

The Atlantic

The Puppet Master
of the Alt-Right p. 40

A Skydive From
the Stratosphere
p. 54



LOLA WAS 18 WHEN MY GRANDFATHER GAVE HER TO
MY MOTHER AS A GIFT. WE BROUGHT HER TO AMERICA.
FOR 56 YEARS, SHE TOILED IN OUR HOME.

MY FAMILY'S SLAVE

BY ALEX TIZON



Will Trump Destroy
the Dollar?

How Pixar Lost Its Way

Can Child Psychopaths
Be Cured?

How *Twin Peaks*
Invented Modern TV



A large central image shows a close-up of a person's hand holding a small insect under a magnifying glass. This image is surrounded by a dense grid of smaller, diverse photographs. Some of the visible scenes include: a group of people in a workshop; a woman in a lab coat working in a laboratory; a drone flying over a landscape; a man with glasses looking at the camera; a person working on a laptop in an office; a deer in a field; a woman looking through a microscope; a person working on a computer; and a city skyline at night.

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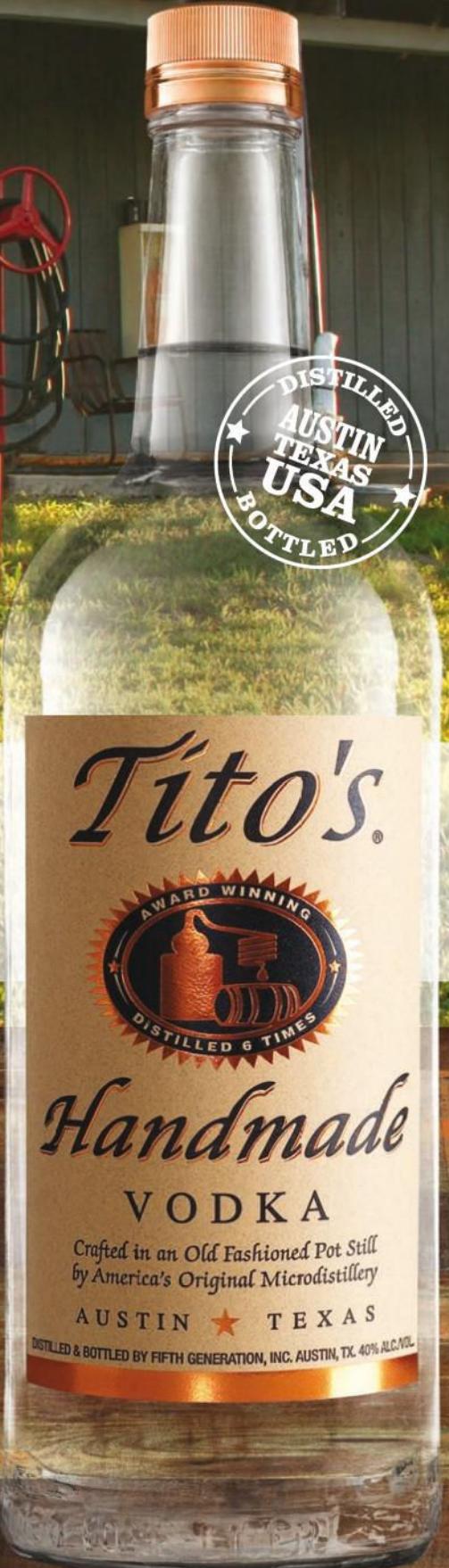


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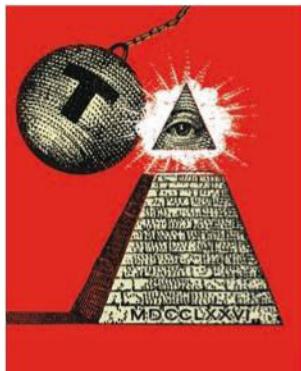
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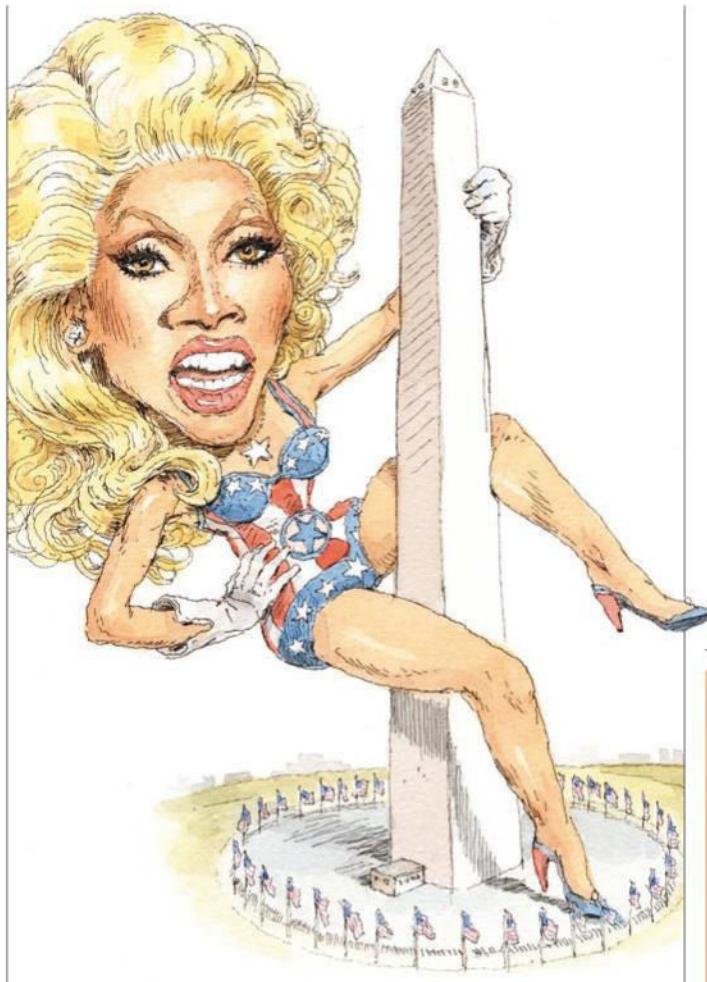


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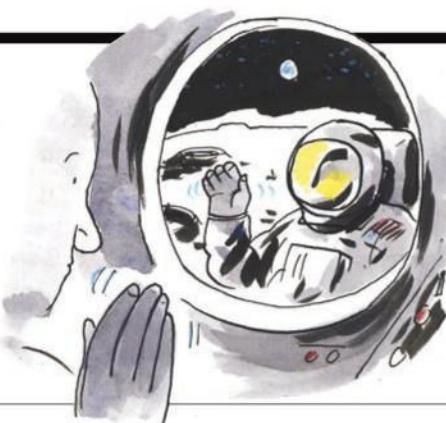


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"IT'S NOT JUST STREETLIGHTS. IT'S ABOUT A SENSE OF COMMUNITY."

ODIS JONES
FORMER CEO, PUBLIC LIGHTING AUTHORITY OF DETROIT

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*On the Cover*Photograph by
Alan Berner



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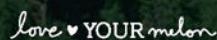
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A REPORTER'S STORY

THE PULITZER PRIZE-WINNING reporter Alex Tizon built an exemplary career by listening to certain types of people—forgotten people, people on the margins, people who had never before been asked for their stories. Alex's wife, Melissa Tizon, told me recently that her husband was always impatient with small talk, because he believed that all people had within them an epic story, and he wanted to hear those epic stories—and then help tell them to the world. "Somewhere in the tangle of the subject's burden and the subject's desire is your story," he liked to say.

His mission aligned well with *The Atlantic*'s, and we were pleased to publish, in the April 2016 issue, "In the Land of Missing Persons," a beautifully rendered story about ordinary people who mysteriously disappeared in the Alaska wilderness. And we were thrilled when Alex offered us the chance to publish a story he had been waiting much of his life to tell, the remarkable tale of Lola, the woman who was his family's secret slave in the Philippines, and who remained their slave when they moved to America.

And we were heartbroken to learn on Friday, March 24, that Alex Tizon had died. His story editor here at the magazine, Denise Kersten Wills, found out late that evening that Alex had been found dead in his home in Eugene, Oregon. He had died in his sleep, of natural causes. He was 57 years old.

His death is a tragedy for Melissa; their daughter, Maya; his daughter from an earlier marriage, Dylan; and Alex's brothers and sisters. His death represents a loss for his students at the University of Oregon, where he was a beloved journalism professor. And his death is a loss for the editors and readers of this magazine, who were just coming to know Alex and his gifts.

Alex was a much-admired reporter in the Pacific Northwest. He shared a Pulitzer Prize in 1997 while on the staff of *The Seattle*

Times, and he served as the Seattle bureau chief of the *Los Angeles Times*. He was also a well-reviewed author; his 2014 memoir, *Big Little Man: In Search of My Asian Self*, was a self-lacerating examination of the complexities, humiliations, and small victories of Asian men trying to adjust to life in America.

His interest in the lives of people situated far outside the mainstream was abiding and deep. When he came to us with the enthralling, vexing story of his immigrant family and its terrible secret, we recognized that this was the sort of journalism *The Atlantic* has practiced since its inception. The magazine was founded in 1857 by a group of New England abolitionists eager to advance the cause of universal freedom. When I first read a draft of Alex's piece, I imagined that the founders—people like Ralph Waldo Emerson, Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, and Harriet Beecher Stowe—would not have believed that 154 years after Abraham Lincoln issued the Emancipation Proclamation, humans would still be enslaving other humans, in America and across the planet. The eradication of all forms of slavery remains an unfinished goal of civilization, and of this magazine, and stories like Alex's help us understand slavery's awful persistence.

Melissa told Denise and me that Alex wanted, more than anything else, to bring Lola's story to the world. "This was his ultimate story," Melissa said. "He was trying to write it for five or six years. He struggled with it. But when he started writing it for *The Atlantic*, he stopped struggling. He wrote it with such ease."

Alex did not know that we would be putting his piece on the cover of this issue; he died the day we made that decision, before we had a chance to tell him. His death, quite obviously, could have derailed publication of what turned out to be his final story, but his family, led by Melissa and his siblings,

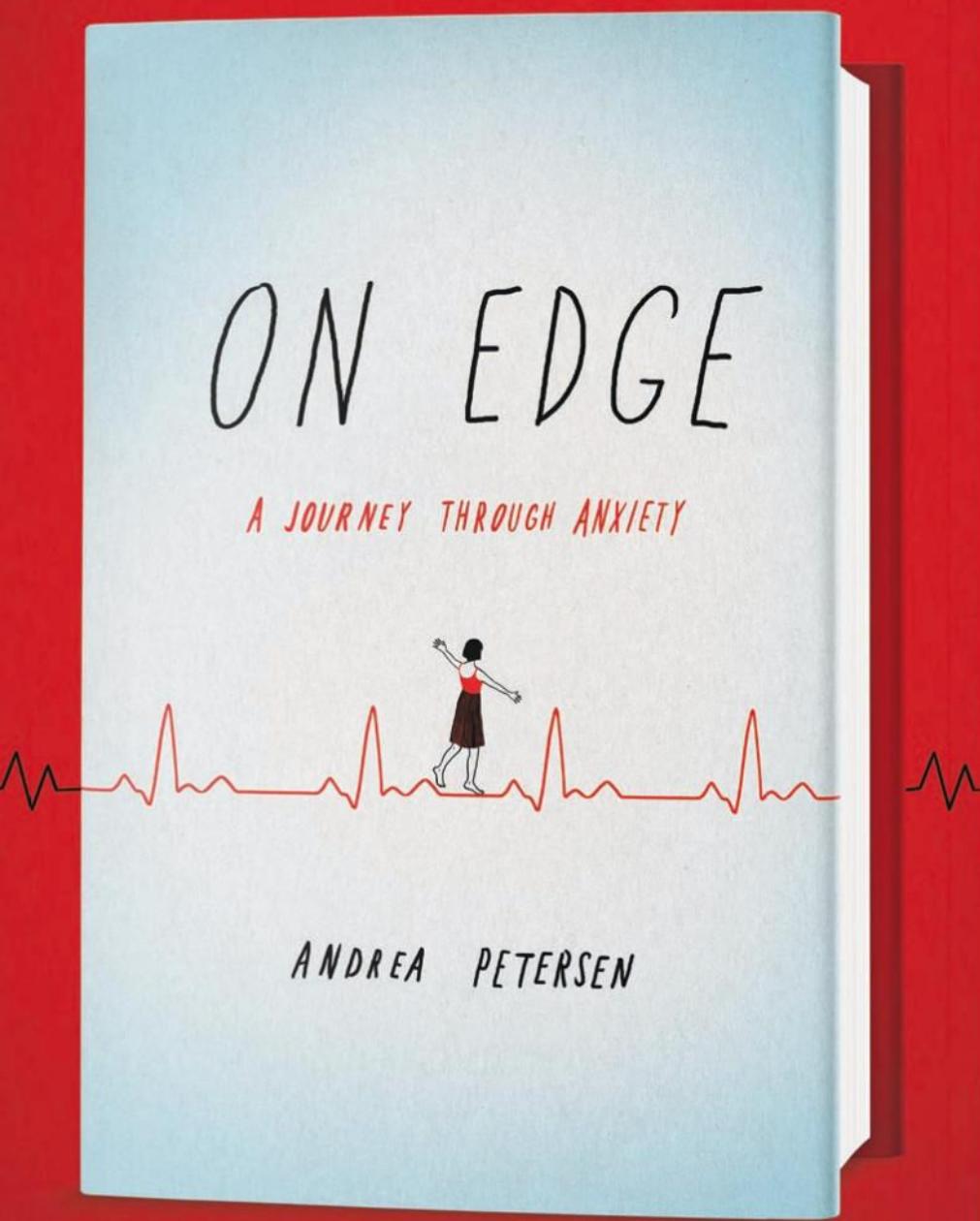
worked with us during this uniquely trying time to make publication possible. We are grateful to them. And we are grateful that Alex shared his story—his epic story—with us.

—Jeffrey Goldberg

*Alex Tizon at a journalism workshop in 1991.
He believed that all people have within them an epic story.*

“This brave, hopeful, sensitive account, grounded in the latest neuroscience, will be both enlightening and comforting to the millions who struggle with anxiety.”

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—Former First Lady
ROSALYNN CARTER,
co-founder, The Carter Center

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THE CONVERSATION

RESPONSES & REVERBERATIONS

Sexism in Silicon Valley

For the April cover story, Liza Mundy asked, "Why Is Silicon Valley So Awful to Women?" She explored the multimillion-dollar efforts of high-profile tech companies to improve conditions for female employees, some of which have been unsuccessful and some of which still hold out promise for positive changes.



It was terrible to read in Liza Mundy's article that women in tech fields today are facing the same kinds and level of discrimination that my women colleagues and I experienced in physics in the 1960s and '70s. I agree with Ms. Mundy that the issue remains most intractable in fields where genius is celebrated; women and minorities are seen as less likely to possess that elusive quality, and by extrapolation to be less competent generally. A professor I had hoped to work with in graduate school candidly told me that he couldn't add me to his research group, because he'd already agreed to hire another woman and the group couldn't tolerate two of us.

One tactic that we used then might be useful in tech companies. Gather as many technical women from all levels of your organization as possible and invite the men in responsible positions to join you for lunch, one at a time. This allows each man to see how it feels to be

the only man in the room for at least a brief period. Although it isn't possible to quantify the effects of these lunches, they did produce some interesting results. One admiral at the Office of Naval Research was so discomfited that he talked nonstop for an hour and a half without touching his food. Lunch groups also send a subtle message throughout the organization that women will support one another.

Kristi Hathaway, Ph.D.
DEALE, MD.

Having females leading in the C-suite makes all the difference. Leadership starts at the top. Role modeling transforms organizations. My experience informs me that the "rule of three" is magic: One female leader is not enough to change the culture. Three begins the process.

Female leadership is perhaps one of the only areas where the concept of trickle-down economics works.

Anne Bonaparte
MILL VALLEY, CALIF.

This article could have been written about any industry or professional group. I despair sometimes of living to see the day when men get their heads on straight and recognize that our greatest natural resource is our people. Surely refusing to allow half of that resource to reach its full potential is foolishness carried to the extreme.

Robert Blackshaw
GLENWOOD, MD.

Containing Trump

In the March issue, Jonathan Rauch argued that while Donald Trump might try to govern as an authoritarian, civil society's response would determine his success. He noted a decline in support for democracy in America (and around the world), but pointed to encouraging signs—such as the creation of groups like After Trump—that the public will hold government accountable.

Jonathan Rauch is alarmed at the proportion of people in the U.S. saying it would be good or very good for the "Army to

rule." He sees this as a decline in support for democracy, especially among the young. Perhaps, but it might be a decline in support specifically for U.S.-style democracy.

The will of the majority is routinely subverted at the federal level these days. By design, rural states are overrepresented in the U.S. Senate. The Electoral College has overruled the popular vote twice in the past five presidential elections, and ever since some states withdrew electors' right to vote their conscience, the Electoral College does nothing to prevent a demagogue from assuming the presidency. Gerrymandering congressional districts has become such a science that in 2012, more votes were cast across the nation for Democrats than for Republicans, but Republicans retained a strong majority in the House of Representatives. This phenomenon has happened

Continued on page 12

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Fixing Tech's "Loss Points"

Prompted by the April cover story, The Atlantic's Gillian B. White interviewed Melinda Gates about women in technology. Here are portions of their conversation. To read the full Q&A, visit TheAtlantic.com.

White: What's at risk if more women don't get incorporated into computer science and tech?

Gates: I think we'll have so much hidden bias coded into the system that we won't even realize all the places that we have it. If you don't have a diverse workforce programming artificial intelligence and thinking about the data sets to feed in, and how to look at a particular program, you're going to have so much bias in the system, you're going to have a hard time rolling it back later or taking it out.

White: You mentioned being an undergrad and feeling like gender equity would increase in the world of computer science. Why do you think that, in large part, hasn't happened?

Gates: I don't think anyone knows for sure. We know there are these gaps—what I call loss points—that start all the way at the kindergarten level. Then you see it again at elementary, you see it in middle school, high school, college, and then going into industry. And when you have any kind of pipeline that's leaky in so many places, you can't plug just one piece of it. So I think we have to do certain things at each of those ...

I think in the industry, if women come out of computer-science [majors], and they're successful but they don't feel welcomed, that's another place you have a huge loss point.

White: Sometimes claims about gender discrimination or leaks about the way women are talked about in the industry make me wonder whether male leaders are really committed to change, or if that's just public-facing rhetoric. Do you think they are?

Gates: I don't work in all those companies, but I can say this: I know some of the larger companies are very committed to it. I mean, Microsoft, Facebook—they want great technical women and they are making changes ... They're all going after a very small pool of computer-science women. They

know their products will be better if they have women on those teams. They want a more diverse team. They also know that once they recruit them, retaining them is hard, because not only is another place trying to recruit them away but they also are learning that those women, if they're the only [woman] on the team, will report not feeling great about their work.

White: How are you thinking about intersectionality as you pursue gender diversity? Computer science seems like one of these areas where there could be the danger of moving the needle for affluent women, or white and Asian women who are already in the space in higher numbers, but leaving out black women, Latinas, and those who don't come from backgrounds where computer science is as easily accessible.

Gates: I think we have to reach people where they are. If we only go to the elite institutions that are doing a good job of pulling in computer-science majors, you're right, you're going to get a certain type of woman coming in. But if you make sure it spreads to all institutions, institutions that have a very diverse student body, then I think you'll get diversity more across the board.

White: You've become most well known for the significant humanitarian work that the Gates Foundation does. Why is gender diversity in tech an issue that's critical enough to divert some of your attention?

Gates: Tech underlies everything we do. It's game-changing in every single field across the board. It's almost like asking yourself the question of, well, what if we didn't have any women scientists in biology? Well, I can tell you we wouldn't be studying women's health if we didn't have amazing women biologists. If we don't have women in the tech space, we won't even be asking ourselves some of the right questions. I can't imagine a world without women in tech.

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in a number of state legislatures, too. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell unquestionably thwarted the intent of the Constitution with his shameful treatment of Barack Obama's Supreme Court nominee Merrick Garland, and has suffered no ill consequences whatsoever.

These are the only features of American democracy young people have ever known; is anyone surprised that they view it as a sham? If a new democracy somewhere in the developing world declared that it was okay for the party in power to redraw district boundaries solely for the purpose of staying in power, how would we react?

I submit that America has been running the beta-test version of democracy all these years. The U.S. was the first modern democracy, but, like an initial version of software, there are bugs in the system. In addition to the problems I've already listed, the U.S. split the legislative and executive functions but combined the head of state with the head of government. We made it difficult for government to get anything done (checks and balances) but also to remove officeholders when they fail to perform. Other countries installed "upgraded" parliamentary versions of democracy, in which the heads of state and government are kept separate, and the governing majority has the power to get things done. If leaders fail, they can quickly be removed through a vote of no confidence.

The parliamentary system is far from perfect, but it is much more efficient than our perpetual gridlock.

Republicans have carried the popular vote in a presidential election exactly once in the past 28 years, but all the "bugs" of U.S. democracy are currently working in their favor. They are not about to agree to give up those advantages. As such, democracy in the U.S. will not change—unless, of course, the generals take over. To be clear: I'm not advocating such a thing. But I can see why young people may view it as no worse than the status quo.

Patrick Leach
HOUSTON, TEXAS

Athens as Analogy

In April's "Making Athens Great Again," Rebecca Newberger Goldstein looked to Plato and ancient Athens for an example of how a citizen responds when a democracy that prides itself on being exceptional betrays its highest principles.

Analogizing from the ancient past can be fun, but it often reveals more about the analogist than either the past or the present. Although she never mentions the president by name, Rebecca Newberger Goldstein sees the election of Donald Trump as a reactionary repudiation of all that makes America good. In her view, America's election of Trump is akin to Athens's execution of Socrates and, by extension, reason and virtue. Socrates's crime? Pointing out

THE BIG QUESTION

On TheAtlantic.com, readers answered May's Big Question and voted on one another's responses. Here are the top vote-getters.

Q: What was the most significant environmental catastrophe of all time?

5. The advent of the Anthropocene epoch, which ushered in human-induced environmental disasters like mass extinction, worldwide pollution, and climate change, posing as a prelude to Earth's sixth extinction.

— Dan Fredricks

4. The Bhopal gas-leak disaster in 1984, in which hundreds of thousands of people were exposed to methyl isocyanate gas and other chemicals.

— Claire B. Ruben

3. It was, is, and will be the melting of Arctic sea ice.

— Gerald Bazer

2. The end-Permian extinction, nicknamed **the Great Dying**, when a staggering number of species died out. All life on Earth today is descended from the small percentage of species that survived.

— Toni Bal

1. Getting hooked on burning fossil fuels as gas and for electricity and heating.

— Patrik Dahl

to his fellow Athenians their moral arrogance.

But when it comes to moral arrogance, it's pretty hard to top Hillary Clinton's ill-fated presidential campaign, dripping with Periclean superiority as Clinton famously castigated her opponent's supporters as "deplorables." Here is another reading of ancient history and modern politics: The 2016 election was the Peloponnesian War and, despite its superior culture, Athens again lost. The coastal elites, like the seafaring Athenians, cosmopolitan and supremely self-satisfied, confident of victory and the rightness of their

cause, smugly dismissed their less cultured, less worldly countrymen in the hinterland and were openly contemptuous of their brutish leader. This hubris has brought us to where we are now. What's more, defeat has done little to quell moral superiority. The left still clings to its dogmas and will brook no discussion, let alone dissent. ("No, you pro-life so-called feminists, you can't march with us.")

Where does Plato come out in all this? While Ms. Goldstein talks about Plato's dialogues, conspicuously absent is any specific mention of his *Republic*, which—with its militaristic caste, the

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guardians, controlling political power; its reliance on the Noble Lie (alternative facts?); and its censorship of poets—resembles Sparta more than Athens. It's as if after his sojourn abroad, Plato returned home to tell his fellow Athenians, "Since we couldn't beat them, we might as well join them."

Joe Borini

NEW YORK, N.Y.

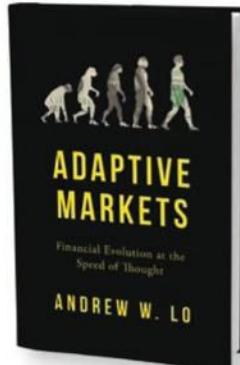
Rebecca Newberger Goldstein replies:

Plato's unique place in the Western philosophical canon is not a matter of the adequacy of every solution he proposed but rather of the profundity and continued relevance of the problems he unearthed. Among these problems none is more timely than figuring out how we, prone to unreason and factionalism, can best live together in a civil society that will promote the flourishing of all. The proposals that we find distasteful in the Republic—the censorship of the arts, one (and only one) Noble Lie—were extreme measures intended to meet the extreme defect Plato detected in human nature: our susceptibility to an irrationality that can push us toward injustice and disaster. It was a first attempt to think out a society that would suppress what is worst in us, including our turning politics into a team sport, as when major policies are equated with minor gaffes.

Joe Borini gets one aspect of Plato's utopia flagrantly wrong: The guardians are not military soldiers on the Spartan model but rather thinker-statesmen (and some of them philosopher-kings) who have undergone decades of education, becoming not only knowledgeable but also, more important, purified of narrow self-interest. To clinch the deal, Plato suggested that these thinker-statesmen not be allowed to hold private property, a negative inducement for would-be leaders of the wrong type.

Here, too, Plato was pondering a question whose answer continues to elude us: How do we arrange our political system to attract to positions of great power those who will not abuse it?

To contribute to The Conversation, please email letters@theatlantic.com. Include your full name, city, and state.



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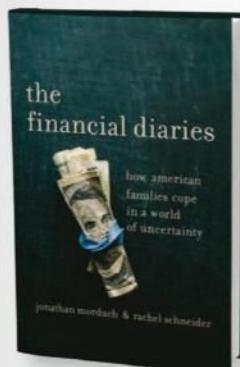
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Andrew W. Lo

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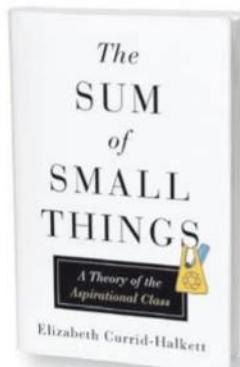
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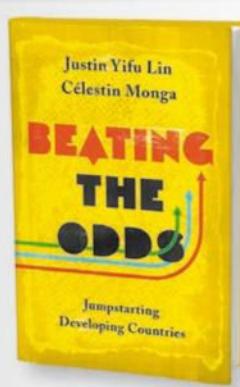
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IDEAS & PROVOCATIONS

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—Jude Stewart,
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ECONOMY

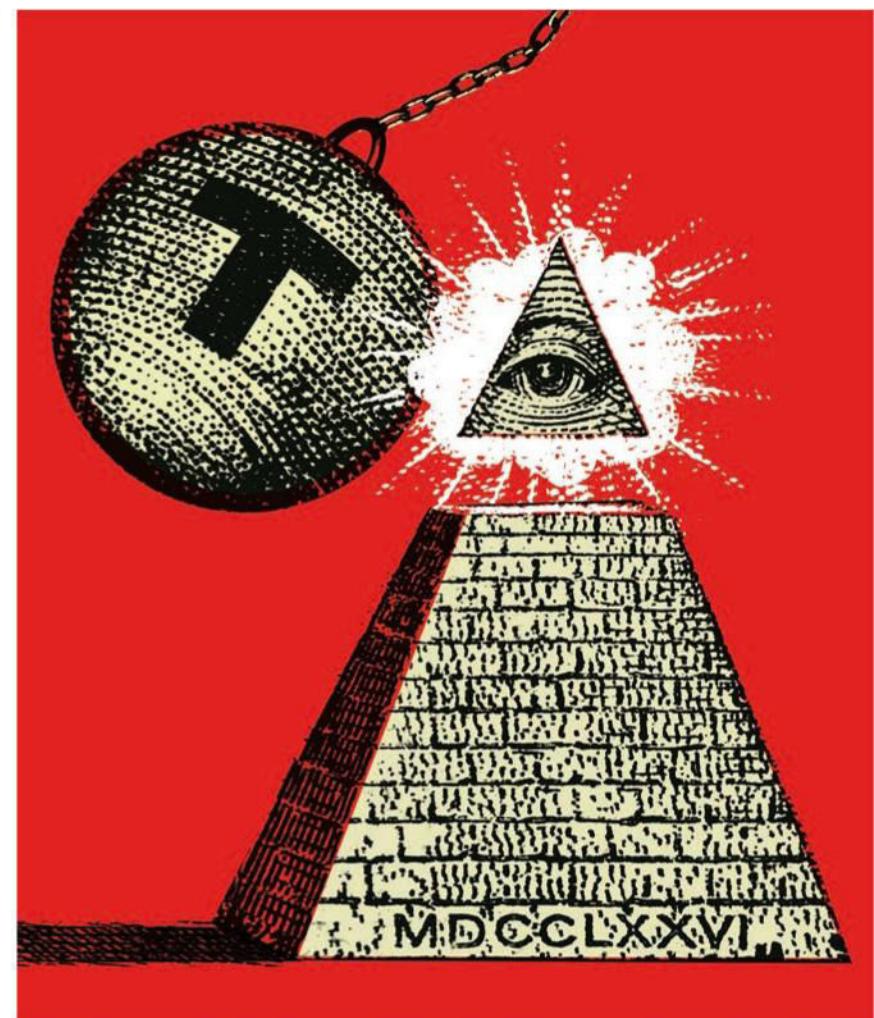
Will Trump Destroy the Dollar?

How a clash with the Fed could stoke inflation and destabilize the economy

BY SEBASTIAN MALLABY

ON MEMORIAL DAY weekend in 1988, George Herbert Walker Bush emerged from his family compound in Kennebunkport, Maine, to deliver a warning. Genteel, dapper, blue-blooded, and careful, the presidential candidate cut a decidedly un-Trumpian figure; “he had always seemed a little like Scott Fitzgerald made him up,” an acquaintance once remarked. The setting that weekend sharpened the contrast: In place of the swampy, chandeliered indulgence of Donald Trump’s Mar-a-Lago resort, the Bush-family retreat was quintessential New England. But the content of Bush’s message presages Trump, and his subsequent actions suggest how one aspect of Trump’s presidency might evolve.

Bush’s target was the Federal Reserve, which he feared might strangle the economy and, should he win the election, weigh down his presidency. “As a word of caution: I wouldn’t want to see them step over some [line] that would ratchet down” economic growth, Bush told reporters, masking his warning



with patrician courtesy. By today’s standards, it was a milquetoast protest; in last year’s campaign, Trump crudely accused the Fed of keeping interest rates low to get Hillary Clinton elected. But Bush’s meaning was evident. He was using his platform as the presumptive Republican presidential nominee to question the Fed’s competence in setting interest rates.

The Kennebunkport warning gave way to a full-blown attack after Bush’s election. Administration officials took to TV to urge low interest rates; Bush filled vacancies on the Fed’s board with

political allies. His Treasury secretary, Nicholas F. Brady, tried to punish the hawkish Fed chair, Alan Greenspan, by excluding him from parties. There would be no more invitations—none!—Brady decreed. “Whoosh! Boom! Stop!” he sputtered. The administration’s budget director, Richard Darman, put the word out that there was something creepy about Greenspan, a then-unmarried 65-year-old who called his mother every day. Perhaps he was a bit like Norman Bates, the mother-fixated figure in Alfred Hitchcock’s *Psycho*?

Bush ultimately paid for his Fed-bashing populism. Greenspan stood up to the pressure and kept short-term interest rates high; meanwhile, the pressure *itself*—the open attempt to meddle with the Fed for political gain—caused investors to fear future inflation. As a result, long-term interest rates also remained high—banks, for example, wouldn’t lower the mortgage rates they offered, thinking that they might need high rates in order to make money on the loans if inflation picked up down the road. That, in turn, dampened economic growth, contributing to Bush’s loss in 1992. Bill Clinton and his successors learned a lesson from Bush’s self-inflicted injury: Don’t criticize the Fed; don’t even comment on it. Since then, Fed independence has come to seem like a given, as solid as the independence of newspapers or the courts.

Until now, that is. Under President Trump, it is possible, for the first time in a generation, to imagine a concerted attack on the central bank. Conceivably, the United States could repeat the story of the mid-1960s and ’70s, when a 15-year period of central-bank independence was brought to an end by presidential bullying. Back then, Lyndon B. Johnson summoned the Fed chairman, William McChesney Martin Jr., to his Texas ranch and shoved him around the living room while proclaiming that low interest rates were imperative in a time of war. “Boys are dying in Vietnam and Bill Martin doesn’t care!” he yelled. Martin ultimately delivered the looser money that Johnson wanted. Richard Nixon followed up by publicly smearing Martin’s successor, Arthur F. Burns, until he, too, complied. Because Martin and Burns, unlike Greenspan, buckled, the U.S. went through the most extreme bout of inflation in its peacetime history.

Might Trump repeat this pattern? Gary Cohn, the top White House economic adviser, and Steven Mnuchin, the Treasury secretary, are Wall Street

pragmatists by background. They know that bald attacks upon the Fed can backfire. In an interview with *The Wall Street Journal* in April, Trump himself sounded a conciliatory note, saying of Janet Yellen, the Fed chair, “I respect her.” But Trump also demonstrated a willingness to go after the Fed during his campaign. He has bashed other institutions and experts, including the courts and the media. And Trump’s outsized expectations for economic growth make conflict between the Fed and the White House seem all too plausible.

ALL PRESIDENTS face a dilemma regarding the economy. They are judged in large part according to how wages, jobs, and retirement nest eggs perform on their watch. Yet they have little control over that performance. Growth, ultimately, is determined by long-term (and in some cases mysterious) factors: demographic trends, business innovation and technological progress, the education level of the workforce. Under the right circumstances, some measures—tax cuts, government spending—can boost growth, at least for a while. But for the most part, presidents cannot quickly influence the deeper elements that govern growth.

There is, however, one lever that seems temptingly close to their grasp. If the Fed can be persuaded to hold down interest rates, cheap loans can boost home purchases, car purchases, and business’s spending on factories and machines, pumping up demand and juicing the economy. The Fed’s power is especially tantalizing because of the technocratic tidiness of its decisions—a single committee of experts sets the short-term interest rate as it pleases, with no need to run the gantlet of lobbyists, advocates, and congressional committees. In the long run, of course, lower interest rates are not a magic elixir. The extra demand may run ahead of the economy’s ability to supply things, causing scarcity that leads buyers to bid up

prices, thus boosting inflation; and inflation, once permitted, can be tamed only by means of painful job losses. But in the short run, a Fed-created sugar high can transform a president’s fortunes.

Now, after years of rock-bottom interest rates following the 2008 crisis, the possibility of hiring bottlenecks and price pressures has reappeared on the horizon. Having recovered painfully and slowly from the crash, the U.S. economy is expected to grow by more than 2 percent this year—not very fast, but faster than the roughly 1.8 percent that the Fed considers to be sustainable without increasing the rate of inflation. The labor market, after all, is tight: Headline unemployment stands at 4.5 percent, considerably below its average of 6.2 percent since the start of 2000. The broader measure of unemployment—including workers who have given up looking for jobs and part-time workers who’d prefer to work full-time—tells a similar story. With workers now relatively scarce, companies must offer more to attract them. Higher wages, when matched by higher productivity, are a good thing. But if wages rise merely because of worker scarcity, companies may have to pass on the costs to consumers, stoking inflation.

Given these facts, the Fed has little choice but to hike the short-term interest rate from its current low level—if inflation is allowed to accelerate too much, workers will pay a terrible price later. Sure enough, the Fed has already started down that path, lifting borrowing costs in December and then again in March; two more hikes are expected before 2017 is over. In a normal political climate, this might feel routine. After all, the Fed is still paying people to borrow, in the sense that its lending rate is negative after accounting for inflation. But today’s political climate is far from normal. If Trump believes even part of his own rhetoric, his reaction to Fed tightening could well become aggressive.

Trump officially maintains that the economy can grow at an annual rate of 4 percent. Some of his advisers have tried to dial back this expectation: Mnuchin has said that growth of 3 percent is achievable. But even that is way above

For the first time in a generation, it is possible to imagine a concerted attack on the Fed.

the Fed's 1.8 percent estimate of sustainable growth. If the Fed, acting on its judgment of the safe speed limit, continues to raise interest rates, it will be announcing that the administration's growth ambitions are delusional. The president, for his part, can be expected to believe that the monetary gurus are conspiring to frustrate his promises to voters.

Higher interest rates do not merely dampen growth; they do so through specific channels. Interest-rate-sensitive parts of the economy get squeezed first; the prime example is real estate, which may not be welcome news to this particular president. The tradable parts of the economy also suffer, because higher interest rates attract capital from abroad, putting upward pressure on the dollar and hence making it more expensive for foreigners to buy American goods. That will appeal even less to Trump, because the most tradable sector of all is manufacturing.

During his campaign, Trump pledged to protect blue-collar workers in the industrial swing states. If the Fed sustains a strong dollar, precisely those workers will suffer. Trump likewise pledged to cut the trade deficit. A strong dollar may cause its expansion. Even Trump's election promises about immigration may be undone. The stronger the dollar, the greater the incentive for a Mexican worker to earn wages in the U.S. and send money home to relatives.

In sum, the White House and the Fed are likely to find themselves at loggerheads. The question is how the parties to this conflict will choose to behave. Trump may indulge his belligerent instincts, or he may listen to his pragmatic counselors. The Fed, for its part, may cave in to pressure, as it did under Martin and then Burns. Or it may resist, following the Greenspan model.

AS A STREET-FIGHTING defender of the Fed's independence, Greenspan was a master. During his showdown with George H. W. Bush's administration, the Treasury tried to get a bill through Congress that would have curbed the Fed's regulatory power; Greenspan used his relationships with lawmakers to bury

the initiative. When Bush's lieutenants came after him, whispering slanders to the press, they got a taste of their own medicine: Greenspan was on friendly terms with journalists, and he could plant stories better than anyone. So skillfully did Greenspan manage his reputation that he proved impossible to unseat. The Bush team reluctantly appointed him to a second term, fearing that removing him might shake Wall Street's confidence.

Janet Yellen will struggle to replicate some parts of the Greenspan model. Whereas Greenspan had strong ties to both Republicans and Democrats, Yellen lacks Republican allies—a vulnerability, given the makeup of today's Congress. Whereas Greenspan operated in pre-Twitter Washington, Yellen faces a vicious media free-for-all. Yet there is

one big historical lesson that Yellen can apply. And she holds an ace, if she is willing to use it.

The lesson is that it pays to manage the Fed's board ruthlessly. In the 1980s, Ronald Reagan's team undermined Greenspan's predecessor, the redoubtable Paul A. Volcker, by appointing administration loyalists as Fed governors. Toward the end of his tenure, Volcker lost votes on three occasions; with at least four of the seven governors on the Fed's board prepared to gang up against him, he no longer fully controlled his own institution. Greenspan applied the dark arts of bureaucratic politics to avoid this fate. When Clinton appointed a potential challenger as Fed vice chairman, Greenspan sidelined him so firmly that he eventually left (some possibly not-coincidental



• VERY SHORT BOOK EXCERPT

CROOKS WIN VOTES

IN INDIA, PARTIES across the political spectrum nominate candidates who have criminal cases pending against them. The country's two truly national parties, the Bharatiya Janata Party and the Indian National Congress, both select a fair number of parliamentary candidates—14 and 11 percent, respectively—who face serious charges, such as assault or murder. In one sense, the answer to why these parties nominate candidates with criminal backgrounds is painfully obvious: because they win. Across the past three general elections, “clean” candidates had a win rate of 6 percent. The win rate for candidates facing a charge of any type, by contrast, was just above 17 percent, and those facing serious charges had an 18 percent chance of winning. While there is some variation in the prevalence of candidates with criminal cases across parties, this is not an issue facing any one political party or type of party: It is clear that criminality in politics is widespread.

— Adapted from *When Crime Pays: Money and Muscle in Indian Politics*,
by Milan Vaishnav, published in January by Yale University Press

press criticism may have encouraged his departure). When Clinton tried to appoint a troublemaker in his stead, Greenspan used his Senate connections to block confirmation. Since Greenspan's retirement in 2006, fashion has swung against his domineering style; Fed governors feel free to express their views in public, and the power of the interest-rate-setting Federal Open Market Committee is less concentrated in the chair. But now, with the Fed's independence in peril, the pendulum must swing back. Three of the seven governorships currently stand empty. Trump will get the Fed he wants unless Yellen actively resists.

The ace that Yellen holds is that, although her term as chair expires in February, her appointment as a governor runs to 2024. Fed chairs usually resign from the board when their term expires, but they are not obligated to do so. If Trump refuses to keep her in the driver's seat, she could remain on the Fed's board and do some vigorous back-seat driving. The last chair to stay on—Marriner S. Eccles, in 1948—proved devastatingly effective. By force of character and intellect, he remained an influential voice, achieving his full revenge in 1951, when he helped lead a Fed revolt against the president who had demoted him.

If, despite recent conciliatory signals, Trump were to drop Chair Yellen, a back-seat-driving Governor Yellen could be formidable. Her public pronouncements might sway markets more than those of the new chair; she could lead a posse within the interest-rate-setting committee, and her backers might include the heads of the regional Feds, whose appointments are largely free of presidential influence. The mere prospect that Yellen might do this could be enough to cause the administration to back down. The Fed's independence is not enshrined in law, but a determined central banker with the stomach for a fight can find ways to sustain it. ■

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BIG IN ... MOSCOW

THE EMBARGO DIET

TRY THE deer heart,” Boris Akimov suggests from behind a bushy beard. My stomach sinks, but I cannot refuse: Akimov is a demigod in the Moscow food world, and we are sitting in LavkaLavka, the flagship restaurant of the LavkaLavka farmers’ cooperative. The crimson meat comes thinly sliced atop a celery puree, with a garnish of cowberry sorbet. It’s surprisingly tender.

When I first visited the cooperative five years ago, its footprint was limited to a cramped shop and café hidden in a labyrinthine courtyard, and its focus on fresh produce and homemade delicacies was still novel. Russian cuisine remained mired in a Soviet-era bog of potatoes and borscht. Fine dining mostly involved imported cuisine, and locavorism remained foreign, at least in concept. Yet over the past several years, a band of Russian farmers, chefs, and restaurateurs have launched a revival of Russian gastronomy.

They have found an unlikely ally in President Vladimir Putin. After the West slapped sanctions on Russia for annexing Crimea and stoking a war

in Ukraine's east in 2014, Putin responded by banning agricultural imports from the European Union, the U.S., and several other countries. Customs inspectors made a show of destroying banned products at the border, resulting in surreal scenes of cheese thrown into incinerators and geese flattened by bulldozers.

Although the embargo sent food prices soaring, Russians largely supported it: According to the Levada Center, an independent polling organization, most say it has made Russia more respected. “Russia can provide for itself,” crowed the pro-Kremlin tabloid *Moskovsky Komsomolets*. And indeed, the ban has been a boon for Russian agriculture. With many ingredients unavailable (and others rendered prohibitively expensive after the ruble went belly-up in 2014), chefs are seeking producers closer to home. “After the sanctions, everyone understood that there’s no other way out,” William Lamberti, an Italian chef behind several Moscow establishments, told the culinary magazine *Afisha Eda*.

In a sign of the times, Arkady Novikov, a restaurateur whose

Aleksandr Mikhailov and Boris Akimov, co-founders of the restaurant LavkaLavka

swanky, import-heavy establishments set the tone for the post-Soviet Moscow food scene, has opened a string of more locally focused projects: Valenok, which serves upmarket versions of Soviet classics; Farsh, a burger chain that uses only Russian meat; and Syrovarnya, which produces its cheeses on-site. Meanwhile, White Rabbit, where executive chef Vladimir Mukhin creates modern spins on prerevolutionary Russian recipes—moose-lip dumplings, the cabbage soup *shchi*, a yogurt drink that Mukhin serves with goose liver—is now No. 23 on the World’s 50 Best Restaurants list.

Akimov cautions that the movement is just beginning. Challenges abound, including Russia’s shoddy infrastructure, which can make getting food from farms to tables a nightmare (*local* is a relative term in a country with 11 time zones). Nonetheless, he says, “people are thinking more about what they eat, about responsible consumption, about supporting local farmers.” LavkaLavka now has an expansive suburban market and five smaller shops, along with the restaurant, whose ingredients are all sourced from Russian producers.

After the deer heart comes a salad of crab from Kamchatka and a delicate river pike perch. We chase it down with infused *polugar*, an ancient Russian bread wine (a forefather to vodka) that’s enjoying a comeback.

—Noah Schneider



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• SKETCH

RuPaul Gets Political

America's top drag queen explains why drag is the ultimate retort to Trump.

BY SPENCER KORNHABER

RUPAUL CHARLES, America's most famous drag queen, sat on a gold lamé couch at a luxury hotel in Midtown Manhattan one Tuesday in March, doling out advice for the white working class. Wearing a patterned suit jacket and black slacks—one of his signature out-of-drag

looks—he made a hand motion to suggest widgets being moved from one part of an assembly line to the next.

"If you were a factory worker and your job was to put this to this from 9 to 5, we don't do that anymore," he said, his soft voice carrying the imperious, jokey edge familiar to viewers of

RuPaul's Drag Race, his reality-TV show. Then he referenced a viral video from Ts Madison, a transgender activist and former porn star: "You better step your pussy up. Get on a business, bitch!" He delivered this spiel with the clipped, decisive tone of a therapist on the clock. "Nature will not allow you to just sail on through doing some factory job," he said. "We don't do factories anymore."

At 56, RuPaul is in little personal danger of being phased out; he is, to the contrary, one of gay pop culture's most enduringly relevant figures. Over the past quarter century, he has done more than anyone to bring drag to the American mainstream. At the same time, he has used his platform to act as life coach to the queer masses, counseling self-love and hard work to combat social stigma and inner doubt. (Catchphrase: "If you can't love yourself, how in the hell you gonna love somebody else?") But lately, thanks to political developments, this inspirational package has come with a dose of indignation, and a sharpened sense of social purpose.

In November, RuPaul tweeted that he was "finding it hard to carry on 'business as usual' after America got a giant swastika tattooed on her forehead," and he told *New York* magazine's Vulture website that Donald Trump's win felt "like the death of America." By the time I met up with him in March, right before the premiere party for *Drag Race*'s ninth season, his mood had improved considerably, but his focus was still on the political scene. "My optimism is back. I understand what it is we must do," he said. "We're going to mobilize young people who have never been mobilized, through our love of music, our love of love, our love of bright colors."

Such mobilization would seem to already be in progress, thanks to *Drag Race*. Tuning in is like entering a fluorescent cocoon of camp, where men who perform as women battle in a wild reimagining of *Project Runway*. Launched on Logo, Viacom's queer-focused network, in 2009, the show is ubiquitous in many gay-friendly circles; this spring, it moved to VH1, in a bid to bring drag to a wider audience.

The moment seems ripe for it. An ad for Season 9 features the tagline “Drastic times call for dragtastic measures” and RuPaul saying, “We need America’s next drag superstar now more than ever”—the implication being that cross-dressing has taken on a special charge under Trump. Which isn’t to say the show wasn’t socially engaged before. In the Obama era, *Drag Race* cheered on gay rights and reveled in gender identity’s vagaries just as gay rights were making significant gains and many Americans were beginning to grapple in earnest with transgender people’s existence. Still, the rejection of a woman president in favor of a man who reportedly prefers his female staffers to “dress like women” and whose supporters rail against “cucks” and “the pussification of America” places drag in a more obviously defiant context: The pussification of America—the freedom of men to partake in that which society has marked as feminine and vice versa—is exactly what RuPaul wants.

The early months of the Trump presidency have seen drag flourish as a form of political critique. The signature pop-culture send-up of the administration has come not from Alec Baldwin’s pursed-lip Trump on *Saturday Night Live* but from Melissa McCarthy’s wild-eyed Sean Spicer—a parody of macho huffiness that reportedly infuriated Trump because, a source told *Politico*, he “doesn’t like his people to look weak.” This reaction led some critics to call for *SNL* to drag up the entire administration; Kate McKinnon has since portrayed Jeff Sessions, and Rosie O’Donnell has offered to play Steve Bannon. Underscoring the sense of gender panic in Trumpland, one of early 2017’s defining memes came when a conservative Twitter user added the words “This is the future liberals want” above a picture of a niqab-clad woman and a drag queen—two bogeyladies of the culture wars—sitting comfortably on one New York City subway bench. The fact that for many liberals this indeed was a perfectly lovely vision prompted much hilarity; one of *Drag Race*’s stars, a deranged-Russian-prostitute character

named Katya Zamolodchikova, tweeted the same caption with a photo of herself crouching grotesquely in a green bodysuit and Birkenstocks.

RuPaul’s own Twitter feed has become a steady source of GIF-laden jabs against the “Manchurian pumpkin,” his preferred term for the president. *RuPaul: What’s the Tee?*, the motivational and comedic podcast he co-hosts with Michelle Visage, a *Drag Race* judge, has begun devoting more time to current events. The title track of his new album, *American*, uses thumping dance pop to assert that gay black drag queens are as American as anyone else. He’s deejayed events to benefit Planned Parenthood and the ACLU in recent months. When I suggested that his level of political engagement had increased, he replied that he’d long been outspoken about politics but not policies. “Now I’ve been happy to talk about policies,” he said. “Because the world’s gone batshit fucking crazy.”

IN PERSON, RuPaul is very much the same self-possessed bald beanpole that *Drag Race* audiences have watched dispense advice and shade to contestants—except his freckles are more noticeable, and his shade can be turned on you. At one point, while discussing the virtues of transformation, he eyed my outfit and suggested that drag could teach the squares of the world to live a little, sartorially speaking: “When you think you’ve landed on this look with the black jeans and blue shirt for the rest of your life, we’re here to say, ‘You know, it’s just clothes.’” (For the record, my pants were dark green.) As we talked, RuPaul seemed to be looking over my shoulder into the hotel lobby; he was, he explained, watching for his husband, Georges LeBar, who was on his way with a chicken panini.

The two married in January, partly out of concern that same-sex marriage could be rolled back under Trump. Though the wedding was in some ways

a formality—they’ve been together for 23 years—it contributes to the sense that this is a time of personal flourishing for RuPaul. In a nod to his popularity (as well as to how insane politics has gotten), John Oliver proposed on *Last Week Tonight* that the drag queen could run for president as the progressive reality-TV-star retort to Trump (hypothetical slogan: “Make America fierce again”). In April, RuPaul debuted as a recurring character on the Netflix sitcom *Girlboss*, playing the main character’s crotchety neighbor; J. J. Abrams is developing a dramedy based on RuPaul’s years as a fixture of the New York City club scene.

The source material is rich. After a childhood split between San Diego and Atlanta, in the care of first his mother and later an older sister, RuPaul worked as an entertainer and shape-shifting party presence, donning loincloths and dab-

bling in David Bowie-esque androgyny while fronting the new-wave bands Wee Wee Pole and RuPaul and the U-Hauls. Eventually, he settled in New York. By 1993, he’d shellacked himself into the 7-foot-tall (in heels) “glamazon” character who rocketed to fame off the dance single “Supermodel (You Better Work)”; this, in turn, led to a talk show on VH1. Now *Drag Race* aims to subject less established drag queens to some of the same trials of “charisma, uniqueness, nerve, and talent” that he once faced. “My career has been built on the fringe of the status quo,” RuPaul told me. “There was no blueprint for what I do.”

Of course, drag as it’s commonly practiced today did exist before RuPaul, mostly among queer folks whose pageants, any decent social theorist will tell you, delighted in exposing the artificiality of both femininity and masculinity. RuPaul’s rise to stardom was part of a public coming-out for the practice, which coincided with a wave of ’90s-era drag-themed movies, including *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* and the acclaimed

The rejection of a woman president in favor of a man whose supporters rail against “cucks” gives drag new salience.

documentary *Paris Is Burning*. Though the decade was a boon to his career, he thinks back with some frustration on various cultural gatekeepers who treated him more as a curiosity than as a social critic. He says he's always approached drag as "punk rock"—as an instrument of resistance. "Just being someone's punch line is not my idea of fun."

Today, even as he finds himself at new heights of acclaim, RuPaul sometimes feels that same sense of being misunderstood. Before a recent TV appearance promoting *Drag Race*, a producer asked whether he'd be willing to teach the show's host how to walk like a supermodel. The request offended him. "I'm not doing drag to give you makeup tips," he told me. "This has always been a political statement." That political statement doesn't exactly lend itself to specific action items, of course; RuPaul is as fluent in righteous woo-woo as any outspoken celebrity. "Following your heart is the most political thing you can do," he told me at one point.

Yet he seems sincere in his conviction that it is worth seeking out the deeper meaning of things that appear superficial. On a recent episode of *What's the Tee?*, he quizzed the actress Leah Remini on her acrylic nails and then, without pausing, asked, "I wonder what the subtext of having nails is? ... Psychologically speaking, what's underneath that?" And he seems equally sincere in his belief that lewd puns and piled-high wigs can fight everything from gender essentialism to consumerism. "Our culture is about choosing an identity and sticking with it so people can market shit to you," he said. "Anything that switches that around is completely the antithesis of what our culture implores us to do."

OUTSIDE DRAG RACE'S season-premiere party, at the PlayStation Theater, in Times Square, the latest crop of contestants mugged for the cameras. Nina Bo'nina Brown wore facial prosthetics designed to resemble

a gorilla; Jaymes Mansfield had on a *Muppets*-inspired bodice; Kimora Blac sported breasts evoking a pervy video-game designer's version of the female form. Though some of the queens talked up their "fishiness"—the joyfully crass drag term for seeming like a real woman—their outlandish getups illustrated one of RuPaul's central assertions: that drag's real purpose has less to do with passing for another gender than with highlighting gender's artificiality.

At one end of the red carpet, Sadie Gennis, a TVGuide.com editor, asked each queen to play a game of word association with some names: Oscar the Grouch, Emma Stone, Donald Trump. The responses to Trump's name were remarkable in their uniformity. Sasha Velour:

"Already a horrifying drag queen." Eureka O'Hara: "Girl, that hairline's a mess. You ain't never heard of lace glue?" Shea Couléé: "Girl, look how orange you fucking look, girl!" (The last line, which quotes a now-legendary *Drag Race* squabble about makeup, has shown up on anti-Trump protest signs.)

This notion of Trump as a drag queen is a common punch line, thanks not only to his Technicolor tan, bouffant hair, and love of insults, but also to his exaggerated display of masculinity. And yet when I put to RuPaul the idea that the president is a drag artist, he drew an important distinction: Trump "actually believes he is that thing. As drag queens, we know we're putting on a facade and we're always aware of it, which is what scares the status quo. He believes he looks good. He believes he's looking like a real man."

However visceral RuPaul's distaste for Trump, he isn't quite your typical Hollywood progressive. Yes, he thinks the

guardians of straight white orthodoxy should lighten up, but he feels much the same way about, among others, liberal types who want him to apologize for using the word *tranny*. Though RuPaul supports federal protections for transgender people and welcomes trans contestants on *Drag Race*, he can sound downright conservative when talking about the self-seriousness of liberal identity politics (he declines to describe himself as a liberal). And *Drag Race*'s cheeky flirtation with gender and racial stereotypes—to say nothing of how it reappropriates terms like *bitch*—hasn't always rated as politically correct. "I'll make a joke about something and people will print it out and it sounds awful, when it's really clear my standpoint is 'Live your life, be free, do what you feel you need to do,'" he told me.

As the premiere party got under way, RuPaul appeared onstage, startling the sold-out house—the advertised lineup of performances by *Drag Race* personalities hadn't included his name—and received the loudest applause of the night, despite the fact that he was the only one whose outfit wouldn't have drawn a second look on the street. Introducing a clip



RuPaul in 1979, at age 18. He says he's always approached drag as "punk rock"—as an instrument of resistance.

of Season 9, he explained that the first episode would feature Lady Gaga. He turned to the drag queen Lady Bunny, a longtime friend. “We tried to get Lady Bunny [for the show], but she turned us down,” he said, letting out a high, knowing laugh. “Lady Bunny, you are a whore.”

The video that followed boasted much of the frivolity and bizarreness fans of the

show have come to expect. The cast’s first meeting quickly gave way to sniping about eyebrow shapes; one queen was done up like a voluptuous rodent. But the opening episode, which aired later in March, also reflected an engagement with larger issues. One contestant sobbingly told Lady Gaga that her career had helped save lives; another wore a leotard scrawled with #BLACKLIVESMATTER. Though

the episode had been filmed before November, it was not hard, watching it, to anticipate the turns that *Drag Race* might take in the future.

“This whole election thing was probably the best thing that could have happened,” RuPaul had remarked to me earlier in the day, before leaving his hotel. “Because everyone is getting woke. These bitches are waking up.” **A**

• STUDY OF STUDIES

Make Time for Boredom

The surprising benefits of stultification

BY JUDE STEWART

BOREDOM HAS, paradoxically, become quite interesting to academics lately. The International Interdisciplinary Boredom Conference gathered humanities scholars in Warsaw for the fifth time in April. In early May, its less scholarly forerunner, London’s Boring Conference, celebrated seven years of delighting in tedium. At this event, people flock to talks about toast, double yellow lines, sneezing, and vending-machine sounds, among other snooze-inducing topics.

What, exactly, is everybody studying? One widely accepted psychological definition of boredom is “the aversive experience of wanting, but being unable, to engage in satisfying activity.” **[1]** But how can you quantify a person’s boredom level and compare it with someone else’s? In 1986, psychologists introduced the Boredom Proneness Scale, **[2]** designed to

measure an individual’s overall propensity to feel bored (what’s known as “trait boredom”). By contrast, the Multidimensional State Boredom Scale, **[3]** developed in 2008, measures a person’s feelings of boredom in a given situation (“state boredom”). A German-led team has since identified five types of state boredom: indifferent, calibrating, searching, reactant, and apathetic (indifferent boredom—characterized by low arousal—was the mellowest, least unpleasant kind; reactant—high arousal—was the most aggressive and unpleasant). **[4]** Boredom may be miserable, but let no one call it simple.

Boredom has been linked to behavior issues including bad driving, **[5]** mindless

snacking, **[6]** binge-drinking, **[7]** risky sex, **[8]** and problem gambling. **[9]** In fact, many of us would take pain over boredom. One team of psychologists discovered that two-thirds of men and a quarter of women would rather self-administer electric shocks than sit alone with their thoughts for 15 minutes. **[10]**

Probing this phenomenon, another team asked volunteers to watch boring, sad, or neutral films, during which they could self-administer electric shocks. The bored volunteers shocked themselves more and harder than the sad or neutral ones did. **[11]**

But boredom isn’t all bad. By encouraging contemplation and daydreaming, it can spur creativity. An early, much-cited study gave participants abundant time to complete problem-solving and word-association exer-

cises. Once all the obvious answers were exhausted, participants gave more and more inventive answers to fend off boredom. **[12]** A British study took these findings one step further, asking subjects to complete a creative challenge (coming up with a list of alternative uses for a household item). One group of subjects did a boring activity first, while the others went straight to the creative task. Those whose boredom pumps had been primed were more prolific. **[13]**



In our always-connected world, boredom may be an elusive state, but it is a fertile one. Watch paint dry or water boil, or at least put away your smartphone for a while. You might unlock your next big idea. **A**

Jude Stewart is the author of *Patternalia*.

THE STUDIES:

- [1]** Eastwood et al., “The Unengaged Mind” (*Perspectives on Psychological Science*, Sept. 2012)
- [2]** Farmer and Sundberg, “Boredom Proneness” (*Journal of Personality Assessment*, Spring 1986)
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- [5]** Steinberger et al., “The Antecedents, Experience, and Coping Strategies of Driver Boredom in Young Adult Males” (*Journal of Safety Research*, Dec. 2016)
- [6]** Havermans et al., “Eating and Inflicting Pain Out of Boredom” (*Appetite*, Feb. 2015)
- [7]** Biolcati et al., “I Cannot Stand

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- [8]** Miller et al., “Was Bob Seger Right?” (*Leisure Sciences*, Jan. 2014)
- [9]** Mercer and Eastwood, “Is Boredom Associated With Problem Gambling Behaviour?” (*International Gambling Studies*, April 2010)
- [10]** Wilson et al., “Just Think: The Challenges of the Disengaged Mind” (*Science*, July 2014)

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- [13]** Mann and Cadman, “Does Being Bored Make Us More Creative?” (*Creativity Research Journal*, May 2014)



• TECHNOLOGY

The End of Forgetting

And a new age of nostalgia

BY BEN ROWEN

WHEN UNCLE Joshua, a character in Peter De Vries's 1959 novel, *The Tents of Wickedness*, says that nostalgia "ain't what it used to be," the line is played for humor: To those stuck in the past, nothing—not even memory itself—survives the test of time. And yet Uncle Joshua's words have themselves aged pretty well (despite being widely misattributed to Yogi Berra): Technology, though ceaselessly striving toward the future, has continually revised how we view the past.

Nostalgia—generally defined as a sentimental longing for bygone times—underwent a particularly significant metamorphosis in 1888, when Kodak released the first commercially successful

camera for amateurs. Ads soon positioned it as a necessary instrument for preserving recollections of children and family celebrations. According to Nancy Martha West, the author of *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia*, the camera "allowed people ... to arrange their lives in such a way that painful or unpleasant aspects were systematically erased."

Technology is poised to once again revolutionize the way we recall the past. Not so long ago, nostalgia's triggers were mostly spontaneous: catching your prom's slow-dance song on the radio, riffling through photo albums while you were home for the holidays. Today, thanks to our devices, we can experience nostalgia on demand. The Nostalgia Machine website plays songs from your "favorite music year"; another app, Sundial, replays the songs you were listening to exactly a year ago. The Timehop app and Facebook's On This Day feature shower you with photos and social-media updates from a given date in history. The Museum of Endangered Sounds website plays the noises of discontinued products (the chime of a Bell phone, the chirping of a

Eurosignal pager). Retro Site Ninja lets you revisit web pages from the '90s.

This is just the beginning: While these apps and websites let us glimpse the past, other technologies could place us more squarely inside it. But although psychologists believe nostalgia is crucial for finding meaning in life and for combatting loneliness, we don't yet know whether too much of it will have negative, even dystopian, effects. As technology gives us unprecedented access to our memories, might we yearn for the good old days when we forgot things?

1 | Breaking the 3-D Wall

In her 1977 essay collection, *On Photography*, Susan Sontag wrote that photos "actively promote nostalgia ... by slicing out [a] moment and freezing it." Because a photograph's perspective is fixed, a viewer can't move within it, and is unable to experience the captured space the way the photographer or her subject did. New technology, however, can turn old photos into 3-D graphics that provide the illusion of moving through space.

Imagine the "bullet time" effect made famous by *The Matrix*—in which a scene's action is either stopped or dramatically slowed down, while a camera seems to weave through the tableau at normal speed—applied to an old family photo, viewed on your laptop. Whereas *The Matrix* required 120 cameras to achieve its signature effect, a new approach known as 3-D camera mapping allows special-effects teams to inexpensively add dimensionality to 2-D photos. Recently, media designers like Miklós Falvay have used the approach to enhance archival images taken with a single still camera, giving viewers the impression that they are navigating spaces photographed years ago.

Artists have used other new techniques to project old photographs onto 3-D spaces. For its production of *A 1940s Nutcracker*, for example, the Neos Dance Theatre, in Mansfield, Ohio, used

THE MACHINERY OF MEMORY: A TIMELINE

CIRCA 1000: Sei Shōnagon, a Japanese courtier, completes *The Pillow Book*, an early example of an introspective diary.



1688: Johannes Hofer coins the term *nostalgia* to describe psychological symptoms observed in homesick Swiss mercenaries.



1839: Louis Daguerre, a painter and diorama artist, unveils the daguerreotype process, which prints photographs on silver-plated copper.

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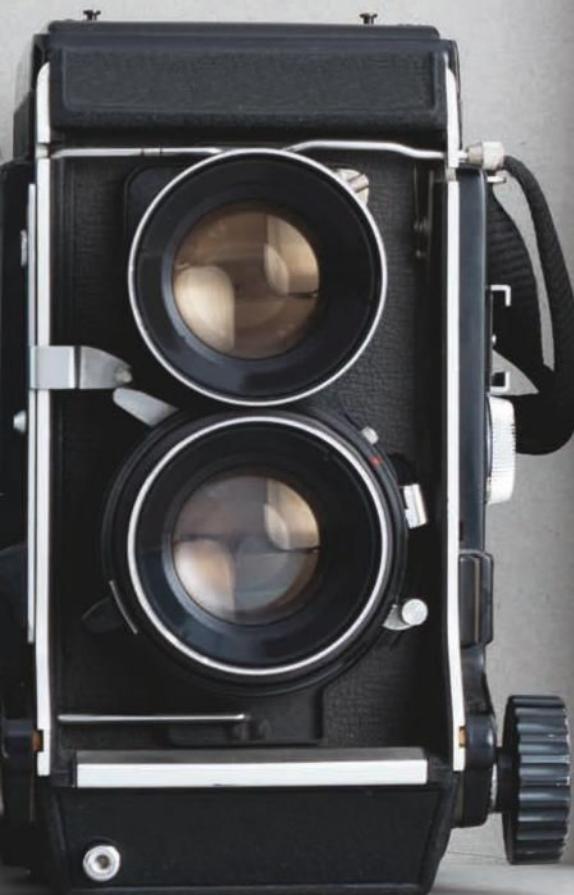
“RIVETING . . .”

Ms. Faludi unfolds her father's story like the plot of a detective novel.”

—*The Wall Street Journal*

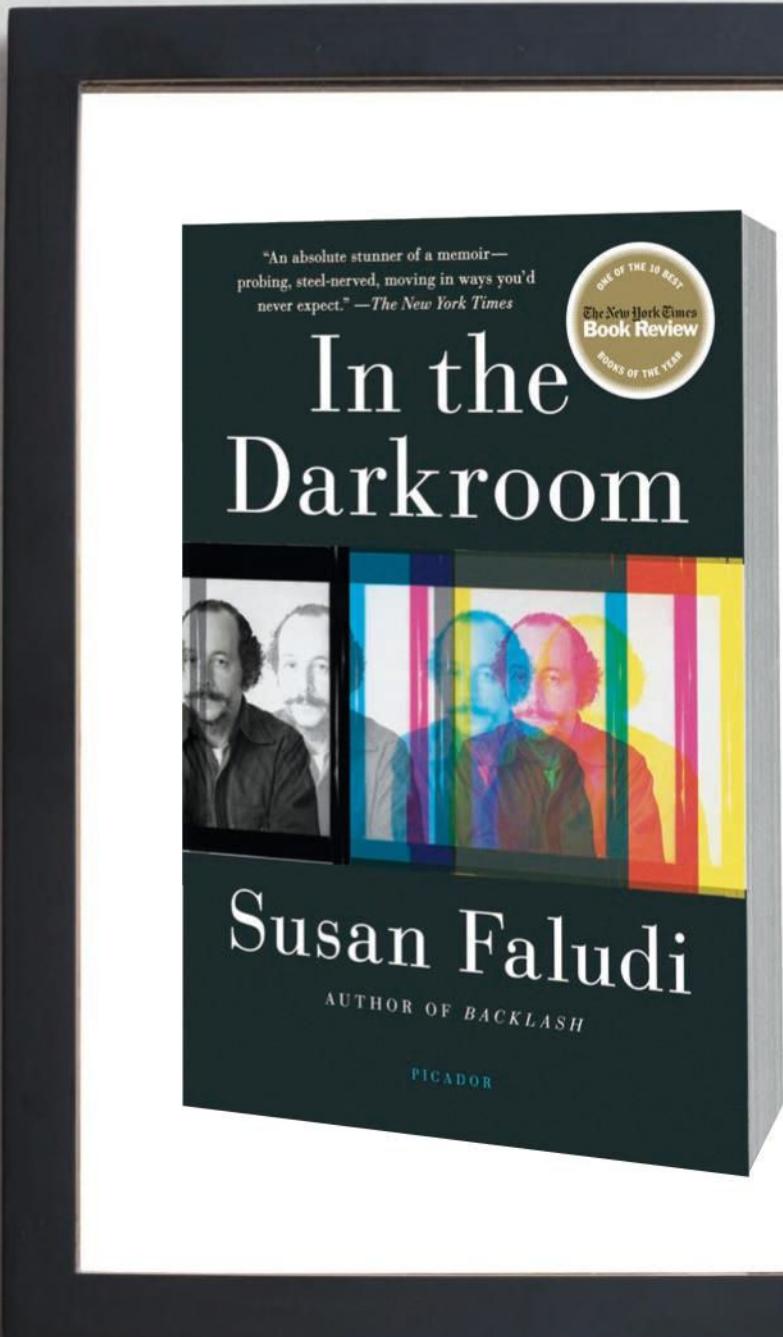
“Few can dissect a prevailing cultural norm as well as Faludi can.”

—*The Washington Post*



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3-D-graphics software to transform 1940s photos of Mansfield into virtual set pieces that dancers could interact with, creating the illusion that they were moving through old city streets. In this way, audience members who grew up in the '40s were treated to the feeling of traveling through childhood landscapes.

Down the line, we may experience new forms of three-dimensional entertainment at home. Testing the appeal of holographic content, the BBC last year unveiled a rudimentary holographic TV, which used a variation on a Victorian theater technique—involving a transparent acrylic pyramid—to make footage of a beating heart and a dinosaur animation appear to float in midair. Although the BBC has no plans to bring such a TV to market, other companies are pursuing higher-tech commercial products, among them Samsung, which has patented a design for a TV that would broadcast laser-generated holographic images. When the technology is eventually perfected, people may watch home movies play out not on a screen but in the center of their living room.

2 | Reliving History

Even in 3-D, movies have a limited capacity for evoking real-life experiences. A viewer will never be able to choose his own perspective—to walk to another room, say, or to view a scene from the vantage point of a child rather than from that of a taller adult. Virtual-reality technology promises to give users a chance to do just that.

In a tantalizing example of how VR might be personalized in the future, Sarah Rothberg, an NYU researcher who specializes in virtual reality, has re-created her old house in "Memory Place: My House," an Oculus Rift experience cum traveling art exhibit. Entering various rooms prompts the playing of home videos, filmed years before by Rothberg's late father, whose early-onset Alzheimer's disease inspired the

project. After months of poring over old footage and photos, Rothberg was skeptical that the resulting experience would dislodge additional memories, but when she put on the Oculus Rift headset and walked across the virtual house's parquet-floored hallway, something felt off: In the real house, a floorboard had been loose and rose at one end, though she had not thought about that fact in many years. As VR gear becomes cheaper, more of us might be able to re-create and then tour our own childhood homes—imagine an immersive, autobiographical version of Minecraft or The Sims.

3 | Backing Up Your Memories

Of course, to appreciate detailed replications of one's past, one must have detailed *memories* of one's past—and memory typically deteriorates with age. But experiments on other primates suggest that technological interventions may one day help us overcome this frailty. Theodore Berger, a biomedical engineer and neuroscientist at the University of Southern California, has developed a means of translating the neuron-firing pattern that the brain uses to code short-term memory into the pattern it uses to store long-term memory—a method he likens to translating "Spanish to French without being able to understand either language." In some human trials, the translations have been found to be 90 percent accurate. Using this method, Berger's team has created a mathematical model capable of recording the signals a rhesus monkey's brain produces in response to stimuli, translating them, and feeding them back to the brain in order to facilitate long-term recall—even when the monkey has been drugged so as to inhibit the formation of lasting memories.

One day, we may even be able to create backups of our memories. In 2011, UC Berkeley researchers led by Jack Gallant, a cognitive neuroscientist,

conducted an elaborate series of experiments that involved showing subjects video clips while taking fMRI scans of their brains, and then using a mathematical model to map how visual patterns translated into brain activity. After presenting a new clip to the subjects, the researchers used the resulting fMRI data to reverse engineer, from an archive of other footage, a video mashup that bore a striking resemblance to the clip the subjects had actually seen. Gallant believes that we could one day map brain activity triggered by a recalled memory and then reverse engineer a video of that memory.

For now, though, memory movies are a long way off. In a 2015 experiment, Gallant found that his model was three times more accurate at guessing the image a subject was looking at than at guessing one she was merely recalling. Another difficulty is that memories, especially nostalgic ones, shift over time. "What you recall is confabulated, made up," Gallant told me. "Even if you can make a faithful reconstruction of a memory you decode from the brain, that memory is already wrong."

Even if we had total recall, it might be best to avoid incessantly replaying memories, both for the sake of our psychological equilibrium and for the sake of our lives in the here and now. Ditto clicking from one nostalgia app to another. Clay Routledge, a psychology professor at North Dakota State University who wrote the leading textbook on nostalgia, says the emotion is typically healthy; in moderation, it can even lead you to seek out new experiences. But he cautions that "too much time focusing on the past could jeopardize your ability to engage in other opportunities that will form the basis for future nostalgic memories." In other words, nostalgia really won't be what it once was if, in the future, you have nothing to remember but the time you spent swiping through your phone, remembering. ■

1965: Kodak launches Super 8 film, cameras, and projectors. The new film doesn't need to be threaded into cameras manually, helping spawn the home-movie craze.



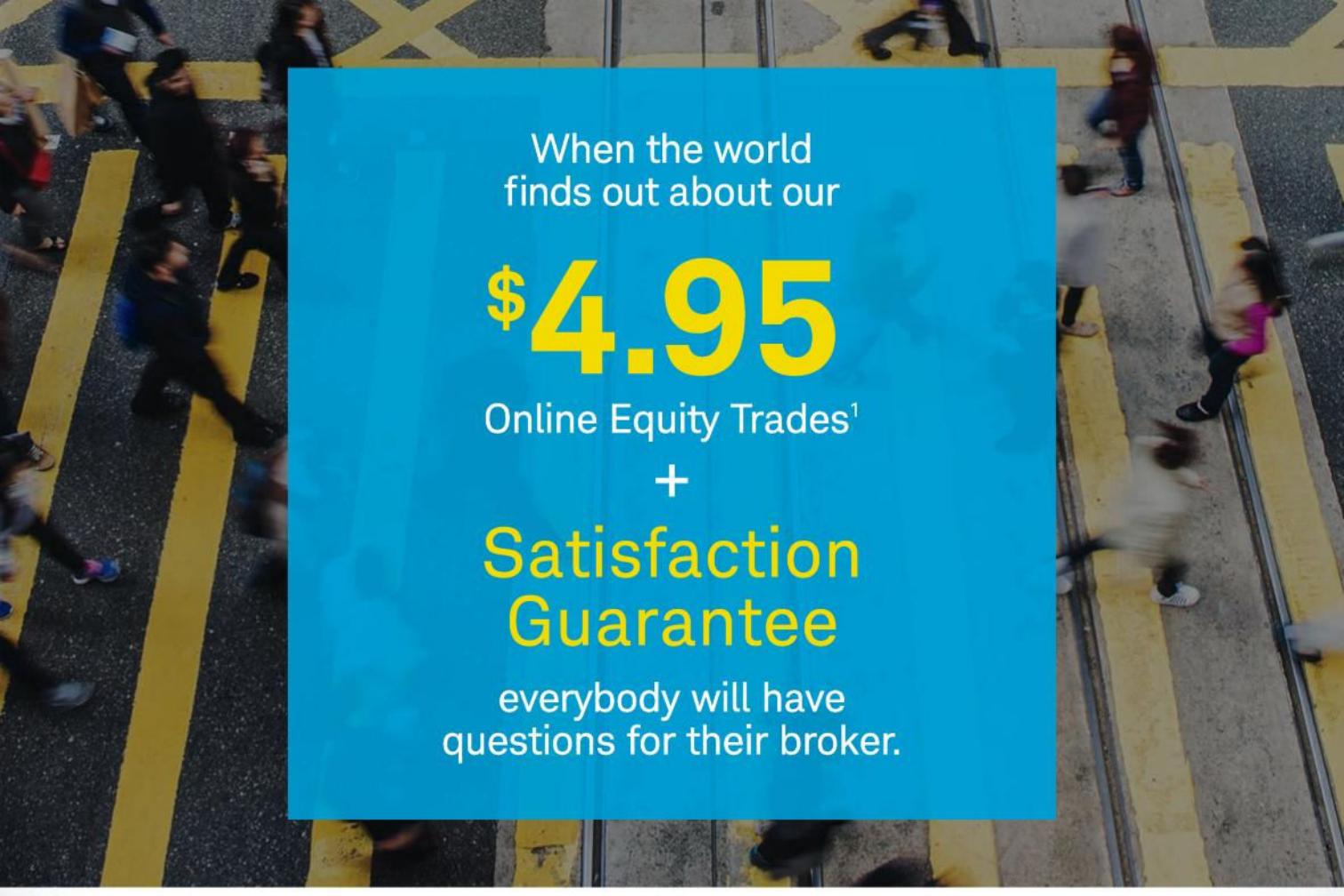
EARLY 1980s: A handful of radio stations, including KRXQ in Dallas and WMET in Chicago, inaugurate the classic-rock radio genre; Baby Boomers revel in the songs of their youth.

2013: Oxford Dictionaries selects selfie as the word of the year.



2050: People watch movie reconstructions of their earliest memories.

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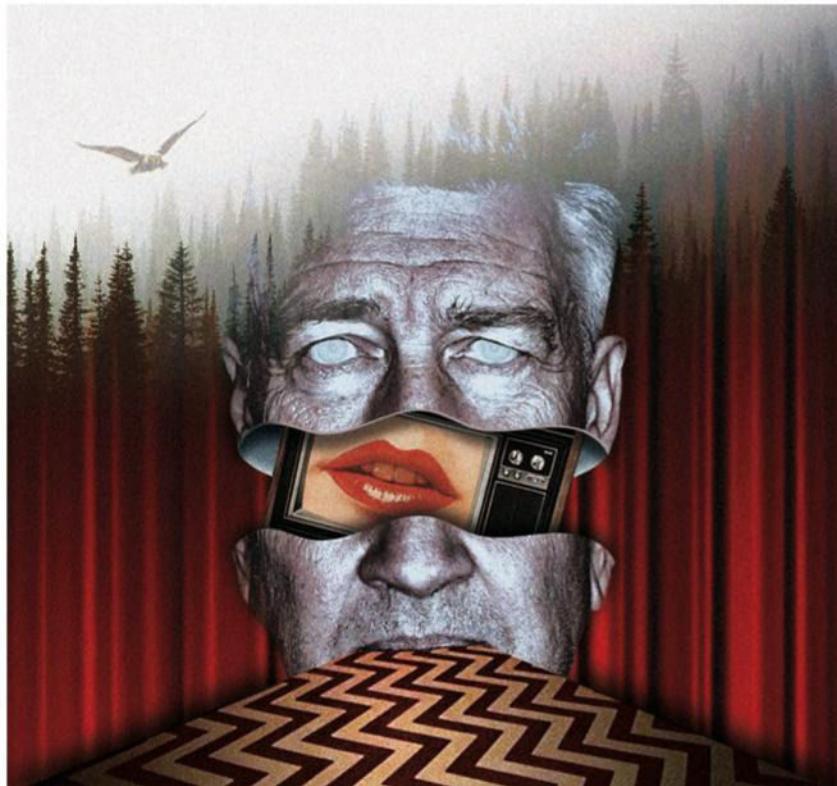
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THE OMNIVORE

How *Twin Peaks* Invented Modern Television

As a long-belated Season 3 arrives, a look back at the immeasurably influential series

BY JAMES PARKER

THE SENSATIONAL ENTRANCE into mass consciousness of David Lynch and Mark Frost's *Twin Peaks*, 27 years ago, was an event that defies replication. To begin with, back then there actually *was* a mass consciousness—or, at least, there were a lot of people watching the same shows at the same time. Norm said something funny on *Cheers* and a single, vast chuckle rumbled westward across the continent and sank hissing into the Pacific. No Netflix in 1990. No personalized viewing recommendations. Just the perennially white-hot maw of the popular imagination, into which—luscious and secretive as a fog bank—rolled *Twin Peaks*, with its unprecedented stew of occultism, irony, horror, deadpan, soap opera, canned narrative, dream logic, burningly beautiful young people, and postmodern diddling-about. The show's pilot had the feel of an initiation, as if some species of hermetic lore was now being diffused outward,

gamma-saturating the frontal lobes of the public. "She's *de-ad*," said Jack Nance, as sawmill worker Pete Martell, into the telephone. He was pop-eyed and panic-warped, getting as much spooked-rustic torque onto the vowel sounds as he could manage. "Wra-apped in pla-astic."

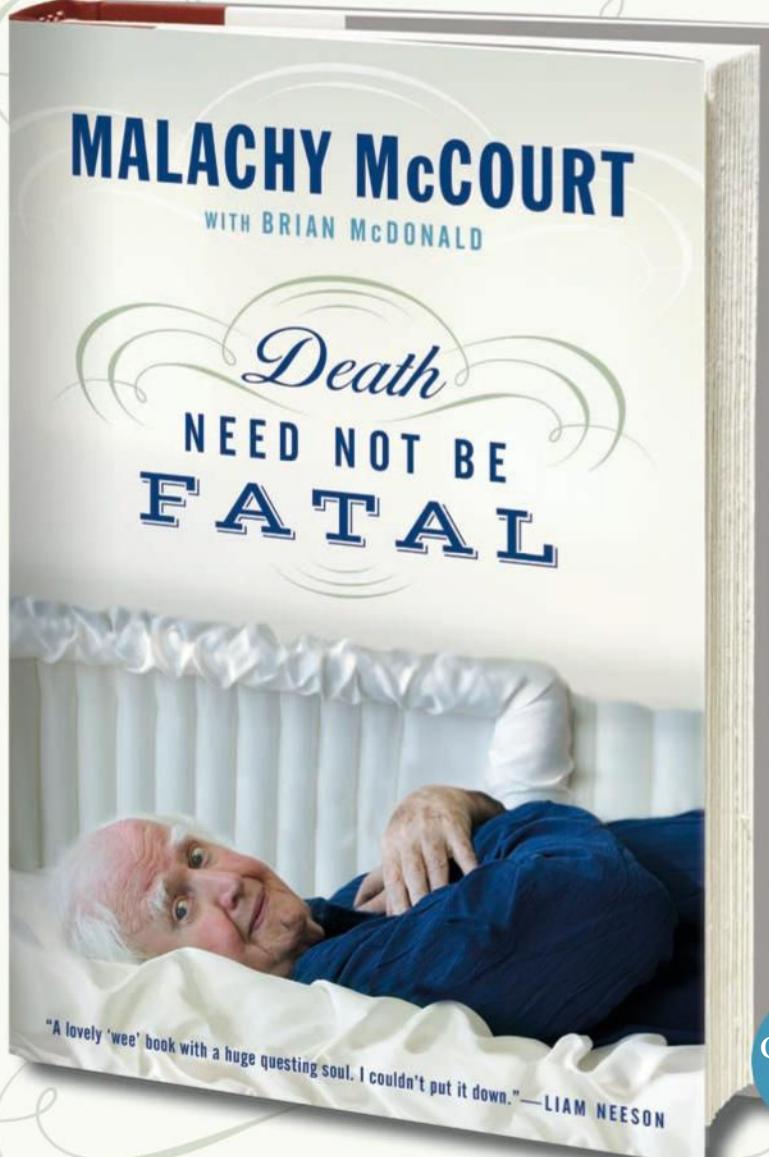
Who was dead? Who had been wrapped in plastic? Why, Laura Palmer, of course. Alpha girl, virtue's orb, homecoming queen, apple of the community's eye—the community in question being the logging town of Twin Peaks, population 51,201, high in the misty Northwest. Laura Palmer, washed up at the river's edge in her shroud of industrial sheeting, looked strangely transmuted: Her face was metallic silver-blue, composed in an expression of vestal serenity, and her beyond-this-world brow was flecked with glittering river minerals. In the background thrummed the queasy, slo-mo gush of those Angelo Badalamenti chords. And as the somber doctor and the handsome sheriff and the sheriff's improbably tall deputy gathered around her body, the deputy buckled and began to weep. "My God, Andy," muttered the sheriff. "Is this gonna happen every damn time?"

And now—the intervening quarter century having been, apparently, a mere blip, a quick writhe of Lynchian static across the screen—*Twin Peaks* is back for a belated Season 3 on Showtime, featuring many of the original cast members and helmed once again by writer-director Lynch and writer Frost. It's vulgar to query the creative impulse behind this resurrection, but somewhere in there, surely, is the sense that they kind of blew it the first time around. *Twin Peaks* dominated 1990, must-see TV for a global viewership that included, apocryphally, Queen Elizabeth II. And then it fell to pieces in 1991,

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superseded as spectacle by the Gulf War and done in artistically by its own internal entropy, by the loopy plotlines, tonal wobbles, bad ideas, and out-of-control conceits that we now recognize as the symptoms of a long-form TV series entering its decadent phase. That the organic breakdown occurred in Season 2—rather than in Season 4 or 5, as it might nowadays—only highlights the volatility and then-novelty of the constituent elements.

Because let's be clear: Without *Twin Peaks*, and its big-bang expansion of the possibilities of television, half your favorite shows wouldn't exist. The absorptive, all-in serial, sonically and visually entire, novelistically cantilevered with deep structure and extending backwards into the viewer's brain, was simply not a thing before Lynch and Frost. With *Twin Peaks* they effectively renegotiated TV's contract with its audience. You didn't tune in to this show the same way that you tuned in to *L.A. Law* or *Murder, She Wrote*. You tuned in psychedelically, as it were, ready to be transported. You were in, or you were out: a binary decision. The story arcs, the curves of character development, were long, longer than the show itself, receding into mystery. If you missed an episode, you were disoriented. If you watched every episode carefully, you might still be disoriented. Remarkably, this has become something like the norm.

Thus the drama of *Twin Peaks* unfolded on two planes: what was happening in the show—who killed Laura Palmer?, etc.—and then, more subliminally, what the show was doing to the medium, to television. And on both planes it was the same story, a reckless privileging of the irrational and the nocturnal, and a push to see how much of it we could take. Watch the pilot again and marvel as Lynch, the master, the nutcase, so loads each frame with preconscious material—tinnitus background river-roar, ghostly whooping of a ceiling fan, crawl of the camera around a room—that a genuine transdimensional pressure is felt, as of something sinister and unaccommodated trying to get in. A new kind of tension: diffracted, half-real.

FBI Special Agent Dale Cooper, played by Kyle MacLachlan, arrives in *Twin Peaks* with his gusto, his heart-healthiness, his extraterrestrial relish for the 10,000 things of the sensory world: “Man, smell those trees. Smell those Douglas firs!” He works procedurally and trench-coatedly, his jawline nobly shining, but he also believes that the solution to the mystery of Laura Palmer’s death has been delivered to him in a dream—a dream featuring a little rolling-jointed man in a red suit, talking in slithery half-words, with subtitles—if he can only interpret the dream correctly.

Stylistically, the most immediate posthumous effect of all this might have been the gnostic,

The Culture File

THE OMNIVORE

Without *Twin Peaks*, half your favorite shows wouldn't exist.

everything-signifies vibe of *The X-Files*, but there are glimmering splinters of *Twin Peaks* in *Breaking Bad*'s trippy desert-sizzle; in the irruptive, disabling dreamtime of Bran Stark on *Game of Thrones*; and in the absurdist plot spirals, the gizmos and MacGuffins, of *Lost*. *The Sopranos* paid homage with Agent Cooper-esque fugue states and shots of trees blowing in the wind, rippling in their fullness and strangeness. And how is it finally communicated to Tony Soprano, after years of repressed suspicion, that Big Pussy—one of his most trusted sidekicks—is ratting him out to the FBI? By a talking fish, in a delirium, after some bad chicken vindaloo. It doesn't get more *Twin Peaks* than that.

Then there was the garmonbozia. In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me*, the much-scorned theatrical-release prequel that Lynch made after the end of the series, the little red-suited man pops up again and slurs out something that gets subtitled as *I want all my ... garmonbozia (pain and sorrow)*. Moments later, we see him in horrible close-up, nibbling on a spoonful of something that looks like creamed corn. Deep as we are in Lynchian wackiness here, the meaning is not obscure: The little red-suited man and his fellow denizens of the dream realm have a taste for human suffering, which they call garmonbozia and consume in the form of a viscous, pearlescent psychic distillate.

Twin Peaks, as a narrative, had a core of almost blackout darkness. Who killed Laura Palmer? Her father, Leland, played by Ray Wise, with his huge and buggily handsome/disturbing Klaus Kinski face. Leland had been molesting his daughter for years, and she, in her brokenness, had crossed over to the druggy, sex-work side of *Twin Peaks*, sucked into the town's undertow of exploitation. This was the spine of the plot. For all its whimsy, *Twin Peaks* was piled high with garmonbozia. Viewers, in fact, had never before experienced such (*pain and sorrow*) on the small screen, and this too was part of the show's breakthrough—to blow open, in a subterranean way, the emotional range of TV drama. Dollops of garmonbozia have since become standard.

What can, or should, we expect from Season 3? To calmly anticipate another ream of seamless prestige television, of the sort that is now ubiquitous, feels like an insult to the raw wizardry of David Lynch. We will watch it, at any rate, not anchored to time and the boxy television set, but weightlessly adrift in our personal viewing cells. It might be great. It might be a disaster. But it won't blow our minds. It can't, because that already happened. ■

James Parker is a contributing editor at The Atlantic.



▼
BOOKS

Screw Wisdom

In a bold new memoir of female middle age, libido obliterates the usual bromides.

BY LAURA KIPNIS

MIDDLE AGE LOVES its platitudes, chiefly the ones about hard-won wisdom and the many things that once seemed important but no longer do as you face down impending mortality and irrelevance. And don't forget the ones about small things that are far more important than you'd realized. Among the many indignities of aging is the irresistible temptation to reach for some menu of bromides and convey to the world those invaluable lessons about living.

This isn't exactly scintillating stuff, and for women writers the ground is especially well trod. The demise of your looks and sexual attractiveness (colloquially known as fuckability) a few decades before men suffer the same fate—sorry, we've heard it, and heard it some more. The condition is insulting enough minus the compensatory nuggets of sagacity about how not fretting over your looks is freeing, or about how getting laid is still fun just not that important, and guess what: Men aren't so crucial after all! Loving yourself is what really matters.

Then there's the mandatory wryness. God save me from wryness.

Admittedly I'm not the best audience for fare like this—I'm the kind of person who, upon encountering any version of the statement "I'm the kind of person who . . ." instantly disbelieves whatever comes next. The little Freud in me hears dissimulation, overassertion, someone trying to strong-arm the world into seeing her in a flattering way, like an aging film star through a Vaseline lens. Over dinner recently, an acquaintance (single and approaching a certain age) returned repeatedly to the theme of not wanting to be coupled. She wondered why people kept insisting she get coupled, and proleptically bemoaned how much narrower her life would be were she coupled. What I heard was someone desperate to couple.

Having confessed to what an enormous bitch I am, I can only assume that the reason I wasn't invited to contribute to the latest volume in the *Bitch* franchise, *The Bitch Is Back*—successor to 2002's best-selling *The Bitch in the House*—is my obvious failure to fit the profile prescribed by the subtitle, *Older, Wiser, and (Getting) Happier*. While I'm definitely older, I've learned nothing, and given the state of things, I feel pretty sure the only people getting happier are the ones who are heavily medicated.

The problem is not that I'm uninterested in reading about how others are navigating such

midlife quandaries as whether to get Botox, or how to spice up sex after 30 years with the same boring husband when you were never that into sex in the first place. I'm as fascinated as anyone by the sex lives of my peers, their medical conditions and romantic travails, their weight gains and other life exigencies. And don't get me started on that eternal heterosexual-female quandary: Men—monsters or just perpetually disappointing?

But the midlife progress report is a deadly genre for a writer; that way lie banality and drab prose, or so I found myself ungenerously reflecting while perusing *The Bitch Is Back*. There's plenty to identify with, and an admirably diverse selection of life experiences on offer (arranged marriage, transgender marital dilemmas, cancer, loss of a child). Many of the writers have proved their literary bona fides elsewhere. Still, I could have done with fewer updates from contributors to the first *Bitch* volume, who catch us up on the past 15 years as though we're all at a high-school reunion. I noticed I was doing more skimming than pondering. Having the editor, Cathi Hanauer, frame certain essays with arm-twisting commands didn't help: "Read her story. Get inspired. Make the world better. Live your life, Live your life, Live your life."

I'D BEEN TRYING to figure out why this well-meaning volume left me feeling so peevish when I read Claire Dederer's latest memoir, *Love and Trouble*, whose subtitle, *A Midlife Reckoning*, would seem to put it dangerously close to *The Bitch Is Back*'s wheelhouse. Except her subtitle could as easily have been *Getting Stupider Every Day*. I immediately cheered up—I believe I've found in Dederer a peevishly kindred spirit.

I was not expecting this, since I recalled her previous book, *Poser: My Life in Twenty-Three Yoga Poses*, as rather weighed down by the figuring-things-out imperative, despite some irreverence at the expense of a "generation of hollow-eyed women, chasing virtue." That's how Dederer anointed her circle of North Seattle enlightenment-seeking mothers, who were busy ensuring their worthiness by pureeing their own organic baby food. An obsession with moral cleanliness, she shrewdly observed, fueled their preservative-free lifestyles and yoga practices. Not that she was entirely immune from the condition herself. But as a participant-observer mocking the native rituals while sipping the delicious local nectar, she made sure to toss in a fair amount of eye-rolling for the benefit of yoga haters and purity shunners like myself.

Love and Trouble is a different sort of animal. Though Dederer continues to perambulate the virtue theme, this time she does so as an apostate.

The Culture File

BOOKS

What knits things together is sex, and all the men who were and are a delivery system for it.

The effect is to unleash a dangerously rambunctious writer on the world. The quippiness of *Poser* has deepened into something stylistically far more distinctive. Sentence for sentence, a more pleasure-yielding midlife memoir is hard to think of. To hedge the accolade slightly, I suspect some portion of the pleasure was narcissistic on my part: I kept recognizing myself in these pages, especially in their evocations of middle-aged befuddlements, and of the surprisingly long half-life of adolescent inchoateness.

Still burdened by an overinsistent libido despite her crumbling body ("There's really no dignified way to go to seed as a woman"), Dederer is, by her account, a perpetual hot mess. But so are a lot of the middle-aged women she knows. She and her girlfriends meet for crying sessions, sobbing self-indulgent buckets of tears for no particular reason. She kisses men (and the occasional woman) who aren't her husband, and fantasizes about men who aren't her husband while in bed with her husband. All the sins and impurities that yoga was meant to cleanse apparently flourished instead. She lusts after a short-story writer encountered at a literary conference; an email flirtation ensues, eventually discovered by her husband. (In *Poser*, she and her husband virtuously shared an email account and a laptop, the Information Age version of a marital chastity belt.)

This is all quite a treat: a 50ish lady memoirist with no epiphanies in sight. Nothing's figured out and nothing's getting better, except Dederer's prose, which has acquired a wonderful sordidness.

It's not really what memoirists say about themselves that tells you who they are; it's the structure of their metaphors. Metaphors are a way of smuggling in backdoor meanings, and Dederer embeds them in her sentences like shrapnel. An old couch her toddlers played on is "as stained with shit and vomit and blood as the backseat of Travis Bickle's taxi." "The sun [in Utah] was unforgiving, like a Mormon rapist." She roots around in old letters "like a truffle pig." Her own previous memoir, its feminine themes wrapped in yoga (a quintessential "lady book," she acknowledges), reminds her of a scallop wrapped in bacon.

Rather than telling you what to think of her, she's immersing you in an idiosyncratic consciousness. For Dederer, even when it's sunny, things are filthy, swinish, thrillingly violent; sedate middle-class lives are a little sickening. Femininity, too, conceals a wealth of dirtiness beneath the pretty frills. Dederer is suitably ambivalent about being slotted into what she regards as the obviously lesser gender, but instead of trafficking in uplifting slogans, she savors the secret squalor. She finds creative work-arounds.

One such work-around was to become a world-class slut—I use the word with utter respect—as an adolescent and into her 20s. She's often quite funny and pretty unrepentant about fucking her way through much of the Western world. Sometimes the sex was “accidental”—that is, she was passed out. Not all of this activity was particularly pleasurable or happy-making, but for Dederer the allure of sex lay in its mystical power to transport her out of herself while simultaneously grounding her. And she valued the sense of power it gave her over men. That adolescent “clueless bitch” is still breathing hard down her neck, well into middle age.

DE DERER REFUSES TO pathologize or regret any of this. Even more admirable is the way the restless sexual seeking of yesteryear is echoed in the memoir’s restlessness of form. *Love and Trouble* is like the town pump of memoir idioms. We get first person, second person, lists, annotated maps, how-to manuals, a “case study” of a teenage slut replete with graphs, and two letters. Both are addressed to Roman Polanski, whose violations of a 13-year-old girl occasion Dederer’s reflections on the sexual encroachments that punctuated her own rather feral teenage years. She also spins out a rape scenario without betraying whether it’s fantasy or reality. I was reminded of the formal promiscuity of Jennifer Egan’s *A Visit From the Goon Squad*—there, too, the real story is in the ruptures.

The memoir’s constantly shifting vantage points allow Dederer to keep returning to the same themes without wearing them out. What knits things together is, of course, sex—the stranger-fucking of adolescence, the been-there-done-that of married sex, the illicit flirtations, all the men who were and are a delivery system for sex, sex as a delivery system for an elusive sense of self. And the power of sex to unravel everything you thought you knew about yourself. And the power of fucking men to rectify the injustice of not having been born a man in a world that favors them.

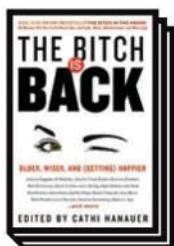
Dederer is startlingly frank here, and women aren’t always the greatest fans of frankness on these matters. She’s equally candid about masochistic yearnings to be passive, dominated, victimized, fantasy-raped—and also sexually adored in a way that will (hopefully) solve everything. Even the tedium of marital sex—a frequent theme in *The Bitch Is Back*, too—becomes, in Dederer’s treatment, surprising stuff. “Marriage is essentially plotless, but a dick has a plot,” she writes, offering up a set of instructions on how to fuck your husband of 15 years. A lot of brio is required to put it quite so pithily.

Of course when it comes to plot, Dederer is on home turf: Memoirists are as involved in the

The Culture File



LOVE AND
TROUBLE:
A MIDLIFE
RECKONING
CLRAE DEDERER
Knopf



THE BITCH IS
BACK: OLDER,
WISER, AND
(GETTING)
HAPPIER
EDITED BY
CATHI HANAUER
William Morrow

mechanics of plotting as any novelist. Never mind what occurred in your life; it’s the ordering of events into a story that matters. In lesser hands, that means retrospectively positing causes and effects: This happened because that happened first, like on a billiard table—this ball hit that ball, which went in that hole. We all do it, aided by therapists and well-meaning friends. My mother didn’t love me, so I found a man who wouldn’t love me either. My mother didn’t love me, so I found a woman who would. Our stories vary, but we subject them to familiar geometries. We make the facts jump through familiar hoops, also known as tropes: traumas, dark moments, reversals, epiphanies. But causality is the mother of all clichés, and the clichés don’t fall far from the midlife-reckoning industry.

After reading early chapters of the memoir, Dederer’s agent wanted to know: Why all the sluttiness? So Dederer wonders whether she should frame a disturbing episode that took place when she was 13—a grown-up friend of her mother’s hippie boyfriend climbed into her sleeping bag and frottaged her one night, though didn’t go further—as the source of her later bed-hopping and adult incoherence. Maybe the “sleeping-bag thingy” is the key to everything?

Life is lived forward, but can only be understood backward, said Kierkegaard. To put it another way, midlife reckonings revise the events of the past to make the present comprehensible. But Dederer, refreshingly unwilling to impersonate a billiard ball, dismisses as “a bullshit narrative construct” the idea that a single event can change your life. She even ups the ante: Maybe that teenage sexual encroachment was, at some level, desired? There’s no way to know, but reversing the causal arrows lets her do some hard thinking about the erotics of violation stories and how much pleasure they’ve yielded, and still do, in her psyche. Indeed, female masochism is a gift that keeps giving in Dederer’s hands. She gets as much mileage from it as Philip Roth did from Newark.

Some of us prefer to cast ourselves as the victim of events, using stories of injuries and affronts to dodge tougher issues, including the deep, intransigent weirdness of simply being female. At some point I realized (epiphany!) that the promiscuities of *Love and Trouble* were rather heroic: a case of stomping down the temptation to tell an easier story and look pretty in the world’s eyes. Would that we all managed to stomp down such temptations.

End of life lesson. **A**

Laura Kipnis’s new book, Unwanted Advances: Sexual Paranoia Comes to Campus, was published in April.

How Pixar Lost Its Way

For 15 years, the animation studio was the best on the planet. Then Disney bought it.

BY CHRISTOPHER ORR

AWELL-REGARDED HOLLYWOOD INSIDER recently suggested that sequels can represent “a sort of creative bankruptcy.” He was discussing Pixar, the legendary animation studio, and its avowed distaste for cheap spin-offs. More pointedly, he argued that if Pixar were only to make sequels, it would “wither and die.” Now, all kinds of industry experts say all kinds of things. But it is surely relevant that these observations were made by Ed Catmull, the president of Pixar, in his best-selling 2014 business-leadership book.

Yet here comes *Cars 3*, rolling into a theater near you this month. You may recall that the original *Cars*, released back in 2006, was widely judged to be the studio’s worst film to date. *Cars 2*, which followed five years later, was panned as even worse. And if *Cars 3* isn’t disheartening enough, two of the three Pixar films in line after it are also sequels: *The Incredibles 2* and (say it isn’t so!) *Toy Story 4*.

The painful verdict is all but indisputable: The golden era of Pixar is over. It was a 15-year run of unmatched commercial and creative excellence, beginning with *Toy Story* in 1995 and culminating with the extraordinary trifecta of *WALL-E* in 2008, *Up* in 2009, and *Toy Story 3* (yes, a sequel, but a great one) in 2010. Since then, other animation studios have made consistently better films. The stop-motion magicians at Laika have supplied such gems as *Coraline* and *Kubo and the Two Strings*. And, in a stunning reversal,

Walt Disney Animation Studios—adrift at the time of its 2006 acquisition of the then-untouchable Pixar—has rebounded with such successes as *Tangled*, *Wreck-It Ralph*, *Frozen*, and *Big Hero 6*. One need only look at this year’s Oscars: Two Disney movies, *Zootopia* and *Moana*, were nominated for Best Animated Feature, and *Zootopia* won. Pixar’s *Finding Dory* was shut out altogether.

This thriving expansion of high-quality animated storytelling would not have been possible without Pixar. The studio literally reinvented the genre with *Toy Story*, the first computer-generated 3-D-animated feature film. Each subsequent Pixar release offered new feats of technical wizardry, from engineering the delicate trajectories of millions of individual strands of fur in 2001’s *Monsters, Inc.* to capturing the wondrous interplay between light and water in 2003’s *Finding Nemo*.

Even as others gradually caught up with Pixar’s visual artistry, the studio continued to tell stories of unparalleled depth and sophistication. Pixar’s signature achievement was to perfect a kind of crossover animated cinema that appealed equally to kids and adults. The key was managing to tell two stories at once, constructing a straightforward children’s story atop a more complex moral and narrative architecture. *Up*, for example, took a relatively conventional boy’s adventure tale and harnessed it to a moving, thoroughly grown-up story of loss, grief, and renewal.

The theme that the studio mined with greatest success during its first decade and a half was



parenthood, whether real (*Finding Nemo*, *The Incredibles*) or implicit (*Monsters, Inc.*, *Up*). Pixar's distinctive insight into parent-child relations stood out from the start, in *Toy Story*, and lost none of its power in two innovative and unified sequels. "Who would want to see a movie about a little boy who plays with dolls?", Michael Eisner, then the CEO of Disney, obtusely asked when told of plans for the Pixar debut. (Disney was to co-finance it.) But the film's creative premise is precisely—and crucially—the reverse: *Toy Story* is a movie about dolls who want to be played with by a little boy.

That inversion complicates and intensifies the film's emotional power. In their desire for the attention of 6-year-old Andy, the toys—particularly Woody the cowboy and Buzz Lightyear the spaceman—mirror children's eagerness to capture their parents' attention. Yet of course Andy is not a parent. He's a child, and it's the toys that are mostly accorded the role of grown-ups. (An astute bit of psychological realism: Andy, like most kids, uses them to pantomime adulthood.) So even as, on one level, Woody and Buzz act as children to Andy's parent, on another they act as parents to Andy's child: His happiness is their responsibility, and they will resort to the most extreme measures imaginable to ensure it.

Toy Story thrilled adults and kids alike with this canny and moving portrayal of the parent-child bond. And its creators seemed to appreciate what a rich emotional and dramatic vein they had tapped into. Following the movie's success, Disney, then the distributor for Pixar, pushed for the production of a quickly made, direct-to-video sequel. Such second-tier fare has long been a lucrative Disney sideline, generally produced by the in-house subsidiary Disneytoon Studios. (Examples of its output include such classics as *The Lion King 1 ½* and *The Little Mermaid: Ariel's Beginning*.) But Pixar rebelled, on the grounds that the studio aspired only to excellence. Instead it produced, at breakneck pace, a theatrical-release sequel that met the high bar set by the original.

In his 2014 book, *Creativity, Inc.*, Catmull describes the episode as "the crucible in which Pixar's true identity was forged." *Toy Story 2* (1999) didn't merely equal the original. The sequel enriched it, presenting Woody with a new but related quasi-parental dilemma: Should he spend the rest of his life untouched and pristine on the shelf of a vintage-toy collector? Or should he return to enjoy loving play with a rowdy boy (as the movie opens, Andy has inadvertently torn Woody's arm half off) who will ultimately outgrow and discard him? In the end, Woody opts for the messy combination of joy and sacrifice with Andy, as apt a metaphor for parenthood as you're likely

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Pixar perfected a kind of crossover cinema that appealed equally to kids and adults.

to find. And with its foreshadowing of eventual abandonment, *Toy Story 2* laid the groundwork for still further thematic development. That promise was fulfilled almost a decade later, in *Toy Story 3*, a concluding chapter in which Andy finally heads off to college and a new life, leaving behind toys and parents alike.

Almost as renowned as Pixar's onscreen magic throughout this period was its collaborative culture. Under the leadership of the studio's founder and creative guru, John Lasseter, it relied heavily on a small, mutually reinforcing group of gifted animators and editors: Pete Docter, Andrew Stanton, Joe Ranft, Lee Unkrich, and Brad Bird (who joined Pixar in 2000). Known informally as the "Braintrust," the group grew over time, but these five men and Lasseter stood out for their collegial self-criticism and ethos of constant refinement in the pursuit of perfection. So strong was their synergy that every time outside directors were brought in to handle a film (as they were for *Toy Story 2* and *Ratatouille*), they were ultimately replaced by one of the early members of the Braintrust. In 2004, a Disney subsidiary, Circle 7 Animation, was created to produce sequels to Pixar films. Dubbed "Pixaren't," its doors were soon closed and all its scripts scrapped.

AND THEN, after *Toy Story 3*, the Pixar magic began to fade. The last film of the golden era, it was also the first film begun after Disney acquired Pixar for \$7.4 billion in 2006, when Lasseter and Catmull were made, respectively, the chief creative officer and the president of both studios. The sequels that followed—*Cars 2* (a spy spoof) in 2011 and *Monsters University* (a college farce) in 2013—lacked any thematic or emotional connection to the movies that spawned them. Though better than either of those two, *Brave*, Pixar's 2012 foray into princessdom, was a disappointment as well. The studio rallied with *Inside Out* in 2015. But the inferior *The Good Dinosaur* (also in 2015) and last year's mediocre *Finding Dory* only confirmed the overall decline, which was particularly noticeable in comparison with the revival under way over at Disney Animation.

Catmull once said that Pixar's intent was to make one sequel for every two original features. The ratio since 2010 has been closer to the inverse. Especially lamentable was the announcement, in 2014, of plans for *Toy Story 4*. The narrative and emotional arc of the trilogy had clearly been completed with Andy's departure for college. The third installment had even closed, lovingly, with a shot that neatly mirrored the opening shot of the first film: the fluffy-white-clouds-on-blue-sky

wallpaper of young Andy's bedroom in *Toy Story* giving way to real white clouds in the real blue sky. Yet instead of concluding on that touching note, Pixar has opted for what has been described as a "franchise reboot"—surely the most dispiriting phrase in contemporary cinema.

The differing trajectories of Pixar and Disney Animation have hardly gone unremarked. At the time of the merger, Disney was "demoralized" and "failing as a company," Catmull observed a couple of years ago, before adding, "Disney is now successful." About Pixar, he was less sanguine: "There are major issues we're addressing at Pixar now."

Lasseter and Catmull do, after all, have only so many hours in their days to devote to their competing obligations at Pixar and Disney, as Catmull made clear in his book. If the studio with the corporate parent's name on it took precedence, that would hardly be a surprise. Nor would it be surprising if the dilution of focus took a toll, given how dependent Pixar's culture was on an intimate circle of innovative minds. (Other Braintrust members have been pursuing interests beyond Pixar too: Stanton explored live-action filmmaking with *John Carter*, and Bird did the same with *Mission: Impossible—Ghost Protocol* and *Tomorrowland*.)

Still, the erosion of Pixar's uncompromising creative independence can't be reduced to a case of inadequate oversight. The Disney merger seems to have brought with it new imperatives. Pixar has always been very good at making money, but historically it did so largely on its own terms. The studio, remember, rejected a low-quality direct-to-video *Toy Story 2*, and instead worked round the clock to come up with another tour de force. But Lasseter, among his other obligations, now oversees Disneytoon Studios as well. In that capacity he served as the executive producer of 2013's *Planes* and its 2014 sequel, *Planes: Fire & Rescue*. The two movies are—like virtually all Disneytoon films—shameless, derivative cash grabs. What makes them unique is that they are also explicit spin-offs of Pixar's *Cars* franchise, a development that would have been almost unimaginable before the merger. As Lasseter himself explained, "By expanding the *Cars* world, *Planes* gave us a whole new set of fun-filled situations."

NO T TO MENTION a whole new set of toys. Merchandising has, naturally, always been a temptation for Pixar (as for any purveyor of kids' movies). And Disney has played a central role in the marketing and merchandising of Pixar films since 1991. But when you become a division of the largest entertainment

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FILM

Subtle themes don't easily translate into amusement-park rides.

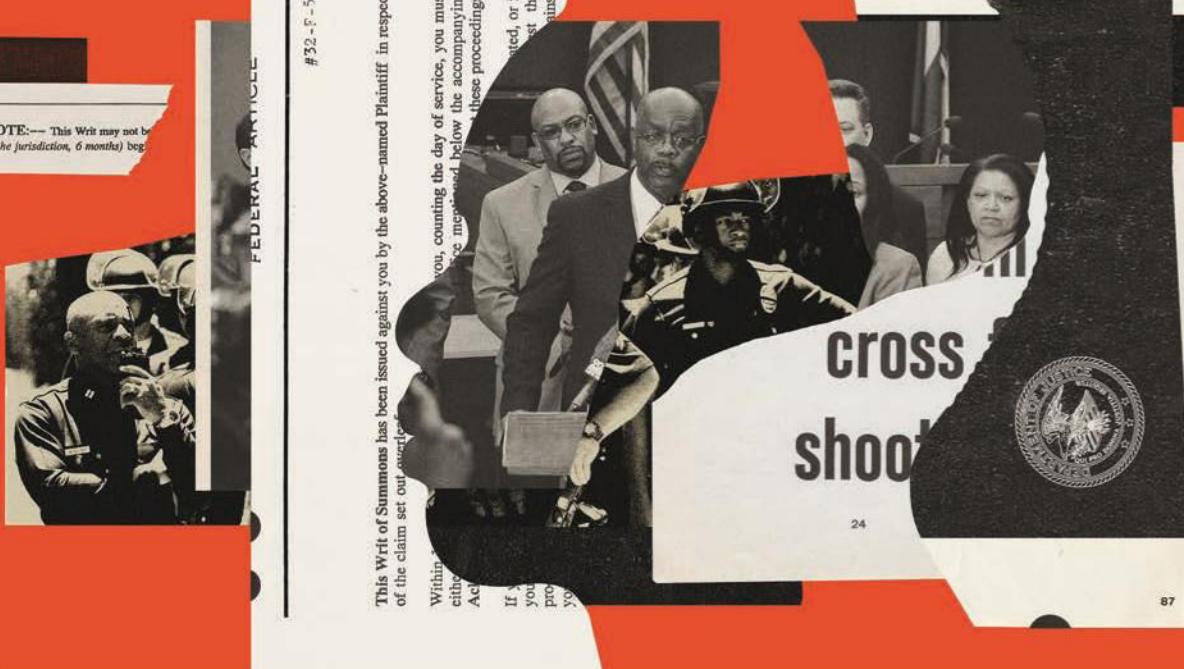
conglomerate in the history of the world, commercial opportunities multiply exponentially. There are a dozen Disney theme parks scattered across the globe in need of, well, themes for their rides. So the year after its acquisition of Pixar, Disney announced that it would open Toy Story Midway Mania the following year at both Disney World and Disney California Adventure. Later in 2007, Disney announced a \$1.1 billion redesign of its failing California Adventure park, featuring a new, 12-acre Cars Land. Additional *Toy Story*- and *Finding Nemo*-themed rides are in the works in Shanghai and Tokyo.

Indeed, the overlap between the Pixar movies that beget sequels and the movies that inspire rides at Disney amusement parks is all but total. Theme-park rides are premised on an awareness of the theme in question, and young parkgoers are less likely to be familiar with movies that are more than a decade old. If you want them clamoring to experience Toy Story Midway Mania, they'll need a *Toy Story 4*. Cars Land could use a *Cars 3*, and *Finding Nemo*-associated rides were due a *Finding Dory*. Who better to preside over all this corporate synergy than Lasseter—who, to note yet one more of his many titles, is also the "principal creative adviser" for Walt Disney Imagineering, the subsidiary responsible for designing the rides?

Pixar has promised that after the upcoming glut of sequels, the studio will focus on original features. But we're grown-ups, and though the once inimitable studio has taught us to believe in renewal, it has also trained us in grief and loss. I'm not sure I dare to expect much more of what used to make Pixar Pixar: the idiosyncratic stories, the deep emotional resonance, the subtle themes that don't easily translate into amusement-park rides. I'm thinking of the heartbreakingly waltz-set "Married Life" segment of *Up*, which packs more emotion into four minutes than most Oscar-nominated dramas manage in their entire running time. Or the wistful solitude of *WALL-E*'s robotic protagonist, left behind on Earth to clean up his creators' mess. Or Anton Ego's artful critique of criticism at the end of *Ratatouille*, arguably the shiest words on the subject since Addison DeWitt's in *All About Eve*.

None of these films is scheduled to have a sequel. And none is particularly suited to becoming a theme-park ride (though Disney unveiled *Ratatouille: The Adventure* at, of course, Disneyland Paris). Which can't help but raise the question: Would Pixar even bother making those pictures anymore? ■

Christopher Orr is a senior editor and the principal film critic at The Atlantic.



NOTE:— This Writ may not be issued before the date of the jurisdiction, 6 months) beg.

FEDERAL ARTICLE

16

This Writ of Summons has been issued against you by the above-named Plaintiff in respect of the claim set out ~~out~~ in the Statement of Claim.

BOOKS

When Black America Was Pro-Police

As crime rose from the late '60s to the '90s, so did inner-city support for law-and-order policies.

BY PAUL BUTLER

AFRICAN AMERICANS LAMENT that the cops are never there when you need them—that “911 is a joke,” as the Public Enemy song goes—and then they complain that their communities are “overpoliced.” These gripes aren’t so much inconsistent as they are underdeveloped, or they have been until now. James Forman Jr.’s revelatory new book, *Locking Up Our Own: Crime and Punishment in Black America*, sets out to describe how, and explain why, both complaints are valid and what that means for criminal-justice reform.

If a conservative is a liberal who has been mugged, you might expect black folks, who are disproportionately victims of crime, to support the politics of law and order. And they frequently have done just that, according to Forman, a former public defender in Washington, D.C.; a co-founder of a D.C. charter school for at-risk youth; and now a professor at Yale Law School. Using the District of Columbia (aka “Chocolate City”) as his laboratory, Forman documents how, as crime rose from the late 1960s to the ’90s, the city’s African American residents responded by supporting an array of tough-on-crime measures. A 1975 measure decriminalizing marijuana died in the majority-black city council, which went on to implement one of the nation’s most stringent gun-control laws. Black residents endorsed a ballot initiative that called for imposing harsh sentences on drug dealers and violent offenders. Replicated on a national level over the same period, these policies led to mass incarceration and aggressive policing strategies like stop-and-frisk, developments that are now looked upon as affronts to racial justice.

Much of what Forman reports would not surprise anyone who has spent time at a black church or a black barbershop—or in the company of my mother. In the '60s, she marched with Malcolm X, and during the '80s, after the public school where she taught was vandalized, she said, “Those niggers should be put under the jail.” My mom’s ideas about criminal-justice policy are informed by getting held up at gunpoint in front of our house on Chicago’s South Side, seeing family members suffer from addiction, and watching the cops treat my stepfather like a criminal after he got into a fender bender with a white man.

Needing the criminal-justice system to help keep you safe, to be fair in its investigations, and to be merciful with people who've run afoul of the law—this urgent, unwieldy agenda explains much of African American politics, from the anti-lynching campaigns of the early 20th century to the Black Lives Matter movement today. As Forman reminds his readers, black people have long been vigilant, often to no avail, about two kinds of equality enshrined in our nation's ideals: equal protection of the law, and equal justice under the law.

THE ABSENCE OF equal protection has been, historically, the most vexing problem in the lives of African Americans. The NAACP was founded in 1909 partly in response to the federal and state governments' turning a blind eye to white violence against blacks. More than half a century later, as open-air drug markets flourished in inner-city neighborhoods, black activists perceived a related form of racist neglect by the state. The police, they believed, would have

shut down those markets had they existed in white communities. In fact, as Forman notes, many activists thought that those in power actually condoned the availability of drugs in the hood, as a means to keep the black man down. (In those days, it was black men—rather than all black people—who were seen as principally injured by racism, a fallacy that made its way into government policy under the guise of the controversial Moynihan Report in 1965.) The black radical Stokely Carmichael, speaking at a historically black college in 1970, said, “Fighting against drugs is revolutionary because drugs are a trick of the oppressor.”

Back then, many white progressives were pro-pot, and disinclined to see drug prohibition as part of a revolutionary utopia. African American suspicion of white liberals is a theme throughout *Locking Up Our Own*. One reason the 1975 effort to decriminalize marijuana in Washington, D.C., failed is that the bill’s two primary supporters were white men. Forman quotes the spoken-word artist Gil Scott-Heron’s portrayal of a typical white member of Students for a Democratic Society: “He is fighting for legalized smoke ... / All I want is a good home and a wife and children / And some food to feed them every night.”

Scott-Heron’s very traditional wish list reveals another important explanation for black support of law and order. Not for the first time, many middle-class African Americans subscribed to the “politics of respectability”: The race advances, the view goes, when black people demonstrate that they are capable of living up to white standards of morality and conduct. Among the black elite, advocacy for lenient criminal-justice policies was deemed an admission that black interests were allied with the interests of criminals. That sort of solidarity would hardly help the cause. For many bougie African Americans—certainly those in cities like Washington and Atlanta, where light-skinned blacks dominated the middle class—colorism was also at work: The fact that their dark-skinned hoodlum cousins were getting locked up was not a problem. Indeed, one of the primary arguments for allowing African Americans to join Atlanta’s police department in the 1930s and ’40s was that they would be better able than white officers to distinguish between elite blacks and the riffraff.

As Forman tells the story, the politics of respectability converged with other cultural and social influences to shape tough-on-crime attitudes in the black community. He builds on, among other things, two conclusions associated with the work of the Harvard Law School professor Randall Kennedy. In *Race, Crime, and the Law*, Kennedy argues that African Americans suffer more harm from underenforcement of the law than from

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BOOKS

I knew how to cross-examine a defendant and mock his references to his “baby mama.”

overenforcement. He also notes that “racist” can be, from the perspective of African Americans, an inaccurate way to describe criminal-justice policies that burden primarily black criminals. Forman doesn’t endorse these views. Rather, he demonstrates how influential they were in the black body politic during an era of high crime.

At the same time, he avoids any hint of the “gotcha” spirit that some commentators found in Michael Javen Fortner’s *Black Silent Majority: The Rockefeller Drug Laws and the Politics of Punishment*, which mines similar territory. Whereas Fortner’s analysis could be read as a rejoinder to the Black Lives Matter movement—implying that early support for harsh sentencing in drug cases undercut later critiques of the policy—Forman’s experience as a D.C. public defender gives him more street cred. His stories about clients make it clear that, however well-intentioned black middle-class power brokers were in fashioning conservative approaches to criminal justice, the policies that resulted were devastating to the larger community.

Some of those stories will stay with me a long time. One woman lost her hard-won job at FedEx because she got arrested for possessing a little bit of weed, and then couldn’t get the job back even after the prosecutors dropped the case. Her arrest record will follow her like a curse for the rest of her life, all because cops pulled her over, supposedly for the infraction of driving a car with dark tinted windows. Though Brandon, a scared 15-year-old kid, had a gun, he never used it. He was sent to jail for six months anyway when a cop found him carrying it (along with a small amount of pot). Forman doesn’t tell us how things turned out for Brandon, but few boys sentenced to D.C.’s notorious Oak Hill juvenile-detention facility left better off than they came in. Sending a nonviolent kid there was like sending him to a finishing school for criminals.

I WAS A PROSECUTOR in D.C. during part of the time that Forman writes about, and I have some stories too. I loved standing in front of juries in my best suit, announcing my name and declaring that I represented the United States. (The federal government is the primary local prosecutor in the capital, because of the city’s status as a district and not a state.) The jurors—often elderly black people—would beam at me, and I imagined them thinking, *You go, boy, you represent the United States!* I didn’t know the term *politics of respectability* at the time, but I did know how to cross-examine a defendant (virtually every single one was black) and mock his diction and references to his “baby mama,” and then button up my jacket and give the jury

a look indicating that they and I were middle-class Negroes and the defendant was a thug who needed to be locked up. I won most of my cases, and Forman's book helps me understand that my trial-advocacy skills weren't the only reason.

But I didn't win all my cases, and that helps me understand that not all the black people in D.C. were as complicit as Forman implies. When I was in training, various experienced prosecutors told us rookies that in some cases we would convince the jury that the defendant was guilty. But if it was a drug case, jurors might find him not guilty because they didn't want to send another young black man to jail. That did indeed happen, and when I left the prosecutor's office and became a law professor, I learned that this practice of jury nullification is not simply legal. It is a check built into the Constitution, through the double-jeopardy clause, which has been interpreted to mean that not-guilty verdicts cannot be reversed for any reason. The purpose is to let the people, rather than a power-mad prosecutor of the kind I used to be, have the final say in the fate of the accused.

I am not sure what Forman would make of the fact that in the nation's capital, widespread jury nullification in drug cases coincided with the city council's passage of a law in 1994 that took away the right to a jury trial in many misdemeanor cases. As a result, D.C. residents have fewer rights to a jury trial than do the residents of most states. More-vivid evidence of deeply mixed impulses with perverse consequences would be hard to find: A law passed by a majority-black city council protected prosecutors (who, though you won't learn this from Forman, remain majority-white) from the judgment of majority-black juries.

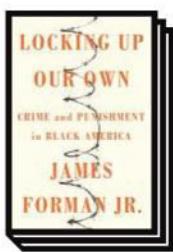
Locking Up Our Own is a well-timed, nuanced examination of the past, but I am glad that the story it tells is over. Beginning in the early '90s,

The Culture File

crime went down dramatically across the country. It has continued, by and large, to decline. Activists have turned their attention to mass incarceration and police violence. Even mainstream civil-rights organizations now focus on reducing sentences and making the police more accountable and transparent. Gone are the days when some black activists and politicians aimed to equip cops with more-powerful guns, as then-D.C. Mayor Marion Barry wanted to do during the crack wave that began in the late '80s.

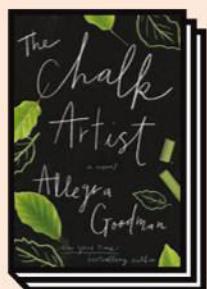
As everyone knows, Barry himself got caught up in that epidemic and eventually, like a lot of the African American politicians who figure in Forman's account, changed his mind about what was in the best interests of the community. If law-and-order policies had actually worked to make neighborhoods safer, maybe people would have been willing to tolerate them, despite the racial disparities and erosions of civil liberties they entailed. But they did not work. Most criminologists don't credit aggressive policing and harsh sentencing with substantially reducing crime, in part because crime went down in jurisdictions that weren't relying on those policies.

At its best, democracy is about being creative and experimental, learning from mistakes and trying a different approach. *Locking Up Our Own* makes a powerful case that the African American community was instrumental in creating a monster. We should be grateful that the same community—from nullifying D.C. jurors and Black Lives Matter activists to writers like Michelle Alexander and artists like Beyoncé and Kendrick Lamar—is leading the fight to take the monster down. ■



LOCKING UP OUR OWN: CRIME AND PUNISHMENT IN BLACK AMERICA
JAMES FORMAN JR.
FSG

Paul Butler is a professor at Georgetown University Law Center. His new book, Chokehold: Policing Black Men, will be published in July.



COVER TO COVER
The Chalk Artist

ALLEGRA GOODMAN
DIAL

HOW'S THIS for a challenge? Write a novel about virtual-reality gaming and high-school teaching, and make it a story that adults and kids will find hard to put down. In her new novel, Allegra Goodman creates suspense where you might least expect to find it.

Aidan is a teenager holed up in his bedroom, consumed at all hours by a multiplayer

game called Ever-When, in which he is a Water Elf named Tildor. Collin, a college dropout, is a virtuosic artist whose remarkable chalk drawings land him a nearly round-the-clock job at Arkadia, the creator of EverWhen. And Nina—Collin's girlfriend and the daughter of Arkadia's owner—is a Teacher-Corps recruit. Every day she walks into a

classroom of students (Aidan among them) who could care less about Emerson, Shakespeare, Hawthorne, or Dickinson.

But Goodman, as deft a plot engineer as any game designer, makes sure her characters don't stay trapped behind closed doors. She gives them unusual love travails to navigate. The other troubles they stumble

into at home, school, and work also test them in ingenious ways. Goodman, like the best teachers, is intent on watching obsessive fantasies turn into imaginative determination. Readers will be too, pulled along by her protagonists' quests, which are not to follow rules or slay dragons. The real goal is to face complicated selves.

—Ann Hulbert

**RICHARD SPENCER
IS A TROLL,
AN IMP, AN ICON
FOR WHITE
SUPREMacists.
HE WAS ALSO
MY HIGH-SCHOOL
CLASSMATE.
HERE'S HOW
HE BECAME A
SYMPTOM OF THIS
AMERICAN MOMENT.**

**HIS
RANT**

**BY
GRAEME
WOOD**





**PHOTOGRAPHS BY
PHILIP MONTGOMERY**





N DECEMBER 17, 2007, the libertarian magazine *Reason* held a Christmas bash—a “Very Special, Very Secular Christmas Party”—at its office in Washington, D.C. The guest of honor, the late *Atlantic* book critic Christopher Hitchens, tugged liberally on his drink and gave a speech about how the holiday season was oppressive (“like living in fucking North Korea”). Then near the height of his powers as an anti-theist pamphleteer, Hitchens led the crowd in a tuneless rendition of Tom Lehrer’s “A Christmas Carol,” before slipping away and leaving the guests to the open bar and the mistletoe.

Among those guests was a figure from my past. I had not seen Richard Spencer in more than 10 years. He was not yet known as our generation’s most prominent white supremacist. I remembered him as my eighth-grade-chemistry lab partner and high-school classmate. We spotted each other and walked closer, circling uncertainly for a few seconds, before he spoke my name and confirmed that a wormhole had indeed opened from late-1990s North Dallas.

Spencer must have sensed my surprise (I would have sooner expected to see our gym teacher at a Washington magazine party). He told me he had blossomed intellectually since high school. Then he asked me what I thought of Hitchens’s fulminations against God. I had no interesting opinion on the subject. But Spencer did.

Was Hitchens’s critique of Christianity, he said, not as wan and naive as Christianity itself? Christianity had bound together the civilizations of Europe, and now Hitchens wanted to replace it with—well, what exactly? American neoliberal internationalism? Why should anyone care if Christianity was irrational and illiberal, when rationality and liberalism had never been its purpose? Hitchens had missed the point.

Spencer wasn’t exactly defending Christianity; he said that he, like Hitchens, was an atheist. But he longed for something as robust and binding as Christianity had once been in the West, before churches surrendered their power to folk-singing liberals and televangelists.

I think Spencer knew he had me at a loss, because he curled out a smile and let his point hang in the air. I was flummoxed by his argument, a more thoughtful Nietzschean critique than I was prepared to take on—and by the unnerving fact that the

kid who’d once cribbed my chemistry notes now had something to say.

Spencer invited me to join a discussion group he was organizing, the Robert Taft Club. I was wary when he evaded my questions about the politics of his club. He seemed reluctant to reveal too much, too soon. I made a point to lose his business card (he was the literary editor of *The American Conservative*, it said) and forget about him, as I had 10 years before.



OR MOST OF the 25 years we have known each other, my attitude toward Spencer was indifference. He arrived at St. Mark’s School of Texas, our Dallas all-male prep school, in eighth grade. We shared a home-room adviser and both took Latin, which he pronounced, with a verbal tic that persists today, as if the middle consonant were a *d*, as in the name *Aladdin*.

Spencer passed his classes but didn’t excel. He played baseball and football, but you wouldn’t have gone to games to see him play. I remember little to admire and little to despise—other than, perhaps, the featureless mediocrity he represented to my ambitious teenage self. When I graduated, in 1997, having won admission to the Ivy League and achieved escape velocity from the Dallas suburbs, it was the mediocrity of Richard Spencer that I was insufferably proud to have left behind.

But after the Christmas party, my indifference slowly gave way to a surreal curiosity, on its way to loathing. I monitored his activities, distantly. Spencer’s writing kept appearing, advancing ever more extreme opinions in ever more obscure journals. In 2008, he began popularizing the term *alt-right*. On Facebook, he posted images of himself with John Derbyshire—a polymathic, often charming writer who was fired from *National Review* in 2012 for racism—and Richard Lynn, an English psychologist who has argued that East Asians are slightly smarter than whites, who are in turn much smarter than blacks. Spencer hosted Ron Paul, then not yet widely known to have published antiblack screeds in the 1980s and ’90s, at his discussion club.

In 2011, he moved from Washington to Whitefish, Montana, where his mother owns a vacation home and a commercial building. (She is the heiress to cotton farms in Louisiana, and his father is a respected Dallas ophthalmologist.) There he edited and published a new online magazine, *Alternative Right*, and soon took over the National Policy Institute. Founded in 2005 by William Regnery II, of the conservative Regnery publishing family, NPI is a white-identity think tank with little money and virtually no staff. During the next five years, Spencer merged its mission with his own. It remained essentially a one-man operation—the Whitefish house owned by Spencer’s mother is listed in official filings as NPI’s principal office, and its 2015 IRS filing shows that Spencer drew just \$13,275 in salary and was the only paid employee. Still, under Spencer’s direction, NPI put on two conferences and published two books that year.

Alternative Right showed signs of erudition. It was not the product of the same Spencer I had known in high school, who’d managed to misquote Shakespeare (“A poor player who struts and frets his hour upon the stage, then heard no more”) and misspell the name of a *SportsCenter* anchor (“Craige Killborne”) on his yearbook page. The magazine’s racism and sexism were expressed with good grammar and a coherent view of the world.

That view, now well known as the platform of the alt-right, can be summarized as white European cultural and racial supremacy, with a deep contempt for democracy. An active comment section revealed the site's id: Many of the commenters' profile photos featured the double-rune insignia of the SS.

When Donald Trump began adopting alt-right themes during his presidential campaign, Spencer threw him his support. On August 25, 2016, in a scripted campaign speech, Hillary Clinton said that the Trump campaign didn't represent "Republicanism as we have known it." Controlling his campaign, she said, was "an emerging racist ideology known as the alt-right." With one major-party presidential nominee using his nomenclature, and the other accused of supporting his ideas, Spencer got famous, and he moved into an apartment in Northern Virginia. (He continues to live part-time in Whitefish.)

A number of mortified St. Mark's alumni conspired to speak out against him. Eight from our class of 69, myself among them, wrote an anti-Spencer statement on a crowdsourced fund-raising website, supporting resettlement of refugees in Dallas—a cause we chose because we knew it would irritate him. By December, after videographers from *The Atlantic* filmed Spencer receiving Nazi salutes and saying "Hail Trump! Hail our people! Hail victory!", the school community had kicked in more than \$60,000. (The school itself denounced the ideas espoused by Spencer—now its most prominent alumnus since Owen Wilson and his brother Luke—though it didn't name him outright.)

Spencer mocked us on his blog, saying that the "Brooks Brothers Brigade" had turned on one of its own. He scoffed at our having chosen refugees—nonwhite and non-Christian—as the recipients of our largesse. We had reacted, he wrote, by deciding "to commit civilizational suicide even harder than before ... If this episode doesn't express the end stage of WASP decline, I don't know what does." His fans concurred. "I suppose from a Darwinian point of view we have to accept that most Whites are no longer fit for survival," reads the post's second-most-popular comment. "We need a Western Purge, a Noah's Ark moment where the traitors came [sic] be thrown to the niggers to be raped and murdered."



HEN I ASKED SPENCER to meet me in January, before Trump's inauguration, he showed better manners than his fans. (He denies that he advocates violence.) The front door of his apartment in Alexandria, just outside Washington, is not clearly marked, and even though he had given me the address, I wouldn't have found it had a bespectacled young man not intercepted me outside, while I was rummaging around trash cans looking for a house number. "Can I help you?" he asked. He had brown hair and a geeky affect.

I wasn't sure how to reveal to a stranger that I had come to meet Richard Spencer. "I am supposed to meet someone," I said, so vaguely that I must have sounded like I was en route to a drug deal or an orgy.

"Do you have *edgy* political beliefs?" he asked, looking at me askance. (Yet another bland code word: *edgy*, *discussion club*, *policy institute*, even *alt-right* itself.)

"No," I said, "but I'm here to meet someone who does." He motioned me upstairs, to a newly renovated yuppie apartment where a television news crew was striking its equipment. The

SPENCER LONGED FOR SOMETHING AS ROBUST AND BINDING AS CHRISTIANITY HAD ONCE BEEN IN THE WEST.



reporter, an Asian woman, stood in the corner and did not introduce herself, uneasy, perhaps, at the thought of exchanging pleasantries with a Spencer associate now that the cameras were off and she wasn't professionally required to do so.

Spencer walked over, carrying a freshly pressed espresso, and said hello. He dresses nattily and today wore a patterned shirt, a wool vest, and a sport coat. He looked like the scion of a Montana banking family, dressed up and ready to film a commercial in a log cabin, assuring local ranchers that their deposits would be safe with him. Only the Reich-evoking fascist-chic ("fashy") haircut would have been out of place.

Once the crew was gone, he and the young man I'd met outside (a "minion," he called himself) ate lunch with me at a nearby Thai restaurant. The meal was interrupted once, by a young black woman who asked whether he was Richard Spencer, the famous racist. "Yes?," Spencer said, cowering half-playfully. She declared that he "doesn't look as mean in person" before walking off. (Because so many of his critics liken him to a Nazi, Spencer often gets this sort of compliment, for the simple courtesy of not mauling Jews or screaming in German in public.) Spencer asked me to leave his minion's identity out of the story—"I have a 'normie' [conventional] job," the minion explained, "and I don't want to get punished for this"—but otherwise kept the conversation on the record.

Spencer began by complimenting my reporting for this magazine on the Islamic State. "Your articles on ISIS have been popular on the alt-right," he told me.

I winced: Anti-Muslim bigots liked that I had described ISIS as an Islamic movement, linked to traditions within Islam. "Is that because you hate Muslims?," I asked.

"No," he said. "Because ISIS is an identity movement. Because they have ideas, and because you wrote about their



A bookshelf in Spencer's office. He counts the German scholars Friedrich Nietzsche and Carl Schmitt—both skeptics of democracy—among his most important intellectual influences.

He said that singling him out among alumni, for nothing more than political thoughtcrime, was unfair.

He proposed other alumni who deserved condemnation. "I met a St. Mark's guy who had been a bundler [fund-raiser] for George W. Bush," Spencer told me. Spencer said that he'd sensed condescension from the man, and had chewed his tongue raw to keep from upbraiding him. "You led to the deaths of tens of thousands of Americans, and millions in Iraq! Who are you to talk?"

In his view, the Bush administration had manipulated the country into war. "Spreading democracy" and "freedom" are, Spencer said, false ideals, distracting Americans from what really matters—namely, a consciousness of their identity as whites with a shared Christian heritage.

Spencer fantasized about the reversal of fortune that might come if the fund-raiser's enemies should gain more power. "If

ideas. Also, they are a grassroots movement. They've built themselves up fast, from nothing."

I told him I was a leader of the Brooks Brothers Brigade and had contributed to our class's effort to disown him. "It was hurtful," he admitted, to find himself officially reviled by our school's community. "They should be proud to have a graduate who is changing the world."

the alt-right triumphs, we're going to probably throw you in jail. We'll hold you guys accountable."

Other targets among the alumni community included Kurt Eichenwald, class of 1979, a *Newsweek* journalist who had written critically about Trump and the alt-right during the 2016 campaign. Eichenwald suffers from epilepsy, and in December, a Twitter user calling himself @jew_goldstein tweeted a strobe-light GIF to him that triggered a series of seizures, leading to temporary partial paralysis on his left side. Spencer blanked on Eichenwald's name, and both he and the minion laughed as they tried to recall it.

"What is that guy's name? The one whom we almost killed?"

"No, no," the minion corrected him, with the precision of in-house counsel. "We did not send that."

Spencer revised his statement. "We collectively almost killed him. Some alt-right shitlord"—alt-right-speak for "online activist"—"sent him a meme." Two months later, @jew_goldstein was revealed as John Rivello, 29, of Maryland, and charged with cyberstalking and aggravated assault with a deadly weapon. According to the federal criminal complaint, Rivello wrote, in private messages, "I hope this sends him into a seizure" and "Let's see if he dies." Spencer retweeted an appeal to crowdfund Rivello's defense "against lying #fakenews Kurt Kikenwald." (Eichenwald is Episcopalian.)

Spencer worried about political correctness at our alma mater today. "What if there's some kid at St. Mark's who is an alt-right shitlord, who has an anonymous Twitter account, posting videos, following me, retweeting me?" he asked. "What's going to happen to him if he gets discovered?" He looked troubled.

"If you had been overtly racist, the way you are now, back when we were students," I told him, "I'm sure you'd have been expelled or sent to the school psychologist."

He said I might be right.

↑ ↓

N DECEMBER, the hipster-Marxist magazine *Jacobin* published an online essay, "The Elite Roots of Richard Spencer's Racism," that sought to understand his white supremacy. "He represents a common and longstanding (if overlooked) phenomenon: the well-educated and financially comfortable bigot," the author, Michael Phillips, wrote. "His blend of racism and elitism represents only an extreme version of a worldview that has long prevailed among the affluent in Spencer's hometown."

Phillips knows Dallas, but he has Spencer exactly wrong. Still, for purposes of comparison, it's helpful to describe a worldview that flourished when Spencer and I were growing up there. Sometimes called "good-ol'-boy conservatism," it reached its apotheosis in the candidacy of Clayton Williams for governor in 1990. Williams, now 85, campaigned with a cowboy hat seemingly stitched to his skull. An oil-and-gas mogul, he stood for backslapping redneck values—limited government, satisfaction with the social status quo of 1957 or so, and Texas pride. Williams's campaign tanked in part because

he joked openly, in front of reporters, that rainy weather is like rape—sometimes you just have to “relax and enjoy it.” (How tender were our sensibilities then, that an election could turn on such a quip.) Many good ol’ boys were racist. But they knew that it was distasteful to talk about race too much, and they knew that the correct answer, when asked about it in public, was to deny that it mattered or that it should matter. Williams lost the election to Ann Richards but won the straw poll in my sixth-grade class at St. Mark’s.

At lunch, Spencer and I tried to think back to the distant land of 1990s Dallas, for memories of our shared education on race. Our class was mostly white, with a few Asians and Hispanics and a lone black student. I was one of a very small number of students of mixed race (half-Asian, half-white, in my case). Our school had hired multicultural facilitators to lead workshops on prejudice, we recalled, so at some official level we had been taught the racial dogma of ’90s liberalism. I wondered whether Spencer had reacted rebelliously, becoming racist out of irritation at the clichés of the era. But he remembered these sessions less clearly than I did and seemed, if anything, less annoyed by their memory than I was. (I had found the facilitators condescending.)

Spencer was, however, also less sensitive to the actual racism common at St. Mark’s and other elite institutions in Dallas back then. He could not recall in any detail the occasional prejudice, racial lampooning, or social segregation that students of color remember vividly. In 11th grade, a history teacher performed an outrageous Mickey Rooney-esque pantomime of the Japanese, to teach us about Pearl Harbor. After a black alumnus, the brother of our black classmate, was randomly murdered while home from Morehouse College, the campus did not convulse with mourning, as it surely would have for a white student. Instead, the reaction was muted, as if the community was unsure what grief about a black student should look like. “I just don’t remember that much from that period of my life,” Spencer told me while we ate.

Of the two of us, Spencer had been closer to John Lewis, our only black classmate. According to Lewis, he and Spencer had been friends. Now Lewis, a businessman in California, is estranged from St. Mark’s because of the school’s slowness to ostracize Spencer from the alumni community.

“My upbringing did not really inform who I am,” Spencer said with a shrug. Then he reconsidered. “I think in a lot of ways I reacted against Dallas. It’s a class- and money-conscious place—whoever has the biggest car or the biggest house or the biggest fake boobs,” he told me. “There’s no actual community or high culture or sense of greatness, outside of having a McMansion.” He emphasized *culture* in a way that evoked a full-bodied, Germanic sense of *Kultur*. In fact, Spencer has joked that he would like to be the *Kulturminister* of a white “ethno-state.” He imagines himself having a heroic role in the grand cycle of history. “I want to live dangerously,” he said. “Most people aspire to mediocrity, and that’s fine. Not everyone can be controversial. Not everyone can be recognized by a random person in a restaurant.”

In the fall of 1997, he struck out from Dallas to find his cultural fortunes at Colgate University, in upstate New York. His time there produced even more profound amnesia, and he doesn’t say much about it, except that he starred in a production of Oscar Wilde’s *The Importance of Being Earnest*.

SPENCER SEES AMERICAN VALUES AS SOMETHING NOT TO RESTORE, BUT TO REPLACE. HIS “HAIL TRUMP” SPEECH DESCRIBES A DISEASED COUNTRY.



It is not a play especially beloved in Texas bro culture, and classmates who saw Spencer in that period report that he took on a Wildean air, dressing foppishly and affecting accents. (On Facebook last year, one of the card-carrying bros of our class called Spencer “Homo Himmler,” although he quickly apologized for the derogatory use of *homo*. Spencer denies the “stupid rumor,” widely whispered among our classmates, that he is gay. He is married to a Russian Canadian woman, Nina Kourpianova, who lives with their toddler daughter in Montana.) That Spencer may have experimented with his identity as a young man is hardly surprising or incriminating—he was, after all, still in his teens, and entitled to try on personae.

He lasted just one academic year at Colgate before transferring to the University of Virginia, where he majored in music history and English. He developed intellectually after a swift kick in the cortex from Richard Wagner and, ultimately, Friedrich Nietzsche, the 19th-century German philosopher whose skepticism of democracy and egalitarianism later made him beloved by the Nazis. “You could say I was red-pilled by Nietzsche,” Spencer told me. To “red-pill,” in alt-right slang, is to enter a vertiginous spiral of awakening and reassessment. The term comes from *The Matrix*, in which Keanu Reeves’s character discovers, after swallowing a red pill, that his





**AT A TRUMP VICTORY PARTY ON
ELECTION NIGHT, SPENCER
WAS SPOTTED HOOTING
AND RUNNING ABOUT GIDDILY.**

**IN A SINGLE EVENING, HIS TIMELINE
SKIPPED A DECADE AHEAD.**



universe is counterfeit, his fellow humans are enslaved to false dreams, and he himself is destined to free them.

The false dreams from which Spencer found himself freed were the dreams of the good ol' boy, who goes to church on Sunday and does things as his granddaddy did before him. Spencer started off with Nietzsche's *On the Genealogy of Morals*, a systematic dismantling of the moral and religious truths of European civilization. Nietzsche saw Christianity as a slave religion, a consolation to the weak. Spencer says that the general effect, an inversion of his moral universe, was "shattering."

The influence of Nietzsche may explain why Spencer's conservatism is not, in good-ol'-boy fashion, merely an attempt to revive a bygone way of life. "Some people in the alt-right are kind of like, 'Women go back to the kitchen, gays go back in the closet'—like everything was great in the '50s. I don't believe that at all." The concerns of conservative Christians don't interest him. He doesn't mind gay marriage, and he favors legal access to abortion—partly to reduce the number of blacks and Hispanics. "Smart people are not using abortion as birth control ... It is the unintelligent and blacks and Hispanics who use abortion as birth control," he said recently on AltRight.com's YouTube channel. "This can be something that can be a great boon for our people, our race."

Spencer graduated from UVA in 2001, then proceeded to the University of Chicago for a master's degree in humanities. He said he studied there with the philosopher Robert Pippin,

A whiteboard Spencer uses to plan his YouTube videos, which he records in his apartment

who “influenced me a great deal.” “It was there I started questioning the fundamental nature of democracy,” Spencer said. (Pippin doesn’t remember him. “I regard his rhetoric and activities as loathsome and despicable,” Pippin wrote to me. “I revere the founding principles of liberal democracy, and want no association with the man.”) At a party during his year at Chicago, he confessed his political leanings to the Marxist philosopher Gopal Balakrishnan, then a professor at the school. Spencer recalls that Balakrishnan gave a professional diagnosis on the spot: “You’re a fascist.”



AMERICANS DISMAYED BY their country's direction have sought exile and renewal in Europe many times: Think of John Reed's migration to Bolshevik Russia in 1917, or Ezra Pound's flight from America's "botched civilization" to Mussolini's Italy. In the early 2000s, Europe far surpassed America in right-wing innovation, and when Spencer arrived in Germany in 2002, he landed on a continent pregnant with multiple nationalist, anti-immigrant groups: Vlaams Belang in Belgium, the National Front in France, Jörg Haider's parties in Austria.

He spent parts of the next few years studying German on the banks of the Chiemsee, a lake southeast of Munich; working as a gofer at the Bavarian State Opera; and reading widely in German literature and history. Among the German ideas he adopted was a concept of race different from the one he and I had been taught in our multicultural workshops in the '90s. In the modern era, American discussion of race has limited itself, by convention, to a few canonical categories: black, white, Asian, American Indian, Hispanic. "Race isn't just color," Spencer told an audience in December. "Color is, in a way, a minor aspect of race."

For Spencer, race is more akin to the German *Volksgenit*, literally “the spirit of a people.” *Volksgenit* is associated, historically, with Johann Gottfried von Herder (1744–1803), and Germans became enchanted with it during the 19th century. Some would say the Second World War was the culmination of German devotion to their own *Volksgenit*. Herder’s followers proposed that each people has an essence that distinguishes it from others. Germans are not French; French are not Zulus; Zulus are not Koreans. The idea was adopted by the black American scholar W. E. B. Du Bois (1868–1963), who traveled to Germany at the same age as Spencer and drank his philosophy of race from the same Teutonic fountains:

The history of the world is the history, not of individuals, but of groups, not of nations, but of races, and he who ignores or seeks to override the race idea in human history ignores and overrides the central thought of all history. What, then, is a race? It is a vast family of human beings, generally of common blood and language, always of common history, traditions and impulses, who are both voluntarily and involuntarily striving together for the accomplishment of certain more or less vividly conceived ideals of life.

Spencer told me the *Volksgeist* he advocated was that of white Christendom, a group with indistinct geographical borders, but roughly including European peoples, from Iberia to the Caucasus, who were Christian as of a few hundred years ago. I proposed that this understanding of “white European culture” seemed arbitrary. It ignored the divisions that European identity movements found crucial. He suggested that any concept of identity could be knocked down if overanalyzed, and overanalysis would only lead to inaction. “I could just sit here masturbating in my own filth,” he said, probably rhetorically.

The importance of identity creation for Spencer cannot be overstated. It is why every black-on-white rape must be portrayed as the ravishing of all white womanhood, and every Syrian orphan who moves into an American city as the general of a colonizing army.

I asked whether I, as someone who is half-Chinese but had a classical Western education, would fit within his group, and he hedged, impishly. “I’m a generous guy,” he told me. “If you truly identify with our people, I would not have any problem with that.” But there were genetic deal breakers. “A full-blooded African, no matter how wonderful he might be—I’m not sure that would really work.”

The other German forerunner Spencer claims is Carl Schmitt (1888–1985), who was, for a time, the court political philosopher of the Third Reich. Schmitt’s work has enjoyed a renaissance recently, and even liberals have found it useful, in part as a worthy oppositional philosophy that has forced them to improve their own. Spencer is hardly Schmitt’s heir. But his reading of Schmitt is fair and reasonably nuanced.

“There’s this notion of parliament as an ‘endless debate,’” Spencer explained over lunch. Liberalism accepts that disagreement is part of the political process, and that people who disagree profoundly can live together. But eventually, Schmitt argued, the parliamentary debate *does* end, and someone gets his way while someone else does not. The state’s job is to provide not the coffeehouse for the debate, but the threat of a beating to compel the loser to accept the result. “Politics is inherently brutal,” Spencer told me. “It’s nonconsensual by its very nature. The state is crystallized violence.”

To this already dangerous political philosophy Schmitt eventually added a further provocation. Given that debate, procedure, and politics all end in the same place—crystallized violence—what or whom should the violence serve? The answer, he said, is some group of close affinity. And the groups with the most full-bodied affinity, a common mythology and experience, are races. “The idea of the ethnic identity will pervade and dominate all our public law,” Schmitt wrote in 1933, and he was just getting started. Within a few years, he was defending the nearly complete annihilation of law and politics as the Führer’s prerogative as champion of the German race. In times of emergency, Schmitt argued, the leader can declare the law null (he called this a “state of exception”) and use force at will to serve the state.

The upshot of this philosophy is, in Spencer’s interpretation, to devalue the homespun truths that have united America’s political parties for decades. Good ol’ boys, neoconservatives, and liberals all honor democracy, freedom, markets, human rights, and various other abstractions. To Spencer, these are idols, and their twilight is upon us.



BVIOUSLY, GERMAN NATIONAL SOCIALISM is not something that has any direct relationship with what I’m doing right now,” Spencer told me. That was horseshit, but I let him continue. Nazis were violent, he said, and “that is not something that I would have anything to do with.

I’ve never advocated that or ever glorified that. I am a dissident intellectual. I am not in charge of the police force or the Army. I’m not ordering the roundup of anyone and throwing them into camps.”

There is the small matter of his aesthetic, starting with the famous fashy haircut. One might, with exceptional charity, attribute the haircut to a trollish desire to get his enemies worked up. But hair aside, his appropriation of Nazi tropes is relentless. In his notorious speech that ended in a roomful of fascist salutes, for instance, he referred to the mainstream media as the “*Lügenpresse*” (“lying press”), a Nazi-era smear against anti-Hitler media, even if Spencer flubbed the pronunciation.

More to the point, Spencer’s ideas themselves are Nazi to the core, and he knows it, even if many of his followers do not. Hitler, too, viewed politics as a struggle and disdained those who imagined it instead as cooperative. For his own race he envisioned a special destiny, like that of an apex predator, expanding its territory until it occupied the land nature intended for it. Here is Spencer, in that same “Hail Trump” speech, on the destiny of whites:

To be white is to be a striver, a crusader, an explorer and a conqueror. We build, we produce, we go upward ... For us, it is conquer or die. This is a unique burden for the white man, that our fate is entirely in our hands. And it is appropriate because within us, within the very blood in our veins as children of the sun, lies the potential for greatness.

That is the great struggle we are called to. We are not meant to live in shame and weakness and disgrace. We were not meant to beg for moral validation from some of the most despicable creatures to ever populate the planet. We were meant to overcome—overcome all of it. Because that is natural and normal for us. Because for us, as Europeans, it is only normal again when we are great again.

Thwarting the competition among races, Hitler proposed in *Mein Kampf*, was a cavalcade of abstractions: justice, human rights, democracy, communism, capitalism. Spencer mocks these same abstractions as shibboleths of the modern age. Members of the mainstream right, he said in a December 2016 speech, “talk about global capitalism, and free markets, and the Constitution, and vague Christian values of some sort. But they never ask that question of *Who are we?* They never ask that question of identity.” His “Hail Trump” speech describes

the concepts that are now designated “problematic” and associated with whiteness—power, strength, beauty, agency, accomplishment. Whites do and other groups don’t... We don’t exploit other groups. We don’t gain anything from their presence. They need us, and not the other way around.

These are among the most orthodox Nazi statements ever uttered by an American public figure.



PENCER WEARS a permanent naughty grin, as if he is getting away with something. In a sense, he is: There are vanishingly few true Nazis in this country, and few people believe everything Spencer believes. And yet he has become a beacon to those resentful of the direction of American society and of their own lives. That grin is the grin of a man who cannot believe his luck at being a fascist just at fascism's moment of American ascent.

The American right has had extreme fringes for some time, operating on low radio frequencies and languishing in obscurity. Perhaps the best known of these was the John Birch Society, founded in 1958 as a dying wheeze of McCarthyism. But the Birchers existed to vanquish communism. Individual members were racist, but the society's leaders tolerated blacks and Jews willing to rail against the Reds. (George Schuyler, a former official of the NAACP, was a member.) The Birchers were twisted patriots, and in their patriotism they resemble mainstream conservatives (think Clayton Williams, but also George W. Bush) much more closely than they resemble Spencer.

Spencer emerges from a darker tradition, one that sees American values as something not to restore, but to replace. His "Hail Trump" speech, even more than Trump's "American carnage" inaugural address, described a diseased America, its culture mired in "filth" and its cities "rotted." He nodded to the Founding Fathers and the disapproval they would cast on modern America—but only to note that their ideals clash with present-day liberalism, and not to suggest that their ideals are his own.

No census of the alt-right exists. The movement, such as it is, may have come together and found public expression in part because of the internet, where its followers can amass and reinforce one another's pathologies. But clearly a few of its claims have acquired special salience, all at once.

The world may be no more complicated now than it was in the past, but exposure to more aspects of it has proved disorienting to many Americans. Far-off wars and economies determine, or seem to determine, the fates of more and more people. Government has grown so complicated and abstract that people have come to doubt its abstractions altogether, and swap them for the comforting, visceral truths of power and identity.

Meanwhile, religion has faded. Hitchens would have said that's for the best. But at the Christmas party, Spencer was right about religion's power. It exerted a binding force and sense of purpose on its followers, and in its absence, the alt-right is delighted to supply values and idols all its own.

It is impossible to hear Spencer or Trump speak about the "filth" and "carnage" of America without sensing that many of their followers consider the whole American project discredited. Spencer's is only one philosophy offering itself as an alternative. As we talked, I was frequently reminded of John Geogelas, the 33-year-old Dallasite who is now the Islamic State's highest-ranking American. (I profiled Geogelas in the March 2017 issue of this magazine.) Both men are the only sons of wealthy north-Dallas physicians. They both bloomed late, intellectually and politically, and overcompensated by immersing themselves in books and ideas with gusto uncommon among their bourgeois demographic. Both admired Ron Paul, and both saw their home country as a broken land—and themselves as its savior.

They are also both young. Trump's supporters skew old, but the alt-right's warriors are Spencer's age (he is 39) or younger. Millennials are rapidly untethering themselves from American values that until recently have been described as bedrock. The political scientists Yascha Mounk and Roberto Stefan Foa have noted that belief in the essential importance of living in a democracy has dropped off dramatically among the young, and support for "Army rule" has increased to one in six Americans. A generation ago it was one in 16.

Perhaps some of this disregard for the cornerstones of modern Western government can be written off as (very late) adolescent posturing. Spencer himself is aware of the hipness gap that yawns between the alt-right and liberalism, to the former's advantage. The young are suckers for rebellion, and Spencer's is a rebel movement. Some will age out of rebellion, but others will, like malevolent Peter Pans, refuse to grow out of the fascism of their youth.

Spencer expects many of his critics to fall in line once victory comes. "People are herdlike," he told me. "There's a story about a Bolshevik agitator who was always getting harassed and beaten up by a policeman in Moscow. Ten years later, the Bolshevik was in power, and the same man came into his office and literally clicked his heels: 'Onwards with the revolution, sir!'"



HE AMBITION IS EVIDENT but the path to victory unclear. Spencer's revolutionaries seem, at present, to consist largely of anonymous online activists. The alt-right has masterfully inflated itself by fielding zombie armies of Twitter accounts—just like ISIS does—and trolling journalists and others capable of amplifying its collective voice. The closest connection between Spencer and the White House is Stephen Miller, a senior policy adviser to President Trump. In an interview with *The Daily Beast*, Spencer called himself a "mentor" to Miller. He told me that the two of them worked and socialized with each other as members of Duke University's conservative union, while Miller was an undergraduate and Spencer a graduate student in intellectual history. (After receiving his master's from the University of Chicago, Spencer studied for a doctorate at Duke, though he never earned his degree.) But Miller denies any close association between them, and he told *The Washington Post* that he "condemn[s] Spencer's 'rancid ideology.'"

As Spencer himself notes, Donald Trump is not a creature of the alt-right or, one suspects, of any other coherent political philosophy. He is, Spencer has said, "compromised by the perversions that define this decadent society" (so much for Spencer's ever getting a plum ambassadorship), and he doesn't really mind blacks and Jews, when having them around suits his purposes. I suspect that any high-ranking official in the Trump administration would be fired if discovered collaborating with Richard Spencer. (Then again, Sebastian Gorka, a deputy assistant to Trump for national security, has allegedly associated with a far-right Hungarian group known for its Nazi ties—Gorka denies this—and he retains his office.) Some statements by Steve Bannon, Trump's chief strategist and the former chief executive of his presidential campaign, harmonize with Spencer's core claims. In 2015, when discussing the alleged overrepresentation of Asians among executives in Silicon Valley, Bannon told a guest on the satellite-radio show



Detritus on Spencer's floor, including a file folder labeled "Loyalty and Betrayal," a newspaper published by the Greek neo-Nazi party Golden Dawn, and handwritten notes describing an encounter with police

Breitbart News Daily that “a country is more than an economy. We’re a *civic society*.” The obvious question—why wouldn’t Asians be a part of American civic society?—has an answer that Spencer is ready to provide. The guest on the podcast, who did not dissent from Bannon’s comment, was Donald Trump.

Before the election, Spencer wrote on Twitter: “Forget the polls. We have a candidate for President who’s demystifying ‘racism’ and the financial power structure.” “No matter what happens,” he continued, “I will be profoundly grateful to Donald Trump for the rest of my life.” At a Trump victory party in Washington on election night, Spencer was spotted hooting and running about giddily. He had hoped that Trump’s candidacy would be a small step toward the mainstreaming of his ideas. In a single evening, his timeline skipped a decade ahead. The long-term goal, Spencer says, is the establishment of a “post-American” white “ethno-state,” through a slow process of awakening ethnic pride and instituting government policies that reflect a new white race consciousness.

Spencer has been casing out a role for himself as a human alarm clock in this process of awakening. He told me that he

wanted to be the alt-right’s William F. Buckley Jr.—an intellectual entrepreneur who patrols the ideas behind the politics, swinging the nightstick when someone from his movement gets out of line.

Buckley emerged, at an age younger than Spencer is now, as a cultural icon, the founder and editor of mid-20th-century America’s most unsubmitive journal of ideas, *National Review*, and later the host of its most highbrow television show, *Firing Line*. Buckley had a flair for theater. He injected his ideas into the public consciousness both openly and insidiously, by announcing them loudly, and by making roguish and heretical asides in otherwise sleepy moments of debate. The poison (or antidote, depending on your view) entered the bloodstream with only the slightest prick felt—but felt it was, and many a viewer came to love and hate Buckley for the thrill of intellectual disorientation. Spencer lacks this suave touch, but he tries to work a lowbrow form of the same magic, through the obnoxious, needling harassment that he and his shitlords call trolling.

“There is a value to shock,” Spencer told me. “You can open someone’s mind with something shocking: ‘I’ve never thought of that before!’ ‘I can’t believe he actually said that!’ There is something to be said for not just retreating into a bourgeois, boring version of my ideas.” Here is the kernel of truth in Spencer’s justification of his “Hail Trump” salutes as ironic, or performative. The salutes provoked sputtering rage from right-thinking people, and between sputters the enraged dropped their intellectual guard. It is hard to be enraged and analytical all at once, and many chose rage. But rage confers no defense against ideas. “Take the term *ethno-state*. I don’t want to sound like I’m bragging, but *ethno-state* has now been used in mainstream sources!” (This article is one of them.) “That term would never be used before. They’re not necessarily original ideas to me, but they’ve never been brought to the mainstream in this way.”

IN INAUGURATION DAY, Spencer gave an interview to an Australian television station near Franklin Square in Washington, D.C., and was asked to explain his movement’s mascot, a homely cartoon frog. “It’s Pepe,” he said. “It’s become kind of a symb—” and then a masked assailant clocked him on the ear, hard enough to send him reeling off camera. Spencer’s many, many haters shared the video, gloating, and even mainstream outlets glamorized the assault by distributing remixes of the footage. I do not recall seeing Buckley assaulted on camera, although I’m sure many viewers would have enjoyed the spectacle; Norman Mailer and Gore Vidal would gladly have contended in a semifinal for the privilege of coldcocking him.

I went back to see Spencer again a few days later. He had upgraded his security. The nebbishy sentinel who had caught me out by the trash cans had been replaced by another man, halfway between bodyguard and babysitter, who accompanied Spencer when he left his apartment. A new dead bolt secured the door, and a Bowie knife rested on a windowsill. There was a pistol in the kitchen.

I WENT BACK TO SEE SPENCER A FEW DAYS AFTER HE GOT SLUGGED. HE HAD UPGRADED HIS SECURITY. HE INSISTED THAT WE ORDER LUNCH, RATHER THAN GOING OUT IN PUBLIC.



Spencer was hit twice, once under the left eye and once on the right ear. The eye sported a shiner, and the ear was crusted with blood. Spencer said his eardrum had ruptured. “It kind of feels like when you’re flying in a plane and your ears pop,” he said. “It basically feels like that all the time.” He insisted that we order our Thai food in this time. “You saw that I got spotted even the last time we were out,” he said, referring to the black woman at lunch. “I don’t know how people will react now.”

“Am I just going to be harassed for the rest of my life? Living in Whitefish is quite difficult,” he said, due to protests. “I thought there would be a little bit of anonymity” in Alexandria. Now he could not walk around without fear.

He said he was going to change his haircut—I’d remarked that it made him stand out—but insisted that fashion was the reason. “I think the fascist haircut has peaked. Aesthetically, I think it can definitely be improved on. Maybe I’ll try a Tom Cruise, from *Mission: Impossible IV*.¹”

He sounded vulnerable, for the first time since he’d said the St. Mark’s campaign had wounded him. “I have a right as a citizen to walk the streets and not be attacked, and I have the right to be protected,” he complained.

Spencer was obviously right when he said he should not be assaulted. But we both could taste the irony in the situation. If he hadn’t caught himself, he might have started talking about his “human right” not to be brutalized with impunity. Instead he recovered, and used the irony to his advantage. “The fact that they are excusing violence against Richard Spencer inherently means that they believe that there’s a state of exception, where we can use violence,” he said. “I think they’re actually kind of right.”

“War is politics by other means and politics is war by other means,” he said. “*We don’t all want the same thing*. And that’s why I think there is a kind of state of war going on.”



S ONE WHO knew Spencer when we were both hapless, overprivileged adolescents, sharing a desire to transcend our origins, what interests me the most about him is his self-reinvention, the intellectual costume changes (foppish actor, grad-school blowhard, opera-director manqué, and now architect of a white utopian dream of world-historical consequence) spanning three decades. After all, it is said that one of the great advantages of America is that its daughters and sons can escape the strictures of the world in which they were raised, be unlike their forefathers. Spencer has certainly done that.

Much about his most recent and significant transformation reminds me of a 1957 Norman Mailer essay, “The White Negro,” that tried to explain trends in white culture during an age that was, in some ways, as disorienting as our own. Living in the shadow of nuclear annihilation, and having freshly returned from war, whites found their own culture anemic and soporific. They craved *danger*—and they found it by imitating blacks, who knew danger without craving it, and whose culture, language, and daily life were smelling salts for their own. Mailer described the sensation: “No Negro can saunter down a street with any real certainty that violence will not visit him on his walk ... [He knows] in the cells of his existence that life [is] war, nothing but war.” Spencer, too, is a pale imitator. He wanted danger, or thought he did, and now he has it.

Spencer must have known that the life he was choosing would get him hated and taunted. But he seemed at most half-aware that it would get him slugged in the face, and completely unaware that it might get him killed. Fifty years ago, George Lincoln Rockwell, the urbane leader of the American Nazi Party, was shot dead in the parking lot of a laundromat, just seven miles from where Spencer lives now. There must be an intellectual thrill in knowing that people might care enough to want to kill you. Spencer seemed unsure whether the thrill would remain worth the risk.

It is difficult to conceive of a path to repentance for Spencer. There is enough in his philosophy that is challenging to the modern American condition, and enough about the modern American condition that is challenging to itself, that he isn’t likely to be convinced of his error. His revolutionary movement is unlikely to succeed. But it is, I fear, authentic and durable. The shame of its indecency is felt only by those who share the country with Spencer, not by the man himself. ■

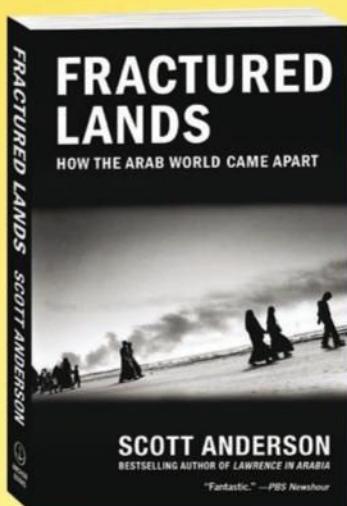
Graeme Wood is a national correspondent for The Atlantic and the author of *The Way of the Strangers: Encounters With the Islamic State*.

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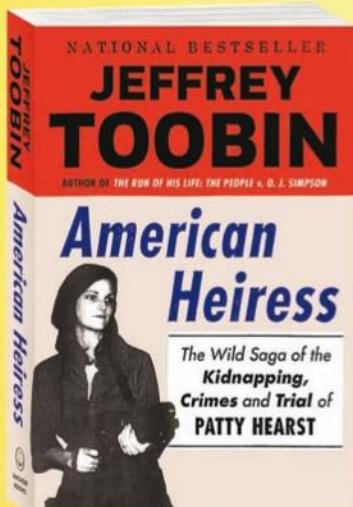
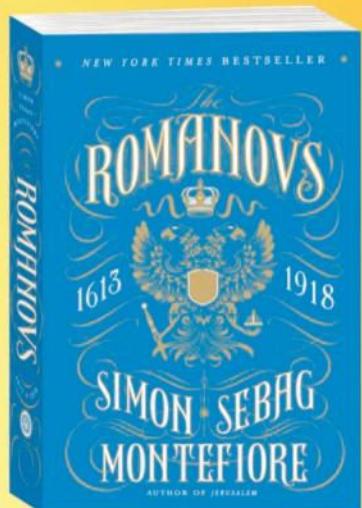
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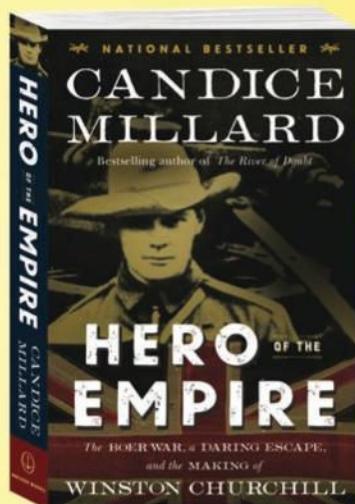
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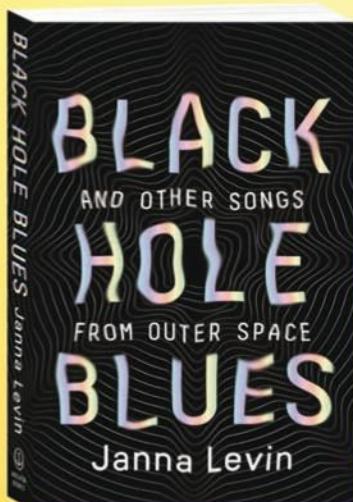
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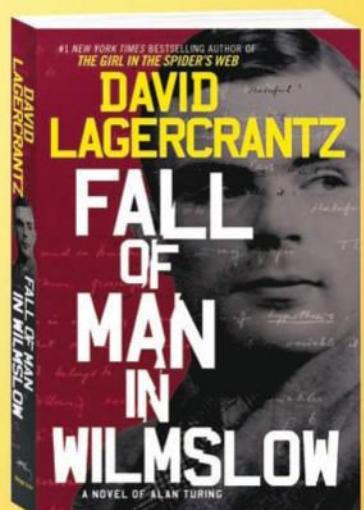
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26

MILES

ABOVE

EARTH

By LAURA PARKER

How Alan Eustace, a Google engineer on the edge of retirement, broke the world record for high-altitude jumping

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Anyone watching would have witnessed an odd sight: Eustace was wearing a bulky white space suit—the kind NASA astronauts wear. He looked like a free-falling Michelin Man.

Through his giant space helmet and oxygen mask, Eustace could see the ground stretched out for miles. But the view wasn't his main concern. He hadn't quite worked out how to control the space suit, which, unlike a typical skydiving suit, weighed about 265 pounds and was pumped full of pressurized air. Eustace, an experienced skydiver, knew how to shift his body to change direction or to stop himself from spinning—a problem that, if uncorrected, can lead to blackout, then death. But when he started to rotate—slowly at first, then faster and faster—his attempts to steady himself just made things worse. He felt like he was bouncing around inside a concrete box.

At 10,000 feet, Eustace pulled a cord to open his parachute. Nothing happened. Then he tried a backup cord. That one didn't work either. Eustace knew better than to panic: Three safety divers had jumped with him to monitor his fall. Within seconds, one of the divers reached across Eustace and yanked open the main chute.

All Eustace had to do now was depressurize his suit, which would deflate it and allow him to steer himself toward the landing area. He reached for a dial on the side of the suit and turned it. Nothing happened. With the suit still pressurized, Eustace couldn't extend his arms overhead to grab the handles that controlled the chute. He began slowly drifting off course. Soon he lost sight of the safety divers. He tried to radio for help, but got no response. He now had a more pressing problem: As he approached the ground, he saw that he was headed straight for a giant saguaro cactus. Unable to maneuver his chute, he leaned as far to the right as he could and just managed to avoid the cactus, instead landing headfirst in the sand.

He craned his neck to look around. The suit was still pressurized, which meant that he didn't have enough flexibility to take his helmet off to breathe. He tried his radio again. Still dead. He knew the safety divers would have alerted rescuers that he'd gone off course. He just didn't know how far off course he'd gone. He calculated that he had two hours of oxygen left in his tank. If he sat still and didn't panic, he should have enough to survive until the rescue team found him. His other option was to try depressurizing the suit again. But if that didn't work, he'd have wasted a significant amount of oxygen in the effort. He decided to wait until he had just 15 minutes of oxygen left. By that point, he would be desperate enough to try anything.

The sun beat down as Eustace lay by the cactus, watching the meter on his oxygen tank.

Twelve minutes and what felt like an eternity later, he heard the sound of an



approaching helicopter. *Oh good*, he thought, relaxing. *I'm nowhere near dead.*

Which was fortunate, because this was only a practice round. What Eustace was gearing up for was something much more dangerous: a jump from seven and a half times the altitude, the highest ever attempted. A skydive from the edge of space.

THE WHOLE THING began innocently enough. Eustace was sitting in his office at Google's headquarters in Mountain View, California, one day in late 2008 when his boss Sergey Brin dropped by. Brin knew Eustace had skydived recreationally in the past, and wanted to know whether he thought it would be possible for someone to jump out of a Gulfstream, a large, expensive private jet that Brin sometimes used.

Brin had already asked around, but almost everyone he'd consulted—Gulfstream pilots, military skydivers, even the company that makes the jet—had advised against it.

Gulfstreams fly at much higher speeds than typical jump planes, so fast that experts worried anyone exiting midair would risk getting sucked into the engine, or hitting the tail of the plane, or getting burned to death by the exhaust.

Eustace wasn't a jet pilot, or a professional daredevil. He was an engineer from Florida who had designed computer-processing units for 15 years in Palo Alto before Larry Page persuaded him to join his growing company over breakfast one morning in 2002. Eustace hadn't been skydiving in 26 years, but the idea intrigued him: He wasn't convinced that the skeptics were right. As an engineer, he preferred to approach a problem from first principles. If it was impossible, why? What was the trajectory of the exhaust? Would the FAA grant approval to open the door mid-flight, which would require circumventing the user manual?

Eustace spent the next few months trying to answer these questions, in between projects that demanded his more immediate attention. He eventually lined up a skydiver to try a jump out of a Cessna Caravan, another high-speed aircraft. Luckily, the skydiver landed without incident. What's more, he filmed himself. When Eustace brought Brin the footage, Brin seemed surprised that he had followed up. But by this point, Eustace was hooked—and he was starting to consider trying the jump himself. All he'd have to do was get reacquainted with the equipment and do a couple of test jumps.

In August 2010, Eustace took a few days off and went down to the suburbs of Los Angeles, where he did six practice jumps with an instructor, a professional stunt skydiver named Luigi Cani. The two hit it off—Cani was warm and friendly, and seemed up for anything. He loved the Gulfstream idea.

A few months later, Eustace was back home in Mountain View when his phone rang. It was Cani. He wanted to know whether Eustace had heard about a guy named Felix Baumgartner, who was after an even bigger challenge: He was trying to beat the high-altitude-skydiving record with a jump from the upper reaches of the stratosphere, more than 100,000 feet in the air. Cani had found a sponsor to launch a competing effort, and wondered whether Eustace could advise him on the type of equipment he'd need.

Above: Alan Eustace at home in Mountain View, April 2017.

Opposite page: Eustace's jump from 18,000 feet

above Coolidge, Arizona, in May 2013—his first test of the space suit in action. Opening spread: Eustace ascending to the stratosphere by helium balloon, October 2014.

Eustace was delighted. He was sure Baumgartner was way ahead—he had backing from the energy-drink company Red Bull, which had hired more than three dozen team members with backgrounds in NASA, the Air Force, and the aerospace industry—but he liked Cani, and wanted to see him create some healthy competition. He agreed to help in any way he could. But before Cani’s effort could kick off, his funding fell through.

Eustace considered this news. He led a quiet, comfortable life. He wasn’t after publicity or adrenaline. But this was the engineering challenge of a lifetime. Forget the Gulfstream. He could attempt the stratosphere jump himself, and fund it with his own savings. He thought for a few months and called Cani to ask for his blessing. Cani laughed, amused. Go for it, he said.

HE ATMOSPHERE IS DIVIDED into five layers. The higher you go, the thinner the air, until eventually you hit outer space. The layer closest to Earth, the troposphere, is where weather occurs.

The next layer, between 33,000 and 160,000 feet above sea level, is the stratosphere. It marks the beginning of what’s known as “near space”—the threshold between the planet we experience on the ground and the mysteries of the universe beyond.

Prior to the onset of the space race in the late 1950s, much of the scientific study into high altitudes was focused on the stratosphere. Starting in the 1930s, scientists used high-altitude balloons to gather meteorological data and document various changes in the upper atmosphere. Then, in 1960, a United States Air Force captain named Joseph Kittinger rose 102,800 feet in a gondola suspended from a helium balloon—and jumped. Kittinger was part of Project Excelsior, a pre-space-age military operation designed to study the effects of high-altitude bailouts. An earlier attempt, from 76,400 feet, had almost killed him: His equipment had malfunctioned and he’d lost consciousness; he was saved only by his automatic emergency parachute. His next jump, from 74,700 feet, had gone better. This one—his third—set a high-altitude-skydiving record that would remain in place for more than 50 years.

NASA would soon send a man into orbit, and ambitions would turn to the moon. The expansion of the space program coincided with a series of catastrophic balloon accidents, and exploration into the stratosphere was largely abandoned.

That is, until 2010, when Baumgartner announced that he was going after Kittinger’s record, with the backing of none other than Kittinger himself—plus a hefty sponsorship from Red Bull. Plenty of people had contacted Kittinger over the years, wanting him to help them break the record, but Baumgartner was

the first to come with a sound scientific support system, courtesy of Red Bull’s team of professionals. The effort, amplified by Baumgartner’s high-octane personal life, attracted a lot of press.

Eustace was an unlikely competitor. The son of an aerospace engineer for Martin Marietta (a forerunner of Lockheed Martin), Eustace had grown up loving planes, but his first time jumping out of one—18 years old, dragged along by his best friend—he felt less exhilaration than ambivalence. The equipment was primitive—coveralls, thick boots, military-grade parachutes—and Eustace landed hard. The experience was a blur. He didn’t know whether he’d done it right, and he certainly didn’t plan to do it again.

Then the instructor handed him his evaluation. His friend’s jump was terrible, but the instructor had deemed Eustace’s “perfect.” So when his friend wanted to go back a week later, Eustace went along. He enjoyed it much more the second time: He was less nervous, and could actually remember what he had done. He went again, and again, and after his 10th jump, he invested in a higher-performance parachute. Then he mastered a stand-up landing, instead of a drop-and-roll. He learned to dive, swoop, somersault, slow down, and speed up, until skydiving became less like falling than like flying.

Eustace began skydiving as often as he could manage between classes at the University of Central Florida, where he majored in computer science and went on to get his doctorate. But as his career took off, Eustace invested less and less time in the sport. Eventually, he sold his equipment.

Skydiving from the stratosphere seemed like a drastic way to get back into practice. But the more he thought about it, the harder it was for him to imagine someone else doing it. His day job—overseeing Google’s engineers—was all about building technology to solve problems and move people forward. Breaking the record would be a personal challenge, but more important, it would be a chance to push the boundaries of human experience. First, he’d need a suit.

THE LIST OF THINGS that can go wrong when parachuting from extreme heights is nearly endless. The stratosphere is cold, for one—the temperature can reach more than 100 degrees below zero. The air is also about 1,000 times thinner than at sea level, which means that without a pressurized suit, bodily fluids start to boil, creating gas bubbles that lead to mass swelling.

The environment is so hostile that high-altitude jumpers have to bring their own. For his record-breaking jump, Kittinger wore a partial-pressure suit—a close-fitting garment with a network of thin inflatable tubes that squeeze the body to make up for the decrease in atmospheric pressure—on top of four layers of clothing for warmth. On the way

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Eustace (center) skydiving with friends in 1981, while getting his doctorate in computer science at the University of Central Florida

up, which took about an hour and a half, he rode in an open gondola that contained an oxygen supply, a communications system, altimeters, and the power source for his electrically heated gloves—everything he needed to survive prolonged exposure to the altitude.

But gondolas present their own risks. In 1962, a Soviet air-force colonel named Pyotr Dolgov hit his head on the side of his gondola when he jumped from almost 94,000 feet, cracking the visor of his helmet and accidentally depressurizing his suit. He died before he hit the ground. A few years later, an amateur skydiver from New Jersey named Nick Piantanida was unable to switch from the oxygen supply in the gondola to the one attached to his suit when he reached his intended jump height of 123,500 feet, and had to abort the trip. (An unknown equipment malfunction on his next attempt would be fatal.)

Gondolas are also heavy. Baumgartner's team was using one that weighed almost 3,000 pounds. Ditching the gondola not only would be safer, Eustace figured, but would also allow him to start his jump from a greater height.

But nobody had ever attempted a stratosphere jump without one. If Eustace was going to rise 26 miles into the air attached to nothing but a helium balloon, he'd need a suit that would provide the same environmental protections—oxygen, instruments, climate control—that a gondola would. In short, he would need a space suit. The problem was that no one had designed or flown a new space suit in about 40 years. NASA has been using essentially the same version of the Apollo suit since the 1970s—and Eustace couldn't just borrow one of those. He needed a suit that could survive a slow ascent into the stratosphere and a fast descent, with swift changes in temperature and velocity, and that could also support the weight of a giant parachute.

Eustace began to dedicate his nights and weekends to thinking about the design. He was still working 80-hour weeks at Google, but he had a lot of vacation time saved up, and his bosses—Brin and Page—were encouraging. A saying inside the company was that employees should have “a healthy disrespect for the impossible.”

Eustace’s wife, Kathy Kwan, was less enthusiastic. The couple had two daughters, 11 and 16, and she knew the history

SKYWARD AMBITIONS

A brief chronicle of high-altitude jumps

1. ALAN EUSTACE (2014) 135,890 feet

2. FELIX BAUMGARTNER (2012) 127,852 feet

Baumgartner had to overcome claustrophobia to put on a pressurized suit and ride a small gondola 24 miles into the sky. His record-breaking jump also made him the first person to free-fall faster than the speed of sound.

3. JOSEPH KITTINGER (1960) 102,800 feet

Kittinger, a U.S. Air Force captain, made three stratospheric jumps from an open gondola. The final one set a record that would stand for 52 years.

4. PYOTR DOLGOV AND YEVGENI ANDREYEV (1962) 93,970 and 83,523 feet, respectively

These two Soviet air-force parachutists rode a gondola into the stratosphere together. Andreyev survived the jump, but Dolgov, who exited second, was killed when his suit depressurized. They were both named Heroes of the Soviet Union in 1962.

5. NICK PIANTANIDA (1966) 57,600 feet

Midway up to an intended jump height of more than 100,000 feet, Piantanida's equipment malfunctioned. Ground control released his gondola's emergency parachute, but by the time he reached the ground, he had lost consciousness from oxygen deprivation. He died four months later.

of the sport. Eustace was so engrossed in the technological challenges that the possibility of death didn't really enter his mind—any risk, he thought, could be mitigated by enough advance preparation. The couple made an uneasy truce: Kwan would support Eustace's project, and he would avoid bringing it up—no stratosphere talk at the dinner table. (Kwan politely declined to speak with me, saying she preferred not to dredge up those particular memories.)

In October 2011, a contact in the aviation industry connected Eustace with a married couple named Taber MacCallum and Jane Poynter, co-founders of Paragon Space Development. MacCallum and Poynter had been two of the eight crew members on the famous Biosphere 2 project of the early '90s, living in a sealed artificial world for two years to determine whether humans could survive in closed ecosystems beyond Earth. They had started Paragon to create biological and chemical life-support systems for hazardous environments, like the deep sea and outer space.

The couple was used to getting calls from people asking all kinds of crazy things: *Can you fly me into space? Would it be possible to strap me to a rocket?* But this was the first time they'd heard anyone propose a stratosphere jump without a capsule. MacCallum was intrigued enough to set up a call with Eustace, and the two spoke for more than an hour. A week later, Eustace flew down to Paragon's headquarters, in Tucson, Arizona, and spent a day presenting his idea.

MacCallum and Poynter soon agreed to lead Eustace's engineering team. They gathered the company's leading engineers, mechanics, and flight operators to work on the design, and commissioned ILC Dover—the same manufacturing company that makes NASA's suits—to build a prototype.

Eustace soon began making regular trips to Tucson for testing. The team put the suit in a wind tunnel and a vacuum

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chamber to determine how it would hold up in free fall. They hung Eustace from a nylon strap and spun him around so he could practice operating his equipment in midair. Next came a series of thermal tests, to ensure the suit could handle subzero temperatures. Eustace was suspended inside a sealed, liquid-nitrogen-cooled chamber for five hours at a time. Small tubes in the suit were supposed to circulate hot water around his limbs and chest to keep him warm. But the tubes ended at the wrists, meaning that, even with a pair of electrically heated mountain-climbing gloves, Eustace's hands eventually began to freeze. The team gave him a pair of oven mitts to wear on top of the gloves.

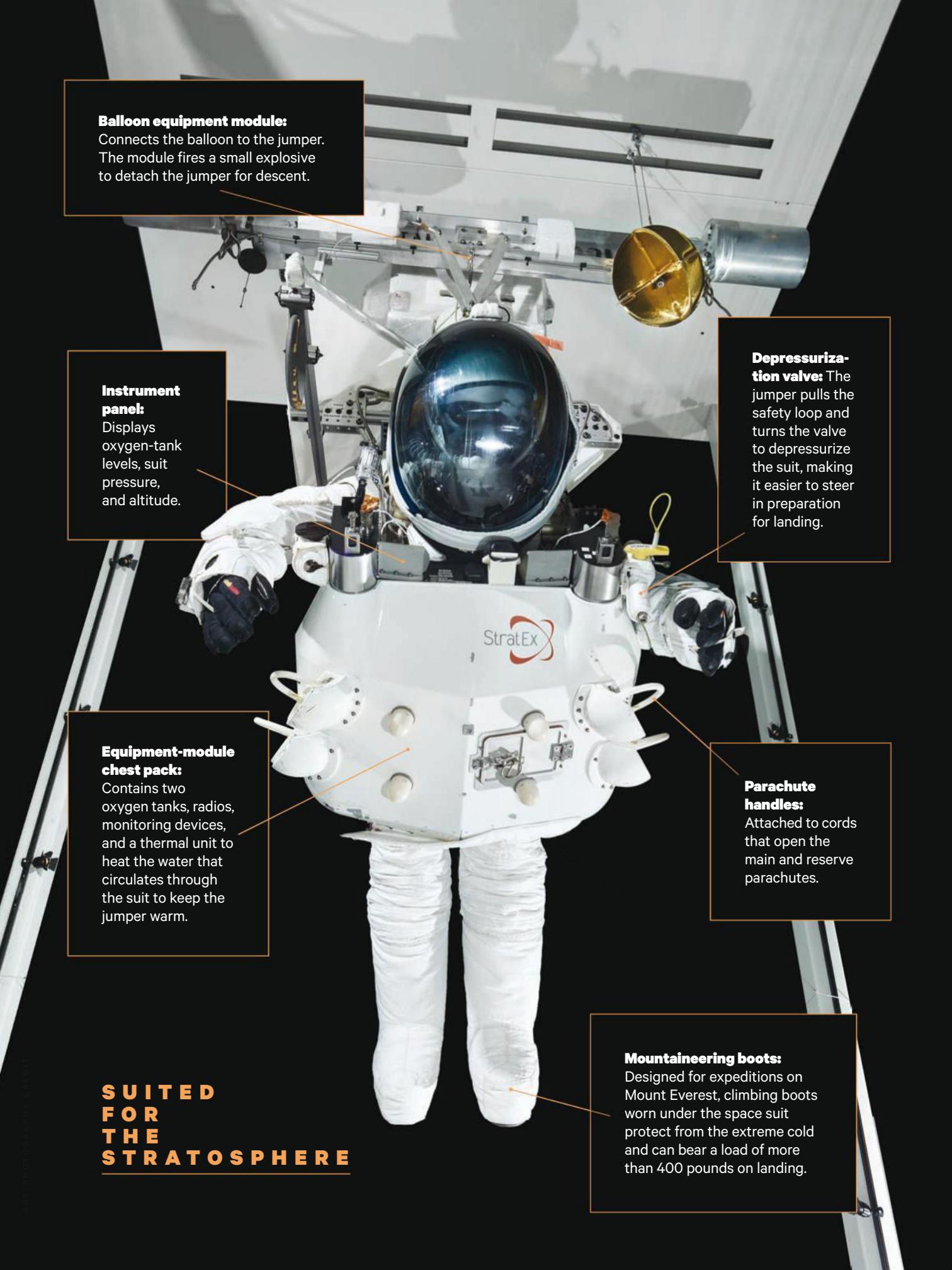
In October 2012, a year into Eustace's work with Paragon, Felix Baumgartner succeeded in breaking Kittinger's 1960 record, free-falling to Earth from a height of 127,852 feet. Reporters from all over the world came to witness the event, and a live webcast of the jump racked up more than 8 million views. Rather than deter Eustace, Baumgartner's jump gave him a test case. Shortly after exiting the capsule, Baumgartner entered a dangerous spin. He was able to right himself in time, but Eustace would be less agile in his suit and knew that he would need to figure out how to avoid the same problem.

Eustace and his team began doing dummy drops from airplanes in the Arizona desert. The test dummy, known as IDA (for "Iron Dummy Assemble"), was made from welded high-pressure pipes, the kind used in industrial plumbing. She was dropped from various heights, equipped with a parachute that opened at a preset altitude. She spun wildly on her way down. One time, her arms and legs flew off.

The team tried to fix the problem by introducing a drogue—a round parachute about six feet across that is supposed to add stability. The Coolidge jump, in May 2013, was Eustace's first chance to test the equipment himself. While nearly everything went wrong, the biggest problem remained spin. Eustace began spinning almost immediately after he left the plane, even with the drogue, and the suit was too rigid to allow him to correct himself midair the way he would during a skydive from a lower altitude.

After the Coolidge jump, the team decided to raise the attachment point of the drogue, moving it from the seat of the suit to

A member of Paragon's engineering team testing how the suit would respond to changes in air pressure



Balloon equipment module:
Connects the balloon to the jumper.
The module fires a small explosive
to detach the jumper for descent.

Instrument panel:
Displays oxygen-tank levels, suit pressure, and altitude.

Equipment-module chest pack:
Contains two oxygen tanks, radios, monitoring devices, and a thermal unit to heat the water that circulates through the suit to keep the jumper warm.

Depressurization valve: The jumper pulls the safety loop and turns the valve to depressurize the suit, making it easier to steer in preparation for landing.

Parachute handles:
Attached to cords that open the main and reserve parachutes.

Mountaineering boots:
Designed for expeditions on Mount Everest, climbing boots worn under the space suit protect from the extreme cold and can bear a load of more than 400 pounds on landing.

**SUITED
FOR
THE
STRATOSPHERE**



the back of the neck. That would make Eustace fall at a slight angle, and therefore not spin. To keep his arms from getting tangled up in the strings when the chute deployed, the engineers added a boom that would extend when the drogue opened and keep it at a safe distance from the suit. They called the system SAEBER.

When the team tested the system on IDA from 120,000 feet, her spinning slowed from 400 rpm to 22 rpm, a gentle pirouette. Eustace did more practice jumps, learning to stick out his elbows to correct himself in midair. They were finally ready.

USTACE WOKE UP

Ewell before dawn on Friday, October 24, 2014, in a tin shed on an unused strip of land next to the airport in Roswell, New Mexico—a site that had been chosen for its open space and relatively few cacti. The weather was perfect.

He spent two hours sitting in a vinyl recliner behind the shed breathing pure oxygen, to prevent decompression sickness. He drank water and Gatorade. Occasionally he stood and did some stretches to get nitrogen out of his tissues. Then he pulled on a diaper—it would be a long ride up—and was helped into his suit by four team members. They attached two GoPros to his chest and wheeled him out to the launchpad on a dolly.

Kwan had chosen to stay home. The girls had school that day—Eustace and Kwan had decided to keep them on their normal schedule—but had been granted permission to bring their phones to class so they could get updates from the launch site. The Paragon team and a single reporter from *The New York Times* would be the only onlookers.

Left: Inflating the helium balloon that would carry Eustace to the stratosphere. Right: Eustace starting his ascent. Below: Eustace in his AirCam.

The team strapped Eustace to a massive helium balloon—525 feet in diameter when fully inflated, roughly the size of a football stadium—and untethered it from the launchpad. Just like that, Eustace was on his way. He felt relaxed, almost drowsy, as the balloon rose above the airport. He worried for a moment that he might fall asleep and miss the jump.

As Eustace drifted higher, he began to make out landmarks: New Mexico's White Sands, the Rocky Mountains. Crop circles became tiny specks. Whole states appeared and receded. At 70,000 feet, the sky darkened. Delicate cloud formations

appeared below him. Eustace felt like he was floating above a lace doily. At 80,000 feet, the curvature of Earth became visible. He turned his head to look for the moon.

Of course, he was also comparing his flight path to the projections, keeping an eye on the time and the stratospheric winds that were expected to kick in and push him east, and doing a mental rehearsal of the emergency procedures. At one point, Eustace stopped climbing fast enough, so ground control radioed him to let him know that it was releasing two 30-pound ballast weights. Each ballast had its own parachute, and he watched with interest as they fell back to Earth.

After two hours and seven minutes, Eustace reached 135,890 feet. This was float altitude: The balloon had expanded as far as it could, so he would not rise farther. Ground control would now detach him by remote control. The countdown began. On “zero,” Eustace felt the balloon snap and drift off. For a single moment, he felt like he was hovering in midair. He did a backflip. Then he did another.

Then SAEBER kicked in, launching the drogue and pushing Eustace into a downward position, facing Earth. The stratosphere was quiet as Eustace began free-falling, but soon he



could hear the rush of air inside his helmet. He passed 822 miles an hour, breaking the speed of sound. At about 8,300 feet above the ground—after four minutes and 27 seconds of free fall—Eustace deployed his main parachute. Nine and a half minutes later, he landed with a smile on his face. His team rushed over, barely able to contain the *whoops* and *yeahs*. The record was his.

The *Times* reporter's story would not run until later that day, and Eustace's reception was decidedly more muted than Baumgartner's. After he was freed from the suit, he helped clean up the landing site, check the GoPro footage, and wrap up the parachute. That night, the whole team went to a Mexican restaurant in Roswell. Eustace was on his third margarita when he got a text from his sister, who was at a bar in Florida and, by some cosmic coincidence, had bumped into none other than Joseph Kittinger. Recognizing him, she went up to him and said, "Hey, did you know that my brother just broke your record?" Kittinger congratulated Eustace by phone the next day and invited him to have a beer sometime. Baumgartner, too, released a statement congratulating him.

The next Monday, Eustace was back behind his desk at Google.

A S T D E C E M B E R ,

Eustace's suit was put on display at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum in Chantilly, Virginia. In the two and a half years since the jump, Eustace has given countless talks about the suit—at NASA, the Jet Propulsion Laboratory, SpaceX. But most people still don't know that Eustace broke Baumgartner's record. "If someone says, 'Hey, this is the guy who holds the record for the highest-altitude jump,'" he told me, "people will usually just turn to me and ask, 'Oh, are you Felix?'"

He retired from Google a few months after the jump to focus on his own projects—including consulting for a space-tourism company called World View, which MacCallum and Poynter helped form while Eustace was working on his jump. Ventures including SpaceX and Virgin Galactic have been working on ways to send civilians into space on rockets. World View is building an eight-person spacecraft that will float up into the stratosphere using a helium balloon, then detach and float back down with the help of a steerable parachute, like the one Eustace used. The trip will be significantly cheaper than going into space—\$75,000 a ticket compared with about \$250,000 for a ride with Virgin Galactic—which, if not quite democratizing the experience, will at least give more people an opportunity for perspective-altering views.

Inside World View's facility in Tucson sits a full-size replica of the *Voyager* capsule. It has four big windows and a bubble

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roof, so everyone on board can have a 360-degree view of space. The capsule has a small bathroom, Wi-Fi, and a bar. It will be a five-hour flight in total: one and a half hours up, then a couple of hours floating at about 100,000 feet before the descent. Eventually, World View hopes to hold wine tastings and photography classes in the stratosphere. The company is targeting late 2018 for its first flight.

Eustace isn't planning to go—he feels it would be anticlimactic. He had hoped to venture out in his space suit again, but ultimately decided that another jump would put too much strain on his family. So he takes every other chance he gets to launch himself skyward.

A few years after he started working as an engineer, Eustace bought a bright-yellow Lockwood AirCam, a small two-seater with an open cockpit. He took me to see it one blustery afternoon in December, in a private hangar at the San Carlos Airport. We drove there from Eustace's house in his Tesla, to which he had recently upgraded, at Kwan's urging, from a 2002 Honda Accord.

I had confessed earlier that I was terrified of heights. "Just don't scream too loudly in my ear when we're up there," he joked as we pulled up to the hangar. "That could really make us crash."

We geared up: puffy pants and jackets and heavy helmets. Eustace helped strap me into the back seat, then jumped in the front. After a few radio calls to flight control, we pointed down the runway and took off. The plane lived up to its tagline—slow and low—and at first,

it was almost like we were floating in a balloon. But as we got higher, flying over the tops of office buildings, the wind picked up. Although I was wearing gloves, my hands started getting numb. I thought about putting them in my pockets, but didn't want to let go of the sides of the plane, which I was gripping with all my strength. We rose higher and higher and banked right over the San Francisco Bay. The water glittered below us, the bridge stretching across the horizon.

After about 20 minutes, I heard Eustace's voice in my ear: "Do you want to take control?" There was a small control stick in front of me, which Eustace had shown me how to use before we took off—a slight pull to go higher, a push sideways to turn. Still holding on to the side of the plane with one hand, I used my other to tilt the stick slightly to the right. The plane tilted to the right. "Oh!" I said, in genuine surprise, forgetting my fear for a moment. "I'm flying!"

Eustace just laughed. "Go higher!" he said. □

Laura Parker has written for *The New Yorker*, *Vanity Fair*, *The New York Times*, and *Rolling Stone*. She is a co-author of *Power Play: How Video Games Can Save the World*.

*She lived with my family for 56 years.
She raised me and my siblings,
and cooked and cleaned from dawn to
dark—always without pay.
I was 11, a typical American kid, before
I realized she was my family's slave.*

Lola's Story

BY ALEX TIZON



The ashes filled a black plastic box about the size of a toaster.

It weighed three and a half pounds. I put it in a canvas tote bag and packed it in my suitcase this past July for the transpacific flight to Manila. From there I would travel by car to a rural village. When I arrived, I would hand over all that was left of the woman who had spent 56 years as a slave in my family's household.

Her name was Eudocia Tomas Pulido. We called her Lola. She was 4 foot 11, with mocha-brown skin and almond eyes that I can still see looking into mine—my first memory. She was 18 years old when my grandfather gave her to my mother as a gift, and when my family moved to the United States, we brought her with us. No other word but *slave* encompassed the life she lived. Her days began before everyone else woke and ended after we went to bed. She prepared three meals a day, cleaned the house, waited on my parents, and took care of my four siblings and me. My parents never paid her, and they scolded her constantly. She wasn't kept in leg irons, but she might as well have been. So many nights, on my way to the bathroom, I'd spot her sleeping in a corner, slumped against a mound of laundry, her fingers clutching a garment she was in the middle of folding.

To our American neighbors, we were model immigrants, a poster family. They told us so. My father had a law degree, my mother was on her way to becoming a doctor, and my siblings and I got good grades and always said "please" and "thank you." We never talked about Lola. Our secret went to the core of who we were and, at least for us kids, who we wanted to be.

After my mother died of leukemia, in 1999, Lola came to live with me in a small town north of Seattle. I had a family, a career, a house in the suburbs—the American dream. And then I had a slave.

AT BAGGAGE CLAIM in Manila, I unzipped my suitcase to make sure Lola's ashes were still there. Outside, I inhaled the familiar smell: a thick blend of exhaust and waste, of ocean and sweet fruit and sweat.

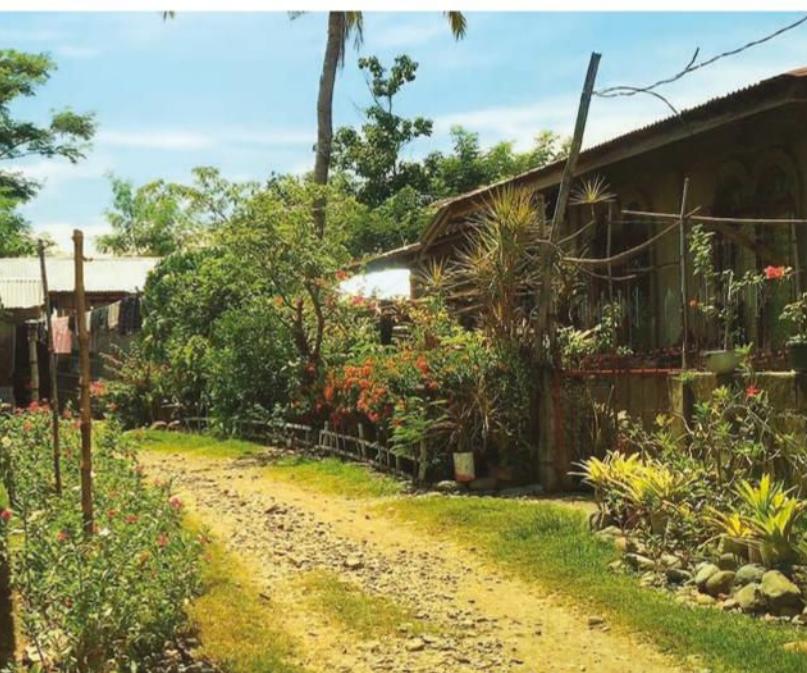
Early the next morning I found a driver, an affable middle-aged man who went by the nickname "Doods," and we hit the road in his truck, weaving through traffic. The scene always stunned me. The sheer number of cars and motorcycles and jeepneys. The people weaving between them and moving on the sidewalks in great brown rivers. The street vendors in bare feet trotting alongside cars, hawking cigarettes and cough drops and sacks of boiled peanuts. The child beggars pressing their faces against the windows.

*I had a family, a career, a house
in the suburbs—the American dream.
And then I had a slave.*

Doods and I were headed to the place where Lola's story began, up north in the central plains: Tarlac province. Rice country. The home of a cigar-chomping army lieutenant named Tomas Asuncion, my grandfather. The family stories paint Lieutenant Tom as a formidable man given to eccentricity and dark moods, who had lots of land but little money and kept mistresses in separate houses on his property. His wife died giving birth to their only child, my mother. She was raised by a series of *utusans*, or "people who take commands."



Lola Pulido (shown here at age 18) came from a poor family in a rural part of the Philippines. The author's grandfather (bottom left) "gave" her to his daughter as a gift. The site of her childhood home is shown below.



Slavery has a long history on the islands. Before the Spanish came, islanders enslaved other islanders, usually war captives, criminals, or debtors. Slaves came in different varieties, from warriors who could earn their freedom through valor to household servants who were regarded as property and could be bought and sold or traded. High-status slaves could own low-status slaves, and the low could own the lowest. Some chose to enter servitude simply to survive: In exchange for their labor, they might be given food, shelter, and protection.

When the Spanish arrived, in the 1500s, they enslaved islanders and later brought African and Indian slaves. The Spanish Crown eventually began phasing out slavery at home and in its colonies, but parts of the Philippines were so far-flung that authorities couldn't keep a close eye. Traditions persisted under different guises, even after the U.S. took control of the islands in 1898. Today even the poor can have *utusans* or *katulongs* ("helpers") or *kasambahays* ("domestics"), as long as there are people even poorer. The pool is deep.

Lieutenant Tom had as many as three families of *utusans* living on his property. In the spring of 1943, with the islands under Japanese occupation, he brought home a girl from a village down the road. She was a cousin from a marginal side of the family, rice farmers. The lieutenant was shrewd—he saw that this girl was penniless, unschooled, and likely to be malleable. Her parents wanted her to marry a pig farmer twice her age, and she was desperately unhappy but had nowhere to go. Tom approached her with an offer: She could have food and shelter if she would commit to taking care of his daughter, who had just turned 12.

Lola agreed, not grasping that the deal was for life.

"She is my gift to you," Lieutenant Tom told my mother.

"I don't want her," my mother said, knowing she had no choice.

Lieutenant Tom went off to fight the Japanese, leaving Mom behind with Lola in his creaky house in the provinces. Lola fed, groomed, and dressed my mother. When they walked to the market, Lola held an umbrella to shield her from the sun. At night, when Lola's other tasks were done—feeding the dogs, sweeping

the floors, folding the laundry that she had washed by hand in the Camiling River—she sat at the edge of my mother's bed and fanned her to sleep.

One day during the war Lieutenant Tom came home and caught my mother in a lie—something to do with a boy she wasn't supposed to talk to. Tom, furious, ordered her to "stand at the table." Mom cowered with Lola in a corner. Then, in a quivering voice, she told her father that Lola would take her punishment. Lola looked at Mom pleadingly, then without a word walked to the dining table and held on to the edge. Tom raised the belt and delivered 12 lashes, punctuating each one with a word. *You. Do. Not. Lie. To. Me. You. Do. Not. Lie. To. Me.* Lola made no sound.

My mother, in recounting this story late in her life, delighted in the outrageousness of it, her tone seeming to say, *Can you believe I did that?* When I brought it up with Lola, she asked to hear Mom's version. She listened intently, eyes lowered, and afterward she looked at me with sadness and said simply, "Yes. It was like that."

Seven years later, in 1950, Mom married my father and moved to Manila, bringing Lola along. Lieutenant Tom had long been haunted by demons, and in 1951 he silenced them with a .32-caliber slug to his temple. Mom almost never talked about it. She had his temperament—moody, imperial, secretly fragile—and she took his lessons to heart, among them the proper way to be a provincial *matrona*: You must embrace your role as the giver of commands. You must keep those beneath you in their place at all times, for their own good and the good of the household. They might cry and complain, but their souls will thank you. They will love you for helping them be what God intended.

My brother Arthur was born in 1951. I came next, followed by three more siblings in rapid succession. My parents expected Lola to be as devoted to us kids as she was to them. While she looked after us, my parents went to school and earned advanced degrees, joining the ranks of so many others with fancy diplomas but no jobs. Then the big break: Dad was offered a job in Foreign Affairs as a commercial analyst. The salary would be meager, but the position was in America—a place he and Mom

had grown up dreaming of, where everything they hoped for could come true.

Dad was allowed to bring his family and one domestic. Figuring they would both have to work, my parents needed Lola to care for the kids and the house. My mother informed Lola, and to her great irritation, Lola didn't immediately acquiesce. Years later Lola told me she was terrified. "It was too far," she said. "Maybe your Mom and Dad won't let me go home."

In the end what convinced Lola was my father's promise that things would be different in America. He told her that as soon as he and Mom got on their feet, they'd give her an "allowance." Lola could send money to her parents, to all her relations in the village. Her parents lived in a hut with a dirt floor. Lola could build them a concrete house, could change their lives forever. *Imagine.*

We landed in Los Angeles on May 12, 1964, all our belongings in cardboard boxes tied with rope. Lola had been with my mother for 21 years by then. In many ways she was more of a parent to me than either my mother or my father. Hers was the first face I saw in the morning and the last one I saw at night. As a baby, I uttered Lola's name (which I first pronounced "Oh-ah") long before I learned to say "Mom" or "Dad." As a toddler, I refused to go to sleep unless Lola was holding me, or at least nearby.

I was 4 years old when we arrived in the U.S.—too young to question Lola's place in our family. But as my siblings and I grew up on this other shore, we came to see the world differently. The leap across the ocean brought about a leap in consciousness that Mom and Dad couldn't, or wouldn't, make.

LOLA NEVER GOT that allowance. She asked my parents about it in a roundabout way a couple of years into our life in America. Her mother had fallen ill (with what I would later learn was dysentery), and her family couldn't afford the medicine she needed.

Alex Tizon passed away in March. He was a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist and the author of *Big Little Man: In Search of My Asian Self*. For more about Alex, please see the editor's note on page 8.



Lola at age 27 with Arthur, the author's older brother, before coming to the U.S.

"*Pwede ba?*" she said to my parents. *Is it possible?* Mom let out a sigh. "How could you even ask?" Dad responded in Tagalog. "You see how hard up we are. Don't you have any shame?"

My parents had borrowed money for the move to the U.S., and then borrowed more in order to stay. My father was transferred from the consulate general in L.A. to the Philippine consulate in Seattle. He was paid \$5,600 a year. He took a second job cleaning trailers, and a third as a debt collector. Mom got work as a technician in a couple of medical labs. We barely saw them, and when we did they were often exhausted and snappish.

Mom would come home and upbraid Lola for not cleaning the house well enough or for forgetting to bring in the mail. "Didn't I tell you I want the letters here when I come home?" she would say in Tagalog, her voice venomous. "It's not hard *naman!* An idiot could remember." Then my father would arrive and take his turn. When Dad raised his voice, everyone in the house shrank. Sometimes my parents would team up until Lola broke down crying, almost as though that was their goal.

It confused me: My parents were good to my siblings and me, and we loved them. But they'd be affectionate to us kids one moment and vile to Lola the next. I was 11 or 12 when I began to see Lola's situation clearly. By then Arthur, eight years my senior, had been seething for a long time. He was the one who introduced the

word *slave* into my understanding of what Lola was. Before he said it I'd thought of her as just an unfortunate member of the household. I hated when my parents yelled at her, but it hadn't occurred to me that they—and the whole arrangement—could be immoral.

"Do you know anybody treated the way she's treated?" Arthur said. "Who lives the way she lives?" He summed up Lola's reality: Wasn't paid. Toiled every day. Was tongue-lashed for sitting too long or falling asleep too early. Was struck for talking back. Wore hand-me-downs. Ate scraps and leftovers by herself in the kitchen. Rarely left the house. Had no friends or hobbies outside the family. Had no private quarters. (Her designated place to sleep in each house we lived in was always whatever was left—a couch or storage area or corner in my sisters' bedroom. She often slept among piles of laundry.)

We couldn't identify a parallel anywhere except in slave characters on TV and in the movies. I remember watching a Western called *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance*. John Wayne plays Tom Doniphon, a gunslinging rancher who barks orders at his servant, Pompey, whom he calls his "boy." *Pick him up, Pompey. Pompey, go find the doctor. Get on back to work, Pompey!* Docile and obedient, Pompey calls his master "Mistah Tom." They have a complex relationship. Tom forbids Pompey from attending school but opens the way for Pompey to drink in a whites-only saloon. Near the end, Pompey saves his master from a fire. It's clear Pompey both fears and loves Tom, and he mourns when Tom dies. All of this is peripheral to the main story of Tom's showdown with bad guy Liberty Valance, but I couldn't take my eyes off Pompey. I remember thinking: *Lola is Pompey, Pompey is Lola.*

One night when Dad found out that my sister Ling, who was then 9, had missed dinner, he barked at Lola for being lazy. "I tried to feed her," Lola said, as Dad stood over her and glared. Her feeble defense only made him angrier, and he punched her just below the shoulder. Lola ran out of the room and I could hear her wailing, an animal cry.

"Ling said she wasn't hungry," I said.

My parents turned to look at me. They seemed startled. I felt the twitching in my face that usually preceded tears, but I wouldn't cry this time. In

Mom's eyes was a shadow of something I hadn't seen before. Jealousy?

"Are you defending your Lola?" Dad said. "Is that what you're doing?"

"Ling said she wasn't hungry," I said again, almost in a whisper.

I was 13. It was my first attempt to stick up for the woman who spent her days watching over me. The woman who used to hum Tagalog melodies as she rocked me to sleep, and when I got older would dress and feed me and walk me to school in the mornings and pick me up in the afternoons. Once, when I was sick for a long time and too weak to eat, she chewed my food for me and put the small pieces in my mouth to swallow. One summer when I had plaster casts on both legs (I had problem joints), she bathed me with a washcloth, brought medicine in the middle of the night, and helped me through months of rehabilitation. I was cranky through it all. She didn't complain or lose patience, ever.

To now hear her wailing made me crazy.

catch glimpses of my family's secret. He once overheard my mother yelling in the kitchen, and when he barged in to investigate found Mom red-faced and glaring at Lola, who was quaking in a corner. I came in a few seconds later. The look on Billy's face was a mix of embarrassment and perplexity. *What was that?* I waved it off and told him to forget it.

I think Billy felt sorry for Lola. He'd rave about her cooking, and make her laugh like I'd never seen. During sleepovers, she'd make his favorite Filipino dish, beef *tapa* over white rice. Cooking was Lola's only eloquence. I could tell by what she served whether she was merely feeding us or saying she loved us.

When I once referred to Lola as a distant aunt, Billy reminded me that when we'd first met I'd said she was my grandmother.

"Well, she's kind of both," I said mysteriously.

"Why is she always working?"
"She likes to work," I said.

*We spent our first decade in the country trying to fit in.
Having a slave did not fit. Having a slave gave
me grave doubts about what kind of people we were,
what kind of place we came from.*

IN THE OLD COUNTRY, my parents felt no need to hide their treatment of Lola. In America, they treated her worse but took pains to conceal it. When guests came over, my parents would either ignore her or, if questioned, lie and quickly change the subject. For five years in North Seattle, we lived across the street from the Misslers, a rambunctious family of eight who introduced us to things like mustard, salmon fishing, and mowing the lawn. Football on TV. Yelling during football. Lola would come out to serve food and drinks during games, and my parents would smile and thank her before she quickly disappeared. "Who's that little lady you keep in the kitchen?" Big Jim, the Missler patriarch, once asked. A relative from back home, Dad said. Very shy.

Billy Missler, my best friend, didn't buy it. He spent enough time at our house, whole weekends sometimes, to

"Your dad and mom—why do they yell at her?"

"Her hearing isn't so good..."

Admitting the truth would have meant exposing us all. We spent our first decade in the country learning the ways of the new land and trying to fit in. Having a slave did not fit. Having a slave gave me grave doubts about what kind of people we were, what kind of place we came from. Whether we deserved to be accepted. I was ashamed of it all, including my complicity. Didn't I eat the food she cooked, and wear the clothes she washed and ironed and hung in the closet? But losing her would have been devastating.

There was another reason for secrecy: Lola's travel papers had expired in 1969, five years after we arrived in the U.S. She'd come on a special passport linked to my father's job. After a series of fallings-out with his superiors, Dad quit the consulate and declared his intent to

stay in the United States. He arranged for permanent-resident status for his family, but Lola wasn't eligible. He was supposed to send her back.

Lola's mother, Fermina, died in 1973; her father, Hilario, in 1979. Both times she wanted desperately to go home. Both times my parents said "Sorry." No money, no time. The kids needed her. My parents also feared for themselves, they admitted to me later. If the authorities had found out about Lola, as they surely would have if she'd tried to leave, my parents could have gotten into trouble, possibly even been deported. They couldn't risk it. Lola's legal status became what Filipinos call *tago nang*



Lola raised the author (left) and his siblings, and was sometimes the only adult at home for days at a time.

*I heard Mom weeping and ran into the living room
to find her slumped in Lola's arms.
Lola was talking softly to her, the way she used to with
my siblings and me when we were young.*

tago, or TNT—"on the run." She stayed TNT for almost 20 years.

After each of her parents died, Lola was sullen and silent for months. She barely responded when my parents badgered her. But the badgering never let up. Lola kept her head down and did her work.

MY FATHER'S resignation started a turbulent period. Money got tighter, and my parents turned on each other. They uprooted the family again and again—Seattle to Honolulu back to Seattle to the southeast Bronx and finally to the truck-stop town of Umatilla, Oregon, population 750. During all this moving around, Mom often worked 24-hour shifts, first as a medical intern and then as a resident, and Dad would disappear for days, working odd jobs but also (we'd later learn) womanizing and who knows what else. Once, he came home and told us that he'd lost our new station wagon playing blackjack.

For days in a row Lola would be the only adult in the house. She got to know the details of our lives in a way that my parents never had the mental space for. We brought friends home, and she'd listen to us talk about school and girls and boys and whatever else was on

our minds. Just from conversations she overheard, she could list the first name of every girl I had a crush on from sixth grade through high school.

When I was 15, Dad left the family for good. I didn't want to believe it at the time, but the fact was that he deserted us kids and abandoned Mom after 25 years of marriage. She wouldn't become a licensed physician for another year, and her specialty—internal medicine—wasn't especially lucrative. Dad didn't pay child support, so money was always a struggle.

My mom kept herself together enough to go to work, but at night she'd crumble in self-pity and despair. Her main source of comfort during this time: Lola. As Mom snapped at her over small things, Lola attended to her even more—cooking Mom's favorite meals, cleaning her bedroom with extra care. I'd find the two of them late at night at the kitchen counter, griping and telling stories about Dad, sometimes laughing wickedly, other times working themselves into a fury over his transgressions. They barely noticed us kids flitting in and out.

One night I heard Mom weeping and ran into the living room to find her slumped in Lola's arms. Lola was talking softly to her, the way she used to with my siblings and me when we were young. I

lingered, then went back to my room, scared for my mom and awed by Lola.

DOADS WAS HUMMING. I'd dozed for what felt like a minute and awoke to his happy melody. "Two hours more," he said. I checked the plastic box in the tote bag by my side—still there—and looked up to see open road. The MacArthur Highway. I glanced at the time. "Hey, you said 'two hours' two hours ago," I said. Doods just hummed.

His not knowing anything about the purpose of my journey was a relief. I had enough interior dialogue going on. *I was no better than my parents. I could have done more to free Lola. To make her life better. Why didn't I?* I could have turned in my parents, I suppose. It would have blown up my family in an instant. Instead, my siblings and I kept everything to ourselves, and rather than blowing up in an instant, my family broke apart slowly.

Doods and I passed through beautiful country. Not travel-brochure beautiful but real and alive and, compared with the city, elegantly spare. Mountains ran parallel to the highway on each side, the Zambales Mountains to the west, the Sierra Madre Range to the east. From ridge to ridge, west to east, I could see every shade of green all the way to almost black.

Doods pointed to a shadowy outline in the distance. Mount Pinatubo. I'd come here in 1991 to report on the aftermath of its eruption, the second-largest of the 20th century. Volcanic mudflows called *lahars* continued for more than a decade, burying ancient villages, filling in rivers and valleys, and wiping out entire ecosystems. The *lahars* reached deep into the foothills of Tarlac province, where Lola's parents had spent their entire lives, and where she and my mother had once lived together. So much of our family record had been lost in wars and floods, and now parts were buried under 20 feet of mud.

Life here is routinely visited by cataclysm. Killer typhoons that strike several times a year. Bandit insurgencies that never end. Somnolent mountains that one day decide to wake up. The Philippines isn't like China or Brazil, whose mass might absorb the trauma. This is a nation of scattered rocks in the sea. When disaster hits, the place goes under for a while. Then it resurfaces and life

proceeds, and you can behold a scene like the one Doods and I were driving through, and the simple fact that it's still there makes it beautiful.

A COUPLE OF YEARS after my parents split, my mother remarried and demanded Lola's fealty to her new husband, a Croatian immigrant named Ivan, whom she had met through a friend. Ivan had never finished high school. He'd been married four times and was an inveterate gambler who enjoyed being supported by my mother and attended to by Lola.

Ivan brought out a side of Lola I'd never seen. His marriage to my mother was volatile from the start, and money—especially his use of her money—was the main issue. Once, during an argument in which Mom was crying and Ivan was yelling, Lola walked over and stood between them. She turned to Ivan and firmly said his name. He looked at Lola, blinked, and sat down.

My sister Inday and I were floored. Ivan was about 250 pounds, and his baritone could shake the walls. Lola put him in his place with a single word. I saw this happen a few other times, but for the most part Lola served Ivan unquestioningly, just as Mom wanted her to. I had a hard time watching Lola vassalize herself to another person, especially someone like Ivan. But what set the stage for my blowup with Mom was something more mundane.

She used to get angry whenever Lola felt ill. She didn't want to deal with the

disruption and the expense, and would accuse Lola of faking or failing to take care of herself. Mom chose the second tack when, in the late 1970s, Lola's teeth started falling out. She'd been saying for months that her mouth hurt.

"That's what happens when you don't brush properly," Mom told her.

I said that Lola needed to see a dentist. She was in her 50s and had never been to one. I was attending college an hour away, and I brought it up again and again on my frequent trips home. A year went by, then two. Lola took aspirin every day for the pain, and her teeth looked like a crumbling Stonehenge. One night, after watching her chew bread on the side of her mouth that still had a few good molars, I lost it.

Mom and I argued into the night, each of us sobbing at different points. She said she was tired of working her fingers to the bone supporting everybody, and sick of her children always taking Lola's side, and why didn't we just take our goddamn Lola, she'd never wanted her in the first place, and she wished to God she hadn't given birth to an arrogant, sanctimonious phony like me.

I let her words sink in. Then I came back at her, saying she would know all about being a phony, her whole life was a masquerade, and if she stopped feeling sorry for herself for one minute she'd see that Lola could barely eat because her goddamn teeth were rotting out of her goddamn head, and couldn't she think of her just this once as a real person instead of a slave kept alive to serve her?

"A slave," Mom said, weighing the word. "A slave?"

The night ended when she declared that I would never understand her relationship with Lola. *Never*. Her voice was so guttural and pained that thinking of it even now, so many years later, feels like a punch to the stomach. It's a terrible thing to hate your own mother, and that night I did. The look in her eyes made clear that she felt the same way about me.

The fight only fed Mom's fear that Lola had stolen the kids from her, and she made Lola pay for it. Mom drove her harder. Tormented her by saying, "I hope you're happy now that your kids hate me." When we helped Lola with housework, Mom would fume. "You'd better go to sleep now, Lola," she'd say sarcastically. "You've been working too hard. Your kids are worried about you." Later she'd take Lola into a bedroom for a talk, and Lola would walk out with puffy eyes.

Lola finally begged us to stop trying to help her.

Why do you stay? we asked.

"Who will cook?" she said, which I took to mean, *Who would do everything?* Who would take care of us? Of Mom? Another time she said, "Where will I go?" This struck me as closer to a real answer. Coming to America had been a mad dash, and before we caught a breath a decade had gone by. We turned around, and a second decade was closing out. Lola's hair had turned gray. She'd heard that relatives back home who hadn't received the promised support were wondering what had happened to her. She was ashamed to return.

She had no contacts in America, and no facility for getting around. Phones puzzled her. Mechanical things—ATMs, intercoms, vending machines, anything with a keyboard—made her panic. Fast-talking people left her speechless, and her own broken English did the same to them. She couldn't make an appointment, arrange a trip, fill out a form, or order a meal without help.

I got Lola an ATM card linked to my bank account and taught her how to use it. She succeeded once, but the second time she got flustered, and she never tried again. She kept the card because she considered it a gift from me.

I also tried to teach her to drive. She dismissed the idea with a wave of her hand, but I picked her up and carried her



The author (*second from the left*) with his parents, siblings, and Lola five years after they arrived in the U.S.

to the car and planted her in the driver's seat, both of us laughing. I spent 20 minutes going over the controls and gauges. Her eyes went from mirthful to terrified. When I turned on the ignition and the dashboard lit up, she was out of the car and in the house before I could say another word. I tried a couple more times.

I thought driving could change her life. She could go places. And if things ever got unbearable with Mom, she could drive away forever.

FOUR LANES BECAME TWO, pavement turned to gravel.

Tricycle drivers wove between cars and water buffalo pulling loads of bamboo. An occasional dog or goat sprinted across the road in front of our truck, almost grazing the bumper. Doods never eased up. Whatever didn't make it across would be stew today instead of tomorrow—the rule of the road in the provinces.

I took out a map and traced the route to the village of Mayantoc, our destination. Out the window, in the distance, tiny figures folded at the waist like so many bent nails. People harvesting rice, the same way they had for thousands of years. We were getting close.

I tapped the cheap plastic box and regretted not buying a real urn, made of porcelain or rosewood. What would Lola's people think? Not that many were left. Only one sibling remained in the area, Gregoria, 98 years old, and I was told her memory was failing. Relatives said that whenever she heard Lola's name, she'd burst out crying and then quickly forgot why.

I'd been in touch with one of Lola's nieces. She had the day planned: When I arrived, a low-key memorial, then a prayer, followed by the lowering of the ashes into a plot at the Mayantoc Eternal Bliss Memorial Park. It had been five years since Lola died, but I hadn't yet said the final goodbye that I knew was about to happen. All day I had been feeling intense grief and resisting the urge to let it out, not wanting to wail in front of Doods. More than the shame I felt for the way my family had treated Lola, more than my anxiety about how her relatives in Mayantoc would treat me, I felt the terrible heaviness of losing her, as if she had died only the day before.

Doods veered northwest on the Romulo Highway, then took a sharp



Lola at age 51, in 1976. Her mother died a few years before this picture was taken; her father a few years after. Both times, she wanted desperately to go home.

left at Camiling, the town Mom and Lieutenant Tom came from. Two lanes became one, then gravel turned to dirt. The path ran along the Camiling River, clusters of bamboo houses off to the side, green hills ahead. The homestretch.

IGAVE THE EULOGY at Mom's funeral, and everything I said was true. That she was brave and spirited. That she'd drawn some short straws, but had done the best she could. That she was radiant when she was happy. That she adored her children, and gave us a real home—in Salem, Oregon—that through the '80s and '90s became the permanent base we'd never had before. That I wished we could thank her one more time. That we all loved her.

I didn't talk about Lola. Just as I had selectively blocked Lola out of my mind when I was with Mom during her last years. Loving my mother required that kind of mental surgery. It was the only way we could be mother and son—which I wanted, especially after her health started to decline, in the mid-'90s. Diabetes. Breast cancer. Acute myelogenous leukemia, a fast-growing cancer of the blood and bone marrow. She went from robust to frail seemingly overnight.

After the big fight, I mostly avoided going home, and at age 23 I moved to Seattle. When I did visit I saw a change. Mom was still Mom, but not as relentlessly. She got Lola a fine set of dentures

and let her have her own bedroom. She cooperated when my siblings and I set out to change Lola's TNT status. Ronald Reagan's landmark immigration bill of 1986 made millions of illegal immigrants eligible for amnesty. It was a long process, but Lola became a citizen in October 1998, four months after my mother was diagnosed with leukemia. Mom lived another year.

During that time, she and Ivan took trips to Lincoln City, on the Oregon coast, and sometimes brought Lola along. Lola loved the ocean. On the other side were the islands she dreamed of returning to. And Lola was never happier than when Mom relaxed around her. An afternoon at the coast or just 15 minutes in the kitchen reminiscing about the old days in the province, and Lola would seem to forget years of torment.

I couldn't forget so easily. But I did come to see Mom in a different light. Before she died, she gave me her journals, two steamer trunks' full. Leafing through them as she slept a few feet away, I glimpsed slices of her life that I'd refused to see for years. She'd gone to medical school when not many women did. She'd come to America and fought for respect as both a woman and an immigrant physician. She'd worked for two decades at Fairview Training Center, in Salem, a state institution for the developmentally disabled. The irony: She tended

to underdogs most of her professional life. They worshipped her. Female colleagues became close friends. They did silly, girly things together—shoe shopping, throwing dress-up parties at one another’s homes, exchanging gag gifts like penis-shaped soaps and calendars of half-naked men, all while laughing hysterically. Looking through their party pictures reminded me that Mom had a life and an identity apart from the family and Lola. Of course.

Mom wrote in great detail about each of her kids, and how she felt about us on a given day—proud or loving or resentful. And she devoted volumes to her husbands, trying to grasp them as complex characters in her story. We were all persons of consequence. Lola was incidental. When she was mentioned at all, she was a bit character in someone else’s story. “Lola walked my beloved Alex to his new school this morning. I hope he makes new friends quickly so he doesn’t feel so sad about moving again ...” There might be two more pages about me, and no other mention of Lola.

The day before Mom died, a Catholic priest came to the house to perform last rites. Lola sat next to my mother’s bed, holding a cup with a straw, poised to raise it to Mom’s mouth. She had become extra attentive to my mother, and extra kind. She could have taken advantage of Mom in her feebleness, even exacted revenge, but she did the opposite.

The priest asked Mom whether there was anything she wanted to forgive or be forgiven for. She scanned the room with heavy-lidded eyes, said nothing. Then, without looking at Lola, she reached over and placed an open hand on her head. She didn’t say a word.

LOLA WAS 75 when she came to stay with me. I was married with two young daughters, living in a cozy house on a wooded lot. From the second story, we could see Puget Sound. We gave Lola a bedroom and license to do whatever she wanted: sleep in, watch soaps, do nothing all day. She could relax—and be free—for the first time in her life. I should have known it wouldn’t be that simple.

I’d forgotten about all the things Lola did that drove me a little crazy. She was always telling me to put on a sweater so I wouldn’t catch a cold (I was in my 40s). She groused incessantly about Dad

and Ivan: My father was lazy, Ivan was a leech. I learned to tune her out. Harder to ignore was her fanatical thriftiness. She threw nothing out. And she used to go through the trash to make sure that the rest of us hadn’t thrown out anything useful. She washed and reused paper towels again and again until they disintegrated in her hands. (No one else would go near them.) The kitchen became glutted with grocery bags, yogurt containers, and pickle jars, and parts of our house turned into storage for—there’s no other word for it—garbage.

She cooked breakfast even though none of us ate more than a banana or a granola bar in the morning, usually while we were running out the door. She made our beds and did our laundry. She cleaned the house. I found myself saying to her, nicely at first, “Lola, you don’t have to do that.” “Lola, we’ll do it ourselves.” “Lola, that’s the girls’ job.” Okay, she’d say, but keep right on doing it.

It irritated me to catch her eating

dentures, and went back to the puzzle. *Progress*, I thought.

She planted a garden in the backyard—roses and tulips and every kind of orchid—and spent whole afternoons tending it. She took walks around the neighborhood. At about 80, her arthritis got bad and she began walking with a cane. In the kitchen she went from being a fry cook to a kind of artisanal chef who created only when the spirit moved her. She made lavish meals and grinned with pleasure as we devoured them.

Passing the door of Lola’s bedroom, I’d often hear her listening to a cassette of Filipino folk songs. The same tape over and over. I knew she’d been sending almost all her money—my wife and I gave her \$200 a week—to relatives back home. One afternoon, I found her sitting on the back deck gazing at a snapshot someone had sent of her village.

“You want to go home, Lola?”

She turned the photograph over and

The priest asked Mom whether there was anything she wanted to be forgiven for. She reached over and placed an open hand on Lola’s head. She didn’t say a word.

meals standing in the kitchen, or see her tense up and start cleaning when I walked into the room. One day, after several months, I sat her down.

“I’m not Dad. You’re not a slave here,” I said, and went through a long list of slavelike things she’d been doing. When I realized she was startled, I took a deep breath and cupped her face, that elfin face now looking at me searchingly. I kissed her forehead. “This is *your* house now,” I said. “You’re not here to serve us. You can relax, okay?”

“Okay,” she said. And went back to cleaning.

She didn’t know any other way to be. I realized I had to take my own advice and relax. If she wanted to make dinner, let her. Thank her and do the dishes. I had to remind myself constantly: *Let her be.*

One night I came home to find her sitting on the couch doing a word puzzle, her feet up, the TV on. Next to her, a cup of tea. She glanced at me, smiled sheepishly with those perfect white

traced her finger across the inscription, then flipped it back and seemed to study a single detail.

“Yes,” she said.

Just after her 83rd birthday, I paid her airfare to go home. I’d follow a month later to bring her back to the U.S.—if she wanted to return. The unspoken purpose of her trip was to see whether the place she had spent so many years longing for could still feel like home.

She found her answer.

“Everything was not the same,” she told me as we walked around Mayantoc. The old farms were gone. Her house was gone. Her parents and most of her siblings were gone. Childhood friends, the ones still alive, were like strangers. It was nice to see them, but ... everything was not the same. She’d still like to spend her last years here, she said, but she wasn’t ready yet.

“You’re ready to go back to your garden,” I said.

“Yes. Let’s go home.”

LOLA WAS AS DEVOTED to my daughters as she'd been to my siblings and me when we were young. After school, she'd listen to their stories and make them something to eat. And unlike my wife and me (especially me), Lola enjoyed every minute of every school event and performance. She couldn't get enough of them. She sat up front, kept the programs as mementos.

It was so easy to make Lola happy. We took her on family vacations, but she was as excited to go to the farmer's market down the hill. She became a wide-eyed kid on a field trip: "Look at those zucchinis!" The first thing she did every morning was open all the blinds in the house, and at each window she'd pause to look outside.

And she taught herself to read. It was remarkable. Over the years, she'd somehow learned to sound out letters. She did those puzzles where you find and circle words within a block of letters. Her room had stacks of word-puzzle booklets, thousands of words circled in pencil. Every day she watched the news and listened for words she recognized. She triangulated them with words in the newspaper, and figured out the meanings. She came to read the paper every day, front to back. Dad used to say she was simple. I wondered what she could have been if, instead of working the rice fields at age 8, she had learned to read and write.

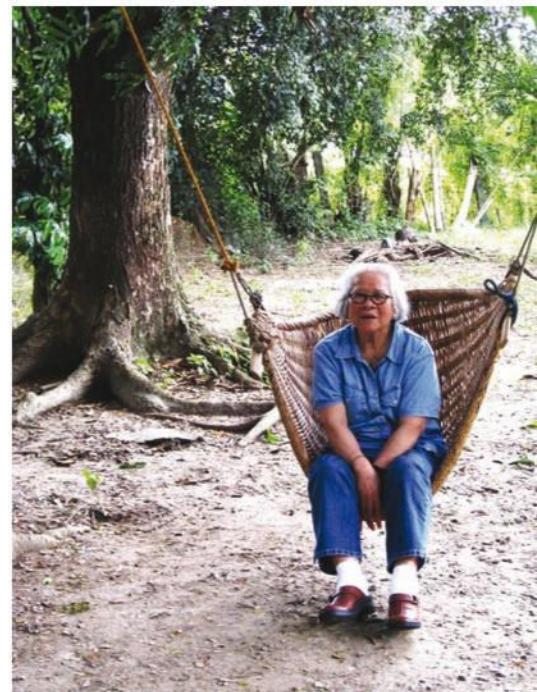


*The old farms were gone. Her house was gone.
Her parents and most of her siblings
were gone. Childhood friends, the ones still alive,
were like strangers.*

During the 12 years she lived in our house, I asked her questions about herself, trying to piece together her life story, a habit she found curious. To my inquiries she would often respond first with "Why?" Why did I want to know about her childhood? About how she met Lieutenant Tom?

I tried to get my sister Ling to ask Lola about her love life, thinking Lola would be more comfortable with her. Ling cackled, which was her way of saying I was on my own. One day, while

Lola returned to the Philippines for an extended visit after her 83rd birthday.





Top: Lola with her sister Juliana, reunited after 65 years. *Middle:* Rice fields in Mayantoc, near where Lola was born. *Bottom:* Lola and the author in 2008.



Lola and I were putting away groceries, I just blurted it out: "Lola, have you ever been romantic with anyone?" She smiled, and then she told me the story of the only time she'd come close. She was about 15, and there was a handsome boy named Pedro from a nearby farm. For several months they harvested rice together side by side. One time, she dropped her *bolo*—a cutting implement—and he quickly picked it up and handed it back to her. "I liked him," she said.

Silence.

"And?"

"Then he moved away," she said.

"And?"

"That's all."

"Lola, have you ever had sex?" I heard myself saying.

"No," she said.

She wasn't accustomed to being asked personal questions. "*Katulong lang ako*," she'd say. *I'm only a servant*. She often gave one- or two-word answers, and teasing out even the simplest story was a game of 20 questions that could last days or weeks.

Some of what I learned: She was mad at Mom for being so cruel all those years, but she nevertheless missed her. Sometimes, when Lola was young, she'd felt so lonely that all she could do was cry. I knew there were years when she'd dreamed of being with a man. I saw it in the way she wrapped herself around one large pillow at night. But what she told me in her old age was that living with Mom's husbands made her think being alone wasn't so bad. She didn't miss those two at all. Maybe her life would have been better if she'd stayed in Mayantoc, gotten married, and had a family like her siblings. But maybe it would have been worse. Two younger sisters, Francisca and Zepriana, got sick and died. A brother, Claudio, was killed. What's the point of wondering about it now? she asked. *Bahala na* was her guiding principle. *Come what may*. What came her way was another kind of family. In that family, she had eight children: Mom, my four siblings and me, and now my two daughters. The eight of us, she said, made her life worth living.

None of us was prepared for her to die so suddenly.

Her heart attack started in the kitchen while she was making dinner and I was running an errand. When I returned she was in the middle of

it. A couple of hours later at the hospital, before I could grasp what was happening, she was gone—10:56 p.m. All the kids and grandkids noted, but were unsure how to take, that she died on November 7, the same day as Mom. Twelve years apart.

Lola made it to 86. I can still see her on the gurney. I remember looking at the medics standing above this brown woman no bigger than a child and thinking that they had no idea of the life she had lived. She'd had none of the self-serving ambition that drives most of us, and her willingness to give up everything for the people around her won her our love and utter loyalty. She's become a hallowed figure in my extended family.

Going through her boxes in the attic took me months. I found recipes she



I remember looking at the medics standing above this brown woman no bigger than a child and thinking that they had no idea of the life she had lived.

had cut out of magazines in the 1970s for when she would someday learn to read. Photo albums with pictures of my mom. Awards my siblings and I had won from grade school on, most of which we had thrown away and she had “saved.” I almost lost it one night when at the bottom of a box I found a stack of yellowed newspaper articles I’d written and long ago forgotten about. She couldn’t read back then, but she’d kept them anyway.

DOODES’S TRUCK PULLED UP to a small concrete house in the middle of a cluster of homes mostly made of bamboo and plank wood. Surrounding the pod of houses: rice fields, green and seemingly endless. Before I even got out of the truck, people started coming outside.

Doods reclined his seat to take a nap. I hung my tote bag on my shoulder, took a breath, and opened the door.

“This way,” a soft voice said, and I was led up a short walkway to the concrete house. Following close behind was a line of about 20 people, young and old, but mostly old. Once we were all inside, they sat down on chairs and benches



Top: The author with Lola’s sister Gregoria.
Above: Lola’s grave site.

arranged along the walls, leaving the middle of the room empty except for me. I remained standing, waiting to meet my host. It was a small room, and dark. People glanced at me expectantly.

“Where is Lola?” A voice from another room. The next moment, a middle-aged woman in a housedress sauntered in with a smile. Ebia, Lola’s niece. This was her house. She gave me a hug and said again, “Where is Lola?”

I slid the tote bag from my shoulder and handed it to her. She looked into my face, still smiling, gently grasped

the bag, and walked over to a wooden bench and sat down. She reached inside and pulled out the box and looked at every side. “Where is Lola?” she said softly. People in these parts don’t often get their loved ones cremated. I don’t think she knew what to expect. She set the box on her lap and bent over so her forehead rested on top of it, and at first I thought she was laughing (out of joy) but I quickly realized she was crying. Her shoulders began to heave, and then she was wailing—a deep, mournful, animal howl, like I once heard coming from Lola.

I hadn’t come sooner to deliver Lola’s ashes in part because I wasn’t sure anyone here cared that much about her. I hadn’t expected this kind of grief. Before I could comfort Ebia, a woman walked in from the kitchen and wrapped her arms around her, and then she began wailing. The next thing I knew, the room erupted with sound. The old people—one of them blind, several with no teeth—were all crying and not holding anything back. It lasted about 10 minutes. I was so fascinated that I barely noticed the tears running down my own face. The sobs died down, and then it was quiet again.

Ebia sniffled and said it was time to eat. Everybody started filing into the kitchen, puffy-eyed but suddenly lighter and ready to tell stories. I glanced at the empty tote bag on the bench, and knew it was right to bring Lola back to the place where she’d been born. ■

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When Your Child Is a Psychopath

Psychopathy has long been considered untreatable. Experts can spot it in a child as young as 3 or 4. But a new clinical approach offers hope.

BY BARBARA BRADLEY HAGERTY

ILLUSTRATIONS BY LOLA DUPRE



This is a good day, Samantha tells me: 10 on a scale of 10. We're sitting in a conference room at the San Marcos Treatment Center, just south of Austin, Texas, a space that has witnessed countless difficult conversations between troubled children, their worried parents, and clinical therapists. But today promises unalloyed joy. Samantha's mother is visiting from Idaho, as she does every six weeks, which means lunch off campus and an excursion to Target. The girl needs supplies: new jeans, yoga pants, nail polish. ¶ At 11, Samantha is just over 5 feet tall and has wavy black hair and a steady gaze. She flashes a smile when I ask about her favorite subject (history), and grimaces when I ask about her least favorite (math). She seems poised and cheerful, a normal preteen. But when we steer into uncomfortable territory—the events that led her to this juvenile-treatment facility nearly 2,000 miles from her family—Samantha hesitates and looks down at her hands. "I wanted the whole world to myself," she says. "So I made a whole entire book about how to hurt people."

Starting at age 6, Samantha began drawing pictures of murder weapons: a knife, a bow and arrow, chemicals for poisoning, a plastic bag for suffocating. She tells me that she pretended to kill her stuffed animals.

"You were practicing on your stuffed animals?", I ask her.

She nods.

"How did you feel when you were doing that to your stuffed animals?"

"Happy."

"Why did it make you feel happy?"

"Because I thought that someday I was going to end up doing it on somebody."

"Did you ever try?"

Silence.

"I choked my little brother."

Samantha's parents, Jen and Danny, adopted Samantha when she was 2. They already had three biological children, but they felt called to add Samantha (not her real name) and her half-sister, who is two years older, to their family. They later had two more kids.

From the start, Samantha seemed a willful child, in tyrannical need of attention. But what toddler isn't? Her biological mother had been forced to give her up because she'd lost her job and home and couldn't provide for her four children, but there was no evidence of abuse. According to documentation from the state of Texas, Samantha met

all her cognitive, emotional, and physical milestones. She had no learning disabilities, no emotional scars, no signs of ADHD or autism.

But even at a very young age, Samantha had a mean streak. When she was about 20 months old, living with foster parents in Texas, she clashed with a boy in day care. The caretaker soothed them both; problem solved. Later that day Samantha, who was already potty trained, walked over to where the boy was playing, pulled down her pants, and peed on him. "She knew exactly what she was doing," Jen says. "There was an ability to wait until an opportune moment to exact her revenge on someone."

When Samantha got a little older, she would pinch, trip, or push her siblings and smile if they cried. She would break into her sister's piggy bank and rip up all the bills. Once, when Samantha was 5, Jen scolded her for being mean to one of her siblings. Samantha walked upstairs to her parents' bathroom and washed her mother's contact lenses down the drain. "Her behavior wasn't impulsive," Jen says. "It was very thoughtful, premeditated."

Jen, a former elementary-school teacher, and Danny, a physician, realized they were out of their depth. They consulted doctors, psychiatrists, and therapists. But Samantha only grew more dangerous. They had her admitted to a psychiatric hospital three times before sending her to a residential treatment program in Montana at age 6. Samantha would grow out of it, one psychologist assured her parents; the problem was merely delayed empathy. Samantha was impulsive, another said, something that medication would fix. Yet another suggested that she had reactive attachment disorder, which could be ameliorated with intensive therapy. More darkly—and typically, in these sorts of cases—another psychologist blamed Jen and Danny, implying that Samantha was reacting to harsh and unloving parenting.

One bitter December day in 2011, Jen was driving the children along a winding road near their home. Samantha had just turned 6. Suddenly Jen heard screaming from the back seat, and when she looked in the mirror, she saw Samantha with her hands around the throat of her 2-year-old sister, who was trapped in her car seat. Jen separated them, and once they were home, she pulled Samantha aside.

"What were you doing?" Jen asked.

"I was trying to choke her," Samantha said.

"You realize that would have killed her? She would not have been able to breathe. *She would have died.*"

"I know."

"What about the rest of us?"

"I want to kill all of you."

Samantha later showed Jen her sketches, and Jen watched in horror as her daughter demonstrated how to strangle or suffocate her stuffed animals. "I was so terrified," Jen says. "I felt like I had lost control."

Four months later, Samantha tried to strangle her baby brother, who was just two months old.

Jen and Danny had to admit that nothing seemed to make a difference—not affection, not discipline, not therapy. "I was reading and reading and reading, trying to figure out what diagnosis made sense," Jen tells me. "What fits with the behaviors I'm seeing?" Eventually she found one condition that did seem to fit—but it was a diagnosis that all the mental-health professionals had dismissed, because it's considered both rare and untreatable. In July 2013, Jen took Samantha to see a psychiatrist in New York City, who confirmed her suspicion.

"In the children's mental-health world, it's pretty much a terminal diagnosis, except your child's not going to die," Jen says. "It's just that there's no help." She recalls walking out of the psychiatrist's office on that warm afternoon and standing on a street corner in Manhattan as pedestrians pushed past her in a blur. A feeling flooded over her, singular, unexpected. Hope. Someone had finally acknowledged her family's plight. Perhaps she and Danny could, against the odds, find a way to help their daughter.

Samantha was diagnosed with conduct disorder with callous and unemotional traits. She had all the characteristics of a budding psychopath.

Pychopaths have always been with us. Indeed, certain psychopathic traits have survived because they're useful in small doses: the cool dispassion of a surgeon, the tunnel vision of an Olympic athlete, the ambitious narcissism of many a politician. But when these attributes exist in the wrong combination or in extreme

forms, they can produce a dangerously antisocial individual, or even a cold-blooded killer. Only in the past quarter century have researchers zeroed in on the early signs that indicate a child could be the next Ted Bundy.

Researchers shy away from calling children psychopaths; the term carries too much stigma, and too much determinism. They prefer to describe children like Samantha as having "callous and unemotional traits," shorthand for a cluster of characteristics and

Researchers believe that two paths can lead to psychopathy: one dominated by nature, the other by nurture. For some children, their environment—growing up in poverty, living with abusive parents, fending for themselves in dangerous neighborhoods—can turn them violent and coldhearted. These kids aren't born callous and unemotional; many experts suggest that if they're given a reprieve from their environment, they can be pulled back from psychopathy's edge.

**"I want to kill all of you,"
Samantha told her mother.**

behaviors, including a lack of empathy, remorse, or guilt; shallow emotions; aggression and even cruelty; and a seeming indifference to punishment. Callous and unemotional children have no trouble hurting others to get what they want. If they do seem caring or empathetic, they're probably trying to manipulate you.

Researchers believe that nearly 1 percent of children exhibit these traits, about as many as have autism or bipolar disorder. Until recently, the condition was seldom mentioned. Only in 2013 did the American Psychiatric Association include callous and unemotional traits in its diagnostic manual, *DSM-5*. The condition can go unnoticed because many children with these traits—who can be charming and smart enough to mimic social cues—are able to mask them.

More than 50 studies have found that kids with callous and unemotional traits are more likely than other kids (three times more likely, in one study) to become criminals or display aggressive, psychopathic traits later in life. And while adult psychopaths constitute only a tiny fraction of the general population, studies suggest that they commit half of all violent crimes. Ignore the problem, says Adrian Raine, a psychologist at the University of Pennsylvania, "and it could be argued we have blood on our hands."

But other children display callous and unemotional traits even though they are raised by loving parents in safe neighborhoods. Large studies in the United Kingdom and elsewhere have found that this early-onset condition is highly hereditary, hardwired in the brain—and especially difficult to treat. "We'd like to think a mother and father's love can turn everything around," Raine says. "But there are times where parents are doing the very best they can, but the kid—even from the get-go—is just a bad kid."

Still, researchers stress that a callous child—even one who was born that way—is not automatically destined for psychopathy. By some estimates, four out of five children with these traits do not grow up to be psychopaths. The mystery—the one everyone is trying to solve—is why some of these children develop into normal adults while others end up on death row.

A trained eye can spot a callous and unemotional child by age 3 or 4. Whereas normally developing children at that age grow agitated when they see other children cry—and either try to comfort them or bolt the scene—these kids show a chilly detachment. In fact, psychologists may even be able to trace these traits back to infancy. Researchers at King's College London tested more than 200 five-week-old babies, tracking whether they

preferred looking at a person's face or at a red ball. Those who favored the ball displayed more callous traits two and a half years later.

As a child gets older, more-obvious warning signs appear. Kent Kiehl, a psychologist at the University of New Mexico and the author of *The Psychopath Whisperer*, says that one scary harbinger occurs when a kid who is 8, 9, or 10 years old commits a transgression or a crime while alone, without the pressure of peers. This reflects an interior impulse toward harm. Criminal versatility—committing different types of crimes in different settings—can also hint at future psychopathy.

But the biggest red flag is early violence. "Most of the psychopaths I meet in

words but not the music" is how Kiehl describes it. "They just don't have the same circuitry."

In particular, experts point to the amygdala—a part of the limbic system—as a physiological culprit for coldhearted or violent behavior. Someone with an undersize or underactive amygdala may not be able to feel empathy or refrain from violence. For example, many psychopathic adults and callous children do not recognize fear or distress in other people's faces. Essi Viding, a professor of developmental psychopathology at University College London recalls showing one psychopathic prisoner a series of faces with different expressions. When the prisoner came to a fearful face, he said, "I don't know what you call this

"optimal level of physiological arousal," and psychopathic people seek out stimulation to increase their heart rate to normal. "For some kids, one way of getting this arousal jag in life is by shoplifting, or joining a gang, or robbing a store, or getting into a fight." Indeed, when Daniel Waschbusch, a clinical psychologist at Penn State Hershey Medical Center, gave the most severely callous and unemotional children he worked with a stimulative medication, their behavior improved.

The second hallmark of a psychopathic brain is an overactive reward system especially primed for drugs, sex, or anything else that delivers a ping of excitement. In one study, children played a computer gambling game programmed to allow them to win early on and then slowly begin to lose. Most people will cut their losses at some point, Kent Kiehl notes, "whereas the psychopathic, callous unemotional kids keep going until they lose everything." Their brakes don't work, he says.

Faulty brakes may help explain why psychopaths commit brutal crimes: Their brains ignore cues about danger or punishment. "There are all these decisions we make based on threat, or the fear that something bad can happen," says Dustin Pardini, a clinical psychologist and an associate professor of criminology at Arizona State University. "If you have less concern about the negative consequences of your actions, then you'll be more likely to continue engaging in these behaviors. And when you get caught, you'll be less likely to learn from your mistakes."

Researchers see this insensitivity to punishment even in some toddlers. "These are the kids that are completely unperturbed by the fact that they've been put in time-out," says Eva Kimonis, who works with callous children and their families at the University of New South Wales, in Australia. "So it's not surprising that they keep going to time-out, because it's not effective for them. Whereas reward—they're very motivated by that."

This insight is driving a new wave of treatment. What's a clinician to do if the emotional, empathetic part of a child's brain is broken but the reward part of the brain is humming along? "You co-opt the system," Kiehl says. "You work with what's left."

**I don't know what you call this emotion,"
one psychopathic prisoner said, looking at a
photo of a fearful face, "but it's what
people look like just before you stab them."**

prison had been in fights with teachers in elementary school or junior high," Kiehl says. "When I'd interview them, I'd say, 'What's the worst thing you did in school?' And they'd say, 'I beat the teacher unconscious.' You're like, *That really happened?* It turns out that's very common."

We have a fairly good idea of what an adult psychopathic brain looks like, thanks in part to Kiehl's work. He has scanned the brains of hundreds of inmates at maximum-security prisons and chronicled the neural differences between average violent convicts and psychopaths. Broadly speaking, Kiehl and others believe that the psychopathic brain has at least two neural abnormalities—and that these same differences likely also occur in the brains of callous children.

The first abnormality appears in the limbic system, the set of brain structures involved in, among other things, processing emotions. In a psychopath's brain, this area contains less gray matter. "It's like a weaker muscle," Kiehl says. A psychopath may understand, intellectually, that what he is doing is wrong, but he doesn't feel it. "Psychopaths know the

emotion, but it's what people look like just before you stab them."

Why does this neural quirk matter? Abigail Marsh, a researcher at Georgetown University who has studied the brains of callous and unemotional children, says that distress cues, such as fearful or sad expressions, signal submission and conciliation. "They're designed to prevent attacks by raising the white flag. And so if you're not sensitive to these cues, you're much more likely to attack somebody whom other people would refrain from attacking."

Psychopaths not only fail to recognize distress in others, they may not feel it themselves. The best physiological indicator of which young people will become violent criminals as adults is a low resting heart rate, says Adrian Raine of the University of Pennsylvania. Longitudinal studies that followed thousands of men in Sweden, the U.K., and Brazil all point to this biological anomaly. "We think that low heart rate reflects a lack of fear, and a lack of fear could predispose someone to committing fearless criminal-violence acts," Raine says. Or perhaps there is an





With each passing year, both nature and nurture conspire to steer a callous child toward psychopathy and block his exits to a normal life. His brain becomes a little less malleable; his environment grows less forgiving as his exhausted parents reach their limits, and as teachers, social workers, and judges begin to

turn away. By his teenage years, he may not be a lost cause, since the rational part of his brain is still under construction. But he can be one scary dude.

Like the guy standing 20 feet away from me in the North Hall of Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center, in Madison, Wisconsin. The tall, lanky teenager has just emerged from his cell. Two staff

members cuff his wrists, shackle his feet, and begin to lead him away. Suddenly he swivels to face me and laughs—a menacing laugh that gives me chills. As young men yell expletives, banging on the metal doors of their cells, and others stare silently through their narrow plexiglass windows, I think, *This is as close as I get to Lord of the Flies.*

The psychologists Michael Caldwell and Greg Van Rybroek thought much the same thing when they opened the Mendota facility in 1995, in response to a nationwide epidemic of youth violence in the early '90s. Instead of placing young offenders in a juvenile prison until they were released to commit more—and more violent—crimes as adults, the Wisconsin legislature set up a new treatment center to try to break the cycle of pathology. Mendota would operate within the Department of Health Services, not the Department of Corrections. It would be run by psychologists and psychiatric-care technicians, not wardens and guards. It would employ one staff member for every three kids—quadruple the ratio at other juvenile-corrections facilities.

Caldwell and Van Rybroek tell me that the state's high-security juvenile-corrections facility was supposed to send over its most mentally ill boys between the ages of 12 and 17. It did, but what Caldwell and Van Rybroek didn't anticipate was that the boys the facility transferred were also its most menacing and recalcitrant. They recall their first few assessments. "The kid would walk out and we would turn to each other and say, 'That's the most dangerous person I've ever seen in my life,'" Caldwell says. Each one seemed more threatening than the last. "We're looking at each other and saying, 'Oh, no. What have we done?'" Van Rybroek adds.

What they have done, by trial and error, is achieve something most people thought impossible: If they haven't cured psychopathy, they've at least tamed it.

Many of the teenagers at Mendota grew up on the streets, without parents, and were beaten up or sexually abused. Violence became a defense mechanism. Caldwell and Van Rybroek recall a group-therapy session a few years ago in which one boy described being strung up by his wrists and hung from the ceiling as his father cut him with a knife and rubbed pepper in the wounds. "Hey," several other kids said, "that's

like what happened to me." They called themselves the "piñata club."

But not everyone at Mendota was "born in hell," as Van Rybroek puts it. Some of the boys were raised in middle-class homes with parents whose major sin was not abuse but paralysis in the face of their terrifying child. No matter the history, one secret to diverting them from adult psychopathy is to wage an unrelenting war of presence. At Mendota, the staff calls this "decompression." The idea is to allow a young man who has been living in a state of chaos to slowly rise to the surface and acclimate to the world without resorting to violence.

Caldwell mentions that, two weeks ago, one patient became furious over some perceived slight or injustice; every time the techs checked on him, he would squirt urine or feces through the door. (This is a popular pastime at Mendota.) The techs would dodge it and return 20 minutes later, and he would do it again. "This went on for several days," Caldwell says. "But part of the concept of decompression is that the kid's going to get tired at some point. And one of those times you're going to come there and he's going to be tired, or he's just not going to have any urine left to throw at you. And you're going to have a little moment where you're going to have a positive connection there."

Cindy Ebsen, the operations director, who is also a registered nurse, gives me a tour of Mendota's North Hall. As we pass the metal doors with their narrow windows, the boys peer out and the yelling subsides into entreaties. "Cindy, Cindy, can you get me some candy?" "I'm your favorite, aren't I, Cindy?" "Cindy, why don't you visit me anymore?"

She pauses to banter with each of them. The young men who pass through these halls have murdered and maimed, carjacked and robbed at gunpoint. "But they're still kids. I love working with them, because I see the most success in this population," as opposed to older offenders, Ebsen says. For many, friendship with her or another staff member is the first safe connection they've known.

Forming attachments with callous kids is important, but it's not Mendota's singular insight. The center's real breakthrough involves deploying the anomalies of the psychopathic brain to one's advantage—specifically, downplaying

punishment and dangling rewards. These boys have been expelled from school, placed in group homes, arrested, and jailed. If punishment were going to rein them in, it would have by now. But their brains do respond, enthusiastically, to rewards. At Mendota, the boys can accumulate points to join ever more prestigious "clubs" (Club 19, Club 23, the VIP Club). As they ascend in status, they earn privileges and treats—candy bars, baseball cards, pizza on Saturdays, the chance to play Xbox or stay up late. Hitting someone, throwing urine, or cussing out the staff costs a boy points—but not for long, since callous and unemotional kids aren't generally deterred by punishment.

I am, frankly, skeptical—will a kid who knocked down an elderly lady and stole her Social Security check (as one Mendota resident did) really be motivated by the promise of Pokémon cards? But then I walk down the South Hall with Ebsen. She stops and turns toward a door on our left. "Hey," she calls, "do I hear internet radio?"

"Yeah, yeah, I'm in the VIP Club," a voice says. "Can I show you my basketball cards?"

Ebsen unlocks the door to reveal a skinny 17-year-old boy with a nascent mustache. He fans out his collection. "This is, like, 50 basketball cards," he says, and I can almost see his reward centers glowing. "I have the most and best basketball cards here." Later, he sketches out his history for me: His stepmother had routinely beat him and his stepbrother had used him for sex. When he was still a preteen, he began molesting the younger girl and boy next door. The abuse continued for a few years, until the boy told his mother. "I knew it was wrong, but I didn't care," he says. "I just wanted the pleasure."

At Mendota, he has begun to see that short-term pleasure could land him in prison as a sex offender, while deferred gratification can confer more-lasting dividends: a family, a job, and most of all, freedom. Unlikely as it sounds, this revelation sprang from his ardent pursuit of basketball cards.

After he details the center's point system (a higher math that I cannot follow), the boy tells me that a similar approach should translate into success in the outside world—as if the world, too, operates on a point system. Just as consistent

good behavior confers basketball cards and internet radio inside these walls, so—he believes—will it bring promotions at work. "Say you're a cook; you can [become] a waitress if you're doing really good," he says. "That's the way I look at it."

He peers at me, as if searching for confirmation. I nod, hoping that the world will work this way for him. Even more, I hope his insight will endure.

In fact, the program at Mendota has changed the trajectory for many young men, at least in the short term. Caldwell and Van Rybroek have tracked the public records of 248 juvenile delinquents after their release. One hundred forty-seven of them had been in a juvenile-corrections facility, and 101 of them—the harder, more psychopathic cases—had received treatment at Mendota. In the four and a half years since their release, the Mendota boys have been far less likely to reoffend (64 percent versus 97 percent), and far less likely to commit a violent crime (36 percent versus 60 percent). Most striking, the ordinary delinquents have killed 16 people since their release. The boys from Mendota? Not one.

"We thought that as soon as they walked out the door, they'd last maybe a week or two and they'd have another felony on their record," Caldwell says. "And when the data first came back that showed that that wasn't happening, we figured there was something wrong with the data." For two years, they tried to find mistakes or alternative explanations, but eventually they concluded that the results were real.

The question they are trying to answer now is this: Can Mendota's treatment program not only change the behavior of these teens, but measurably reshape their brains as well? Researchers are optimistic, in part because the decision-making part of the brain continues to evolve into one's mid-20s. The program is like neural weight lifting, Kent Kiehl, at the University of New Mexico, says. "If you exercise this limbic-related circuitry, it's going to get better."

To test this hypothesis, Kiehl and the staff at Mendota are now asking some 300 young men to slide into a mobile brain scanner. The scanner records the shape and size of key areas of the

boys' brains, as well as how their brains react to tests of decision-making ability, impulsivity, and other qualities that go to the core of psychopathy. Each boy's brain will be scanned before, during, and at the end of their time in the program, offering researchers insights into whether his improved behavior reflects better functioning inside his brain.

No one believes that Mendota graduates will develop true empathy or a heartfelt moral conscience. "They may not go from the Joker in *The Dark Knight* to Mister Rogers," Caldwell tells me, laughing. But they can develop a *cognitive* moral conscience, an intellectual awareness that life will be more rewarding if they play by the rules. "We're just happy if they stay on this side of the law," Van Rybroek says. "In our world, that's huge."

How many can stay the course for a lifetime? Caldwell and Van Rybroek have no idea. They're barred from contacting former patients—a policy meant to ensure that the staff and former patients maintain appropriate boundaries. But sometimes graduates write or call to share their progress, and among these correspondents, Carl, now 37, stands out.

Carl (not his real name) emailed a thankful note to Van Rybroek in 2013. Aside from one assault conviction after he left Mendota, he had stayed out of trouble for a decade and opened his own business—a funeral home near Los Angeles. His success was especially significant because he was one of the harder cases, a boy from a good home who seemed wired for violence.

Carl was born in a small town in Wisconsin. The middle child of a computer programmer and a special-education teacher, "he came out angry," his father recalls during a phone conversation. His acts of violence started small—hitting a classmate in kindergarten—but quickly escalated: ripping the head off his favorite teddy bear, slashing the tires on the family car, starting fires, killing his sister's hamster.

His sister remembers Carl, when he was about 8, swinging their cat in circles by its tail, faster and faster, and then letting go. "And you hear her hit the wall." Carl just laughed.

Looking back, even Carl is puzzled by the rage that coursed through him

as a child. "I remember when I bit my mom really hard, and she was bleeding and crying. I remember feeling so happy, so overjoyed—completely fulfilled and satisfied," he tells me on the phone. "It wasn't like someone kicked me in the face and I was trying to get him back. It was more like a weird, hard-to-explain feeling of hatred."

His behavior confused and eventually terrified his parents. "It just got worse and worse as he got bigger," his father tells me. "Later, when he was a teenager and occasionally incarcerated, I was happy about it. We knew where he was and that he'd be safe, and that took a load off the mind."

By the time Carl arrived at Mendota Juvenile Treatment Center in November 1995, at age 15, he had been placed in a psychiatric hospital, a group home, foster care, or a juvenile-corrections center about a dozen times. His police record listed 18 charges, including armed burglary and three "crimes against persons," one of which sent the victim to the hospital. Lincoln Hills, a high-security juvenile-corrections facility, foisted him on Mendota after he accumulated more than 100 serious infractions in less than four months. On an assessment called the Youth Psychopathy Checklist, he scored 38 out of a possible 40—five points higher than the average for Mendota boys, who

He started talking in therapy and in class. He quit mouthing off and settled down. He developed the first real bonds in his young life. "The teachers, the nurses, the staff, they all seemed to have this idea that they could make a difference in us," he says. "Like, *Huh! Something good could come of us*. We were believed to have potential."

Carl wasn't exactly in the clear. After two stints at Mendota, he was released just before his 18th birthday, got married, and at age 20 was arrested for beating up a police officer. In prison, he wrote a suicide note, fashioned a makeshift noose, and was put on suicide watch in solitary confinement. While there, he began reading the Bible and fasting, and one day, he says, "something very powerful shifted." He began to believe in God. Carl acknowledges that his lifestyle falls far short of the Christian ideal. But he still attends church every week, and he credits Mendota with paving the way for his conversion. By the time he was released, in 2003, his marriage had dissolved, and he moved away from Wisconsin, eventually settling in California, where he opened his funeral home.

Carl cheerfully admits that the death business appeals to him. As a child, he says, "I had a deep fascination with knives and cutting and killing, so it's a harmless way to express some level of what you might call morbid curiosity.

"I remember when I bit my mom really hard, and she was bleeding and crying," Carl says. "I remember feeling so happy, so overjoyed."

were among the most dangerous young men in Wisconsin.

Carl had a rocky start at Mendota: weeks of abusing staff, smearing feces around his cell, yelling all night, refusing to shower, and spending much of the time locked in his room, not allowed to mix with the other kids. Slowly, though, his psychology began to shift. The staff's unruffled constancy chipped away at his defenses. "These people were like zombies," Carl recalls, laughing. "You could punch them in the face and they wouldn't do anything."

And I think that morbid curiosity taken to its extreme—that's the home of the serial killers, okay? So it's that same energy. But everything in moderation."

Of course, his profession also requires empathy. Carl says that he had to train himself to show empathy for his grieving clients, but that it now comes naturally. His sister agrees that he's been able to make this emotional leap. "I've seen him interact with the families, and he's phenomenal," she tells me. "He is amazing at providing empathy and providing that shoulder

for them. And it does not fit with my view of him at all. I get confused. *Is that true? Does he genuinely feel for them? Is he faking the whole thing? Does he even know at this point?*"

After talking with Carl, I begin to see him as a remarkable success story. "Without [Mendota] and Jesus," he tells me, "I would have been a Manson-, Bundy-, Dahmer-, or Berkowitz-type of criminal." Sure, his fascination with the morbid is a little creepy. Yet here he is, now remarried, the father of a 1-year-old son he adores, with a flourishing business. After our phone interview, I decide to meet him in person. I want to witness his redemption for myself.

The night before I'm scheduled to fly to Los Angeles, I receive a frantic email from Carl's wife. Carl is in police custody. He considers himself polyamorous, and had invited one of his girlfriends over to their apartment. They were playing with the baby when his wife returned. She was furious, and grabbed their son. Carl responded by pulling her hair, snatching the baby out of her arms, and taking her phone to prevent her from calling the police. She called from a neighbor's house instead. (Carl says he grabbed the baby to protect him.) Three misdemeanor charges—spousal battery, abandonment and neglect of a child, and intimidation of a witness—and the psychopath who made good is now in jail.

I go to Los Angeles anyway, in the naive hope that Carl will be released on bail at his hearing the next day. A few minutes before 8:30 a.m., his wife and I meet at the courthouse and begin the long wait. She is 12 years Carl's junior, a compact woman with long black hair and a weariness that ebbs only when she gazes at her son. She met Carl on OkCupid two years ago while visiting L.A. and—after a romance of just a few months—moved to California to marry him. Now she sits outside the courtroom, one eye on her son, fielding calls from clients of the funeral home and wondering whether she can make bail.

"I'm so sick of the drama," she says, as the phone rings again.

Carl is a tough man to be married to. His wife says he's funny and charming and a good listener, but he sometimes loses interest in the funeral business, leaving most of the work to her. He brings

other women home for sex, even when she's there. And while he's never seriously beaten her up, he has slapped her.

"He would say sorry, but I don't know if he was upset or not," she tells me.

"So you wondered if he felt genuine remorse?"

"Honestly, I'm at a point where I don't really care anymore. I just want my son and myself to be safe."

Finally, at 3:15 p.m., Carl shuffles into the courtroom, handcuffed, wearing an orange L.A. County jumpsuit. He gives us a two-handed wave and flashes a carefree smile, which fades when he learns that he will not be released on bail today, despite pleading guilty to assault and battery. He will remain in jail for another three weeks.

Carl calls me the day after his release. "I really shouldn't have a girlfriend and a wife," he says, in what seems an uncharacteristic display of remorse. He insists that he wants to keep his family together, and says that he thinks the domestic-violence classes the court has mandated will help him. He seems sincere.

When I describe the latest twist in Carl's story to Michael Caldwell and Greg Van Rybroek, they laugh knowingly. "This counts as a good outcome for a Mendota guy," Caldwell says. "He's not going to have a fully healthy adjustment to life, but he's been able to stay mostly within the law. Even this misdemeanor—he's not committing armed robberies or shooting people."

His sister sees her brother's outcome

"I would say an 8. Because 8's difficult, very difficult."

I've grown to like Carl: He has a lively intellect, a willingness to admit his flaws, and a desire to be good. Is he being sincere or manipulating me? Is Carl proof that psychopathy can be tamed—or proof that the traits are so deeply embedded that they can never be dislodged? I honestly don't know.

At the San Marcos Treatment Center, Samantha is wearing her new yoga pants from Target, but they bring her little joy. In a few hours, her mother will leave for the airport and fly back to Idaho. Samantha munches on a slice of pizza and suggests movies to watch on Jen's laptop. She seems sad, but less about Jen's departure than about the resumption of the center's tedious routine. Samantha snuggles with her mom while they watch *The BFG*, this 11-year-old girl who can stab a teacher's hand with a pencil at the slightest provocation.

Watching them in the darkened room, I contemplate for the hundredth time the arbitrary nature of good and evil. If Samantha's brain is wired for callousness, if she fails to experience empathy or remorse because she lacks the neural equipment, can we say she is evil? "These kids can't help it," Adrian Raine says. "Kids don't grow up wanting to be psychopaths or serial killers. They grow up wanting to become baseball players or great football stars. It's not a choice."

Samantha knows that her thoughts about hurting people are wrong, and she tries to suppress them. But the cognitive training cannot always compete.

in a similar light. "This guy got dealt a shittier hand of cards than anybody I've ever met," she tells me. "Who deserves to have started out life that way? And the fact that he's not a raving lunatic, locked up for the rest of his life, or dead is *insane*."

I ask Carl whether it's difficult to play by the rules, to simply be *normal*. "On a scale of 1 to 10, how hard is it?" he says.

Yet, Raine says, even if we don't label them evil, we must try to head off their evil acts. It's a daily struggle, planting the seeds of emotions that usually come so naturally—empathy, caring, remorse—in the rocky soil of a callous brain. Samantha has lived for more than two years at San Marcos, where the staff has tried to shape her behavior with regular therapy and a program

that, like Mendota's, dispenses quick but limited punishment for bad behavior and offers prizes and privileges—candy, Pokémon cards, late nights on weekends—for good behavior.

Jen and Danny have spotted green shoots of empathy. Samantha has made a friend, and recently comforted the girl after her social worker quit. They've detected traces of self-awareness and even remorse: Samantha knows that her thoughts about hurting people are wrong, and she tries to suppress them. But the cognitive training cannot always compete with the urge to strangle an annoying classmate, which she tried to do just the other day. "It builds up, and then I have to do it," Samantha explains. "I can't keep it away."

It all feels exhausting, for Samantha and for everyone in her orbit. Later, I ask Jen whether Samantha has lovable qualities that make all this worthwhile. "It can't be all nightmare, can it?" I ask. She hesitates. "Or can it?"

"It is not all nightmare," Jen responds, eventually. "She's cute, and she can be fun, and she can be enjoyable." She's great at board games, she has a wonderful imagination, and now, having been apart for two years, her siblings say they miss her. But Samantha's mood and behavior can quickly turn. "The challenge with her is that her extreme is so extreme. You're always waiting for the other shoe to drop."

Danny says they're praying for the triumph of self-interest over impulse. "Our hope is that she is able to have a cognitive understanding that 'Even though my thinking is different, my behavior needs to walk down this path so that I can enjoy the good things that I want.'" Because she was diagnosed relatively early, they hope that Samantha's young, still-developing brain can be rewired for some measure of cognitive morality. And having parents like Jen and Danny could make a difference; research suggests that warm and responsive parenting can help children become less callous as they get older.

On the flip side, the New York psychiatrist told them, the fact that her symptoms appeared so early, and so dramatically, may indicate that her callousness is so deeply ingrained that little can be done to ameliorate it.

Samantha's parents try not to second-guess their decision to adopt

THE TAVERN TREES

Fairfield, Tennessee

Having forced the stiff U.S. Mail flag up
and left the card crackling among cricket nymphs,
the wheel ruts' little rocks nibbling at my soles,
the cattle grate a memory, a lock installed
to forbid locals from riding donuts on the lawn
or chucking empties in the boondocks,
from which fireflies still drowse into the grasp
like spirits, Eliza says, *like will-o'-the-wisp*—
all at once they sweep up from the grass:
hackberry, coffee, sweet gum, ash, and beech,
centuries of speechlessness pitched to a high,
unfiltered exactitude my praise stabs at
even as they fall back to papery, aromatic stars
and elephant ears fruited savagely as maces.

—Danielle Chapman

Danielle Chapman's collection of poems is Delinquent Palaces.

her. But even Samantha has wondered whether they have regrets. "She said, 'Why did you even want me?'" Jen recalls. "The real answer to that is: We didn't know the depth of her challenges. We had no idea. I don't know if this would be a different story if we were looking at this now. But what we tell her is: 'You were ours.'"

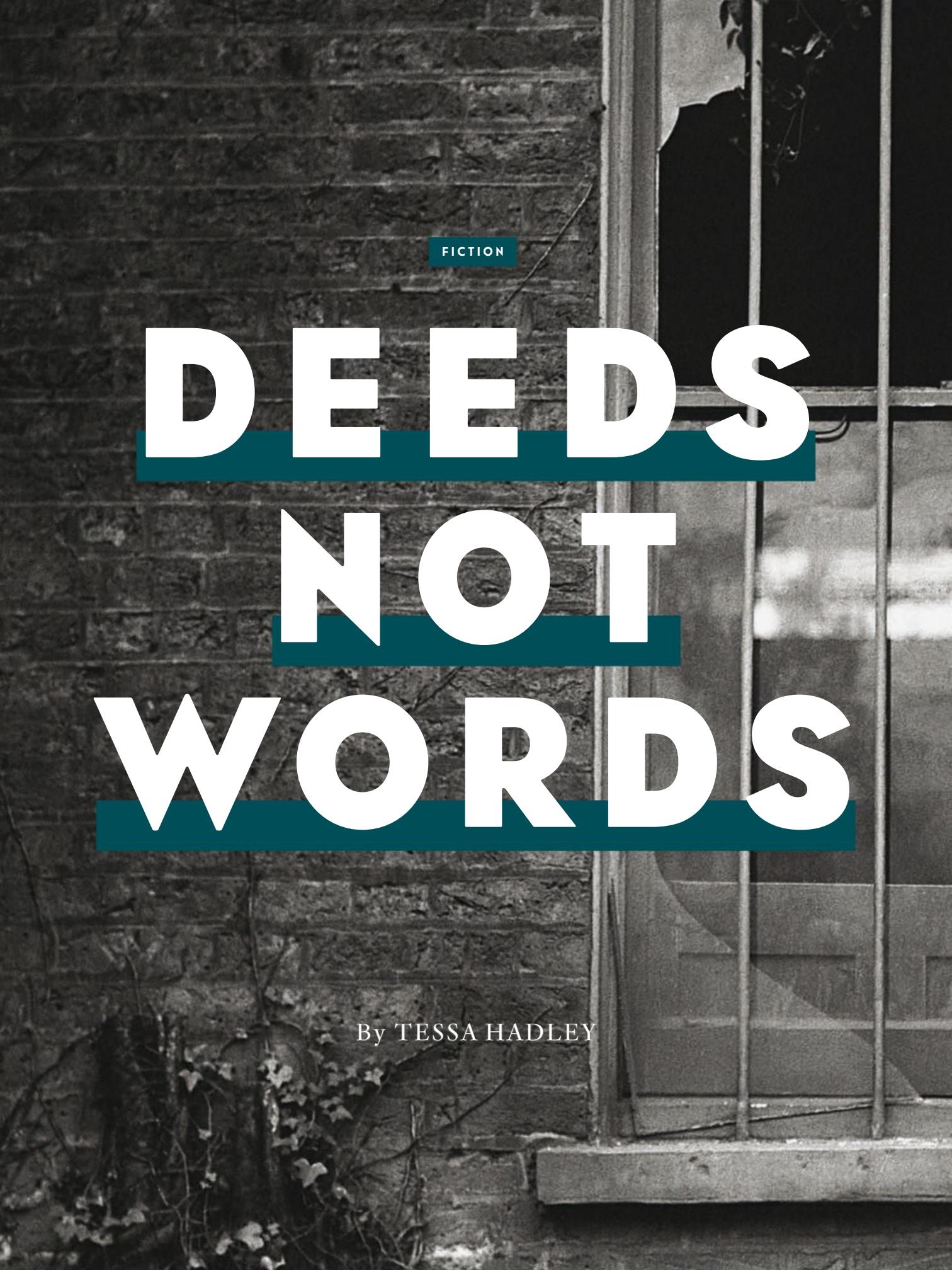
Jen and Danny are planning to bring Samantha home this summer, a prospect the family views with some trepidation. They're taking precautions, such as using alarms on Samantha's bedroom door. The older children are larger and tougher than Samantha, but the family will have to keep vigil over the 5-year-old and the 7-year-old. Still, they believe she's ready, or, more accurately, that she's progressed as far as she can at San Marcos. They want to bring her home, to give it another try.

Of course, even if Samantha can slip easily back into home life at 11, what of the future? "Do I want that child to have

a driver's license?" Jen asks. To go on dates? She's smart enough for college—but will she be able to negotiate that complex society without becoming a threat? Can she have a stable romantic relationship, much less fall in love and marry? She and Danny have had to redefine success for Samantha: simply keeping her out of prison.

And yet, they love Samantha. "She's ours, and we want to raise our children together," Jen says. Samantha has been in residential treatment programs for most of the past five years, nearly half her life. They can't institutionalize her forever. She needs to learn to function in the world, sooner rather than later. "I do feel there's hope," Jen says. "The hard part is, it's never going to go away. It's high-stakes parenting. If it fails, it's going to fail big." ■

Barbara Bradley Hagerty is the author of Life Reimagined: The Science, Art, and Opportunity of Midlife.



FICTION

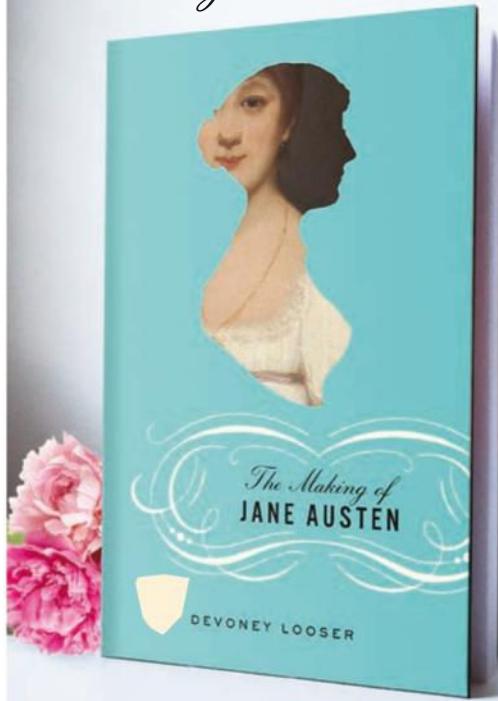
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A

LL THE GIRLS at St. Clements loved Miss Mulhouse. Quite a few of them had loved her even before she broke windows in a shop on Oxford Street and was arrested as a suffragette. She was graceful and earnest and angularly thin, with a lot of very soft hair and large, interesting pale eyes, the lower lids languidly heavy. Her intensity was of the smoldering and not the flaring kind, and she read Browning and Dante Gabriel Rossetti to the girls in her lessons. *I have been here before, / But when or how I cannot tell: / I know the grass beyond the door, / The sweet keen smell ...*

After the news of her arrest had spread—someone's father had found her name in the newspaper—loving Miss Mulhouse became a kind of cult in the school and no one dared not belong. The girls decorated their desks in Women's Social and Political Union colors, purple and green and white, and stuck pictures of the Pankhursts inside their desk lids. They found out their teacher's first name, Laura—perhaps it had been in the list in the newspaper—and passed it around in hushed voices, like an initiation into occult knowledge. Fervently some of them began mugging up on suffragist politics; one of the day girls had a brother with a printing set, and they composed angry pamphlets with BELIEVE AND YOU WILL CONQUER in big letters set crookedly on the front page, or LIBERTY AND NO SURRENDER. All through prayers one morning, one of these pamphlets was pinned at the very center of the honors board, where the names of distinguished alumnae were picked out in gold. Afterward discussion surged among the groups of girls: Had the teachers and the headmistress really not noticed their pamphlet? Or had they seen it and chosen to leave it there? Some of them were known to be sympathizers.

Edith Carew taught Latin, and approved in principle—of course—of votes for women, but was too skeptical to be an enthusiast for any political cause. Laura Mulhouse had always seemed vaguely comical to her, drifting through the corridors with her arms full of poetry books and her air of high-minded regret. Laura had such reserves of indignation over so many outrages, and seemed freshly astonished every day by the world's wickedness—though

she could be petty over borrowed tea-cups in the staff room. Edith thought that Laura played up to certain susceptible girls, too, encouraging them to worship her. Edith and the French teacher, Mr. Briers, had privately called Laura the Lady of Shalott—it was Mr. Briers's first shared joke with Edith, though they gave it up later when Laura was in prison. By that time, anyway, Edith wasn't giving Laura Mulhouse much thought. Her mind was all absorbed in lower things: She was drowning in her love affair with Fitzsimmon Briers.

Edith was 34 and lively and not bad-looking and had always expected to get married, but humiliatingly she had to own up to Fitz that this was her first experience of love—certainly of what she shyly called “intimate relations.” Fitz was the most intelligent man Edith had ever gotten anywhere close to; his dry humor and his good taste, and his appreciation of her, changed her life as drastically as if she'd found footprints on an island where she'd been beginning to believe she was alone. Sometimes she felt this alteration so intensely that she imagined he must be

leaving actual marks on her body, and looked for them after they'd spent time together. Fitz was heavy and shambolic, with black hair and a beard, and silky black hair on his chest. Edith was trim with a neat figure; she had dreaded that this body would bloom and fade under her clothes without any man ever knowing it. Unfortunately, and it was just her luck—the only thing to do with her luck,

Loving Miss Mulhouse became a kind of cult in the school and no one dared not belong.

Edith thought, was to laugh at it—Fitz was married, with a child. He wouldn't talk about his wife, just said she was an invalid and didn't go out much. Edith had never seen her. People said she'd had a nervous collapse.

St. Clements had moved recently into an 18th-century gentleman's residence built on the hillside above a town on the south coast; the classrooms were

wood-paneled and poky, and all of the headmistress's energies were bent on raising funds for a modern science block. Every afternoon at the end of the school day, when she wasn't on duty and Fitz could get away, Edith climbed the back staircase in Old Court to the French office, hardly more than a cupboard under the roof, where French grammar books were kept, along with spare chairs and editions of Racine and Victor Hugo. This staircase was forbidden to the girls. Fitz would be waiting for her; he would hurry her over the threshold, nuzzling her hands and her arms as if he was too hungry to delay. Then he'd lock the door behind them and lay out on the floorboards the blankets he'd brought from home, which smelled of mothballs. Sometimes rain drummed on the sloping roof, enclosing them; sometimes the sun baked down on it and their skins were slick with sweat. Edith could hardly believe that this French cupboard, which had been so prosaically ordinary, could transform into the scene of such revelations. After their intimacies, while she lay curled in the crook of his arm, he read to her out

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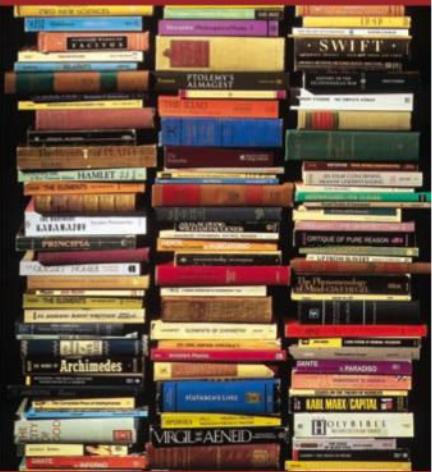
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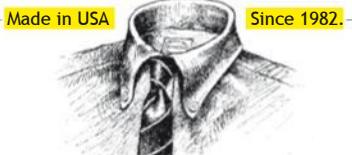
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of *Phèdre* or Madame de Staël. He had a beautiful accent and got carried away with the sound of the words; Edith had to whisper to him to keep quiet. She was haunted by the perils of their situation, though she'd never been fearful in her life before. They might be found out and she would be disgraced and they would both lose their jobs. Or she might conceive a child—though Fitz assured her that he “knew what he was doing.”

Meanwhile word went around that Miss Mulhouse was on a hunger strike in prison, and being force-fed. Passion for the movement blew up fervidly among the girls. They asked permission to hold meetings in the common room. In the end the headmistress agreed—though not all her teachers supported her—and the meetings were so well attended that they had to be moved into the refectory. Certain members of the staff went along too. Crazes had swept the school before, Edith remembered—for automatic writing, and the novels of Marie Corelli; last winter half the girls were wearing crosses hidden under their blouses, and swapping around scent bottles supposed to be filled with holy water. Fitz agreed with Edith that the force-feeding was barbaric, but he said that Laura Mulhouse had gone to Oxford Street intent on suffering: In another era she'd have been a Christian martyr. Police brutality only encouraged hysterical behavior. Then two senior girls were suspended—there was a rumor they'd been planning to invade the local racecourse. Someone set fire to a letter box in the high street, though probably this had nothing to do with the school.

At the end of one afternoon, when Edith and Fitz climbed the stairs to the French cupboard, its door was daubed with slogans in white paint. END THIS OUTRAGE NOW! STOP THE TORTURE OF WOMEN!

In her shock Edith was confused for a moment. “Do they know about us?”

“Don’t be silly. It’s nothing to do with us. It’s those blasted suffragettes.”

Fitz was right, of course—it turned out the slogans were all over the place, the work of the girls who'd been suspended and who'd crept back with a bucket of whitewash while the school was in afternoon lessons. He said Edith had better not stay, there was bound to be uproar. Sick with her disappointment, she made her way downstairs. All that

was left for her now was to return to her lodgings, heat up her supper of leftover meat and vegetables and rice pudding over the paraffin lamp, prepare her lessons for the next day. I might as well be dead, she thought, crossing the school garden. The evening was tenderly sunlit and warm, and a little breeze turned the leaves of the young beech trees pale side out—but all of its loveliness was wasted. She was waylaid by a fourth-former, a

**Sometimes rain
drummed on the
sloping roof, enclosing
them; sometimes the
sun baked down on it
and their skins were
slick with sweat.**

big-bosomed gushing girl called Ursula Smythe with a WSPU badge pinned to her lapel. Ursula was carrying a petition clipped to a board.

"Miss Carew, do you support votes for women? Will you sign the petition for our poor Miss Mulhouse?"

Bad-temperedly, Edith pushed the petition away. "For goodness' sake, Ursula, I've got tests to mark. I can't help what Miss Mulhouse chooses to do with her spare time. I suppose she knew what she was letting herself in for."

What good would it do anyone, Edith thought, for a dolt like Ursula Smythe to have the vote? What would she vote for? Hadn't she been one of the champions at automatic writing, filling whole exercise books with her nonsense?

AFTER THE INCIDENT with the whitewash, the school governors suspended the headmistress and certain teachers. The girls had worked themselves up by this time into such a state that when this news got around there were riots in the classrooms and it was impossible to impose any kind of discipline, or carry on with normal lessons. The boarders tore up sheets to make sashes painted with the WSPU motto, "Deeds not words." They called themselves "irregulars" and barricaded themselves in the dormitories, threatening to jump out of the windows;

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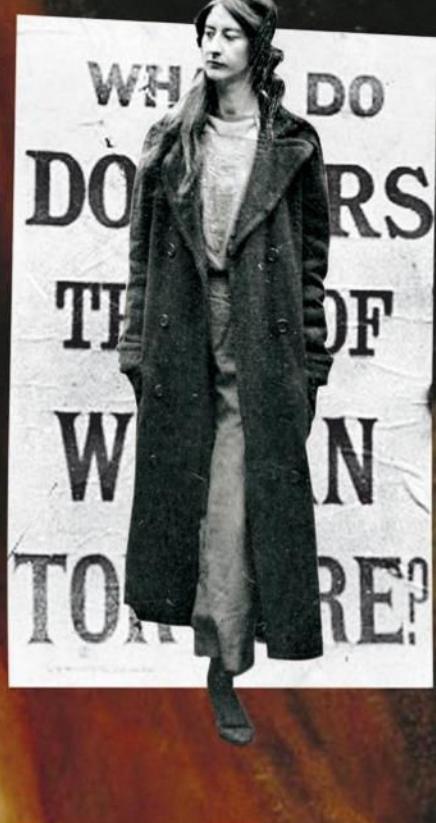
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on one occasion the police had to be called in. Parents who got wind of the disturbances came to carry their daughters off to safety. All of this lasted for several weeks, and it was hard to see where it would end—until the school holidays arrived, and then in August war was declared, and the WSPU announced from Pankhurst headquarters in Paris that it was abandoning its campaign for the duration.

One evening in September, Miss Carew and Mr. Briers met on the school grounds. They couldn't use the French cupboard any longer, because Mr. Briers had resigned from his position at the school and been awarded a commission in the Queen's Royal West Surrey Regiment. All the furor of the summer had died down; girls in their white blouses paraded calmly, arm in arm, or chased one another squealing around the great cedar on the lawn. Some were already knitting socks for soldiers. Edith and Fitz were on a bench at a turn in the path, tucked behind some holly bushes; when Edith raised her voice Fitz warned her that the girls were watching, but she hardly cared. He had his back half-turned, with his shoulder in its ghastly khaki hunched against her, as if he were only enduring their conversation. His black hair, which had been carelessly unkempt in the days when he read Racine to her, was now shorn close; where his ears stuck out from his scalp, the skin was reddened and raw.

"How can you give yourself to this beastly war?" she raged. "I can't believe you don't see through it all as I do. You never had these militarist opinions



before. Isn't it all so foul? Don't you hate the idea of all this death and pain?"

With heavy patience he tried to explain. "Whatever my opinions are, how can I stay at home teaching French to little girls, when other men are giving their lives out there?"

She thought that if only she could touch him, she could win him back.

"What does your wife think?"

He turned his hooded eyes on her, gleaming in righteous anger. "Don't speak about my wife."

Then Edith guessed that he had a picture in his mind like a sentimental postcard, of his wife standing waving farewell to him as he went off to war, hidden half out of sight behind a curtain at a window, perhaps with the child in her arms—whatever it was, girl or boy. Of course Edith had no place in this sacred

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scene, contaminating it. She jumped up from the bench as if she had to save herself from his new patriotic stupidity. But no matter how she saw through his condemnation, she couldn't escape it: He had power over her, because of what had happened in the French cupboard. It was another sentimental postcard: She was unchaste, she had forfeited the white flower of a blameless life, she wasn't the kind of woman a man would go to war for. Fitz was allowed to think this if he liked. She walked away from him through the garden without looking back once, and went inside the school to collect her books—she had 10 minutes, thankfully, before classes started. She needed to sit for a moment in the classroom, to collect herself, because her legs were shaking.

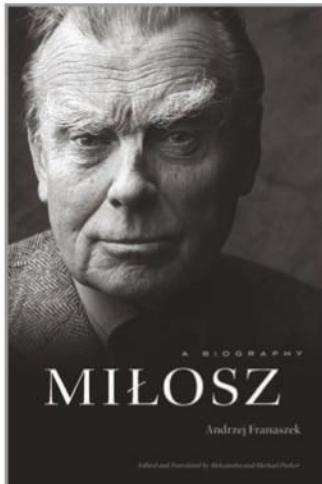
And on her way up the back stairs she met Laura Mulhouse coming down. Laura had spent the summer at home with her mother, recovering from her ordeal in prison; now she'd quietly resumed her teaching. The girls hadn't made any great fuss over her. The headmistress and all the other teachers had

"How can you give yourself to this beastly war?" she raged. "I can't believe you don't see through it all as I do."

been reinstated; no one spoke now about the madness of last term. Edith stopped to let her pass on the narrow staircase. Laura didn't look as intense as she used to: She was oddly stooped and her hair lay dead flat and her complexion was lusterless and clammy. Edith remembered what she'd read about force-feeding: the India-rubber tube pushed up the women's noses, the indignity and dreadful pain and the choking and vomiting. Both of them were broken, Edith thought. In their shame, they could hardly bear to look at each other. **A**

Tessa Hadley, who lives in London, is the author of six novels and two short-story collections. This story appears in *Bad Dreams and Other Stories*, published in the U.S. in May.

Harvard



Miłosz

A Biography

Andrzej Franaszek

EDITED AND TRANSLATED BY

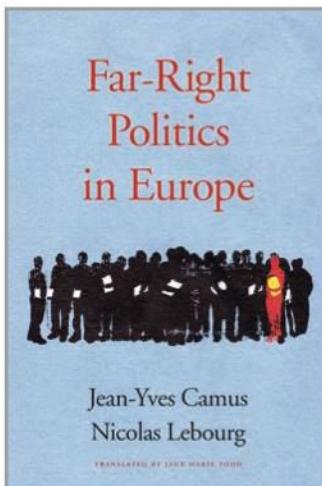
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Far-Right Politics in Europe

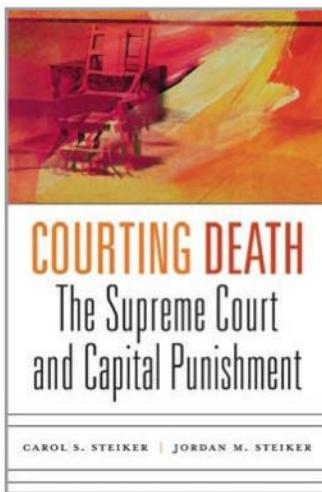
Jean-Yves Camus • Nicolas Lebourg

TRANSLATED BY Jane Marie Todd

"Has much of interest to say about the broad span of right-wing movements in Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, and Eastern Europe; about the influence of thinkers like the antidemocratic Italian philosopher Julius Evola (a favorite of top Trump adviser Stephen Bannon) and Alexander Dugin, the intellectual guru of Putinism; and about the contacts among all of these."

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THE BIG QUESTION

Q:

What is the best exit of all time?

Phil Keoghan, host, *The Amazing Race*

At 10:56 p.m. on July 20, 1969, **Neil Armstrong** exited “the Eagle,” *Apollo 11*’s lunar module, and entered the history books. As half a billion people watched live from Earth, Armstrong became the first human to walk on the moon.

Brian Wolly, digital editor, *Smithsonian magazine*

By voluntarily stepping down from the presidency after two terms, **George Washington** did his part to keep the United States from becoming an autocracy. His farewell address laid out an exemplary vision for the country he helped build, forewarning against messy international entanglements and petty domestic disputes. In short, Washington taught us how to say goodbye.

Michael Finkel, author, *The Stranger in the Woods*

It's a three-way tie between Jesus (who left society to wander alone in the Sinai desert for 40 days), **Muhammad** (who retreated to a cave

near Mecca), **and Buddha** (who meditated beneath a pipal tree in India). After their exits, each founded a religion. More than 4 billion people now follow one of these faiths.



Sacha Zimmerman, senior editor, *The Atlantic*

Elvis, of course, famously left the building.

Jen Kirkman, comedian and author, *I Know What I'm Doing—And Other Lies I Tell Myself*

The best exit of all time is comedy folklore. The story goes that **Redd Foxx** was slowly walking onstage to the *Sanford and Son* theme song when he stopped,



noticed the show's poor attendance, and said, “Five people? I ain’t performing for no motherfucking five people.” He turned and slowly walked offstage as, on cue, the *Sanford and Son* theme started right back up again.

Stephanie Danler, author, *Sweetbitter*

The Irish exit, otherwise known as leaving a party without saying goodbye. It’s the best thing to happen to party etiquette in my lifetime. Do not pause and make a drinks date that you will surely cancel. Do not get roped into one last tequila shot or a nightcap at a murky after-party. Fetch your belongings, get into your Lyft, draft your thank-you text, and enjoy the silence.

READER RESPONSES

Bo Wang, Palo Alto, Calif.

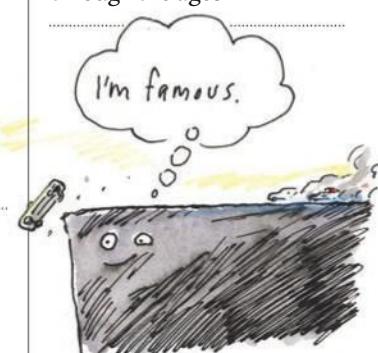
Pheidippides, the ancient-Greek foot soldier turned courier, is reported to have run from Marathon to Athens to deliver news of the Greeks' victory over the Persians in the Battle of Marathon. “We are victorious!” he uttered, before collapsing and passing on to the afterworld.

Thomas J. Straka, Pendleton, S.C.

Richard Nixon exited twice. After he lost the gubernatorial election in California, in 1962, he famously said, “You don’t have Nixon to kick around anymore.” And then, after he resigned the presidency, he gave that iconic victory wave from the White House South Lawn. Both exits are in the history books.

Gary Kohl, Toronto, Canada

Socrates crushed his persecutors’ arguments, took his poison, and left a legacy that has lasted through the ages.



Margaret Whitt, Gerton, N.C.

Thelma and Louise joyously driving at top speed over a cliff—credits roll.

Want to see your name on this page? Email bigquestion@theatlantic.com with your response to the question for our September issue: **What was the most important letter in history?**

THE MOST REFRESHING FINISH

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