in Italy.

In 2003, Nigeria passed its first law prohibiting human trafficking. But it was too late. The U.N. report, published the same year, concluded that the industry



"You think I just roll out of bed majestic?"

was "so ingrained in Edo State, especially in Benin City and its immediate environs, that it is estimated that virtually every Benin family has one member or the other involved." Today, tens of thousands of Edo women have done sex work in Europe, and some streets in Benin City are named for madams. The city is filled with women and girls who have come back, but some who can't find work end up making the journey again.

Many of the original traffickers came from Upper Sakpoba Road, in one of the city's poorest neighborhoods, where children hawk yams and sex workers earn less than two dollars per client. Nuns working for an organization called the Committee for the Support and Dignity of Women travel to local schools and markets, explaining to girls the brutality of the industry. But a nun told me that women in the market on Upper Sakpoba Road warn them off. "Many of them say we should not stop this trafficking, because their daughters are making money," she said. "The families are involved. Everybody is involved."

"I was a victim before, when I was very young," one woman told me. "I was living with my auntie in Benin City," she said. "She asked me if I would like to travel to Italy." For the next six years, she travelled through Côte d'Ivoire, Mali, Algeria, and Morocco, working as a prostitute, sending money to her aunt, and believing that she would soon be brought to Europe. After she was abandoned in an oasis city in the Sahara, she made her way back to Nigeria. Today, she makes a living trafficking others.

IN BENIN CITY, important agreements are often sealed with an oath, administered by a juju priest. The legal system can be dodged or corrupted, the thinking goes, but there is no escaping the consequences of violating a promise made before the old gods. Many sex traffickers have used this tradition to guarantee the obedience of their victims. Madams in Italy have their surrogates in Nigeria take the girls to a local shrine, where the juju priest performs a bonding ritual, typically involving the girl's fingernails, pubic hair, or blood, which the priest retains until she has repaid her debt to her trafficker.

One afternoon, I met an elderly Edo juju priestess who maintains a special re-

lationship with the god who lives in the Ogbia River. She wore a white sheet and a red parrot feather, and carried a wand decorated with charms, to detect any "demon priest" who challenged her spiritually. When I asked her to explain juju contracts, she said that all parties must obey them, "because the solution is from the gods."

"You say that when you get there you will not run," Sophia, a young woman who had come back from Europe, told me. In exchange for the madam covering travel expenses, the girl agrees to work for her until she has paid back the cost of the journey; the madam keeps her documents, and tells her that any attempt to flee will cause the juju, now inhabiting her body, to attack her. "If you don't pay, you will die," Sophia said. "If you speak with the police, you will die. If you tell the truth, you will die."

The traffickers are no less convinced of juju's efficacy. Last year, Italian police heard a madam, on a wiretapped call, tell an associate that one of her victims had broken her juju oath, and would die. As a guarantee, often "the madam films girls naked, swearing to her the oath of loyalty," Sophia said. "She says if you run she is going to leak it on Facebook." This had happened to one of Sophia's friends, and, to prove it, she pulled up the video on her phone.

BEFORE BLESSING DISAPPEARED, she met with a Yoruba trafficker without telling her family, but she balked when she discovered that the woman wanted her to become a sex worker. Soon afterward, her friend Faith introduced her to an Igbo woman with European connections—she was elegant, well dressed, and kind. The woman promised Blessing and Faith that she could take them to Italy; she would pay for their journey, and find them jobs, and then they would pay her back. Blessing dreamed of completing her education, of buying back the home her mother had lost. She climbed into a van, along with Faith, the woman, and several other girls.

They began a perilous journey north. Avoiding territory controlled by the terrorist group Boko Haram, they crossed

an unguarded part of Nigeria's border with Niger. The fertile red soil of the tropics became drier, finer, and soon there were only withered shrubs in the sand. After several days and a thousand miles, they reached Agadez, an old caravan city at the southern edge of the Sahara.

In Agadez, locals pick dust out of their hair and eyes and ears and toenails, and sweep it out of their homes, but by the time they have finished it is as if they had never begun. Men wrap their heads and faces in nine-foot scarves, called chéches, and dress in flowing robes. Everyone wears sandals; even in the winter, the temperature can approach a hundred degrees.

Agadez has always been a transit point, a maze of mud-brick enclosures in which to eat and rest and exchange cargo before setting off for the next outpost. Its oldest walls were built some eight hundred years ago, and by 1449 it had become the center of a Tuareg kingdom ruled by the Sultan of Air, named for the local mountains. Traders stopped in Agadez while crossing the desert in miles-long caravans carrying salt, gold, ivory, and slaves. The Tuareg developed a reputation for guiding merchants through the desert, then robbing them.

Most of Niger's population is concentrated in the south, in a semiarid band known as the Sahel, which runs across Africa. Beyond that, to the north, eighty per cent of Nigérien territory is desert, much of which is uninhabitable. Though the Tuareg make up just a tenth of Niger's population, they control vast swaths of empty land. They have rebelled against the government several times, and, together with Toubou tribesmen, they have hoped to establish an independent Saharan state, spanning parts of Mali, Niger, Algeria, Chad, and Libya. The Tuareg and the Toubou signed a territorial agreement in 1875, but recently it has begun to fray. The two groups are currently engaged in bloody fighting across the border, in southern Libya.

All manner of contraband passes through Agadez—counterfeit goods, hashish, cocaine, heroin. Stolen Libyan oil is sold by the roadside in liquor bottles. After the fall of Qaddafi, Tuaregs



and Toubous raided abandoned weapons depots in southern Libya and sold whatever they didn't keep to insurgent groups in neighboring countries. By 2014, however, the value of the migration trade had surpassed that of any other business in the city.

Blessing's van pulled into a walled-off lot containing a building known as a "connection house," where dozens of migrants were guarded by men holding daggers and swords. There was nothing to do but wait. From other migrants, Blessing picked up the vocabulary of her surroundings: the boss was a "connection man"; the light-skinned Tuaregs were known as Arabos; the darker-skinned Toubous were referred to as Black Libyans. The woman still hadn't given Blessing and Faith her name; she just said to call her Madam, and she never let them venture outside.

The compound was situated in a migrant ghetto, a shabby cluster of connection houses on the outskirts of the city. Niger belongs to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), a visa-free zone, so its western and southern borders are open to some three hundred and fifty million citizens of fourteen other countries. Most of the migrants had travelled more than a thousand miles by bus, and arrived in Agadez with the phone number of their connection man—usually a migrant turned businessman, of their same nationality or colonial heritage. Nigerians, Gambians, Ghanaians, and Liberians stuck together, because they spoke English; Malians, Senegalese, and Guineans could do business with any connection man who spoke French. For those who arrived without contacts, recruiters at the bus station offered transport across the desert. Migrants gathered at A.T.M.s and phone shops near the station. Once a deal was struck, the recruiters drove the migrants to the ghettos on motorcycles, and the connection men paid them a small commission.

Most women from Nigeria stayed inside the migrant ghettos. They didn't need to work, because their travel had been paid for by traffickers in Europe. The connection houses were hot and crowded, but the women were fed and protected until it was time to cross the desert. Other Nigerian girls, who were on their own, had to do sex work in

order to feed themselves and to finance the next stage of the journey. In Agadez, sex workers typically earn around three dollars per client, much of which goes to local madams, in exchange for room and board. One Nigerian teenager told me that it took her eighteen months and hundreds of clients to earn enough money to leave.

Most Nigerian brothels in Agadez are in the Nasarawa slum, a sewage-filled neighborhood a short walk from the grand mosque, the tallest mud-brick structure in the world. One afternoon, a young woman from Lagos sat outside a brothel holding the infant son of her friend Adenike, a seventeen-year-old girl, who was with a client. A few minutes later, a tall Toubou man emerged, adjusting his chèche. Adenike followed, wiping her hands on her spandex shorts. She picked up her baby, but soon another client arrived, so she passed the infant to another Nigerian girl, who looked no older than thirteen and was also doing sex work, and led the man past a hanging blanket and into her room.

Each Monday, Tuareg and Toubou drivers went to the migrant ghettos, collected cash from the connection men, and loaded some five thousand sub-Saharan migrants into the beds of Toyota Hilux pickup trucks, roughly thirty per vehicle. They set off with a Nigérien military convoy, which would accompany them part of the way to Libya, a journey of several days. Some migrants brought small backpacks containing food and cell phones; others had nothing. One driver, a young Toubou named Oumar, told me that he had made the trip twenty-five times. When I asked him if he had to give bribes along the way, he listed amounts and checkpoints: seventy thousand West African francs (about a hundred and fifteen dollars) to the police before they got to the desert; ten thousand to the gendarmes at Tourayat; twenty thousand split between the police and the republican guard at Séguédine; another forty thousand at Dao Timmi for the military and the transit police; and, finally, at Madama, the last checkpoint before Libya, ten thousand to the military.

According to an internal report by Niger's national police, obtained by Reuters, there were at least seventy con-

nnection houses in Agadez, each protected by a crooked police officer. In a separate investigation, Niger's anti-corruption agency found that, because funds from the military budget were stolen in the capital, bribes paid by smugglers at desert checkpoints were essential to the basic functioning of the security forces. Without them, soldiers wouldn't have enough money to buy fuel, parts for their vehicles, or food.

Shortly before I arrived in Agadez, Angela Merkel, the German Chancellor, came to Niger on a tour of African countries, hoping to reduce the flow of migrants, and promising development funds in return. "The well-being of Africa is in Germany's interest," she said. After her visit, everything changed. Security forces raided the ghettos, and arrested their former patrons. Military and police officers were replaced at all desert checkpoints between Agadez and the Libyan border. Niger's President, Mahamadou Issoufou, announced that he and Merkel had agreed "to curb irregular migration."

Mohamed Anacko, a Tuareg leader who serves as the president of the Agadez Regional Council, which oversees more than two hundred and fifty thousand square miles of territory, saw the situation differently. "Niger has a knife at its throat," he told me. The city's only functioning economy was the movement of people and goods. "Each smuggler supports a hundred families," he said. If the crackdown continued, "these families won't eat anymore."

To address the crisis, Anacko called a Regional Council meeting and invited a dozen of the biggest smugglers in the Sahara—half were Tuareg, half Toubou, and all had fought in recent rebellions. Wearing chèches and tribal robes, they sat at two long tables in an airless meeting space at the Regional Council's headquarters. More than four hundred smugglers had asked the council to represent them. Anacko promised to convey their grievances to the state, and to demand the release of their colleagues.

After Anacko's opening remarks, a middle-aged Tuareg who went by the name Alber stood up and partly unwound his white turban, uncovering his mouth. "We are not criminals—we are transporters!" he shouted. "How are we going to eat? Take tourists? There are

never any tourists! Never! We cannot live!" He pointed at me. "What do you want us to become? Thieves? We don't want to be thieves! We don't want to steal! What do you want us to do?"

Alber sat down, fuming. Across the table, a tall, handsome Touhou named Sidi stood up, furrowed his brow, and calmly argued that if the European Union really wanted to halt migration it should engage the smugglers, not pay off their government to arrest them. Another speaker reminded the group that they had rebelled in the past. Why should they stop smuggling without being offered other means to survive?

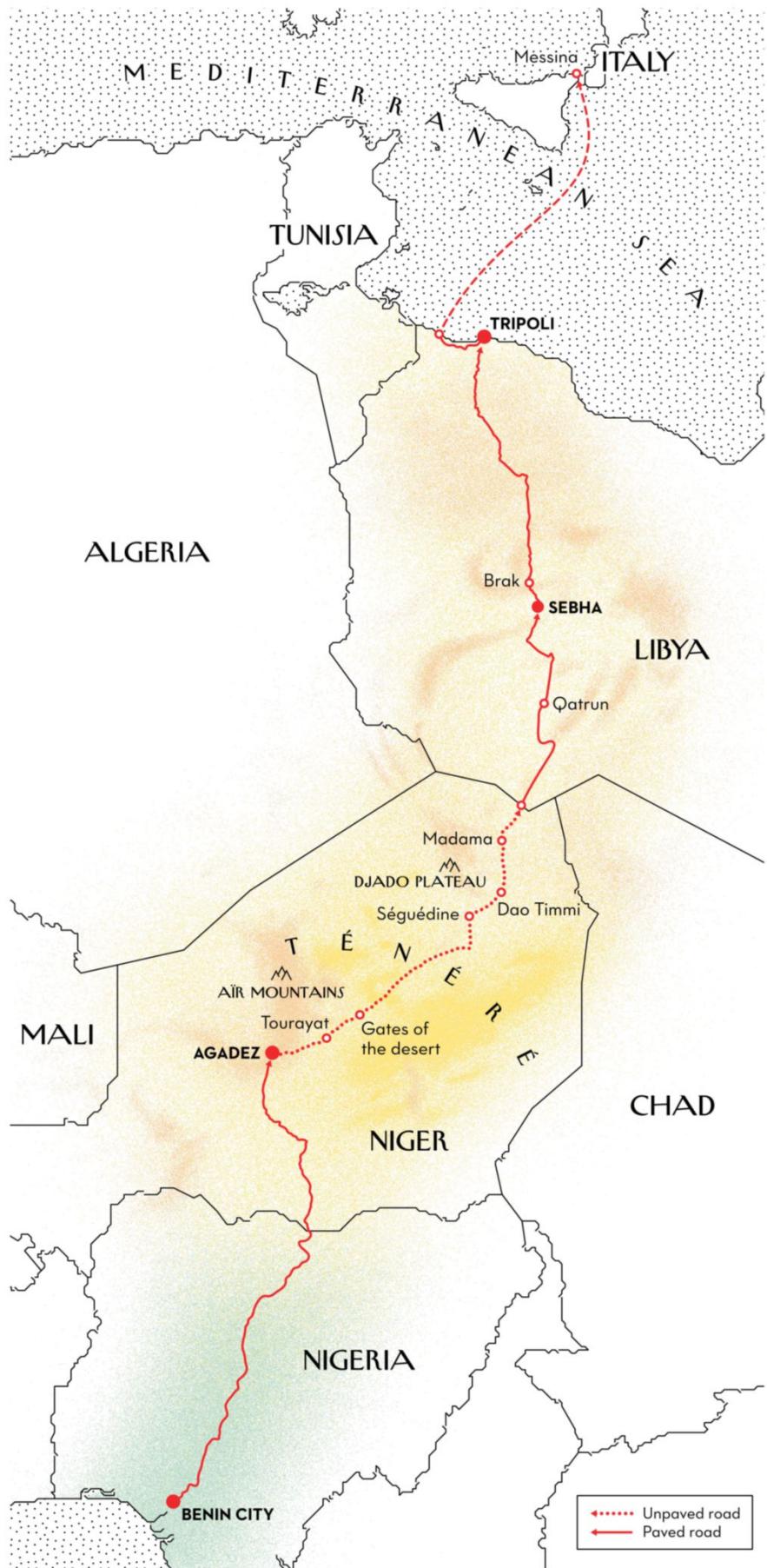
The next day, I met with Alber at his home, a mud-brick building in a neighborhood that was the site of frequent raids. He welcomed me inside and offered water from a large communal bowl. The room was dark. Three other men lounged on a couch, all of them heads of powerful smuggling families.

"I know more than seventy people who have been arrested," Alber said. "But I don't know the law. Nobody knows the specifics of the law." Although an anti-migration law was passed in early 2015, it had never been seriously enforced; apparently, the Nigérien government had made little effort to inform the smugglers of its implications. Less than twenty per cent of Niger's adult population is literate. Besides, Alber continued, "you can't tell me not to take someone from Agadez to Madama. We're in the same country. It's like a taxi."

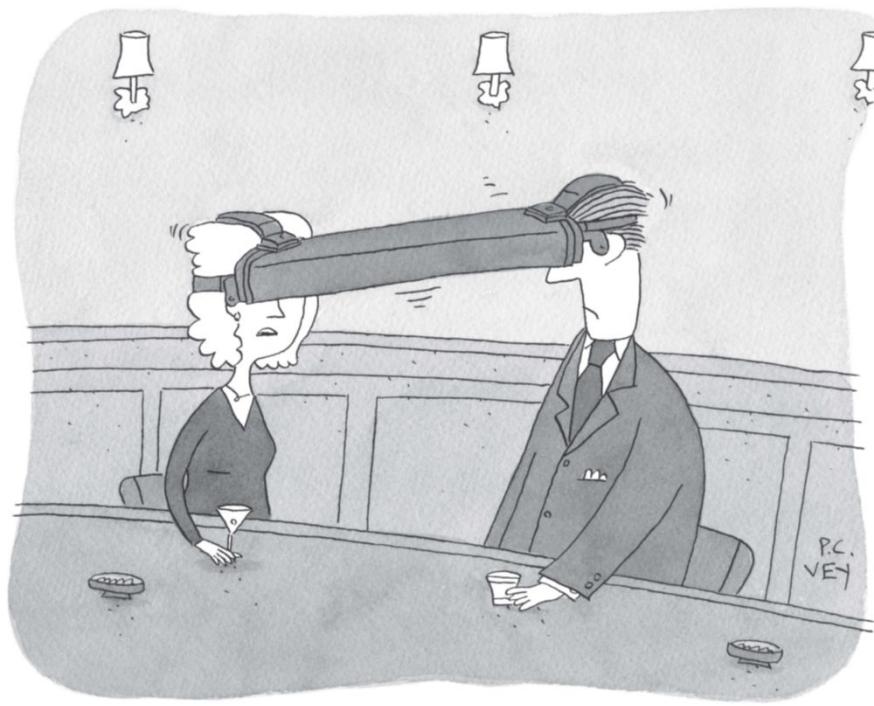
Another smuggler, Ibrahim Moussa, spoke up. "Everyone calls them migrants, but we don't agree," he said. "They're people of the ECOWAS. They're at home in Agadez. We go just as far as the border. After that, they're migrants." (Later, however, Moussa and Alber offered to connect me with contacts in Libya.)

"Nobody would go into the desert if we had good options here," Moussa added. "The desert is hell. You are always close to death." He sighed. "The European Union—it's because they're living well that they want Niger to stop migration. Why can't we live, too?"

There was further trouble. Boko Haram, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb, and other terrorist groups are leading insurgencies in the countries surrounding Niger, and suspected jihadis had recently killed twenty-two Nigérien soldiers near



From Agadez, migrants reach the Ténéré desert. "It's like the sea," a Nigerian girl said. "It don't have a start, it don't have an end."



"It's been nice, but I really have to be getting back to my own virtual reality."

Agadez. A few days after that, an American aid worker was kidnapped and taken to Mali, and a notorious Toubou narco-trafficker was assassinated in public. There was also talk of the fighting between the Tuareg and the Toubou in Libya spilling across the desert and taking root in Agadez. Nobody knew whether to attribute the gunfire at night to a drug war, a tribal conflict, a personal vendetta, a migration raid, or an Islamist attack.

Every smuggler I met expressed concern that the crackdown in Agadez would leave local young men vulnerable to recruitment by jihadi groups. Previously, Moussa said, "every time we see something suspicious, we tell the state." Tips from the desert, passed through the Nigérien military chain of command, can provide information to American and French counterterrorism operations in the region. (The United States is currently building a drone base in West Africa half a mile from Alber's house.) But now, Alber said, "If I see a convoy of terrorists, will I tell the state? I will not, because I will be afraid of being arrested."

"The desert is vast," Moussa added. "Without us, the state would see nothing."

"Have you seen the Air mountains?" Anacko asked me, in his office. "No Islamists can enter—none—because the population doesn't want them. The people want peace. But if there is no more economic development, and the people are going to prison whenever they work with migrants, it's certain: there will be jihadis in the mountains. I'm sure of it! And the day that the terrorists have a base in the Air the Sahel is finished." He continued, "The Americans and the Europeans won't be able to dislodge the terrorists from the mountains. It will be like Afghanistan. They will have created this, and the Islamic State will have been right. We'll all become the Islamic State in the end."

THE CRACKDOWN HAD another immediate effect: more dead migrants. To avoid checkpoints, smugglers were taking unfamiliar routes and abandoning their passengers when they spotted what appeared to be a military convoy on the horizon.

"When you go to the Sahara desert, you will meet many skeletons," a man from Benin City named Monday told me. During his trip north, the truck car-

rying him and twenty-seven other migrants had been attacked by bandits; a bullet had grazed his head, removing a tuft of hair. The truck had turned over and the driver had run away, leaving the migrants behind. Everybody scattered, except for Monday and another Nigerian, named Destiny, who used to work at the Uwelu market. They remained at the site of the wreckage. "After three days, one boy came back," Destiny recalled. "He said the others died in the desert. He drank his piss. After that, he gave up. He died in front of us." Nigérien troops found Monday and Destiny, and took them to Dirkou, an ancient salt-trading village now filled with abandoned migrants. Some steal food from locals and beg truckers to bring them to Libya; others are transported in military trucks back to Agadez, where they are deposited at the local U.N. migration facility.

"I know it's a death game, but I don't care," Alimamy, a migrant from Sierra Leone, told me in Agadez. He had nearly died during his first attempt to cross the Sahara; now his money was gone, his smuggler was in jail, and he was looking for a way to try again. "If I make it to Italy, life will be O.K.," he said. Back in Sierra Leone, "we are already dead while we're alive."

The crackdown had also trapped the sex workers in the Nasarawa slum. "When the road is safe, I can go," a young woman from Benin City told me. She had just earned enough money to cross the desert when the route closed. "I will just have patience," she said.

AFTER THE RAIDS, it became impossible to pick up migrants at the connection houses and drive them into the desert. But there were other methods. Oumar, the Toubou smuggler, left Agadez in a Toyota Hilux with a Nokia G.P.S. unit, two hundred litres of water, and extra fuel. He got through the checkpoint at a narrow pass without any trouble. Fifty miles on, past the black volcanic boulders of the Air mountains, he and six other smugglers gathered and waited for their cargo to arrive. Huge trucks routinely transport workers and supplies from Agadez to gold and uranium mines in the desert. The workers, sometimes more than a hundred per truck, sit on top and cling to ropes. This time, however, when a truck pulled up,

the men, their faces hidden in chèches, were not miners. The men climbed down. Oumar and the other smugglers put them in their vehicles and set off toward Libya, leaving behind an enormous cloud of dust.

After several hours in the mountains, Oumar reached the gates of the desert, the beginning of the Ténéré, an expanse of sand roughly the size of California. "It's like the sea," a seventeen-year-old Nigerian girl told me. "It don't have a start, it don't have an end." Some years pass without a drop of rainfall. "Nothing lives there, not even insects," Oumar said. "Sometimes you see birds, but if you give them water they die."

Oumar stopped and let air out of his tires, for better traction in the soft sand. Navigating the Ténéré is always difficult; dunes form and re-form with the winds, so the horizon changes shape between journeys. Last summer, when a tire on one of the cars in Oumar's convoy burst, the vehicle flipped, and seven migrants died. Another time, he watched a truck tumble down a dune—a frequent occurrence in the Ténéré. Everybody died, including the driver, and Oumar buried them under a thin layer of sand. On each trip, Oumar sees more desiccated corpses, covered and uncovered by the shifting sands. Migrants often fall out of trucks, and the drivers don't always stop. When I asked him if he was afraid of dying in the Ténéré, he shook his head and clicked his tongue. "*C'est normal*," he said.

Oumar's convoy evaded the military for four days and several hundred miles, but the checkpoint at Dao Timmi, situated at a gap between mountains in the Djado Plateau region, is unavoidable. Since the crackdown, the guards there have almost doubled their prices. Oumar paid, and continued roughly a hundred and fifty miles to Madama, the last checkpoint before the Libyan border. There, the soldiers now charge what he used to pay for the entire journey.

At the Libyan border, a black line of asphalt marks the beginning of a long, smooth highway heading north. But any relief belies the lawlessness and the cruelty to come. Last fall, at a checkpoint, a migrant from Sierra Leone named Abdul looked on as a Libyan man harassed a teen-age girl from Nigeria.

"There was some argument, so the man just cocked his gun and shot the girl in her back," Abdul told me. "We took the lady to the Hilux." The Libyans shouted "*Hayat!*"—meaning they should get out of there. The girl was still alive, but the driver took a six-hour detour into the desert, to a sprawling migrant graveyard, where small rocks arranged in circles marked each of the hundreds of bodies in it. Passports and identity cards had been placed with some of the rocks. "Most of the names that I see were Nigerian names," Abdul continued. "Mostly girls." By then, the teen-ager had died.

Before leaving Agadez, migrants are typically given the phone number of a connection man in southern Libya. For some, that means disembarking in Qatrur, three Toubou checkpoints and two hundred miles past the border; for others, it means paying an extra thirty thousand West African francs (about fifty dollars) to reach Sebha, a Saharan caravan city another hundred and eighty miles north. Oumar always leaves Qatrur shortly after two o'clock in the morning, because Sebha is the site of unpredictable conflict among militias, proxy forces, and jihadis, and the safest time to get there is just before dawn.

In Sebha, Oumar pulled into the driveway of a small house, and the passengers gave him the phone numbers of their connection men. He called each one to collect his migrants. Those who travel on credit are considered the property of the connection men who pay for their journey. "If you enter Sebha and you didn't already pay your money to the connection man, you will suffer," a Ghanaian political refugee named Stephen told me. "Morning time, they will beat you! Afternoon! They will beat you! In the night, they will beat you! Dawn! They will beat you!" Stephen buried his head in his hands, and said, under his breath, "Sebha is not a good place, Sebha is not a good place, Sebha is not a good place."

The connection houses in Sebha are especially dangerous for women and girls. One night, according to Bright, a seventeen-year-old boy from Benin City, a group of Libyans carrying swords started collecting women. "Some of the girls are pregnant—you see them. They are pregnant from the journey, not from home," he said. "Raped." A recent report commissioned by the U.N. estimated that

nearly half the female refugees and migrants who pass through Libya are sexually assaulted, including children—often many times along the route. A twenty-one-year-old Nigerian named John told me that he had witnessed female migrants being murdered for refusing the advances of their Libyan captors.

Libya's connection houses are usually owned by locals but partly run by West Africans. "Some of the Ghanaians treat us worse than the Libyans," a young Ghanaian told me. Migrants are imprisoned, beaten with pipes, tortured with electricity, and then forced to call their relatives to get more money. Now that the negotiations are about who lives and who dies, the price of the journey often doubles.

"I was in prison for one month and two days," a twenty-one-year-old Gambian named Ousmane recalled. The facility was run by Libyans, and, to clarify the stakes and to make room for more detainees, "every Friday they would kill five people," he said. "Even if you pay, sometimes they don't set you free—they say they will throw you out, but they just kill you instead." Ousmane told the guards that he had no family to pay for him. "One Friday, they finally called my name," he said. Because Ousmane was one of the youngest detainees, an older migrant, who also couldn't pay, asked the Libyans to kill him in Ousmane's place. Before they took the man outside, he told Ousmane, "When you go to the Gambia, go to my village and tell them I am dead."

A few nights later, Ousmane escaped. He made his way back to Agadez and told his story to the U.N. migration agency, which helped him return to Gambia. In January, according to the newspaper *Welt am Sonntag*, the German Embassy in Niger sent a cable to Berlin corroborating these weekly executions, and comparing the conditions in Libya's migrant connection houses to those of Nazi concentration camps. Sometimes the sick are buried alive.

LAST SPRING, Blessing, Faith, and the madam left Agadez, crossed the desert, and made it to Brak, just north of Sebha, where they stayed in a private home. Their journey through the desert had been a blur of waiting, heat, thirst, discomfort, beatings, dead bodies, and fear. The madam continued

to promise the girls education and lucrative work in Italy. It is unclear whether she was ever in a position to decide their fate; women who accompany girls across the desert are often only employees of traffickers in Italy. One day in Brak, the madam sold Blessing and Faith to the owner of a connection house, to work as prostitutes.

"It's not what you told me!" Blessing said. "You told me that I'm going to Italy, but now you say you want to drop me here?" She started sobbing. She hadn't sworn a juju oath, but the madam threatened to kill her.

In Benin City, Doris, Blessing's mother, received a phone call from a Nigerian woman with an Italian number. It had been three months since her daughter had disappeared, and the caller told her that unless she paid four hundred and eighty thousand naira (about fifteen hundred dollars) Blessing would be forced to work as a prostitute. "I say to the woman that I cannot get it," Doris told me.

That Sunday, at the weekly traders' meeting in the Uwelu market, Doris explained Blessing's plight and asked for help. Although Doris's shop was already running on loans, the group approved her request, charging twenty-per-cent interest. Godwin, Blessing's brother, dropped off the cash at a MoneyGram exchange service, using the details given by the woman on the phone. After that, there was no further word.

Blessing was delivered to another connection house in Brak. A few days later, armed men put her and several other migrants into the back of a truck, covered them with a blanket, and stacked watermelons on top, to conceal them from rival traffickers. The truck set off north, toward Tripoli. Faith stayed in Brak, because her family didn't pay.

THE DRIVE TO Tripoli from Brak takes all day and is plagued with bandits, known among migrants as the "Asma boys." Like the connection men in Sebha, they rob black Africans, beat them, hold them captive, demand ransoms, and murder, sell, or enslave those who disobey orders or are unable to pay. Packed on

top of one another in the trucks, and concealed under tarps and other cargo, the passengers can hardly breathe. Nevertheless, a teen-age Nigerian girl explained to me, "we can't make noise, so that the Asma boys don't catch us." Sometimes, after unloading the cargo in Tripoli, the smugglers discover that the passengers have suffocated.

Blessing was taken to a large detention center, a concrete room in an abandoned warehouse somewhere near Tripoli. For months, she stayed inside with more than a hundred people, huddled next to other Nigerian girls for safety. Arbitrary beatings and rapes were common. Sometimes the migrants were given only seawater to drink. People routinely died from starvation and disease.

August 22nd came—Blessing's birthday. But by then she had lost track of time. She cried every day, unaware of who controlled her fate and when she would be brought to the sea. When she sneezed, she wondered if it was a sign from God that her mother was thinking about her.

OUTSIDE THE DETENTION center, militias patrolled the streets in pickup trucks mounted with anti-aircraft guns. Libya is in the midst of a civil war; Tripoli is being fought over by two rival governments and a host of militias. Nevertheless, the European Union, desperate to quell the flood of migrants, has sent delegations to Tripoli to train and equip the coast guard. Militias, while purporting to police migration, sell migrants to smugglers and invite local Libyan builders to come to the detention centers and collect workers. "We have no choice," a Nigerian man who cleaned houses, stacked cinder blocks, and worked on farms told me. "We can't fight with them, because they have guns."

"If you are sick and you go to them, they tell you, 'Fuck you, black! Fuck you!'" Evans, a twenty-four-year-old Ghanaian, said. "As soon as they see you, they will cover their nose." A Nigerian migrant who lived in Tripoli for four years told me that he was stabbed in the chest by a shop owner because, after

paying for his items, he had asked for change. A Ghanaian said that a Libyan cut off his friend's finger in order to steal his ring.

Migrants stuck in Libya have started recording warnings to their friends back home, and urging them to circulate the messages through WhatsApp. "Anyone who has family in Libya should pray for them," a message sent to Ghanaians said. "They have bombed and killed our black siblings—Ghanaians—any black person." Another message listed names of missing migrants. There was also a series of photographs and videos depicting migrants walking in a line with their hands behind their heads, like hostages, and scenes from a number of massacres. Some of the corpses had been beheaded. "Take a look for yourself," another Ghanaian message urged. "If you have family in Libya and haven't heard from them, you should be sad for them."

Late one night last September, the guards at Blessing's detention center roused the migrants and ordered them into a tractor-trailer. The truck dropped them at a beach west of Tripoli. Armed smugglers crammed them into a dinghy, prayed in the sand, and sent them out to sea.

FOR THE PREVIOUS several days, the Dignity I, a boat operated by Médecins Sans Frontières, had been patrolling a stretch of the Libyan coast—eight hours east, eight hours west, just beyond territorial waters—searching for migrants but finding none. The wind had been blowing from the north, sending six-foot waves crashing on Libya's shores and making it impossible to leave. But now the air was warm and still, the water barely rippling, and so the rescuers expected thousands to come at once.

Shortly after 8 A.M., the first mate spotted Blessing's dinghy, a speck on the southern horizon. Crew members lowered a small rescue vessel into the water, and I climbed aboard with them.

The rescue vessel eased alongside the dinghy, and we shuttled migrants back to the Dignity I in groups of around fifteen. As the rescue boat bobbed next to the larger ship, Nicholas Papachrysostomou, an M.S.F. field coördinator, helped Blessing stand up. She was nauseated and weak. Her feet were pruritic; they had been soaking for hours in a



puddle at the bottom of the dinghy. Two crew members hoisted her aboard by her shoulders. She stood on the deck with her arms crossed—sobbing, shivering, heaving, praising God.

When everyone was safely transferred to the Dignity I, a crew member tossed Papachrysostomou a can of black spray paint, which he used to tag the empty dinghy with its geographic coordinates and the word “Rescued.” (European naval ships used to focus exclusively on rescuing migrants; now they run an “anti-smuggling” operation, in which they assist with rescues, arrest migrants who drive the boats, and destroy abandoned dinghies, so that they can’t be reused.) As we towed the dinghy farther out to sea, three Libyan men in a speedboat approached. One lifted four silver fish out of a bucket. “Trade! Trade!” he said, in Arabic, extending his arms toward us. The men had spent the past half hour watching the rescue from around a hundred feet away, and wanted to take the dinghy’s motor back to Libya, to resell. Some Libyans steal the motors while the migrants are still aboard. Papachrysostomou waved them off. As we sped away to help another boat in distress, the Libyans circled back and took the motor.

MORE THAN ELEVEN thousand Nigerian women were rescued in the Mediterranean last year, according to the International Organization for Migration, eighty per cent of whom had been trafficked for sexual exploitation. “You now have girls who are thirteen, fourteen, fifteen,” an I.O.M. anti-trafficking agent told me. “The market is requesting younger and younger.” Italy is merely the entry point; from there, women are traded and sold to madams all over Europe.

By the time we got back to the Dignity I, a nurse had logged each migrant’s nationality and age. Blessing had told the nurse that she was eighteen, but, suspecting that to be a lie, the nurse had tied a blue string around her wrist, signifying that Médecins Sans Frontières considered her to be an unaccompanied minor. Most of the Nigerian girls had a blue string. Madams coach the girls to say they are older, so that they are sent to Italy’s main reception centers, where migrants can move about freely.

Otherwise, they end up in restrictive shelters for unaccompanied minors.

While the moment of rescue marks the end of most migrants’ debts to their smugglers, for the Nigerian girls it is only the beginning. “You’re delivering them to hell,” an M.S.F. staffer told me. M.S.F.’s focus is on saving lives, not on policing international waters, and it does not share suspicions about trafficking cases with the European authorities. “The moment you begin entering this part of the investigation, you are no longer a rescue boat,” Papachrysostomou said. “We need to maintain distances from just about everybody”—governments, smugglers, and traffickers alike.

This approach makes some staffers uneasy. One told me that they had been briefed by M.S.F. on the fact that criminal networks have co-opted sea rescues as a reliable means of transporting young African women to Europe’s prostitution market. That morning, the smugglers had given one of the migrants in a departing boat a satellite phone and the phone number of the Maritime Rescue Coördination Center, in Rome, which sends real-time alerts to ships in the Mediterranean. “Sometimes I feel as if we are the smugglers’ delivery service,” another M.S.F. staffer said. But at least twenty-

three hundred people were saved from eighteen rubber dinghies on the day that Blessing was picked up, and, without the work of M.S.F. and several other N.G.O.s, many of them would have drowned.

The Dignity I headed for the port of Messina, on the eastern coast of Sicily, a journey of two and a half days. There were three hundred and fifty-five migrants on board. The youngest was three weeks old. Few had space to lie down, and it was difficult to walk among the bodies without stepping on limbs and torsos.

Late that afternoon, Sara Creta, an Italian M.S.F. staffer, and I met with Blessing and another girl, Cynthia, who had grown up on a farm and then sold snacks on the streets of Benin City. Blessing and Cynthia had met on the dinghy, several hours earlier, and were now sitting with some other Nigerian girls. All of them looked underage, though they insisted that they were eighteen. Blessing smiled and spoke in nervous fragments while she massaged Cynthia’s swollen feet. She said that she had been kidnapped, but withheld the details. As Blessing spoke, Cynthia wept.

Creta tried to comfort the girls. “When you arrive in Italy, you are not obliged to do anything you don’t want



“Poor thing! Shouldn’t have tried eating that apple.”

to do," she said. "In Italy, you are free. O.K.? Just follow your heart." Blessing picked at her skin for a few seconds, then said, "I don't have the opportunity."

Three older Nigerian women appeared to be eavesdropping on the conversation. One of them—heavyset, with a sickle-shaped scar on her chin—interrogated me about my role on the ship, pursing her lips and raising her eyebrows when I told her that I was a reporter. She refused to respond to my questions, except to say, "I did not pay for my own journey." She and the other two women spent most of the next two days perched on the ship's railing, monitoring the younger women.

In Messina, the migrants disembarked in groups of ten. The Italian authorities gave them flip-flops, took photographs for immigration records, conducted medical exams, and registered them with Frontex, the E.U. border agency. Humanitarian workers introduced themselves to some of the girls whom they suspected of being under eighteen, but none of them accepted help. One Nigerian girl, who, on the Dignity I, had confessed that she was fourteen years old, later claimed that she was twenty-three.

The U.N. refugee agency had sent a representative, who carried flyers outlining the migrants' legal rights, but they were printed in Tigrinya, the language of Eritrea and northern Ethiopia. Many people who might have been eligible for asylum told me that they had never heard of it. The Egyptians and the Moroccans were pulled out of line and directed to sit under a blue awning, where they remained for the rest of the afternoon, likely unaware that Italy has repatriation agreements with their home countries. Most of them would be taken to Sicily's expulsion center, in Caltanissetta, and flown home.

The other migrants were led to a line of buses. The drivers wore masks, to guard against the smell. Blessing and Cynthia waved to me before boarding. The woman with the sickle-shaped scar got on the same bus.

MANY MIGRANTS WERE temporarily kept at Palanebiolo, a makeshift camp in a former baseball stadium on the outskirts of Messina, before being distributed among other centers throughout Italy. A huge concrete wall

GELATO

The two nuns I saw I urged to convert to Luther or better yet to join the Unitarians, and the Jews I encountered to think seriously about Jesus, especially the Lubavitchers, and I interrupted the sewer workers digging up dirt to ask them how many spoonfuls of sugar they put in their coffee and the runners in their red silk to warn them about the fake fruit in their yogurt since to begin with I was in such a good mood this morning, I waited patiently for the two young poets driving over from Jersey City to talk about the late Forties and what they were to me when I was their age and we turned to Chinese poetry and Kenneth Rexroth's "Hundred Poems" and ended up talking about the Bollingen and Pound's stupid admiration of Mussolini and how our main poets were on the right politically—most of them—unlike the European and South American, and we climbed some steps into a restaurant I knew to buy gelato and since we were poets we went by the names, instead of the tastes and colors—and I stopped talking and froze beside a small tree since I was older than Pound was when he went silent and kissed Ginsberg, a cousin to the Rothschilds, who had the key to the ghetto in his pocket, one box over and two rows up, he told me.

—Gerald Stern

surrounds the complex; rusted rebar pokes through it, and lizards dart in and out of the cracks. A couple of days after being taken to Palanebiolo, a group of West African men who had been rescued by the Dignity I sat on a cinder-block ledge outside. They had no money or possessions, and complained that the food was lousy and the tents let in rainwater. They had received no medical attention—not even antiparasitic cream to treat scabies, which all of them had. Some were still wearing the same ragged clothes from their voyage, stiff with dried vomit and seawater.

In Italy, it is widely known that many contracts to provide services for the migrants are connected to the Mafia. The government allots reception centers thirty-five euros per migrant per

day, but the conditions at Palanebiolo and elsewhere indicate that the money is not being spent on those who stay there. A few years ago, in a wiretapped call, Italian investigators heard a Mafia boss tell an associate, "Do you have any idea how much we earn off the migrants? The drug trade is less profitable." Migrants are entitled to daily cash allowances of two euros and fifty cents; at Palanebiolo, they were given phone cards instead, which they sold on the streets nearby at a thirty-per-cent discount, so they could buy food, second-hand clothes, and, eventually, mobile phones.

I wasn't allowed into Palanebiolo, but I found Cynthia outside. She told me that Blessing was still living there but had gone out for the morning with

a Nigerian man who worked at the camp. A few hours later, Blessing and the man returned together. "He took me in a train!" she told me. She was still reeling from the novelty of what she had seen in the city center. "The white people—I saw many white people," she said.

The girls told me their real ages—Cynthia was sixteen, Blessing was barely seventeen. They also claimed that they had told the truth to the Frontex agents, at disembarkation, but I was skeptical; Palanebiolo was supposed to house only adults. Together, we walked down the hill to have lunch. Near a busy intersection, we asked directions from a tall, bearded Nigerian man, named Destiny, who had crossed the Mediterranean in 2011 and now worked at a supermarket in Messina. His arms and neck were covered in religious tattoos; Cynthia thought he was handsome and invited him to join us. We walked to a nearby café, but as soon as we entered a waitress shooed us out, saying that the café was closed. Several tables were occupied by Italians enjoying coffee and pastries. We stood outside, deliberating other options, until the waitress poked her head out the door and told us to leave the property.

We headed back up the hill, to Palanebiolo. Blessing moved with slow, labored steps. Her joints ached and were still swollen from her time in detention in Libya. Destiny asked me where I was staying. "Oh, Palermo," he said. "My favorite city." He winked, and, switching to Italian so that the girls couldn't understand, added, "That's where I go to fuck the young black girls for thirty euros."

SEX WORK IS NOT a crime in Italy, but it attracts the attention of the police, so trafficking networks try to get residency permits for every girl they send to work on the streets. Having lied to Frontex about their ages, underage victims are eventually issued official Italian government documents claiming that they are eighteen or older; these shield them from police inquiries. Italian police wiretaps show that Nigerian trafficking networks have infiltrated reception centers, employing low-level staffers to monitor the girls

and bribing corrupt officials to accelerate the paperwork. An anti-trafficking agent from the International Organization for Migration explained that, at centers like Palanebiolo, "the only thing the girl has to do is make a call and tell the madam she has arrived—which city, which camp. They know what to do, because they have their guys all over."

In Palermo's underground brothels, trafficked Nigerians sleep with as many as fifteen clients a day; the more clients, the sooner they can purchase their freedom. When people spit on them, the women go to the bushes to retrieve hidden handbags, take out their hand mirrors, and, by the dim yellow glow of the street lamps on Via Crispi, fix their makeup. Then they get back to work.

"There's an extraordinary level of implicit racism here, and it's evident in the fact that there are no underage Italian girls working the streets," Father Enzo Volpe, a priest who runs a center for migrant children and trafficking victims, told me. "Society dictates that it's bad to sleep with a girl of thirteen or fourteen years. But if she's African? Nobody gives a fuck. They don't think of her as a person."

Twice a week, Father Enzo loads a van with water and snacks and, in the company of a young friar and a frail old nun, sets off to provide comfort and assistance to girls on the streets. His first stop, one Thursday night last fall, close to midnight, was Parco della Favorita, a nine-hundred-acre park at the base of Mt. Pellegrino, known as much for prostitution as for its views of the Tyrrhenian Sea. Father Enzo parked the van near a clearing. Four Nigerian women emerged from the woods, where they had made a small fire with twigs and plastic chip bags. "Buona sera, Vanessa," Father Enzo said. "Good evening. God bless you."

Everyone gathered in a circle, prayed, and sang church songs that the girls had learned in Nigeria. A car approached, and out of it came Jasmine, who looked to be around fifteen years old. "It's my birthday," she said. Someone asked how old she was. She paused, then said,

"*Ventidue*"—twenty-two. The nun had brought a birthday cake. "If we come and pray with them and give them medical information, it's fine," Father Enzo told me. "But, if you go and ask questions about how the network works, they say nothing. They disappear."

TWO WEEKS AFTER disembarking in Messina, most of the migrants from the Dignity I had either run away from Palanebiolo or been transferred to other camps. Blessing and Cynthia stayed, and began to venture into the city. One Sunday morning, an Italian woman noticed the girls at church, and took them for a coffee—their first ever. Another woman gave them second-hand clothes. I bought them anti-inflammatory medication and treatments for scabies and lice.

The girls soon learned how to count to ten in Italian. They also picked up Italian words for various things they encountered: Tomato. Butterfly. Stomach ache. Cynthia shouted "*Ciao!*" at every passing motorist, pedestrian, and dog, and was delighted when it elicited a friendly,

if puzzled, response. "She is a village girl," Blessing teased. "I like greeting everybody!" Cynthia replied.

A car pulled up to the intersection where the girls were sitting. "*Ciao!*" Blessing called to the driver. The driver stared straight ahead and rolled up her window.

The girls marvelled at a double-decker bus, and spent an hour sitting next to an electric gate at an apartment complex, watching it open and close for arriving cars. Blessing picked up a supermarket catalogue

that she found on the road, and the girls pointed at items, trying to identify them from the pictures and the Italian names. Cynthia started reading a page in mock Italian. "Sapudali," she said. "Shekatabratabrotocchikamano."

A number of passing cars caught Blessing's eye, but she was especially impressed by the design of a small, gray Nissan Qashqai S.U.V. "Wow, I love this ride!" she said. "It is one of the best kinds in town." She started blowing kisses





"What do the instructions say?"

at it, and spoke of it for the rest of the day. "It is the best car," Cynthia agreed. "Everything is the best."

IN ITALY, WE'RE very good at the process of emergency reception—the humanitarian aspect," Salvatore Vella, a prosecutor in the Sicilian city of Agrigento, told me. "They arrive. We give them something to eat. We put them in a reception center. But after that? There is no solution. What do we do with these people?" Vella looked out the window. "Let's be honest: these reception centers, they have open doors, and we hope that they leave. Where to? I don't know," he said. "If they go to France, for us that's fine. If they go to Switzerland, great. If they stay here, they work on the black market—they disappear."

Most of Palermo's migrants live in Ballarò, a crowded old neighborhood of winding cobblestoned alleyways and hanging laundry which is the site of illegal horse races and Palermo's largest open-air market. At dusk, young men whistle at passersby and tell them the price of hashish. On Sundays, at around five o'clock in the morning, thrifty locals browse *il mercato delle cose rubate*, "the market of stolen goods," where you can find televisions, toilet

seats, chandeliers, ovens, sunglasses, leather jackets, cabinets, jewelry, iPhones, seven-piece dining sets.

One night in Ballarò, I met with a former drug dealer from Mali at an outdoor bar that smelled like sweat, weed, and vomit. Sex workers walked past in red fish-nets and six-inch stilettos. On the corner, two men grilled meat over a trash fire. Italians and Africans exchanged cash and drugs, unbothered by the presence of witnesses. "This is the power of the Nigerian mafia," the Malian said. "It gives work to those people who don't have papers."

At street level, Ballarò looks to be largely under the control of Nigerian gangs. The most powerful group, called Black Axe, has roots in Benin City and cells throughout Italy, and has carried out knife and machete attacks against other migrants. But, although the Nigerian gangs are armed and loosely organized, none of them ultimately work alone. "If I want to deal, I have to talk to the Sicilian boss," the Malian explained. He said that, unless a dealer gives the Cosa Nostra its cut of the business, "O.K., you can make it work for two days, but if they understand that you are doing something"—he whistled and started sawing at his neck

with a finger—"they eliminate you." Last year, after a street brawl near Ballarò, an Italian mobster shot a Gambian migrant in the back of the head.

Italian officials and local criminals agree that the Cosa Nostra profits at both ends: Nigerian bosses buy drugs in bulk from the Mafia, then pay an additional *pizzo*—protection money—for the right to deal. For generations, Ballarò has been under the control of the D'Ambrogio family, whose patriarch, Alessandro, is currently in prison. In public, African dealers are afraid to utter his name louder than a whisper, though the family's business in Palermo is widely known: it owns at least nine funeral parlors.

It is impossible to say how many Nigerians work in Ballarò's brothels, but many of them are abused by clients, and severely beaten, branded, or stabbed by their madams. "I never went outside," a former prostitute named Angela told me. Her madam, an Edo woman named Osasu, picked up girls from the camps before they got their residency permits, and kept sixteen of them captive. Angela was locked inside for two months and forced to have sex with eight men each day, while Osasu collected her earnings. When Angela became severely ill after a miscarriage—she had been raped in Agadez, several months earlier—Osasu kicked her out. An elderly Italian woman took her to the police station. The authorities listened to her story, then repatriated her to Benin City. To this day, she told me, "I don't even know what city I was in."

According to Vella, the Sicilian prosecutor, violence against Nigerian prostitutes is rarely investigated, because "the tendency, here in Italy, has been to not look at criminal organizations as long as they're committing crimes only against non-Italians." One consequence, he said, is that Nigerian gangs have spent at least fifteen years "collecting vast sums of money, arming themselves," and exploiting underage girls with impunity. (Vella has led groundbreaking investigations into Nigerian crime, resulting in the convictions of several traffickers.)

A security official in Palermo told me that his team, which is focussed on Nigerian crime but employs no Nigerians, considers Ballarò to be practically

impenetrable. With virtually no on-the-ground access, Vella explained, roughly eighty per cent of the investigative work on Nigerian crime involves wiretapping phone calls that the police cannot understand. "We have thousands of people living here who speak languages that, fifteen years ago, we didn't even know existed," Vella said. "The person I select to listen to wiretaps is usually an ex-prostitute or a girl who works in a bar. I need to trust her, but I don't even know her." These obstacles are further compounded by security threats. "During a trial, I have to call up the interpreter to testify," he continued. Her name and birthplace are written into the public record, and the trafficking networks are so well established that, "with a Skype call or a text message, they have the ability to order their associates to go into a small village in Nigeria and burn down houses with people inside them."

Most girls don't know the extent of their debt until they arrive in Italy, when they are told that they owe as much as eighty thousand euros. Some madams extend the debts by charging the girls for room, board, and condoms, at exorbitant rates. One night in Palermo, I spoke with three Nigerian women who were working the streets near Piazza Rivoluzione. One of them had grown up on Upper Sakpoba Road, before coming to Italy "as a little girl," she said, and being repeatedly raped. She despised the work but couldn't leave it, because, after five years in Palermo, she still owed her madam thousands of euros.

FOR THE AUTHORITIES, one of the most confounding aspects of the sex trade is that Nigerian trafficking victims almost never denounce their captors. Most fear deportation, and also the consequences of breaking the juju oath. "I hear this juju killed many girls," Blessing told me. "This spell is effective."

A few weeks after reaching Italy, some of the Nigerian girls from the Dignity I had got phones, and one of them circulated a WhatsApp message that warned of a juju priest living in Naples, named Chidi, who used "evil powder" to manipulate women. "He has killed and destroy many girls in Europe," it said. The message also included Chi-

di's phone number, and instructed recipients to save it so that they would know not to answer if the devil called.

One afternoon, a former sex worker from Nigeria introduced me to an elderly Ghanaian woman, a retired wigmaker who is known in Ballarò as the Prophetess Odasani. In the past decade, Odasani has helped many Nigerian women escape prostitution by challenging juju on a spiritual level. Dressed in shining blue robes, she took me to the base of Mt. Pellegrino, where she picked up a wooden staff and started walking up the mountain. We soon reached a small clearing, a space she calls Nowhere for Satan Camp. For the next half hour, Odasani sang and prayed and spoke in tongues.

"They have bad spirits inside them—that's why they do prostitution," Odasani said. To free girls from their juju curses, she performs a kind of exorcism. "I ask the spirit, What is your name? And the spirit answer." When she asks why it is inhabiting the person, she said, the spirit explains the debt bondage, at which point "I say, O.K., in the name of the Lord, depart from the person. Depart! Depart from my daughter!" Eventually, the juju leaves the girl's body, "and then she is free."

"The madam still asks for money," Odasani said. "I tell the girl to tell the madam that she will pay a little bit"—but by doing housework and cooking, not prostitution. "And if she continues to do these bad things to you I will pray to Jesus Christ to attack her spiritually."

AFTER TWO MONTHS in Italy, Blessing, Cynthia, and a sixteen-year-old girl named Juliet were the only migrants from the Dignity I who were still at Palanebiolo. Blessing told me that several girls from the boat had left the camp in the company of their traffickers.

Blessing wanted to leave the camp, too. "I am tired of pasta," she said, clicking her tongue in frustration. "I miss Nigeria, where people know how to cook." She missed her mother, and was annoyed that she hadn't yet had an opportunity to pursue an education in Italy. Minors are supposed to be enrolled in schools, but, I had since learned, the girls had been left in Palanebiolo because all the restrictive centers for underage migrants in Sicily were full. (This winter, Palanebi-

olo was shut down, and the girls were transferred to a shelter for minors.)

In Benin City, Blessing's schoolbooks are still piled on a shelf in her former bedroom, but Doris sold her mattress to buy food. The room is occupied by Blessing's younger sister, Hope, who is now fifteen and has dropped out of school to help Doris at the shop. In order for the family to keep the apartment, Godwin helps with the rent, which is thirty dollars per month. The debt Doris took on to free Blessing in Libya continues to mount.

"I don't know how my mummy, she will recover that money. But I can't go and sell myself, even though I need money for them," Blessing said. "I better go to school. I promised myself, and I promised my mum." Blessing dreams of building her mother a house that's surrounded by a wall so high that thieves break their legs when they try to scale it. The compound will have an electric gate. "My mum, I will spoil her," she said. "The reason I'm here now is my mummy. The reason I am alive today is my mum. The reason that I will not do prostitution is my mummy." Tears streamed down her face. "I am my mummy's breath of life."

Blessing, Juliet, and a Nigerian girl named Gift walked down the hill singing church songs and drawing smiles from locals. The sky was gloomy, and soon it started to drizzle. But they kept walking, farther from the camp than they had ever been. Eventually, they reached a pebble beach, a few miles north of the port of Messina.

The rain stopped, and for a moment two bright rainbows shone over the short stretch of water separating Sicily from the mainland.

"It comes from the sea," Blessing said of the double rainbow. "Look at it now. It is going down."

"Yes, it comes from the sea," Gift said.

"And then it go into the sky."

"Yeah."

A cloud shifted. "It is finished now," Blessing said. Gift nodded. "It has gone back to the sea."

The girls prayed. Then Blessing stepped into the water, spread her arms wide, and shouted, "I passed through the desert! I passed through this sea! If this river did not take my life, no man or woman can take my life from me!" ♦

ON THE CONTRARY

At Fox News, Tucker Carlson brings the chaos and hysteria of Trump-era politics into his studio.

BY KELEFA SANNEH

TUCKER CARLSON started wearing a bow tie in 1984, when he was in tenth grade at St. George's, a Rhode Island prep school with a dress code. He stopped wearing a bow tie on April 11, 2006, acknowledging the change in the final minutes of the show he hosted on MSNBC. "I like bow ties, and I certainly spent a lot of time defending them," he said. "But, from now on, I'm going without." The affectation had come to define him: Carlson was primarily known—and, in no small number of television households, reviled—as the self-assured young conservative who dressed like a spelling-bee champion. MSNBC advertised his program with posters that read, "The Man. The Legend. The Bow Tie." He had been wearing a bow tie when, in 2004, Jon Stewart paid him a visit on CNN, to tell him that "Crossfire," which Carlson was then co-hosting, was "hurting America," and to call him a "dick." And Carlson wore one again during a disastrous appearance on "Dancing with the Stars," in which he was eliminated after his first routine, a semi-stationary cha-cha.

At MSNBC, the producers had spent months asking Carlson to abandon the tie, because they felt that it encouraged the audience to view him as a character, or perhaps a caricature. But the change in wardrobe wasn't enough to save the show, which was cancelled two years later. It wasn't even enough to alter the public perception of Carlson, who seems like the kind of guy who would wear a bow tie, even when he doesn't. Unemployed at forty, Carlson launched a scrappy Web site, the Daily Caller, which published exposés, conservative opinion, and clickbait, such as "Jennifer Love Hewitt's Cleavage: A History."

What followed is one of the most unlikely comebacks in the annals of cable news. While Carlson was running the Daily Caller, he also served as a contributor to Fox News, where he became in-

creasingly visible. On Fox, his disdain for liberal piety was less anomalous than his manner. He had begun his career as a waggish writer for the conservative *Weekly Standard*, and his television segments tended to be wittier and shrewder than his competitors'. The job required some amount of partisan invective, which Carlson was happy enough to supply, but he did not always manage to hide his opinion of politicians in general, which is rather low—or, as he might say, in his unplaceable high-preppy accent, *rawther* low.

Last fall, he once again became the host of his own show, "Tucker Carlson Tonight," which began its run at 7 P.M. and then, in January, moved to 9 P.M., to fill the space formerly occupied by Megyn Kelly, who had defected from Fox News to NBC. The promotion was a surprise—Carlson had been hanging around the cable-news industry for far too long to be considered a rising star—and so, too, was the result. Buoyed by the election of Donald Trump, and the attendant explosion of interest in political news, Carlson drew even better ratings than Kelly had. Where Kelly had conducted a long and lopsided feud with Trump—she was relatively skeptical of him, he was absolutely cruel toward her—Carlson thought Trump was refreshing, not least because of his habit of making enemies on the left and the right. Carlson's show was a success both on television and online, where clips of his segments, which are frequently and sometimes obnoxiously disputatious, are reborn as viral videos. The format is simple: Carlson prefers to talk to one person at a time, eschewing the "Brady Bunch" grids that many cable-news shows use to fill the screen with noise and drama. Often, watching the segments feels like stumbling into a Twitter argument, even though Carlson himself dislikes Twitter.

In many ways, Carlson is a throwback, and a contradiction: a fierce critic of the

political and cultural establishment who is also, unapologetically, a member of it. He has endless disdain for the Washington élite and its conventional wisdom, including the belief—widespread among political insiders—that Washington stinks. He moved there in 1992 with his wife, Susie, and they have lived there, happily, virtually ever since. "Everyone I love is here," he says. Carlson broadcasts from the drab Washington office of Fox News, halfway between Union Station and the Capitol, and one night he was accompanied by the sound of heavy machinery. "You may hear construction noise behind us during this show," he said. "That's because there is construction going on. There always is, in Washington, the richest city in America. We want to thank you for that, for sending your tax dollars here." He smiled. "Still, it's a pretty nice place."

CARLSON IS FORTY-SEVEN, and though he was formerly what one friend calls a "pretty heroic" drinker, he says that he quit in 2002, having decided that neither the pleasant nights nor the unpleasant mornings were improving his life. A few years earlier, he had given up smoking—cowed into submission, he once wrote, by "the dark forces of Health." There is, alas, no substitute for alcohol, but for cigarettes there is nicotine gum, a product that Carlson buys, in bulk, from New Zealand, where it is sold in satisfactorily easy-to-open packaging. He chews constantly, stopping only to be filmed or to eat; he likes long lunches, during which he observes a not-entirely-strict proscription against carbohydrates.

One recent afternoon, he settled into a booth at the Monocle, a Washington establishment distinguished chiefly by its proximity to the Senate buildings. He seemed pleased to be accosted by staff and patrons alike, feigning surprise at every compliment.

One woman told him that she loved his show, and that she worked for Senator



Carlson has a knack for making any view, no matter how widespread or advantageous, seem like a brave rebellion.

Marco Rubio. "Will you tell him to come on?" he asked.

"You're scary, though," she said.

"I'm not scary," he said, brightly.

Once she was gone, Carlson said that he really does struggle to book politicians, especially ones—like Rubio, perhaps—who maintain an artful ambiguity about some of their positions. "I think you should say what you think," he said. "I understand the practical reasons why you wouldn't, but I still think it's cowardly." This, of course, is another reason that politicians might want to avoid Carlson's show: he knows that one easy way to look courageous is to call someone cowardly, especially on television. As the show's profile has increased, so has a certain reticence among potential guests. "It's very hard to get people to come on," he says. "I would *love* to have senators every night. I only want to debate people who are more powerful than I am."

Like most of the big names at Fox News, Carlson is known for criticizing Democrats, but, with Republicans in control of the White House and both houses of Congress, there are fewer obvious targets than there used to be. On many nights, Carlson's viewers watch what looks like a mismatch, as he interrogates some liberal opponent who seems unfamiliar with television—and, sometimes, unfamiliar with politics. (During one surreal segment, in February, he tried to debate the merits of an anti-Trump protest with an actor from Los Angeles who had no substantive connection with the organizers.) Part of the appeal of Carlson's show is its tendency to generate knockouts rather than split decisions. His unofficial Reddit page features pictures of guests judged to have performed especially poorly; over each face is written "Wasted," the word that signals total collapse in the Grand Theft Auto video games. Andrew Ferguson, a senior editor at *The Weekly Standard*, remembers once marvelling at Carlson's ability to turn out well-wrought magazine prose, but he is not a fan of the show. "He's on a network that I think is kind of disreputable, and I think he's better than that," Ferguson says. "To me, it's just cringe-making. You get some poor little columnist from the *Daily Oregonian* who said Trump was Hitler, and you beat the shit out of him for ten minutes."

In January, 2016, Carlson wrote an essay for *Politico* in which he suggested

that Trump was "the ideal candidate to fight Washington corruption" (because "he has personally participated in it") and was more likely than any of his rivals to defeat Hillary Clinton. The Great Recession had reminded Carlson that capitalism could be destructive, and that markets could not be counted upon to cure ills like rural unemployment—at least, not quickly enough to help the working-class men who were drifting out of the workforce. He was influenced, too, by talking to people in Maine, where he spends his summers (in the rural northeast of the state, he is quick to add, not on the wealthy coastline). "It changed my politics more than anything," he says. "It's a disaster. No one gets married." Carlson has carefully positioned himself as not uniformly pro-Trump, but certainly anti-anti-Trump—scornful of all the experts who were sure that the Trump Presidency would be a catastrophe, and who think that they have already been proved right.

James Carville, the Democratic commentator, is a longtime friend and occasional sparring partner, and he considers Carlson "one of the world's great contrarians." This is an unstable identity. "To be a contrarian, you've got to be a contrarian against your own people," Carville says—and one of Carlson's gifts is a knack for making any view, no matter how widespread or advantageous, seem like a brave rebellion against someone else's way of thinking.

ONE RECENT EVENING, Carlson's guest was Mitch Landrieu, a Democrat and the mayor of New Orleans, who had made headlines by declaring that he would not allow his police officers to be used as a "deportation force" for the Trump Administration. Carlson was in his Washington studio, and Landrieu was in New Orleans, which Carlson described, in his introduction, as a city with "many policies that protect the rights of illegal immigrants," and also one where "crime is surging."

Some cable shows rely on the drama of putting people in the same place, but Carlson's thrives on remote interviews, which allow his producers to "box" his face, keeping it onscreen so that viewers can watch him react. When Carlson is talking to someone he agrees with, he pulls back, adopting the role of an ear-

nest student seeking edification from a wise professor. But the segments most people remember are the contentious ones. Carlson grows incredulous and furrows his brow; he grows more incredulous and unfurrows it, letting his features melt into a disbelieving smile, which sometimes gives way to a high-pitched chuckle of outrage. One of his favorite tactics is to insist that his guest answer a question that is essentially unanswerable, as when he pressed Bill Nye to tell him what percentage of climate change was caused by human activity, then berated him for evading the question.

Landrieu had argued that the way to fight crime was to convince immigrants that they could trust the city's police department. Carlson responded with statistics. "Your murder rate is almost doubled from January of last year; your rapes are up almost a hundred per cent," he said. "I'm not saying it's your fault. I'm merely saying that clearly these policies that you say will alleviate crime"—he paused, and cocked an eyebrow—"haven't. Moreover, is there any actual evidence, like, social science, to *prove* that your talking point, which I've heard a thousand times, If we ask people their immigration status, they won't coöperate with the police, and we'll have more crime'—Where do you get that?"

Carlson has long believed that America's immigration policies are too lax, and his show provides near-nightly support for the view, central to Trump's agenda, that unchecked immigration has increased crime and unemployment. But Landrieu refused to engage. "The people that are committing those crimes are not folks that are here illegally," he said, pivoting to an impenetrable combination of policy detail and sloganeering.

When the segment was finished, Carlson rewarded himself with a piece of nicotine gum. "Eh!" he said, with a shrug. "I didn't think it was super-compelling television." A tech assistant turned on some music for Carlson, who likes to have classic rock playing whenever the cameras aren't rolling, and he retreated to his office, which contained a fridge full of Perrier and a fly-fishing rod. (Once, at the Daily Caller, Carlson was practicing casting when he nicked a staffer on the neck; the two men vigorously disagreed about whether this was hilarious.) His executive producer,

Justin Wells, who works in New York, called in for a postmortem.

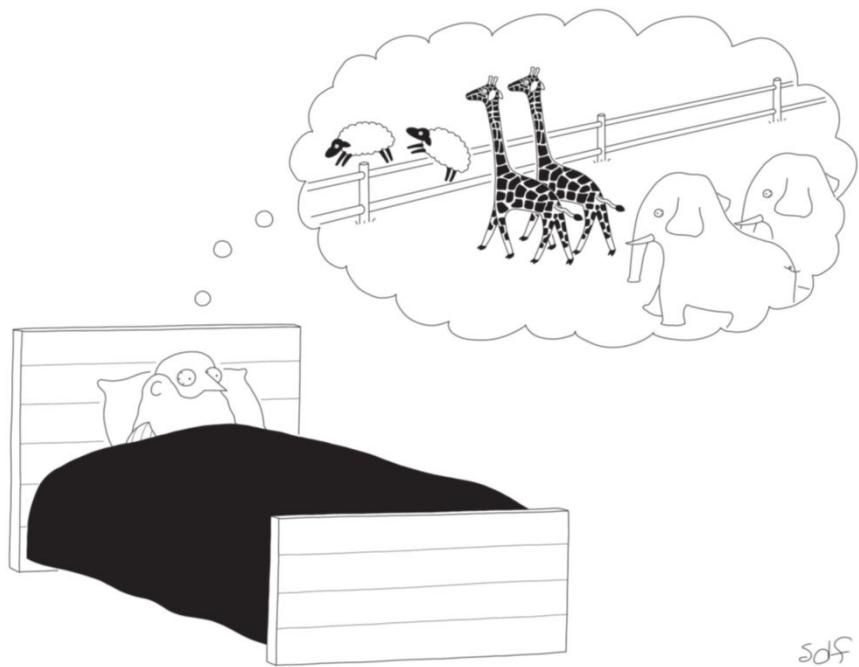
"Mitch went long," Carlson said. "What did that clock out at?"

"Ten and a half minutes," Wells said.

"Fuck!" Carlson said. "He's a windy character. I guess they all are." In fact, Carlson likes Landrieu, mostly. "I think he's been a decent mayor," he says. "But people say what they feel like they have to say." Carlson's show—and, you might say, his career—is built on the proposition that there are obvious truths that people are unwilling to state. In his view, American immigration policy has been distorted by "virtue-signalling": the tendency, particularly prominent among élites, to propound dubious ideas as a form of moral preening. "It's like, We're good people. We do certain things as expressions of our goodness."

Carlson's aversion to self-righteousness can seem like an aversion to righteousness itself, or to the notion that any person, any government, might be counted on to do the right thing. Once upon a time, this tendency made him a small—"L" libertarian, contemptuous of the Libertarian Party (too marginal, too zealous) but drawn to the idea that government is less harmful when it is less powerful. Although he is registered as a Democrat, so that he can participate in Washington's Democrat-dominated primaries, he says he can remember voting for President only once: in 2008, for John McCain, whom he supported mainly because he'd developed an affection for him on the campaign trail.

In place of a grand ideology, Carlson embraces an unsentimental form of tribalism: a belief that, in a cruel and confusing world, no virtue is more important than loyalty to one's family and friends. Two years ago, Carlson and his younger brother, Buckley, were e-mailing about a liberal communications director whom they found annoying; she was accidentally copied on one message, in which Buckley described her in startlingly distasteful terms. (The e-mail included two neologisms: "spoogeneck" and "labiaface.") Tucker Carlson conceded that his brother's response was "nasty," but declined to go any further. "They wanted me to denounce my brother—my only brother?" he said, weeks later, during an interview on C-SPAN. "I would die first. Under no circumstances am I going to criticize my family in public." Simi-



larly, when a Daily Caller blogger published a post accusing Fox News of being soft on immigration, Carlson unpublished it. "You don't criticize your employer," Carlson said.

Now that Carlson is the anchor at the heart of the Fox News prime-time lineup—wedged between Bill O'Reilly, at eight, and Sean Hannity, at ten—he has to think anew about what loyalty might mean. During his CNN days, Carlson described O'Reilly as a "thin-skinned blowhard" and a "humorless phony," but now the two must coexist. (Last week, after O'Reilly inspired outrage by mocking Maxine Waters, the African-American congresswoman, for wearing what he called a "James Brown wig," he made an unusual appearance on Carlson's show, to promote his new book; Carlson introduced him as "the legendary Bill O'Reilly.") Carlson likes to say that he stays relaxed and happy by pretending that no one besides his wife watches the show. But he surely knows that his prospects at Fox News would change if he suddenly became a sharp critic of President Trump. When Carlson interviewed Trump last month, he asserted, cordially but firmly, that the Republicans' health-care bill, with its tax cut for investors, did not seem "consistent" with the message voters sent in 2016. Trump shrugged. "A lot of things aren't consistent," he said.

"But these are going to be negotiated."

Carlson prides himself on occasionally booking unexpected figures, like Mark Blyth, a political economist who criticizes neoliberalism from the left, or Michelle Brané, a lawyer and migrant-rights activist, who charmed him with calm answers to his suspicious questions. But he avoids overt expressions of political apostasy, at least for now. "I'm very conscious of the fact that my views, on a couple of subjects, are out of step—not just with our audience but with most other people in America," he says. "It's better to lead people to things, rather than to just make statements." Having initially supported the Iraq War, Carlson soon turned against it. And, unlike most conservatives, he supports closer diplomatic ties with Iran, a topic that he hopes to explore—carefully—on future shows. "It's going to confuse the living shit out of our viewers," he says. "When's the last time you saw someone defend Iran on Fox News? Right around never?"

It is still not clear what it might mean to be a prime-time contrarian at Fox News, or whether such a thing is even possible. Carlson says that network executives leave him alone, and that he follows no directives besides his own curiosity. But, last month, while Rachel Maddow was devoting her MSNBC show to an eagerly awaited—and, ultimately, disappointing—revelation of an

old Trump tax document, Carlson delivered an unusually fierce indictment of the competition, telling viewers he had sources who confirmed that executives at NBC News and MSNBC were complicit, despite their denials, in leaking the “Access Hollywood” tape that captured Trump making boorish remarks about women. (On the tape, Trump is talking to Billy Bush, who happens to be an old prep-school friend of Carlson’s.) “NBC News lied to the public to help destroy a politician they didn’t like,” Carlson said, sounding very much like a company man. “Do we know they’re not doing it now?”

CARLSON LIVES IN an elegant but understated white brick colonial in the posh Northwest corner of Washington. It is full of books, but not cramped, and it still bears signs of the Carlsons’ four children, the youngest of whom just left for boarding school. If you get close to the garage, you might notice that the windows are fogged over, because Carlson uses it to season firewood, which gives off moisture as it dries. On a recent Saturday morning, Carlson was cooking pancakes, even though there didn’t seem to be many takers: one daughter, home from college, wasn’t interested, and neither was Susie, his wife, to whom he has been attached since around the time he first put on a bow tie.

“Old money” describes Carlson’s aesthetic but not, exactly, his circumstances. His father, Richard Carlson, couldn’t

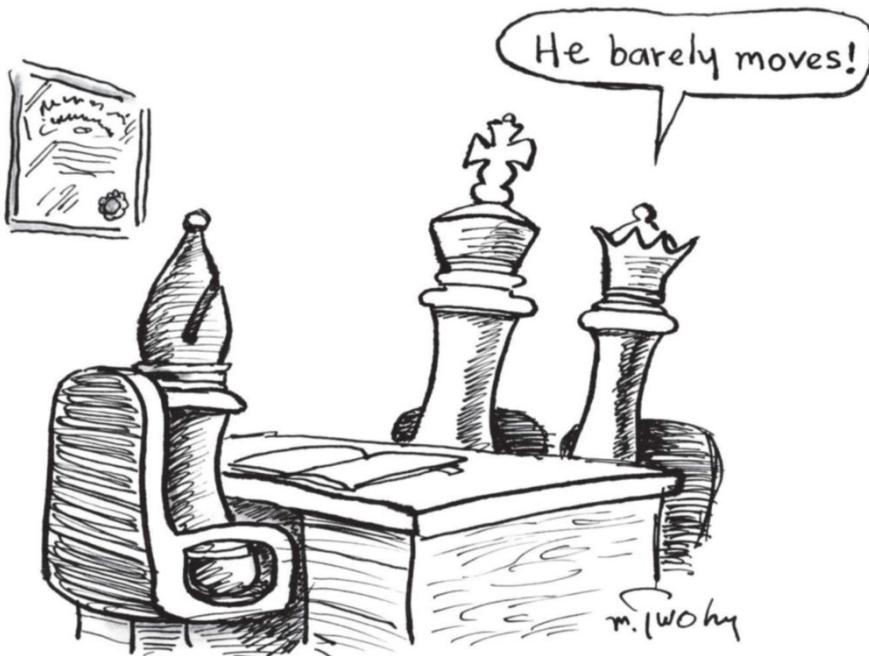
afford college, so he enlisted in the Marines, and then forged an eventful career in journalism, working in California as a reporter and as a television anchor. (In a 1976 local-news report, he outed the tennis player Renée Richards, who had recently transitioned from male to female.) Tucker Carlson grew up with his brother in La Jolla, nurturing a rebellious streak that he never turned against his father, perhaps because his father shared it, and perhaps because he had no one else. His mother, a bohemian, left the family when he was six and ultimately settled in France; the boys never saw her again. “Totally bizarre situation—which I never talk about, because it was actually not really part of my life at all,” Carlson says. In 1979, the year Carlson turned ten, his father married Patricia Swanson, of the frozen-food Swansons. Richard Carlson had a job in banking by then, and eventually moved to Washington, where he secured a series of Republican political appointments: he ran Voice of America, served as Ambassador to the Seychelles, and was the president of the Corporation for Public Broadcasting. For many years, Richard and Tucker Carlson lunched at adjoining tables at the Palm, the clubby Washington restaurant.

Carlson was fourteen when he was sent to boarding school; one classmate describes him as resembling a beach boy teleported in from nineteen-fifties California. The school had an after-dinner

debating society, which Carlson came to dominate: an eloquent young man with an elephant poster in his room who was happy to tell liberal teachers exactly why they were wrong. He started dating Susie Andrews, the daughter of the Reverend George Andrews, the headmaster. This connection came in handy during Carlson’s senior year, when, having spent more time debating than studying, he failed to impress any number of prestigious universities. The Reverend Andrews arranged for him to attend Trinity College, in Hartford.

Carlson was, by all accounts, a lousy student, and he now takes pleasure in declaring college overrated. But he was evidently assiduous in his courtship of Susie, whom he married when he was a college senior, and whom he credits with leading him to take faith seriously. (They are Episcopalians, and Carlson loves the liturgy, though he abhors the liberals who run the denomination. The Church is part of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, while Carlson is utterly opposed to abortion—it is just about the only political issue he considers non-negotiable.) After college, he tried and failed to persuade the C.I.A. to employ him; the real-life agency, unlike its fictional counterparts, prefers not to hire young men who are gabby and insubordinate. Instead, he got a job in Little Rock, working for Paul Greenberg, the exacting editorial-page editor of the Arkansas *Democrat-Gazette*. Carlson wrote a series of articles about crime, and drafted a book called “People vs. Crime: How Citizens Can Restore Order to America’s Streets,” only to cancel the book deal and refund the publisher’s advance when he realized that he was not actually sure how to restore order to America’s streets. “You *can* eliminate crime,” he says now. “Just become Saudi Arabia.”

It was another writing job that made Carlson famous: he was hired, in 1995, to write for the newly founded *Weekly Standard*, which was published by Rupert Murdoch’s News Corporation. Carlson delighted in filleting liberal enterprises, like the campaign to free the activist and convicted murderer Mumia Abu-Jamal, or the public-relations firm that was struggling, in 1996, to rehabilitate the tarnished image of the First Lady, Hillary Clinton. When Carlson was sent to profile James Carville, who



was still enjoying acclaim for having helped Bill Clinton win the Presidency, Carville expected the worst. "I thought, They're going to fuck me—what difference does it make?" he recalls. "But he was a nice guy, and it turned out different."

Carlson's story, in fact, described Carville's "reptilian features," his "decidedly spotty" political track record, his "partisan and cant-filled" recent book, and his all-purpose avariciousness; the headline was "JAMES CARVILLE, POPULIST PLUTOCRAT." If Carville remembers the experience fondly, that is probably a tribute to Carlson's charm and to his mischievous prose, which made Carville seem like a rakish antihero.

Carlson loves rascals. He has written semi-sympathetically about the Reverend Al Sharpton, and he is friends with Roger Stone, the indefatigably controversial Republican operative, whom Carlson named men's style correspondent of the Daily Caller. (Stone is one of the few people in Washington who mourn the demise of Carlson's signature look. "The guy has the tastiest collection of bow ties," Stone says. "He's a good—if shabby—dresser.") One of Carlson's favorite authors is George MacDonald Fraser, the writer who gave us Flashman, the cruel but quick-witted nineteenth-century gentleman who excused his every act of brutality as a harmless jape. (Carlson wanted to name his son Flashman, but his wife and his father overruled him.) And when Jack Abramoff, the disgraced lobbyist, emerged from prison with a new book to sell, Carlson threw a party, which Abramoff called one of the happiest nights of his life. In a toast, Carlson denounced all the people in his town—in his tony neighborhood, no doubt—who, he was sure, felt themselves superior to Abramoff. Standing in his well-appointed living room, he declared, "I raise a middle finger to those people!"

CARLSON'S JOURNEY from magazines to television may baffle some old colleagues, but it doesn't baffle him. "I had financial demands," he says, laughing. "When you're reproducing at that rate, it's kind of unsustainable." By the end of the nineteen-nineties, he had three children, and Susie had given up her career, as a teacher at an Episcopal school, to raise them. Like many political jour-

nalists, Carlson periodically accepted offers to go on television and opine. For his first appearance, on the CBS newsmagazine "48 Hours," he flew to New York to discuss the O. J. Simpson case, a topic on which he was not especially well informed. Carlson's blithe confidence was evidently telegenic, because CBS asked him to spend the night in New York so he could talk some more the next morning. Eventually, CNN offered him a yearly contract that paid fifty thousand dollars, nearly double what he was earning at *The Weekly Standard*. That led to the job that many people still associate Carlson with: an ill-fated tenure on "Crossfire," in which a host "from the right" and one "from the left" debated the issues of the day.

It is not easy, now, to figure out how "Crossfire" became such a punching bag—perhaps, having been launched in 1982, it was simply too old to command much allegiance. But it never really recovered from the day, in 2004, when Jon Stewart came to visit. He had evidently prepared an indictment, thin in specifics but skillfully delivered in front of a sympathetic studio audience. Addressing Carlson and his liberal co-host, Paul Begala, Stewart said, "You are partisan—what do you call it?—hacks," averse to "honest debate." When Carlson mentioned the considerably partisan nature of Stewart's own program, "The Daily Show," Stewart said that he was merely making comedy, and that "Crossfire" should be held to a higher standard, which he never quite delineated.

Carlson says that he was already thinking of ways to move on from the "Crossfire" format. His contract was coming up for renewal, and a few months later, on January 5th, he told CNN executives that he had reached an agreement with MSNBC, which had offered him his own show. This, anyway, is Carlson's story. What readers of the *Times* saw, the next morning, was "CNN WILL CANCEL 'CROSSFIRE' AND CUT TIES TO COMMENTATOR." The clear implication was that Carlson had been fired. Even more wounding was a quote from Jon Klein, the network president: "I agree wholeheartedly with Jon Stewart's premise."

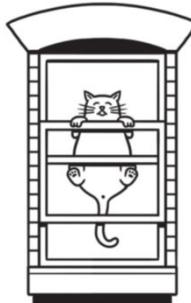
The MSNBC show, "Tucker," was an attempt at rehabilitation—more playful, less partisan—but it never quite thrived, despite some strong casting. Carlson selected as his foil a wonky, little-known radio host named Rachel Maddow, who eventually took over Carlson's spot, as part of the network's liberal makeover, and is now his competitor in the nine-o'clock hour.

The period following the cancellation of "Tucker" seems to be the closest Carlson has ever come to being depressed. The family had moved to Madison, New Jersey, and Susie remembers him saying, "I can't get stranded here with four kids, and no job, in New York." They returned to Washington, where Carlson and an old college roommate, Neil Patel,

started the Daily Caller, which Carlson envisioned as a right-of-center online tabloid. The funding, about three million dollars, came largely from Foster Friess, the political philanthropist. The name was a cheeky homage to the Corpus Christi *Caller-Times*, the newspaper that first reported the 2006 incident in which Dick Cheney accidentally fired bird shot into a friend. Patel had been working for Cheney then, and it was he who recommended giving the *Caller-Times* the scoop, perhaps in the absurd hope that the incident would pass with little notice.

At the Daily Caller, Carlson liked reporters who were young, pushy, and not necessarily college-educated; he once said, "We are not hiring wine stewards." He offered his employees free junk food, an unmonitored keg, a Ping-Pong table, and, if they wanted it, permission to sleep under their desks. (He also made a point of inviting stray reporters to his house for Thanksgiving dinner.) The site published traditional news articles alongside more dubious pieces, like the one that claimed the Social Security Administration was buying enough ammunition "to kill 174,000 of our citizens." Alexis Levinson, a Caller alumna who is now a political reporter at BuzzFeed, loved working there, but she remembers a division among the staff. "There were a few of us who were there because we wanted to be reporters," she says. "And there were other people who wanted to take over the world."

One reporter in this latter category



was Matthew Boyle, a hard-charging muckraker who now works for Breitbart, in which capacity he has emerged as a persistent critic of Paul Ryan, the Speaker of the House. Another was Charles C. Johnson, who helped break the story of Elizabeth O'Bagy, a Syria expert who had exaggerated her credentials. But Johnson, a freelancer, could also be a liability for the Daily Caller; he reported, erroneously, that a *Times* reporter had once posed for *Playgirl* and had confessed that he liked to "drop trou." (The information came from a college satire publication.) After that, Johnson stopped writing for the Daily Caller, launched a site called GotNews, and declared himself "a member, and perhaps a leader, of the alt right."

After Carlson lost his MSNBC show, he had resolved never to turn down work again. So, when Roger Ailes asked him to become a weekend co-host of "Fox & Friends," in 2013, he readily accepted, even though it meant commuting to New York. He got exercise by running through midtown in the middle of the night, finishing in time to be on the air by six o'clock, ready to chat about the news, gawk at a zoo animal, or interview an aging rock band. (He once played cowbell with Blue Öyster Cult.) The work was unglamorous, but Carlson says he wasn't troubled. "I have high self-esteem," he says. "I never felt like a loser. I think a lot of people felt that I was, but I never did." Accordingly, he was not as surprised as some industry watchers when, last fall, Fox executives offered him his own program. For a long time, Carlson had thought of himself as a writer with an unusually high-profile sideline, but eventually he realized, or admitted, that he enjoyed live television, both its rewards and its risks. "You could *blow up your life*," he says. "I like the drama."

LAST DECEMBER, when a writer named Lauren Duca received a call from Carlson's producers, inviting her on the show, she had good reason to say no: it was her husband's birthday, and he told her, "I'd rather you not get yelled at today." But Duca was feeling idealistic. She had recently written an article for *Teen Vogue* comparing Trump to an abusive husband. In the aftermath, she had received

some sympathetic e-mails from Trump supporters, and she allowed herself to imagine the headlines her interview with Carlson might generate: "RARE RATIONAL CONVERSATION ON FOX."

What resulted, instead, was a session so hostile that it might have made Jon Stewart weep, if he had seen it—and, considering how widely it circulated, there is a good chance he did. After a temperate start, in which the two seemed close to agreeing on the public responsibilities of Trump's daughter Ivanka, Carlson zeroed in on an infelicitous phrase from Duca's essay: she had claimed that Trump was "threatening the sovereignty of an entire religion," and Carlson demanded that she explain what that meant. Eventually, Carlson, getting irritated, tried to embarrass her by reading the headlines to some pop-culture stories she had written, including one about the singer Ariana Grande and her "epic thigh-high boots." He ended the interview with a condescending sneer. "You should stick to the thigh-high boots—you're better at that," he said.

Viewers saw Duca register shock, and heard the first part of her reply: "You're a sex—" Then her microphone was cut, although viewers could lip-read the rest: "—ist pig!"

When it was over, Duca's phone began to vibrate. Her e-mail address is in her



Twitter profile, and Fox News viewers were sending her vituperative e-mails, along with vituperative tweets. One user created an image of Carlson as Pepe the frog, a common pro-Trump symbol, tucking Duca into bed ("TUCKED," it said); another wrote, "JUST WAIT TILL TUCK 'KILL A JEW FOR GOOD LUCK' CARLSON IS SHOVING YOU

IN THE OVEN AT CAMP TRUMP!" accompanied by a crude image of Carlson as a Nazi prison guard, and Duca peering out from an oven. Martin Shkreli, the so-called Pharma Bro, took an interest in Duca, sending her sardonic pickup lines and creating photographic collages of them together, until Twitter suspended his account. But, as liberal viewers discovered the exchange online, Duca began getting encouraging responses, too. Larry Wilmore, the former host of "The Nightly Show," called her "brilliant," and Duca's Twitter following increased from about

forty thousand to about two hundred thousand. *Teen Vogue* gave Duca a weekly online column, which is called "Thigh-High Politics," in honor of the unpleasant encounter that helped make her reputation.

These days, Carlson is adored by precisely the people who might once have dismissed him as a twerpish avatar of establishment Republicanism. Johnson, the former Daily Caller freelancer, suggests that Carlson has long been more of a political insurgent than many people recognized. "He understood that there was something stirring in the psyche and the mind of Republicans and conservatives," Johnson says. "I think Tucker, like Trump, represents the return of the alpha white male to our politics." Online, Carlson has been given a very unofficial slogan: "You can't fuck the Tuck." The phrase refers to the term "cuckservative," a mocking description of conservatives who are too weak to defend their own ideology, the same way a cuckold is said to be unable to defend his own wife. The term also has a racial connotation, derived from a pornographic subgenre in which a man, often white, watches his wife have sex with an interloper, who is often black. "You can't fuck the Tuck" is, among other things, a way of affirming that Carlson is a white guy who isn't afraid to stand up for himself.

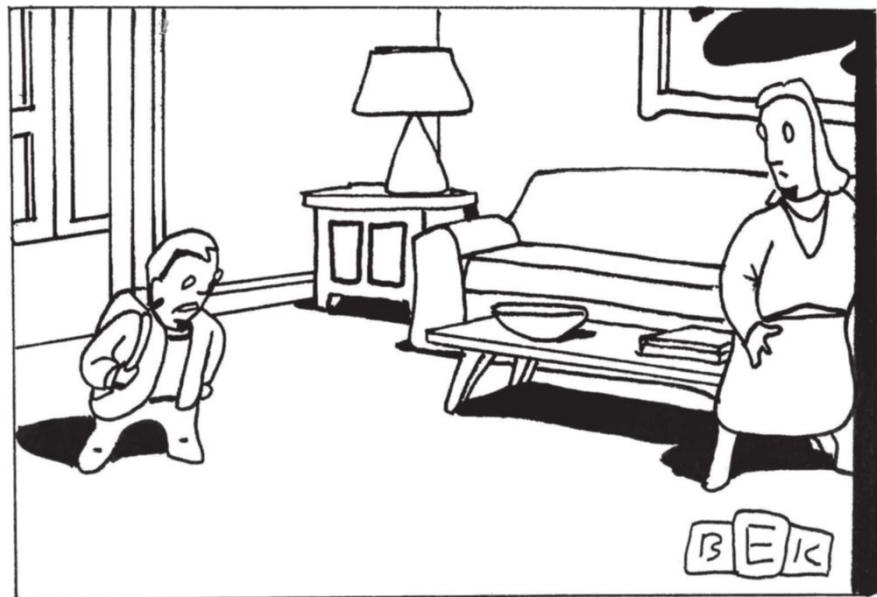
Certainly Carlson himself would never put it that way, but part of his appeal is his unwillingness to apologize for who he is: he expresses no uneasiness about being a straight white man, even when he is debating gender identity with a transgender activist, or sparring about race with the African-American liberal commentator Jehmu Greene, who is a frequent guest. For Carlson, as for Trump, there is virtually no issue more salient than immigration—Carlson loves to trip up pro-immigration advocates by demanding that they explain exactly how many immigrants the country should admit, and why. After Carlson broadcast a segment about crime in immigrant neighborhoods in Sweden, Trump was inspired to tell a crowd about "what's happening, last night, in Sweden." It sounded as if he were talking about a recent attack; in fact, "last night" seems to have referred to Carlson's show.

Carlson has also found ways to forge connections with the feral online culture that nurtures Trump's most

inflammatory supporters. He has earned some of his highest ratings with sympathetic coverage of Milo Yiannopoulos, the crusader against political correctness who was greeted by rioters when he attempted to speak at the University of California, Berkeley. This attention helped turn Yiannopoulos into a mainstream conservative cause, a cause that was swiftly abandoned after video circulated of him defending the value of “relationships between younger boys and older men.” Carlson jettisoned Yiannopoulos immediately: Trace Gallagher, a straight-news Fox correspondent, told viewers about Yiannopoulos’s fall from grace, while Carlson, unabashed, acted as if he had never heard of the guy.

IT WAS SHOWTIME on Sixth Avenue, in the Fox News control room where Justin Wells and the other producers work. Wells was taking special precautions with one of the guests, an activist known for having assaulted a white nationalist during a street protest. “She’s cursed on TV before,” Wells said, “so we’re on a delay, just in case we need to bleep her.” Part of Carlson’s goal is to bring the chaos and hysteria of Trump-era politics into his studio, but his job would probably be easier if Hillary Clinton had picked up a few thousand more votes in the Rust Belt: it’s not hard to imagine him, under a Clinton Administration, gaping in delight and incredulity at each day’s news. Instead, Carlson, like all his colleagues, is a hostage to current events: what happens during the day helps dictate which kinds of people are eager to watch it rehashed at night. As Trump has struggled to turn his hugely entertaining Presidential campaign into an effective governing body, liberals have been particularly energized. In March, for the first time, Rachel Maddow won the nine-o’clock hour, drawing more viewers between the ages of twenty-five and fifty-four than Carlson did.

In the past year, Fox News has contended with a series of embarrassments, including the sexual-harassment scandal that led to the resignation of Roger Ailes, and a federal investigation that is reportedly related to the scandal. Still, it remains the most popular cable-news



“The kids at school were fine—I just keep taunting myself about never producing a great body of work.”

network. Carlson knows that many people watch his show simply because they like Fox News, and they like the anchors who surround him. O’Reilly positions himself as an elder statesman, the cranky but avuncular voice of mainstream America. Hannity, the ultimate loyalist, often functions as a member of Trump’s extended Cabinet, giving the Administration a nightly dose of encouragement and advice. But Carlson is a bit harder to pin down. His inclination to defend Trump might best be understood less as ideological commitment than as media criticism. “If you wrote a piece saying, ‘I think Trump is a buffoon and he’s reckless, and he doesn’t really know that much, and he’s kind of the accidental President, and he plays upon people’s fears in order to gain power’—I’d say, Yeah, O.K., that’s totally defensible,” he said. “But, like, the Nazi stuff? Maybe I’m the deranged one, but I don’t see that as supportable at all.” During a 2015 interview with Alex Jones, the loose-cannon Infowars host, Carlson said that he hated listening to the media “whine” about the dangers of Trump. “Every time I hear that, I feel like sending him money,” Carlson said. And, even now, he is more viscerally annoyed by what he calls the “self-satisfaction” of Trump’s critics than by

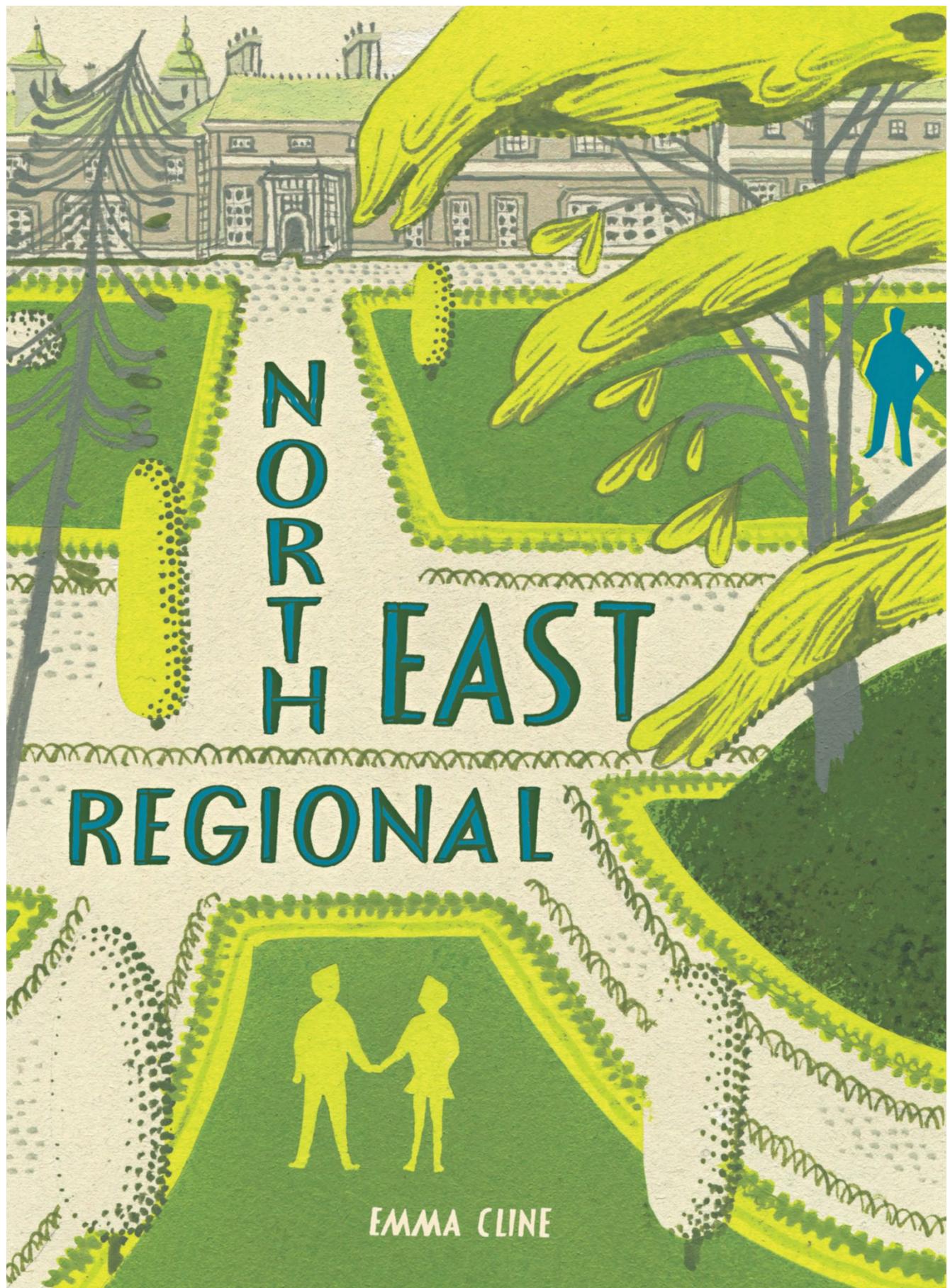
anything Trump has done, or failed to do.

Carlson thinks that, in general, people get too “spun up,” which is one of his favorite terms—a reminder of the tendency to overestimate the goodness or the badness of whoever is in charge. But no political philosophy is equally appropriate for every era. There comes a time, eventually, when wild-eyed outrage is entirely appropriate. And nobody can be sure that this is not it.

During a recent discussion of Trump’s unsubstantiated claim that President Obama had wiretapped him, Carlson offered a pro forma criticism (“You can’t say things without backing them up, if you’re the President”), and then suggested, as he often does, that citizens should be more concerned about government spying and leaking. No doubt Carlson really believes this. But, when he says it, he is surely thinking about all the people he knows who disagree, and how annoyed they will be.

In conversation, Carlson often returns to an unusual disclaimer: “I’m not a deeply moral guy.” Maybe this is his way of playing the rogue. Maybe this is a debater’s ploy—a way of insisting that some principles are so clear that even he can see them. But with Carlson it is wise to consider another possibility: Maybe he means it. And maybe he is right. ♦

FICTION



CLOSE TO FIVE hours on the train. And then twenty minutes by taxi from the station to the school. He would have time to call the lawyer, work through the options. He had the number of a consultant, in case Rowan needed to apply somewhere else. Maybe the school legally had to contact the college he'd got into, but Richard wasn't sure. And maybe it wouldn't come to that. The school wouldn't want to make anything public. The thought calmed him—good, good. They were on his side, even if they had not said so in so many words: they weren't stupid.

The trains were housed underground, in cool alleys of concrete, and Richard headed for the first car. It was only half-full, the interior air recirculated to an unnatural chill. Richard settled in, that brief moment when he could present himself anew in the context of this narrowed world. He could be kind, he could be neat and conscientious, and all it took was laying his folded jacket on the seat beside him, tucking his newspaper into the webbed nylon pocket.

Richard's pills were in his bag, consolidated in one container. He could easily identify them by shape and color, the pills for depression and insomnia. Offering nudges in his mood like the touch of a dance partner. A subtle but real pressure. He felt for the pill tube through the bag's front pocket—there it was—and he was reassured, lightened.

The car filled slowly. Newcomers maintaining a zone of polite privacy, choosing seats and shaking out their newspapers as if they were making a bed. Everyone excessively tidy, excessively generous. Passing their gum silently into a napkin held to their mouths. No matter that, an hour into the ride, all solicitousness would be forgotten, music leaking through headphones, bawling phone conversations, children racing down the aisle.

A sullen girl and her father were stopped in the aisle beside him, waiting for a man to hoist his luggage. The girl stared at Richard, a fresh zit between her brows like a third eye. She was maybe fourteen, a few years younger than Rowan, but how much more childish she seemed than his son. Her gaze was unsettling, too specific—

Richard looked down at his phone.

There was bad service underground, no reassuring stair-step bars on his screen, but once the train started moving he could make calls. He reread the e-mail from Pam. Then the lawyer's e-mail referring the consultant. "She's very good," he'd written. "A real pro." Nothing from Ana. Poor Ana, her weekend ruined. She had tried her best to be a good sport. That was the phrase he was sure was circling down at the bottom of her thoughts, stern ticker tape: be a good sport be a good sport be a good sport.

HE AND ANA would have had a better time if they could've gone in the water. If it had been summer, they could've gone in the water, and that would've helped, but it wasn't summer, so they didn't. They sat with their backs against the base of a driftwood fence that marked someone's beachfront rectangle. The sand was baked and pale, the sea dark. Ana held his hand loosely, her face shaded under a floppy white hat. Richard had the thought that she might have bought the hat specifically to wear this weekend, and the idea made him wince.

They had lunch in town, an endless lunch. Richard could not catch the waiter's eye, and the plates lingered too long, the silverware dirtied and askew, and who wanted to stare at the soiled instruments of their feeding? The white wine tasted like granite. Ana stepped outside to call her husband. Richard could see her from the table, pacing in the courtyard. She touched her collar, turning away so her face was hidden.

She returned to the table, tore a roll in half, and soaked it in oil. She chewed energetically, her enthusiasm without veil. She piloted the conversation: work, work, a problem with a tenant who wouldn't vacate a house. Bad health news from a cousin on the West Coast. Richard's responses were clipped, but Ana didn't seem to notice, taking time with her lunch: she ate normally, sensibly, free from darker hungers. "How's Rowan?" she asked. Richard had not got the call, not yet, so he felt no anxiety at the mention of the name—Rowan was doing fine, he said, his grades were fine. Though he saw Rowan's grades only if his ex-wife sent them to him, never mind that he paid the tuition.

The waiter came by to see if they wanted dessert.

"Should we?" Ana asked, breathlessly, the waiter grinning in practiced collusion. Richard couldn't bear to enact his role, play at naughtiness.

"If you want," he said, lightly, forcing himself to erase any impatience from his voice. But Ana picked up on it anyway.

"Nothing for me," she said, handing the menu back to the waiter, making a face of cartoonish regret. You don't have to apologize to him, he wanted to say. The waiter really doesn't care. Then he felt bad for being unkind. Ana was barely thirty, closer to Rowan's age than to his. He squeezed her hand across the table; she brightened.

HER HUSBAND WAS out of town for the entire weekend, and this was the first time they had spent the night together. Everything seemed significant to her—the groceries she put in the fridge, the movies she had downloaded to her laptop, that hat. Stress had caused a haze of pink to cloud her eyes, a mild case of conjunctivitis that she tried hard to downplay. Every four hours, she tipped back her head and squeezed a dropper of antibiotic into each eye.

Richard didn't need to do it, but he did—sought out these married women, the ones who looked at him across a table of catered tournedos and cut peonies while their husbands talked to the people on their right. Women whose lingerie was haunted by the prick of the plastic tag they'd tried to snap off so that he wouldn't realize it was new.

They were the type of women whose own sorrow moved them immeasurably. Who wanted to recount the details of their worst tragedies in the lull after sex. Ana hadn't seemed like that kind of woman. She tended to all her own weaknesses, briskly removing her own underwear but never taking off her watch. Like the other married women, she always knew what time it was.

She was a real-estate agent, one of her listings the house in which they were staying. It had been Richard's mother's house, until she died, and was now his. He had never liked visiting his mother here, on the occasions he

did, and there was no thought of keeping the place.

The afternoon they'd first met, Ana had been optimistic about the property. "It's nice acreage," she said. "Big but not too overwhelming." She walked ahead of Richard, opening doors, passing through rooms, turning on lights and faucets. Wearing tailored shorts, so that her muscular legs showed.

The second time: Richard's hands loose on Ana's head as she gamely kneeled. They were outside, on the back porch, Richard's ass pressing into the slick plastic slats of a lawn chair as he tried feverishly to imagine someone watching. He said thanks, when it was over, as Ana discreetly spat into the grass.

"Really," Richard said. "That was great." Ana's smile was crooked. It was summer then, and behind them the massed green of the trees moved in silence. That was the thing about being with married women, how hidden pockets of the day were suddenly revealed. The slightest pressure and the grid buckled, exposing the glut of hours. It was

only eleven and still the whole day spread before him.

Back in the city, she came over at strange times, carrying a gym bag that stayed untouched by the door. Her husband, Jonathan, was an importer of olive oil and other things kept in dark, cool warehouses. Ana said his name often when she was with Richard, but he didn't mind. He was glad for the helpless invocation of her real life—he didn't need a reminder of the limits, the end already visible from the moment she had first shaken his hand, but maybe she needed a reminder. The groceries she'd brought this weekend worried him, the purity of their domestic striving, and so did the questions about his son, the assumption that Richard was tracking the saga of her cousin's health. How she had made up the bare mattress with the sheets they'd brought, eager as a new bride.

They would go back to the city the day after next, and Jonathan would return from wherever Jonathan had gone and the house would sell and all shall be well, all manner of things shall be

well—the phrase surfaced in his brain, some hippie scrap that Pam used to incant to herself.

IT WAS DARK outside, the sky faltering to black. Ana squeezed a dropper of her antibiotic into one eye and then the other, then shut her eyes tight. "A minute," she said, eyes still closed. "Tell me when a minute is up."

Richard was putting the dishes away.

"A minute," he said, after a while, though he'd forgotten to check, and she opened her eyes.

"They feel any better?" he said.

"Yeah," she said. "Lots." She was a smart woman. She had sensed some shift in his attention and was now willfully cheerful, cool, not giving away too much. Her bare feet kneaded the cushions. She'd plugged in her laptop, and a menu screen was queued up for a black-and-white movie that he didn't want to watch. "Someone could take down this wall," she said, nodding at the room, "and then have their dining table in here."

"Someone could," he agreed.

"That's Rowan?" she said. There was a framed photo: Rowan, a few hours old, in Pam's arms.

"Yeah."

Ana got up to look more closely. "She's pretty."

He wanted to tell Ana that there was no need to catalogue Pan's attractiveness, or try to gauge Richard's feelings for her—nothing residual remained. They'd been divorced sixteen years. She lived in Santa Barbara, had married again and divorced again, existed only as a voice on the telephone arranging logistics or relaying information.

"Is he sad you're selling the house?" Ana said.

It took him a moment. "Is Rowan sad?"

"He must have had fun here. In summers and stuff."

Richard wiped his hands on his pants; there were no dishtowels.

"We only came here a few times. Rowan likes the city better, I think. I don't think he cares."

Pam and Richard had divorced when Rowan was two. Pam had moved to the West Coast—really, since then Richard saw Rowan only in summers, and then for only the few weeks the boy wasn't at



"Everything smells like fear now."

camp. But they had been good times. Good enough—Rowan a small stranger who'd arrive for the summer, dark-eyed and bearing a Ziploc of vitamins from Pam with detailed instructions for their distribution. With his private ways and ritualized habits, one summer obsessed with a leather wallet some boyfriend of his mother's must have given him.

RICHARD FELL ASLEEP during the movie, snorting awake with his head on his chest. Ana laughed, a little unkindly. "You snore," she said. "I didn't know you snore."

"It's still going?" he said. The actors on the screen had soft-looking moon faces; he had no idea what was happening.

"We aren't even halfway through," she said. "You want me to go back?"

He shook his head, forcing himself to stay awake. The movie finished to violent trumpets, *The End* scrolling in gilded, overblown script. She shut her laptop in the middle of a horn blast.

"Bed?" he said.

She shrugged. "I might stay up."

She wanted to talk, he could tell, itching for him to push back, probe for the source of her discontent.

"I have to sleep," he said.

Ana rolled her eyes. "Fine," she said, stretching out her pretty legs without looking at him, her youth the ultimate trump card.

A LONE IN THE upstairs bedroom, Richard took off his pants and raked his fingers through the hair above his belly. He left his boxers on, white swimmy cotton that Ana hated, and pulled just the top sheet over himself. Where had Ana even found that movie, and what logic had made her think he would like a black-and-white movie? He was only fifty. Or fifty-one. He fell asleep.

"Hey."

Ana was shaking him, pushing his shoulder. "Richard."

He recognized her voice, dimly, a ripple on the water, but didn't open his eyes.

"Your phone," she said, louder. "Come on."

IT HAD VIBRATED, she told him, an incoming call, and she had ignored it, except it happened two more times. Richard sat up and took the phone, dumbly: Pam. Three missed calls. He

oriented the time: it was only ten in Santa Barbara. But 1 A.M. here—Rowan. Something to do with Rowan. He was still half asleep, a bad feeling only beginning to make itself known.

"Is everything O.K.?" Ana said, and he started; he had forgotten her, the stranger on the bed, staring at him with her pinkish eyes.

He went down to the kitchen to call Pam back. "Richard, Jesus," she said, picking up on the first ring. "He's fine, fine, totally safe," and Richard told himself that he had never thought otherwise, though immediately his mind had zoomed through a pornographic strip of every evil thing that could have befallen his son. "The school called—I don't really understand, they aren't telling me anything. He's fine, but they need one of us there. Some trouble, a fight or something."

There was a pause. "I was sleeping," he said. "I'm sorry."

Pam sighed. "I can't get there until Monday," she said. "Why do they have these schools out in the middle of nowhere?"

"But he's fine."

"He's fine. I guess someone got hurt. He was involved, or so they said."

As a child, Rowan had not liked violence. He found the smallest corner of every room and folded himself there.

"Have you talked to him?"

"He didn't say very much. It's hard to tell."

Richard pushed a finger between his brows.

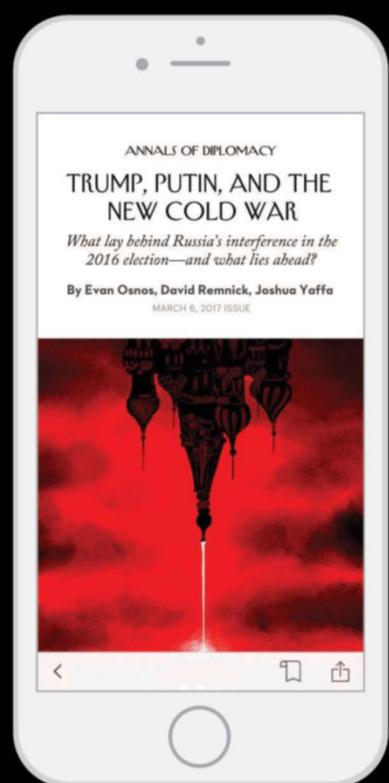
"Those people at that goddam school," Pam said, off on a tear. As she talked, he spotted Ana in the doorway, listening while trying to appear as if she weren't, her eyes cast carefully down.

"I'll go up," he said, interrupting Pam. "First thing."

Ana snapped to attention—here was information that affected her, and she tried and failed to hide her disappointment.

THE TRAIN MOVED at a forgotten pace, quaint. He had taken the train often when he worked for the Treasury Department, ten years before. The express, with regulars heading straight to their usual seats. The train rattled along with all the carnival heave and huff. Passing houses, boxy and plain,

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with aprons of lawn, the hedges sheared neatly like military haircuts. Rowan's school used to require such haircuts. Uniforms, too. Dark gray, worsted wool, jackets with rows of brass. But that was fifty years ago. Now it was scrubbed of any implication of violence, less like a school and more like a coed holding pen, funnelling students into Ivy League and liberal-arts colleges—there was no focus on anything beyond college itself, the first fact of acceptance. The invitation to a party when the party was incidental. Rowan had got into a better-than-expected college—Pam was surprised and pleased—its Web site a well-designed labyrinth of photographs and italicized quotes in a vaguely corporate color scheme.

The boy wanted to study international relations, but that seemed to mean he wanted to study abroad and drink in new countries. He didn't exhibit any interest in Richard's work, apart from a desultory question or two, offered out of nowhere.

"How much money do you make?" he'd asked Richard once.

Richard didn't know whether to lie, whether parents had some complicated moral arithmetic about these things. He told Rowan the truth, embellishing slightly—the year would pick up, he was sure—and Rowan seemed appropriately impressed, his eyes going cold and adult as he processed the information.

Richard had not thought of Rowan so much in a long time, not this condensed concern. He called him every once in a while, or pinged off a series of texts, Rowan's responses shorter and shorter until the exchange trailed into virtual silence—*How are your classes?* *Fine.* They were useless missives, but he felt he had to make these offerings. If there was a reckoning, a moment when they demanded to see the record, he could present these messages. Proof that he had tried. Ana would be driving back to the city now. He'd sent off a quick text to her as the train pulled out, apologies that the weekend had ended so abruptly, but there was still no word from her. Maybe she hadn't seen it. Or maybe she was sulking. Childish woman, he thought, and let himself feel free of her, glad for the escape Pam's call had offered. He drank water from a plastic

bottle, dented by his bag. He checked his phone again. He would meet with the headmaster in the afternoon.

Richard was going to wait until the train was halfway there to take a pill. This was the kind of rule he was only foggily aware of, the patter under the surface of his waking brain. But the rules were easily bent by obscure rationalizations. A cold look from a stranger, a rumble of hunger or impatience, discomfort: any of these could tip Richard into a sudden certainty that he deserved to have the pill now. So he uncapped the tube and didn't acknowledge what he was doing until he was already staring into the abundance. Oval, he decided, after a moment. He washed the pill off his tongue with a slug of water, swallowing hard. When it dropped, there was no more doggy-paddling against the riptide of the day—he could relax, let it pass over him. Clicking in like rails.

HE WAITED TEN minutes for a taxi: none appeared. All around him, people streamed off to the parking garage or hustled to the cars of loved ones, cars that arrived like magic and painlessly collected their cargo. Passengers sorted themselves into their proper places, trunks slamming. Richard checked his phone—still nothing from Ana. Christ. It was almost noon, clouds beginning to condense overhead.

Richard went to ask the attendant at the parking garage about taxis. "One'll show up," the man said, and Richard stalked back to the curb, his bag thudding into his side.

Finally a burgundy minivan pulled up. Richard exhaled loudly, though no one was there to hear him. The driver had long hair and rimless glasses, and hustled to open the trunk.

"I'll just keep my bag with me," Richard said.

"Sure," the man said, bobbing from foot to foot. "Sure. You want to sit up in front?"

"No," Richard said, after a moment of confusion. Did people ever want to sit in front? Though, now that he was getting in the back, he understood that some people did sit in the front, or the man wouldn't have asked. What kind of people? People who wanted to advertise their own goodness. He didn't care if the driver thought he was a shitty

person because he didn't want to ride alongside him.

When he gave the name of the school, the driver turned to the back seat.

"Do you have the address?"

Irritation prickled up Richard's scalp. "It's the only school around," he said. "You don't know it?"

"Sure I do," the driver said, churlish now. "I just wanna plug it into the machine, see, it'll tell me the best way to go."

This was why you lived in cities—abundance buffered you from the vagaries of human contact. If this had happened at home, Richard would have got out and grabbed the next cab. But here he was forced to sit as the man fumbled with his G.P.S., forced to encounter the full, dull reality of this person. He sat back and closed his eyes.

"All set," the driver announced. Richard picked up a punitive lilt in the man's tone, but when he opened his eyes the car was moving and the man was silent, staring ahead.

THE SCHOOL WAS at the top of a hill, overlooking the town, the swift-moving river spanned by a stone bridge. The campus buildings were gray limestone, tidy and stark. It had snowed a few days earlier, it seemed, but not enough to be picturesque, and in the muddy aftermath everything seemed scraped.

Rowan was supposed to meet him in front of the chapel, but he wasn't there. Richard should have stopped first to stow his bag at the one inn in town, with its basket of Saran-wrapped corn muffins at the front desk. He had been to the school twice before: dropping Rowan off the September of his freshman year, and picking him up for a single, awkward Thanksgiving.

He moved his bag to the other shoulder, checked his phone. An hour until his meeting with the headmaster. Rowan wasn't answering texts or calls. Richard glanced at his phone's blank screen—the galactic space of it, the empty hum. How often was he checking? Ana hadn't texted even once. He typed another note to her. *All okay here.* He watched the cursor blink—he erased the message.

He stood there for another few minutes before a boy and a girl ambled toward him, the boy not immediately

recognizable as his son. It was Rowan, obvious now as the boy got closer, and Richard pretended he'd known all along. Wasn't that what parents were supposed to do? Be able to spot their children in a crowd, in an instant, the most primal of recognitions?

"Father," Rowan said, half smiling. His son had never called him Father, even when he was a little boy. He wore a shiny jacket that seemed borrowed from someone else; his wrists strained in the too small sleeves. Richard looked from the girl to his son. He went to hug Rowan, but stuttered, a moment of hesitation, and the weight of his bag dropped down his arm and he had to reshoulder it, an awkward lurch, and in that time the girl thrust out her hand.

"Hi, Mr. Hagood," she said.

Before Richard could understand who she was, she was shaking his hand. She had washed green eyes, thickish animal hair that fell to her waist.

"Hi."

"Livia," Rowan said. "My girlfriend."

Richard had never heard anything about a girlfriend. He stared at Rowan. "Why don't you and I talk alone for a minute?"

"We can talk in front of Livia. Right, babe?"

A dormant headache pulsed back to life. "I think we need to talk," Richard said. "Alone."

"Come on," Rowan said. "She's great."

Richard could feel Livia watching them.

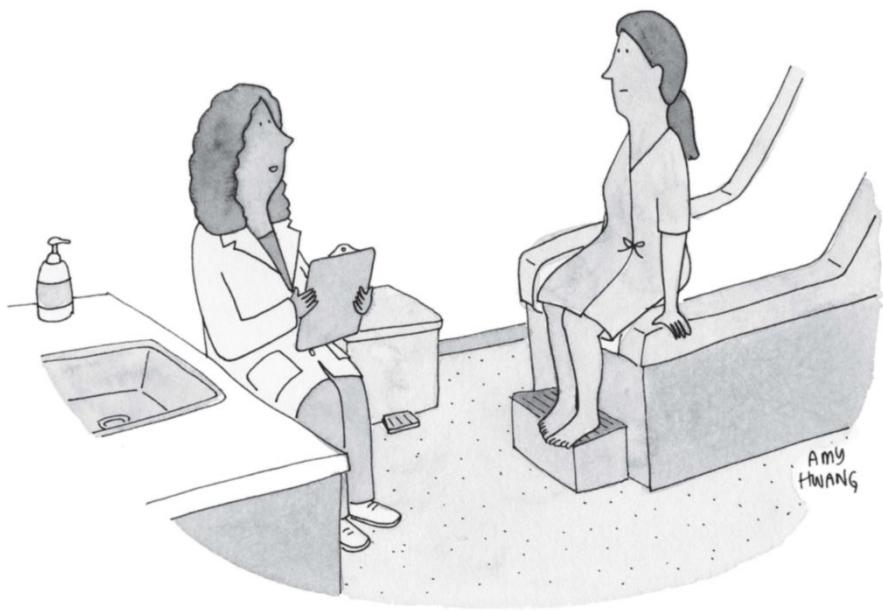
"I'm sure she's great," Richard said, trying to keep his voice even. "And I'm sure she can excuse us for a moment. Right, Livia?" He forced a smile, and, after a moment, the girl shrugged at Rowan and ambled a few feet away. She breathed into her cupped hands, studiously looking away when Richard glanced over.

"I'm meeting with your headmaster in less than an hour," he said.

Rowan's face didn't change. "Yeah."

"Is there anything you want to say?"

Rowan was staring past Richard, his arms folded and straining against the jacket sleeves. "It wasn't a big deal," he said, and smiled. Out of discomfort, Richard told himself, and he felt it, too; a hysterics grimace tightened his own face. Rowan seemed to take this as



"You will live a long and healthy life if you abstain from anything that brings you joy."

some kind of collusion, and his posture relaxed. He pulled out a pack of cigarettes and lit one with a teen-ager's elaborate casualness.

"Don't smoke," Richard said. "It can't be allowed?"

Rowan let the cigarette hover a moment in the air, the smell rising between them. "Frisch doesn't care. And there's worse things than smoking," he said, taking a drag. "It's not even that bad for you."

Richard's hands flexed, then relaxed. What could he do, snatch the cigarette away? His headache was worse. The pill was wearing off, the granularity of each minute becoming more apparent. He wanted to check his phone. His son kept smoking, his exhale threading thinly through the air before breaking apart. The girl was stamping her feet now, her puffy boots making her legs above them seem tiny and breakable, and Richard imagined, for a second, snapping them clean. He cleared his throat. "Where's the headmaster's office?"

PAUL FRISCH HAD attended the school as a teen-ager, back when it was still single-sex. His time there had been slurred over by distance until it seemed blessed, four years steadily

knit with hearty friendships and kindly teachers and good-natured pranks. No matter that he had been somewhat unpopular, occasionally the recipient of pointed abuse, once punched so hard in the stomach that he vomited in a tidy unreal circle in the snow. They pushed his face into his own warm sick. It was easy to forget, though. And enough had happened on the other side of the fulcrum—a scholarship to college, a sensible girl who became his wife, her long hair worn in a single braid. He'd returned to teach at the school for many years before taking over as headmaster. This office with its oak furniture and mullioned windows. A life tipping toward good, and it was only this kind of thing, the occasional meeting of this sort, that called up a sour whiff from the back of his throat, a familiar feeling elbowing its way to the light.

The student: chubby with the helpless bulk that came from psychiatric drugs, not from excess of enjoyment. Thatchy hair, like the nests that deer make in grass. He wasn't unattractive, just raw, all there on the surface. Frisch had met with his parents that morning. The boy's mother looked older than she was. A high flush on her neck, a darty,

wild look. Her husband kept one arm around her in a weary huddle.

They were decent people, unable to imagine or prepare for anything like this.

And now here was Rowan Hagood's father, wearing a wool overcoat that smelled like the cold air, a man who kept tilting his phone in his lap to check the screen, as if Frisch couldn't plainly see what he was doing. Frisch shifted in his chair, the leather seat giving off a flatulent squeak that triggered an old self-consciousness. Rowan's father was hearty, at first, ready to find a solution, to coöperate. He had a full head of hair and the aggressively pleasant affect of someone used to getting what he wanted. Smiling a contained, respectful smile, a smile that assumed a shared interest here.

Rowan could not stay at the school, though his father seemed to expect otherwise. Not even the most rabid of parents with the most rabid of lawyers could have kept Rowan there. Frisch repeated the facts. As he went on, the man's heartiness started to fray, and he began passing his phone from palm to palm with increasing agitation. Frisch laid out the time line they had pieced together, what the hospital's report had concluded.

Rowan's life was not ruined. In lieu of expulsion, he and the others would be asked to leave. Rowan would be given

the chance to transfer somewhere else to finish the semester. Colleges wouldn't be notified, the incident never part of any formal, accessible record. This was the best possible outcome for Rowan, Frisch explained, and Mr. Hagood should be grateful that his son's future was intact. All this would recede in Rowan's life, Frisch knew, a blip easily calcified. People like Rowan and his father were always protected from themselves.

Earlier that morning, before the other boy's mother and father had left his office, the mother had stopped and looked at Frisch. "He'll be all right, won't he?" she asked, her voice unravelling.

Frisch had assured the parents that their son would be fine. They needed to hear him say it. Everything would be O.K. And how could he say otherwise—confess that he had spoken with the boy a few hours after everything, had looked into the boy's black, roving eyes, and that he couldn't say what would happen later, what any of this would mean?

RICHARD DESCENDED THE dark, narrow stairs that led to the dining room of the one fancy restaurant in town. White tablecloths and stiff lace curtains—this was a part of the coun-

try where sombre stood in for formal. Rowan and Livia followed behind at the respectful but vaguely menacing distance typical of bodyguards and teenagers. Their whispers were punctuated only by the girl's grating laugh. The kids had been twenty minutes late meeting him at his hotel, but the restaurant was mostly empty, Richard's reservation an unnecessary urban habit.

Pam had cried on the phone when he called her after the meeting, though Richard was careful to repeat what the headmaster had said: Rowan would still go to college; this could all be dealt with soon enough. There were logistics to get through, but it was fixable. Richard didn't fill in the blanks in the story. Didn't flesh out the incident in full, obscene detail—details the headmaster seemed to linger over, studying Richard's face as he recounted the whole thing. Like he wanted Richard to feel bad, like Richard should be the one to offer an apology. And he did feel bad—the story was awful, perverse, made his gut tighten. But what could he do now, what could anyone do? He apologized, pitching the wording carefully—enough to acknowledge that the incident was bad but not enough to encourage any kind of future lawsuit.

The waitress handed out menus while Rowan and Livia scooted their chairs closer together. Rowan had obviously told her that he would have to leave the school—when the kids had finally shown up at Richard's hotel the girl's eyes were red from crying. Livia seemed fine now, no lingering sadness that Richard could discern. If anything, she was fizzy with secret hilarity, she and Rowan exchanging significant glances. They started to giggle, bizarrely, keeping up some coded conversation that he didn't try to follow. Crescents of sweat were darkening the underarms of the girl's shirt. Richard tipped his phone onto the table, casually, so he could tell himself he wasn't really checking. Still nothing from Ana. His stomach hollowed and he picked at his napkin. He made an effort to smile at Livia, who looked back blankly with a shake of her uncombed hair.

Rowan had taken the news stoically, with a maddening tilt of his head as he stared past Richard out the window of his dorm room. He twisted a lacrosse

UNEASY LIES THE HEAD
THAT WEARS THE PENGUIN



stick in his hands while Richard talked, an in-and-out roll that kept a yellow ball trapped in the net. The movement was unusual, hypnotic, a kind of witchy glide. In the corner, his roommate's humidifier motored away, loosing puffs of dampness.

Rowan's nonchalance doubled Richard's headache. "You understand this could have been much worse," Richard said.

Rowan shrugged, keeping the ball in the net. "I guess."

This was his son, Richard kept reminding himself, and that fact had to be bigger than anything else.

"We will always help you," Richard said, conscious of trying to gather some formality, a sense of fatherly occasion. "Your mother and I. I want you to know that."

Rowan made a noise in the back of his throat, the barest of responses, but Richard saw the mask drop for a second, saw a quick flash of pure hatred in the boy's face.

RICHARD KNEW HE shouldn't drink with the pills, but he ordered a beer anyway.

"Actually," he said, "gin-and-tonic."

Ana had told him once that clear alcohol was the healthiest—she drank vodka. Ana, with her muscular legs and practical shoes and her skin, soapy and pale as a statue's.

"I'll have one, too," Rowan said, sending Livia into a fit of giggling. The waitress looked at Richard for permission.

"No," he said. "Christ."

The rage in Richard grew and fizzled, easy as taking a breath, easy as not responding. He stuffed his mouth with a slice of bread, dry and lacking salt, and chewed intently.

AFTER THEY ORDERED—the girl got the most expensive thing on the menu, Richard noted—he stepped out to the parking lot. "I'll be back in a minute," he announced to the kids. They ignored him. The river was close enough that he could hear it.

He called Ana. Pushing the button quieted some immediate anxiety, dropped it down a notch. He was taking action, after all, he still had some control. But the phone kept ringing into space. Now the anxiety had doubled. It rang too

many times. He felt the silence between each ring. He hung up. Maybe she had just been surprised by his call—they didn't speak on the phone, as a rule. Or maybe she had her phone on silent, or maybe Jonathan was home early. Maybe. Or maybe she was just ignoring him. Back at her apartment, doing nothing, wearing her unflattering sweatpants, her dingy bra. Revulsion caught in his throat. Richard knew he shouldn't call again, but it was so easy to endure the same series of rings. He pressed the phone to his ear, wondering how long the rings could possibly go on. There was a moment, a click, when he thought she had answered—his stomach dropped—but it was only her voice mail. The recording made her voice seem lunar and far away. In the silence that followed the beep, he tried to think of something to say. He could see his breath.

"Cunt," he said, suddenly, before hanging up.

HE RETURNED TO the table, bending to retrieve his napkin from where it had fallen on the floor. An oblique thrill was animating his movements, a buoyant flush. The food arrived quickly, the waitress smiling as she set down the plates. Richard ordered a second drink. When the waitress left, Rowan stabbed a finger at her retreating back.

"Lizard person," he announced. "Two points." Livia started laughing again.

Richard just blinked, the drink a wave he was riding, another on its way. This was his son sitting beside him at the table? All is well, he thought, and all shall be well, and all manner of things shall be well.

He sawed at his steak, salting the mashed potatoes, loading up his fork. Rowan had ordered the pasta—claiming to be a vegetarian, which seemed like another joke of some kind—and he ate steadily, his lips coated with oil. Livia sipped at her water and poked at her own steak. She cut up some of the meat but only moved the pieces from one side of the plate to the other. Rowan was in the middle of a sentence when Livia quickly shifted one of the slices onto his plate.

He looked down, but kept talking.

"Listen," Richard said to Livia. He hadn't meant to speak at all. "You can't just drink water for dinner."

Livia stared at him.

"You have to eat something," Richard said.

"God," Rowan said. "You aren't eating that much, either."

"I'm just fine," Richard said. His son looked tense. Richard could tell that his hand was on Livia's knee under the table. "I'm fine," he repeated, "but I won't allow Livia to starve."

"What the fuck?" Rowan said.

Richard had never hit his son, not once. His mouth filled with saliva, and there was a pounding behind his eyes. Across the table, Livia still stared at him.

"Eat your food," Richard said. "We aren't going anywhere until you eat."

Her eyes got wet. She picked up her fork, clutching it hard. She stabbed at a thick slice of steak and brought it to her mouth, chewing with tight lips, her neck surging when she swallowed. She took another bite, her eyes widening.

"God, stop it," Rowan said. "It's fine."

Livia kept eating. "Stop, babe," Rowan said, grabbing her wrist, her mouth still cartoonishly full. She dropped her fork, letting it clatter onto the floor.

"You're a prick," Rowan said, glaring at his father. "You were always a fucking prick."

The waitress hurried over with another fork, her face frozen in a frenzy of politeness that meant she'd seen the whole thing.

"Sorry," the girl said, tears dripping into her lap.

"No problem," the waitress sang, "no problem at all," replacing the girl's fork, bending to snatch the soiled one off the floor. Smiling hard but not making eye contact with anyone. When she retreated, leaving Richard alone with his son and the crying girl, it occurred to him, with the delayed logic of a dream, that the waitress must have thought he was the bad guy in all this. ♦



THE CRITICS



BOOKS

MOST LIKELY TO SUCCEED

Where Prince Charles went wrong.

BY ZOË HELLER

FOR AT LEAST a decade, senior aides at Buckingham Palace have been quietly finessing arrangements for the moment when the Queen dies and her son Prince Charles becomes sovereign. One of their chief concerns, apparently, is that republicans may try to use the interval between the death of the old monarch and the coronation of the new one to whip up anti-royal sentiment. In order to minimize the potential for such rabble-rousing, they propose to speed things up as much as decorum will allow: in contrast to the stately sixteen-month pause that elapsed between the death of King George VI, in February, 1952, and the anointing of the Queen, in June, 1953, King Charles III will be whisked to Westminster Abbey no later than three months after his mother's demise.

The threat of a Jacobin-style insurgency in modern Britain would seem, on the face of it, rather remote. Despite successive royal scandals and crises, support for the monarchy has remained robust. In the wake of Princess Diana's death in 1997, when the reputation of the Windsors was said to have reached its nadir, the Scottish writer Tom Nairn sensed that the crowds of mourners lining the Mall had "gathered to witness auguries of a coming time" when Britain would at last be freed from "the mouldering waxworks" ensconced in Buckingham Palace. But, almost twenty years later, roughly three-quarters of Britons believe that the country would be "worse off without" the Royal Family, and Queen Elizabeth II, who recently beat out Queen Victoria to become the longest-reigning monarch in British history, continues to command something approaching feudal deference. Last year, to honor her

ninetieth birthday, legions of British townspeople and villagers turned out to paint walls and pick up litter, in a national effort known as "Clean for the Queen."

There is some reason to doubt, however, whether such loyalty will persist once the Queen's son, now sixty-eight years old, ascends the throne. His Royal Highness Prince Charles Philip Arthur George, Prince of Wales, K.G., K.T., G.C.B., O.M., A.K., Q.S.O., P.C., A.D.C., Earl of Chester, Duke of Cornwall, Duke of Rothesay, Earl of Carrick, Baron of Renfrew, Lord of the Isles, and Prince and Great Steward of Scotland, is a deeply unpopular man. Writers in both the conservative and the liberal press regularly refer to him as "a prat," "a twit," and "an idiot," with no apparent fear of giving offense to their readership. In a 2016 poll, only a quarter of respondents said that they would like Charles to succeed the Queen, while more than half said they would prefer to see his son Prince William crowned instead. Even among those who profess to think him a decent chap, there is a widespread conviction that he does the monarchy more harm than good. "Our Prince of Wales is a fundamentally decent and serious man," one conservative columnist recently wrote. "He possesses a strong sense of duty. Might not it be best expressed by renouncing the throne in advance?"

How this enthusiastic and diligent person, who has frequently stated his desire to be a good, responsible monarch, managed to incur such opprobrium is the central question that the American writer Sally Bedell Smith sets out to answer in a new biography, "Prince

Charles: The Passions and Paradoxes of an Improbable Life" (Random House). Hers is not an entirely disinterested investigation. As might be inferred from her two previous alliteratively subtitled works—"Diana in Search of Herself: Portrait of a Troubled Princess" and "Elizabeth the Queen: The Life of a Modern Monarch"—Smith is an avid monarchist. For anyone invested in the survival of the royals, Prince Charles presents a challenge, and Smith's stance is very close to what one imagines a senior palace aide's might be: Charles is far from ideal, but he is what we've got, and there can be no talk of mucking about with the law of succession and replacing him with his son. Once you start allowing the popular will to determine who wears the crown, people are liable to wonder why anyone is wearing a crown in the first place.

Smith's mission is, therefore, to reconcile us to the inevitability of King Charles III and to convince us that his reign may not be as insufferable as is generally feared. Having had the honor of meeting the Prince "socially" on more than one occasion, she can attest that he is "far warmer" than the tabloids would have you think. She can also vouch for his "emotional intelligence," "capacious mind," "elephantine memory," "preternatural aesthetic sense," "talent as a consummate diplomat," and "independent spirit."

Early on, however, it becomes apparent that Smith's public-relations instincts are at war with a fundamental dislike of her subject. The grade-inflating summaries she offers at the beginning and the end of the book are overpowered by the damning portrait that emerges in

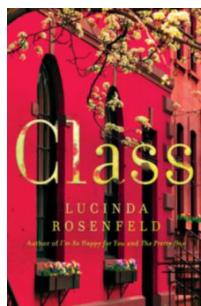


Charles has become unpopular trying to carve out a role while waiting longer to reign than any previous Prince of Wales.

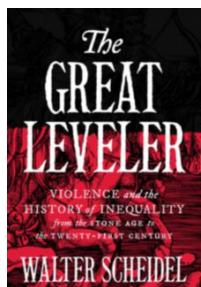
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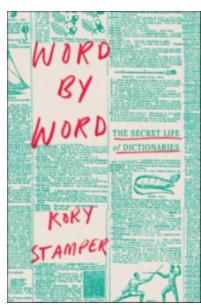
One of the Boys, by Daniel Magariel (Scribner). In this haunting début novel, two unnamed brothers move from Kansas to New Mexico with their mercurial, charming father in the wake of a divorce and custody battle. They initially see the move as a grand adventure, but slowly discover the extent of their father's addiction to crack cocaine. As he becomes increasingly paranoid and violent, the brothers, trapped with him in a claustrophobic apartment, desperately form a pact to escape. "Our dad was an act with a single end," the younger boy observes. "And it wasn't that I didn't care anymore. He was my father. It was just that we had spent far too long as his audience."



Class, by Lucinda Rosenfeld (Little, Brown). Karen, a self-proclaimed liberal whose inner monologue provides the fabric of this satirical novel, is dedicated to the disadvantaged in both her professional and her personal life. She works for a non-profit organization called Hungry Kids and sends her daughter to a public school whose racial mix is a source of both pride and, increasingly, angst. When she illegally transfers her child, it is the first in an escalating series of risky misdemeanors. Karen's relentless self-doubt and hypocritical attitudes to race and class make her a hard character to sympathize with. But, by the same token, Rosenfeld's attack on upper-middle-class pieties is unerring in its aim.



The Great Leveler, by Walter Scheidel (Princeton). Death is proverbially a leveller, but this sweeping and provocative study, which examines economic trends from the earliest societies to now, takes the idea further. Scheidel finds that protracted periods of peace, whether in ancient Rome or in contemporary America, have tended to produce social and economic stratification, while cataclysms such as the plagues of medieval Europe and the twentieth century's world wars have brought greater equality. All major redistributions of resources have been preceded by one of what he calls the "Four Horsemen"—state failure, pandemics, "mass mobilization warfare," and "transformative revolution." Scheidel refrains from developing an overarching ethical or economic theory of inequality, but his reading of history leaves him pessimistic about how much can be achieved by policymaking alone.



Word by Word, by Kory Stamper (Pantheon). The compiling of dictionaries may seem a quiet topic, but this memoiristic account of the lexicographer's art, by an editor at Merriam-Webster, is an unlikely page-turner. Offering a nuts-and-bolts exploration of the English language, Stamper displays a contagious enthusiasm for words and a considerable talent for putting them together, as when describing "the fusty glut of old papers bunged hastily into metal bookshelves" that fills the basement of Merriam-Webster. Her discussion of the role of language in culture is illuminating, and she is a reliable guide to such issues as the tension between a dictionary's descriptive and prescriptive roles, explaining, for instance, why "irregardless," though widely loathed as a solecism, is no more illogical than "inflammable," and merits inclusion.

between. The man we encounter here is a ninny, a whinger, a tantrum-throwing dilettante, "hopelessly thin-skinned... naïve and resentful." He is a preening snob, "keenly sensitive to violations of protocol," intolerant of "opinions contrary to his own," and horribly misled about the extent of his own talents. (An amateur watercolorist, he once offered Lucian Freud one of his paintings in exchange for one of Freud's; the artist unaccountably demurred.) He is a "prolix, circular" thinker, "more of an intellectual striver than a genuine intellectual," who extolls Indian slums for their sustainable way of life and preaches against the corrupting allure of "sophistication" while himself living in unfathomable luxe. (He reportedly travels with a white leather toilet seat, and Smith details his outrage on the rare occasions when he has to fly first class rather than in a private jet.) Although the book would like to be a nuanced adjudication of the Prince's "paradoxes," it ends up becoming a chronicle of peevishness and petulance.

PRINCE CHARLES was three years old when he became heir apparent. Asked years later when it was that he had first realized he would one day be king, he said that there had been no particular moment of revelation, just a slow, "ghastly, inexorable" dawning. Doubts about his fitness for his future role were raised from the start. As a timorous, sickly child, prone to sinus infections and tears, he was a source of puzzlement and some disappointment to his parents. His mother, whom he would later describe as "not indifferent so much as detached," worried that he was a "slow developer." His father, Prince Philip, thought him weedy, effete, and spoiled. Too physically uncoordinated to be any good at team sports, too scared of horses to enjoy riding lessons, and too sensitive not to despair when, at the age of eight, he was sent away to boarding school, he was happiest spending time with his grandmother the Queen Mother, who gave him hugs, took him to the ballet, and, as he later put it, "taught me how to look at things." Neither physical demonstrativeness nor sensitivity to art was considered a desirable trait by the rest of his family. Charles told an earlier biographer, Jonathan Dimbleby, about a time

when he ventured to express enthusiasm about the Leonardo da Vinci drawings in the Royal Library at Windsor; his parents and siblings gazed at him with an embarrassed bemusement that, he said, made him feel “squashed and guilty,” as if he had “in some indefinable way let his family down.” (Charles has continued to define himself against his family’s philistinism, boasting in his letters and journals of his intense, lachrymose responses to art, literature, and nature.)

In an effort to build the character of his soppy, aesthete son, Prince Philip sent him to his own alma mater, Gordonstoun, a famously spartan boarding school in Scotland founded on the promise of emancipating “the sons of the powerful” from “the prison of privilege.” Charles—the jug-eared, non-sportif future king—was a prime target for bullying, and when he wasn’t being beaten up he was more or less ostracized. (Boys made “slurping” noises at anyone who tried to be nice to him.) That he survived this misery was largely due to the various dispensations he was afforded as a V.I.P. pupil. He was allowed to spend weekends at the nearby home of family friends (where he could “cry his eyes out” away from the jeers of other boys) and, in his final year, was made head boy and given his own room in the apartment of his art master. He had taken up the cello by this point, and, although he was, by his own admission, “hopeless,” the art master arranged for him to give recitals at the weekend house parties of local Scottish aristocrats.

Throughout Charles’s youth, he was pushed through demanding institutions for which he was neither temperamentally nor intellectually suited, and where rules and standards had to be discreetly adjusted to accommodate him. When he went to Cambridge University, the master of Trinity College, Rab Butler, insisted that he would receive no “special treatment.” But the fact that he had been admitted to Trinity at all, with his decidedly below-average academic record, suggested otherwise, as did the colloquium of academics convened to structure a bespoke curriculum for him, and the unusually choice suite of rooms (specifically decorated by the Queen’s *tapisser*) that he was granted as a first-year student. When he received an undistinguished grade in his final exams, Butler said that he would have done much

better if he hadn’t had to carry out royal duties.

In the Royal Navy, which Charles entered at his father’s prompting, his superiors, faced with his “inability to add or generally to cope well with figures,” sought to “build in more flexibility and to tailor duties closer to his abilities.” They changed his job from navigator to communications officer, and his performance reports laid diplomatic emphasis on his “cheerful” nature and “charm.”

Even Charles’s love life was choreographed for him with the sort of elaborate care and tact usually reserved for pandas in captivity. Throughout his twenties, his public image was that of a dashing playboy. But this reputation appears to have been largely concocted by the press and his own aides, in an effort to make an awkward, emotionally immature young man more appealing and “accessible” to the British public. Charles’s great-uncle Lord Mountbatten blithely informed *Time* that the Prince was forever “popping in and out of bed with girls,” but to the extent that this was the case it was thanks mostly to the assiduous efforts of his mentors. Having told Charles that a man should “have as many affairs as he can,” Mountbatten offered up his stately home as a love shack.

Mountbatten also set to work finding a suitable woman for Charles to marry. At the time, virginity was still a non-negotiable requirement for the heir apparent’s bride. (“I think it is disturbing for women to have experiences if they have to remain on a pedestal after marriage,” Mountbatten wrote to Charles.) Thus, Camilla Shand, the “earthy” woman with whom Charles fell in love at the age of twenty-three, was regarded as an excellent “learning experience” for the Prince but decidedly not wife material. Charles seems to have accepted this judgment and the stricture on which it was based, more or less unquestioningly. Almost a decade later, his misgivings about marrying Lady Diana Spencer, a woman twelve years his junior, whom he did not love, or even know very well, caused him to weep with anguish on the eve of their wedding, but he went through with it anyway, believing that, as he wrote in a letter, it was “the right thing for this Country and for my family.”

When that marriage exploded, Diana’s

superior instincts for wooing and handling the press insured that Charles emerged as the villain of the piece. But it seems safe to say that the union visited equal misery on both parties. One of the chief marital shocks for Charles was Diana’s lack of deference. He had assumed that the slightly vapid teenager he was settling for would at least be docile, but she turned out to be the biggest bully he had encountered since Gordonstoun. She taunted his pomposity, calling him “the Great White Hope” and “the Boy Wonder.” She told him that he would never become king and that he looked ridiculous in his medals. When he tried to end heated arguments by kneeling down to say his prayers before bed, she would keep shrieking and hit him over the head while he prayed.

C HARLES HAD ALWAYS disliked the playboy image that had been thrust upon him, feeling that it did a disservice to his thoughtfulness and spirituality, and part of what he hoped to acquire by getting married was gravitas: “The media will simply not take me seriously until I do get married and apparently become responsible.” The strange artificiality of his youthful “achievements,” and the nagging self-doubt it engendered, seems to have left him peculiarly vulnerable to the blandishments of advisers willing to reassure him that he was actually a brilliant and insightful person, who owed it to the world to share his ideas.

The cannier of these flatterers, and the one who had the most lasting impact, was Laurens van der Post, a South African-born author, documentary filmmaker, and amateur ethnographer. He dazzled Charles with his visionary talk—of rescuing humanity from “the superstition of the intellect” and of restoring the ancients’ spiritual oneness with the natural world—and then convinced Charles that he was the man to lead the crusade. “The battle for our renewal can be most naturally led by what is still one of the few great living symbols accessible to us—the symbol of the crown,” he wrote to the Prince. It’s no wonder that Charles was seduced. The life of duty opening up before him was a dreary one of cutting ribbons at the ceremonial openings of municipal swimming pools and feigning delight at the performances of

foreign folk dancers. Here was an infinitely more alluring model of princely purpose and prerogative.

Under the influence of van der Post and his circle, Charles began exploring vegetarianism, sacred geometry, horticulture, educational philosophy, architecture, Sufism. He received Jungian analysis of his dreams from van der Post's wife, Ingaret. He visited faith healers who helped him uncork "a lot of bottled feelings." Staying with farmers in Devon and crofters in the Hebrides, he played at being a horny-handed son of toil. He travelled to the Kalahari Desert and saw a "vision of earthly eternity" in a herd of zebras. On his return from each of these spiritual and intellectual adventures, he sought to share the fruits of his inquiries with his people.

Over the years, Charles has set up some twenty charities reflecting the range of his Bouvard-and-Pécuchet-like investigations. He has written several books, including "Harmony," a treatise arguing that "the Westernized world has become far too firmly framed by a mechanistic approach to science." He has sent thousands of letters to government ministers—known as the "black spider memos," for the urgent scrawl of his handwriting—on matters ranging from school meals and alternative medicine to the brand of helicopters used by British soldiers in Iraq and the plight of the Patagonian toothfish. He has given countless speeches: to British businessmen, on their poor business practices; to educators, on the folly of omitting Shakespeare from the national curriculum; to architects, on the horridness of tall modern buildings; and so on.

The stances he takes do not follow predictable political lines but seem perfectly calibrated to annoy everyone. Conservatives tend to be upset by his enthusiasm for Islam and his environmentalism; liberals object to his vehement defense of foxhunting and his protectiveness of Britain's ancient social hierarchies. What unites his disparate positions is a general hostility to secularism, science, and the industrialized world.

"I have come to realize," he told an audience in 2002, "that my entire life has been so far motivated by a desire to heal—to heal the dismembered landscape and the poisoned soul; the cruelly shattered townscape, where harmony has been

replaced by cacophony; to heal the divisions between intuitive and rational thought, between mind and body, and soul, so that the temple of our humanity can once again be lit by a sacred flame."

The British tend to have a limited tolerance for sacred flames. They are also ill-disposed to do-gooders poking about in their poisoned souls. ("The most hateful of all names in an English ear is Nosey Parker," George Orwell once observed.) What's more, Charles's sententious interpretation of noblesse oblige leaves him open to the charge of overstepping the constitutional boundaries of his position. A constitutional monarchy requires that the sovereign—and, by extension, the prospective sovereign—be above politics. Their symbolic power and their ability to work with elected governments in a disinterested manner depend on their maintaining an impeccable neutrality on all matters of public policy. The Queen's enduring inscrutability is often cited as one of the great achievements of her reign, and she has fulfilled her duties to everyone's satisfaction, with no mystical knowledge beyond dog breeding and horse handicapping. Charles's refusal to shut up about his views and his brazen efforts to influence popular and ministerial opinion have provoked much ridicule, as well as more serious rebukes. Both Margaret Thatcher and Tony Blair had occasion to complain—to him and to the palace—about his interference in the legislative process. "I run this country, not you, sir," Thatcher is alleged to have told him. But Charles has shown no signs of repentance. Indeed, he has repeatedly indicated that he intends to continue his "activism" after he ascends the throne. "You call it meddling," he told an interviewer nine years ago. "I would call it mobilizing, actually."

HISTORICALLY, THE QUESTION of how the Prince of Wales should occupy himself while waiting for his parent to die has rarely found a satisfactory answer. Many heirs to the throne have incurred opprobrium on the ground of moral turpitude. A hundred and fifty years ago, in "The English Constitution," Walter Bagehot noted the temptation for bored princes to become fops and fornicators, and concluded that "the only fit material

for a constitutional king is a prince who begins early to reign."

But Charles, who has been waiting to become king longer than any previous Prince of Wales, does not boast a distinguished record of degeneracy. His greatest known sin is to have resumed his relationship with Camilla while still married to Diana. It's true that some of the revelations regarding this infidelity were not strictly consonant with the dignity of a future king. In an alleged transcript of a phone conversation between the adulterous couple, the public learned that the Prince yearned to be his lady-love's tampon. But while it is certainly a dark day for England when the Italian press is emboldened to speak of the heir apparent as "Il Tampaccino," few have gone so far as to suggest that Charles is too debauched to become king.

Oddly, and perhaps rather tragically, the severest damage to his reputation has come not from his modest history of vice but from his strenuous aspirations to virtue. "All I want to do is to help other people," he has written. The fact that so many are ungrateful does not deter him: he accepts that, like any of the great men in history who have dared to go against the grain, he must endure derision. "It is probably inevitable that if you challenge the bastions of conventional thinking you will find yourself accused of naivety," he observed in the introduction to "Harmony." He is honor-bound to ignore the scorn, and to march on. In 2015, when the *Guardian* won a ten-year battle to release two batches of the meddlesome "black spider memos," under Britain's Freedom of Information Act, he was unabashed. A spokesman defended the Prince's right "to communicate his experiences or, indeed, his concerns or suggestions to ministers" in any government, and, by then, the law had been obligingly changed to make much royal correspondence exempt from future release. Not long after, there appeared a two-volume, 1,012-page compendium of Charles's articles and speeches from 1968 to 2012. The books, which retailed at more than four hundred dollars a set, were illustrated with his own watercolors and bound in forest-green buckram on which his heraldic badge—three feathers, a crown, and the motto "*Ich dien*," meaning "I serve"—was emblazoned in gold. ♦

RATTLING THE CAGE

The mistakes we make about mass incarceration.

BY ADAM GOPNIK



A focus on drug offenders and private prisons can distract from the larger problem.

REFORMERS ARE FAMOUSLY prey to the fanaticism of reform. A sense of indignation and a good cause lead first to moral urgency, and then soon afterward to repetition, whereby the reformers become captive to their own rhetoric, usually at a cost to their cause. Crusaders against widespread alcoholism (as acute a problem in 1910 as the opioid epidemic is today) advanced to the folly of Prohibition, which created a set of organized-crime institutions whose effects have scarcely just passed. Progressive Era trade unionists, fending off corporate thugs, could steer into thuggish forms of Stalinism. Those with the moral courage to protest the Vietnam War sometimes became blinded to the reality of the North Vietnamese government—

and on and on. It seems fair to say that a readiness to amend and reconsider the case being made is exactly what separates a genuine reforming instinct from a merely self-righteous one.

The fight against mass incarceration in the United States is no exception to this rule. In recent years, the horror of what Americans have done to other Americans—and particularly white Americans to black Americans—has led to a steady, engaged anti-prison polemic, one with many authors singing more or less in unison. The numbers make their own case: 6.7 million people, mostly men, were under correctional supervision during the year 2015—more than were enslaved in antebellum America and more than

resided in the Gulag Archipelago at the height of Stalin's misrule.

In a new book, "Locked In" (Basic), John F. Pfaff, a professor of law at Fordham, calls this choired voice (in which this writer has been a participant) "the Standard Story." The standard story, as he sees it, insists that, first, the root cause of incarceration is the racist persecution of young black men for drug crimes, which overpopulates the prisons with nonviolent offenders. Then mandatory-sentencing laws leave offenders serving long prison sentences for relatively minor crimes. This hugely expanded prison population, one that tracks in reverse the decline of actual crime, has led to a commerce in caged men—private-prison contractors, and a specialized lobby in favor of prison construction, which in turn demands men to feed into the system. (This exploitation is further supported by local communities in which a new prison can replace a closing factory, providing one of the few reliable sources of decent incomes for working-class, mostly white men.)

Pfaff, let there be no doubt, is a reformer. "Mass incarceration," he writes, "is one of the biggest social problems the United States faces today; our sprawling prison system imposes staggering economic, social, political, and racial costs." Nonetheless, he believes that the standard story—popularized in particular by Michelle Alexander, in her influential book, "The New Jim Crow"—is false. We are desperately in need of reform, he insists, but we must reform the right things, and address the true problem.

PAFF TAKES ON the elements of the standard story one by one, mostly concentrating on statistics involving state prisons, where the majority of inmates are housed. (American prisons operate in such a complicated patchwork of federal, state, and local jurisdictions that, as Pfaff points out, it is hard to get a good handle on the numbers.) First, he inspects the claim that it is predominantly nonviolent drug offenders, imprisoned against all moral logic, who populate our prisons. It's a claim that President Obama endorsed as recently as 2015: "Over the last few decades, we've also locked up more and more nonviolent drug

offenders than ever before, for longer than ever before, and that is the real reason our prison population is so high.”

In fact, Pfaff argues, drug convictions are a distinctly secondary factor in prison growth. During the great wave of incarceration—generally thought to have begun around 1980, and cresting about three decades later—state prisons added something like a million inmates, with about “half that growth coming from locking up more people convicted of violence,” Pfaff calculates. Nonviolent drug offenses accounted for only around a fifth of the new incarcerations.

What’s more, many of the drug convictions were meant to be what Pfaff calls “pretextual attacks on violence.” Violent crimes that are associated with drug dealing are more difficult to prosecute than drug offenses themselves, which usually involve hard evidence rather than the testimony of witnesses. This argument sets off some suspicious-skeptical alarms, since it seems cousin to the idea that we might as well lock ‘em up for drugs as for anything else, since, if we didn’t, “they” would be committing violent offenses anyway. “It is, of course, completely fair to debate the morality . . . of using drug charges to tackle underlying violence,” Pfaff observes, to his credit. He accepts that “blacks are systematically denied access to the more successful paths to economic stability,” and therefore “face systematically greater pressure to turn to other alternatives.” But he also makes a more complicated argument, following recent sociological research: it’s not that the prohibition of drugs attracts crime, which then produces violence; it’s that violence thrives among young men deprived of a faith in their own upward mobility, making drug dealing an attractive business. In plain English, young men without a way out of poverty turn to gangs, and gangs always turn to violence. Since efficient drug dealing is, by its illicit nature, likely to involve violence, those accustomed to violence are drawn to drug dealing. One sees the logic: Lucky Luciano and Al Capone weren’t ambitious street kids who chose bootlegging as a business, and were then compelled to become gangsters to pursue it, as in “Boardwalk Empire.” They were al-

ready cadet gangsters, who saw that their acquired skills lined up neatly with those demanded by bootlegging.

And so the war on drugs, however misguided as social policy, was not, Pfaff insists, a prime mover of the epidemic of incarceration—the numbers just aren’t there. Even in New York State, famous for its Draconian “Rockefeller laws,” the decline in the number of inmates imprisoned for drug offenses in the past fifteen years has been dramatic—without changing the face, or the fact, of mass incarceration. Pfaff calls this his core claim: “If we define the people in prison as a result of the war on drugs to be those serving time for a drug conviction, then that war simply hasn’t sent enough people to state prisons for it to be a major engine of state prison growth.”

What about mandatory sentences? Pfaff notes that these outsized punishments are given to a very small part of the actual prison population. Most new inmates are serving relatively short sentences. This, Pfaff observes, is essentially good news. “Prison admissions are a flow, not a stock,” he writes. “They depend far more on choices made today than on the lingering effects of thousands of past decisions.” Pfaff deals with the issue of for-profit prisons with similar statistical efficiency: even if private prisons were banned tomorrow and all their inmates released, the prison population would drop by, at most, eight per cent. The numbers just aren’t there.

SO WHAT MAKES for the madness of American incarceration? If it isn’t crazy drug laws or outrageous sentences or profit-seeking prison keepers, what is it? Pfaff has a simple explanation: it’s prosecutors. They are political creatures, who get political rewards for locking people up and almost unlimited power to do it.

Pfaff, in making his case, points to a surprising pattern. While violent crime was increasing by a hundred per cent between 1970 and 1990, the number of “line” prosecutors rose by only seventeen per cent. But between 1990 and 2007, while the crime rate began to fall, the number of line prosecutors went up by fifty per cent, and the number of prisoners rose with it. That fact may explain the central paradox of mass incar-

ceration: fewer crimes, more criminals; less wrongdoing to imprison people for, more people imprisoned. A political current was at work, too. Pfaff thinks prosecutors were elevated in status by the surge in crime from the sixties to the nineties. “It could be that as the officials spearheading the war on crime,” he writes, “district attorneys have seen their political options expand, and this has encouraged them to remain tough on crime even as crime has fallen.”

Meanwhile, prosecutors grew more powerful. “There is basically no limit to how prosecutors can use the charges available to them to threaten defendants,” Pfaff observes. That’s why mandatory-sentencing rules can affect the justice system even if the mandatory minimums are relatively rarely enforced. A defendant, forced to choose between a thirty-year sentence if convicted of using a gun in a crime and pleading to a lesser drug offense, is bound to cop to the latter. Some ninety-five per cent of criminal cases in the U.S. are decided by plea bargains—the risk of being convicted of a more serious offense and getting a much longer sentence is a formidable incentive—and so prosecutors can determine another man’s crime and punishment while scarcely setting foot in a courtroom. “Nearly everyone in prison ended up there by signing a piece of paper in a dingy conference room in a county office building,” Pfaff writes.

In a justice system designed to be adversarial, the prosecutor has few adversaries. Though the legendary *Gideon v. Wainwright* decision insisted that people facing jail time have the right to a lawyer, the system of public defenders—and the vast majority of the accused can depend only on a public defender—is simply too overwhelmed to offer them much help. (Pfaff cites the journalist Amy Bach, who once watched an overburdened public defender “plead out” forty-eight clients in a row in a single courtroom.)

Meanwhile, all the rewards for the prosecutor, at any level, are for making more prisoners. Since most prosecutors are elected, they might seem responsive to democratic discipline. In truth, they are so easily reelected that a common path for a successful prosecutor is toward higher office. And the

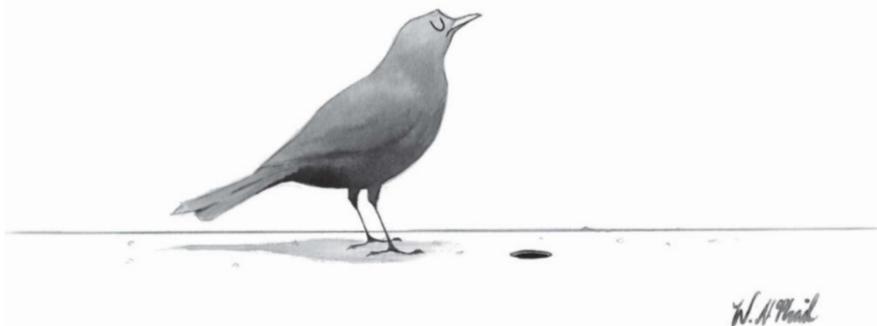
one thing that can cripple a prosecutor's political ascent is a reputation, even if based on only a single case, for being too lenient. In short, our system has huge incentives for brutality, and no incentives at all for mercy.

Add to that the reality that the office of a prosecutor is too often a "black box," where nobody knows anything about the deliberations that produced a particular outcome, and one sees that prosecutors in our time have something like the authority of Inquisitors in the old days of the Church. Though supposedly merely the instruments of investigation, they really hold all the effective power, reporting to no one save God, or their own ambition.

IF PROSECUTORIAL DISCRETION is indeed the cause of the prison epidemic, what can be done about it? Pfaff proposes guidelines that would curb overaggressive charging, and better funding for public defenders; he likes the idea that the costs of housing prisoners would be borne in part by the D.A.'s county budget, not just by the state budget. A solution that Pfaff proposes for the rest of us is to pay more attention to local elections. Instead of just checking off the boxes on our favored party's ballot, as most of us do, we should educate ourselves about the specific record of the prosecutor when he runs for reelection, to be sure that "the person voted into the office has values that align with the electorate's." The problem here is that very few people have the time or the inclination to assess the values of their local prosecutor, if they even know who he or she is.

The other path to reform that Pfaff outlines is, in effect, to care less about crime. Criminal violence, he shows, is "a phase, not a state." Most such prisoners effectively "age out," and, past the age of forty, are unlikely to re-offend. This is one of those statistical truths—like the negligible effect of batting orders in baseball—which everyone who has looked at the numbers knows, and which everyone who refuses to look at the numbers vehemently rejects. The fact is that if we let everyone convicted of a violent crime out of prison on his fortieth birthday there would be little risk for the rest of us. Like lifelong "sex

LATE BIRD HATES WORMS ANYWAY



W.H. Phaid

offenders," violent recidivists are rarer than you might think.

Since this idea is an obvious non-starter, Pfaff advocates a program of "graduated release," in which a small number of inmates would be released at the age of forty, and then tracked, in order to demonstrate to the public how small the actual risk of re-offending is. This program would, of course, be fatally vulnerable to a single Willie Horton: one recidivist would overwhelm, in the public mind, a thousand non-offenders. But it is worth a try. The true cause of crime is being a young man, Pfaff suggests; convincing the public of this is one of the jobs of educators.

PUTTING ASIDE QUARRELS about the specific numbers, one can accept the broad truth of Pfaff's data without necessarily buying into his position completely. The first thing that, say, Michelle Alexander might assert is that not all social sins can be measured by counting. It has been pointed out, for example, that the great majority of gun crimes in America have nothing to do with schoolroom or movie-house massacres or the like. Yet we draw on Newtown and Aurora for moral ammunition against the madness of uncontrolled gun use. Newtown is not what's wrong with American gun policy; but American gun policy is what allows something as wrong as Newtown to happen. "Relatively rare" doesn't mean morally unimportant.

Kindred issues arise with mass incarceration. Even if private prisons account for a relatively small proportion of the prison population, that they are allowed to exist at all is an indictment of our system. Dickens, in writing about the injustice of debtors' prisons, was unaffected by the fact that those institutions were largely in decline by the time he wrote. "Sanity is not statistical," Winston says, in "1984," and morality is not numerical. When we are talking about such immense numbers, the fact that anyone would be imprisoned for a long term for a nonviolent drug offense is a scandal. That anyone would be housed in a prison kept for profit by an entrepreneurial concern is an evil.

Similarly, although the data on differential rates of prosecution for African-Americans and white Americans may, upon closer inspection, betray less bigotry than they suggest at first glance, it would be absurd, as Pfaff recognizes, to look at a typical prison population and deny that it is connected with a history of racial oppression—a history that radically contours our life chances based on our color. Reformers must avoid fanaticism and listen to the facts; but the friends of reform must keep their indignation intact, and not be blinded to suffering by the news that our model of how people suffer should be retuned. "A Robin Redbreast in a Cage," Blake wrote, "Puts all Heaven in a Rage." Liberals should remain indignant about all those cages, even as we argue the particulars of their condition. ♦

THE THEATRE

THE FALL GUYS

Eugene O'Neill's vexing outsiders.

BY HILTON ALS



Obi Abili's bravura performance in "The Emperor Jones" has no cheap flourishes.

EUGENE O'NEILL GREW up in a show-business milieu, which means that, unlike most white Americans who were born at the end of the nineteenth century, he was exposed to different kinds of people early in his life. Actually, O'Neill's understanding of difference began at home. His father, the actor James O'Neill, was born in Ireland and made his way in the United States at a time when anti-Irish discrimination was at its height. Before O'Neill addressed that experience directly in his late masterpiece "Long Day's Journey Into Night," which was published posthumously in 1956, he produced a number of narratives about other types of male outsiders, the most interesting and vexing of whom are black, or ostensibly black. As with other modernists, including Gertrude Stein, in her 1909 story "Melanchtha," the reality of

black-American life wasn't O'Neill's primary concern. He was more focussed on the question of how to make a "new" language live in an old form, and what could be more dramatic for his largely white audiences than black bodies exhibiting their distinctly American suffering and triumph? O'Neill was drawn to exoticism even as he empathized with marginalization, and his dramaturgy is shot through with contradictions. He was an unusual product of his time, but that doesn't mean he was exempt from its backward thinking, which makes his portraits of black men under duress, in one-act plays such as "Thirst" (1914), "The Dreamy Kid" (1919), and "The Emperor Jones" (1920), at once unbelievable, riveting, clichéd, politically astute, and bizarre.

O'Neill wrote "The Emperor Jones" (in revival at the Irish Repertory) within

a matter of weeks after his father's death, drawing on a number of inspirations to give life to his protagonist, Brutus Jones. (Joseph Conrad's "Heart of Darkness" was clearly one of them; O'Neill was a Conrad fan, and one wonders how much of James Wait, the West Indian sailor in the terribly titled "The Nigger of the 'Narcissus,'" there is in Brutus as well.) Divided into eight short scenes—the show runs about seventy minutes—"The Emperor Jones" takes place, O'Neill writes, on "an island in the West Indies as yet not self-determined by White Marines. The form of native government is, for the time being, an Empire." Brutus (Obi Abili) is its ruler. Before we meet him, though, we encounter Henry Smithers (Andy Murray), a white Cockney who represents the dying days of English empire. Unaccountably angry and smug, the scraggly Smithers is Brutus's cynical, conniving cohort. Together, they have ripped off the inhabitants of this island, and now the drums are beating to signal an end to Brutus's reign: he has taxed the islanders beyond endurance, and they want him dead. Smithers is O.K. with that; he's always resented Brutus, this black man who is more fearless, more intelligent, and more crooked than he is. (Brutus has stuffed his money into offshore accounts.)

A former Pullman porter convicted of murder in the U.S., Brutus convinced the islanders that he was some sort of god—their god—when he managed to dodge a bullet early in his stay there. Only a silver bullet could kill him, he told them, and he has one in his gun now—to blow off his own head if his subjects try to get at him. That's not going to happen, though. Brutus has beaten fate before, and he'll beat it again. The subsequent scenes amount to a monologue, in which Brutus, lost in the forest, battles nature-as-voodoo, the drums pounding offstage all the while, like a nagging enemy whispering "Failure" in his ear. Brutus's body and words fuse into a force that incorporates reason, certainly, but there's something else at work, too, in Abili's bravura performance, which doesn't come off as "bravura" and has no cheap flourishes. How to name it? Abili plays Brutus's subconscious as if it were his reality—and, of course, it is—while making the script both more and less than it is; it's a catalyst for his transformations.

In the theatre, we tend to take words

at face value, since they tell the story. But how could O'Neill take people at their word, given the home he came from—all that pretense, starring an actor father and a mother who was addicted to morphine? He didn't have the luxury of trust, and distrust is what Abili plays: the distrust that black men feel in a society that they must con in order to survive, even if it means turning a cold shoulder to other blacks. Brutus isn't so much a race man as a capitalist, and he's learned a lot from being thought of—at least, in the white world—as a commodity himself. The oppressed learn from their oppressors; Brutus's language can be oppressive, too. O'Neill's brilliance was to show us how Brutus's idea of the truth unravels even as he thinks he's telling the truth. He has no power in the larger world (the world that Smithers stands for), and he wrestles continually with his desire for it. Abili makes this clear in the way he handles O'Neill's text: he strips it of its "poor black" inflections, thereby claiming his own voice, as an actor—as a black actor.

The Wooster Group's director, Elizabeth LeCompte, in several stagings of the work had the beautiful and reckless actress Kate Valk play Brutus in black-face, pronouncing all the "de's" and "dem's" of O'Neill's lines. I think one of the points LeCompte was trying to make was that O'Neill's dated script was what it was, a road map to a strange Expressionist theatre, on top of which she layered her own brand of Expressionism. The director of this production, Ciarán O'Reilly, takes a different approach. While O'Neill was working on the play, he was considerably influenced by the argument made by the legendary stage designer Gordon Craig, in his book "The Theatre Advancing," that, in doing away with masks, pantomime, and dance, the theatre had lost its magic. O'Reilly throws all of that back in. (Charlie Corcoran designed the corny set; the much more successful lighting is by Brian Nason.) The result is mostly cumbersome and "artisanal," but, in the end, this unconvincing backdrop serves to show us Abili's performance in relief: he takes O'Neill's imagined blackness and makes it real.

LIKE "THE EMPEROR Jones," "The Hairy Ape," which premiered in 1922, is one of O'Neill's more directly political plays. It is also awkward, false,

and true. "The Hairy Ape" (an Old Vic London co-production at the Park Avenue Armory) begins at sea and ends in a cage. When it comes to the former, at least, Robert (Yank) Smith (the stupendous Bobby Cannavale), a tough-talking, anti-intellectualizing stoker, who shovels coal in the boiler room of a ship heading for New York, feels that he has some control. Coated in grease and pride at what his body can do, Yank is both a man and an Expressionistic impression of a worker, an embodiment of the playwright's ideas about theatrical naturalism and how to elevate it beyond the prosenium and make it deeper, spookier.

Up on deck, a spoiled girl named Mildred Douglas (a terrific Catherine Combs) stands with her aunt (the equally great Becky Ann Baker), complaining about her privilege. She's tired of being the daughter of a steel industrialist, whose product was, in fact, used to build the boat that Yank feels he's the true captain of: isn't it his labor that makes it go? Hankering for something "real," Mildred enlists the Second Officer (Mark Junek) to take her belowdecks, where, on catching sight of Yank, she screams and faints; to her, he's a "beast" in human form. Despite her reaction, Yank can't get over Mildred's whiteness—her unstained skin seems unreal amid the murk and grief that have overrun his mind. Disembarking in New York, Yank encounters a cold world of heartless sophistication and greed that repeatedly rejects him as "primitive."

Like O'Reilly, the director, Richard Jones, is interested in masks—in returning O'Neill to a dramatic style that inspired him in the nineteen-twenties. But Jones has a bigger palette, which allows him to fully exploit O'Neill's operatic urges. O'Reilly is a more careful director: he clings to O'Neill's narrative, while Jones blows it off the page with one idea after another. Reading "The Hairy Ape," you'd never imagine what Jones comes up with, and those surprises are the reason the production is such a thrill. O'Reilly's is a respectable talent; Jones's is genius. By engineering this spectacle of O'Neill's tragedy, he makes the playwright's twenties modernism modern now, just for us, and it's astonishing. ♦

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WONDER WOMEN

"Ghost in the Shell" and *"Graduation."*

BY ANTHONY LANE



Scarlett Johansson plays the part-machine Major, in Rupert Sanders's movie.

THE NEW Scarlett Johansson movie, "Ghost in the Shell," is upon us, sheathed in controversy. Rupert Sanders's film is adapted from the anime work of the same name, directed by Mamoru Oshii, in 1995. Fans of anime are ferociously purist and loyal, and for them, I suspect, the very notion of converting Oshii's masterpiece (as it is deemed to be) into a live-action Hollywood remake smells of both travesty and sellout.

Such scorn is as nothing, however, compared with the wrath that has greeted the casting of Johansson. In the original, which started life as a graphic novel, her character was called Major Kusanagi, but in Sanders's movie she is referred to mostly as Major. In other words, although the tale is still set in an Asian city, the heroine has been Westernized. Why not hire an Asian performer? The brutal answer to that, I imagine, would be: A production this vast and costly demands a name from the top rank, and there are currently no English-speaking Asian actresses on the A-list. And the indignant answer to that would be: Yes,

that's the point—only by placing an Asian star in the spotlight will you buck the system, break the habit, and right a persistent wrong.

And so the rumpus fumes on. Meanwhile, in the middle of it all, we have a movie. It unfolds in the future—a less convincing future, it must be said, than that foretold by "Blade Runner," with its jostling cityscapes. The exteriors of "Ghost in the Shell," by contrast, don't feel dramatically lived in. They feel like sets. It is behind closed doors, rather, that the film stirs. We learn that the frontier between people and machines has collapsed. Major is a human brain housed in a synthetic body; when she strips, you can see the faint joins between panels of skin, like state lines on a map. There are sockets in the back of her neck, allowing a scientist, such as Dr. Ouelet (Juliette Binoche), who designed Major, to download the contents of her consciousness. I would love to report that these consist of things like "Must buy milk," or "Call Jeff re: Thursday lunch?" but no. Major is part of a government security outfit, Section 9, which re-

quires her to launch herself from the crests of high buildings, crash exquisitely through windows, slaughter enemies of the state by the roomful, and turn invisible at will, as if she had stolen a cloak from Harry Potter. In short, a busy schedule.

One thorn in Major's side is Cutter (Peter Ferdinando), a corporate villain, and a dull one to boot. Also causing trouble is a hacker known as Kuze (Michael Carmen Pitt). More enticing are her comrades, not least her boss, Aramaki, who is played by Takeshi (Beat) Kitano—the fabled star and director of pared-down Japanese thrillers, who, toward the end of the film, spins the chamber of his revolver and provides "Ghost in the Shell" with its sole flourish of indisputable cool. Then, there's Batou (Pilou Asbæk), Major's partner in Section 9, who, after losing the use of his eyes in an explosion, is soon kitted out with a replacement: two little metal roundels, complete with X-ray vision. He seems pleased, and the story is littered with these touchingly plausible moments, as men and women reveal, or rejoice in, their technological ease. One of them unclips part of her face, the better to lock into some gizmo. Becoming part cyborg, or having memory implants, is no big deal. Think of it as a nose job for the soul.

Oshii's movie was, like its protagonist, a hybrid. The firefights and chase sequences made way for unhurried ruminations on the malleable fate of the self. No surprise, perhaps, since the title echoes "the ghost in the machine," a phrase deployed by Gilbert Ryle, the British philosopher, to cast aspersions on Cartesian dualism. The idea of Descartes settling down with a tub of Gummy Bears to watch Scarlett Johansson is certainly appealing, and he might well approve of the new film, which is modelled—sometimes shot for shot—on the 1995 version, and which proposes that minds can indeed be popped in and out of bodies like batteries in a flashlight. Sadly, as the plot proceeds, Sanders begins to duck these bothersome concepts. He picks a more sentimental path, which leads Major, following the example of Jason Bourne, on a quest to discover who she truly is.

It is this rage for authenticity, more than the leading lady, that transforms

“Ghost in the Shell” into an American product. Here’s an irony: if anything preserves the unnerving quiddity and strangeness of the Japanese movie, it is Johansson. Major slots into other recent roles of hers, in “Under the Skin,” “Lucy,” and “Her,” to create a buzz of impatience with the merely human. Lay aside racial identities for a second: think alternative species, digital personalities, and robots—otherness of the most radical variety. Such is the zone that Johansson patrols, and nothing is more haunting, in “Ghost in the Shell,” than the scene in which she picks up a woman—tall, black, and stately—on the street, and takes her home. Each is unsure whether the other is false flesh or the real thing. “What are you?” the woman asks. That is the question.

A HOLE IS DUG in the hard ground, and a stone is thrown through a window. With those two actions, neither of them explained, “Graduation” gets under way. The scene is a housing project in a provincial Romanian town. A doctor named Romeo (Adrian Titieni) lives there with his wife, Magda (Lia Bognar), and their daughter, Eliza (Maria Dragus), a student at the local high school, who has won a scholarship to a British university. She still needs to gain top grades in her final exams, but that’s not much of a stretch for Eliza: she is clever and determined, though not quite as determined as her father, who has spurred her on for years, even paying for private tuition, so that she can do what her parents never managed to accomplish—fly the nest and land in a better place. Behind every turn of the plot lies an overwhelming plea: How

do you get the hell out of purgatory?

Near the school, with the exams looming, an unknown assailant tries to rape Eliza at knifepoint. She fends him off, but hurts her arm—her writing arm—in doing so, and the ordeal leaves her woefully shaken. No allowance, however, is made for her distress, and she duly falls short in her first exam. Her grades, and therefore her entire future, are jeopardized, and Romeo, in desperation, lends assistance. On the advice of an old friend, now the chief of police, he meets with Bulai (Petre Ciubotaru), the deputy mayor, who is sick, and bumps him up the list for surgery. In return, Bulai has a word with Eliza’s principal, who agrees to arrange for her papers to be, let us say, generously marked. We see at once how the system works, and how its wheels are greased; we realize, too, that Romeo will be trapped inside it, and chewed up.

“Graduation,” written and directed by Cristian Mungiu, is a mirthless farce. All that can go wrong does go wrong, and the process is both compelling and close to unwatchable. The bitterest joke is that Romeo is not very good at corruption, and, in his job, he suffers from the terrible burden of honesty. “Oh, you’re the kind of doctor who tells his patient the truth,” Bulai says, adding, “Don’t tell me you live off your salary.” Later, he proffers him an envelope of cash. Everyone but Romeo, it seems, is on the take, and Mungiu is careful not just to plant evidence of that norm—the Volvo S.U.V., for instance, that the principal drives—but also to insure that we don’t, for a minute, mistake Romeo for a paragon of virtue. In private, the guy is a perfumed soul. He’s

sleeping with Sandra (Malina Manovici), a tattooed teacher at Eliza’s school, although Sandra has already had enough of the subterfuge, and, when he finally spends a night at her apartment, she gives him a bowl of soup and makes him bed down on the couch. Romeo, bespectacled, potbellied, and bone-weary, is not much of a Romeo.

Mungiu’s tale, in its tightening of the moral vise, is an obvious successor to “4 Months, 3 Weeks & 2 Days,” his masterwork of 2007. But it’s worth reaching further back, to a movie like “The Oak” (1992), directed by Lucian Pintilie, one of the great Romanian filmmakers. That, too, has a dutiful daughter at its heart, as well as a helpful doctor, except that he is a cynic with an impish grin, who knows that the world, amid the detritus of Communism, has gone mad. The story is a picaresque, half revelling in the chaos, and alive to the thought of a future seeded with hope, whereas the residents of “Graduation” have either given up or caved in. Magda sits quietly with her cigarettes, so faded a figure that she could be made of smoke. Twice, without warning, grown men cry. The bleakness is relieved by the rituals of tension—spot the many dogs that stray into view, and listen for the smashing of glass—and by Mungiu’s baleful pastiche of a happy ending. On a sunny day, a bunch of kids stand together to have their photograph snapped by Romeo. “Happier!” he urges them. Courageous smiles are mustered. Then the screen goes black. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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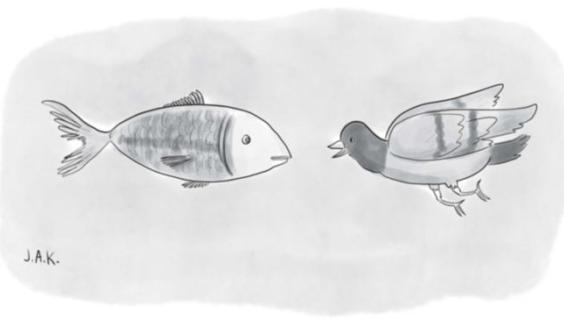
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Joe Dator, must be received by Sunday, April 9th. The finalists in the March 27th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the April 24th 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



"One of us is about to die."
Rachel Rosengard, Queens, N.Y.

"I didn't think the oceans could rise any higher."
Ginmann Bai, Chicago, Ill.

"But where would we raise the kids?"
Gary Schonfeld, New York City

THE WINNING CAPTION



"Getting past the guard is easy. How do we remove the paintings?"
Clinton Guthrie, New York City

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Ben Brantley, *The New York Times*



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This compassionate but clear-eyed play throbs with heartfelt life.”

Charles Isherwood, *The New York Times*

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SWEAT has come at a breathtakingly timely moment.”

Terry Teachout, *THE WALL STREET JOURNAL*

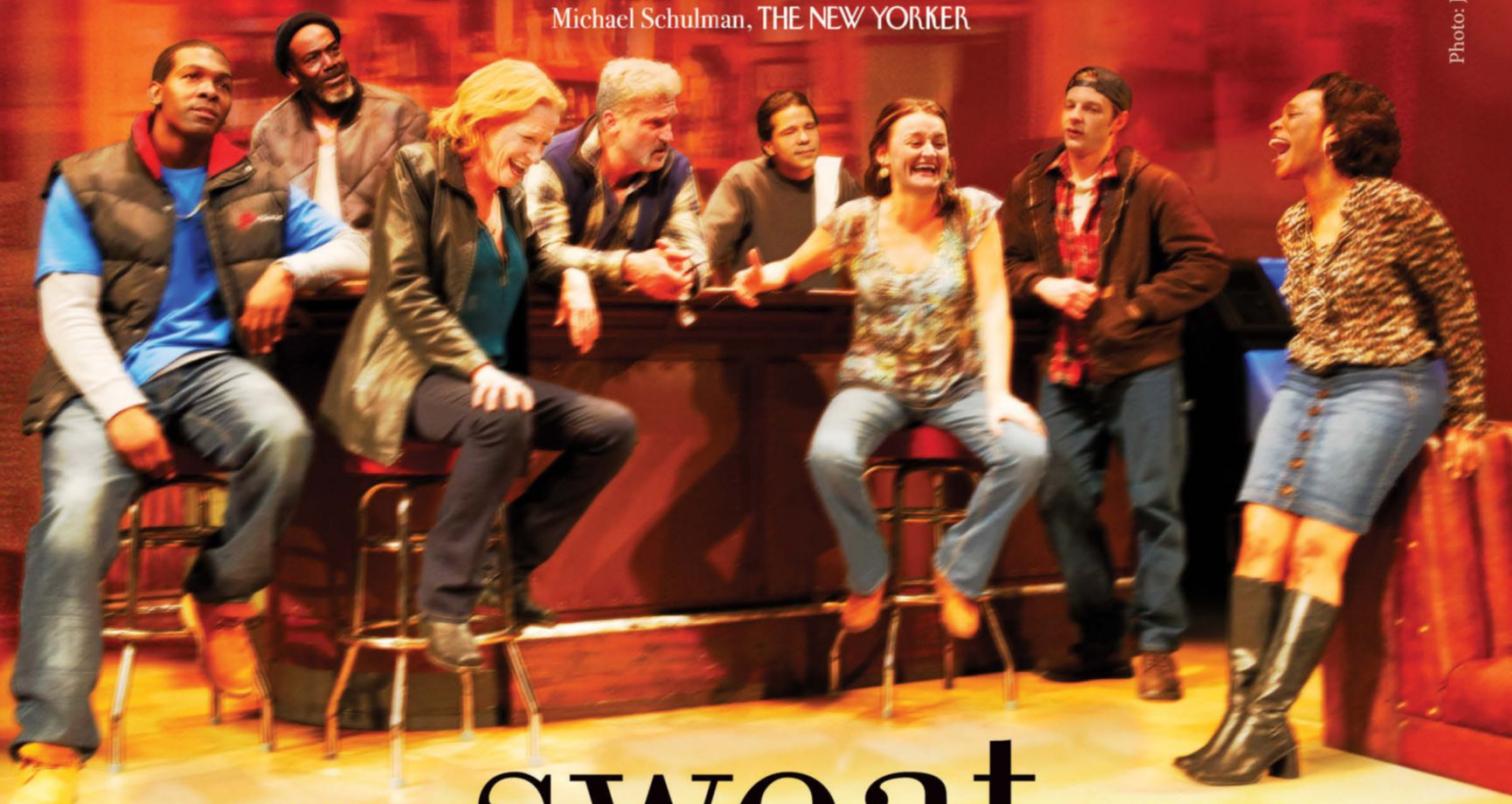


“Under Kate Whoriskey’s emotionally vibrant staging, SWEAT is masterful, passionate and necessary.”

David Cote, *TimeOut NEW YORK*

“A Theatrical Landmark.”

Michael Schulman, *THE NEW YORKER*



A NEW PLAY BY
LYNN NOTTAGE

Sweat

DIRECTED BY
KATE WHORISKEY