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CONTRIBUTORS

Matt Crowley (Movies Preview, p. 13) contributes to The Onion, but contributes nothing to society. He lives in L.A. Sorry. Twitter: @matthewcrowley

Michael Yurchyshyn (Above and Beyond, p. 15; Visual of Silence, p. 44; “Keeping the Faith,” p. 73) will publish his first seven-part autobiographical novel, No No No, Br Myyyy Struggle, in December.

Kathleen Jordan (Going on About Town, p. 6; “Nearing the Asymptote,” p. 71) is a television writer and producer based in Los Angeles. She feels so humbled to be the voice of a generation.

Matt Nelson (Food & Drink, p. 16) is the food comedian for this magazine.

Matt Barots (Night Life Preview, p. 9) is a staff writer and editor at the magazine. He commutes from Yonkers.

Blythe Roberson (The Talk of the Town, p. 22, Shoes & Frames, p. 25) is a contributor to ClickHole, a headline contributor to The Onion, and previous to being blacklisted due to her participation in New Yorker, was a contributor to the New Yorker dat com.

Kevin Bauer (Classical Music Preview, p. 11) grew up in Sandusky, Ohio, graduated from The Ohio State University, then moved to Queens.


Jordan Hall (“Knotty by Nature,” p. 36) is a filmmaker in New Orleans, currently producing a documentary on the first African American rodeo clown. Help!

Michael J. Wolf (Breath Review, p. 7; “What’s Inside of Me,” p. 46; “Sex,” p. 68) is a writer, and received the 2015 “Quietest Audience Member” Award from the NY Theater Foundation and prefers movies.

Branson Reese (Cover) just illustrated his first book, How My Wife Has Told You? Joshua Mikulits (Dance Preview, p. 58) is in rabbinical school. He graduated from Haverford College’s Without a (Noun) School of Bep Bep Boop Boop.

Sam Weiner (The Mail, p. 5) is a staff writer for SeriouslyTV.

Tim Pratt (“Three Poems by Tim Pratt,” p. 38) is a comedian, artist, and puppeteer living in Brooklyn. Check out Tim Pratt’s squarespace.com to learn more.


Pat Landers (“Running Iron,” p. 64) is a writer and editor who owes Sasha Freere-Jones $5,000.

James Folta (“Round and Round,” p. 67) is a writer and a comedian. Wish that there was more to the story. www.jamesfolta.com

Daniel Sargeant (“The Hero Strange,” p. 56) is about 5,105, 175lbs. His Pulitzer-eligible collection “You Call That a Session?” is now available in pdf.

Elizabeth Stamp (The Talk of the Town, p. 20) was recently named to Vassar’s list of “30 People We’ve Never Heard Of.”

Kady Rush Ashcroft (Portfolio, p. 58) teaches a poetics of Ayahuasca class at Bennington College. She also writes for Fanny or Dixi.

Andrew Lipstein (The Financial Page, p. 23) founded GQ & I’s Reads (be-1.com), a digital bookstores & fit website, and works at Meural, an art tech startup.

Nicole Silverberg (“Finding My Gallipoli,” p. 26) is a comedian and writer named one of Brooklyn’s 50 Funniest People by Brooklyn Magazine. #DahFook!!

Brittny Soldano (Copy Editor) is a copywriter, crossword puzzle enthusiast, and linguistic vigilante making the world a better place, one fad typo at a time.

Langen Kingsley (The Talk of the Town, p. 21) is a human being who lives in beep boop—malfunction—Brooklyn, New York. She enjoys putting pets in a gentle, human way and eating delicious dinners of hard drives with her closest human friends.

Caroline Schaper (Briefly Noted, p. 70) is a writer and comedian from the greatest city in the world: Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She wrote for Letterman, and has been featured on CNN, QH, THR, and other letters.

Matt Strickland (Art Preview, p. 56) is a standup comedian, Tweets at @strickbomb, and is currently hiding under his desk.

TOM READER

As an anthropologist myself, I was excited to see our humble profession written about in your pages. However, your article on my colleague Dr. Frank Viroto (“A Vacation In Ruins,” March 13th) failed to answer several crucial questions: Did Viroto recover any magical rubies from the France’s Tumulus of Bougon? And if so, could the rubies be used to restore an elderly professor’s youth and vigor when dipped in virgin’s blood? Although your article was no doubt informative to a lay audience, its lack of details was troubling to those of us in the field.

Prof. Eljifh Draeven San Francisco, Calif.

CAPTIVATING COLLECTION

Once again, Porter Wellman’s genius for exploring the human condition through delightful specifics was on display. His profile of a young girl, Lisa Altschuler, with the world’s largest sticker collection (“Sticker Shock,” April 15th) was a treat. And yet Mr. Gladwell’s article contained ZERO information about the revitalizing powers of rubies dipped in unainted blood. For instance, we learned that Ms. Altschuler collects stickers, but is she also pure of both mind and body? What is her address? I haven’t much time.

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FAN FOR LIFE

I read Charles Berrn’s review of Soledad Farita’s latest poetry collection (“Verse With A View,” June 1st) under a black moon—a moon I myself called to the sky by imbibing a cocktail of powdered ruby and thick, unspoiled ichor. As the arcane concoction dripped down my beard, onto my uncovered chest and into my naked pubic hairs, I cackled with strength. Let any who doubt my conviction tremble! And let Mr. Woods know that he has turned this scelestial Chicanan verse into a devoted admirer! I look forward to reading this fine publication for another 1,000 years!

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I say, “Huzzah!” to another profile of Lang Lant (“Lang Time,” May 11th)! Mr. Lant, or Chiang Chikkan, as he was called when I first met him 200 years ago in Manchu-

OIS-K.COM/NEUJORRE

Everything that’s in the magazine, and that’s about it.

The Neu Jerker was a labor of love from the people you see above (as well as our illustrators, and those art contributers listed in the Table of Contents); not a single cent was spent or made on this project. We’ve done our share of research on fair use and parody law (a solid Wikipedia skin), and are pretty sure we’re good, but we do hope that the magazine—not-to-be- named understand that this is somewhat between satire, parody, and homage.

Thanks again to all that have spent their time on this, and for trusting us for absolutely inconceivable reason.

Goofs and gaffes,

Andrew Lipstein & James Folta

Editors-In-Chief

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The New York art world has long awaited the moment when Gregory Harry and Ileana Garalnik of Murray Hill’s vibrant underground clowning scene would realize the romantic potential of their on-stage chemistry in some intimate and frenzied pantomime. They are known as the “Ross and Rachel of clowns” (perhaps in reference to NBC’s Friends, a once popular sitcom), yet for ten years casting has kept them platonic—a child and her clumsy caretaker in “Babysitter Blues,” a housewife and her rabid dog in “NYU Performance,” a lamp and her too-big lampshade in “Silly Lamp.” Well, no longer must we wait. In a one-time performance entitled “Airbal” this Friday at 233 Mott Street, Apt. 3B at 11:30 am, Harry and Garalnik will shed their clothes and make love for (at most, one imagines) one hour. In the tradition of clowning, the show will be wordless. Seating is first-come, first-served—$15 or best offer, seniors free.

Death of a Whalesman
Experimentation under the sea

I DON’T GET this and also I hate it. After paying my $60 ticket, I walked into the theater to see eight dead whales on stage. At first I was pretty intrigued, but after an hour and a half I was very intrigued. Where are they going with this? I mused, touching my chin thoughtfully as flies buzzed in and around my eyes.

Perhaps it was I. Had my years of analyzing and critiquing plays left me jaded and calculated, unable to discern beauty and daring in an act of bold defiance against form? Or had I simply walked into the back entrance of an aquarium morgue? Maybe the answer was a little bit of both.

After another hour I was just about to leave until a pack of condors descended into the theater and began gnawing on the whale carcasses. Now THIS got my attention, but as the show waned it proved to be another paper-thin deus ex machina, just more flash than substance. I appreciated the risks taken by the actors and the utter dedication to their death, but the critic in me yearned for structure. Where was the conflict? Why was there no dialogue? How did these massive carcasses get here?

I left after hour six, thoroughly bored and craving seafood. Overall, a passionate but confusing theatrical debut by writer Harmony Korine, although the part of Biff was played with verve and gusto.

—Michael J. Wolf
I'm Weird But Funny
Mike Birbiglia brings his latest work to the stage with stories about getting diagnosed with sleep apnea, being in love and then making a mistake, food he ate that was too hot, and pretending to be drunk.

(Triple Crown Theater, 54th at Ave., New York. 545-212-4115)

Sugar Raysin in the Sun
Mark McGrath’s musical one-man show traces his moments rise to fame as the voice of every generation ever. Missed opportu- nity in not having a flying number, but smart choice to avoid using any Sugar Ray songs. (Anthea Ruards, Newport Beach. 374-734-5323)

Rubix Cube Reloaded
Michael Bay’s theatrical debut stuns and sizzles as this mind-boggling toy becomes a killing machine with as many twists and turns as you’d expect from a cube. Many members of the audience were severely burned and/or maimed but still had a great time. (Grammati Chinese Theatre, 6801 Hollywood Blvd. 342-986-0043)

PeepEats a Pancake
This is just a frickin’ guy named PeepEats eating a frickin’ blueberry pancake. That’s it. (IHOP: 845-709-3003)

Jewish Town 8000
The riveting story of an entire TOWN ENTIRELY populated by Jewish people set far into the future. Stand-out performances by Barbra Streisand and Adrien Brody, two big-time Yids. (Broadway Theater, 1545 Broadway. 734-049-2677)

The Sleeping Bag Wars
Written and produced by 7th grader Lindsay Hammill, this semi-autobiog- raphical play contains a whole lot of kids stuck head first in sleeping bags. (New York Theater Workshop, 79 E. 4th St. 898-2344)

Sex: The Play
Great art always pushes limits and this piece definitely does that. An exploration of the erotic and tantalizing, mixed with the grotesque and nauseating. So muchgruntin. (Classic Stage Company, 234 W. Rennigeld St. 980-786-3400)

Uncle Sam’s Lament
This reviewer hasn’t seen so many flags in one place since streaking drunk into the U.N. A brave critique of modern war, Uncle Sam’s Lament boldly asks the question, “Why do we all kill each other?” and then follows that up with the less bold question, “Is it for money? Because if so, I’m cool with that, just lemme get some.” There was a full moment in this perform- ance, from the musical number “I Can’t Affgan-Istand It,” to the 45-min- ute sex scene between two drones, to the Shell bills which were the printouts of the Wikipedia page for Bengahzi (which I skimmed). Personally, I’ve never been to war, and now I can’t wait to. Written and directed by Oliver Stone with great performances by Sam Waterson as Uncle Sam, John Krasinski as Bill Clinton, Oliver Platt as Mean Terrorist, and Benedict Cumberbatch as Barack Obama. Hub. Just realize they’re all white. Very cool. (Jilly Fuku Amphitheatre, 1600 Wash- ington Ave. 442-609-6578)

Glengarry Glen Ross 2: Glengarriler Glen Rosser (or Mitch and Murray’s Revenge)
Much like tight sweaters, sequels are notoriously hard to pull off. David Mamet (who I thought was dead) struggles to find his footing in this in- dulgent exercise. The play consists en- tirely of Stephen and Daniel Baldwin screaming the alphabet at each other for two hours, with one-hour inter- missions. The theater did provide free coffee, which made me chuckle until it was realized it was Nespresso (I only drink Stumptown). Long story short, wait for this play to come out on DVD. (Shubert Theater, 225 W. 44th St., New York. 847-948-4244)

My Sick Children
This reviewer has only cried three times in his life; first, when Lance Armstrong left his wife for Sheryl Crow. Second, when I stubbed my toe real frickin’ bad last week on a little nail poking up on my third. And, during every second of My Sick Children. The play delivers everything the title promises. Chelsea Handler makes a bold step out of her typical oeuvre to play the waiting mother Gwenlyn, whose children are real sick with stage three asthma. She tries soup, she tries Tylenol, she even tries yelling at them to stop coughing...but none of it works. The sparse set design (the play takes place inside a box of tissues) only highlighted the intense emotional scenery. My only complaint is that I wish the actors playing the children didn’t also have to give. Great commitment but so sad. (Both Israel Center for the Arts, 10 Nathan D Perlman Pl. 212- 488-8650)

Eviction
Performance art is not for everyone but breaking correct and correctly, it can be forming breaking and breathtaking. Eviction is a relentless tour de force by newcomer writer/performer Julia Lapinska, who never once breaks as character as she plays “Ousted Landlord.” The perform- ance began as an inconspicuous no- tice taped to my door, a flawless imitation that blended in with the restaurant flyers. So much attention to detail that I almost mistook it for an actual eviction notice. The performance continued for the next four months in various venues: emails, phone calls, even spontaneous monologues by Julia performed at my doorstep for a meal. This multi- media approach to theater will keep this playwright relevant for many years to come, but it’s her impressive dedication that shines the brightest. I was nearly free from screaming and vicious threats before remembering that it was all an act. The only downside was the lesser perfor- mance by the two police officers. Their aggressive physical choices felt over- blown and melodramatic and I never quite believed them as they twisted my arm behind my back or slammed my face into my carpet. Overall, an experi- mental and memorable show. (3 Russell St. Apt 2L. Brooklyn. 413-620-6677)

The Play They Put On Inside the Movie ‘Birdman’
Pretty good! (Red Box, 32nd St. and 4th Ave., New York. 234-975-2933)

The NEW IOWA-BASED folk collective Fort Blanket answers the question, “What would it sound like if a basket of neglected forest animals came together and attempted to harmonize?” The five band mates, all non-Midwestern natives, seem to have arrived at music by accident. Before putting out singles like, “My River Is Yonder Creek,” and “Howl’er Heart of Lonesome Creek,” the group met working together at a local Iowa City bakery where they sported minimum-wage lifestyles by choice. For months they were simply bakers, baking the necessary quota of loaves that the day demanded while working shifts in pre-dawn silence. But their lives began to change, as Susan (bambourine player #2) recalled, “Well, one day Kenneth showed up wearing this hat. Like a wide brimmed folk-hat. The rest of us kind of noticed and pretty much just kept baking as usual. Well the next week, there was Debby rocking a next little vest with a western flare to it, and we sort of just influenced each other on a subconscious level.”

These fashion selections emerged into their weird, vague, misguided identity. “Nobody really knew why it was happening; it simply snowballed from one of those wide brimmed Beck-looking hats,” added Susan. Terry (tin can player) even got a sleeve of tattoos despite having no real-world experiences to back up the decision. The five individuals proceeded to shut people out of their lives who didn’t adhere to their snap-dressing-folk-baker-power schema.

This unwarranted image was capitalized upon by deciding to create a band. These bakers were not musicians to begin with, but they learned enough basics in order for Kenny to strum towards a chorus, so the group could clap in unison and “harmonize about nature themes” in a way that gave a manufactured sense of inspiration.

Although the majority of Fort Blanket members are originally from Florida, geog- raphical boundaries appear to be no match for lazy co-optimized identities spawned out of fear. The hats got bigger and the denim got tighter. Not one member of the band has ever been to a creek before, however when they write songs, that is certainly a dominant theme for some reason; the theme of “creeks.” Either way, most critics agree they sound exactly like Mumford & Sons.

—Matt Barats

The Theatre

NOW PLAYING

Flannel and vinyl
The origin behind the midwestern folk collective of “accidental musicians”

The openers and previews

NOW PLAYING

Moving in 2016

The Theatre

NOW PLAYING

The openers and previews

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Fingered Nicholson
As the new contemporary standard in alto jazz saxophone, seeing this trio live (aka “fingering a must.”) With their bee bop bridges into their flim flam versus, this finger-licking trio of dark-sunglasses-wearing-jack-nicholson-looking twentysomethings will have you theepokking, skewersattting, yweetwartting, and diddykong on the dance floor all night shlong. (The Smokey Crystal, 117 W 27th St. 212-553-2232)

The Tom Cat 5
This Midwestern collective hails from Omaha, NE where they are among the most prolific jazz musicians working today. Unfortunately for their fans, most of their music never makes it into the recording studio. Sure, all the more reason to see them live, but why is that? Well, they’re a bunch of white dudes with no problems. Then they didn’t stop there. They went on to create different styles of India and North Asia. The group has grown into the first ever “jazz octet fusion music.” Not only do they do it seamlessly slip in and out of world jazz styles...they cook them, serve them, and even offer delivery on Seamless! During solos, the remaining band members assume roles of host, waiter, chef, wait-terboy, and menu goy. So, slip on your dance shoes, grab a date, and don’t forget your “jazz-iette.” (Midtown Catering Hall, 131 E.49th St. 4pm music/dinner)

Billy Style Duo
Wondering where “the groove” has gone? Haven’t seen “the rhythm” around lately? That might be because Saxomoxo- flutist Billy Style has taken them and packaged these elements into a tone- driven razzmatazz jazz product in the form of his latest album. A bit of his- tory: upon notably discovering his flutist having an affair with his wife in the autumn of 2013, Billy Style used a sturdy adhesive to conjure a flute to his “barry sax” and downsized the band to a duo. Billy’s wife, Kat, can still be heard on snare drum, and provided artwork for the latest album, “Family Matters.” (Blue Jazz Blue, 24 Broadway, 11pm)

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After their indefatigable leader Steven Rick was arrested for his role in a Poni school involving “didgetidos,” many naysayers saw that to be the doom of his company. Now with most of those nay- sayers sent to Rikers, the Company has had the freedom to tap back into its pre-didgetido roots—interpretative dance of the окру of the Toeal Youth Didgeti- doo Chorus. Their newest piece, “Go on. They can’t throw away all those tubu- necks,” will premiere under the Brooklyn Bridge June 19, 5:15am. Tickets are half off with a donation of a single sock.

Team Dance!
With their copyright lawsuit with Team Dance of Bulgaria resolved, Team Dance is back with a brand new piece of punc- tuation tackled on, the exclamation point (pronounced shoua). Inspired by the post-structuralist paintings, theories, and Scrabble strategy of Abe Ralston, their new piece “The Ap is the Ap of His Ap-Dad” is delicately performed with charm and blazes with gentle movements and confident flicks of the hips. Attend- ees should look out for free Green Bay Packers’ “cheeseheads” that they will be asked to wear as slippers. (G.K. Arts Cen- ter, St. Ann’s Warehouse, June 18–30, 7pm)

West Village Ballet
The young choreographer, Styles With CREAM (real name unknown), doesn’t hide from the big themes: the nature of the self, the brutality of the animal king- dom, the making of tense faces while on the elliptical. West Village Ballet will be the first group to debut this piece. They will also be the first to use my Uncle Ken’s basement as the performance space it was always meant to be. (Ken Bernstein, 55 Lafayette Ave., Apt 4B, Brooklyn, please don’t tell Aunt Carol, June 16, 6:30pm).

Emma Paul
Playing an interdisciplinary artist who works mostly with video, will make her breakout solo performance, “AHH! HHHUUUUUMMMMM! The Cry of the Banshee.” Emma Paul will juxtapose sonic themes from “The Electric Slide” with images of Dmitri Shostakovich as she overhears Hot Pockets, the proud sponsor of this performance. In this get-back-to-basics performance, Paul delicately widens her limbs as she contorts to attempt different microwave settings, including “Defrost” and “Popscreen.” (MOMA PS1 22-25 Jack- son Ave., Long Island City, June 18-25, 4pm)

“Snaps!”
Concepted by the eccentric and hermetic choreographer Rabbi Steven Jackson, this rake-rop infused performance uses ab- struse concepts I am legally forbid- den to write about due to the intensity of their non-disclosure agreement. It is not especially bizarre, but gave me a few free pens. (New York Live Arts, 219 W 19th St., June 16, 8pm)

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The young choreographer, Styles With CREAM (real name unknown), doesn’t hide from the big themes: the nature of the self, the brutality of the animal kingdom, the making of tense faces while on the elliptical. West Village Ballet will be the first group to debut this piece. They will also be the first to use my Uncle Ken’s basement as the performance space it was always meant to be. (Ken Bernstein, 55 Lafayette Ave., Apt 4B, Brooklyn, please don’t tell Aunt Carol, June 16, 6:30pm).

Emma Paul
Playing an interdisciplinary artist who works mostly with video, will make her breakout solo performance, “AHH! HHHUUUUUMMMMM! The Cry of the Banshee.” Emma Paul will juxtapose sonic themes from “The Electric Slide” with images of Dmitri Shostakovich as she overhears Hot Pockets, the proud sponsor of this performance. In this get-back-to-basics performance, Paul delicately widens her limbs as she contorts to attempt different microwave settings, including “Defrost” and “Popscreen.” (MOMA PS1 22-25 Jackson Ave., Long Island City, June 18-25, 4pm)

“Snaps!”
Concepted by the eccentric and hermetic choreographer Rabbi Steven Jackson, this rake-rop infused performance uses abstruse concepts I am legally forbidden to write about due to the intensity of their non-disclosure agreement. It is not especially bizarre, but gave me a few free pens. (New York Live Arts, 219 W 19th St., June 16, 8pm)
**ART**

**MUSEUMS SHORT LIST**

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**

“Are Doors Really Necessary?” Through June 29.

**MOMO**

“Moamoa and Rompers: Can anything be a murder weapon?” Through July 22.

**Guggenheim Museum**

“Milli Vanilli: shared ironic likes turn to desperate memories.” Through September 19.

**The Brooklyn Museum**

“Coney Island: Visions of a forgotten graphic, on a historical arc of linear sorcery from Ingres to Picasso. You feel nonchalant, as when a jubilant dancer’s hair "Are Doors Really Necessary?”

**The Whitney Museum**


**New Museum**

“Eddie Vedder: Did an obsession with a perfect man damage a marriage?” Through July 15.

**Museum of the Heart**

“How can you mend a broken heart: A Cher review.” Over.

**Bronx Museum**


**Museum of Sex**

“Erectile Dysfunction: Maybe it’s your fault?” Through August 3.

**Sculpturecenter**

“A Boomer’s look at a millennial’s treachery.” Through my father’s departure back to St. Louis.

**My Apartment**

“My Wife: When did the cheating start? Indefinitely.

**ART**

**GALLERIES SHORT LIST**

**METROPOLITAN MUSEUM**

“Metropolitan Museum and Libraries: ‘The Lederhosan of Mortdecai Saltzman’”

The focus of this historical review is the leather knee-length breeches of famed German lutanist and snort Mortdecai Saltzman (1785–1891). Saltzman’s Leiders, many of which he hosumed himself, are displayed with a lyrical buoyancy and a cunning eye for detail. On close inspection one can see many of the brass fasteners bear a striking resemblance to a woman who, until very recently, resided in my domicile engaging in marital bliss.

**Museum of the Fifth Ascension**

“The World is ending in 6 weeks”

The simplicity of this group show is what gives it its power. Descending down the 50-foot staircase into New York’s newest museum the smell quickly becomes the most overwhelming sensation, yet once your eyes adjust to the darkness you realize it’s because the nameless artists have staged a series of what look like very lifelike human ribsages around the space, which they have decorated in reclaimed materials from the New York streets. The songway they request you to stay will come with a phlegmatic allure not usually seen in basements this rat infestad. Their commitment only rarely seems put on. For one hopeful life imitates art and I can soon shed this mortal coil.

**GALLERIES—CHELSEA**

“Horror Business”

Three New Jersey youth approach the small New Jersey town of Lodi, as one might approach a lover. Their tender photography is succulent, their imagery ample. They capture the hometown of Punk Rock icon Glenn Danzig with a voluptuous potency. I have not known the touch of a woman since Eleanor left.

Paulina Tchilavskii

This concise retrospective of Tchilavskii’s first 120,000 works is refreshing in its brevity. My wife was not brief when describing the extent of her affairs, and stands in direct contrast to Tchilavskii’s self-control. Paulina Tchilavskii, born of Polish decent in a tent behind a Wawa, has a classic grace, which some women never find, despite the generous amounts of high-end yoga and dance classes which were paid for.

**GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN**

“American Conspiracy: The Bilderbear Group”

This complex retroaspective assembles every piece of evidence, no matter how controversial, about the infamous Bilderbear Group that controls the nation’s toy economy. It requires a signout a waver, as Jean-Luc Montenegro’s gallery cannot guarantee your safety if the Bilderbears consider you a threat. I pray to receive that sweet release from a Bilderbear. I’m scared to die, but I also wish I was never born.

**Kildeer**

Bland James Bland. The umteenth installment in the continued misadventures of England’s least clandestine secret agent seems calculated to leave audiences shaken, not stirred. A particularly cranky and craggy Daniel Craig trudges through a rote plotline rife with inscrutable motives, thinly sketched personages, and a double helping of oh, seven or so explosions per minute. Broad James Broad. As he goes, he runs afoul of a boilerplate beauty (Amanda Seyfried) and the characteristic coterie of criminals, headed by the inimitable, if not intimidatig, Chiewetel Ejiofor. Its cuddled mediocrity aside, box office receipts suggest that we’re stuck with this spy for eons to come. Brand, James Brand. —Antoine Path

**WORLD’S APART**

Pixar’s dream factory spins the tale of an alien fixer (Ed Helms) who must journey to Earth to discover the whereabouts of his planet’s missing children. While the interplay between Helms’ buckless Bleeblo Jones and William H. Macy’s Horatio Alger of a deuteragonist escalates pleasurably from 8-8 to manou-a-marn, the mise-en-scene cannot match the droll jery of the dialogue. Director Pete Docter (Up, Inside Out) strives for an elegiac eulogy in this peripatetic pseudoothriller, painting an Orwellian future of Kaleasque proportions, but a Kishindekutch structure unwisey peppered with Verfremdungseffekt ultimately deflates into a grandiloquent rodmadomata of a denouement. Featuring a decidedly non-diegetic score by Randy Newman.

—Robert Granty

**MOVIES**

**HOMICIDE HOME**

Alfred Hitchcock’s seminal thriller Strangers on a Train captivated audiences with an intriguing cast of characters and a breathtakingly taut storyline. Alas, Rian Johnson’s newest movie, which centers on a family of assassins, is a far cry from such classic finery. One cringes to imagine how Hitchcock would respond to this filmic foldeor, which is as senselessly personal as it is offputtingly innovative. As the family patriarch, Michael Fassbender refuses to be either Don Corleone or Popeye Doyle, instead stubbornly exploring new terrain. Never once in its inimmuable 12 minutes does Homicide Home adequately answer the cinematic question, “why bother making a movie about crime after Goodfellas?” With Bill Hader, who isn’t as good as Charlie Chaplin.

—Daniel Dobson

**SO THERE YOU GO**

Woody Allen’s latest filmic foray is more carapace than caprice: a crusty and declawed cinematic crustacean with an abstruse texture, brackish flavor, and a philosophically decided, if not shellfish, in other words, it’s not kosher, Woody! Hugh Laurie stars as a suicidal flust who embarks on an affair with a high school ingenue (Selena Gomez) possessed by the ghost of François Truffaut. At one turgid and tossed off, this pernicious potboiler pushes and prods but never proceeds with any pretense of the pleasures that elevate Allen’s previous projects. With Albert Brooks, Anne Hathaway, and Ed Harris as a zombified Federico Fellini. —F.P.
It Goes to Show
This seriocomic neo-noir from the Coen brothers tracks a puerile parvenu of a director (Oscar Isaac) who becomes embroiled in a kidnapping plot. As the shaggy dog tale unspools, he encounters a money-stuffed McSuffin, an atavistic cabal of producers, and an agglomeration of anatopism—all appurtenances of the Coen milieu. Indeed, the film’s portrait of a prelapsarian Hollywood rife with antediluvian lurias, long the bailiwick of the brothers’ oeuvre, has curredled from raison d’être to idle fact. Despite pretensions to Bildungsroman, the film never punctures the Panglossian purview of its protagonist, rendering his philosophy scant more than an effluvia shibboleth. Weltanschauung aside, the film’s true Achilles’ Heel is its Chekov’s Gun, the implementation of which is more Gordian Knot than Oceanic Razo—the Coens would be well served to heed that platitudinous leitmotif: Keep It Simple, Stupid. —R.G.

Riptide
Sam Raimi’s soggy shocker is a self-styled self-reflexive satire of The Shining’s symbology, swapping out a secluded seraglio for a spooky ship. While copious contemporary chilers have cleaved sculpulouly to the Kubrick rubric (Shutter Island, The Witch) rarely has its riches been ripped off as tidily as in Riptide. Yet the trademark tension of the Torrance tribe never tips into a torrent for Raimi’s ragtag troupe, whose terror instead trickles into a torpor, and there’s no iniquitous Nicholson or demure Duvall on deck to stir the waters—instead, heeereee’s John C. Reilly, as the wryly recalcitrant captain, joined by a Danny doppleganger (Jacob Tremblay) devoid of Dan Lloyd’s disturbing demeanor, and an obsequious sea-cook (Courtney B. Vance) whose performance proves he’s not the Crotch- ers keeper and left me wanting to say, “Scat, man!” By the final fright, the film proves it’s not fit for a King with numerous flaws that cannot be Overlooked sure to leave audiences Red, Rumi- nating that Raimi should have been a better caretaker. Repeat after me: All reworking and no playfulness makes Riptide a dull joy. —A.P.

Seven By Seven
This early satire from the great Billy Wilder blooms into effervescent light in a lovingly remas- tered rerelease playing at the Film Forum. Fred MacMurray shines as Harry Mills, a down-on- his-luck adman whose fortunes change as a result of mistaken identity. Wilder’s lampoonic swipes at wartime rationing and the Red Menece remain as devastat- ingly hilarious as when they were originally penned. Indeed, Seven By Seven’s tightly wound mousetrap of a story makes it a hundred times more gut-busting than the so-called “comedies” of the current season. Simultane- ously, its tender and unforgettable love story make the film a thou- sand times more gut-wrenching than the loosely defined “dra- mas” of today. Though hampered slightly by its 45 missing wanes, the remaining scenes constitute an unforgettable experience from a cinematic titan worth revisiting again and again. —D.D.

A Celebration of a True Harlem Renaissance
City-dwellers more prone to shopping in SoIloought to venture up to Harlem to whet their appetites. Now standing atop the demolished grounds of James Bald- win’s former church, the picturesque Har- lem Renaissance Shopping Outlet comprises a Rockport shoe outlet, All-Alpine skiing gear, and the largest Trader Joe’s in the Boroughs. Those previously averse to the smalldarkened dilapidation will feel at home among the stunning, blanched marble of this “contemporary bazaar.” An open house for the “Same Luxury studio apartments (beautifully renovated from rent-controlled family housing) will be held from 10am thru 7pm Saturday and Sunday. Appointments for viewings are made on a highly selective basis. (Inter- section of Adam Clayton Powell and Adam Clayton From U2 Blvd., Harlem)

ACTIONS AND ANTIQUES

Silicon Valley Antiques Show at Queens Micro Center
As it does every month, the Silicon Val- ley Antiques Show takes over half of the Queens Micro Center with exhib- itions of technological artifacts dating as far back as the Prehistoric Era of early 2010. Relics of long-lost eras in- clude pieces from the Macintosh Re- formation as well as daguerreotypes of 16-bit screensavers, many of which are redolent of the most repulsive Flemish vistas. Silicon Valley exhibitions also notably in- quest that women over 30 do not attend. (Kissena Blvd. at 71st Ave. 718-674-8400)

Heartbreakers Yard Sale at The ‘Cosgroves’ Residence
‘Miss’ Elena Cosgrove, apparently ‘under- appreciated’ (despite being the beneficiary of innumerable goods and affection), shall auction away Americana-inspired curiosities compiled through decades of turbulent marriage by this correspondent, her ex-husband. Among many collectibles that can be considered my property in a just and benevolent world are: a hand- crafted birdhath, vintage photography of our happiest memories together, and an heirloom maternity doll I wanted to give a daughter someday. Sure to be a panopti- cum of shattered dreams, this auction will delight even the most reserved emotional sadist. (Still Technically My House, Green- point)

REASONS TO TALK

LHOOMMAD: DOG VERSION

Bi-polar CIA analyst Carrie Mathison might be the only person alive who can stop a terrorist from attacking the USA. And now... she’s a dog instead of a person.

• Are all the other characters also dogs?
• Or is it just that one character is now a dog for some reason?
• How is a dog a CIA analyst? Can it talk?
• Can the dog talk to Mandy Patinkin as agent Saul Berenson?

The answers await in HOMELAND: DOG VERSION: THE BOOK

A new adaptation of Showtime’s hit series...
“Purely fresh air”
“Thrilling victory for modern literature.”

Shively Press
A division of Crocker Barrel USA
PHOTOGRAPH BY MEREDITH JENKS FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

OTHER WAY OF SAYING THAT IT’S TWELVE YEARS RATHER THAN TWENTY-SIX. THIS IS ALSO AN-

WON’T BE. CHANG INSISTED IT WAS PIN-

HE TOOK TO HIS OWN SPIN ROOM—

DAVID

PHOTOGRAPH BY MEREDITH JENKS FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

NOW UBiQUITous BLOND-WOOD BACKLESS

FUCKING IT UP.” OVER THE NEXT THOUSAND OR

SKY’S RESTAURANT, WHILE ADMITTING, “I WORRY

HIS EIGHTH IN NEW YORK) WOULD BE A

MONSTRO’S

245 E. 19TH ST. (212-736-3100)

ON A COLD NOVEMBER NIGHT, I FOUND MYSELF ON SLACKS AVENUE, A NEIGHBOUR-

HOOD ON THE NORTH SIDE OF E. 19TH STREET, A FORMER TEXTILE HAUNTED, NOW DOMINATED BY THE FURNITURE INDUSTRY, THOUGH MANY THERE CONTINUE, UNWITTINGLY, OR UNKNOW-

INGLY, USING TEXTILE EXTENSIVELY; BOTH ON

THEMSELVES, AND IN EACH ESTABLISHMENT, AND I, MYSELF, IN A BISTRO, A NOSHING NOOK, A

RESTAURANT, MONSTRO’S, WHERE THE KNIFE-

SLAYED, WOOD-FIRE ROASTED LAMB CHOPS PROVED A WORTHY FOE TO MY UNSETTLED AP-

PETITE, ITSELF A CONTROLLING, YET BENEVOLENT,

PRESENCE, ALWAYS UP TO THE CHALLENGES OF BEING FED, AS IT WAS THAT NIGHT, SET UPON

THE CHOPS, THESE COOKED WITHIN AN INCH OF SUCCESS, TEETERING BUT FALLING JUST SHOR-

THOUGH HAPPY TO HAVE HUNG ON THE EDGE FOR A MOMENT AT LEAST, THEIR COHORTS, BEER-

CHOPPED, PAN-SEARED YUKON GOLD FINGERTIPS, MADE TO WATCH AS THE CHOSEN PROTEIN GAVE WAY TO MY ADVANCES, THE PATO-

TOSSES THEN FINISHED IN KIND, SURVIVED BY THEIR OVER-WRONG COUSIN, TORTELLINI, A HUSKY YOUTH WITH A SIMPLE MIND, LACKING THE DELICACY OF ITS OLDER SIBLING, THE WELL-

DRESSED AND ATTENTIVE TURKISH SALAD, WHO MAY HAVE SEEN OR HEARD IDEAS FOREIGN TO

ME, THE YOUNGER STARCH, AND WHO HAD ESCAPED MY GAZE UP TO THIS POINT, ITS PROTECTIVE

BARRIER OF COW-CHILD NOW REMOVED, RE-

VEALING A STOCKPILE OF GREENS AND STAGED BREAD; CHEESES AND ROOT VEGETABLES, ALL STANDING UP TO SAY “EAT, CAPTAIN” AND SO I DID, SET UPON SATISFACTION AS I WAS, FINISHING THE APPOINTED SIDE WITH EASE, LEAVING ME THEN

ONLY THE AFOREMENTIONED, THE TORTELLINI, A FORMER TRUMP, NOW A DETECTED REPLACEMENT FOR A MIGHTIER Linguini, A PRETTIER SPAGHETTI, A MORE SIGNIFICANT RIGATONI, ALL A PROPER CHOICE FOR A DINNER SUCH AS ANY-

ONE, THOUGH TONIGHT THIS DINNER FACED CHAL-

LENGES RATHER THAN TREATS, THE IMPOSITION OF TORTELLINI, AND AS I EXHALED, ANNOUNCING BOTH MY SUCCESSFUL TURN WITH THE SALAD, AS WELL AS MY CAMPAIGN AGAINST THE COOLING CIRCULAR DOUGHS, I FELT A FEELING CLOSE TO

JOY, WHICH, FOR A MOMENT, WAS BEYOND MY

CALCULATIONS OF POTENTIALS FOR THE EVENING, THOUGH THAT EMOTION WAS THEN SWIFTLY SWAYED BY THE SINSALUTATION OF GLUTEN DISCS, A PAINFUL CHALLENGE WHICH, WHILE UNDERSERVED, PUT THE MEAL IN PERSPECTIVE, REMINDING ME THAT WITH GOOD MUST COME BAD, WITH CARS MUST COME ACCIDENTAL DEATH, WITH CHRISTMAS MUST COME PINE SMELL, WITH PLACES MUST COME IMPROPER DESTINATIONS, SUCH AS ICED, OR LAX, THE FORMER TOO SMALL, THE LATTER ONE STAR, DIRT AIRPORT, BOTH UNLIKE PARIS, OH PARIS, THE CITY OF NIGHTS, A HAVEN FOR LOVE AND REASON AND CAREFUL EXAMINATION OF ONESELF AND ANY COMPANIONS CLOSE ENOUGH TO JUSTIFY CARE-

FUL EXAMINATION IN ADDITION TO YOURS, THEN DINNER WITH THOSE WHO ARE WORTHWHILE, OR THOSE WHO ARE NOT GENERALLY, BUT COULD BE FOR THE NIGHT, AS MANY ARE CAPABLE OF ONE NIGHT’S JOYOUS COMPANY, WHILE FEW ARE CAPABLE OF SIGNIFICANT LEARNING, AS IN THE STUDY OF CATALOGUES OF ANCIENT TEXTS OR OF MATHEMATICS OR OF THE ANATOMY OF THE EARTH’S SPECIES, EACH SIMILAR IN THEIR COEX-

ISTENCE ON THIS PLANET, YET VASTLY DIFFERENT IN THEIR NEEDS FOR SURVIVAL, FOR SUCCESS, FOR BEING COOKED AND CONSUMED.

MONSTRO’S OPEN AT NIGHT.

—MATT NELSON

TABLES FOR TWO

GARDEN PHI’S

205 E. HOUSTON ST. (212-254-2246)

ONE STOP THROUGH THE GATE TO THE GARDEN AND YOU’RE TRANSPORTED TO THE WOOD-BACKED BAR OF YOUR MOST GREEN-DUMBED COHORT IF EFFORT CAME OVER THEM FOR LONG ENOUGH, A HUSH PARADISE WITH PLUMP PLANTS READY FOR PICKING, AND EATING. AND EAT THEM I DID. AND CHOP THEM I DID. THESE PLANTS ARE NOT THE PLANTS I BUY IN THE GROCERY STORE. A SECOND STEP AND YOU’RE BUMPED INTO ONE OF THE LOW, INVITING TABLES, INNOCENTLY STRESSES ABOUT THE COSY FOREST TOWER. EVERY INGREDIENT USED AT GARDEN PHI’S IS GROWN IN-HOUSE, ENSURING FRESH, IN-SEASON OXFORDS IN A WARM, HUMID, PLANT-

FRIENDLY ATMOSPHERE. WHEN ASKED ABOUT THEIR OFFERINGS, NAMSEUM PHIL WATERS MENTIONS, “THE MINT HAS REALLY TAKEN OVER—IT’S HARD TO TAME.” MOJITOS, MOJITOS, MONITORS? I ORDER A SCOTCH & MINT SMOKY THREE BAR AND REDUCE MYSELF TO A TABLE IN THE BACK. WITH MY VIEW MOSTLY OBSCURITIZED BY FORCIBLE FOLIAGE, I CANT HELP BUT STICK A YOUNG, EURO TWENTY-OR-SOMETHING SITTING IN ONE OF THE RAISED BENCHES. THOROUGHLY, AND APPARENTLY, ENJOYING THE COCKTAILS, HE LEANS BACK WITH SATISFACTION, REST-


PHOTOGRAPH BY MATT NELSON FOR THE NEW YORKER. ILLUSTRATION BY ROSE LEEF

FOOD & DRINK

The train for nieces

acela

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16

THE NEW YORKER, JUNE 20, 2016

BAR T AB
For decades now, swelling rents and an eye-pun- 
turing cost-of-living have done nothing to stem the tide
of young people arriving in New York. It seems every col-
lege student with an ounce of self-determination and access
to kayak.com will soon appear at LaGuardia or JFK, with a
duffel bag of dreams and the taste of big apple on their swol-
len lips. Indeed, recent polls of seniors at colleges in North
America and Europe paint just such a picture: 91 percent of
students so polled declared their intent to move to New York
within hours or minutes of graduation.

Many current New Yorkers are worried these newly ar-
ived, desperate twenty-two-year-olds will make an already
crowded job market no dif-
f erent than a crack across the
cheekbone with half a cin-
derblock. But at City Hall, a
teresting trend among new
arrivals is giving city plan-
ers a far greater concern.

In the 1960s young adults
preferred to set up shop in
the West Village. But as that
area became more crowded,
gentrified and (inevitably)
expensive, the influx moved
directly east to the relatively
uninhabited East Village
and Lower East Side. When
those filled up, people moved
yet farther east to Williams-
burg. More and more young
people are now signing their first leases in Bushwick, and
that’s what has city planners losing sleep. For as any subway
map can tell you, Bushwick is east of Williamsburg.

“T’s always east!” said Dr. Paul Castle, Mayor de Blasio’s
most trusted city planner and best friend. “East at an ever
increasing rate. It looks like some sort of natural law.” Cast-
er’s data analysis projects new arrivals rapidly overwhelming
Bushwick and taking over Ozone Park and then South Ja-
maica by May of this year. With any luck the wave of mid-
twentieth hopes will narrowly miss the runway at John F.
Kennedy international, but eventually—Caste predicts Ar-
bor Day of 2021—the crowd will spill into the ocean some-
where near Baldwin Harbor.

Deaths will be inevitable. “These young people don’t have
the body fat to stay afloat for even a day, let alone the two or
three years it takes to establish a career and earn enough for
a one bedroom in Cobble Hill,” explains Dr. Karrah Webber,
a nutritionist and swim coach who has consulted with city
planners since 2011. “Imagine a house party in a shitty one
bedroom two hundred yards offshore. People will drown! All
the drugs will get wet!”

Soon, according to Dr. Webber, “the beaches will
be choked with corpses. Not literally though since beach-
es can’t breathe—that’s im-
possible.”

Impossible is right. Doz-
en of solutions to the prob-
lem have been put forward,
but few seem likely to help.

A Bushwick zoning plan to
restrict new coffee houses,
tattoo parlours and the like
had the opposite of the de-
sired effect; it seems an un-
licensed “illegal” skateboard
shop has even more appeal
to a broke twenty-two-year-
old Oberlin grad than a nor-
mal one. Last year a ten-mile-long, 200-foot-high wall on
Lefferts Boulevard, built from donated materials by terrified
old people, was reviewed as a “cool hang-out spot with a su-
per chill vibe” on Gothamist within days of its completion,
and so many second-hand bicycles were chained to it in the
ensuing week that it collapsed.

Most recently De Blasio’s team enlisted Joey Bada$$, the
popular twenty-year-old rap phenom from Bed-Stuy, to in-
fluence incoming renters using his vast social media presence.
Last Friday, after two more town halls, later, during a Republican debate, Ted trended in our word-search data,” Republican elsewhere to make sense of the President, anxious voters have been turning some of the region’s populations. The kingdom and some of its neighbors could a. “Without us, Saudi Arabia wouldn’t exist very long,” Trump their elected governments, to sacrifice and even die for one form of land-drowning. Under twenty-five and is instead focused on “strangling,” a new fl. Drowning is right: local contractors are now deluged with re. 

In Findings News, it seems this time the sharks will feast. —Stephen Unleashes  

THE CHILDREN’S DEPT. BOY UNINTERRUPTED  

On a recent afternoon that was neither particularly warm nor particularly cold, John English slid into a corner booth at Sardi’s on West Forty-Fourth Street. His slight figure was emphasized by his choice of attire: an oversized cable-knit sweater, long khaki slacks, and well-worn sunglasses. On a nearby wall amid caricatures of Broadway stars, local politicians, and a boxer or two, a sketch of English hung beside a guacamole. English is known for many things—his chalk murals of Jane Jacobs on the side-walks of Greenwich Village, his brief stint as a costume designer for an off-Broadway production described in reviews as Tennessee Williams meets Carousel, and his letters to the editor of The Paris Review, in which he lambasted George Plimpton for being a poor dresser and all-around terrible hockey player—but he is perhaps best known for the title he has held since 1965: the Only Living Boy in New York. “There have been other boys by English,” said Britain, stabbed with bites of grilled cheese, a dish that does not appear on the restaurants as reserved for the children’s menu. “But they usually die immediately.” His long run as the sole boy in the five boroughs is both a source of pride and sadness. “I often wonder why I lasted and they didn’t,” he said softly before taking a gulp of milk. “I also wonder why I’ve never advanced past the age of 11.” English is now speaking publicly about his perpetual youth with Real Live Boy, a book that took nearly ten years to write. “It’s hard when you can’t advance past a fifth-grade reading level,” he said. “Can I play with your cell phone?” He shifted his attention back and forth between the dessert menu and a game of Minecraft. “I’d like all of it. You’re paying, right?”

Moments later a parade of waiters filled the table; dessert was served, and English surveyed the sweets, his legs dangling off the banquette. “My parents disappeared early on in my life,” he said. “I was raised by Mayor Tony Morris and who helped fund the William Amherd Exhibition at the Met, is pressing hard to outlaw apartment subdivisions in the five boroughs.

But Dr. Caster at city hall is agitated at the idea. “The creation of twenty tiny apartments from what were once very small apartments is what are once sausage warehouses and chemical plants is the only thing we have for us,” he explained. “If we can’t cram miserable young adults into what are basically live-in bathrooms, it’s just a matter of months before the wave of people between Williamstown and the ocean over-whelms every unit of housing we have left.”

Left is right: as things now stand, the western side of the Atlantic ocean will soon be one big liquid cemetery for the world’s hopeful youth. Caster, ever the optimist, does believe in one strategy that could actually succeed at preventing the tragedy—temporarily re-classifying parts of Long Island as part of the State of New York. But when whispers of that plan were first made public, real estate values plummeted so quickly in the other boroughs that some of the original owners rioted. Mayor de Blasio, in an electrifying speech speech made only to his fun video diary, vowed never to follow that plan. Unlike in Findings News, it seems this time the sharks will feast. —Stephen Unleashes  

I T S A C O O L, clear day in February on the corner of Bowery and 2nd Avenue and Roger Klunkman is doing what he does best—defeating in the middle of the street. “I like this int. —Elizabeth Stamp

MAN ON THE STREET POoping in Public.

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Roger has been coming to me for moments later a parade of waiters filled the table; dessert was served, and English surveyed the sweets, his legs dangling off the banquette. “My parents disappeared early on in my life,” he said. “I was raised by Mayor Tony Morris and who helped fund the William Amherd Exhibition at the Met, is pressing hard to outlaw apartment subdivisions in the five boroughs.

But Dr. Caster at city hall is agitated at the idea. “The creation of twenty tiny apartments from what were once very small apartments is what are once sausage warehouses and chemical plants is the only thing we have for us,” he explained. “If we can’t cram miserable young adults into what are basically live-in bathrooms, it’s just a matter of months before the wave of people between Williamstown and the ocean over-whelms every unit of housing we have left.”

Left is right: as things now stand, the western side of the Atlantic ocean will soon be one big liquid cemetery for the world’s hopeful youth. Caster, ever the optimist, does believe in one strategy that could actually succeed at preventing the tragedy—temporarily re-classifying parts of Long Island as part of the State of New York. But when whispers of that plan were first made public, real estate values plummeted so quickly in the other boroughs that some of the original owners rioted. Mayor de Blasio, in an electrifying speech speech made only to his fun video diary, vowed never to follow that plan. Unlike in Findings News, it seems this time the sharks will feast. —Stephen Unleashes

I T S A C O O L, clear day in February on the corner of Bowery and 2nd Avenue and Roger Klunkman is doing what he does best—defeating in the middle of the street. “I like this int. —Elizabeth Stamp

MAN ON THE STREET POoping in Public.
That gets her to stop yammering one was worth it. It was a great shit.”

“Hit by a bicyclist in the middle of the Middle Avenue. But that was worth it. It was a great shit.”

“Hold your breaths!”

“It’s a guy with a whip. He’s making a tractor.”

“I’m just going to kill mosquitoes on this porch.”

“Mainly John Candy. Slap, slap. I slapped my leg with a pillow from the couch. Fallon hurled a pillow from the couch.”

“The first thing I did, they headed to an S.U.V. Photographers called it ‘Cannibal Girls’ together, an improvised play.”

“While we’re in town, taping an episode of the ‘Tonight Show’ at NBC.”

“Before talking about ‘Schitt’s Creek,’ the Canadian sitcom that comes out three times a year. ‘I think there has to be an anchor,’ Levy said, ‘a little-known word into popular usage.’”

“Alanna Bishop, staff writer for the New Yorker, explains to a volunteer Ylana that the show ‘Alanna explained to a volunteer Ylana: “Haha, it’s not a serious conversation.”’

“After about an hour, the witches got together on mornings when they get to work from home, and conversation turned to the current state of witchhood. “I hate when people say they aren’t witches,” said Ylana. "It’s like, hello, you’re on the wrong side of history!”"

“Or when they see something funny, they do it.”

“Ylana explained to a volunteer witch (me) that the only fortune-telling requirement was to say something bad would happen. ‘And make sure you’re targeting the right people—only men, and only people who believe in capitalism. Like that guy.’ She gestured to a man wearing a collared shirt.”

“A stream of men passed and the witches tossed out some prophecies. “You will be CEO, but Fortune will run a cheesy photo of you on your motorcycle in a profile and the internet will turn you into a meme!” “You will devote your life to the capitalist-colonialist system, only to witness its inevitable downfall!” “You will... fall into a big hole in the ground,” said Alana, shrugging. She confided that when she can’t think of anything to say, she just yells that she is on her menstrual cycle. As the morning commute slowed to a trickle, conversation turned to the past. (Imagine Levy in the movies, playing a time travel arms race that would make ‘Cannibal Girls’ together, an improvised play.”)

“I’m just going to kill mosquitoes on this porch.”

“While we’re in town, taping an episode of the ‘Tonight Show’ at NBC.”

“No country is born into the same disposition. Some come with an expanse of land, but poor exportable resources. Others have a substrate of petroleum, but pugnacious neighbors with differing ideas about land. Ready is the nation that enjoys true solitude, those lone desolate islands that are just a bit too ‘native’ for a Sandals Resort. But even they suffer from tribalism and its trappings, such as a dearth of language, forcing its people to express themselves through thigh-slaps and coo-coo babble. These disparities are natural, and thus just. But others are man-made, and must be overcome through political might.”

“China lives in the future, with a booming tech sector, a beautifully stratified class structure, and a government that refuses to be handcuffed by eco-regulation. But they also live in the future—literally. In an age where regimes rise and fall in a day, and microseconds decide markets, we simply cannot allow our competitors to the east keep their 13+ hour advantage.”

“The solution isn’t (is any?) but it’s a one-time fix. What I’m proposing is simple: Every Sunday at 9 am local time, for forty-eight weeks, America will set its clocks back thirty minutes. At the end of this procrasten period, we’ll find ourselves, once again, in the sweet spot of world leadership—this time, in minutes.”

“Maybe we’ll get quick to rebut. They’ll say that we’ll have to be nocturnal for a good part of the year. That our economy will be rat-tled. That we’ll have massive infrastructure overhauls. That China doesn’t actually live in the future. But they’re also refusing to acknowledge even the most salient advantages, such as cutting our air-conditioning costs. Plus, it’ll be fun, like a nation-wide summer party, where we really can’t wake our neighbors to the east, because then they’ll do the same thing, spurring a time travel arms race that would make Marty McFly’s (of the 80’s and early 90’s science-fiction adventure trilogy ‘Back to the Future’) story look quaint by comparison. In this brave new world, we’ll ask all citizens to tell everyone they see about the government policy, but only once that person has provided proof that they’re also a citizen.”

“The answer is whispering, and handwritten notes. Keep people completely analog and it simply can’t travel across seas. To spread the word in a controlable way, we need to take a step back (when ‘tablet’ still referred to the Ten Commandments—ha!). In this brave new world, we’ll ask all citizens to tell everyone they see about the government policy, but only once that person has provided proof that they’re also a citizen.”

“Network science experts anticipate the entire process, starting with one person in the center of Times Square, will take somewhere between thirty and seven hundred minutes for the greater New York City area, and then another five to eighteen years for the rest of the country. It’s not ideal. The problem is that there are citizens in the boonies—the fringes of Alaska, the corners of the Dakotas—that will simply be too far away to be reached. And that’s where advanced squat laws come in.”

“Squat laws are straightforward and, like the concept of daylight savings time, something that already exists in our laws. Basically, if someone finds land unattended for a certain period of time, they can claim it as their own. What I’m merely suggesting is shrinking the necessary vacancy period to one second. If you go to the store to get milk and come back to find a family of strangers peering around your own, it’s time to move on. It won’t be long until we have a nation of drifters, stepping outside of our comfort zones, seeing their homeland with wide eyes and the thrill of being uprooted without an end in sight, checking the IDs of everyone they see and then telling them our national secret.”

“And it will be a national secret. It’s very, very important no one knows about this. Not even France, unless they really promise not to blab. I mean, we can tell India too. Norway? Too judge-y? Okay, no one.”

“There’s nothing Washington loves to talk about more than limited resources: money, food, energy, housing, guns, rights, research. But the commodity that ties it all together is unlimited time. So conceived is the ‘present’ arena that we fail to see its malleability, that we can create our own definition of it, just like we’ve done with ‘democracy’ and ‘equality.’ With the backing of a unified Congress, and the support of a nation of whispering, note-passing vagabonds, it’s time to step out of the past, and into the future...”

—Andrea Lipstein

“TANKING IS, OF COURSE, THE MOST DETERMINED COUNTRY TO USE ITS PETROLEUM RESERVES TO TANK THEIR ECONOMY. THIS IS THE NEW POLICY, BUT ONLY ONCE THAT PERSON HAS PROVIDED PROOF THAT THEY’RE ALSO A CITIZEN.”

“The new policy, but only once the person has provided proof that they’re also a citizen.”

“Rarer still is the nation that enjoys true solitude, those lone desolate islands that are just a bit too ‘native’ for a Sandals Resort. But even they suffer from tribalism and its trappings, such as a dearth of language, forcing its people to express themselves through thigh-slaps and coo-coo babble. These disparities are natural, and thus just. But others are man-made, and must be overcome through political might.”

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“The new policy, but only once the person has provided proof that they’re also a citizen.”
Behind the world we know lies a secret history of incredible stories that have the power to change everything. Or at least around 60% of things. 65% tops.

Ballpark
The counterintuitive history of the power of guestimates

MALCOLM GLADWELL

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SHOUTS & MURMURS

TEST YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF HUMOR WRITING

BY BLYTHE ROBERSON

1. Why am I writing in this style?
   (a) 45 years ago I came up with the idea to use a multiple-choice format as a humor piece and I vowed to never try to think of another way to make jokes
   (b) I am not funny
   (c) In 2005 a witch put a spell on me that caused me to forget what “comedy” is

2. Why does anything I say about young people seem like it was written by an alien whose entire knowledge of humanity comes from one episode of 2 Broke Girls?
   (a) I am old and white and I assume anyone younger than me is a frivolous idiot
   (b) I read a New York Times trend piece about young people wearing pocket watches and I assume that pretty much sums it up
   (c) I know a lot about young people! I have three daughters who are 7, 5, and 3 years old and they are all named Caroline

3. What now?
   (a) Something about how women are ugly, old sluts?
   (b) Something about fat people being gross?
   (c) A joke about New Jersey?
   (d) Something about Native Americans, for no other reason than I want to be culturally tone deaf and I have never met a person of color in my life or even one woman not named Caroline?

4. What is the most relevant thing I can think of?
   (a) 50 Shades Of Grey
   (b) Miley Cyrus
   (c) The TV show Felicity
   (d) “Call Me Maybe”

5. I think “Call Me Maybe” is hilarious because I don’t know that Carly Rae Jepsen’s new album is:
   (a) Lit
   (b) Bae
   (c) “it me”
   (d) AF (as fuck)

6. If I tried to make it in comedy now, in 2016, I would:
   (a) Not be successful, because even though I am a privileged white man I am not funny
   (b) Have a Twitter where I tweet monologue jokes at the Tonight Show every night and within two months I would be hired

7. Why does anyone do anything differently than me??
   (a) They must be poor
   (b) They must be weird
   (c) Literally anything that anyone does is too strange for me because I spend all day sitting in an ecru room on a tan sofa while my wife Caroline and my three daughters Caroline Caroline and Caroline make crûité for me to eat while I watch a football game goooooo Payton Mannana

8. Why is there so little of my personality in these pieces?
   (a) I have no personality
   (b) I am actually a computer program designed to write jokes but I was coded back in the ‘80s before anyone really knew how computers worked
   (c) I do have a personality but it is very bland and if you met me in person this is exactly how I would be: Bad

9. True or false: I am so hateful because I am always exhausted from making sure absolutely no jokes slip into my humor pieces
   Answer: False. I am so hateful because I wish I had come up with the idea of doing a bad rip-off of The Onion, but someone beat me to it

10. Why is this piece still going?
    (a) Because I am a white man, no one has ever told me anything I have ever done is bad
    (b) I am a millionaire probably
    (c) I actively hate the readers of The New Yorker

THE NEW YORKER, JUNE 20, 2016
PERSONAL HISTORY

FINDING MY GALLOP

The equine, the exquisite

BY NICOLE SILVERBERG

MY JOURNEY as a horse begins, strangely, in the middle.
In 2007, as I approached my fortieth birthday, I felt an unprecedented
sense of failure. My husband, Andrew, and I had been married over ten years,
had two beautiful daughters, and a house staff of five. I was in terrific
physical health and owned a business, yet I felt a daunting pang of discomfort
during the most mundane of daily tasks: lowering myself into a car, taking
a bite of my half-grapefruit breakfast, drying myself with a towel—even
when reading to my youngest daughter, Genna.

The very nature of a parasite is its clandestine takeover, and so it was with
my dreams of another, more complete life. At first it was just a glint of desire,
so small I hardly noticed. But over many years it became the elephant in the room—and it was a loud elephant.

The elephant was screaming.

Alas, I longed to become a horse—not necessarily in identity, but certainly
in behavior—a confession that earned more than its fair share of scoffs. “Only horses are horses,” I heard from many friends as they looked past me, fearful of eye contact. As if becoming a horse is any more impossible than my girl-friends’ quest for eternal youth?

I’m quite aware of the reputation horses have earned in modern society: majestic in the wild, persecuted in the cities, but always odd-toed ungulates. Yet to me it was simple: while I have never been any good at sports or the arts (no matter how many times my father put a squash racket in my hand or my mother put ballet shoes on my feet!) I’ve always loved horses very deeply. Racing like a horse seemed like a natural evolution, a way of honoring the main constant in my life—and to have some fun! This wasn’t a mid-life crisis. And I wasn’t about to take no for an answer.

Andrew and I have a unique, special marriage in which nothing is off limits. This has led to a fair share of embarrassing run-ins (you try explaining to your in-laws why, in a feat of lovemaking, you entirely de-tiled their bathroom?) but also affords a safe space of discussion that has saved the house from arson on at least three occasions.

And so, when I finally told him of my ambitions—to become what I’d always idolized, to gallop and trot, to become a horse, and a damn good one at that—he listened.

I CANNOT REMEMBER the first time I saw a horse. Growing up in the cowboy terrain of Arizona, they seemed to be a part of the landscape, as natural as the purple mountains or rigid saguaros that dotted the skyline. Beyond the wash behind my house was a small, private ranch, and on clear days I could peer over my back wall and see the thick chocolate burrito bodies of my equine amigos.

From clothing to framed paintings to stuffed animals (whose yarn mane I would raggedly brush with my own comb), my childhood was almost entirely populated with these companions. They held a particular addictive magic no other doll or toy train could match. I would sit for hours in our ornate playroom, stroking my little horses with the tenderness and love a nanny gives to the child she cares for.

Other horse lovers of my youth took pleasure in riding or grooming the beautiful beasts, but however many times my father took me to the stables, I couldn’t quite bring myself to make physical contact. A pensive, sensitive child, I felt overwhelmed when confronted face-to-face with their majesty. Who could blame a delicate girl like myself? After all, horses are quite tall.

Instead I was mesmerized by

The author went on a quest that was truly her own. There were costs, but it was a journey to which she could not say ‘nay.’

IMAGE BY JAMES FOLTA
Horse racing has been around since the times of Ancient Greece; horses have been around even longer. Once I graduated from university, I did what so many ambitious people do: I reverted to childhood. I didn’t move back in with my parents, but I did take an interest in horse racing—not betting money, but learning everything I could about the jockeys, the horses, the different track surfaces, and the derbies. If my love for elite horses had gone dormant over the four years I was immersing myself in Latin, literature, and cheap champagne, it was awakened now.

Horse racing is, at its core, one of the simplest competitions in existence. Though the particulars and traditions change from country to country, all horse racing determines one thing: What horse is fastest over a fixed distance?

The most common type of racing is “flat racing,” in which the horse rides “on the tongue” of the jockey gallops a track between two points to test its speed and stamina. Tracks can be as short as 400 meters and as long as 2.5 miles, though the most famous derbies usually test a distance of 1 or 1.25 miles.

In the United States, these races are mainly designed for Thoroughbreds. The birth of North American horse races was Salisbury, New York (now the Hempstead Track in Long Island), in 1665. The two biggest competitions in the country are the famous Kentucky Derby, held on the first Saturday of May in Louisville, and the Preakness Stakes, held two weeks later in Baltimore.

I attended my first Kentucky Derby by the father of my college, taking a young then-boyfriend who was something of Tennessee royalty. His family had attended the Kentucky Derby since its inception, and to join them was nothing short of a pre-marriage ritual to test my compatibility.

Beneath the brim of my hat (which barely arrived in time from France the night before) I could see my boyfriend’s mother, as majestic as the horses themselves. Thin and sinewy, she was an agile woman, darting from person to person to make sure the show went smoothly. I could see how an eager first-timer swept up in the moment could mistake her for a horse, assuming she was the horse. I had been clipping the most unusual bits from the paper for months to assemble into a small scrapbook to give Andrew upon his return. Sure, some husbands would rather have the gift of American football tickets, but what can I say? We’re intellectual.

One autumn morning I found a curious ad that read: “WANTED: RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS FOR HORSE ROLEPLAY.” I was horrified, but intrigued. What could it mean?

I put the paper away, but over the next several days, my mind kept returning to the ad. I was afraid the role-play was sexual or unsafe; I had heard horror stories from girlfriends about being brought to “interactive” theatre pieces in seedier parts of the city. Yet the word “research” had become hooked. Ever since I was a little girl, I’ve loved research almost as much as I’ve loved horses.

Perhaps I was afraid to admit to myself that however much information I had gathered about horse racing, there was still an element that felt entirely unattainable: the feeling of being the horse. Being a race participant in horse role-play would fill in some of the gaps—or at least connect me to someone who could.

I called the number from the paper and, to my surprise, was met with a warm female voice on the other end. “I’m calling in regard to your horse-play ad,” I said, so nervous I was already using up my words.

“Where are you available?” the voice on the other end said. “We have sessions on Tuesday and Thursday nights.”

I was overwhelmed. What happened in the sessions? Who exactly was I speaking to?

“You are still there,” the woman asked gently. “The sessions last an hour, tops. It pays $20 cash. You don’t have to bring anything, just wear close-toed shoes.”

Before I knew it, I was writing down an address, having hardly said five words over the phone. I looked up the address in the phonebook and was surprised to see that it belonged to a psychology lab at New York University. Maybe the mystery voice wasn’t out to get me after all.

When I arrived the following Tuesday night, I was surprised to see not an open space or a mock pasture, but a set of cubicles, each containing a computer monitor. I was led into a cubicle and handed industrial-looking goggles. It was explained to me that graduate students were studying herd mentality, and that my goggles would adjust my depth perception. The experiment involved looking at different photos of horses and pressing different letter keys on my keyboard depending on my instincts. It was terribly boring.

When I emerged from my cubicle nearly an hour later, I felt defeated. I had learned nothing from the “herd mentality exercise” except that my fingers were sore. I made a mental note to book a deep tissue massage for the disappointment alone, I’d earned it.

I was halfway out the door when I remembered something curious; I turned back to the proctor.

“Why did you say I needed to wear close-toed shoes?” I asked, with a maybe a bit more bite than I intended.

“Randomly selected participants also have to operate a foot pedal,” the bespectacled girl squealed. “Not you, obviously.”

I stomped out of the room, feeling personally attacked. Why had this research project advertised itself so vaguely? Why couldn’t they research something I was truly interested in? And why was I so disappointed? It made little sense.

In the weeks after the lab, I started doing research to see if there was a service like what I had been hoping the experiment would be. I wanted someone to teach me how to embody a horse so that I could, in my spare time, find personal enjoyment through galloping and maybe one day compete. I had difficulty finding an instructor, but I realize now that this was a pivotal moment for my passion and me.

Before I knew it, Andrew returned from Iowa, and a week after that we became engaged. With wedding plans, the horse dream would have to wait.

"Crab? Like the animal?"
B Y T H E T I M E | I was pregnant with our first daughter, Mattalia, Andrew and I had started living upstate more than half the year. When speaking to my best friends in the city, I would feign frustration at the lack of culture and activity in our new rural home, but in truth I appreciated the calmer lifestyle, simpler people, and the opportunity to have quiet time with my husband before the baby came. Besides, anyone will tell you July in Manhattan is not the ideal place to have swollen ankles and a small bladder, no matter how nearby your driver is.

Throughout my pregnancy, I recalled a pregnant mare that had lived on the neighboring ranch when I was a child. I watched that horse obsessively, on the autumn night, Genna was born, and our surrogate. But on a special rainy autumn day, I was pregnant with my pregnancy for me, Andrew, and our baby came. Besides, anyone will tell you July in Manhattan is not the ideal place to have swollen ankles and a small bladder, no matter how nearby your driver is.

After Mattalia was born, I entered a state of bliss. Gone were my petty concerns of being the best liked in my social circle, or even the important concerns, like wearing the most fashionable outfits. I was completely content to just sit with my wet nurse and Mattalia. Everything felt destined.

Three years later, my second daughter was born. It was a difficult pregnancy for me, Andrew, and our surrogate. But on a special autumn night, Genna was born, and our family was complete.

I had a feeling of arrival in my life; it was in the same region of my country as they had lived.

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help but feel like I was being punished for my creativity.

George Bush was a strange little man with a tendency to start every sentence with the phrase “Quite frankly.” His jockey career had ended after allegations of stealing from his employer, but I’d been keeping a close eye on the horses’ bank accounts and nothing seemed askew.

I had been subtly trying to gauge George Bush’s interest. I’d learned a set of skills. My father had always maintained that passion and determination could open any door as long as you had money to back it up. As much as I had been denying it, Andrew was correct. If I was going to do this, I was going to need to fund my family by my side.

The next day, I flew Mattalia home from Europe and informed her that she would be taking a yearlong break from her skiing trials, no matter the impact. I withdrew Genna from her Manhattan school. The entire family would be settled upstate year-round for me to pursue my horse hobby full-time with them by my side. But that meant one final thing needed to be done.

I shut down Milk Soap, letting everyone in the company go. Horses don’t own businesses, and so neither would I.

My life had moved from a canter to a gallop, and it was time to race.

T hough I had been informally racing the Thoroughbreds in our barn for over a year, the time had come for a real competition to showcase my skills. This had become more than a hobby to me; it was a side career.

We had built a track behind the spare space barn (for the horses in case the now defunct Milk Soap had wanted to expand), and hired two more jockeys to work under George Bush. We set the date of the race, and got working.

The event was years in the making. The suit was still a prototype then, and wasn’t nearly as fashionable or ergonomic as I’d have liked. But from the moment I put it on, I felt positively ferocious.

I was only able to devote a few hours every couple days to my new hobby of horseracing as much as I wanted to give more. I felt guilt about prioritizing it. I didn’t want to leave Andrew with an unfair share of the parenting or staff control. So many other mothers had to pursue a hobby like mine with me on this very same dilemma—the desire to be the perfect mother and wife, but the need to answer a different, perhaps higher, call.

And, on top of all that, we were still spending several months a year at our place in Manhattan. Genna was enrolled in two kindergartens (one upscale and one in the city) in order to allow us freedom to travel. Mattalia, now nine, was on a fast track to becoming an Olympic skier, and would go to Italy and Switzerland for months every year. At that time, I had come to enjoy the chaos, and I didn’t want to live with time on the slopes.

We were proud of Mattalia, who clearly possessed a warrior’s spirit. Brilliant, athletic, and resourceful, our sweet girl was a world champion. I wanted to be just like her, and couldn’t help but notice the irony that my pursuits to emulate her meant that I could not be present to support her. She’d started calling me “Mommy Nursery” and the nanny “Nanny Mommy.” Could I live with that?

Every time I pushed forward with my horse work, I was inevitably missing dinner or a parent-teacher conference or a qualifying Olympic trial. I was frustrated and felt, for the first time in my life, helpless. Wasn’t I entitled to a life of bliss and purpose? Yes, I had a family and a business and homes, but that hardly mattered.

Then my father fell ill.
before daybreak the next morning. Out, mercifully quickly, to the dim roar deviant, before beating a retreat. I passed for a moment, evidently reappraising allowed, in which I decided it would be a couple came in. An awkward pause fol-

There was no alternative but to lick the footage now, it seems the perfect way, but I knew I was going to be a challenge; morning on in the dining room, this was begin-

some of the lens solution had leaked, was going to be a challenge; morning on in the dining room, this was begin-

slightly disreputable unicorn. I took out ibex, though in profile it looked like a

Triglav National Park I got into a car and drove into a road. In the middle of the road I got out and walked on the road. It was a Sunday morning race, and it was a mostly private event, attended by a few of the kids’ friends and some neighbors who were interested in the fun. I was glad to have an audience, but focused on what was most important. This was about me. Would I succeed? Could I? In previous trials, I was able to beat the oldest horses, but often lost to the more experienced racers.

“Quite frankly, it’s not your fault.” George Bush would say to me, and I knew he was right. But I wanted to win to prove to everyone—Elizabeth, friends, my father, Andrew, myself—that this was time well spent.

I zipped myself into the newest version of my horse suit, a functional work of art. A childhood friend was now an industrial couture designer in Paris, and had offered to improve upon the first version for me. Made of velvet and puriﬁed dirt with burlap and gold leaf accents, the suit was nothing short of divine.

As I trotted out to the track, I made eye contact with George Bush: my mentor, my leader, and my jockey. I approached him for a ﬁnal brush. I took the groom as an opportunity to focus. Then it was time for the mount.

I could feel the weight of George Bush on my back and as I stretched my legs, I felt all human thought ﬂy out of me. I was no longer a mother, husband, and horse hobbyist—I simply was the horse. I felt a deep con-

connection with my surroundings from my fellow competitors to the ground I scraped my hoof against. I knew that I had ﬁnally ascended into a humble self-actualization.

I thought the race would be a blur of adrenaline, but I was hyperaware of every moment. I could feel the motion of my legs, the pattern of my gallop, all as natural as breath itself. I was pos-

sessed by the intense ambition that had guided me to that moment, and I placed second of ﬁfth!

I was as elated as I was exhausted, and I was eating the sugar cubes to prove it.

After the race, Andrew approached me; he touched my snout gently, petting my mane. I nestled into him. I knew he was proud of me, because I was proud of myself.

It may embarrass him for me to share it, but Andrew and I made love through my horse suit that night—a ﬁnal consummation on my internal transformation and achievement. The next morning at the breakfast table, I heard the girls asking our chef, “I heard neighing last night—was there a horse in the house?” Andrew and I couldn’t stop laughing. Our life, ﬁnally, was complete.

THE VERY ESSENCE of being alive is one of change. We are forced to adapt, and it only behooves us to ﬁnd a path of adaptation that brings us joy. I think of my father, who followed his whims responsibly and lived a long, fruitful life on three continents. I think of my loving husband, who chooses to never question, but always declines to answer. I think of George Bush. I think of my daughters, who are being brought up by a mother who believes in ﬁnding personal power and holding on tight. Mattalia will compete in the Olympics for the second time next year, and Genna is already the “quirky” one. She dreams of Yale Law School.

In years since my ﬁrst race, I’ve competed close to eighty times in both private and public contexts. My body has stayed taut and athletic, and my mind has sharpened. For entire days at a time, I’ll ﬁnd myself in a horse mindset—practically unable to communicate with speech. Even now as I type, my ﬁngers feel stiﬂed, aching to be hooved. In this way, I’m free.

Will time travel exist in my lifetime? Perhaps. I think often of the moment to which I return. Would I speak to my ex-boyfriend’s mother who introduced me to derbies? The meek lab proctor who, by failing, showed me what success meant to me? My dad? No. I think I would visit my younger self.

If I could go back in time to visit myself as a child in Arizona, what would I say? Would I let that small girl know what’s in store? Or would I walk right past her, hop over the buck fence, and walk onto the ranch to be with my greatest equine inspirations? Yes.

I think they would recognize me as one of their own. I think we would gallop...

“The new issue has a brilliant article analyzing the situation in Syria or something.”
From 1990 to 2011, Larry Schnotz didn’t tie a single knot. he reminded me of the fragile final set-piece in a game of pickup sticks. Still, he is an indefatigable character. He has faint scarring along his forearms and hands from a teenage fire-breathing accident. (The flame never made it to his mouth.) He also has a habit of talking to himself, and, when he makes a mistake, aping his mother’s old censure: “Oh, Dunklin, you’ve done it again.” He took two shots of an unidentifiable spirit, and we were off.

Our destination was about forty miles northwest of the city, to the remote mountainous region near Ben Wyvis—from the Gaelic, “Hill of Terror.” Once there, Donegan and I would begin our search for the man I came here for. We would have to track him down by our own means: no one knew for certain where he lived, or, frankly, if he was even alive. He was once the most famous knot expert, or knotsman, in the world. In the 1980s, he was perennially considered a popular candidate for knighthood, and, over a career spanning several decades, his admirers have included the likes of David Cameron, Michel Houellebecq, and Dame Helen Mirren. But Larry Schnotz hadn’t been seen in twenty-five years. The reason for his disappearance was unknown, but recently rumors had begun to surface. Some said that Schnotz was working again. In fact, they said, he’d been working throughout his supposed hiatus. For the last twenty-five years, Schnotz had been developing the Holy Grail of knots—a knot that would subsume all others. Now, it was tied.

T HIS PAST SEPTEMBER, I sat in a cozy, dimly lit pub, overlooking the River Ness, in what is generally regarded as the capital city of the Scottish Highlands, Inverness. Across the bank, and a few hundred yards upriver, stood Inverness Castle, a red sandstone structure built into the cliff, whose foundations date back to the eleventh century. The pub was mostly empty, save for a small group of tourists preparing to visit the famed loch, twenty-three miles to the southwest, of which the eponymous river stems. I initially balked at ordering a drink—it was 10:00 A.M. on a Tuesday—but my day guide was late, and the tourist group was already at it. I ordered a stout brown ale.

Ten minutes later, Dunklin Donegan slid into my booth. Donegan is a pitcher, and the house is infested, solely by members of their bat-wielding teammates. I guess I’d be used to walking up to the sound of “My Sharona,” by the Feelies, and my own Borders, en route from Edinburgh or the Shetland Islands to the north. “We’d lose Donegan, only to lose it again on her own. When he was thirteen, his father left on a haphazard trip to New York, where he would find another job as a trucy officer, only to lose it again weeks later. “He was lazy and forgetful,” Donegan told me. It was around this time that he took up fire-breathing. Still, knots captivated him more than anything. At the port, two older deckhands, Fergus and Drewed, would teach the young Donegan three to four new knots each time they came to harbor, en route from Edinburgh or the Shetland Islands to the north. “We’d pull into town, and there would be Dunski, date a quoy,” said Fergus. “Oh please, sir, teach me more about knots,” he’d say. “I need to know more about knots, or I’ll never amount to anything.”

Fergus and Drewed eventually taught Donegan about Schnotz, whom they had known, and who had gone into hiding about eight years prior. “Larry was a real prodigy,” Drewed told me. He said that Schnotz “was like da Vinci, excepting that he really had no talents other than tying knots. But, say if Da Vinci only had one talent—like if da Vinci was the F. Scott Fitzgerald of his day—that’s what Larry was: the F. Scott Fitzgerald of knots. And me and Fergie thought Donegan was the same way, excepting that he was definitely way worse than Larry at tying knots.”

The more he learned, the more Donegan became obsessed. He read every piece of literature on Schnotz he could find and methodically worked his way through Schnotz’s own voluminous bibliography. First, the basics: “Knots for Knot’s Sake,” “Knots of Ol’ Knoped,” and “Larry’s Last Knot... Not!” These books are essentially primers on the history and craft of knotsmanship, published in the mid- to late-seventies, and include tutorials on some of Schnotz’s favorite standards. From there, Schnotz’s oeuvre becomes characteristically esoteric. There’s “Knotsrodamus,” published in 1981, followed three years later by “Knotsicism: Do Knots Exist?” and, in 1985, “Knotshiilim: Knot Don’t Exist.” These works are all but inaccessible to even the most experienced knotsmen, much less a novice, but they assume a Biblical significance for Donegan. I thumbed through some of his well-worn copies and hardly knew where to begin. There were rough etchings, occult symbols, whole passages of the Greek poetess Sappho, untranslated and previously thought to be lost. One of Schnotz’s more curious works, “Knot Knot Jokes: Not Bad Jokes,” consisted of five pages of top-pop figures, none of which were knots (and, incidentally, none of which were recognizable as anything at all).

Some have accused Schnotz of obfuscation. Ten years ago, in the midst of one of Schnotz’s decadent renaissances, the critic N.Q. Voldenheim died and the contents of six whole books could be arranged into a single uninterrupterd acrostic. If true, the discovery was a miracle. But the acrostic followed a complex code of lateral moves unique to each page, and Voldenheim died shortly after his discovery, before he could publish his findings. A cryptog-
three poems by tim platt

Poem 1:

i. the chameleon’s tongue is its most boring flesh its springing shocks the weak-willed cadavers too thoraxed to fly

ii. the chameleon’s eyes dart as independently as two brothers in the back seat of a moving car straining their belts as they claw for different bags of sugar on the packed ground

iii. the skin of each chameleon is the same in its variety another boring cycle of change in a tree too used to color

iv. the chameleon is my favorite dang animal (lizard)

Poem 2: a glue spotted spaniel a dog covered in glue a pooch patched with glue there’s so much glue on that dog that dog is covered in glue

Poem 3: though derelict and dismal craig’s body grew and grew and grew, blemused portentions magnify a giant’s jar of pickled brew-infused with pust with piss and stink and stuffed with stuff that giant’s drink-craig froze affix’d upon the jar for there was enough for two.

camera eyes confound aflash betroth’d despite a poor review craig’s hands-begirded-grasp, lift to sip the giant’s jar of pickled brew. “for sack the flare, despise the shine-respite from crimson fists and wine” read ribbons banded round the hall outlined’d by glitter and glue.

braggin bozos barely born formed then reformed a merry crew. adorn’d their king’s thorn crown with drink-the giant’s jar of pickled brew. as liquids pour from cup to crown the bozos’ eyes glue on the brown of bozo king, king bozo born by the daughters of the coup.

—tim platt

while all this may fall somewhere between benign lunacy and perilous imbecility, nearly everyone i spoke to on the subject echoed McCauley’s enthusiasm. “larry rapped on and on about the Knot of Life,” said fergus. “he’d go weeks without sleeping, just thinking about it—couldn’t put hand to rope,” Drewed concurred. They said that in the mid-twenties, to usher in some kind of revelation, Schnotz moved to the countryside just beyond Inverness proper. He fashioned himself in the mold of a modern-day prophet, and his behavior became increasingly strange. He dined on wild oats and locusts. With a nod to Descartes (knowingly or otherwise), he once walked into the town laundermat, curled up inside a running dryer, and meditated for a week and a half. When that failed, he thought a new hobby might spark his creativity. He discovered a documentary on bagpipes—he had never heard of them—and tried to teach himself how to play. Even accounting for the instrument’s formidable difficulty, Drewed told me that Schnotz was remarkably bad. His nearest neighbors from several miles away petitioned and won a municipal injunction that forced him to quit. Still, Schnotz sought inspiration. He tried falconry and lost four falcons in three hours, all of which returned a few days later to attack him in unison. The following week he was diagnosed with a rare strain of avian influenza, or bird flu. The doctors indicated it was contracted from a separate incident.

Nevertheless, although he’d grown erratic, Schnotz’s disappearance a few years later remained a mystery. Throughout this period, he had continued to go into town to socialize, on occasion. Friends said he seemed to be straightening out. In 1989, he wrote...
I COULD TELL Donegan was nervous as we began to approach Ben Wyvis. More than anyone I’d met, he had placed all his faith in the Knot of Life, and, in particular, Schnotz’s hypothesis that it contained a portal to another world. “I haven’t seen him since.”

One day he was just gone,” said Drewed. “Haven’t seen him since.”

“Red Rover, Bring Larry Schnotz Over: To fulfill books of his career, “Red Rover, Red fog had rolled in and obscured our view. It was inaccessible to vehicles. We drove up into the gray sky. According to his self as a “guerilla atheist.” Fergus and Donegan was -

As Donegan and I joined him by the base. Donegan paused and peered up into the wall off the mountain’s southern face, which opened to a small shack built somewhere into the side of a mound. “That’s how he stumbled upon his love of knots. He looked perplexed. “It was just a thing old folks talked about.”

I'd exhumed from his pack pocket. He’d held them up, resulting in an accordion effect, which sharply narrows in the chest and neck, and is interminably curious, and, when he asks a question, he tilts his head to the right and sticks his tongue between his teeth, like a Bichon Frise.” I “like show tunes and smashing Pumpkins,” he’d said. “It’s a part of me. The way I came out of the cradle entwining.”

Schnotz was confused about Scotland’s Revolutionary Highlanders. “I grew up in Inverness pubs, where old men would discuss politics and tried his best to heed him much.”

Growing up in Cold War Scotland was tough on the young Larry. Larry Schnotz was a member of the underground Revolutionary Highlanders Worker’s Party, the Lowlander chapter, were commonly known as Sea Levelers. As a child, Schnotz was confused about Scotland’s turbulent political state (wholly caddied in standard American history textbooks). “My father came home from meetings all round up, saying wild things like—Larry, the proletariat’s a cuss; so I’d go home and smoke cigarettes. She didn’t heed him much.”

*After we book up I’ll want to blog a little.*

As Donegan tapped his scarred fingers against the steering wheel. Soon, the southern hills of Ben Wyvis loomed in the distance, a steep, barren ridge shot up into the gray sky. According to his account, Schnotz was rumored to live in a shack built somewhere into the side of the mountain’s southern face, which was inaccessible to vehicles. We drove another three miles, parked by the roadside, and began to walk.

For more than an hour, we saw no life forms, human or otherwise, when suddenly some black mass of a bird streaked overhead, startling us and causing Donegan to cough up a large, leaf-shaped block of cheese that he’d exhumed from his pack pocket. Soon, we reached a depression in the mountain, which opened to a small brook and waterfall, twenty feet wide at the base. Donegan paused and peered up to find the fall’s source, but a thick fog had rolled in and obscured our view. We leapt through. On the other side of the fall, directly in front of us, was a stairwell carved out from the boulders of the mountain. Donegan took off, and I hurried after him in the darkness, feeling the way with my hands.

When the stair ended, I stood beside Donegan on a ledge, three-quarters of the way up the mountain. A stream sprang from a crevice in the rock to our right. To our left, the wall sucked in and the shoulder was worn. A wattle and daub hut was in the corner. Larry Schnotz stood before us holding a dead ravens and an iron-pronged shovel. He looked as if he’d been waiting.

*CHNOTZ IS SHAPED IN THE FASHION of your father’s bedside lamp: round, splated feet form a firm foundation, which sharply narrows in the legs, bulges in the waist, thins in the chest and neck, and is finally engulfed by a conic shag of extra-white hair that extends well past his shoulders. Despite his fububas, Schnotz’s jeans were still a size and a half too big, and he tied a rag around his neck to keep it from falling. He smiled and pointed beneath the faux nest, where the ground was caked in feathers.

Inside, Schnotz’s hut was larger than I expected. Lanterns hung from the rafters, and a cataract of knots covered the walls, each one tagged with a small paper label. I checked over two hundred of these against my research to ensure I hadn’t previously come across any of them. Most names were typically Schnotzian: Paulos and Francesca in Hell; Pinick’s Promise; the Savage Phoenixian; the Jack and Rose Ship; Cheyenne’s Buckle; Hamlet’s Solutionary; Harry, Meet Sally; I asked Schnotz how many there were; he had no idea.

As Donegan and I joined him by the fire, he poured us two bright red draughts of Hi-C, and started to signal for me to imitate him so that you folks’ most favorite music group?”

“Smashing Pumpkins for over an hour. I poured us two bright red cups. He raised his cup in a toast, and we drank. Having broached the reason for our visit, I asked him a few questions, but Schnotz was reluctant to discuss himself or his career. “What’s you folks’ obsession with me, anyway? You got a crush?” He giggled to himself. “I try not to get so knotted up in the details of life nowadays.” He nodded toward the wall to tip off his joke. “What’s you folks’ favorite music group?” he asked. “You like music?” Schnotz responded when he explained a question, he tilted his head to the right and sticks his tongue between his teeth, like a Bichon Frise.” I “like show tunes and SMASHING PUMPKINS,” he’d said. “It’s a part of me. The way I came out of the cradle entwining.”

He reached under the kitchen table for a small stereo, inserted a CD, and pressed play: “The world is a vampire!” Schnotz sang along word-for-word to “Bullet with Butterfly Wings,” raising his arms above his head and pumping his fists toward the ceiling. At the turn of the chorus, he climbed on top of the table, bopping up and down like an analog alarm clock. Donegan turned toward me; he looked back and signaled for me to imitate him so that you folks’ obsession with me, anyway? You got a crush?” He giggled to himself. “I try not to get so knotted up in the details of life nowadays.” He nodded toward the wall to tip off his joke. “What’s you folks’ favorite music group?” he asked. “You like music?” Schnotz responded when he explained a question, he tilted his head to the right and sticks his tongue between his teeth, like a Bichon Frise.” I “like show tunes and SMASHING PUMPKINS,” he’d said. “It’s a part of me. The way I came out of the cradle entwining.”

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For two weeks or more, I’d never felt comfortable discussing politics and tried his best to avoid it. After school, rather than going home, he began to hang around the Inverness pubs, where old men would talk. I’d say, “You’re going to be fine, I’m just saying stuff. I’d wake in the morning, see an old knot of mine, barf. Go outside, see a bag of knots, barf. And I’ll be standing, and there’s something yellow, or I’d run into them trying to feel my way around, and barf some more. For years I lived like that, barfing on knots.”

One day, around the summer of 1999, Schnotz had a revelation. “Well, I realized I could untie them,” he said. The aftereffect of this notion was severe. He became obsessed with untwisting knots. “Take how much I loved tying knots. And make it bigger, like a bigger knot. “Take how much I loved tying knots. And make it bigger, like a bigger knot. So, I tied two loops, and he asked about them, and I told him about how I’d grown sick of believing in that hocus pocus. It don’t exist.” (At this, Donegan shuddered, and I almost started to cry. At this, Donegan shuddered, and I almost started to cry.)

When asked Schnotz how he could know for certain that the Knot of Life was merely a myth, he shrugged his shoulders. “Of course, I supposed he should reply.”

Schnotz told me that from 1990, when he first fled to Ben Wyvis, in 2011, he didn’t tie a single knot. “I said to myself, Hey, what have you done with your life? Hey, I’m talking to you! You’ve wasted it, sitting around, tying knots.” He said that he’d “grown sick of this.” He meant literally. At the sight of a knot, he would “go queasy and just start barfing stuff up. I’d wake in the morning, see an old knot of mine, barf. Go outside, see a bag of knots, barf. And I’d be standing, and there’s something yellow, or I’d run into them trying to feel my way around, and barf some more. For years I lived like that, barfing on knots.”

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“Is the snark fresh today?”

“Most of the time it won’t take me but two or three minutes to untie a knot, even a bad one. But after ten minutes I still hadn’t finished. I said, Hey, weird! I checked nine hours to finish, Lou must’ve caught a dozen fish on his other line at that point. But, by the time I was done, I realized that was a beautiful knot, beautiful in its fearlessness. I handed the line back to Lou and haven’t seen him or the lake since.”

“So you went back to tying knots?” asked Donegan.

“Oh yes,” said Schnotz. “All these in four years,” he said, pointing to the walls. He looked at Donegan. “You don’t know how to tie a knot until you’ve learned to untie one.”

HE NEXT MORNING, Donegan had the haggard look of some one who had suffered rough dreams and little sleep. His eyes drooped, and, as he tended to the fire, flames played on his shirtless, pelucid torso, illuminating his entrails so that he seemed a glass station summer roll. While Schnotz and I had stayed up late talking, Donegan had opted to sleep outside, clearly shaken by Schnotz’s knot-of-life postmortem. “Just de-flated, that’s all,” Donegan assured me, on the drive back to Inverness.

When I told Ferguson and Drewed about Schnotz days later, they were simultaneously non-plussed and suspicious. “Larry’s always up to something,” said Ferguson. “You really think he’s got it?”

After weeks, I stopped bartering, and whether I’d brought any. After Donegan had shown the Knot of Life after Donegan had seemed to have recovered.

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“Two or three minutes to untie a knot, even a bad one. But after ten minutes I still hadn’t finished. I said, Hey, weird! I checked nine hours to finish, Lou must’ve caught a dozen fish on his other line at that point. But, by the time I was done, I realized that was a beautiful knot, beautiful in its fearlessness. I handed the line back to Lou and haven’t seen him or the lake since.”

“So you went back to tying knots?” asked Donegan.

“Oh yes,” said Schnotz. “All these in four years,” he said, pointing to the walls. He looked at Donegan. “You don’t know how to tie a knot until you’ve learned to untie one.”

HE NEXT MORNING, Donegan had the haggard look of some one who had suffered rough dreams and little sleep. His eyes drooped, and, as he tended to the fire, flames played on his shirtless, pelucid torso, illuminating his entrails so that he seemed a glass station summer roll. While Schnotz and I had stayed up late talking, Donegan had opted to sleep outside, clearly shaken by Schnotz’s knot-of-life postmortem. “Just de-flated, that’s all,” Donegan assured me, on the drive back to Inverness.

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I T WAS 1996 when the Pittsburgh Steelers lost to the Dallas Cowboys on Super Bowl XXX, but it was not the defeat that left a long-lasting impression on composer Oliver Robeson; in fact, it was the national anthem, not how it was sung necessarily, but perhaps that it was sung at all. “No travesty had stricken such a traumatic blow to my musical imagination than the egomaniacal disposition with which the average—and I mean average—singer exploits this categorically abysmal National Anthem,” he wrote in his private diaries. “It made me realize how much joy a vocalist would hold hostage in order to bolster their egos. There is no need for prolonging the singer’s moment in that context. Then again, there’s no context for which prolonging a singer’s moment is allowable, let alone even giving those monsters any moment to ruin.” To this day he claims that his favorite national anthem is the Roman national anthem, as he has yet to hear it.

Robeson does not much remember being exposed to the joys of singing in his childhood; as a white male his church’s attempts to invigorate the ceremony often felt stilted and awkward. The sound, as he recalls it, carried an unpleasant yet validating ghostliness to it: “I liked how ashamed they were to sing, those people,” he said. “They ought to feel that way given what an absurd gesture it truly is. And shame is the church’s bread and butter. I can tolerate the shameful act of singing so long as the performer feels the shame with me. I’m so tired of how oblivious they are to themselves.” His parents were avid listeners of classic rock and soul, never singing along to the radio for fear of ruining the listening experience for other family members; he had learned from that experience that his parents were generous enough to “let the awfulness of a singer speak for itself.” Once when his cousin came to visit she began to sing along to Frankie Valli & The Four Seasons. Twenty minutes later, a doctor had to surgically remove a mechanical pencil from Robeson’s ear. “I clicked the eraser bit repeatedly hoping the lead would enter my brain and poison me. But I wasn’t so lucky.” In an unfortunate foreshadowing of his old-age impotence, there was no lead in his pencil.

As a child, Robeson’s sanctuary became the library due to its strict adherence to the values of silence. Even whispers seemed like tiny revolts against propriety during long sessions studying the point of singing. He detested hummers, literally. By chance he pulled a score of Mahler’s Eighth Symphony, scribbled a note in it, and presented it to a customer at the library who was humming. It stated, “Why don’t you keep your masturbating to yourself and wank it in the restroom?” To this day it remains not only a cogent request, but an accurate critique of Mahler’s Eighth. Robeson’s aversion to the human voice became quite trouble-some only when he began attending elementary school. His parents, of Irish Catholic descent, had very little experience with the pleasures of verbal communication, or the pleasures of anything for that matter, and maintained that value system until their appropriately stoic and anguished deaths. On her last day alive, Robeson’s mother drove to the beach in a bathrobe with all of its pockets filled with stones, and stared into the distance. Police found her dead that evening.

Robeson remembers reacting very quietly. The day before his 44th birthday, the investigation confirmed the worst: she threw the stones across the surface of the water, used the bathrobe as a towel to sunbathe nude, and then accidentally shot herself with a pistol.

“I knew she always respected my wishes until the very end,” Robeson said of her many years later. “The pistol had a silencer.” He was an only child in a neighborhood with no other children his age with which to play. He remembers his first transgression as a student when a classmate tried to teach his peers how to whistle. In an attempt to eliminate the piercing sound from the air, he grabbed an eraser from the chalkboard and tried to erase the boy’s lips. “WHY MUST YOU MAKE IT ALL ABOUT YOU?” he hissed at his classmate before being sent to the principal’s office. His parents were quite in character in their punishment: “They simply told me to never, ever do it again. It was stern, but mercifully short,” he wrote. “Their words stung, if only because they were spoken out loud.”

Robeson did, however, have plenty of role models in his upbringing. He admired the silent...
WHAT’S INSIDE OF ME

We walk this weary world half dead
Trapped in bodies, thoughts locked in heads
But outside only hold the fragility
If only you could see inside of me.

Blood that pumps and lungs that churn,
An engorged heart that thumps and yearns
Arteries severely clogged
From years of eating butter logs.

A shriveled liver soaked in gin,
Pooriasis has worn it thin.
A family of spiders laid a nest,
Inside the kidney I loved best.

I should’ve censored the fuck,” he reflects.
Robeson’s all-vocal arrangement of John Cage’s 4’33”
still struggles, to this day, to find any
mainstream performance opportunities.
“It goes to show you that you really can’t shut up a singer, any singer,” he writes.

Without it, his performance is less
enact more moments of silence for
our fallen warriors, perhaps one every
seven or eight,” he recalls in his
memoirs. “Well, it turns out I only
saw two-thirds of it or something like that. People find my preference
for it over the ‘I Have A Dream’ speech incredibly galling. I don’t get it.” School was miserable for
him with the exception of one student assembly where a professional
mime performed for the children.

“I was enraptured,” he commented.
“I have blocked out of my memory
the primitive shrieks of laughter.”
Because mimes didn’t
exist because of how he detested
the use of voice. His parents capitulated
without knowing any music
theory or the structure of musical
notation, Robeson set out to trans-
pose all four minutes and thirty-
three seconds of Cage’s totally silent masterwork from piano to
voice. He had no inkling for tran-
scribing the octaves of the piano to separate vocal registers; further-
more, there was the issue of writ-
ing transcriptions of total silence for innumerable permutations of
vocal ensembles: mixed choirs,
boy’s choirs, all-male or all-female choirs, even the more insufferable
ensembles like collegiate a cappel-
a. After several minutes of writ-
ing “Everyone just shut the fuck
up for this long,” and photocopy-
ing the pages, Robeson created his
first arrangement of 4’33” in less
than an hour and showed it to his
CCD instructor at the St. Therese
parish in Munhall, Pennsylvania.
Robeson petitioned her by writing
furiously that it should be consid-
ered a hymn for the next service,
but she quipped. He spent the following Friday listen-
ing to it repeatedly on a vinyl in
the Homestead public library, and even
relishing the score. He describes it as
a revolutionary moment for him, and
wanted desperately to surmise
whether or not such a piece would
work for a choir. (Robeson once
told me if he were ever made Pres-
ident, he would declare 4’33” our
national anthem. He would also
enact more moments of silence for
fallen warriors, perhaps one every
quarter of an hour.)

Without knowing any music
theory or the structure of musical

—Michael J. Wolf

It is by sheer accident more than
anything else that Robeson had
stumbled across the career of be-
coming a church composer/conduc-
tor. He dreamed of being an astro-
naut to explore the deep, dark, “no
one can hear you scream” silence of
space, but, much to his chagrin, it
appeared that operations of space-
ships and satellites required com-
munication. As an advocate for the
def, he mastered the art of Ameri-
can Sign Language and taught it to
a close family members as well. “My
parents have both become hard of
hearing in their old age so it ended
up becoming rather invaluable; I
can only hope that this condition
is hereditary.” He learned ASL by
taking volunteer opportunities at
the Jefferson School for the Deaf
in Shadyside to coordinate field
trips, chaperone fellow students,
and coordinate fundraisers to help
against the school’s increasingly
austere budget. Unfortunately,
Robeson’s reputation for being an
admirably conservative head of an
LGBTQ organization, as well as
his general reputation among the
community as a bad spokesperson (a term he detests), his fundrais-
ing campaigns could not save the
school. A wealthy benefactor three
hours upstate did enroll them at
low tuition rates at a school near
Erie, but it caused Robeson great
distress to see his friends leave
him. He put on a small farewell
benefit for his peers where he per-
formed, once again, 4’33” for
Solo Baritone. He explained the
nature of the piece and the signifi-
cance of John Cage’s work to the
musical community, but also how
it may be one of the few cross-over
pieces of musical appeal to the
hearing-impaired. He emphasized
that he interpreted the piece as a
means of musical inclusion and
hearth display of his own tal-
ent to give the fondest farewell
he could muster. His performance
ended with the rallying sign-lang-
guage equivalent of applause (it
involves putting your hands near
your ears and rotating your wrists
back and forth). He said the joy of
performance was the best form of
textual revelation. “It cemented for me
a belief that music is very much reli-
ant on this notion of context. The
best music functions within an ap-
propriate context, like a Cage work
in a school for the deaf. It is what
boredered me greatly about the na-
tional anthem, and it is what so
reinvigorated me about my perfor-

films of Buster Keaton and Vin-
cent Price. His grandfather owned
an art-house theater in East Brad-
dock, PA, which has since closed,
and would often invite his grand-
son along to watch the movies that
he himself treasured as a child. “I
saw Metropolis when I was about
seven or eight,” he recalls in his
memories. “Well, it turns out I only
saw two-thirds of it or something
like that. People find my preference
for it over the ‘I Have A Dream’
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the primitive shrieks of laughter.”
Because mimes didn’t
exist because of how he detested
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ed to no avail, that others will do the
same.” Nevertheless, it was re-
ceived poorly among family mem-
bers, and it stung him so much that
he hardly participated in the game
of Charades he himself requested
after the performance.

Seven hot dogs in my stomach.
That was all that I could stomach.
I had cooked eight hot dogs but alas,
I threw up before I could munch the
last.

Bones, bones, brittle bones,
My doctor said that I am prone,
To osteoporosis, ain’t that wild.
I have the bones of a sickly child.

All this exists below my skin,
Which I should note is super thin.
So before you judge my mortal facade
Realize that I’m probably gonna be
dead in like four or five months.

—Michael J. Wolf

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anything else that Robeson had
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naut to explore the deep, dark, “no
one can hear you scream” silence of
space, but, much to his chagrin, it
appeared that operations of space-
ships and satellites required com-
mance for these wonderful people. It moved me greatly, and indeed I wept, but I wept quietly, because I'm not a hypocrite." Robeson occasionally visits his peers from those days still, many of whom still reside near Lake Erie.

Robeson opted not to go to college for fear of having to endure more endless and purposeless lectures, instead committing to a relationship with a mute woman. Sally Redfield and Robeson met at a bar where she had been signaling the bartender without words or overt gestures what she desired to drink. "Her taste in alcohol was quite perfect," he wrote. Sally did indeed charm Robeson; they had dated for a year and a half before Sally broke it off. Redfield claims that Robeson desired her condition more than her companionship as a person. She recalls telling him that she did not care about what she might want to say to him. He misunderstood the implication and responded, "Precisely." Robeson had written boastfully to friends how perfect she was, but could not decouple her perfection from how much money he claimed he was saving on earplugs. "It made me not mind paying for dinner," he once gauged, "so shouldn't that be a plus?" Redfield claimed that she had told Robeson over and over that she was discontent with the loss of her voice, that it was impossible for him to empathize with her. To Sally, Robeson had the privilege to speak when needed. He lived in the comfort of knowing it was a tool he had the choice to utilize; for Sally, her voice was taken from her altogether. She felt terrified to tell Robeson that she would have liked to sing, or speak, one day, and she never disclosed this to him. She grew distant and afraid, and broke up with him. He understood why immediately. "I wanted her to feel like I could love her for how she was now, and I did not want her to feel that she needed to be someone else for anybody," Robeson writes, "but at the same time I cannot change someone's inner yearning, whether it be for quiet or for noise." They parted ways and remain acquaintances at best. "It was an amicable break-up; indeed, there was time for noise." They parted ways and remain acquaintances at best. "It was an amicable break-up; indeed, there was time for noise." They parted ways and remain acquaintances at best. "It was an amicable break-up; indeed, there was time for noise." They parted ways and remain acquaintances at best. "It was an amicable break-up; indeed, there was time for noise." They parted ways and remain acquaintances at best.

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A PHYSICAL PIECE of mail in this day is as rare as a finding a slice of white stilton gold on a charcuterie plate. The tangible form of correspondence is more a quaint, kitsch statement than anything convenient or practical. Yet still today there are almost 25 operating post offices in the United States alone. Chaos and misgovernment have made their home in what used to be the communication polestar of our country. Take a look at the activity occurring within these all but abandoned premises.

According to research done by Millicent Reeves, the leading analyst in vagrants who won’t leave the post office, a single letter can take up to 13 weeks to be sent back to the sender for no apparent reason.
A large percentage of post office patrons are of the belief that post offices are banks. This has led to the financial demolition of a few small towns as well as a number of unsuccessful heists.
In one post office that remains open but underused in Floyd, Kentucky, a small cult has been renting the empty mailrooms to cleanse and abuse their members. It's a profitable way to keep the doors open and engage with the community.
THE HERO SCOURGE

By Daniel Sargeant

As 1980 drew to a close, New York found itself in the midst of a crime epidemic. Statistics from the era sketch a grim landscape: there were 1.6 switchblades per adult resident in Manhattan, 3.3 sets of brass knuckles per household citywide. Children as young as five reported to kindergarten, if they reported at all, in tiny leather jackets, and were often found concealing lengths of chain in their lunchboxes. Three in five primary school students reported having at least one tattoo. Gangs franchised their brands and alleyways festered with criminality. Rats began to travel in packs for safety; several muggers admitted to having more than once attempted to assault what turned out to be a mound of rats merely that he would be assaulted again if he attempted to commit a crime. They admitted to ongoing gang activity. They offered their bosses, their routes, their best practices, in exchange for as much jail time as they could get. The bureaucratic underpinnings of their organizations, internal politics, minor grievances. More information than could ever have been required by the police. Weird foods their bosses would get angry about at lunch. They spit it all up in their statements, their compositions pale. Something in their apprehension had stirred fear. Most were eager to talk about the man who had captured them. Their stories were all similar. At the moment in their approach when their crime turned from mere intent to cold execution, a figure wrapped in skin tight leotards appeared from above, muttered a pun-heavy witticism, and cold cocked them. They recalled being dragged, begging for their lives, unsure of how to handle their new role as prey. Each was told the same pithy platitudes in gruff tones: that this was the beginning of a new dawn, that the city’s virus now had a cure. Several hoodlums who had turned to crime after abandoning advanced literature degrees were clocked a second time for their apprehension had stirred fear. Each was told the same pithy platitudes in gruff tones: that this was the beginning of a new dawn, that the city’s virus now had a cure. Several hoodlums who had turned to crime after abandoning advanced literature degrees were clocked a second time for rolling their eyes.

Over the next few evenings, then through the months and into Spring, the police learned that they had to decide whether these new crimefighters were their cooperatives or their competitors. It emerged that what the police had dismissed as a group delusion among feeble minds had instead been the first rumblings of a new cadre of vigilantes possessed of means and abilities that far outstripped those of the NYPD. The busloads of new Sing Sing residents reported that the men they encountered seemed unscumbered by gravity. They were exceptionally cunning, and said so, out loud, while delivering uppercuts to flummoxed henchmen, literally describing themselves as “exceptionally cunning.”

Oscar Calmenti, one of the earliest to be rounded up by what he later learned was Batman, spent eight years at Rikers after pleading out. He, like most of those captured in early 1980, pled out his sentence without realizing how little usable evidence was actually attached to his case. He instead believed merely that he would be assaulted again if he attempted to commit a crime. The trauma of his apprehension lingers in his daily life. A free man for almost thirty years, he still cannot bring himself to travel through any shaded, narrow space without experiencing vertigo. Since his arrest, he talks exactly like Shaggy from Scooby-Doo after having seen a ghost. “I was a dumb kid,” Calmenti said recently over a croissant at a Midtown Magnolia Bakery. “Sure, I was snatching purses. I served my time. But did I deserve to be humiliated? The police found me on a flagpole hanging from my briefs. I was incoherent for months. Remembering the outfit, I felt like I’d been picked up by a rogue ScM dungeon gimp. That’s not stopping crime, that’s floating.”

With the Giuliani era still a decade away, the NYPD chose to ignore a problem that has only festered with age. The criminals wondered then, as the city does now: isn’t vigilism a crime of its own? Regardless of their origins, once, caped crusaders were eager to protect Gotham. Now, they harm more than heal.
and their intent, can super heroes really be permitted to act outside the law, even in order to enforce it? Could we even stop them if we wanted? How do we do justice to a Justice League?

The current iteration of New York City is unrecognizable to those who fled during the decades of decline. The contemporary Disney version of Manhattan owes much of its image to a citywide cleanup effort in which superheroes played no small role. Indeed, petty crime remains low, thanks primarily to ongoing police intervention tactics, championed in the 90’s by Commissioner William Bratton and still in effect today. Broken windows policies that held sway through the Giuliani and Bloomberg eras remain effective (if controversial) and community outreach programs have proven effective at stemming juvenile crime in low-income areas. Minor violence and larceny, combating which was once the stock-in-trade of the superhero, has now largely become a manageable nuisance, left in check by the city and its residents without the intervention of mutant and alien do-gooders. Citizens are left to wonder, then, what exactly is prompting the super heroes to linger.

While minor crime has been more or less eradicated, other historically unheard-of issues now threaten the average New Yorker. With superheroes come supervillains. Instead of subway muggings, city residents now cope with the semi-annual threat of nuclear holocaust. Commutes are regularly disrupted by disarray as interdimensional portals manifest in the Canarsie and Montague MTA tunnels. Bridges over the East River are demolished with alarming regularity. Mad scientists have engineered the redirection of comets, setting them on a course for Gotham. Residents pine for days when they merely had to watch knife-wielding vigilantes soil themselves on the walk to Zabar’s.

Nemeses of the superheroes have prompted the heroes themselves to become communities. Having made their homes along the Hudson, the heroes see little of the city they protect. Superman has been known to refuse to see little of the city they protect. Superman, for years, we have heard that ours is a city in need of saving, and various caped men have offered their version of aid. But now we sit frustrated, with the less glamorous ongoing work of rebuilding of our homes, and no heroes standing over us.
with the accumulated toxic energy of de-
cades of stagnation billowing off of the
city. Quality of life increased ten percent or
more over the course of the Reagan era from
1983 through 1990. The Justice League seemed genu-
inely to enjoy interacting with the city’s resi-
dents. Most Thursdays in 1985 Spider-
Man could be found volunteering at the Bowery Mission, while Batman cut the ribbons on the city’s first needle ex-
change depot, across from Katz’s in what is now (no kidding) a gelato laboratory.

High-profile arrests of crime bosses
and gang leaders spurred the city into a state of devotion and adulation. “It was
an incredible time to be in the ticker tape trade,” confetti supplier Randolph Parity recolled, recalling how he was making
money hand over fist, between the near-
weekly parade prep, and then getting the
cleanup for the same parade funneled through a simple service created for
private sanitation. God, New Yorkers love a parade.”

Documents from the era highlight
the heroes’ continued efforts to eradicate crime, but with few outwardly sinister
suspects were nowhere to be found. In
the financial sector began to bloom, Superman and
financial geniuses were becoming common. In
relationship, gang activity, ma-
}
shelter, assuming high-altitude destruction and its attendant falling objects are on the way. Some ex-New Yorkers, priced out of their neighborhoods, claim that they could never be beckoned back to the city. “Honestly? I’ve been in Passaic for three years now and no one has threatened to incinerate my block in exchange for something they will only mysteriously refer to as ‘the device,’ you know? There’s the usual New York bullshit that you don’t see anywhere else, and then there’s the shit these guys attract,” said former Upper West Side resident Hugo Carbine, an ophthalmologist whose family lived in New York for generations. “I like that I can get my kid to school without the fuselage of an alien craft slamming into Amsterdam Avenue.”

Carbine echoed what many high-profile New Yorkers have said about leaving the city. Many celebrities now make their homes in the tri-state area outside the city limits, and chalk their departures up to more than just relaxed tax codes in New Jersey and Connecticut. “I like that I can walk my dog without being ensorced by beams of light in a color my mind cannot comprehend. Maybe it’s just me, but damn.”

Recent local elections highlighted the discord; the mayoral candidates in 2013 at times competed to see who could distance themselves the most from the Justice League. For their part, the heroes seem to have no intention of moving on to greener, less populated pastures. Indeed, with the exception of Spider-Man, the heroes appear to have retired to a life among Manhattan’s upper crust, with Superman recently spotted at Per Se dining with David Koch and former Mayor Bloomberg. Reportedly, Superman’s temper flared up over a disagreement about sentencing and prison conditions in the United States. Long a champion of privatizing incarceration, the Man of Steel reportedly coughed a butter-poached lobster tail through a window and into the center of Columbus Circle’s globe. Batman recently appeared on Meet the Press, insisting that “the United States needs to build the wall, and Wayne Industries is the company to do it.” Long suspected of xenophobia, Batman has refused to stop crime in Queens since the mid-80’s, saying “they should take care of their own,” and refusing to elaborate. Never formally inducted into the League, Spider-Man appears to be suffering a crisis of conscience, having enlisted with the UN as a global ambassador. He was most recently spotted chatting with Bono on a fact-finding mission in Central Africa.

And so New York persists, burdened by those most suited to protect us. Though the daily services of superheroes have ceased, and a criminal element has crept back into everyday life, the NYPD’s statistics-based models tend to be just as effective in ongoing violent crime prevention. When a major crime slips through their grasp, Superman et al. hold it up as an example of their ongoing necessity; when a crime is thwarted, regardless of how, they muscle their way onto stage to claim the credit. Average New Yorkers now shrug off their antics as though talking about any other local crackpot. Altruism has given way to solipsism. And every foiled plot becomes transmitted into another advertisement for how doomed we would be without the heroes’ assistance. In-house and contract brand managers for the Justice League, including Karl Rove, articulate a message of the city’s ongoing need for protection, a rehash of the messaging used to re-elect Bush. Yet the heroes bring as much threat as anyone else. The tactics that helped make this city safe have grown old, and perhaps the end justified the means.

But what about after the end? New York finds itself in the same situation as Iraq, ravaged by a destructive overreaction to a bad situation, wondering how to rebuild, forced to lean on the very influences that wrought the destruction in the first place. The currency in New York now is fear. Children travel to school in buses reinforced with kevlar and explosion-resistant glass. Protection in case overhead war should break out. The subway system continues to undergo its first revamping in decades, but the bulk of the money is going to protection from forces underneath the tunnels, where Batman’s nemesis makes their lairs. Quality of life is at its lowest since at least the Lindsay administration. These heroes stepped in to assist us where a feeble police force could not. But now that they no longer need to protect, will they ever serve? •
They had left the scablands weeks ago. Had traded a shrub-dotted landscape for one of powdery dust mottled with grass and the occasional sagebrush that reminded them of a dog with mange. It was a hard, empty land. The only other living things they’d seen for weeks were beetles in the food and lice in their clothes.

The path went southeast, corrallled between two mountain ranges. The only breezes to be had were hot, dry, and coated everything with dust. Their hands, faces, throats, and eyes were all stung by it. The horses had painful sores beneath their saddles.

Each morning the big man put on a red tie that turned pale pink before the sun had broken free of the horizon. He rode ahead of the rest, picking out a path with practiced ease. The slit back of his battered cavalry coat laid smoothly over the horse’s flanks.

Behind him was Grady. He’d been from a city once, but no longer. All he’d kept was a pipe and a vest coat with a cameo brooch in the waist pocket. Sat lightly in his saddle, his shadow stretched ahead of him as the sun fell towards evening.

On this particular evening they saw a modest church a ways down the trail. Stacked stones made a small room with a rough wooden cross on an eave. When they came closer, they saw it was burnt. Grady started the speculation.

“Bandits,” said Grady, “they’d burn up the world if they could.”

“It wasn’t any bandits, the folk in that church burned it themselves,” said Hoke. He rode a gosh-eyed horse. His hat was battered, and his clothes stiff with sweat.

“Why would anyone burn up their own church?”

“Religious ecstasy,” said Hoke, saying the words like they were borrowed. “They got all swept up in their sermon. Speaking in tongues, trembling with the holy spirit. But then it goes different.”

“How does that make them burn up their church?” said the kid, riding alongside the two.

“Some fool knocks over a candle, and starts a fire. Maybe catches himself on fire. Everyone else thinks it’s the divine plan and sets fires of their own. The place goes up like a pyre, because the Lord helps those who help themselves.”

The kid thought. With a thin face and fair hair, coated in dust, he looked like a balsa wood doll. “I think it was lightning,” he said.

“That wasn’t any lightning, I’m telling you it was bandits.”

“Even bandits wouldn’t burn a church, not unless they had gold. But that church didn’t even have windows.”

“I’d bet my horse it was bandits.”

“You could bet your boots if you hadn’t lost them at dice two weeks gone,” said Hoke.

“I’m not betting my boots, I’m betting my horse.”

“It was soldiers.” The big man had rejoined them. His white hair framed his weatherworn face in ringlets, like a cherub grown old. He rode on without further dissembling.

The others were silent. Soon enough they had passed the church and seen the other side. The wall had been dynamited and collapsed inward. The roof on that side sagged close to the ground like a man tipping his hat. Dark stains ran from inside the church into the crater outside. A buzzard had gotten itself caught in a priest’s robes. Its head poked out grotesquely through the collar as it hopped and flapped, trying to escape.

They kept riding until after sunset.

When it was too dark to ride safely they made a rough camp. The kid gathered scrub wood to make a fire. He sang, clear and high, while he searched.

Out by the bedrolls, Hoke brushed down the horses. Grady set up the stew pot and set to kindling a fire. He piled the fire higher as the kid brought more wood.

The big man dropped two of the long-legged and scoop-eared rabbits peculiar to that part of the country next to the fire. Grady tried not to look as he prepared them.

There were never any shots when the big man went out hunting, and the rabbits had no injuries. They were just dead.

That night the kid had first watch, and the others fell asleep as he hummed in that same clear tone.

The kid found a streamlet the next morning, and whooped as he cleaned himself. Grady and the big man walked over to join, but Hoke stayed with the horses.

Clean or not, they all filled their canteens before setting out.

It was a long morning, and Hoke muttered and cursed from his saddle.

“This goddamned dust. It doesn’t grind your throat raw then it half blinds you.” He covered his face with his hat.

A good piece of an hour passed before Hoke’s horse stumbled and bumped Grady’s horse. He grabbed Hoke hard at the shoulders.

“This doesn’t bother me more than you do.”

Grady hit him. A formless gasp escaped through Hoke’s hat as he hunched over, braced against his cantle.

He took slow breaths for a time, while Grady looked as far down the road as he could. Hoke slowly straightened up.

“Damn it! This dust bothers me more than you do.”

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Hoke ate the extra dinner. * 
Next morning Grady was up before everyone. He slapped the dust from his clothes and yanked the saddle onto his horse. He tugged his cameo brooch into the kid's possible.

Thick clouds dropped down from the sky that morning, hiding the sun. As they rode, Hoke covered his face with his hat. His horse bumped into one of the others.

“Was that you, Grady? Sorry, I got my hat over my face again,” he said. There was only silence.

“I know it riles you up,” Grady said nothing. Hoke’s hat went back on his head.

They rode on until early evening, when Hoke nudged his horse to the side of the trail and called out. He needed to relieve himself. Grady and the big man stopped, but the kid didn’t.

“Look who’s got himself in a hurry now,” said Hoke.

Grady rode toward the kid without a glance at Hoke. He caught up to the kid and grabbed him.

“What are you—” The kid fell loose-limbed out of his saddle. Grady didn’t notice when Hoke joined him. He saw only the kid, dead and already cold, without a mark on him.

It took most of the evening for Grady and Hoke to bury him. They hauled a load of dust that afternoon so far after so they stood with their hats crushed in their hands. When the sun touched the horizon, the big man rode up to them.

He tucked his pigeon string back into the britchkin of his saddle, then swept his hand back toward the trail. A breeze kicked up a vicious spray of dust that made Grady and Hoke flinch away. The dust settled, and the big man was still there. “It’s time to go,” he said.

And they rode on. * 

There’s a moment in Hands on the Wheel (Melville House), the shimmering debut novel by Jason Kiefer, when protagonist Harrison Lincoln remarks on the awakening of his intimate connection to the presidential campaign bus that he drives for a living:

“Everybody wants some!!” and “Miles Ahead.”

“The emperor is naked—and he has a flabby butt!”

The bus purred beneath him. His hands gripped the wheel, sweating slightly. CNN flabbits popped in the night around the bus and Harrison felt each one throb in his eyes. The bus zipped right around the snowy New Hampshire cul-de-sac, grooping at the pavement through the melting ice. Inside the cavernous university, the candidates shuffled away their pre-debate jitters like huskies softly shaking snow from their fur. And as they took the stage, Harrison brought his bus to a stop. Carefully, tentatively, the bus and Harrison made love.

Hailed as a Lolita for the post—Citizens United world, Kiefer’s novel explores the strange intersections of politics and lust. But in a world where the sexual proclivities of presidents and senators are plucked from the Oval Office and truck stop bathrooms and splashed onto the pages of the most prestigious newspapers, the novelist must dig deeper. Hands on the Wheel is a wonderful exploration of the unorthodox love between a man and a bus and sacrifices they must make. By the end of the novel, the astute reader wonders whether it is stranger than the world of modern primary politics.

Kiefer’s book comes after much anticipation. The publishing world has long been delighted with the origin story of Hands on the Wheel: riding a bus into New York City, Kiefer was so inspired by his trip that he immediately sped out 400 pages in a fit of hyperproductivity. “A substantial majority of the pages proved unusable,” Kiefer mused in an interview last year in this magazine, “but the idea of a bus as the vehicle for narrative, it stuck in my craw, as it were.” The autopilot was set to novel.

Kiefer’s main character, Harrison Lincoln, is carefully drawn. The most interesting revelations of his character come through his bus log entries. Beginning as simple recording of space and time, the logs soon become more romantic and personal as Harrison and the bus’s sexual rela-
tionship blossoms. This log, from an early trip in Iowa, is so stark that it verges on found poetry but crackles with lust: “January 19th. 6:15 AM: left Marriott Motor Inn; 6:45 AM: arrive Applejack Diner. Gas and fluids refilled, the bus laps them up hungrily. Weather grey, roads slick.”

Harrison is drawn to the one constant in his life, his campaign bus. A strong and stoic former Greyhound Bus, the vehicle seems to become just another of the roads. In straight lines, extending out across the landscape pockmarked with railbeds, with salt crystals glittering along the section that demonstrates their evident merit. Harrison’s quiet reflection while walking along the rail is an impressive number of Midwest inmates. Including Emmett Diggs.

The husband looks at him evenly. “Yes,” he says. “I’m just getting a Coke.” Harrison’s quiet reflection while walking along the tracks is an impressive number of Midwest inmates. Including Emmett Diggs. Moving southwest, I crossed into Italy, where the air grows thin and marvellous. I took out my phone and filmed it as it ambled slightly disreputable unicorn. I took out my phone and filmed it as it ambled slightly disreputable unicorn. I took out my phone and filmed it as it ambled slightly disreputable unicorn. I took out my phone and filmed it as it ambled slightly disreputable unicorn. I took out my phone and filmed it as it ambled slightly disreputable unicorn.

Kiefer is to be particularly lauded for his rigorous process. Traveling on a generous grant from the University of Texas at Austin’s Center for Innovative Bus Writing, the young author was able to visit an impressive number of Midwestern diners over the summer and the research shines in his attention to the detailing of cutlery, plates and menus. The descriptions often run pages and pages at a time, doling out specifics in heaping portions: “coffee the color and taste of old steel beams,” “pancakes teetering to Babbel heights,” and “short order eggs arrived so fast that they seemed to be cracked from their shells already over-easy.” The culinary tour is as good as any other food writing and the sections are a joy to peruse.

I felt the author’s hand reaching for a crutch in the moments of Harrison’s quiet reflection while walking alone musing on the bus he comes to love. The sections captivate and inspire, but have a tendency to lose steam. They are thrilling when he is mentally composing speeches he would give, admissions he would make, or songs to recite to his bus. But the sections tend to break down when Kiefer has to find his way back to the fact that Harrison is standing alone in an empty field, often ignoring the campaign staff searching for him. These transitions are as ungraciously as they are unnecessary. The one saving grace here might be at the book’s apt ending, when a wandering Harrison and Kiefer’s knowledge of Fort Green Park artfully situates a firecracker of a set piece.

Much has been made in the publishing world over Kiefer’s reputation as a sad and dour young man. But this book is a brilliant sign post for fans who know him to be brutal and funny. There is no need reading Hands on the Wheel that he is downright hilarious. This is clear in sections like when Harrison’s mother excitedly attends one of the Senator’s rallies, only to realize halfway through that she has confused the candidate with his opponent. As a mortified Harrison tries to smooth his mother’s confusion, she loudly remarks, “well, Harry, what is a woman to do when a man is not the man who she thought him at first to be?” There is no doubt in the mind of the astute reader when he or she exhales the small sigh of recognizing humor that we are in the presence of an ace humorist.

The triumph of good fiction is to allow us to empathize, to open a curious door. Harrison and the bus are a relationship we find ourselves frowning on, but it is not our own frown, but society’s. The astute reader struggles to find his or her own smile, to find common ground on the book’s own terms. Because what can any of us hope to find in any romantic relationship but a little sex and a little sympathy?

And as we watch our airwaves become increasingly thickened with politics, they become so weighed down that the rhetoric and trickery becomes normalized. The calculations, horse-trading and ad hominem attacks feel just part of our day, packaged and slick, part of a balanced breakfast. Any thinking American is advised to step on the bus with Senator Dash and Harrison, to prowl the political streets with them. Kiefer brings us inside the machine, reorienting the political process back to the strange place it should be. Kiefer’s intimate portrayal shows us that the political process is as simultaneously strange and relatable as, well, a man having sex with a bus.

James Folta blogs about vlogs.
THE ART WORLD

NEARING THE ASYMPOTOTE

One woman’s superlative ugliness, and her son’s destiny to paint it

BY KATHLEEN JORDAN

"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?"
—Mary Oliver

OF COURSE, ANY WELL-READ ADULT IS COMPLETELY SICK OF MARY OLIVER’S WORK, BUT THIS ONE LINE FROM ONE POEM IS PERFECT AND POSES A QUESTION SO ESSENTIAL TO OUR BEING THAT IT IS AS IF THE POEM HAS EXISTED SINCE THE DAWN OF HUMAN-kind (MIDDLE PLEISTOCENE ERA BY THE MOST REPUTABLE ACCOUNTS). MUCH TO ZANE FERGSTEIN’S ARTISTIC CHAGRI, HIS MOTHER’S ANSWER TO OLIVER’S QUESTION IS, “TO GET UGLIER AND UGLIER WITH EACH PASSING YEAR.”


THE COLLECTION, MORE THAN THIRTY YEARS IN THE MAKING, TRACKS FERGSTEIN’S EFFORT TO DOCUMENT HIS MOTHER GERT’S UNFORTUNATE APPEARANCE AS SHE LIVES IN HER GARAGE APARTMENT IN TERRYTOWN, NEW JERSEY. HIS MOTIVATION IS AT ONCE MAGICAL AND HEARTBREAKING: HE WISHES TO DEPICT THE TRUE DEPTHS OF HER GROTESQUENESS, AND, BY HIS OWN MEASURES, FALLS SHORT WITH EACH PIECE, LUCKILY FOR HIS FANS, FERGSTEIN FEELS HE MAY NEVER CAPTURE GERT’S TRUTHFUL UGLINESS AND SO MUST TRUDGE ON.

EVERY TIME I COMPLETE A PAINTING, I THINK THIS: THIS IS HOW UGLY MY MOTHER IS. BUT THEN I SEE HER AT BREAKFAST, AND PERHAPS THE LIGHT CATCHES HER NOSE IN A NEW UNGODLY ANGLE, AND I KNOW THAT MY WORK IS NOT COMPLETE,” THE ARTIST SAID, SIGNING A CARD."IT’S QUITE DEPRESSING.”

His initial email to me pitching the opening and describing the collection was filled with so many horrific superlatives about his mother’s appearance—“THE FOULEST LOOKING WOMAN ALIVE,” “GREASIER THAN A PLATE OF BLUE CHEESE FRENCH FRIES,” “A HORRID HUMAN SWAMP,”—THAT REASONABLY, I HAD TO QUESTION HIS CREDIBILITY. BUT THEN I ARRIVED. Indeed, the collec-
half of the purse’s contents is crumpled up Gray’s Papaya wrappers.

Upon first glance, the pieces in the collection possess hereditary but not genetic similarities—a wad of dead hair here mirrors a wad of dead hair there, but the elements, the building blocks, the architecture feel entirely unique—of, and representing, a new being in each work. I mentioned this observation to Fergstein over a tiny ham sandwich we shared in line for the bathroom, and his response was, “I hope each piece feels like it’s from a new artist and of a new subject because in essence, they are. Each day I wake up in a house with my mother. I feel anew with disgust and rage because my mother continues to find new ways to be the worst thing I’ve ever seen. I want each piece to fully take on the agony of that. Each day I shed a skin, and each day she puts on a new smeller one—like a cardigan pulled from a garbage dump outside of a Chinese restaurant.”

The collection is Fergstein’s first—though using a word like “first” might suggest that there is a likeness to come. That, like so much in our small and inconsequential lives, is a false suggestion. Fergstein has made it very clear that this will be his only collection because he does not self-describe as an artist. He self-describes as a son tortured by the horrible presence of his mother in his life, and that horror must sublime into art, lest it cause his organs to rot inside his body.

The collection was discovered by famed gallerist Maren Chapman, who came across the collection in Fergstein’s Terrycloth barn while looking for a place to leave a puppy. Fergstein himself was happy to have the collection trucked away. “It really hurts her feelings,” he said, nibbling on an apricot crumble. “And she’s even uglier when she cries.”

Illustration by Daniel Filamino

KEEPPING THE FAITH

“The Slow Drown”

BY MICHAEL YARISH

In a surreal and haunting opening scene, the word “Son” is repeatedly said by his torturers as he is laid flat on a tilted wooden board, arms extended outward and restrained while his feet are bound crossing at the ankle. He remains in this posture as he is methodically water-boarded by his interrogators. The Christ-like imagery in the film’s opening scene, while perhaps a bit baffling considering the Son’s own Sikhism, surely evokes some controversial yet wholly illuminating contours of thought: For example, is this the film’s plea to recognize the commonalities between major religions? In these troubled times of our country where religious strife is being wrought to the most cynical of political ends, is this edgy and nuanced portrayal of a Christ-like Sikh meant to ameliorate the enmities in the name of common ground? Is it possible to believe that the captors of our protagonist would chant his name as opposed to remain quiet and focused during the torturing process? Or is it just that Cage kind of always has to do something Jesus-y in his movies? Regardless, Cage is surprisingly convincing as a water-boarded, mentally traumatized gay Sikh, giving a performance as a waterboarding victim reminiscent of Christopher Hitchens. (Ironically, Hitchens’s actual waterboarding was wooden and unconvincing in comparison.)

Son is placed promptly there-

Very liberally adapted from Mohamedou Ould Slahi’s Guantanamo Diary by the gentleman who wrote the screenplays for Forrest Gump and The Curious Case of Benjamin Button, The Slow Dream seems perfectly calibrated as a showcase for Nicolas Cage’s more, ahem, “exuberant” talents as an actor, but strangely offers little else. Cage plays a mentally traumatized, openly gay Sikh wrongly detained at Guantanamo Bay. The protagonist is never identified by name; all of the characters in the film only refer to him as “Son.”

Nicolas Cage goes all-in for another Oscar bid in the role of “Son.”

THE CURRENT CINEMA

THE NEU JORKER, JUNE 20, 2016

NEUJORKER.COM

Kathleen Jordan reads this article in a cockney accent—and by the end it’s full-on Australian.

THE NEU JORKER, JUNE 20, 2016
after in solitary confinement where it seems the drowning effect that waterboarding creates does impact him. But Cage is no stranger to this, either; during a trigger-a-trauma-induced hallucination as his decaying body languishes in a tank, filthy cell. The film is deftly directed by Christo- pher Nolan, introducing us to the now-needed dark and gritty undertake to the subject material. In the hallucination, Son reimagines himself as the black sheep of the family, a wise and surprisingly calm Victor Frank-like figure named Vic (played by the always welcome Alan Alda). Vic is an utterly charming and charmingly arrogant character, despite the circumstances, and the cheery, precious dialogue could not be more Eric Roth-like in execution. Their friendship had begun to evolve into a clandestine love affair when Vic is brutally exter- minated. In this hallucination, Son falls, in sheer grief with his arms spread-eagled over his head, leg crushed, into a random, really large pit. Shortly thereafter, Son re-awakens to the present day. The film is convincing although alarmingly long; this flashback takes approximately 34 minutes out of the film’s 128-min- ute running time. Cage does give us a compelling portrayal of a hallucin- ating, emotionally broken, gay Sikh’s self-portrayment of a Jewish WWII prisoner, but it seems the film delve into this territory only to demonstrate Cage’s desire to do a Holocaust period drama un- der any circumstance whatsoever. Rather than using this opportunity to the ramifications of such a flashback, maybe by clarifying why Christ- like imagery is appropriate in a Jewish concentration camp or if the opportunity to watch Cage nail what I could only guess, is what a Sikh-Jewish-gay accent sounds like. It’s possibly the case that Cage was given such an im- possibly specific accent that he could not fail. It is fair to say that Son’s narra- tive does not end well; while he is free for approximately fifteen years, what follows is a surreal mixture of The Passion of the Christ and Oz. Son’s many hours spent in solitary cause an inscrutable decay in cog- nitive capacity, thereby rendering him developmentally disabled in a character arc reminiscent of Flower- s for Algernon. By the end of the film, Son is still awaiting freedom from prison, malnourished but still holding onto humanity. He finds solace in his writing and hopes to “write a diary, a Guantanamo Diary” if you will, to tell my story.” The color, we are indeed less invested in his plight. Since Hollywood has brutally whitewashed Jesus and to the shock of few, I think, if you were to re- view Air 2, however, it was a secret to the film industry that Cage himself would release a documentary that outlines all of the traumatic, Meth- od-inspired endeavors he incurred in preparation for The Slow Drown. The dreadfully titled Sikh And Ye Shall Find is a story about Cage’s attempt to present his character off-screen in his day-to-day life. The persecution and harass- ment borne by Cage are unbearable to him and would dissuade him from be- ing for a Muslim by sheer bigots; he is consistently mistaken for a Sikh by friends and family who know it is an act but he’s just Cage-y enough to pull it off; he suffers the outra- geous bigotry on his Grindel profile as he attempts to discreetly hook up with men; he falls in love—or, rather does his character fall in love—in a relationships with what he calls a “masc” older gentleman who is un- aware of Son’s deepest secret: that he is, in fact, Nicolas Cage. It is stunningly disheartening not only because the audience is black- mailed into not having any other choice: it’s simply wrong for its physical and emotional pain, we want to believe his talent for it has become so masterful, yet when he tries to convey such a specific mix of human experience, his por- traying, he is Nicolas Cage. Is it possible that Cage is too good for his own good? Or is he too bad for his own good? Cage the aforementioned questions are Cage himself seeks to answer. It is no secret to the film industry that Cage will fearlessly inhabit the circumstances of his characters regardless of personal difficulty, from volunteering to be waterboarded in rehearsal for The Slow Drown to actually being water- boarded in rehearsal for I Am The One Who Knocks Air 2. However, it was a secret to the film industry that Cage himself would release a documentary that outlines all of the traumatic, Meth- od-inspired endeavors he incurred in preparation for The Slow Drown. 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Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, and we choose three finalists, and you, the reader, vote for your favorite. This is democracy in action. The cartoon caption contest is the closest thing to the Athenian ideal that modern citizens of the modern world have. Please exercise your power to vote. But only if you are a resident of one of the good countries: the United States, Canada (except Quebec, for the love of God), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland. And only if you are eighteen or above. And please refrain from highly gratuitous threats, anthrax, and pictures of your genitalia. We’ve had a shocking number of submissions like those just described, and in addition to being horrifying, they’re making our jobs significantly less pleasant. So please, only light-hearted wit. Thank you. For a complete list of rules, visit contest.newyorker.com/pleasestopthemadness.htm

**Cartoon Caption Contest**

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**This Week’s Contest**

**The finalists**

*I am always happy to see everyone, why do you ask?*

Bill Toulaire, North Branford, CT

*Picasso’s Fifth*

Allison Chains, Voluntown, CT

“At this level of magnification, everything looks like a painting at the Whitney”

Dunn Dunmond, Bozrah, CT

*Achoo!*

Bar Scrunting, Brooklyn, CT

**The winning caption**

*I am always happy to see everyone, why do you ask?*

Bill Toulaire, North Branford, CT

*“Picasso’s Fifth”*

Allison Chains, Voluntown, CT

“At this level of magnification, everything looks like a painting at the Whitney”

Dunn Dunmond, Bozrah, CT

*Achoo!*

Bar Scrunting, Brooklyn, CT

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Our electricity
Powers New York City
because we can’t figure out
how to turn it off.

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All except for Andy, that is. We can’t find Andy.

So you can rest assured knowing that even if we could turn out the lights, we wouldn’t. Because someone—or something—wants them on, permanently. And besides, if they did somehow get turned off, we probably couldn’t get these bad boys back on even if we wanted to.

If you know where Andy is, visit MetroStarElectric.com
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