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Erik Agard (*Puzzles & Games Dept.*) co-founded the Crossword Puzzle Collaboration Directory, a resource for aspiring puzzle-makers from underrepresented groups.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

PERSONS OF INTEREST
Ingfei Chen writes about a math Olympian who nurtures prodigies from around the world.

THE NEW YORKER INTERVIEW
Rachel Syme talks with J. Smith-Cameron about playing Gerri on the HBO series "Succession."

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LEFT: JORDY VAN DEN NIEUWENDIJK; RIGHT: MICHELLE WATT

THE MAIL

A BETTER DEFENSE

As a criminal-defense attorney, I read with interest Rachel Poser's article about stash-house stings ("Set Up and Sent Away," October 18th). I recently represented a client with no criminal history, who worked as a grocery-store clerk and an Uber driver. During one ride, he told a passenger about his financial difficulties, which stemmed in part from expenses relating to the care of his two children. My client's passenger happened to be a government informant. An undercover operation was set up, and my client, though hesitant, agreed to pick up a package, drive twenty minutes, and deliver it, in exchange for five hundred dollars. On collecting the package, my client was arrested. He accepted a plea deal that required at least two years of prison time; he was sentenced to up to seven years.

As in the cases that Poser describes, my client faced a nearly impossible battle. In part because of the narrowness of the entrapment defense, he was guilty by the letter of the law. If legislators are not willing to ban or to limit such operations, a more thorough entrapment defense—one that accounts for a defendant's lack of criminal history, the nature of the contact between the undercover operative and the defendant, and other circumstances—should be put in place. This would give defense attorneys a real chance when they bring these cases to trial, allowing juries to decide whether a target deserves to spend years imprisoned.

Jason Goldman
Brooklyn, N.Y.

MASTERY AND LUCK

I was disappointed by some of the details in Tad Friend's article about the online teaching platform MasterClass ("Watch and Learn," October 25th). MasterClass elides the fact that many of its instructors succeeded not just because of talent, hard work, and perseverance but also because of luck. In an unequal society, circumstances beyond our control shape what we are able to achieve. It may be compelling to hear about someone who founded a company after watching a few MasterClass videos, but it seems to me that MasterClass, an increasingly valuable business, peddles the notion that anything is possible for anyone. But it isn't: there are systemic problems that need to be fixed before most MasterClass viewers can realistically dream of becoming masters.

Pauline Chalamet
New York City

MEMORIES OF McCARTNEY

Reading David Remnick's Profile of Paul McCartney brought back a memory from my youth, of going with my mother to a screening of "Let It Be" ("Let the Record Show," October 18th). As a teen-ager, she had screamed while watching "A Hard Day's Night" in a packed theatre. This time, the theatre wasn't even half full, and the audience was very quiet. I didn't like the movie; the only part I enjoyed was the band's concert on the roof of a London building. But I remember well how my mother looked at that moment. She was transfixed. It was as if she had returned to a time when the most important thing in her life was seeing four young men with long hair sing love songs.

After the movie, she told me that I had slept through most of it. But I saw the part where the Beatles were playing on the rooftop, I told her. They were pretty good. She smiled. Yeah, they were pretty good, she agreed. When she was younger, she remembered, they were even better.

Gary P. Taylor
Santa Ysabel, Calif.

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As New York City venues reopen, it's advisable to confirm in advance the requirements for in-person attendance.

NOVEMBER 17 – 23, 2021

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

Edmund de Waal's memoir, **"The Hare with Amber Eyes,"** has inspired an exhibition of the same name, at the Jewish Museum, opening Nov. 19. At the heart of both the book and the show is an exquisite group of Japanese netsuke—ivory carvings used as kimono ornaments—acquired, in the nineteenth century, by an ancestor of de Waal's, the French art historian Charles Ephrussi. (Four are pictured above.) When the Nazis later looted the family's art collection, the netsuke, hidden in a mattress, eluded their grasp.

PHOTOGRAPH BY BALARAMA HELLER

MUSIC

Ellen Allien

ELECTRONIC Much of the Berlin-based techno producer Ellen Allien's latest music boasts a flat formalism that reaches back to nineties-vintage basics—the kick drums brusque, the synths buzzy, the bass a no-nonsense pummel—standing apart from the more textured work that propelled her, in the early two-thousands, to international club stardom. But that formalism is clearly an effective creative choice, one made most recently on Allien's trio of remixes for "Living on the Edge," by the cold-wave duo Lebanon Hanover, offering highly varied treatments that work sharp, beguiling changes on the track. Allien d.j.s at Elsewhere, with Black Rave Culture and Heidi Sabertooth, on Nov. 20.—*Michaelangelo Matos*

Emmet Cohen Trio

JAZZ It's always a pleasant surprise to encounter a young pianist such as Emmet Cohen getting his fingers around stride, a formidable technique from the nineteen-twenties which requires its practitioners to lay down an insistent, self-contained bass line. But making room for the master bassist Ron Carter in his trio proves that Cohen also embraces a more modern sensibility. He exhibits his all-encompassing style with the same gusto he's displayed in his frequent and delightful YouTube appearances. Carter, no wallflower, will likely have much to say as well.—*Steve Futterman (Village Vanguard; Nov. 16-22.)*

Julia Holter

EXPERIMENTAL Stillness can take many musical forms: the drone artist communing with her glowing synthesizer, the singer-songwriter mirroring your precise inner monologue, the improvising ensemble conjuring a humbling, oceanic force. The "Outline: Fall" showcase at the industrial, labyrinthine Knockdown Center, in Maspeth, promises all of these with its slate of vanguard musicians, many of whom are affiliated with the visionary RVNG Intl. label. The headliner is the intrepid avant-pop composer Julia Holter, from Los Angeles; her latest recordings, including 2018's "Aviary," take her poised chamber pop ever closer to her seismic live sets. Emily A. Sprague plays in two wondrous configurations—one a solo ambient performance and another with her awestruck indie-pop band, Florist. Completing the bill are the electric-guitar deconstructionist Rachika Nayar, the minimalist project Bing & Ruth, and the soul revivalist Matthew E. White in collaboration with the visual artist Lonnie Holley, who balance things out with some spirited chaos.—*Jenn Pelly (Nov. 20 at 8.)*

Innov Gnawa

GNAWA Gnawa is a fiendishly hypnotic musical form that draws on centuries-old rituals from West and North African cultures. In Morocco, the music's hub, performances can stretch through the night. New York may lack such marathons, but it boasts Innov Gnawa, a captivating ensemble spearheaded by the sintir player Maalem Hassan Benjaafar. A Fez native now settled in midtown, Benjaafar was tutored in Gnawa by his father, a *maalem*, or master musician, and he eventually ascended to the rank himself. Steered by Benjaafar's soft-hued instrument, the band's songs exist in a headspace somewhere between dream and consciousness. But lulling tones can be deceiving: the soft staccato of the castanet-like *qraqebs*, the group's bio explains, "is said to represent the shackles and chains of slaves." At Pioneer Works, Innov Gnawa closes out Ragas Live, a festival of Indian classical music that includes a collaboration between Brooklyn Raga Massive and the titanic avant-gardist Terry Riley, who joins virtually.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Nov. 19.)*

Anna Netrebko: "Amate dalle Tenebre"

OPERA With vocal cords of steel, Anna Netrebko progressed rapidly in her career, from lyric-coloratura roles to full-lyric and spinto repertoire, leaving a trail of successes in her wake. On her new album, "Amate dalle Tenebre," it appears she may have finally hit a wall. To surmount the sustained demands of dramatic selections from "Ariadne auf Naxos," "Tannhäuser," "Aida," "Madama Butterfly," and, even more daringly, "Tristan und Isolde," she distends her tone and relies on effortful gulps and rocky forte singing. She's at her best when she scales back, just a touch, to lavish a voice of sterling quality on arching, Italianate melodies. In such moments, her instincts for color and phrasing take over. Riccardo Chailly conducts the Orchestra of the Teatro alla Scala with enough vim to honor the music without overshadowing his diva.—*Oussama Zahr*

The Orchestra Now

CLASSICAL Earlier this month, the violinist Gil Shaham joined the New York Philharmonic in a glowing account of Berg's Violin Concerto. On Nov. 18, he appears at Carnegie Hall with the conductor Leon Botstein and the Orchestra Now, for the local première of "Birds of America": Violin Concerto No. 2, a new composition by Scott Wheeler. Also on the program are two works never before performed at Carnegie Hall—Julia Perry's impassioned "Stabat Mater," from 1951, sung by the mezzo-soprano Briana Hunter, and George Frederick Bristow's "Arcadian"

R. & B.

The twenty-five-year-old singer-songwriter Summer Walker is a master of confrontational balladry. Like Keyshia Cole and K. Michelle before her, Walker traffics in an argumentative form of R. & B., navigating toxic relationships and putting the men responsible on notice. Her 2019 début album, "Over It," overflows with charming exchanges between an assertive woman and her insecure suitors, drawing upon classic hits by Destiny's Child and Usher in the process. As the title of her new album suggests, **"Still Over It"** picks up where her début left off: these are composed, nonchalant songs about refusing to be mistreated. Walker writes from experience, and the record probes the drama between her and London on the Track, her producer and former boyfriend, adding a layer of tabloid spectacle to many of these cuts. But, ultimately, it is Walker's effortlessly smooth voice and her candid, pointed writing that binds these songs together. Even at her most annoyed, she never loses her cool.—*Sheldon Pearce*

OPPOSITE: ART WORK COURTESY DE WAAL FAMILY COLLECTION; RIGHT: ILLUSTRATION BY HAYDEN GOODMAN

Symphony, composed in 1872 and presented here uncut and newly restored.—*Steve Smith*

THE THEATRE

Trevor: The Musical

Trevor (Holden William Hagelberger) is a thirteen-year-old whose irrepressible flamboyance and precocious razzmatazz get him tagged as "weird" (and sometimes worse) at school. When in doubt, he consults his spirit singer, and, since we are in 1981, it is not Lady Gaga but peak Diana Ross (Yasmeen Sulieman) who drops by to dispense wisdom and snippets of her finest songs. This does a disservice to the show's writer, Dan Collins, and to its composer, Julianne Wick Davis, whose score would struggle to stand out in any context but pales further when juxtaposed with the likes of "Ain't No Mountain High Enough." Fortunately, the musical—based on the Academy Award-winning short film "Trevor," which inspired the creation of the Trevor Project, a suicide-prevention hotline for L.G.B.T.Q. kids—has a big heart, and Hagelberger, himself thirteen, holds the stage with confident poise. Under Marc Bruni's direction, he gets terrific support from a cast full of youthful promise.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli (Stage 42; open run.)*

Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992

As time rolls on, Anna Deavere Smith's exhaustively researched docu-plays of urban proximity seem only more daring and impossible. They attempt an incredible trick—to turn what was once the news and is now recent history into a forecast of the future. This new production of "Twilight: Los Angeles, 1992"—a choral remembrance of, and commentary on, the 1992 L.A. riots—somehow meets that test. Instead of making the work sing through one body (in past productions, that body has almost always been Smith's), the show's monologues are split among an ensemble—Elena Hurst, Wesley T. Jones, Francis Jue, Karl Kenzler, and Tiffany Rachelle Stewart. More people means more juxtapositions and agglomerations of meaning—an opportunity amply exploited by the director, Taibi Magar. A clever dinner-party scene, for example, brings loose strands of monologue into dancing conversation; differing ideologies—on protest, on violence, on multiracial coöperation—all get a hearing in this metaphorical public square.—*Vinson Cunningham (Pershing Square Signature Center; through Nov. 21.)*

The Visitor

All you need to know about this new musical can be found in the faces of the actors charged with delivering its material—confused, subtly pained, regretful, and possibly thinking of ways to repent. Kwame Kwei-Armah, Brian Yorkey, and Tom Kitt have concocted a show so bafflingly bad, and intermittently offensive, that its performers can't help but wince. David Hyde Pierce plays Walter, a sad but largely affectless white professor, bored with his job, who involves himself in the lives of Tarek (Ahmad Maksoud) and Zainab (Alysha Deslorieux), a pair of itinerant lovebirds, both undocumented and terrified of deportation. When Tarek is detained by ICE, Walter's social conscience—if not his facial aspect—perks up. As if apologizing for the obvious problematics of that plot, he sings a late number imploring "old and tired white men" to find their "better angels" and finally wake up. Thankfully, I can't remember the tune.—*V.C. (Public Theatre; through Dec. 5.)*

ON BROADWAY

Stephen Sondheim and George Furth's groundbreaking musical **"Company,"** from 1970, is an acidic, episodic portrait of urban bachelorhood which follows its commitment-phobic hero, Bobby, as he blows out the candles on his thirty-fifth birthday and eyes his married friends with envy and dread. A few years ago, the British director Marianne Elliott, noticing the pressure that her female friends in their thirties felt to settle down, pitched Sondheim her version: What if the bachelor were a bachelorette? It took some convincing, but in 2018 Elliott's gender-flipped "Company" made it to London's West End, and now, after a pandemic delay, the show arrives on Broadway. (Previews begin on Nov. 15, at the Bernard B. Jacobs.) The captivating Katrina Lenk ("The Band's Visit") plays the protagonist, Bobbie, with Patti LuPone as Joanne, the vodka-wielding doyenne who sings "The Ladies Who Lunch."—*Michael Schulman*

DANCE

Complexions Contemporary Ballet

This Joyce Theatre mainstay—famous for its impressive, and impressively diverse, roster of dancers, as well as for the sharp-edged works of its founding choreographer Dwight Rhoden—offers two different programs for its fall season, Nov. 16-28. "Snatched Back from the Edges," on Program A, began its life as a series of dance films, made during the pandemic, addressing fear and racial injustice, pride and activism. On Program B, "Truly, Madly, Deeply" compiles works by Rhoden on the subject of love. Both programs end with "Love Rocks," a piece from early 2020, set to the songs of Lenny Kravitz.—*Marina Harss (joyce.org)*

Stephen Petronio Company

For its first in-person program of the pandemic—at La Mama, Nov. 18-21—the company goes retrospective, with "Punk Picks and Other Delights," a collection of solos and duets from the nineteen-nineties and early two-thousands. Apart from a Stranglers track, the music isn't strictly punk: there's work by Nick Cave, Yoko Ono, Rufus Wainwright, Radiohead, the London Suede, plus a little Elvis and Stravinsky. But the costumes and choreography are punk-chic, in the East Village baroque that is Petronio's style. The show also features a première by a breakout choreographer whom Petronio has lately been presenting as an heir, Johnnie Cruise Mercer.—*Brian Seibert (lamama.org)*

"Twyla Now"

Ever moving forward, ever looking back, Twyla Tharp returns to City Center, where her history-making ballet-modern-dance hybrid "Deuce Coupe" was first performed, in 1973. This time, Tharp brings a medley of new and older works. As always, she has her pick of dancers, and she's assembled a stellar

ILLUSTRATION BY JASJYOT SINGH HANS

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AT THE GALLERIES

The extraordinary percussionist Milford Graves, who died in February, at the age of seventy-nine, didn't keep time—he set it free, seeing beyond the convention of drummer-as-metronome and tuning into the body's polyrhythmic vibrations. (His interest in heartbeats led to training as a cardiac technician and years of EKG-inspired improvisations.) This cosmic vision enriched far more than free jazz, as **"Milford Graves: Fundamental Frequency"** (at Artists Space through Jan. 8) makes abundantly clear. An herbalist and an esteemed music professor, he also invented a unique martial-art form called Yara—Yoruba for "nimble." The hand-painted "Yara Training Bag" Graves made circa 1990 (pictured right) prefigures the bristling, shamanic sculptures he began to create near the end of his life, forever breaking new ground.—*Andrea K. Scott*

cast that includes Sara Mearns, Tiler Peck, and Roman Mejia, of New York City Ballet; Jacquelin Harris and James Gilmer, of Alvin Ailey; Robert Fairchild; and Aran Bell and Cassandra Trenary, of American Ballet Theatre. The evening begins with three duets, one of which, "Cornbread," is set to five infectious songs by the African American string band the Carolina Chocolate Drops. In the second half, the whole cast dances the new work "ALL IN," set to Johannes Brahms's Sonata for Clarinet and Piano, Op. 120.—*M.H. (Nov. 17-21; nycitycenter.org.)*

Yin Yue Dance Company

Known for its FoCo technique—which ripples and flows in the overlap between Chinese traditional and Western contemporary dance—Yin Yue Dance Company returns to live performance on Nov. 18, as part of the 92nd Street Y's "Mainstage" series. "Ripple" is a linked set of calligraphic solos and duets which relish weight sharing and touch. The program is also streaming, Nov. 19-21, on the Y's Web site.—*B.S. (92y.org)*

ART

Jasper Johns

In 1954, having had a dream of painting the American flag, Jasper Johns did so, employing a technique that was unusual at the time: brushstrokes in pigmented, lumpy encaustic wax that sensitize the deadpan image. The abrupt gesture—sign painting, essentially, of profound sophistication—ended modern art. It torpedoed the macho existentialism of Abstract Expressionism and anticipated Pop art's demotic sources and Minimalism's self-evidence. Politically, the flag painting was an icon of the Cold War, symbolizing both liberty and coercion. Patriotic or anti-patriotic? Your call. The content is smack on the surface, demanding careful description rather than analytical fuss. Shut up and look. Johns's styles are legion, and "Mind/Mirror," a huge retrospective split between the Whitney Museum, in New York, and the Philadelphia Museum of Art, organizes them well, with contrasts and echoes that forestall a possibility of feeling overwhelmed. In his tenth decade, the painter remains, with disarming modesty, contemporary art's philosopher king—the works are simply his responses to this or that type, aspect, or instance of reality. You can perceive his effects on later magnificent painters of occult subjectivity (Gerhard Richter, Vija Celmins), but none can rival his utter originality and inexhaustible range. You keep coming home to him if you care at all about art's relevance to lived experience. The present show obliterates contexts. It is Jasper Johns from top to bottom of what art can do for us, and from wall to wall of needs that we wouldn't have suspected without the startling satisfactions that he provides.—*Peter Schjeldahl (whitney.org)*

Vasily Kandinsky

Some eighty paintings, drawings, and woodcuts by Kandinsky, the Russian hierophant of abstraction, line the upper three-fifths of the Guggenheim's ramp, in the retrospective "Around the Circle." The show's curator, Megan Fontanella, recommends starting at the bottom, with the overwrought works of the artist's final phase, and proceeding upward, back to the simpler Expressionist landscapes and horsemen of his early career. This course is canny in terms of your enjoyment, which increases as you go. The teeming complexities—enigmatic glyphs, contradictory techniques—that make Kandinsky's late phase are numbingly hermetic. A middle range, from about 1910 to the early twenties, seethes with the artist's excitement as he abandons figuration to let freely brushed, spontaneously symphonic forms, intended as visual equivalents of music, enthrall on their own. Finally, we are engulfed in cadenzas of hue that may be the strongest art of their kind and their time, relatively crude but more vigorous than the contemporaneous feats of Matisse, Derain, Braque, and other Parisians whose Fauvism anchors standard accounts of modernism. The mining heir and mogul Solomon R. Guggenheim met Kandinsky in 1930 and began collecting him in bulk, advised by the enthusiastic German baroness Hilla Rebay, who also merits credit for recommending Frank Lloyd Wright as the architect of the museum's hypermodern whorl, which opened in 1959. Kandinsky lingers in the ancestral DNA of the museum and his equivocal majesty haunts every visit to a building that cannot cease to amaze.—*P.S. (guggenheim.org)*

Jessie Makinson / Phumelele Tshabalala

In concurrent solo shows at the Lyles & King gallery, two painters—one British and one South African—conjure different, but equally opulent, mythic worlds. The London-based Makinson depicts sinister pleasure gardens and twilight pavilions, populated by women, animals, and sexy hybrids of the two. The witchy, conspiratorial mood of her exhibition is conveyed by its title, "Stay here while I get a curse." The panoramic centerpiece features an orgiastic vision of chaos, equal parts Bruegel and Leonora Carrington. Tshabalala, who works in Johannesburg, uses fantastical imagery to counter colonialist histories, depicting Black joy in vibrant space-collapsing compositions, in his New York solo début, "The act of witnessing the descendants of Hope." The mixed-media, gilt, and Day-Glo canvas "When the dust subsides," a psychedelic combination of contemporary figuration and magic realism, is emblematic of his rapturous approach.—*Johanna Fateman (lylesandking.com)*

Kandis Williams

52 Walker is more than the new Tribeca outpost of the Zwirner gallery—its director, Ebony L. Haynes, plans to run the space like a *Kunsthalle* rather than a commercial enterprise, organizing long-running shows by artists whose approaches are research-based. The compelling inaugural exhibition, "A Line," is by the polymath Kandis Williams, who has a background in dramaturgy and founded the Cassandra Press, an independent distributor of radical texts. Lining the gallery walls is a series of Williams's diagrammatic collages, combining ink and photocopied, cutout images of dancers; the results suggest a novel, conceptual method of movement notation. The works' lengthy poetic titles underscore the tangle of historical, cultural, and racial dynamics at play. In the back, these concerns recur in austere videos on a phalanx of monitors. Installed along the floor, potted plants are, in fact, sculptural assemblages, bearing fake fruit painted in a range of flesh tones, with collaged eyes appearing, uncannily, on the occasional leaf, uniting the botanical and the anatomical.—*J.F. (52walker.com)*

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MOVIES

Alice in the Cities

In Wim Wenders's 1974 drama, Rüdiger Vogler plays the director's alter ego, Philip Winter, a thirtysomething German journalist on the road in the United States. Philip takes Polaroids instead of writing a story and, so, loses his job and must go home. But along the way, in New York, he's thrown together with Alice van Damm (Yella Rottländer), a nine-year-old German girl who's been abandoned by her mother (Lisa Kreuzer), and the two share an odyssey throughout West Germany in search of her grandmother. With this film, Wenders crystallizes his style of existential sentimentality. His cool eye for urbanism and design fuses a love of kitsch with a hatred for commercialism, a devotion to historicism with a fear of history's ghosts. Wenders's New York chapter is an endearing time capsule featuring the Rockaway Beach boardwalk and the organist at Shea Stadium; his German towns offer only grim industry and grubby necessity. The movie runs on American dreams; a jukebox playing Canned Heat, a Chuck Berry concert, and even John Ford's obituary lend a touch of life to Wenders's gray continent. In German and English.—*Richard Brody (Screening at Film Forum Nov. 18 and streaming on the Criterion Channel.)*

Eternals

The director Chloé Zhao, who made "Nomadland," manages to infuse this Marvel production with her artistic sensibility, albeit to the advantage of neither. The titular superheroes travel through space and time, from ancient Mesopotamia to present-day London, in order to defend the human race from tentacular monsters called Deviants. The ten Eternals—headed first by Ajak (Salma Hayek) and then by Sersi (Gemma Chan)—are under the command of Arishem (voiced by David Kaye), a godlike figure whose reign conceals a dastardly scheme. Now, with the Deviants again menacing the world, the Eternals must reunite to save it—but divisions within their ranks threaten the mission and, with it, humanity. The script, which Zhao co-wrote, spotlights philosophical matters—the conflict between conscience and duty, the qualities of a worthy leader—but it does so in absurdly slogan-like dialogue that's delivered flatly in style-free images. The admirably diverse cast includes Lauren Ridloff, Kumail Nanjiani, Don Lee, and Brian Tyree Henry, who plays a gay Eternal, but the characters' identities and experiences throughout the course of millennia go unexplored; the movie's superhero sex scene should launch a season of parodies.—*R.B. (In theatrical release.)*

Out of the Blue

Dennis Hopper directed and stars in this raw and vehement melodrama, from 1980, playing Don, a truck driver awaiting his release from prison, where he served time after drunkenly smashing his rig into a school bus. But Hopper yields the spotlight to Linda Manz, who plays Cebe, Don's teen-age daughter, a punk rocker, a social outcast, and an heir to his wild ways. While Don is incarcerated, his wife (Sharon Farrell), a waitress at a diner, takes up with her boss (Eric Allen) and, in the company of Don's best friend (Don Gordon), starts using heroin. Cebe, in despair, runs away from home and ends up on probation and under the care of a sympathetic psychiatrist (Raymond Burr), who can do little in the face of her open revolt. When her father returns, she joins in the family's degradation, torment, and guilt in scenes of derelict energy and proud insolence. Hopper's characters inhabit the realm of the irreparable; if the fervent acting occasionally overheats, the reckless emotions nonetheless convey the authentic struggle of personal experience.—*R.B. (Opening Nov. 17 at Metrograph.)*

Philomena

An out-of-work journalist (Steve Coogan), seeking a story, meets Philomena Lee (Judi Dench), an elderly Irishwoman, and decides to follow the trail of her predicament. Half a century ago, as a pregnant teen-ager, she was sent to live with nuns in a convent; there her son was born, and from there he was taken to be adopted by an American couple. Now Philomena needs to find him. Stephen Frears's film could have turned out mushy or merely splenetic, yet it keeps its poise and draws you into its moral quandaries, thanks to the controlled performances as well as to the screenplay, by Coogan and Jeff Pope. Some of the early jokes feel a little cheap and superior, but you become grateful for the leavening wit, and there aren't many films that can successfully throw in a T. S. Eliot gag at the climax. Moreover, just as the movie girds itself for an indignant blast, it finds a surprising peace; unlike most tales of crusading reporters, it suggests that their outrage, however fruitful, matters less than the feelings—sometimes more delicate—of the victims for whom they speak. Released in 2013.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/25/13.) (Streaming on Netflix, Amazon, and other services.)*

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ON THE BIG SCREEN

COURTESY STRAND RELEASING

The Honolulu-born director Christopher Makoto Yogi's second feature, **"I Was a Simple Man,"** one of the outstanding premières at this year's Sundance Festival, opens Nov. 19 at Metrograph, ahead of its wider release. It's the story of Masao (Steve Iwamoto), an elderly man of Japanese descent who lives alone amid the wild natural splendor of Oahu. Coughing hard and passing blood, Masao is preparing to die—and death itself is preparing for him, by sending apparitions of his late wife, Grace, who died young. (She's played, at different ages, by Constance Wu and Boonyanudh Jiyarom.) Unable to care for himself, Masao reluctantly turns to their three grown children, whom, as a widower, he'd sent away; the roots of his impenitent, embittered solitude are revealed in deep-seated divisions between the island's Japanese and Chinese residents, as well as in uneasy relations with white settlers and in the very notion of American identity. The action, embedded in the island's landscape, dramatizes the spiritual toll of grotesque overdevelopment. Yogi unfolds the characters' intimate stories and the region's history in sharply textured details and rapturous images; he blends social practicalities and metaphysical mysteries with a serene, straightforward astonishment.—*Richard Brody*

TABLES FOR TWO

Shukette

230 Ninth Ave.

Where else but in New York City would you find a chef from Gravesend, Brooklyn, who's the daughter of an Italian mother and an Indonesian father, at a restaurant named after an Israeli marketplace, making an incredible twist on a popular Turkish snack? You'll find this—the chef Ayesha Nurdjaja and her *gozleme*, a stuffed, pan-fried bread—and much more at Shukette, a Middle Eastern restaurant in Chelsea. It's the latest from Vicki Freeman, whose Bowery Group also includes the High Line-adjacent farm-to-table stalwart Cookshop, the East Village Mexican canteen Rosie's, and the SoHo Mediterranean spot Shuka, where Nurdjaja is also the chef. These dependable restaurants have all evolved, in the past fifteen years, along with Freeman's hard-won formula: nurture and follow the passions of talented chefs, highlight seasonal ingredients, balance the practical with the decadent.

The formula feels extra inspired at Shukette, which Nurdjaja, on the "Today" show, described as Shuka's "mischievous sister," perhaps because it ventures further from the safety of the familiar; at Shuka, beet hummus is as crazy as it gets. Shukette's menu emphatically suggests that you'd better be ready to party. Its headliner, "When You Dip, I Dip, We Rip," includes an exceptionally rich labneh, darkened by harissa, brightened by lime and pomegranate seeds. There's also a winsome salt-cod dip, like a friendly whitefish salad spiked with serrano chili and fried-garlic chips. They pair well with any and all items in the "Rip This" section, an abridged tutorial on Middle Eastern breads: *frena*, a thick, pillowy round of Moroccan origin, lightly oiled and pan-fried for patches of crunchiness, topped with whole roasted garlic cloves; *lafa*, an Iraqi flatbread, grilled and slathered with oil-laden za'atar; the delightful *gozleme*, a generous oblong sheath filled with provolone and grated potato. Hot, tangy, crunchy, showered with flaky salt and incongruously light, it's the grilled cheese you didn't know to ask for.

An extensive list of salads and small plates ("The Shuk") includes well-fried squid that tries on an unctuous sauce of Castelvetrano olives and preserved lemon; kibbeh appears as mini ground-lamb corn dogs, which were a bit dry even when dipped in spicy tahini. But the charcoal-grill section ("Al Ha'esh") provides reliable pleasures, high among them Fish in a Cage, a whole porgy painted with harissa, served on its ungainly grilling basket with herb and chili sauces. The juiciest and most flavorful dish is the Joojeh Chicken, a half bird marinated until tender in turmeric, yogurt, and onion, then char-grilled, a classic Persian preparation. Add some shawarma-spiced fries and swipe it all through a side of *toum*, a pungent Lebanese garlic spread.

Shukette opened in July, when its extensive outdoor-dining setup made perfect sense, but it remains to be seen how the restaurant-going hordes will respond to another winter outside. One recent night, as I was guided away from the restaurant down Twenty-fourth Street, Freeman, acting as hostess, asserted that I would be seated in the "V.I.P. suite," i.e., the table farthest from the restaurant. With no heater in sight—now that the city has banned propane, she had electric ones on order—the metal chairs looked like an awfully cold place to wait for a friend. A blanket was quickly proffered and a citrus *gazoz*—a spritz with St. Agrestis Paradiso apéritif, lemon shrub, and grapefruit bitters—was promptly delivered.

It was cozy enough, but the atmosphere was a far cry from the cheerful festivities inside, where you can sit in blond-wood booths or, better still, at the "chef's counter," a bar nearly as long as the establishment—a main component of the restaurant's concept long before the pandemic changed anyone's perception of such close quarters. At the counter, guests are treated to a front-row view of chefs performing something of a ballet, setting purple potatoes on green chermoula, free-style-dressing roasted cauliflower with date slivers and mint, frying bread, and grilling fish, kebabs, and lemons. One of each, please. *(Dishes $5–$31.)*

—Shauna Lyon

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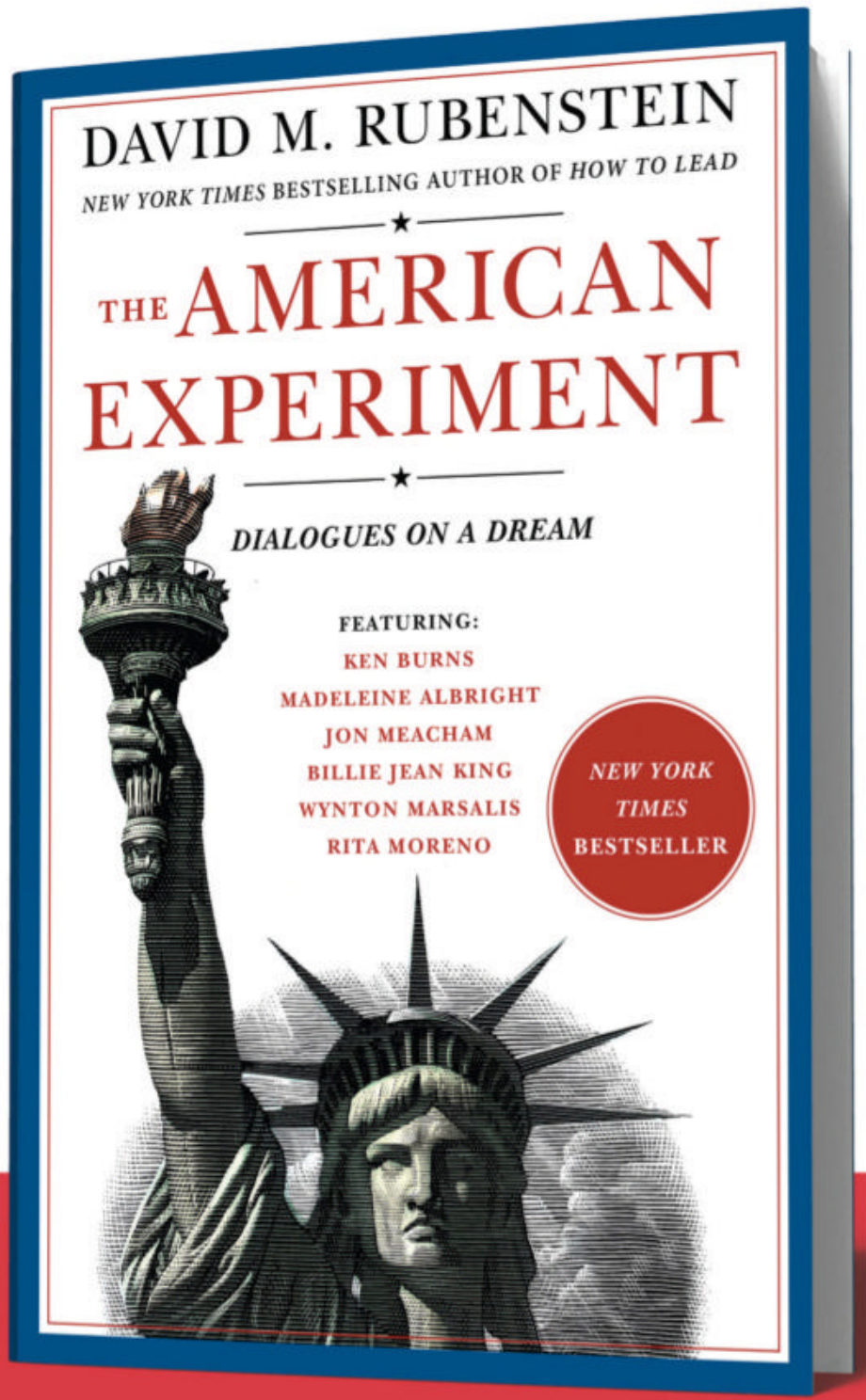

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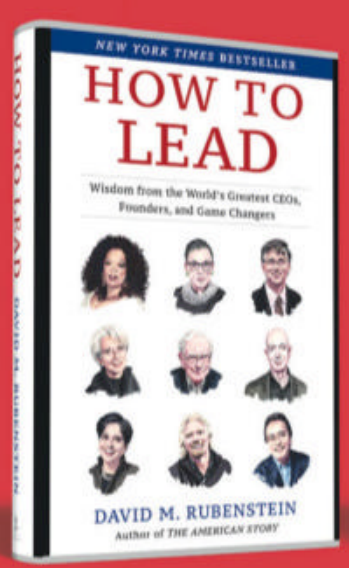

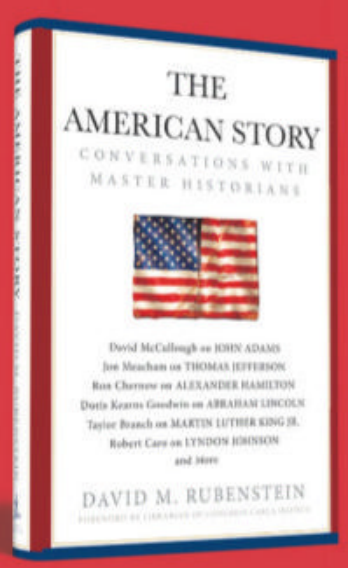

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THE NEW YORKER

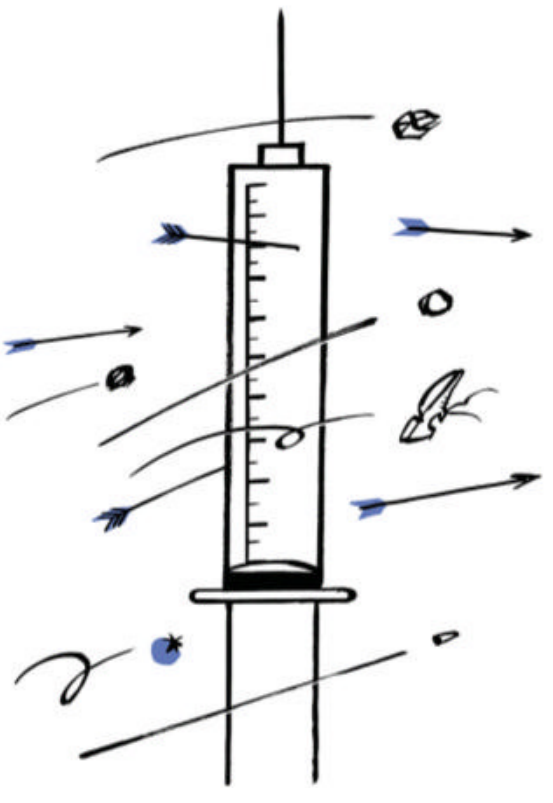
THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
UNMASKED

In the midst of the sports-world uproar over the revelation that Aaron Rodgers, the Green Bay Packers quarterback, had deceived the public about whether he had been vaccinated against COVID-19—he hadn't, which came out after he tested positive for the disease—Max Kellerman, an ESPN commentator, made an observation about how vaccine rules work. "X number of people say, 'I don't want to get vaccinated—it hasn't been out long enough, I don't know the effects,' " Kellerman said. But, he added, when there are mandates the "vast majority of people just get the vaccination." The reason, he said, is that people decide differently "when there is low to no cost" than they do when there are real consequences to the choices they make.

Kellerman appears to be correct. In New York City, the Police Benevolent Association warned that ten thousand officers would be "pulled from streets" because they wouldn't meet the city's November 1st deadline for municipal employees to be vaccinated. Only a few dozen were, though others have applied for exemptions. Another oft-cited example is Tyson Foods, which instituted a mandate despite fears that doing so would make it too hard to find workers in red states where the company operates; by the end of last month, more than ninety-six per cent of its workforce had been vaccinated. Similarly, Rodgers notwithstanding, around ninety-four per cent of National Football League players are vaccinated, even though the league's mandate, negotiated with the players' union, offers them an alternative: they can continue to play if they get tested daily and wear masks inside the team's facilities, among other restrictions. It might seem obvious that there is a cost to not getting a vaccine that offers protection against a virus that has killed three-quarters of a million Americans, but nationwide only sixty-eight per cent of those over the age of eleven are fully vaccinated. And so, amid concerns about a winter surge—already emerging in Europe—more mandates and vaccination-related rules are being introduced.

Part of the controversy in Rodgers's case is particular to him: a three-time M.V.P., he seems to have been allowed to operate by his own rules. Both the Packers and the N.F.L. knew that he wasn't vaccinated, but they didn't respond in any effective manner when Rodgers, asked directly if he was vaccinated, told reporters, "Yeah, I've been immunized," and also violated the league's protocol. (Last week, the N.F.L. fined the Packers three hundred thousand dollars for failing to enforce its protocol, and Rodgers fourteen thousand six hundred and fifty dollars, in part for attending a Halloween party, in a John Wick costume, unmasked.) More broadly, the Rodgers affair has become a showcase for misinformation about vaccines. In a sprawling interview on "The Pat McAfee Show," on YouTube, Rodgers said that he was being pursued by a "woke mob," and listed one false claim after another: there is a way to immunize oneself without getting COVID or a vaccine; vaccines might interfere with his someday "being a father"; his friend Joe Rogan, the podcast host, had the medical answers he needed; freedom is at stake and he shouldn't have had to follow rules designed to cause "shame."



Similar distortions can be found in a sheaf of new lawsuits aimed at vaccine mandates. Some of these concern state or local rules; the Supreme Court has declined to block mandates involving health-care workers in Maine, state-university students, faculty, and staff in Indiana, and public-school employees in New York. One of the biggest targets, though, is a federal rule promulgated by the Occupational Safety and Health Administration on November 4th, and intended to go into effect on January 4th, which covers workers at firms that employ more than a hundred people. It is, properly speaking, a vaccine-or-test

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

mandate, since workers have the option of getting weekly tests and wearing masks in certain settings, and it doesn't apply to those who work only outdoors or remotely.

On November 6th, a panel of judges in the Fifth Circuit stayed the enforcement of the mandate in a case in which the lead plaintiff operates fifteen supermarkets in Louisiana and Mississippi. By Friday, cases had been filed in eleven of the nation's twelve judicial circuits. They will be consolidated, and a special judicial panel is expected to hold a lottery this week to determine which circuit will hear, and thus shape, that case. (It will almost certainly reach the Supreme Court.) Some unions that have supported mandates filed suits, too, perhaps hoping for a lottery win for a relatively liberal circuit. Many of the suits, though, portray vaccine mandates as a form of federal tyranny—one calls the OSHA mandate a "diktat"—downplaying the extent to which the spread of an infectious disease affects the freedom of others. The Supreme Court, for its part, may focus on whether OSHA is the proper body to issue such a rule; public health is traditionally a state concern, but OSHA does deal with workplace risks.

Yet mandate opponents have gone to court even when the federal government's role is clearer. Last Wednesday, Eric Schmitt, Missouri's attorney general, joined by his counterparts from nine other states, filed suit against a Biden Administration mandate that employees of health-care providers that receive Medicare and Medicaid funds must be vaccinated. Schmitt is running for the Republican nomination for the Senate, and may see an opportunity. Glenn Youngkin, the Republican who won the Virginia governor's race this month, campaigned against vaccine mandates. In the wake of that victory, Republicans have been open in their hope that mandates will inflict a political cost on Democrats. Senator Ted Cruz, of Texas, is leading an effort to block mandates through legislation. It's a cynical line of attack, and one that's likely to be increasingly infused with emotion now that more children are eligible for the vaccine.

The Biden Administration, in a filing last week, argued that staying its mandate "would likely cost dozens or even hundreds of lives per day." The challenge lies in communicating that reality to a distrustful and polarized public susceptible to fears of big government or Big Pharma. The bet is that, as mandates help the country return to something like normal, they will cease to be seen as frightening abstractions and, instead, be recognized as what they are: practical measures that offer much while asking little. Vaccines work; so do mandates. But not, it seems, without a fight.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

HELLO MY NAME IS
POLISHING THE PRECINCT

At the New York City Police Academy, in Queens, thirty-five civilians sat in a lecture hall for the final day of their training to become "community guides," the N.Y.P.D.'s version of maître d's or Walmart greeters. The guides—in a new hybrid role devised to bridge hospitality and law enforcement—will greet citizens who walk into a police precinct. The lesson under way was titled "Effective Communication." A PowerPoint slide read, "What is emotional contagion?" It showed a pie-chart graph with the caption "The spoken word is only 7% of effective communication." A student raised his hand. Before the guide job, which pays thirty-two thousand dollars a year, he had worked at Target. "Sometimes you get into, you know, a situation where the customer thinks they're right," he said.

"You're not going to turn blood into wine," the instructor, an officer named William Garcia, said, taking a drink from a can of Monster Energy. "Don't tell people to calm down. That's a trigger word."

The deputy police chief and commanding officer of the Police Academy, Frederick Grover, jumped in. "Maybe your car was stolen—you might be intimidated walking into a precinct," he said. "There's a lot going on." He added, "Visitors won't necessarily leave happy." The goal, he said, is "about making it satisfying."

The community-guide program grew out of a customer-service working group that the N.Y.P.D. created after last year's anti-police protests. Juanita Holmes, the department's chief of patrol, said, "We aren't going to get on Zagat, but you should be able to pull up reviews for your precinct." The department currently uses a "How did we do?" survey system. "When we started—wasn't so good," Holmes said.

Kayleigh Robertson, who has a degree in forensics and used to work at Dairy Queen, told a visitor, "People get crazy when it comes to their ice cream, so I had to deal with yelling, people throwing milkshakes, people who are stressed over random things—and keep my cool." Those skills, she thinks, will translate well to the precinct house: "I'll use a 'hi,' gentle, ready-to-assist-you tone, not a 'what do you want?' tone." The orientation guide for greeters reads, "Do not permit people to adversely influence you into showing anger. There is an old saying: 'he, who angers you, conquers you.'" Also: "Avoid preening."

The guides had sat through such lessons as "Introduction to Police Jargon," "The Role of the Unarmed Civilian," and "The Mystery of Active Listening." They were quizzed on converting standard time to military time. Next was a session on L.G.B.T.Q. issues, in which members of the force shared their coming-out stories. The group workshopped addressing civilians as "sir, ma'am, they."

A woman raised her hand and asked, "Can we pep this up? Can we do some scenarios?" The academy has three floors of multimillion-dollar "mock environments," stage sets in which the city plays itself—multiple courtrooms, a subway car, a police van in Central Park, a public-housing unit, a bodega, and a bar ("New York City Bistro")—where recruits practice responding to, say, a bar fight or a disturbed person in a deli. (The answer to the woman's question was no.)

"This is needed because of the history the cops have left," Francelis Camilo, who wore a navy suit and had her bright-red hair in a bun, said. She'd worked at Chipotle and a daycare center before becoming a guide. "My friends were definitely skeptical. I didn't tell so

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many people at first." She hopes to help create a serene space: "The community needs someone not in uniform. I'll be the first person you see. Then maybe you don't have to be so tense around police officers." (The dress code for greeters is business casual.)

Angela Morrison, who used to work at a post office, hopes to make her precinct "more of a home setting, instead of feeling like you're stepping into a lion's den." She said, "As a Black woman, I know of course there's gonna be racism, but at least there'll be a familiar face, and that helps sort of deflect from the image the police have."

As part of a criminal-justice lesson, the class listened to a presentation on "media versus reality." The instructor told the students, "A police show that gave an accurate account of police life would be about officers on patrol dealing with confused, irritable, or unhappy lovers, parents, and kids."

"Nobody wants to live in reality. Reality sucks," Morrison said. "Cops are a lot nicer on TV. Reality-wise, that's not what we've seen." She went on, "For most people, the precinct is a scary place." She views her new job as "like being a hostess at a very fancy restaurant. I've worked in salons. I've dealt with people. At the end, I'll say, 'I hope you come back.'"

—Antonia Hitchens

THE BENCH
CATS AND DOGS

Matthew Cooper knows a lot about resentment and rage. You would, too, if you'd been a judge in New York's matrimonial court for the past thirteen years. Cooper, who is retiring from the bench next month, also knows a bit about dogs. His own dog, Sophie, a rescue pit-bull mix with a reddish coat, sometimes goes into what Cooper calls "full Joe Pesci mode": "She just turns from a beautiful, loving animal to a snarling pit bull." Last week, sitting in Hudson River Park with Sophie by his side, he considered the state's new pet-custody law, which Governor Kathy Hochul had just signed. The law allows judges to consider the best interest of the animal in divorce cases that involve a pet. Previously, New York treated animals as property to be distributed equitably, along with cars, crystal, and other marriage detritus.

Cooper, a dog-lover, decided a 2013 case, involving a miniature dachshund named Joey, that served as a blueprint for the new law. In a career in which he has presided over thousands of divorces (including Robert De Niro's and Richard Gere's), this was a highlight.

"For a while, a lot of pet disputes seemed to involve Yorkies," Cooper said. "It goes through stages. Now disputes tend to involve some form of Doodle." His first pet-custody case ("extremely contentious") concerned a Labrador retriever named Otis. "The ex-wife claimed that her ex-husband had taken Otis and refused to let her see him, and asked me to grant full custody to her," Cooper said. A number of employees in Cooper's chamber were fellow dog enthusiasts, and they dug into the Otis question. (One clerk had a three-legged pit bull named Prince. "I am amazed by how many three-legged dogs there are," Cooper said.) He recalled carefully considering the question of whether a dog is more like a lamp or a human being. (Otis died before the case was decided.)

When Joey showed up in a divorce proceeding a few months later, Cooper was ready. In an opinion dotted with references to Homer, Lassie, and the Jetsons' dog, Astro, he laid out the history of canine jurisprudence in New York. Relevant statistics: seventy-six per cent of pet owners feel guilty about leaving their animals at home; forty-one per cent take their dogs on vacation with them; thirty-eight per cent telephone their pets so that the critters can hear their humans' voices. "The big majority of pet owners polled said that they wouldn't trade their pet for a million dollars," Cooper said. "I was struck by that."

He concluded that pets should be given a special legal status, somewhere between a piece of property and a human member of the family. In Joey's case, he said, "I ordered a limited, *one-day* hearing at which the parties could make their case."

The hearing never happened: Joey had spent the time since the couple separated living happily with the defendant's mother, in Maine; the couple decided to let sleeping dogs lie, and dropped the matter. But Cooper's recommendation took hold and has guided lawyers in New York pet-custody cases ever since. Jacqueline Newman, a member of the matrimonial bar, said, "He opened up the idea that judges and the law should look at animals not as chattel but as living beings who have interests."

But how does a judge determine the best interest of an animal? Judge Judy once adjudicated a pet-custody case by ordering Baby Boy, a small white dog, into the courtroom; the dog rushed to the plaintiff's side. "It's his dog," Judge Judy decreed. "That's all. Take the dog home."

In 2000, a family court in San Diego ordered that a "bonding study" be conducted by an animal behaviorist to determine the fate of Gigi, a greyhound-pointer mix. One exhibit, offered by the wife's attorneys, was a video called "A Day in the Life of Gigi." It took two years and close to a hundred and fifty thousand dollars in legal fees for the wife to persuade the court that Gigi should live with her. (California now has a "best interest of the animal" law on the books.)

Cooper thinks that a part of his legacy may be awakening New York law to the inner life of animals. "There are worse things," he said. "As long as it doesn't open a Pandora's box of drawn-out hearings, proceedings, and testimony about cockapoodles."

"And, yes, my decision extended to cats," he added—although, personally,

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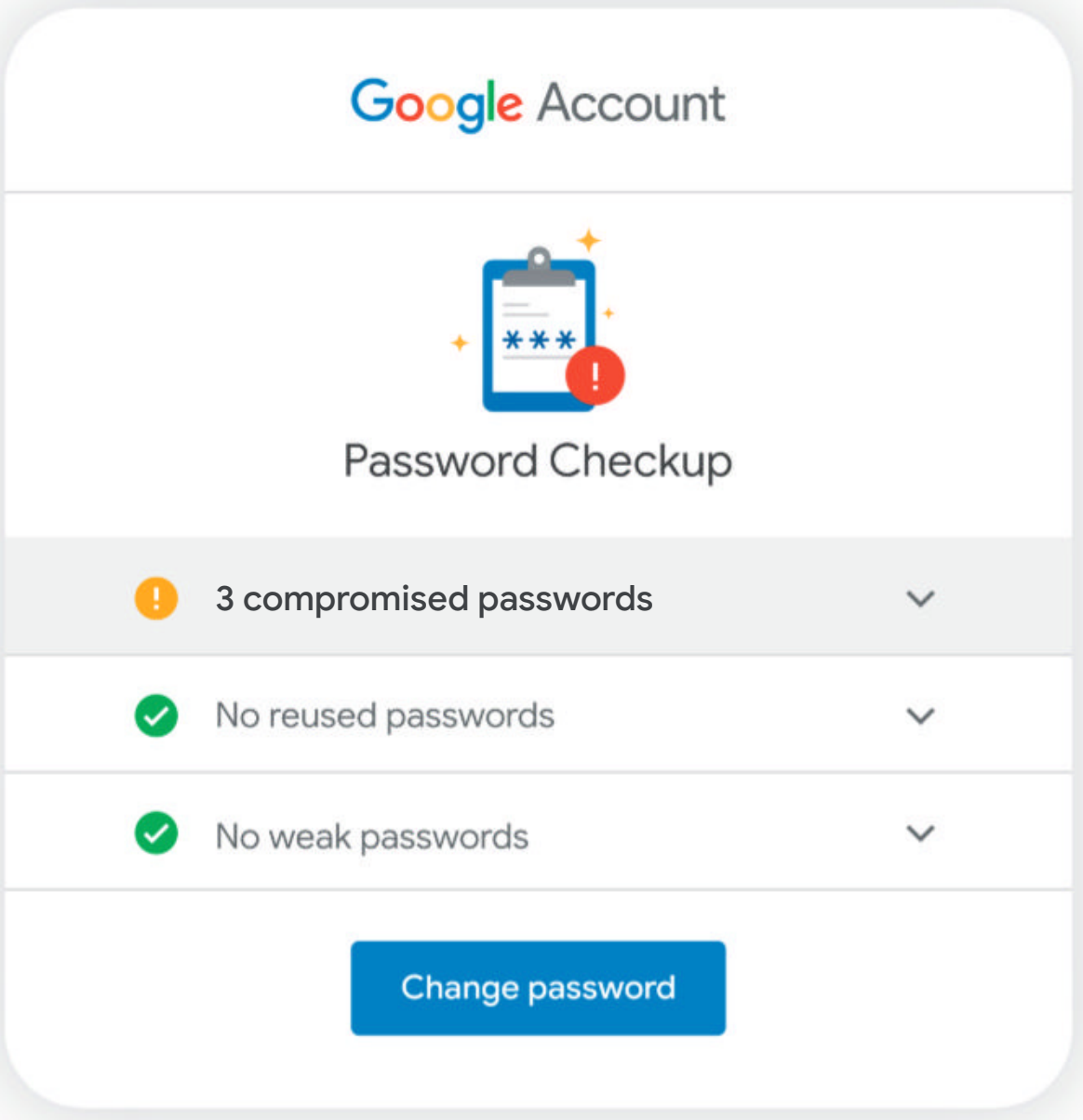

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he finds it hard to imagine that anyone would fight over a cat. "I also don't understand people wanting small dogs," he said. "Instead of real ones that can chase squirrels or Frisbees." The main point, as he sees it: "People may stop loving their spouse at some point, but they never stop loving their dogs."

—Susan Lehman

THE PICTURES

GIRL TALK

Time: an autumn Sunday. Scene: a Zoom call with the cast of Maggie Gyllenhaal's directorial début, "The Lost Daughter," based on the Elena Ferrante novel. Dramatis personae: Olivia Colman, who plays Leda, a divorced literature professor planning to spend a summer alone with her books on a Greek island; Dakota Johnson, who plays Nina, a young American mother vacationing nearby and an object of unhealthy obsession for Leda; and Jessie Buckley, the Irish actress who plays Leda in flashbacks to her own years as an overwhelmed young mother.

Gyllenhaal entered the chat first, from a hotel room in Los Angeles: silver hoop earrings, sideswept bob, good lighting. Next came Buckley, puckishly punk in a black leather jacket, with a jagged haircut that suggested the work of Edward Scissorhands.

"How are you?" Gyllenhaal asked.

"I'm feeling a bit nervous today," Buckley said. She was in rehearsals for her turn as Sally Bowles in the London revival of "Cabaret." "It's so nice, doing theatre. It feels so pure. How are you? You look gorgeous."

Johnson materialized, in a wood-panelled study, pulling on her pants. "Christ," she said. "I'm really sorry that I'm late." She zipped her fly and sat down.

"I love you," Buckley said.

"Hello!" Johnson said, in a comical English accent, as Colman appeared, grinning in a green turtleneck.

"Are you in bed?" Buckley asked.

"Hi, girls!" Colman said. She was in bed. "I'm very underdressed. I'm going to go and get better lighting."

"Dakota and I have to go to a luncheon in L.A.," Gyllenhaal explained. "Hair and makeup, the whole thing."

"You two look fucking amazing," Colman said. She had relocated to a closet. "This is where my husband has his office now. We set up a recording studio there, for A.D.R. and voice-overs, and then just there"—she tilted the screen—"is the bath and the loo. So if he's on a Zoom, and I need to poo, I make sure he angles it this way so no one can see."

"We love you," Buckley said.

"I'm sorry, were you talking about something very, very clever before I showed up?" Colman said.

"I just want to know, who's on your T-shirt?" Gyllenhaal asked Buckley.

"Her name's Valeska Gert," Buckley said, plucking the shirt at the shoulders to show an image of a pale woman with vampiric lipstick. "She was this brilliant Weimar Republic performance artist, and I've fallen in love with her. I've made T-shirts for myself of all of her pictures."

Gyllenhaal: "I really want one."

Johnson: "Me, too."

Colman: "I want one, too."

Gyllenhaal: "That will solve the problem of the press-clothes bullshit."

Buckley: "We'll wear T-shirts, nothing else."

Colman: "I might wear knickers."

Talk turned to the film, and to Ferrante. A friend had recommended the author's Neapolitan quartet to Gyllenhaal. "She still felt like a secret at the time," Gyllenhaal said. When she got to the third novel, in which the narrator begins to make her way in the world, she thought, "Oh, my God, this woman is so fucked up." Then she thought, "Uh-oh, I actually really relate to her. So does that make me really fucked up? Or, in fact, is there a common, secret experience here that we're not talking about?"

Jessie Buckley, Maggie Gyllenhaal, Dakota Johnson, Olivia Colman

"It's so cool that she's anonymous," Buckley said. "I'm so jealous."

"She can be whoever I need her to be," Gyllenhaal said. In a letter, published in the *Guardian*, Ferrante had given Gyllenhaal her blessing to make the adaptation her own. "She can be this fantasy feminine, wise voice out in the cosmos," Gyllenhaal went on. She has two daughters. The thing that drew her to Ferrante, she said, was the writer's ability to say "these things out loud that I hadn't really heard anyone say out loud, about mothering, about sex, about desire, about the intellectual life of women, about the artistic life of women."

Colman has two sons and a daughter. "I do understand a lot of the feelings that Leda has," she said. "But not all of them. Possibly, I'm odd. I wish I could have had sixteen kids."

Motherhood is the subject of Gyllenhaal's film, but the feeling on set was sisterly. "We just sat on one another's laps and played and had a lot of food and wine," Johnson said.

"*Spanakopita*," Colman said, pronouncing the word like a spell.

"I feel like I grew up a lot making this movie," Johnson said. "There's this thing that I talk to my therapist about, which is the different phases of being a female." Playing Nina, who is torn between the pleasures of youth and the responsibilities of parenthood, had helped her to "release the little girl."

"Wow," Colman said, as an appreciative stillness settled over the chat.

"Why can't we all be in the same room?" Colman said. "I want to give everyone a squish." Gyllenhaal suggested a visit to her home, in New York. "You can stay in Ramona's room," she said, referring to her own daughter.

"Will she mind?" Colman asked.

"She'll stay with friends," Gyllenhaal said.

—Alexandra Schwartz

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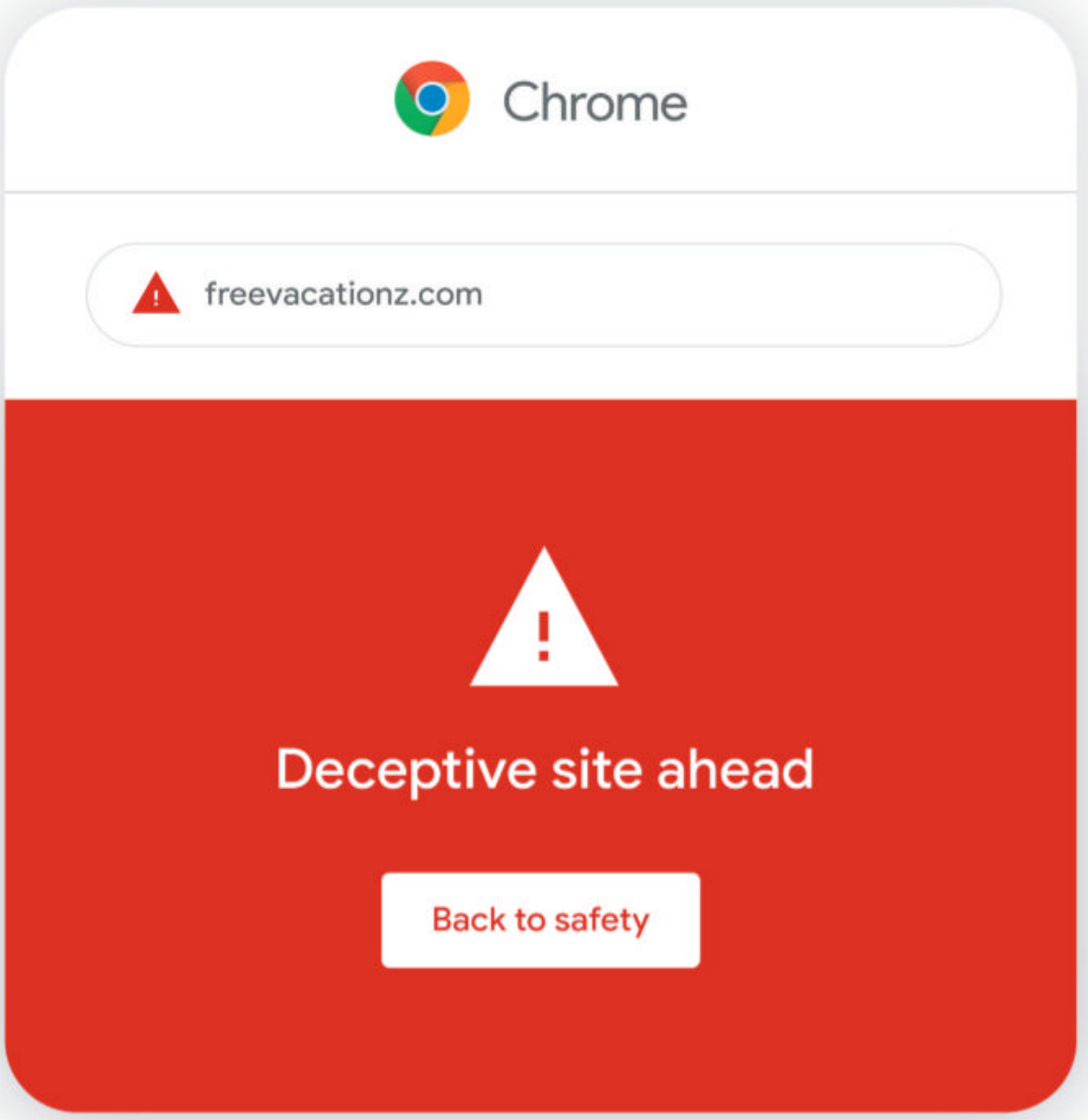

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AMATEUR HOUR
WINDOW THEORY

In 2016, Charlie Munger, the billionaire vice-chairman of Warren Buffett's holding company, announced his intention to donate two hundred million dollars to the University of California, Santa Barbara, to be used to build a dormitory. There was "one huge catch," as Munger, an amateur architect, put it: no windows.

"Our design is clever," Munger assured skeptics. "Our buildings are going to be efficient." In addition to cutting costs and foiling potential defenestrations, his design would force students out of their sleeping cubbies and into communal spaces—with real sunlight—where, he said, they would engage with one another.

Last month, Munger's plan was formally accepted by U.C.S.B. without apparent alteration: a nearly two-million-square-foot structure, eleven stories tall, that will house around forty-five hundred students in a hive of tiny bedrooms—the vast majority of which will indeed be windowless. Instead of the real thing, there will be Disney-inspired fake windows, of which Munger has said, "We will give the students knobs, and they can have whatever light they want. Real windows don't do that." A consulting architect named Dennis McFadden subsequently announced his resignation from U.C.S.B.'s design-review committee. In a letter, which was later leaked, he wrote that "Charlie's Vision" was "unsupportable from my perspective as an architect, a parent and a human being."

McFadden called Munger's U.C.S.B. building a "social and psychological experiment with an unknown impact on the lives and personal development of the undergraduates the university serves." Having no natural light was a problem. So were stale air and tight spaces. McFadden noted that the structure had just two main exits and would qualify "as the eighth densest neighborhood in the world, falling just short of a portion of Dhaka, Bangladesh." Nearly all of Yale's undergrad population could fit inside.

Munger, who is now ninety-seven years old and lives in a house in Los Angeles with plenty of windows, was unfazed by McFadden's critique. "When an ignorant man leaves, I regard it as a plus, not a minus," Munger said. He called McFadden an "idiot" who did not "look at the building intelligently." In a follow-up in *Architectural Record*, McFadden countered, "I understand the plans well and in detail." He added that a famous architect had e-mailed him "about the horrors of the project and asked what he could do to help." Munger, meanwhile, said that he expected the concrete structure, inspired by a Le Corbusier building in Marseille, to "last as long as the pyramids."

Dormzilla, as the building has been nicknamed by the local papers, is not Munger's first windowless lodging. A few years ago, he donated a hundred and ten million dollars to the University of Michigan, his alma mater, to build the Munger Graduate Residences, which opened in 2015. McFadden decried the "unknown impact" of windowless living on students, but thousands of students in Michigan have already been guinea pigs for several years.

Matthew Moreno, a computer scientist, joined his partner in the Munger Graduate Residences last March. It seemed nice at first. There were slate floors and fancy fixtures. The basement had massage chairs, along with a movie theatre that didn't seem to play movies. A rooftop garden offered views of Ann Arbor, but when it rained water ran straight into two stairwells. Moreno said, "There was abundant seepage, along with tons of dead crickets."

There were other technical problems: Errant fire alarms went off constantly. A trash-chute malfunction resulted in someone getting bombarded by falling waste. Moreno described poor ventilation and even poorer sleep. "Lots of talk of sunlamps and melatonin," he said.

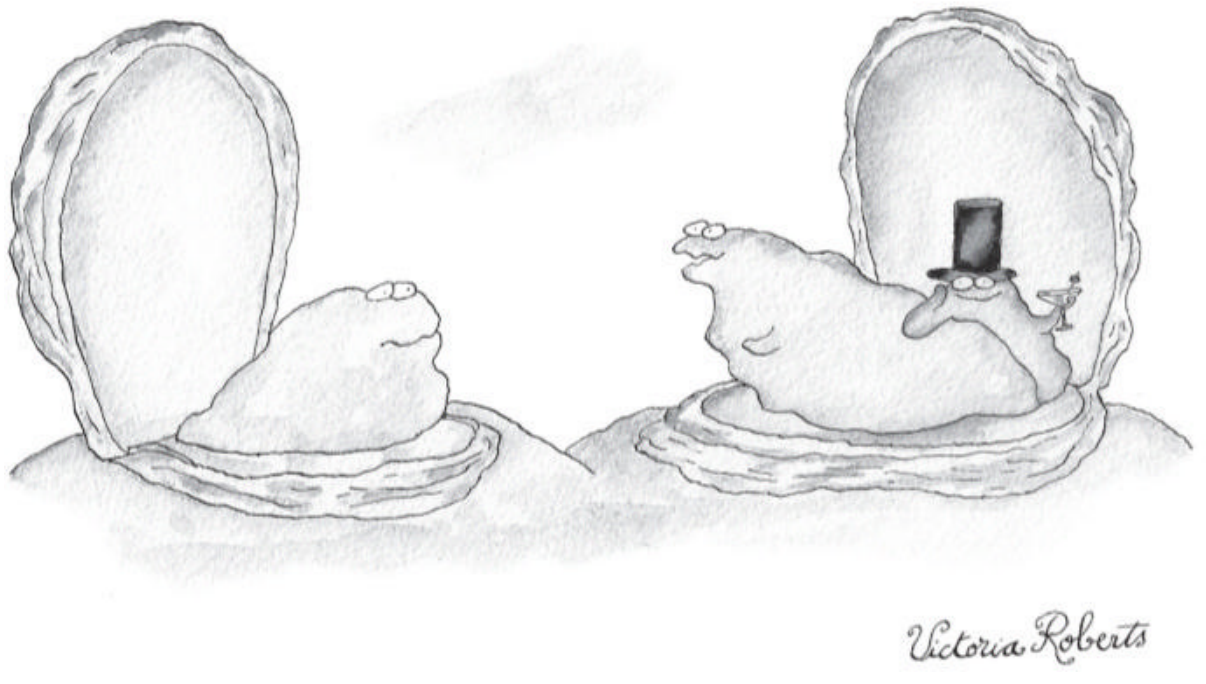
Some residents adapted. Wilson Chen, a former pharmacy student, said, "The windows thing was a big bummer, but after a year I kind of got used to it. It got super dark." A few rooms had a single real window, but, Chen said, "you had to submit, like, a waiver stating your need for a window."

Eventually, Moreno moved from his sleeping cubby into his suite's communal area. (In another such area, he'd once watched a scantily clad fellow-resident train for a triathlon on a stationary bicycle set up over a tarp, to catch his sweat, as students played beer pong around him.)

After Moreno moved out, he tweeted a message to Munger. "If you think you can make people make friends with randos just because u didn't put a window in their bedroom," he wrote, "u are wrong my man."

Chen, during four years without windows, never thought to question the philosophical underpinning of the design. "There was a window theory?" he said, of Munger's notion. "Everyone I knew just kept to themselves."

—Charles Bethea



"He moved in during the pandemic, and now he won't move out."

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LETTER FROM MOSCOW

THE PAPER TRAIL

A Russian newspaper reports on dangerous conflicts—and endures its own.

BY MASHA GESSEN

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELENA ANOSOVA

Around noon every workday, Dmitry Muratov, the editor-in-chief of *Novaya Gazeta*, sits down at the head of a long table in a large round room in the paper's office, in Moscow, to chair a *planyorka*, or planning meeting. On October 11th, the Monday after the Friday when the Norwegian Nobel Committee announced that it was awarding this year's Peace Prize to Muratov and the Filipina journalist Maria Ressa, ten people gathered at the table, joined by fifteen on Zoom, to discuss how to spend Muratov's half of the $1.15 million in prize money. Muratov had told the media that he saw the Nobel as a prize for everyone at the paper, that he wouldn't take a kopeck for himself, that the entire amount would go to charity, and that he wouldn't choose the charities unilaterally. After some discussion, members of the editorial staff settled on several priorities, including helping children with spinal muscular atrophy (a condition that the paper had been covering for more than a year); launching a supportive-housing program for mentally disabled adults living in institutions (*Novaya Gazeta* published an exposé about such institutions last spring); donating to Moscow-area hospices; and aiding independent Russian media outlets that Vladimir Putin's government had recently hobbled by branding them "foreign agents."

After the meeting, Muratov and a longtime friend, the politician Grigory Yavlinsky, celebrated the Nobel with schnitzel, mashed potatoes, and vodka at the *Novaya Gazeta* cafeteria. The lunch squeezed our interview, which bumped into Muratov's next appointment. Still in his office ten minutes past his scheduled departure time, jacket on and bag in hand, Muratov asked me, "Do you want some whiskey? People have been congratulating me and bringing a lot of alcohol. This looks like it would be good." He poured us two snifters. He refilled them. As we drank, he issued instructions to his assistant, Olga: "Tell them I'm leaving"; "Let's say I'm stuck in traffic." After an hour, Olga announced that she would make no more excuses. *Novaya Gazeta*, a registered nonprofit, depends primarily on donations, and Muratov had a meeting with a donor. "I have to go, since I've already given away all the prize money," he said.

According to the Nobel committee's citation, Muratov and Ressa—the C.E.O. and co-founder of Rappler, a digital newspaper in Manila—received the prize "for their efforts to safeguard freedom of expression, which is a precondition for democracy and lasting peace." Under Muratov's leadership, *Novaya Gazeta* has survived for nearly thirty years, longer than virtually any other independent media outlet in Russia. It publishes a print issue three times a week (the October 11th issue—the first one after the Nobel—featured Ressa on the cover), with a press run of ninety thousand, and releases a constant stream of online articles, videos, and podcasts; its Web site draws about half a million unique visitors per day, and about nine million per month. *Novaya Gazeta* is known for its conflict reporting, particularly from Chechnya and eastern Ukraine, and its investigations: it was the Russian partner in the international consortium of journalists that mined the Panama Papers, which exposed the offshore bank accounts linked to many world leaders and their allies, including close associates of Putin. But most people probably think of *Novaya Gazeta* first as the publication that lost six journalists and contributors to murder between 2000 and 2009. The newspaper and its staff operate in a near-constant state of emergency, always under

Dmitry Muratov is the Nobel Prize–winning editor of Novaya Gazeta.

threat and often on the verge of folding.

By all accounts, the paper's continued existence is the result of Muratov's unceasing negotiations with the many men in and near the Kremlin who have the power—and, often, the desire—to shut *Novaya Gazeta* down. If one imagines a future in which Russia enjoys democracy and lasting peace, then Muratov, who has maintained a fragile sort of peace for a community that exercises freedom of expression in a profoundly unfree country, embodies the precondition for such a future.

Muratov was born on October 30, 1961, in Kuybyshev (now Samara), a city on the Volga River. Like many Russians of his generation, he was raised by two women: his mother, a factory technician, and her mother, a doctor. The women worked all the time, leaving Muratov to hang out in the courtyards of what he describes as a rough neighborhood. He got into fights and played hockey on the makeshift rinks that used to dot Soviet housing blocks. (His office in Moscow holds a display of several dozen hockey sticks that once belonged to well-known Russian and Soviet players.)

In the Soviet Union of the nineteen-sixties and seventies, the past didn't exist, because no one talked about it. The future didn't exist, because nothing ever changed. Time stood still. Life was preordained. Boys went to school for eight years, then to trade school, then to the military, and then they had dull jobs and drank a lot. Muratov assumed that he'd be a truck driver or a photographer, because the neighborhood vocational school offered these specialties. Today, at six feet tall and two hundred and forty pounds, with a full beard and a preference for bluejeans and work shirts, he looks like a long-haul driver. But forty-five years ago there was a girl, and she was going on to high school rather than to trade school, and so did he.

Muratov then went to Kuybyshev State University, and life suddenly became interesting. A stout, butch Jewish woman named Sophia Agranovich taught folklore studies. She smoked in the auditorium and delivered meandering lectures full of off-color jokes and entire poems recited from memory; most important to Muratov, she revealed how language, story, and myth worked. "Do you know why Baba Yaga"—the evil witch in Russian folklore—"has one leg made of flesh and one made of bone?" he roared at me across the conference table in his office. "It's because she has one foot in the kingdom of the dead!" He sounded like he'd learned it that morning, not forty years ago. Another professor, Lev Fink, had spent seventeen years in labor camps and internal exile. His students read Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, whose work was banned in the Soviet Union, because, Fink said, they needed to know the enemy. He secured passes for his students to the local *spetskhran*, or "special collection," where the state kept banned books. (In Kuybyshev, the *spetskhran* was situated in the attic of the opera theatre.) On his first visit, Muratov tried reading Freud. He was unimpressed. The book seemed to say that the world ran on sex; Muratov had already concluded that the world ran on joy.

He got a job at *Volzhsky Komsomolets*, the regional youth paper. "It was a joyous paper," he told me. He had been out of college for less than a year when he was summoned to the local Party headquarters and offered a position at a Party newspaper. It came with a good salary and housing; Muratov had got married (not to his high-school flame), and was living with his wife and his grandmother in an apartment that consisted of two rooms and a kitchen. Saying no to the Party was a punishable offense, and in Muratov's case the penalty was two years of military service. But, in a moral universe shaped by Lev Fink and Sophia Agranovich, Muratov could see no justification for taking a Party job. He called his young wife, who agreed. He left the Party headquarters and reported to the draft-registration office. "That was the end of youth for me," he said. He was twenty-two years old.

It was 1983, and the Soviet Union was at war in Afghanistan. Muratov refuses to say where he served or what he did. "I signed an N.D.A.," he told me. I argued that Muratov had made his promise to a state that no longer exists. "But I signed it," he said. If, in Muratov's world, joy is the fuel of everything, then loyalty—understood broadly—is the road map. One never goes back on one's word.

At university, Muratov had discovered that Russia's people and language had a past; while he was in the military, he saw the first glimmers of Russia's future. The general secretary of the Communist Party, Yuri Andropov, died after fifteen months in office. The man who replaced him, Konstantin Chernenko, died a year later. A decades-long gerontocracy began to crumble. Chernenko's successor was a sprightly fifty-four-year-old, Mikhail Gorbachev. He started talking about perestroika (restructuring) and glasnost (openness). Within a few years, newspapers would be publishing bold reports on Afghanistan, poverty, the crimes of the Stalin era, and many other previously forbidden topics.

Muratov returned to *Volzhsky Komsomolets* after his military service. He and his colleagues persuaded local leaders of the Komsomol, the Communist youth organization, to take a monthlong vacation and let other people run things in their absence. The newspaper then put out a casting call for their replacements and pursued a real-life experiment in the rotation of political power. A few weeks later, Gennady Seleznev, the editor-in-chief of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*—the national youth daily, known as a cool, ambitious newspaper—called. Seleznev ordered Muratov to be in Moscow the following morning.

Muratov took the overnight train and headed to the office of *Komsomolskaya Pravda*, in the big media compound on Pravda Street. "They had this long hallway, with three elevators. I was issued a pass to take the central elevator," he said. He stood there, young, large, dishevelled, with a ratty little suitcase. Muratov recognized two men who were waiting for elevators at either end of the hallway: Yaroslav Golovanov, a legendary journalist who wrote about space exploration, and Leonid Repin, a famed travel writer.

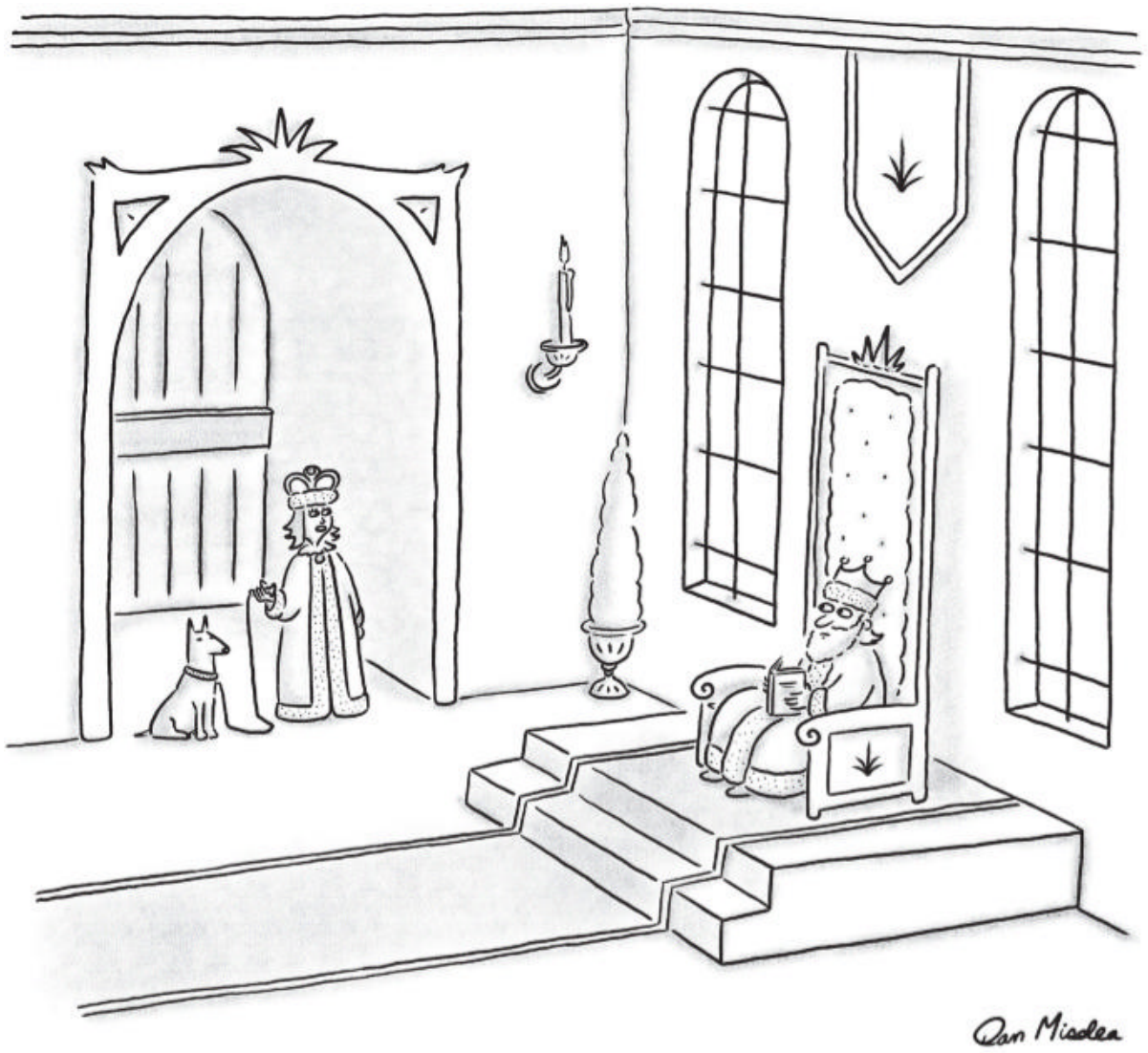
Golovanov shouted to Repin, past Muratov, in a high voice, almost a falsetto, "Lyonechka! I am going to Paris. What shall I bring back for you?"

"Slava, bring me some condoms!" Repin shouted back. Condoms were in short supply in the U.S.S.R., and both men had proud reputations as womanizers.

"What color condoms would you like, Lyonya?" Golovanov shouted.

"Green!"

"You are right, Lyonya," Golovanov



"Are you just going to sit around in your robe all day?"

shouted. "Green makes you look younger."

It was the most worldly conversation Muratov had ever heard.

Today, he often uses a similar intonation of loud, performative familiarity, frequently laced with profanity, that invites the interlocutor to be in on some shared knowledge. (When the Nobel committee was trying to reach him, Muratov was arguing with one of *Novaya Gazeta's* reporters, Elena Milashina. Later, when I asked him what the argument was about, he exclaimed, "Masha! Masha! How could one not be having a fight with Milashina? How can one ever have a calm discussion with Milashina?" I have no idea; I barely know Milashina.) It's the intonation from that overheard conversation from 1987, when history was suddenly happening, and the newspapers were writing it down, and everyone read them, and everything they reported mattered. "The eighties and the nineties—it was a black-and-white show in which everyone smoked and we were called 'newspapermen,'" he told me. "That was my life. Now I study new things, I take classes in English and coding, but I'm still there, in the time of the war in Chechnya, in Afghanistan, the war in Karabakh, the storming of the television tower in Vilnius—I'm still there, right there." We were a couple of glasses of whiskey into the conversation.

In 1992, a year after the collapse of the Soviet Union, several dozen journalists, including Muratov, left *Komsomolskaya Pravda* to start something new. On April 1, 1993, *Novaya Yezhednevnaya Gazeta* (the *New Daily Newspaper*) published its first issue. At the time, President Boris Yeltsin was locked in battle with parliament. The front page featured a miniature manifesto, headlined "A FEW QUESTIONS FOR OURSELVES." The first question was "Whose side are you on?" The answer: "Neither . . . We need new people, with hands clean enough to conduct politics and minds clear and sober enough to know how to do it. The fact that they didn't exist before does not mean they don't exist at all."

The next year, Russian troops launched an offensive in the breakaway republic of Chechnya, and Muratov went to report on the war. So did hundreds of other Russian and foreign journalists. Reporters risked their lives documenting the brutality of a military carpet-bombing its fellow-citizens; they published long exposés of the origins and the mechanics of the humanitarian catastrophe. But the war went on, and life elsewhere in Russia continued as it had before. This was the end of the era when everything mattered and the beginning of the epoch of cynicism. Russians, like much of the rest of the world, are still living in that time—now labelled "post-truth"—but Muratov has refused to accept it. In 1995, he became the editor-in-chief of *Novaya Yezhednevnaya Gazeta*.

Yeltsin, who remained President until the end of 1999, permitted a number of independent media outlets to thrive. When Putin succeeded Yeltsin, that unprecedented press freedom was all but crushed. Most Russian media organizations that began in the nineteen-nineties have long since shut down; others have been absorbed by the state propaganda apparatus. One of the exceptions is the radio station Ekho Moskvy (the Echo of Moscow), which frequently criticizes the government, praises dissenters like the opposition politician Alexey Navalny, and appeals mainly to older liberals. Another is *Novaya Gazeta*, which, aside from dropping "daily" from its name, has undergone remarkably few changes.

After other media stopped reporting from Chechnya—because it was too dangerous and it felt futile—*Novaya Gazeta* stayed on the story, documenting the death toll, the disintegration of civilian life, the disappearances and hostage takings, and, starting in 2000, the rise of the Kadyrov-dynasty dictatorship. The lead journalist covering Chechnya, Anna Politkovskaya, survived an apparent poisoning in 2004; in 2006, she was shot dead in her apartment building in Moscow. Elena Milashina took over the beat, and has broken many stories: in 2017, she exposed the arrests and extrajudicial executions of gay men in Chechnya. *Novaya Gazeta* also aggressively investigated the war in Ukraine. In 2014 and 2015, the special correspondent Elena Kostyuchenko documented the Russian occupation of

eastern Ukraine, which the Kremlin denied. And after a Malaysian passenger plane was shot down over a region of eastern Ukraine held by pro-Russian separatists, in 2014, *Novaya Gazeta* journalists spent months reconstructing the tragedy.

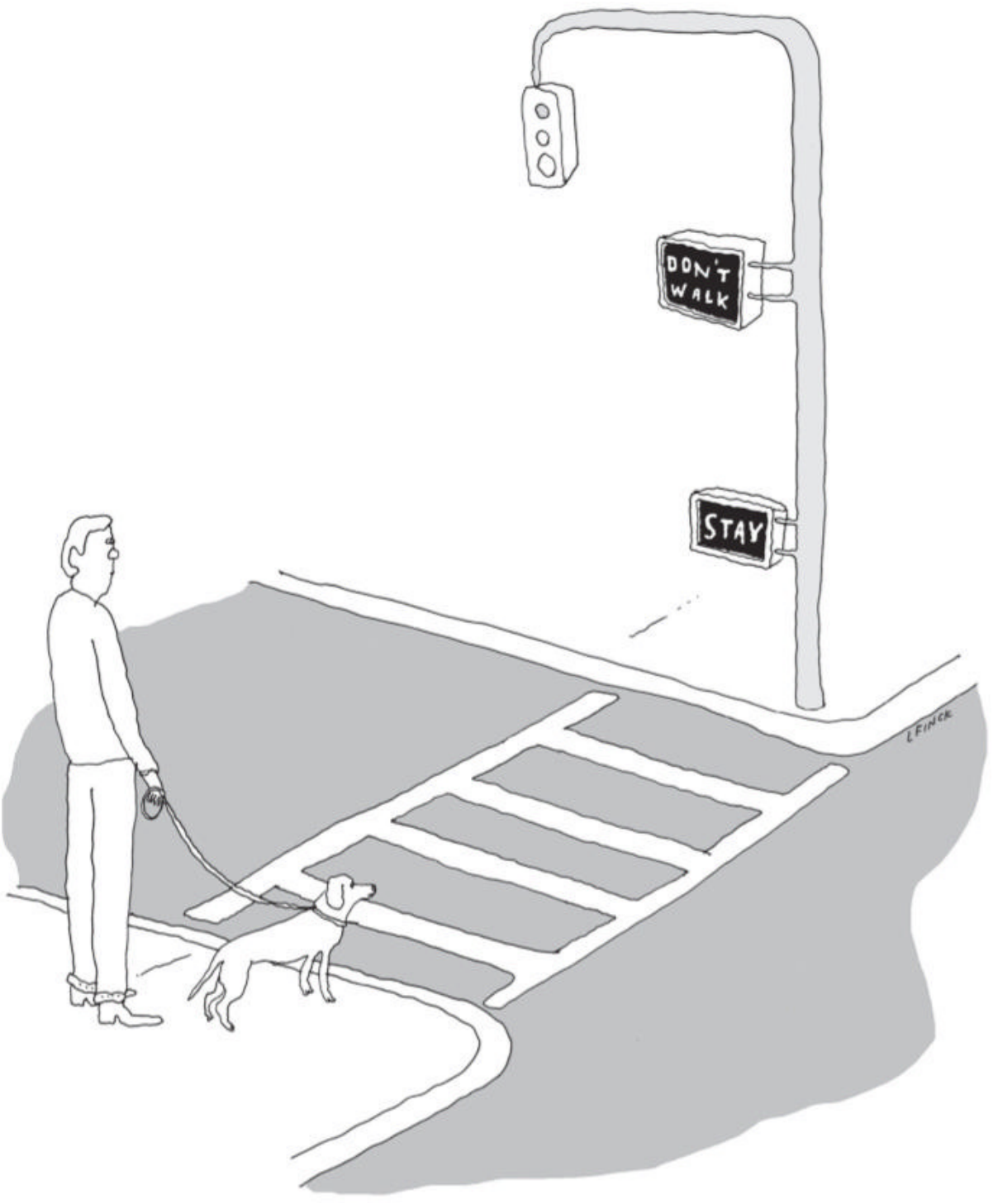
It's not quite precise to describe *Novaya Gazeta* as a newspaper. It is not what, say, the *Times* or even the lefty investigative magazine *Mother Jones* would be under more trying circumstances. Imagine, rather, the *Village Voice* of the nineteen-eighties crossed with a mutual-aid society, but run, at times, like Occupy Wall Street. *Novaya Gazeta* is a community and a humanitarian institution, and it is very messy.

Novaya Gazeta also carries on a peculiar Soviet tradition: the newspaper as a court of justice. The Soviet citizen lived surrounded by impenetrable walls of bureaucracy—there was no recourse for injustices big or small, except when a letter to a newspaper got a reporter's attention and didn't elicit the censor's objections. A story could lead to change: an abusive teacher would get fired, for example, or an unsafe building would get repaired. At *Novaya Gazeta*, such stories are mainstays. In the late nineteen-nineties, when Russian troops pulled out of Chechnya, leaving some fifteen hundred soldiers behind—no one knew how many were dead or were being held captive—the paper regularly published articles by an Army officer, Major Vyacheslav Izmailov, who organized search parties and wrote about them. For years, families would come to *Novaya Gazeta* to ask Izmailov to find their sons. In 2000, the paper opened a hotline to collect word-of-mouth reports of soldier deaths in order to check official statistics on military casualties in Chechnya. The project later expanded to include survivors, then changed to compel the military to help the wounded and their families. People would line up outside Anna Politkovskaya's office to ask for help with their disappeared or injured loved ones. In 2002, when a group of Chechens took more than nine hundred people hostage in a Moscow theatre, Politkovskaya went in as a negotiator and persuaded the hostage takers to allow water and juice to be delivered to their captives. In 2004, when another group took more than a thousand children and adults hostage at a school in Beslan, in southern Russia, Politkovskaya flew there to negotiate, but was poisoned en route. "This paper was created to help people," Milashina told me. "Not humanity but people—and not by informing them but by getting them actual help."

Muratov "is a paratrooper," Dmitry Bykov, a poet and a journalist who has been affiliated with *Novaya Gazeta* for twenty-two years, told me. "He values friendship above all else, and he is always ready to parachute in. He was a paratrooper in the military, too." Bykov must have found a crack in Muratov's N.D.A.

Unlike most publications, in Russia and elsewhere, *Novaya Gazeta* does not belong to a wealthy individual, a corporation, or a foundation; it is owned collectively by its staff. When the paper began, Milashina said, "there weren't yet any wealthy people who wished to invest in media." One early supporter, Gorbachev, bought some computers for the paper; legend has it, he drew the funds from his own Nobel Peace Prize, which he received in 1990. In 2006, facing an acute financial crisis, the paper sold a minority stake to Alexander Lebedev, a billionaire who had served in the K.G.B. After a few years, Lebedev, who was divesting in Russia, gave the shares back to the *Novaya Gazeta* collective.

In the Soviet Union, all publications were (on paper) collectives and editors were (nominally) elected. In truth, Soviet media were microcosms of the totalitarian state. Over time, *Novaya Gazeta* has become a functioning democracy: the editor-in-chief, the editorial board, and a recently created ethics council are all elected. Any staff member can call a general meeting to air a grievance. A few years ago, in a radio appearance, Muratov praised a writer from a different outlet for a story about protests and



memory in Beslan; Elena Kostyuchenko had covered the story, too, but Muratov did not acknowledge her work. Kostyuchenko and her colleagues called a group meeting. Muratov heard her out. He hedged and preened a bit—he quoted the French sociologist Jean Baudrillard—then conceded, "Something fragile has been violated. If Lena feels it, then that's what happened. I sincerely apologize. I certainly didn't want to hurt you. Can we put this behind us?" (The meeting was filmed by the documentarian Askold Kurov, who included the footage in a movie he made about *Novaya Gazeta*.) Kostyuchenko, a woman with a thin, birdlike profile, nodded without looking at Muratov. The meeting ended. Two women comforted Kostyuchenko as she wept.

Soon afterward, Ilya Azar—the journalist whom Muratov had praised at Kostyuchenko's expense—joined *Novaya Gazeta* and ran for editor-in-chief. Azar printed flyers stating that, with Muratov ever at the helm, the paper's idea of democracy was "like Putin's, if not worse." He got thirteen votes to Muratov's seventy-four. (A third candidate, the paper's longtime director general, Sergei Kozheurov, got fifty-one.) Azar and Kostyuchenko now share an office.

Novaya Gazeta's tolerance for internal dissent meant that even its most celebrated reporter, Politkovskaya, faced skepticism from her colleagues. "I didn't like the tone of her writing—it was too personal and a bit hysterical," Dmitry Bykov told me; they "barely spoke for the last few years" of her life. (In the early two-thousands, Bykov also vehemently disagreed with Muratov's—and many *Novaya Gazeta* writers'—wariness and criticism of Putin, but, he said, "this had no impact on my relationship with Muratov.")

Roman Anin, an investigative reporter, told me of Politkovskaya, "A month after I started working for the paper, I was vocally expressing my outrage: 'How long is she going to get away with casting aspersions on the Russian military?'" (He also said that he was nineteen at the time and "an idiot.") Muratov tried to convince Politkovskaya that she was risking her life for Chechen freedom long after Chechen people themselves had embraced a dictator. He told me that they fought loudly in the *Novaya Gazeta* cafeteria, even knocking over a couple of barstools, and afterward didn't speak for months. (Other staffers, eavesdropping on the racket from behind closed doors, believed that the editor and the reporter had actually thrown chairs at each other; Muratov genially embraced the tale.) "No one ever fears getting fired here—everyone threatens to quit," Milashina told me. In twenty-four years at the paper, she has quit too many times to count, usually because Muratov kept asking her to stop reporting on Chechnya. He ripped up her letters of resignation; once, Milashina ripped up her *Novaya Gazeta* press card. She still works there, and still reports on Chechnya.

Novaya Gazeta is an erratic publication. Some of its projects are stunningly ambitious and inventive: in 2019, the paper convened a data-journalism marathon to code and analyze more than twenty-five hundred cases in which women were convicted of premeditated murder, and found that seventy-nine per cent of the women had killed while defending themselves against a husband or a male partner. *Novaya Gazeta's* stories are often eye-opening—Kostyuchenko's report on institutions for mentally ill adults described inhumane warehousing conditions in unprecedented detail—or spectacularly brave, such as the multipart report based on the Panama Papers leak, which uncovered an extensive network of offshore accounts linked to Putin's longtime friend Sergei Roldugin, a cellist. (Roldugin has denied any wrongdoing.) But other articles are too long, meandering, overinterpreted, and underreported, and some are deeply flawed. In 2016, the paper published a story about an online game in which adult participants supposedly manipulated teen-agers into killing themselves; relying primarily on interviews with the teen-agers' families, the author, Galina Mursalieva, claimed to have documented a hundred and thirty such deaths. During the next couple of years, other independent Russian reporters poked various holes in the story. *Novaya Gazeta* has acknowledged that the article was rushed and poorly edited, but maintains that it drew much needed attention to the problem of teen suicide and social-media use. The article has been viewed online more than three and a half million times.

In the past decade, even as the Kremlin's crackdown on independent media has intensified, Russian journalists have created new media outlets that are agile, daring, and innovative. The independent channel TV Rain has hot-pink corporate branding and a hip, conversational tone. The home page of the investigative outlet Proekt resembles a children's-book catalogue, as if to say, "Click on any window to find an immersive tale of corruption and greed." Little about *Novaya Gazeta* feels hip or new or cheeky. The print edition looks much as it did in the nineteen-nineties. Its office, recently renovated, is like the love child of Russian bureaucratic architecture and IKEA. More than half of its online audience is forty-five or older. Yet *Novaya Gazeta* continues to appeal to the kind of young Russian who has, against all reason, decided to become a journalist. People come to intern at *Novaya Gazeta* as students and often stay for good.

Recently, a dozen of the youngest staffers wrote an ethics code that addresses sexual harassment and other kinds of mistreatment in the workplace. The staff voted to adopt the code and create a five-member ethics council. "People used to be rude to one another a lot," Milashina said. "Muratov was a jackass, and he didn't realize that he was hurting people. I frequently encountered his jackass behavior—granted, in response to my own." He yelled. He put people down. One of his favorite sayings was "What's worth more—your copy or a hectare of tall, beautiful young pine trees?" Milashina said, "The older staff members couldn't make him see the damage, but the young put him in his place. It's fun to watch."

Muratov told me, "The very fact of this code and council means that this kind of bullshit—when someone who is your boss and is male and all that—that just can't happen to you here anymore."

(He had stumbled slightly on the exact nature of the thing he was condemning.) "And if it does I'll fuck them up, over and above the decision of the ethics committee, quickly and skillfully, as I was taught in the military."

A different kind of generational divide has proved more difficult for Muratov. In the past few years, Russian investigative journalists—most prominently those working for Navalny's organization, whose reach has come to rival that of *Novaya Gazeta*—have explored the personal relationships of powerful Russians to understand how corruption functions. They have mined social-media accounts to find yachts allegedly belonging to Putin's close ally Yevgeny Prigozhin and tracked down property and investment records that seem tied to a woman who may be the mother of one of Putin's daughters. They have found a woman believed to be another one of Putin's daughters, who, with her former husband, seems to have become wealthy through lucrative state concessions. This kind of sleuthing is too much for Muratov. "I won't delve into people's private lives," he said. "Because I am not without sin myself. I have no mercy for a politician, but, when it comes to their family members, their wives, children, and the women they love, I draw the line. When they want to write about Putin's daughter, I ask myself, 'Do I want someone writing about mine?' " Muratov never talks about his family. (One of his children, a journalist in the United States, declined to speak to me, citing safety concerns.)

Muratov said that these boundaries cost *Novaya Gazeta* one of its star investigative reporters, Roman Anin. "Muratov is responsible for a hundred and fifty people who will lose their livelihoods if the paper is shut down—I have fewer responsibilities," Anin told me. A year ago, he launched *iStories* (short for *Important Stories*), which recently published an article about a woman who appears to be the longtime girlfriend of the foreign minister, Sergey Lavrov (an allegation that Lavrov has denied); the woman and her daughter have significant real-estate holdings and an impressive collection of luxury cars. The Russian state has designated *iStories*, Anin, and five of his colleagues as "foreign agents," a legal status that entails bizarre bureaucratic and public obligations, including registering yourself as a legal entity, reporting your every expense to the Justice Ministry, and prefacing any written or spoken statement with the declaration that you are a foreign agent. Failure to comply can result in criminal prosecution. Anin has been living in exile since July.

Muratov said of Anin, "It was very painful for me that I wasn't brave enough to let him pursue some of his ideas. With age, your risk tolerance naturally wanes, until you realize that no story is worth risking one hair on a staff member's head."

If Muratov really thought that no amount of risk was acceptable, he couldn't be a journalist in Russia. But of all the parts an editor plays for his reporters—mentor, source of encouragement, voice of reality—Muratov's principal role is that of protector. As macabre as this calculus is, there have been no violent deaths at the paper since 2009. There have been threats and attacks: Kostyuchenko has been physically assaulted, detained, and credibly threatened with terrifying regularity. In 2017, the paper twice received envelopes filled with an unidentified white powder (later deemed harmless). Earlier this year, someone dressed as a bicycle messenger rode up to the building and sprayed it with an unknown chemical substance.

In April, 2019, Bykov fell ill during a flight to Ufa, a few hours east of Moscow. His symptoms were similar to those which Navalny experienced when he was poisoned aboard a plane the following year. According to Bellingcat, the investigative-journalism group that identified Navalny's probable attackers, Bykov was targeted by the same people. Bykov told me, "My wife, Katya, called an ambulance, but they didn't want to come out, just because the airport is so far away. Her second phone call was to Muratov. He got the ambulance to come. Then he flew to Ufa. Then he arranged for my transport to Moscow. Then he was the first person who came to see me in intensive care at the hospital in Moscow."

In 2017, Khudoberdy Nurmatov, a regular contributor, was arrested, ostensibly

"Excuse me, this is the work table."

for violating immigration law. A refugee from Uzbekistan, he wrote under the pen name Ali Feruz, primarily about Central Asian politics, but his most recent story had investigated the death of an eighteen-year-old conscript at a military training camp. While Feruz was held at a migrant-detention center outside Moscow, the paper filed claims in Russian and European courts on his behalf, appealed to Russian officials, and kept up a steady stream of publicity. Feruz is gay, and he and his colleagues feared that his deportation to Uzbekistan would be tantamount to a death sentence. Finally, Muratov got someone—he will not reveal the person's name—to override the police and the courts. After six months in detention, Feruz was released, and he left for Germany.

To keep his colleagues safe, Muratov has struck many fraught bargains. In 2009, after one of *Novaya Gazeta's* correspondents in Chechnya, Natalya Estemirova, was kidnapped and killed, Muratov learned that a second reporter who wrote about Chechnya was in imminent danger. Through a government official, he made an offer: in exchange for the second reporter's safety, *Novaya Gazeta* would refrain from covering Chechnya for a year. "Maybe that was the wrong thing to do," Muratov said in an interview for a film released by *Novaya Gazeta* for the fifteenth anniversary of Politkovskaya's death. "But I'd do it all over again."

In June, 2012, Alexander Bastrykin, the head of Russia's top prosecutorial body, asked Muratov's deputy, Sergei Sokolov, for a meeting. He drove Sokolov into a forest outside Moscow, where he raged at him and threatened to mutilate him. Muratov published a furious open letter detailing what had happened to Sokolov and demanding an apology from Bastrykin. Someone brokered a meeting. Bastrykin apologized to Muratov "for going overboard," and Muratov apologized to Bastrykin for getting overly emotional. Then they shook hands.

After more than two decades as editor-in-chief, Muratov decided, in 2017, not to run for reëlection. For the next two years, his title was publisher, and Sergei Kozheurov was editor-in-chief. "I was tired," Muratov told me. Milashina has a different explanation: the paper was on the verge of being shut down, she said, and Muratov agreed to step aside in exchange for *Novaya Gazeta's* continued existence. Muratov returned to his post in 2019—because, he told me, he had figured out all the ways in which the paper could be reinvigorated. He also understands that he is uniquely suited to steering the newspaper through crises. Anin calls Muratov "the great negotiator": he knows whom to talk to when, and has the access. "The opposition has to be as stable and unchanging as the regime," Bykov said.

In the past few years, *Novaya Gazeta* has invested heavily in digital media, starting a video-and-audio division and pouring resources into data journalism. In 2018, the paper launched a crowdfunding platform, which has become a primary source of support. A yellow button on the Web site invites visitors to "become a co-conspirator"; more than a hundred thousand people have done so. Younger staffers have started a TikTok account—a point of particular pride for Muratov—and half a dozen podcasts. A podcast producer, Nadezhda Yurova, who helped campaign for *Novaya Gazeta's* ethics reforms, wants to one day produce a podcast on L.G.B.T.Q.+ issues. Muratov has been supportive, she said, but they haven't yet figured out how to do it without putting the paper at risk—standing up for L.G.B.T. rights may be the fastest route to being designated a "foreign agent."

Muratov pushes the ever-shifting boundary of what is possible in Russia, but never so far that *Novaya Gazeta* is shut down. He resents being asked how he has managed to secure the paper's survival for so long. Whenever I broached the question, Muratov shouted at me; once, he hung up the phone on me. "Do we have to be shut down to become trustworthy?" he bellowed. (Navalny, who has been imprisoned since January of this year, used to be similarly besieged by suspicions and questions about why he was still alive and still free.) But yes, Muratov said, "I engage in secret diplomacy. And I'm not going to tell you anything about it."

Every so often, Kostyuchenko told me, Muratov orders staff members to finish any projects so that they can be published before the paper has to close. "Then a couple of weeks pass and he goes, 'As you were,'" she said.

The secret of Muratov's diplomacy may be simple: he knows many of the men who, through the years, have wielded power in Russia. He met some of them in the nineties, when they were beginning their careers and he was an upstart newspaperman. A few even worked alongside him at *Komsomolskaya Pravda*. Other opposition journalists are an abstracted enemy to these men, but not Muratov—he drinks with them. He even starts charitable projects with them. The Circle of Kindness, a foundation launched at *Novaya Gazeta's* instigation to help children with spinal muscular atrophy, was created earlier this year by Putin's special decree.

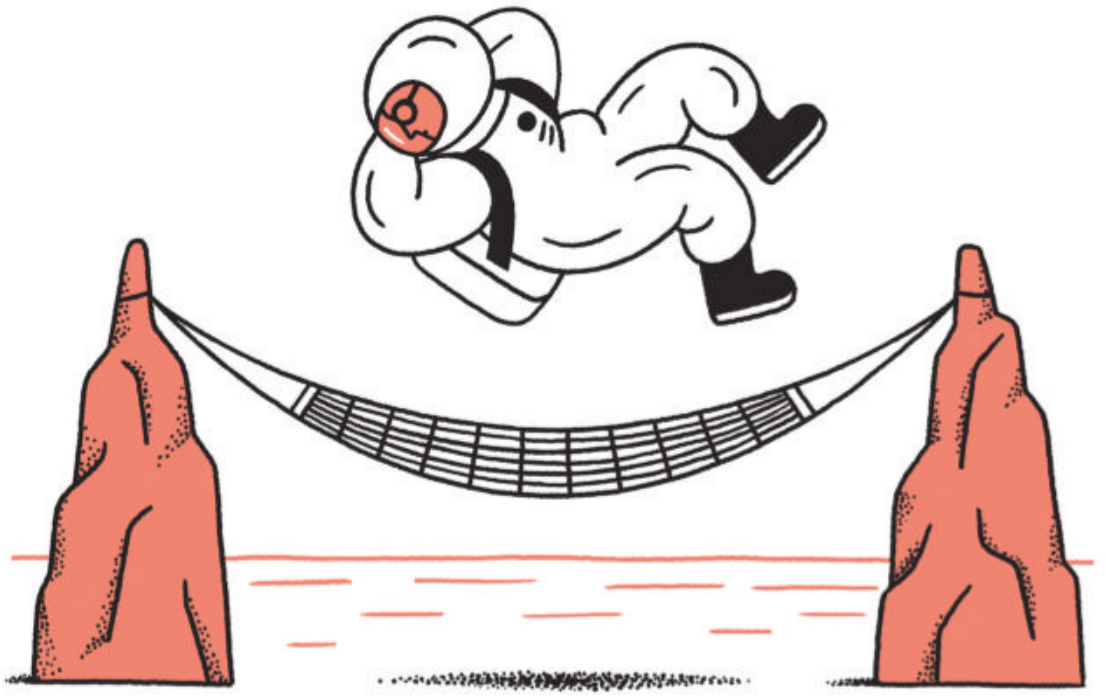
Two weeks after he got the Nobel, Muratov participated in the Valdai meeting, Putin's annual gathering of handpicked journalists and scholars. In prepandemic times, Putin typically spent a day at Valdai mingling with foreign and domestic notables. This year, he appeared only briefly, speaking to participants from a very socially distant stage. Muratov got a chance to ask Putin a question, but first he announced how his Nobel money would be allocated: to the Circle of Kindness, to two hospices, to a foundation for children with cancer, to a prize endowed in memory of Politkovskaya, and to a medical-aid fund for journalists. All but the last two entities have received Putin's imprimatur. Then Muratov took the opportunity to criticize the law on "foreign agents" for its arbitrary and extrajudicial enforcement.

Putin responded by congratulating Muratov on his Nobel; he deflected the criticism of the law. As often happens in Russia, the most significant part of the exchange was in the omissions. Muratov made no mention of using the Nobel money to help media organizations that had been declared foreign agents, as he had previously promised. He had not dropped the plan—he will channel the money through the Politkovskaya prize. But this was neither the time nor the place to draw attention to his scheme. ♦

That's Too Bad Dept.

From the Times.

An earlier version of this article referred incorrectly to the ownership of Dimes restaurant in Lower Manhattan. The restaurant's owners are not models.



WELCOME TO MARS!

BY NICKY GUERREIRO AND ETHAN SIMON

Although life on Mars is perfect in every single way, you might have some questions.

Is there air here?
Great question! Scientists and other busybodies are quick to assert that Mars has no air. This is simply not true. Mars has loads of air; it's just different.

Different how?
You might not realize it, but Earth's air has a lot more than just oxygen. Nitrogen, argon, bees—when you breathe air on Earth, there's no telling what you're inhaling. Mars's air, on the other hand, is completely, a hundred per cent pure. It contains only one ingredient: dust.

Can I breathe the dust?
Definitely not.

Has anyone ever died on Mars?
Nope! Statistically, Mars is the safest place in the universe. On Earth, people die every day from things like traffic accidents and poorly maintained carnival rides. Not here. One guy went outside and tried to breathe the dust, and even he didn't die. He lives in a glass tube now, and our team of doctors is helping him lead a productive and dignified life.

Is there gravity?
Gravity on Mars is thirty-eight per cent of that on Earth, so you will weigh considerably less here than you did back home. This has its pros and cons. On the con side, your muscles will atrophy to the point where returning to Earth would kill you. But, on the pro side, everyone can dunk.

I can't go back to Earth?
Of course you can! People go back to Earth every day. Many live for weeks.

O.K. Is there TV here?
Yes! Mars is a utopia, which means TV is perfect here. On Mars, "Lost" makes sense, and "The Sopranos" ends with Tony explaining the exact time and manner of his death. We put the "Game of Thrones" finale in a really deep hole.

What about music?
Studies show that music makes people homesick, so we've eliminated every reference to Earth from the canon of Western music. Groove along to such classics as "Heaven Is a Place on Mars" and the complete works of Mars, Wind & Fire.

How about books? I love books.
On Mars, you don't have to pretend.

Where is my wife?
Our algorithm determined that your old marriage was an inefficient pairing, so you have been assigned a new wife. Your new wife is tender and supportive. And, like you, she is a six.

But I liked Megan. She smelled nice. On the weekends, she made waffles.
Megan's with Chuck now. Chuck is an eight, and he understands things about sex and pleasure that you will never grasp. He, too, loves waffles.

What do I do for work?
Like all Mars residents, you will be employed by The Corporation. You will enjoy an exciting career in a fast-paced and collaborative mine shaft.

I don't want to work in a mine shaft.
Sounds like someone should have finished dental school.

Do I get paid?
Good news! As a utopia, Mars has no need for money. In exchange for the lithium you mine, The Corporation will provide you with a daily ration of gruel. The amount of gruel you receive will be determined by how much lithium you extract, and by whether you can curry favor with a small group of benevolent billionaires.

Is this slavery?
You worry too much.

Because what you're describing is the literal definition of slavery.
What am I, a dictionary? Look, we could go back and forth all day about who is and isn't a slave, but then we'd have a pile of unmined lithium, and we'd both look foolish.

Is there food that isn't gruel?
There's a Sbarro.

Oh.
Yeah, most people just stick with the gruel. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

BECOMING VOCAL

Davóne Tines is changing what it means to be an operatic singer.

BY ALEX ROSS

Before the altar of the church stood a large screen displaying the words "RECITAL NO. 1: MASS," in black letters on a white background. The singer entered from the back, walking slowly, delivering an a-cappella setting of the Kyrie from the traditional Mass, by the contemporary composer Caroline Shaw: "Lord have mercy, Christ have mercy." The light was low, almost séance-like. The singer wore a black suit jacket over a black tank top, with a pearl rosary around his neck. Once he reached the front of the church, he walked over to a piano, where an accompanist was waiting for him, and launched into Bach's "Wie jammern mich," from the cantata "Vergnügte Ruh": "How I bewail those wayward hearts/That set themselves against you, my God." He then sang the spiritual "Were You There When They Crucified My Lord?," in a ghostly, semi-modernist arrangement by Tyshawn Sorey. There followed another segment of Shaw's Mass, the Agnus Dei. In a matter of minutes, we had traversed multiple centuries and worlds, yet all the music was filtered through the taut resonance of one voice: a timbre at once grand and fraught, potent and vulnerable.

The singer was the thirty-four-year-old bass-baritone Davóne Tines, performing with the pianist Adam Nielsen at the First Congregational Church of Los Angeles, in September. I had never heard a recital quite like it: instead of the usual smorgasbord of tastefully varied selections, it felt like a sustained creative statement, almost a composition in itself. It culminated in another startling a-cappella moment: a rendition of "Prelude to the Holy Presence of Joan d'Arc," by the avant-garde Black composer Julius Eastman, who died in obscurity in 1990. Tines conveyed this music with disciplined desperation, rising to a siren-like wail on the line "Joan, speak boldly when they question you."

The next day, at a café in the Hollywood Hills, Tines ordered a sausage-and-spinach scramble and spoke to me about the "MASS" program—one of several projects in which he is challenging the conventions of classical music, tackling themes of race and sexuality and expanding what it means to possess an operatic voice. Tines, whose first name is pronounced "da-*von*," arrived with his suitcase in tow: he was heading to Detroit, where he is an artist-in-residence at the Michigan Opera Theatre, and where, next spring, he will sing the title role of Anthony Davis's 1986 opera, "X: The Life and Times of Malcolm X." Onstage, Tines is an intense, magnetic presence, and also, at six feet two and a half, a towering one. In person, he is urbane, discursive, and playful, though he speaks with an unguarded directness that is not often encountered in the nervous corridors of classical music.

"When I was at Juilliard, we were given instruction in how to build a recital," Tines told me. "You were supposed to follow a template, where you establish your abilities in various areas—antique Italian arias, Lieder, and so on. And there'd be a section at the end where you were allowed to do something 'fun.' I saw this type of recital so many times, and at the end you'd see a person suddenly come alive. And I'd always ask myself, 'Hmm—why didn't that happen the whole time?'"

Most rising singers do as they are told. Tines, who has a bachelor's degree in sociology from Harvard and has worked in arts administration, has his own ideas about how to present himself in public. He shows up at recording sessions with a precise concept of how his voice should be equalized; he knows about lighting, lenses, film stock; his program notes are couched in his own elegant prose. He spent years planning the program that became "MASS," and ultimately hit upon

Tines speaks with an unguardedness rarely heard in the corridors of classical music.

PHOTOGRAPH BY STEFAN RUIZ

a structure built around the Latin liturgy. "I really like structures," he said. "The ritualistic template of the Mass is a proven structure—centuries of culture have upheld it. Anything that I put into it will assume a certain shape. And what I put into it is my own lived experience. I grew up singing spirituals and gospel. I also sang Bach, opera, new classical music. Julius Eastman was Black and gay like me—he's someone I idolize. It was always about finding the connections so I didn't go crazy."

The director Peter Sellars, who helped launch Tines's international career by casting him in Kaija Saariaho's 2016 chamber opera, "Only the Sound Remains," attended the Los Angeles recital, a presentation in the long-running Monday Evening Concerts series. Sellars later told me, "The first time I heard Davóne, it was so clear that he sang because he had something to *say*, not simply because he has a beautiful voice. He grew up with a sense of music being not decorative but essential—deeply functional, serving a need, serving a range of needs. He knows that music is here to meet real human needs and real divine imperatives. And that's really, really *super* different from the standard conservatory-trained opera singer."

Fauquier County, Virginia, where Tines spent his childhood, is a mostly white area east of the Blue Ridge Mountains. "Preppy horse country," he calls it. His family has lived in the region for generations. For a multimedia project titled "Everything That Rises Must Converge," which Tines is developing in collaboration with the violinist Jennifer Koh, he interviewed his grandparents John and Alma Tines, who played a primary role in raising him. On a recording, Alma is heard saying, "Your great-great-great-grandmother, she still was a slave. She lived right up the road from where we live now. . . . She was in slavery, but she never caved in. She helped to start the Trough Hill Baptist Church. Three of her great-great-great-grandchildren graduated from M.I.T., Harvard, and Juilliard."

Music of all kinds, sacred and secular, echoed through the Tineses' house; John, a retired naval officer, is also a choir pianist. Although Davóne sang in church as far back as he can remember, he devoted himself mainly to the violin, becoming the concertmaster of two school orchestras. On his CD Walkman, he listened to music ranging from Vivaldi to Janet Jackson; he recollects being especially captivated by Stravinsky's "Rite of Spring"—"those waves of sound moving through the orchestra." In his high-school years, people began noticing his booming bass-baritone. Once, Davóne recalls, he sang "faux operatically" to his grandfather, who told him, "Whoa, I think you have a voice there."

At Harvard, Tines made his first venture into opera, taking the role of the devilish Nick Shadow in a student production of Stravinsky's "The Rake's Progress." He also played violin in the Harvard-Radcliffe Orchestra, serving as the ensemble's president, and sang in the Harvard-Radcliffe Collegium Musicum. But he didn't see a future in performance: he majored in sociology because he imagined pursuing a career as an arts administrator. Marx's theory of species-being and Durkheim's concept of social alienation have remained on his mind as he ponders how classical artists can regain a sense of autonomy; all too often, they are regarded as cogs in a cultural machine that rates aesthetic values over human ones.

After college, Tines had an internship at the American Repertory Theatre, in Cambridge, Massachusetts, and then he became the production manager of the opera program at George Mason University, where he also took voice lessons. He had a side job singing in the choir at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception, in Washington, D.C., where Callista Gingrich was a fellow-chorister. ("Always a few cents flat," Tines said of her. "Terrifying Southern charm.") A growing dedication to the voice led him to apply to the master's program at Juilliard, where he studied from 2011 to 2013. Although he received excellent guidance from coaches, he found the general climate rigid and oppressive. "I felt continually that I was inadequate and being judged," he said. "Honestly, when I graduated, I didn't think I'd have a career in singing."

After graduation, Tines received unexpected encouragement from an eminent source—Lorin Maazel, the former music director of the New York Philharmonic. Tines was invited to join a summer opera program that Maazel hosted at his estate in Castleton, Virginia, and he was told, "Maestro really likes you." The social atmosphere among younger participants was mellower than it had been at Juilliard. "It was very 'Wet Hot American Opera Summer,'" Tines said, alluding to late-night pool parties. The real turning point came in 2014, when he auditioned for Sellars, who, after hearing two numbers, cast him in the Saariaho opera. Suddenly, Tines had engagements in Amsterdam, Helsinki, Paris, Madrid, and New York.

I first heard Tines in 2016, when he was a soloist in a Los Angeles Philharmonic performance of John Adams's oratorio "El Niño." Tines's stentorian delivery of the aria "Shake the Heavens," in which the singer has to approximate the voice of God ("I will shake the heavens, and the earth, and the sea, and the dry land"), was one of those moments which anyone who attends concerts lives to witness: within thirty seconds, I knew I was in the presence of a major artist. The next year, at the San Francisco Opera, Tines took part in the première of Adams's "Girls of the Golden West," intoning an aria that had been written for him: a granitic setting of Frederick Douglass's speech "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?"

Tines had made rapid progress for a singer in his early thirties. But he kept pressing forward, feeling the need to adopt a more conscious stance as a Black artist in a largely white environment. The time-honored ritual of code-switching came easily to him, but he lost patience with it. He told me, "I know just what to wear to signify class and status—that I'm an artist, but not too flamboyant about it, and I'm a little gay, and maybe even telegraphing a certain sexuality that's exciting to you, but I'm not being overt about it. There are so many levels and minutiae of messaging, and at this point in my life, having been forced into so many contexts, there's almost a certain play with it—you know? But it makes me sick, it makes me sick to my fucking stomach, that that's what I consign myself to every time I go to an Upper East Side cocktail party."

These were the years of Trumpism, of unashamed white-supremacist politics, of unending police brutality against Black

people. Tines emerged with an astounding work titled "The Black Clown," an adaptation of the eponymous poem by Langston Hughes, with a rollicking musical-theatre score by Michael Schachter. Tines had begun discussing the project with Schachter back in 2010, but it jelled in 2017, when Tines brought in Zack Winokur, one of the most inventive younger American opera directors. Tines refers to Winokur as his "art husband": the two are in constant contact, turning over ideas for new projects. "What I love about Zack's dramaturgy is that he always keeps letting the floor fall out from under you," Tines told me. "He gets you comfy with something out of vaudeville or 'Singin' in the Rain,' and then he punches you with something very dark, very raw."

Hughes's poem, written in 1931, gives a mordant overview of Black American history, emphasizing the merry-making-entertainer roles to which generation after generation of Black artists has been relegated. The production, which had its première at the American Repertory Theatre, in 2018, and then travelled to the Mostly Mozart Festival, at Lincoln Center, engenders from Hughes's verses a series of brilliant set pieces—a Harlem revue, a plantation chant, a grand second-line jazz funeral featuring the spiritual "Sometimes I Feel Like a Motherless Child"—while subtly undermining the audience's enjoyment of the razzle-dazzle. One tour de force is built around Hughes's sardonic evocation of the false promise of Emancipation: "Freedom!/Abe Lincoln done set me free—/One little moment/To dance with glee." A savage farce ensues onstage. Lincoln appears on stilts; dancers representing the formerly enslaved enter with broken chains and a noose, and do a kick line.

Tines's enactment of the Clown was, first and foremost, a stupefying technical feat. Operatically trained singers often have trouble switching into popular registers; Tines, whose voice doesn't seem to belong to any single genre, glided with ease from spirituals to jazz and on to musical theatre, R. & B., and funk. He also held his own with the show's fleet, furious choreography, by Chanel DaSilva. All the while, Tines offered a kind of essay on self-reflexive performance, distancing himself from the infectious swirl with an array of wry faces and ironic inflections. He often looked out at the crowd with a questioning stare, as if to ask, "Is *this* what you want?" His recitation of the poem's final lines made a whiplash turn from hollering desperation to cool matter-of-factness: "I was once a black clown/But now—/I'm a man!"

Many of Tines's projects can be called political, although for him they are personal and existential. In "Were You There," another collaboration with Winokur and Schachter, he sings a program of spirituals and more modern pieces while surrounded by light bulbs positioned at various heights, each one representing a Black victim of police violence. "Everything That Rises," the collaboration with Koh, interweaves African American and Asian American histories. And there's an orchestral recital, titled "Concerto No. 1: SERMON," which Tines recently presented with the BBC Symphony Orchestra and with the Philadelphia Orchestra. It consists of an aria from Davis's "X"; a work called "VIGIL," dedicated to the memory of Breonna Taylor, which Tines wrote with the Dutch-French composer Igee Dieudonné; and Adams's "Shake the Heavens." Tines begins the suite by reciting a famous line from James Baldwin's "The Fire Next Time": "The black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations." The pummelling A-minor chords of the Adams follow without pause.

For Tines, "SERMON" is an act of catharsis. It allows him to articulate the inescapability of his identity as a Black man—the way it affects every passing interaction, whether inside the music world or in everyday life, whether at moments of overt racism or during sustained stretches of polite unease. He told me, "If I really connected to the amount of rage and passion I feel, multiplied through the centuries of Black people behind me, I would run down the street punching people in the face. Singing for me is a more measured way of dealing with that emotion. I can just go out and sing 'Shake the Heavens.'"

Some presenters and audience members flinch at the bluntness of his approach. They wish that Tines would, as the phrase goes, leave politics out of it. But his Blackness can never be left out of it. When he walks onstage, he says, the first thing the audience likely thinks is "tall Black man." And he argues that an honest expression of the subjective self is, in fact, necessary to the survival of the tradition that he admires. "The message I tried to send to organizations is this," he said. " 'Cool, you can do the D.E.I. efforts, you can play a Florence Price symphony on your program. But if you don't do it well enough, or if you don't address the root issue, it's not that you will be moralistically judged—it's that your organization will simply die. Mozart alone will sell tickets for only some years. When you get to Generation Alpha's kids, they literally won't have a context for it, and it will die. Entropy is real, and the universe moves on.' "

What kind of alternative future for classical music does Tines have in mind? I got a sense of it in August, when I drove several miles up an unpaved country road in southern Vermont, near the town of Stamford, to observe Tines working with a collective called AMOC—the American Modern Opera Company. It was founded, in 2017, by Winokur and the composer Matthew Aucoin, and among its members are Tines's fellow-singers Paul Appleby, Julia Bullock, and Anthony Roth Costanzo, the dancers Bobbi Jene Smith and Or Schraiber, and the cellists Jay Campbell and Coleman Itzkoff. About half the group had assembled in Vermont to flesh out a new piece, "The No One's Rose," which would be seen later that month in Palo Alto, under the auspices of Stanford Live and the Philharmonia Baroque Orchestra & Chorale.

Stamford, a conservative-leaning town with a population of eight hundred, seems an unlikely place to find a radical opera laboratory. Controversy erupted last winter when the town board rejected COVID-19 mandates, accusing Governor Phil Scott, a Republican, of "Communist tactics." Nonetheless, the bohemians have descended. Their ringleader is the veteran dancer Marta Miller, who, some years ago, bought a property that had hosted a dance camp. She renamed the complex Certain Bird and began inviting artist friends to live and work there. Several members of AMOC have fallen sufficiently in love with the area that they have bought houses of their own. Winokur lives just up the road from Miller's farmhouse and dance

studio. Aucoin and his husband, the bassoonist Clay Zeller-Townson, have a house in town.

Aucoin and Tines first met in college, when Aucoin, a precocious freshman, coached Tines, a senior, on "The Rake's Progress." Aucoin's ascent in the music world has been even more dizzyingly swift than Tines's. Later this month, the Met will present his opera "Eurydice," and in December he will publish "The Impossible Art," a personal survey of operatic history. In the book, Aucoin succinctly describes AMOC's philosophy: "Opera is the medium in which art forms collide and transform one another." His compositional vocabulary, which initially had a somewhat traditional cast, is now tending in a spikier, more rhythmically forceful direction, as became apparent when sections of his latest piece were played in rehearsal.

AMOC is one of a number of new-generation operatic entities—Heartbeat Opera and the Prototype Festival are two others—that jettison stereotypes of the genre. Ensembles are small, sets are intimate, voices are fluid, forms are in flux. Above all, these projects are collaborative, emerging from a polyphonic exchange of ideas. Aucoin is nominally the composer of "The No One's Rose" but serves more as a musical moderator. The piece has what he calls a "Canterbury Tales" structure, with each member of the group stepping forward to communicate in song or dance. It was conceived before the pandemic, but its final iteration reflects the experience of the past two years. At the beginning, the performers are seated at a dinner table, although they soon abandon it to move around the stage. Bullock sings two Aucoin settings of poems by Paul Celan, from whom the title comes. Arrangements of Lassus, Bach, Schubert, and Berlioz are tailored to each singer's taste and skill. Appleby picks up a guitar and croons Paul Simon's "American Tune." All four voices converge to deliver Aucoin's roiling rendition of Jorie Graham's poem "Deep Water Trawling": "It is in a special sense / that the world ends. You have to keep living."

The rehearsal took place in the studio, which resembles a barn. Tines, dressed in a black tank top, black pants, and multicolored suspenders, worked on a segment that intermingled monologue and music. In a low voice, he reflected on his own propensity to disappear into "blissful hedonistic safety," saying that he has learned to "swim lovingly into realities that aren't my own." The music segued from a bit of Bach's Magnificat—the aria "Quia fecit mihi magna" ("Because he who is mighty has done great things for me, and holy is his name")—to a haunting, spiritual-like version of Sam Cooke's "Lost and Lookin'." During the latter, Itzkoff strummed a guitar-style accompaniment on his cello while Schraiber executed a loping, lunging dance. As with the "MASS" and "SERMON" programs, Tines forged a meta-composition from disparate parts—this time, one that was confessional instead of meditative or oratorical. Later, the Bach and part of the monologue were cut, but the essence of the scene remained.

In the evening, an elaborate meal was served on the back patio of Winokur's house. The mood was much mellower than it was during the dinner-table psychodrama that had been rehearsed in the studio. Partners, friends, and pets arrived from nearby houses; no fewer than seven dogs, of various breeds and sizes, rampaged through the house and yard. Schraiber, who is from Israel, supervised the making of an array of dishes incorporating homemade pita bread.

Tines, digging into a sabich pita, gave updates on an array of future projects. When he discusses his schedule, he sounds like a frantic cook: the stove that

he is manning has several front burners and many more in the back. He talked about the possibility of bringing "The Black Clown" to Broadway; about a fifty-state tour of the "Were You There" cycle; about a film project based on the life of Julius Eastman; about a visual album based on the "MASS" program; and about AMOC's role as music director for the Ojai Music Festival next year. Tines also mentioned a few conventional operatic roles that he has considered undertaking: he wants to sing Don Giovanni, and has even thought about Wotan, the doomed god of Wagner's "Ring."

He is unmistakably a singer of high ambition, but he doesn't seem to have a fixed plan for his career. Recalling his time at Juilliard, he complained about how "political" the atmosphere was—not in the sense of public politics, which were discouraged, but in the sense of career politics, the plotting of a trajectory leading to success. Tines's orientation toward politics in the wider sense means that his creative work is contingent on events as they unfold. He also reacts to impulses from his collaborators; Aucoin, Winokur, and the others regularly nudge him in one direction or another. They, in turn, feed off his preoccupations. There is a democratic roughness in AMOC; no one seems to be in charge.

"It's about basic human respect," Tines said. "In the arts, there's this extreme cognitive dissonance between all our platitudes about art being the highest form of human expression, the universal language, and so on and the fact that we don't actually ask, very simply, 'How do you feel? What do you need?' In AMOC, we're trying to give everyone a voice. It's about saying, 'Your life is as full and as complex as mine.' It's about how Coleman shapes the ground bass in 'Lost and Lookin'.' There is no way I could have created that interpretation alone. I'm stunting the possibility of my work if I assume I hold in myself all possible realities. In fact, that's insane."

Sellars, an older operatic revolutionary who has avidly followed AMOC's doings, compares the group to the Florentine Camerata—the consortium of musicians, writers, and cultured dilettantes who gathered around Giovanni de' Bardi, in late-sixteenth-century Florence, and laid the foundation for opera as a genre. But the members of AMOC are a little less aristocratic and a little more self-aware. "They're hanging out and doing stuff together, and they're doing it on a scale that fits in the palm of your hand," Sellars told me. "Beyond a certain scale, it's impossible to maintain integrity. You get to the point of 'one size fits none.' With people like Davóne, this art form is being reborn at a scale that's intimate, that's personal, that has very high stakes. It's not just the future of opera but the future of everything." ♦

ANNALS OF JUSTICE

FAMILY SECRETS

Genealogists like CeCe Moore are using genetics to solve mysteries. How much do we really want to know?

BY RAFFI KHATCHADOURIAN

On Thanksgiving morning, 1987, Rick Bart, a homicide detective in Snohomish County, Washington, got word that a pheasant hunter had discovered a body in a field beneath High Bridge, an overpass spanning the Snoqualmie River. Bart was preparing to spend the day with his family, but he went anyway. He was one of only two homicide detectives in Snohomish—a jurisdiction, just north of Seattle, that covers more than two thousand square miles. He was familiar with the crime scene. It was near the Monroe Honor Farm, where inmates milked cows to provide dairy to the state prison system. The bridge was secluded enough to be private, but accessible by a country road. Teen-agers drank there.

When Bart arrived, morning fog was clinging to trees along the riverbank. The body was partially shrouded by a blue blanket. Lifting it revealed signs of a brutal death. The man's head had been struck with a rock. A clump of hair, ripped from his scalp, was in the grass. A ligature, made from plastic twine and two red dog chokers, was around his neck. An autopsy later revealed that he had been gagged with a tissue and a pack of Camel Lights.

"We had no I.D.—didn't know who he was," Bart recalled. "We didn't know when he was put there, *at all*. There was nothing."

The following day, he got a call from a detective in nearby Skagit County, who thought the body belonged to Jay Cook, a twenty-year-old from British Columbia. The detective told Bart what he knew. Several days earlier, Cook's father had asked Jay to drive the family's van to Seattle to pick up some furnace parts for his business. Jay had brought his girlfriend, Tanya Van Cuylenborg, an aspiring photographer. Tanya had an open smile, and friends called her "sweetie." Jay had a boyish, elfin face and wispy brown hair.

Regarding the errand as a chance at adventure, the two decided to sleep in the van, and packed it with foam mattresses and provisions. They drove down on November 18th, taking the Coho ferry from Canada to Washington. Then they vanished.

After days with no news, Tanya's father filed a missing-persons report with the Royal Canadian Mounted Police. Then he hired a plane to look for the van himself. When the search was unsuccessful, he drove hundreds of miles, interviewing people at restaurants and convenience stores.

While he was on the road, detectives in Skagit County discovered Tanya's body near a creek. She had been raped, and shot in the back of the head. The following day, the van was found sixteen miles north of the creek, parked close to a tavern and a Greyhound bus terminal. Behind the tavern, police found keys to the van, a camera lens cap, a wallet with Tanya's I.D., surgical gloves, zip ties, and a box containing .380-calibre bullets, which matched those found at her crime scene.

After Bart heard all this, he rushed back to High Bridge and collected zip ties that he had noticed on the ground near Jay Cook's body. The killer, it was clear, had intercepted the couple with a "murder kit" in hand.

Bart wondered if he was pursuing a serial offender—perhaps an inmate who had once been at the prison farm. About two weeks later, taunting letters began to appear at the Cook and Van Cuylenborg homes, from someone claiming to be the killer. ("I had a gun in Jay's back. Tanya was pleading.") The letters were written by hand, and postmarked from all over: Seattle, Los Angeles, New York.

The detectives desperately ran down every lead. A forensic analysis of the correspondence offered nothing conclusive. All the suspects affiliated with the prison had alibis. Jay and Tanya's movements could only partially be constructed. "We couldn't even put them for sure in Seattle," Bart said. "It all added up that this was a cold case."

In 1989, the detectives opened their files to "Unsolved Mysteries," and hundreds of tips poured in. Some were easy to dismiss—one was a long missive from a psychic—but many seemed worth pursuing. All were dead ends. A lens belonging to a camera that Tanya had with her on the trip turned up at a pawnshop in Portland. It was also a dead end. The detectives learned that a serial killer had lived near the spot where the van was ditched; they searched a crammed storage locker that he used for weapons and other items. Another dead end.

In the nineteen-nineties, policing was revolutionized by forensic DNA analysis, which could identify criminals from biological evidence. The F.B.I. created a national DNA database of convicted offenders, and another for missing persons and for samples taken at crime scenes. Together, they would aid in the investigation of more than half a million crimes. But, when Snohomish detectives uploaded their crime-scene DNA samples, they received no hits. Their suspect was not a convicted felon, and his DNA had not been found at another crime scene. It was possible that he was dead.

In 1999, Rick Bart became sheriff. "One of the first things I did was to create a cold-case squad," he told me. "I wanted this case solved. It just haunted me." In 2005, the investigation fell into the hands of a detective named Jim Scharf. By then, its file had grown to fill a dozen binders, containing the names of more than a hundred possible suspects. Scharf had a reputation for absorbing volumes of detail and pursuing every tip. Delving into the material, he established that the letter writer was not the killer; he was a disturbed itinerant, who travelled around on buses and trains. But, after more than a decade on the

After Moore helped police identify an elusive criminal, one officer said, "It seemed like magic what she was able to do."

PHOTOGRAPH BY PETER YANG

case, Scharf was still no closer to finding the killer.

In July, 2016, Scharf's captain learned about a company in Virginia, Parabon NanoLabs, that had created a tool called Snapshot. From a DNA sample, the company claimed, it could derive information about physical traits: hair color, eye color, complexion, possibly even facial structure. "I want you to find a case where we can use this tool," the captain told Scharf, who decided to try it on the Cook and Van Cuylenborg investigation. A DNA sample was shipped to Parabon, and a report came back noting that the killer was of northwestern-European descent and likely had reddish-blond hair, green or hazel eyes, and a light complexion.

Scharf, along with a partner, returned to the case binders and found four men with comparable traits. Two were deceased. Two were living. None, it appeared, was the killer. The detectives published a computer-generated rendering of the Snapshot, but the only result was a new wave of useless tips.

Having hit another obstacle, Scharf began to consider a new approach: forensic genealogy. For years, genealogists had been using ever-larger private DNA databases to compare genetic information among populations, allowing them to chart family networks more completely. What if those same tools could be used with the DNA that detectives had gathered back in 1987?

In April, 2018, Scharf permitted Parabon to pass the killer's DNA profile to one of the world's leading genetic genealogists, CeCe Moore. The company's C.E.O. told him that she would likely identify the killer within a week. Scharf was skeptical, but three days later Parabon reported that Moore had a name: William Earl Talbott II, a truck driver who lived not far from High Bridge. It had taken her two hours on a Saturday to figure this out.

Scharf thought of all the names in the voluminous case file. There had been no William Earl Talbott. After thirty years of detective work, after hundreds of tips and leads, the man's name had never come up. Still, he had officers tail Talbott, hoping to retrieve something that had his DNA on it. When a coffee cup fell from Talbott's truck one afternoon, they rushed it to a crime lab to compare his genetics with the killer's. Scharf waited anxiously in the lab, until a technician emerged, and said, "Jim, it's him." Scharf's eyes filled with tears, and, raising a fist, he called out, "We got him!"

By then, Rick Bart had retired. From a beach in front of his house, he could see where Jay's and Tanya's families had lived in Canada—a daily reminder of the brutal deaths. When Scharf called with the news, he was looking across the water. He burst out laughing. "For thirty years, we couldn't do a damn thing," he told me. "And here comes this lady who says, 'Hey, I know who did it!'"

CeCe Moore lives on a hill in coastal California, about an hour's drive south of Los Angeles. This summer, when I arrived at her home, her husband, Lennart Martinson, a film producer, greeted me and walked me inside. Moore was sitting on a puffy leather sofa, facing a laptop on a stand. The air-conditioning was cranked up, and she had a fuzzy purple blanket over her bare feet. On one side of the room, a skylight illuminated a print of a mermaid. On the other, a Teddy bear sat by windows offering a stupendous view: eucalyptus and palm trees, and the endless Pacific.

Moore has a warm but intense manner. On a black cord around her neck, she wears a pendant of the Finnish flag—she is a quarter Finnish—and a tiny square of metal engraved with the word *Sisu*. It means something like "grit" or "daring"—adrenaline-fuelled doggedness. Holding the bit of metal, Moore told me, "*Sisu* is me."

Although she is in her fifties, Moore pulls all-nighters with the frequency of a college freshman. While working on a difficult case, she will let phone calls and e-mails go unanswered for hours as she stares at archival data—hunting for patterns in families she has never met, while her own family quietly places food and coffee beside her. "I can hardly see the screen many times, but I keep going," she told me. During one of our conversations this summer, she sounded tired, and I asked if she had slept. "I was up late, and saw that a building in Florida collapsed," she said. She had noticed the news online, at 3 A.M., and turned on CNN. "That kind of woke me up, so I kept working with that in the background."

Moore is typically juggling at least two full-time jobs. Last year, ABC aired "The Genetic Detective," a prime-time show based on her work. She is also a genealogist for "Finding Your Roots," a PBS show hosted by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., through which she oversees what is likely the world's largest collection of celebrity DNA. She is a co-founder of the Institute for Genetic Genealogy, and runs DNA Detectives—a Facebook group, with a hundred and seventy thousand members, in which volunteers help people find their biological parents and unravel other family mysteries.

Since working on the murders in Snohomish County, Moore has also become an avid crime solver, one of several prominent genealogists—nearly all women—who have combined the study of ancestry with genetics to forge a powerful new policing tool. Moore leads a team of three at Parabon. They have helped resolve more than a hundred and fifty criminal investigations since 2018—averaging about one a week. No other group using genetic genealogy, not even one within the F.B.I., has documented more successes.

Most of Moore's cases were long cold, and more than one police detective told me that the technique that she helped pioneer was a kind of forensic wizardry, which might one day rival the fingerprint. A few years ago, Moore was brought into an investigation in Utah, where a man had raped a seventy-nine-year-old woman in her home. Local detectives had worked every lead but got nowhere. Days after Moore took the case, she sent them the names of four brothers, explaining that the rapist had to be among them. When the officers questioned the oldest brother, he immediately confessed. "It was mind-blowing," one officer said at the time. "It seemed like magic what she was able to do."

Crime-solving genetic genealogist is not a profession that one chooses by picking up a leaflet at a career fair. Moore fell into it—partly by accident, and partly by helping to invent the field.

She grew up, with two older sisters and a younger brother, in Rancho Bernardo, a planned community on the outskirts of San Diego. Her parents—a senior manager at J. C. Penney and a homemaker—were deeply religious, and did not expect education to play an im-

portant role in their children's lives. But Moore was academically inclined. Her teachers drew up an independent curriculum that she could pursue while the rest of the class focussed on conventional lessons. She tested into Mensa, but didn't entirely fit in at school, or at her congregation, or at home. "We had a tree next to my house that I would climb up in, and read my books, to be alone," she told me.

Neither of Moore's sisters had gone to college, and she assumed that she wouldn't, either. "I started having teachers say to me, 'You're joking, right?'" she told me. So she bought a Pee-Chee folder and wrote "$30,000" at the top—the scholarship money that she would need to attend the University of Southern California.

She liked science, journalism, and law, but a music teacher, impressed by her singing, encouraged her to study music. "She had an influence over me—more than anybody outside of my parents," Moore said. "She told me that I had to stop with calculus, stop with this and that, just focus on singing. She thought that I could make it."

U.S.C.'s music school was a world-class destination for aspiring classical musicians. Moore was admitted, but quickly discovered that she had little interest in studying opera. She wanted to be in musicals. When she got a part in one, staged by the theatre department, her instructors were aghast, fearing that her participation would ruin her training. "They said, 'You have to choose,' basically," she said. " 'It's the program or the musical.'" She transferred to the theatre department.

As a senior, she lived in a friend's home, in Irvine, acting in a community production and commuting an hour to campus. That year, her friend committed suicide. Distraught, Moore struggled to complete her one remaining course. The university told her that she could walk at graduation and finish the work afterward, but she was already acting, and decided that there was no point in getting a degree.

For an actress, Moore was introverted—more comfortable reading a book than jumping on a table and launching into soliloquies. But she was relentlessly focussed, and memorizing lines came easily. ("I used to have a photographic memory," she told me. "I joke now that I used up all the film.") She spent hours at the gym, training her body. She was likewise disciplined about organizing the jumble of gigs that aspiring actors must negotiate; once, she lined up fifty days of work in a row. She landed roles in the theatre and small parts on TV and in movies. (During an ocean-side scene in Francis Ford Coppola's "The Rainmaker," she can be seen in the background, a bikini-clad beachgoer.) In between, she made ends meet with infomercials and convention work. She had to forgo a chance to appear on "The Young and the Restless" because she was at a toy fair, modelling as Barbie.

On September 11, 2001, Moore had three auditions scheduled for the day, but after the terror attacks her gigs were all cancelled. With no work, she threw herself into an old neglected project: building a family tree. Virtually every genealogical quest, Moore learned, begins with a psychological mirage. What appears to be ego-driven—a desire to map relationships that affirm one's centrality in the world—at some point reveals itself to be about others, people we can no longer see, hear, or perhaps even name.

Moore's family, like everyone's, had its uncharted branches and enigmas. She knew, for instance, that, after her mother's Finnish grandparents emigrated, they had mysteriously cut off communication with their relatives. "They would never talk about their families—not their parents, their siblings, not anyone," Moore said. "That intrigued me." Her father's heritage was a quarter Norwegian, and two of his cousins had travelled to Norway to collect genealogical details about the family. Moore dug further, poring over church records, many of them in Old Norwegian, a language that she taught herself to navigate.

"I would kind of come and go from genealogy," she told me. "But one thing that I consistently kept doing was read about DNA testing." A vanguard of genealogists was seeking to bring genetics into the field; they were often dismissed by peers who regarded archives as paramount, but Moore loved the science. At the time, the DNA tests available were too expensive for her. But within a few years the technology would evolve, and genetics would fill her entire waking life.

The human cell is a masterpiece of data compression. Its nucleus, just a few microns wide, contains six feet of DNA: helical molecules that string together some three billion pairs of

"I miss fall in New England."

"He never passes by without a mischievous smile."

• •

nucleotides, each represented by an initial—A, C, G, and T—the programming language of our genetic code. These strands are divided into coiled chromosomes. Two of them—labelled either X or Y—determine our biological sex. The remaining twenty-two pairs, known as autosomal DNA, are encoded with information about our traits: bone structure, eye color, skin color, the stuff of ourselves.

Genealogists grew interested in genetics at the turn of the millennium, when it became possible to analyze bits of information from the Y chromosome—known as Y-DNA—on a commercial scale. Because the Y chromosome is passed from father to son with little mutation, and because surnames historically were passed down the same way, it seemed worth exploring whether the confluence could be useful to researchers. In the late nineties, Bryan Sykes, an Oxford geneticist, persuaded forty-eight men who shared his surname to take Y-DNA tests. "Sykes" comes from a Middle English word meaning "spring" or "stream," and the name was thought to have arisen separately among unrelated families that lived near various sources of water. But the genetics suggested that the men descended from a single ancestral line. "If this pattern is reproduced with other surnames, it may have important forensic and genealogical applications," Sykes concluded. Theoretically, researchers could use Y-DNA to establish the pedigree of a man with an unknown identity. Sykes made a similar case for mt-DNA, which is passed down on the maternal line, in a book titled "The Seven Daughters of Eve."

Sykes was a popularizer with a knack for flamboyance. He once declared that an accountant in Florida was a descendant of Genghis Khan. The claim was quickly disproved, but it remained evident that Y-DNA and mt-DNA had genuine applications in tracing ancestry. In Utah, the Sorenson Molecular Genealogy Foundation began collecting genetic samples, hoping that they would reveal linkages across humankind. A company called FamilyTreeDNA started selling mail-in Y-DNA tests to consumers, to build a database that offered clues to genealogical puzzles.

Moore was intrigued by Sykes's work, and as the costs of the technology dropped she had her father take a Y-DNA test and her mother an mt-DNA test. Her acting gigs had returned, but genealogy remained a comforting focus, especially as she was hit by personal difficulties. She had fallen in love with a medical researcher, become pregnant, then fallen out of love. Moore worked as long as her pregnancy allowed, then directed clients to friends who could fill in—collegial gestures that grew into a business called Commercial Casting. After running into Lennart Martinson on the set of a commercial, she developed a close friendship with him. They soon became a couple, and also business partners, merging her casting agency with his film-production company.

In 2009, Moore persuaded executives at FamilyTreeDNA to hire her to make a commercial. During one shoot, a genealogist showed her the Web site of a competitor, 23andMe. The company had been developing technology that allowed users to access their autosomal DNA for genealogy, by tracking tiny genetic mutations. These mutations, called single-nucleotide polymorphisms, or SNPs, combine in unique patterns that are passed from one generation to the next: a child will share fifty per cent of them with each parent, about a quarter with each grandparent, 12.5 per cent with each great-grandparent, and so on.

23andMe had created a simple online dashboard that compared users' SNPs and made rudimentary estimates about their relatedness—say, whether they were first or second cousins. After about six generations, the mutations would become too scarce to offer insight, but Moore was still floored. "This opened up the inner branches of the family tree for genetic exploration," she told me. "I knew that was huge. I just *knew* it in my deepest place."

Soon afterward, Moore called the genealogist who had shown her the site, Katherine Borges. "This is what I want to do with my life," she told her. "How can I get involved?" Borges ran the International Society of Genetic Genealogy, which had a Web forum for "newbies" who were curious about DNA. She told Moore that she could take it over. "Just start answering people's questions," she said. "Read as much as you can, and become an expert."

The peer-reviewed literature was scant, but a small group of citizen scientists was working to fill the gaps. Moore experimented with 23andMe's technology by systematically testing her own family, to compare the results with relationships that she had vetted. "I was finding interesting data," she told me. "Second cousins are supposed to share 3.125 per cent of their DNA on average, but some of my second cousins shared almost six per cent. Others shared one

per cent." She became fluent in terms like "haplogroup" (an ancestral society that shares SNP patterns) and "centimorgan" (a unit for measuring DNA segments). Moore was soon able to identify, for instance, that a cluster of SNPs on her own seventh chromosome indicated an ultra-distant Jewish ancestor. She became active on genealogy forums, and created blogs where she reported on her findings, and adopted the role of a promoter, noting when new companies offered DNA testing, and which offered sales.

By then, Moore had ceded her business responsibilities to Martinson. "I dropped everything," she told me. "I am sure I've done more genetic genealogy than anyone in the world—probably by far—because from that time on I did it a ridiculous number of hours. I'm so obsessive-compulsive." The tools were limited, and the databases still small, but the technology's power was revealing itself. An increasing number of people were taking DNA tests, many of them at Moore's encouragement, and some were learning that their paternity was not what they had thought it was. Because Moore had put herself forward as an accessible expert, they often came to her, and she helped them solve the riddles of their parentage. "I would just dive in," she said. "I wouldn't sleep sometimes, and just work on somebody's case non-stop."

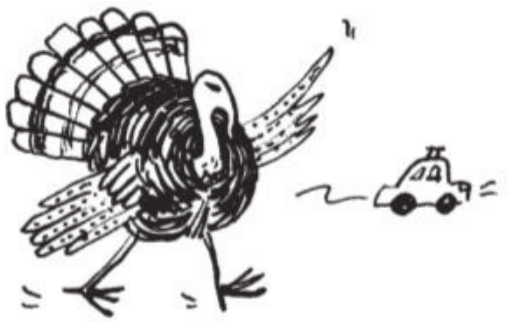
The sun was glinting off the ocean outside Moore's window. On her computer, she pointed out an open tab, for GEDmatch. "It's just this very basic-looking account," she said. It looked like it had been designed in 1997.

GEDmatch was the brainchild of Curtis Rogers, a former marketing executive who had spent the sixties and seventies in Hong Kong and the Philippines, representing brands like Quaker Oats and Mennen. In the eighties, he moved to Florida and ran candy stores, but by the early two-thousands he was retired and devoting himself to genealogy.

Rogers built GEDmatch with John Olson, a transportation engineer in Texas, whose day job involved devising systems for optimal traffic flow. Their original intent was to support software that could compare family trees—a difficult problem, since many trees include thousands of names. Soon, the site also allowed for segment-by-segment comparisons of autosomal DNA. GEDmatch was free and open—a nonprofit, commercially agnostic place for serious genealogy. Unlike 23andMe, it provided detailed results. People were encouraged to extract their DNA profiles, or "kits," from private testing companies and upload them to the platform.

Moore began uploading profiles in 2011, and now manages ninety-four personal kits on GEDmatch—her family members' and her own. (She tests herself often, tracking improvements in the technology.) As we sat at her computer, she initiated a comparison between her profile and that of one of her sisters. The screen filled up with horizontal bands, each representing one of the twenty-two chromosomal pairs. Vertical stripes—green, yellow, and red—ran across them, like a bar code. Red stripes indicated segments where the two siblings shared no DNA. Yellow indicated where they shared DNA from one parent. Green was where they inherited identical DNA from both.

Moore pointed to a chromosome with a green segment that was a hundred and eighty-five centimorgans—a long stretch of shared DNA. "So, there's 27,803 SNPs in a row," she said. "You're not going to have fully identical segments with most people. You could have them with double first cousins—two brothers marry two sisters. Even then, it would be nowhere near this amount."



"Do you know this so well that you could just scroll through these colors and say 'sister'?" I asked.

"Oh, absolutely," she said. Then she stopped and reviewed the stripes again. "The only other thing that looks like this is a 'three-quarter sibling'"—a term that she and her collaborators invented. "When a father has children with two sisters, or a woman has children with two brothers, their offspring are half siblings, plus first cousins with each other. Instead of sharing fifty per cent of their DNA, the children will share 37.5 per cent. It's something we've actually seen quite a bit of."

Moore called up another profile; this time the color coding showed large bands of identical SNPs inherited from *both* parents. In such cases, GEDmatch issues users a warning: contact CeCe Moore. Years ago, she began volunteering to examine such data, to determine if the results indicate incest or a genetic anomaly. In cases of incest, Moore tries to identify the relatives. She also founded a private support group for people wrestling with the news, but the work was overwhelming, and she recently turned over some responsibilities to an assistant. "I was getting multiple e-mails a week from people who had first-degree relatives for parents," she told me. "It's the worst thing a person can find out from direct-to-consumer testing, other than a relative is a serial killer."

Genetic anomalies can also be devastating. Once, a parent approached Moore with horrifying news. Her children, conceived by sperm donation, had been born with significant disabilities; a DNA test suggested that they had chromosomal abnormalities consistent with an embryo produced by sperm from an elderly man—a person who clearly had not been her selected donor.

Moore knew the clinic. It was affiliated with the University of Utah. In 2012, she and another parent had figured out that the facility had employed a felon—a former professor who had kidnapped a woman for an "experiment" designed to compel her to love him. The clinic had served some fifteen hundred couples during his time there; following an official investigation, the university conceded that it did not know how many children he had fathered through tampering. "He was playing God," Moore said. "He was mixing up vials."

All genealogy is a search for human continuity. When researchers cannot trace someone's lineage beyond a certain ancestor, they say that they have hit a "brick wall." There are always brick walls, but the farther back in time one hits them the less painful it tends to be.

For adoptees, who live right up against

their brick walls, the proximity can be heartrending, a primordial loss. Genealogists known as "search angels" have long volunteered to help them break through. Many are adoptees themselves, or are relatives of adoptees, and understand firsthand the importance—psychological, and perhaps physical—of finding birth parents. Unlike conventional genealogy, search-angel work is not a race to reclaim memory. It is a revolutionary act, a hack of privacy laws.

By 2011, Moore was working as a search angel, noting on one of her blogs, "I am, and have been for some time, committed to helping adoptees utilize their DNA results to learn more about their ancestry, especially in light of the unjust laws on the books of so many states blocking adoptees from their inherent right to know." Eventually, she found her way to like-minded volunteers in a Yahoo discussion group, and joined in an effort to develop an elegant, powerful technique for identifying people. They called it the Methodology.

The first step was to establish a DNA profile for the adoptee in a database like GEDmatch, to look for partial genetic matches with other users. The people linked with those matches were not always easy to identify; some users logged on without any personal information or, worse, under aliases. But, when the genealogists succeeded, they could trace back family trees until they identified common ancestors. Then they would reverse the process: starting from the common ancestors, they would build a complete tree of *all* the descendants, knowing that the adoptee's parents had to be among them. The amount of DNA that the adoptee shared with matches in the database was a key clue to where he or she belonged in the larger tree; personal details, like birth dates and geography, could also provide clues.

Among the search angels working on the Methodology, Moore had the deepest experience with genetic genealogy. She was not adopted, but she was personally invested in the work. Growing up, she had often heard family members talk about an aunt of hers who had a son stolen from her while she was sedated during labor; the theft, the family was sure, had been orchestrated by her husband at the time, with help from a doctor. "They took the child, and told her that it died," Moore explained. "They never let her see the child or bury it." The story implied a wild conspiracy, and Moore was skeptical at first. But, after encountering similar cases as a search angel, she came to take the scenario seriously.

"I have been trying to solve this my whole life," Moore told me. We were hunched over her computer, reviewing the people who shared her DNA. Scrolling through the list, she stopped at a young man named Erik, who had appeared among her matches on Ancestry earlier this year. He shared about four per cent of her DNA—indicating a second cousin—but Moore did not recognize him. Curious, she accessed an Ancestry account that she maintains for her mother, and another that belongs to her aunt's daughter. Each woman shared eight per cent of her DNA with Erik—double the amount that Moore did. "I said, 'Who *is* this?'" she recalled.

Moore built Erik's extended tree; finding no connections with her own, she decided to reach out to him. "I am shocked to see how closely you are related to my family," she wrote. "Is there an adoption in your family?" She asked to examine his profile, and he agreed.

After grouping Erik's relatives into distinct "genetic networks," Moore traced them to common ancestors: Martin and Julia Timm, who lived in Minnesota in the nineteenth century. With days of painstaking work, she filled in their descendants, until she noticed that one of the Timms' great-granddaughters had married a man who was born on November 6, 1950, the same day as her aunt's stolen son—and in the same town. She found an obituary for him, from 2018, and a photo. "I was like, 'Oh, my God,'" Moore told me. "He was full siblings with my first cousin that I'm closest to. And they look alike! They have the exact same red hair."

Moore had found her missing cousin, but another mystery remained: how were he and Erik linked? The obituary noted that her cousin was survived by two daughters and by a son named Ed. Delving into their biographies, she figured out that Ed had served at a military base near where Erik's mother lived. Erik was the result of a drunken liaison. Neither man knew of the other.

Excited, Moore called her aunt to explain that the family's suspicions were true. "I found him," she said. "He is dead, unfortunately—he died pretty recently." But, Moore explained, she had located his descendants. Erik, recently married, had just become a father.

Moore expected the news to be earth-shaking. "My aunt found out she has got three more grandchildren," she told me. "She's got great-grandchildren. A great-great-grandchild! I was hoping everyone would get to meet." But her aunt was ninety-one, and the pandemic was raging. "So, um," Moore said. "My aunt got COVID. She got over COVID, but never got better, and died."

Moore flushed. Her hand was quivering. "I feel guilty," she said. "I found these people. I told them, 'Hey, your grandmother is alive.' She never even reached out, because she was so—" She quieted. "Now I feel very bad. I'm the one who figured it out and told everybody." Moore had hoped that her research would heal a family wound. Instead, she feared it had only added to the sense of loss. She looked past me, out to the Pacific. "It's so complicated," she said.

Genetic genealogy, it turned out, could function as an all-purpose deanonymizer. As long as it targeted the secrets of the living, it would likely become entangled, in some way, with police work. Moore's effort to track down her lost cousin had apparently identified a crime: the theft of a child. The same possibility existed for people who had been abandoned as babies; their unidentified mothers were often the subjects of criminal investigations. Some adoptees who had followed a genetic trail to their biological parents ended up learning that their mothers had been raped.

"If one of my loved ones was murdered and I had access to that DNA sample, you better believe that I would be using our databases to try to figure out who was guilty," Moore wrote in 2010. "Wouldn't you?" But, as she grew into a public figure—one who encouraged people to take DNA tests—she developed a more cautious attitude. People who handed over their genetic data to private companies, or to GEDmatch, never consented to their use by police. "I was very concerned that if I went behind the scenes, and worked with law

KAEPERNICK

My mother is uncomfortable with my top.
She doesn't think my boobs should be
out like this. She adjusts the TV antenna and says
Isn't the TV working better now? I don't want
to watch football. I am trying to learn to do my makeup.
My mother never taught me. Should I say at this point
that my mother is white? I used to watch Pantene commercials
and think my hair could look like that if I used enough
of her product. She has one of those white-mom
haircuts now. It is thinning. She needs more volume.
She needs me to tell her I know I'm white, too.
Like I think about anything else. The football players
are kneeling because, I say, anyone could kill
your Black son. He's white, too, she says—and you
could use a little more eyeliner. She wonders
why I don't want her to help me pick out foundation.
The football players stand up. Then they play football.

—*Sasha Debevec-McKenney*

enforcement, that it would look like a betrayal," she told me.

Early attempts by police officers to use genetic genealogy had triggered controversy. In 2011, a physicist and former NASA contractor named Colleen Fitzpatrick worked with detectives in Washington State to help identify the killer of a high-school girl. Using Y-DNA testing, she concluded that the suspect was a descendant of Robert Fuller, a colonist who had lived in Salem, Massachusetts, in 1630. The suspect, she told detectives, could also be a man with the surname Fuller. The tip led police to the girl's neighbor, a family friend, who was totally innocent.

Not long afterward, police in Idaho uploaded a killer's Y-DNA to the Sorenson database—the archive in Utah, which by then had been acquired by Ancestry. A partial match led them to Michael Usry, a filmmaker in New Orleans who had made a movie, "Murderabilia," that seemed to echo the crime. Usry also turned out to be innocent. "I am probably still rocked by this," he told me recently. "Anybody who has read a science-fiction book has an idea of what it could mean." After the episode, Ancestry shut down access to the entire Sorenson database, which had grown to include a hundred thousand profiles—many belonging to dead people, who could no longer be tested. Moore was horrified. "For us, that's like burning libraries," she told me.

With the advent of autosomal-DNA testing, detectives began to surreptitiously rummage through those repositories, too. In 2014, a police department in Florida uploaded a DNA profile from a rapist to GEDmatch, but failed to identify him. It was only a matter of time before people skilled in genealogy would try the same procedure. A year later, a detective in California teamed up with Barbara Rae-Venter, a retired patent lawyer who knew the Methodology, to work on a case. Decades before, a drifter had kidnapped an infant girl and renamed her Lisa; he kept her captive for several years, before abandoning her in an R.V. park, in 1986. Although Lisa had grown into adulthood, she still didn't know what her given name was, or where she was born; the drifter had zigzagged across the country and perhaps even into Canada. He went by multiple aliases—and was later convicted, as "Curtis Kimball," of murdering and dismembering a woman. He died in prison, but the detective, convinced that he had more victims, still hoped to piece together the details.

After Lisa took a DNA test at Ancestry, Rae-Venter and a team of volunteers helped establish her profile on all the major databases, including GEDmatch and 23andMe. Each had different users, offering different possible matches. The team identified a pair of common ancestors four generations back, only to learn that the couple had fourteen children, twelve of whom could have been Lisa's distant ancestors. After more than a year—and twenty thousand hours of research and analysis—the genealogists figured out that she was Dawn Beaudin, from New Hampshire. The drifter had apparently kidnapped her after killing her mother. In 2016, Rae-Venter and her team began working to identify him, too.

Moore was aware that Rae-Venter was taking on criminal casework, but she remained uncomfortable doing so herself. She had asked executives at 23andMe and at Ancestry if they would allow genealogists to use their databases to identify killers or rapists; they flatly rejected the idea. At a talk before law-enforcement officials, she urged the policing community to build its own database for forensic genealogy, to avoid the moral and legal quandaries that private databases posed. None did.

In 2017, Moore attended the International Symposium on Human Identification. "I would like to work more with the forensics community," she said there. "I am a little bit more hesitant to identify a killer, much as I want those solved." But she signalled that she was ready to help identify Jane and John Does—a step that other genealogists were also exploring. By then, she was already in contact with Parabon, which had relationships with detectives who were wrestling with unsolved Doe cases. "Identifying deceased people for their families, so they can get some relief—that's something very much along the lines of what I do now, just kind of reversing it a little bit," she said. "So that's really where I think my focus will be."

The offices of Parabon NanoLabs are on a tree-lined street in Reston, Virginia. Amid the myriad federal contractors and agencies in the area, it occupies a curious niche. The company was founded in 1999 by Steve Armentrout, a computer scientist who specialized in machine learning, and by his wife, Paula. They hoped to build a cloud-computing service, but, as Amazon, Microsoft,

and Google began to dominate the field, they pivoted to focus on the intersection of machine learning and biotech. One early contract was with the Department of Defense, which wanted to know if traces of DNA left on improvised explosive devices in Iraq and elsewhere could be used to identify the people behind them. Was it possible to construct a person's phenotype—all of the observable traits—from genetic clues?

Armentrout regarded this as a computational problem well suited to machine learning. He hired a young geneticist from Harvard to help with the biology. Within a year, the Defense Department was pouring more than a million dollars into the project, and expanding its scope. The genetic profiles that Parabon used to build the phenotypes could also help determine how two people were related. In places like Iraq, where clan affiliations are strong, such comparisons could potentially identify combatants. The tool could also help identify the remains of soldiers killed in action. Parabon called the new product Kinship Inference. Significantly, it was designed to work even when DNA samples were degraded.

To train a machine-learning algorithm to assess degrees of kinship, Armentrout and his staff had to feed it genetic profiles of people whose relationships were already known. At first, this seemed like costly information to harvest. But they realized that genetic genealogists had already done it. Canvassing genealogy conferences, the company found its way to Moore, who agreed to promote its project. Soon, Parabon was inundated with data.

As Moore got to know Armentrout, she told him that she wanted to work on Doe cases, and agreed to an unpaid trial run. "I needed to convince them it was viable," she told me. Parabon reached out to GEDmatch, and after weeks of discussion obtained permission.

In 2018, Moore took on her first two cases, from a police department in Texas. They proved to be unexpectedly challenging. One involved a Louisiana woman with roots in Acadia, the early French settlement in eastern Canada. "It's a population that has stuck together and intermarried for centuries," Moore told me. As she worked on the woman's tree, she kept running into the same surnames. Worse, because of intermarriage, the quantities of shared DNA were exaggerated. A match that looked like a second cousin, for instance, represented something far less. "I was finding these *big* segments—thirty to forty centimorgans—that came from before the expulsion of the Acadians from French Canada, before 1755," she said.

That April, Moore was working on the cases when she awoke to a startling news flash: the Golden State Killer, a serial rapist and murderer who had terrorized the state in the seventies and eighties, had been arrested, after he was identified by a task force that included California detectives and the F.B.I. His real name was Joseph James DeAngelo, Jr. He had once been a cop.

Moore was certain that genetic genealogy was behind the breakthrough. Aware that Barbara Rae-Venter had been quietly working with law enforcement, she asked her if she had been involved. Rae-Venter confirmed that she had. The research had been conducted through GEDmatch and other databases. Moore called Curtis Rogers, the co-founder of GEDmatch, to tell him that genetic genealogy had crossed a Rubicon: his site had been used to catch a killer.

Rogers had been running his nonprofit out of a small house in Florida, which doubled as his wife's painting studio. When the authorities made the role of GEDmatch public, the property was swarmed with television crews, and Rogers was caught by conflicting imperatives. The spectre of police officers prowling through his site risked eroding public trust; he knew that he could denounce the intrusion and prevent it from happening again. But he also believed that GEDmatch was in a unique position to perform a societal good. The site had helped capture a man who had killed at least thirteen people and raped as many as fifty women. He told Moore that she, too, could use the database to help pursue violent offenders. "You need to be doing this," he said.

By the end of the week, Rogers had posted a notice on the site, warning users that their profiles might be accessed for "non-genealogical" purposes, and that if they objected they should remove their data. He also redrafted the terms of service, noting that detectives would be issued special research accounts, to be used only for cases of homicide or sexual assault, or for identifying human remains. Moore called Steve Armentrout, at Parabon, to say that she had changed her mind. "I feel like I can work suspect cases now," she said. "The cat's out of the bag."

A week or so earlier, Jim Scharf, the detective in Snohomish County, had asked Parabon to retrieve his suspect's DNA profile, so that Rae-Venter could take on the case. The company had been slow to respond. But now Armentrout recognized a business opportunity. Para-

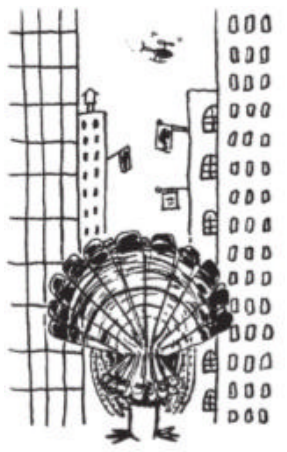
"Sometimes it's hard to get them away from a really good book."

bon had a repository of DNA profiles of criminal suspects, provided by detectives who had purchased Snapshots; these could be used with GEDmatch to solve cases. Armentrout called Scharf back and said that Parabon could perform the genealogy instead of Rae-Venter—and at no charge.

For Moore, identifying William Earl Talbott II, the truck driver, turned out to be straightforward. On GEDmatch, she found two users who shared a significant amount of his DNA—"genetic witnesses," as they are now sometimes called. One was Chelsea Rustad, a second cousin living in Tacoma. Moore traced Rustad's ancestry to her great-grandparents, then strove to reconstruct their lives. They had lived in North Dakota, but the wife in the couple, Janna, had died in Seattle. Searching there, Moore discovered that Janna had a granddaughter who had married a man named Talbott. The name struck her, because the other genetic witness she found had a great-grandmother, Ada Marie, who had also married a man named Talbott. Homing in on the convergence, she figured out that Ada Marie's son had married Janna's granddaughter. They were the suspect's parents.

Moore spent the rest of the weekend double-checking her work, uncomfortably aware that she was the only person, other than the killer, who knew who had committed the crime. When the case went to trial, she was able to observe the verdict. Talbott stood, a hoary behemoth of a man. (Scharf told me that he couldn't get cuffs around his wrists, because they were so thick.) "When they said he was convicted, he collapsed," Moore recalled. "His female attorney grabbed him, and he said, 'I didn't do it.' I saw it, and I thought, Oh, my God, can I be wrong? Then I thought, No, no, no. His semen was on her pants. Talbott's DNA was on the zip ties. There is no other explanation." Tanya Van Cuylenborg's parents had by then passed away, but her brother was at the trial. Moore said, "It looked, physically, like a burden was lifted off of his shoulders."

Moore began using GEDmatch to work through a lineup of horrific cold cases. On May 5th, she identified the killer of Terri Lynn Hollis, an eleven-year-old who was murdered in California in 1972. The officers investigating her death had conducted two thousand interviews, over half a century, to no avail. On May 15th, she identified the killer of a teacher who was raped and murdered at her home in Pennsylvania in 1992. On May 30th, she identified the murderer of a twelve-year-old in Washington whose body was dumped in a gulch in 1986. Three days later, she identified a man who had kidnapped, raped, and killed an eight-year-old girl in Indiana in 1988.



She continued this way in the weeks ahead—as if she had discovered a master key to investigative cryptographs made up of imperfect memories, bad evidence, and evasive wrongdoing. Some of the men she had identified were deceased. Some were aging and free; they had apparently been one-time offenders—contrary to the conventional belief that a successful rapist-murderer will likely become a serial rapist-murderer. Paul Holes, who worked the Golden State Killer case, told me that genetic genealogy was revealing a new criminal profile: the rapist or murderer who never "escalates."

Moore was gaining momentum, but so was a fractious debate, prompted by the Golden State Killer's arrest. Even in the best of circumstances, the nature of DNA made the question of consent particularly thorny. As one commenter on a genealogy blog pointed out, "When YOU give consent, you are also giving consent for fifty percent of your mother's and fifty percent of your father's DNA, too."

Judy Russell, a blogger known as the Legal Genealogist, noted that, in addition to the problems of consent, police searches were being conducted without judicial oversight. "I think of the DNA results—the links that allow us to reconnect our families—as delicate and priceless vases on glass shelves," she wrote. "Right now, there's a bull loose in that china shop."

In 2019, police in Centerville, Utah, asked Parabon for help with an investigation: someone had broken into a church where an elderly organist was practicing, choked her until she passed out, and then fled. Steve Armentrout told the officers that the crime did not meet GEDmatch's new terms of service—it was neither a homicide nor a sexual assault—and so the company could not assist them. One of the officers, fearing that lives were at stake, went to Curt Rogers and requested an exception. "The detective said, 'This guy is out there, and I think he is going to do it again,'" Rogers told me. "So I said, 'O.K., let's try it this one time.'"

Moore's team quickly identified the strangler. But when news surfaced that GEDmatch had again been involved it caused an even greater uproar. Rogers's unilateral decision to redefine the policy only stoked fears that private genetic data were being managed by fiat. "In 2012, I called it a 'DNA geek's dream site,'" Judy Russell noted. "Now that dream has turned into more of a nightmare."

Striving to navigate the complicated ethics, Rogers rushed to make two key changes. He broadened the site's terms of service to permit police searches for a wider range of violent crimes. But he also decided that users would, by default, be opted out of those searches, until they explicitly gave permission. GEDmatch by then contained more than a million kits. For anyone who was doing police work on the site, it was now effectively empty.

"To go to zero on this—oh, it was very hard," Rogers told me.

At the time, Moore was in Idaho Falls, having just helped resolve the investigation that had ensnared Michael Usry, the filmmaker from New Orleans. Not only had she managed to identify the killer; she had helped to exonerate a man, Chris Tapp, who had been wrongfully convicted of the murder. She flew home feeling triumphant.

"I woke up the next morning with zero matches," she told me. "I went from the highest high to the lowest low." She had a backlog of half-complete cases; families had been waiting, in some instances for decades, for a resolution. "There were the loved ones of victims, and women who had been raped, who were writing to me," she told me. She

called Rogers. The two had a tearful conversation, not knowing how they could proceed, or even if they could.

The chaos at GEDmatch underscored a fundamental problem with genetic genealogy and policing: there were no rules; anyone could do it, in just about any way. Inside the F.B.I., there was a movement to formally adopt the technique, and with that came attempts to clarify some of the uncertainties. In Los Angeles, Steve Kramer, an F.B.I. lawyer who had helped lead the Golden State Killer case, joined with an agent to prove to the Bureau's leadership that it was not a fluke. They set a goal to solve twelve cold cases using genetic genealogy, and in 2019 they flew to Washington to present their work to the F.B.I.'s deputy director, David Bowdich. "This is the Lord's work," Bowdich told them. "The F.B.I. should own this."

The Department of Justice, meanwhile, began to consider a legal framework for the new tool. In September, 2019, it issued provisional guidelines, indicating that genetic genealogy could be used only for violent crimes, or for cases that presented a clear threat to public safety or national security. Federal agents were instructed not to upload DNA profiles to consumer repositories covertly, or against the terms of service, and were urged not to trick suspects' relatives into providing DNA samples. Most important, genetic genealogy had to be treated like a tip, and could not serve as the only basis for an arrest.

There were other significant limitations, but the guidelines remained only advisory, and held little sway at the state level, where many violent crimes are tried. Perhaps for this reason, states began to take notice, too. In 2019, Barry Scheck, a co-founder of the Innocence Project, worked with a legislator in Maryland to develop a bill that would codify and expand the guidelines. "For us to allow private companies to be engaging in this kind of incredibly private surveillance without government oversight, I think, is crazy," Scheck told me. It is not unusual for law-enforcement officers to get help from outside contractors. But genetic genealogists were being brought into the most sensitive aspects of the investigative process: generating key evidence, selecting suspects. And, while government agencies have strict controls on such data, companies like Parabon faced few legal limits on how they might monetize information that they gathered.

Earlier this year, the bill became law. Moore had advised legislators as they crafted the statute, but, after it passed, she reacted with a police officer's protectiveness: "If it means that these cases don't get solved because you've added too much of a burden, is that a good thing?" The law requires genealogists to be credentialled, but there are no agreed-upon credentials; flaws like this bothered her. But, when we spoke several weeks later, she seemed confident that the law's unworkable elements would fall away. "Things will get clarified in time," she said.

By then, nearly half a million GEDmatch users had opted to allow police to use their kits to identify violent criminals. Some of those people, undoubtedly, were new to the site. More and more people were taking DNA tests. In 2014, barely two hundred thousand people had been tested across all platforms. By 2018, the total was approaching twenty million. Researchers calculated that sixty per cent of all Americans with European ancestry could be identified from their DNA. Before long, they speculated, the number will approach a hundred per cent.

Moore's furious output resumed. After getting a COVID vaccination, she suffered for days from fatigue and migraines. Nonetheless, she spent her recovery resolving two cold cases. One had been with her for years. "The detective is going to retire, so I have been putting a ton of pro-bono hours into it," she told me. At the same time, Moore volunteered to help a retired N.F.L. player search for his birth parents. "I got an e-mail from someone who heard a rumor that his parents were half siblings, so I have been working a little bit on that, too," she said.

Her deadlines at Parabon were piling up, but each new request was a plea that she could not ignore. "I know that if I spend a few hours we'll have the answer," she told me. The older the mystery, the more pressure Moore felt to solve it quickly—fearing that opportunities for healing would be lost, as people passed away. "I just identified a John Doe, and I think his mom died in May—and he was lost in 1979," she told me. "He just missed her. After the first couple of times that happened, it was so devastating. That's why I don't want to go out and see a movie, or do something recreational. I could be helping to get these answers for somebody before it's too late."

One evening, at Moore's house, she spoke about a lingering mystery that she still hoped to resolve. It was for George R. R. Martin, the celebrated fantasy author whose books inspired the HBO series "Game of Thrones." He is now seventy-three.

Moore had first encountered the case years earlier, through "Finding Your Roots." She began working on the show in 2013, after Henry Louis Gates, Jr., heard her speak in Burbank and hired her on the spot. At first, his producers were skeptical, but within a few episodes Moore had established herself as a force. "We have five geneticists who vet her work," Gates told me. "There were a couple of things she found that were so astonishing to me—I was, like, 'We're going to *triple*-check this,' and each of the geneticists said, 'No, CeCe is absolutely right.'"

George R. R. Martin had come on the show hoping to learn more about the family of his father, Raymond. He knew a lot about Raymond's mother, Grace Jones, who had grown up in Bayonne, New Jersey. But he knew little about his father—Luigi Mazucola, an Italian immigrant who took on the name Louie Martin. Grace and Louie were married in 1915, but they separated after Raymond was born. Louie married a younger woman; for the family that he left behind, he became persona non grata.

Martin believed that Louie had left after having an affair. As Moore delved into the family's genealogy, though, she learned that the opposite was more likely true. The genetics indicated that Raymond's father was not Louie but another man, an unknown Ashkenazi Jew.

For Martin, the news was wrenching. "It's uprooting my world here!" he told Gates on the set. "It doesn't make any sense! So I am descended from mystery?" After the taping, Martin followed the show's production crew to a local restaurant, wanting to talk more about what

they knew. In the years that followed, he and his sisters strove to solve the mystery, to no avail.

It upset Moore that her work, intended to give people a sense of ancestral belonging, had left Martin with only disconnection. She continued to work the case. Initially, there was just one lead to pursue—a Jewish man, named Scott Ross, who shared three per cent of Martin's DNA. But there are more than a quarter of a million Americans with the surname Ross. She built trees for dozens of Scott Rosses, hoping to locate one who could plausibly share DNA with Martin. Years passed. A combination of deduction and intuition led her to a family in New Jersey, but she could not complete their tree. Uncertain that they were the right family, she refrained from reaching out.

As I sat with Moore, she opened up Martin's DNA profile for the first time in months. Up popped a new genetic match: another Jewish man, Corey Roberts, who also shared about three per cent of Martin's DNA. It appeared that the two men and Ross all shared a set of great-grandparents. But how?

Roberts had built a rudimentary family tree, and Moore quickly vetted and expanded it, identifying all of his great-grandparents. But none of them seemed to connect to the Rosses. So Moore returned to the Ross family's remaining brick wall. To break through, she needed a marriage certificate from the New York City municipal archives. Back in New York, I was able to apply for it, and weeks later a copy printed on pale-blue card stock arrived by mail. On a line at the bottom, pounded into the original document by a government typewriter, was the name of a woman who tied the families together. Her surname was Perlmutter.

I sent a copy to Moore. "WhooHoo!" she wrote. "Here we go." Within minutes, she was assembling a detailed genealogical portrait of Chaim Yossel Perlmutter. He was born in 1896 in Poritzk, a shtetl in what is now northwestern Ukraine. Two years later, his mother brought him and his two older brothers to Holland, where they boarded the S.S. Rotterdam for Ellis Island. Her husband had made the journey before them, and found work as a tailor. The family lived in Bayonne, just blocks from where Martin's grandmother Grace had lived. Chaim Yossel Americanized his name to Joseph, but in Bayonne people called him Patty. He worked at a local oil refinery, and became friends with Louie Martin, who worked there, too. When the First World War broke out, both men registered for the draft. Joseph fought as an infantryman in the forests of the Ardennes. He returned to Bayonne in the spring of 1919, and several months later Raymond was conceived.

"Who cares about the Davis account numbers when we're all gonna end up as pie anyway?"

• •

A few weeks ago, Moore invited Martin to a Zoom chat, so that she could present her findings. At first, he seemed irritated by problems with the connection, but as she spoke his mood softened, and after two hours it was clear that he was moved. Moore hinted at a Shakespearean romance. Joseph and Grace seemed to have fallen in love—but, by the time she separated from her husband, Joseph had married someone else. "They might have just missed each other," she said.

The two had remained friends, however. Moore shared photos of Joseph and Grace in middle age. In one, they are grinning, their bodies close, heads nearly touching; she is holding his hand. "It's a very affectionate picture," Martin said. "Clearly, there is something going on!" In another photo, from 1942, Raymond, a young man in a suit, sits at a cocktail table between Joseph and Grace, his arms around both his biological parents. The resemblance between father and son was striking.

"They look like a happy family," Moore said.

Martin agreed, but then he wondered if his father ever knew. He explained that Grace's mother—"a stern matriarch"—would have judged her daughter harshly for having an affair. "There might have been a very good reason that Grace never told anyone—if indeed she never did tell," he said.

Eventually, Joseph and his wife bought a tavern and moved into the apartment above it. Joseph struggled with drinking, but he ran the tavern as a locus for community: a place for wedding receptions, or Friday-night oysters and beer.

Joseph died before turning fifty, from liver disease. He and his wife never had children, but a niece and a nephew remembered him as a kindhearted uncle. Moore ended her presentation with a photo of his gravestone—a beautifully carved, well-tended monument. A Hebrew inscription began, "Here is buried an upright man, our teacher, the master."

"Wow," Martin said.

"How do you feel?" Moore asked.

"I am glad you discovered I am related to him," he said.

Martin could only glimpse the other side of the brick wall. He asked about connecting with the Roberts and Ross clans, and wondered if there were any living Perlmutters who had known Joseph. There were relatives to meet, questions to ask. "I'm a storyteller," he said. "I want to know all the details." ♦

GET REAL

As Princess Diana in "Spencer," Kristen Stewart takes on the biggest role of her career.

BY EMILY WITT

The airport in Telluride, Colorado, is small and private. The town's film festival, held each year during the Labor Day weekend, has a reputation for intimacy—celebrities are not subjected to red carpets or corsetry, and the looming mountains have a way of making Hollywood seem garish and far away. This year, Kristen Stewart flew to Colorado from Venice, Italy, where "Spencer," a new movie in which she plays Princess Diana, had just premièred. The first reviews of her performance (" 'Spencer' Stuns Venice, Earning Standing Ovation and Oscar Buzz"—*Variety*) were published as she slept above the Atlantic. She stopped at a hotel to change and have her dyed blond hair styled in a messy updo, then went directly to the Werner Herzog Theatre, along with Pablo Larraín, the movie's director, arriving only a few minutes behind schedule.

Her look was nineteen-fifties suburban dad: a black-and-white cabana shirt over a cropped white tank top, blue jeans, red suède creepers, white socks. Stewart, who was born and raised in Los Angeles, describes herself as California to the core—she has "L.A." tattooed on a wrist—and few people since James Dean have looked better or more at ease in a T-shirt and jeans. She seems to channel a lineage of countercultural American femininity: rockabilly girls and punkettes, Beat poets and skaters, Jordan Baker rather than Daisy Buchanan. She was convincing as Joan Jett, in the 2010 bio-pic "The Runaways," and as Marylou, the sixteen-year-old bride of Dean Moriarty, in the 2012 adaptation of "On the Road." Now she was playing a different misfit, the twentieth century's most famous princess. She told the audience that Telluride was the best festival, and that she'd never had more fun making a movie. Then everyone settled in to watch a film about confinement and despair set to a frequently menacing score of free jazz.

"Spencer" takes place during the Royal Family's Christmas holidays at Sandringham House in 1991, at a breaking point in Diana's marriage to the Prince of Wales. Surrounded by quivering Christmas jellies and glistening puddings, the Princess is cut off from the world and oppressed by royal traditions; eventually, she is haunted by the ghost of Anne Boleyn. The score, by Jonny Greenwood, raises the tension to nearly unbearable levels. Early in the movie, Diana sits at dinner in the throes of an anxiety attack, dressed in a green gown the same color as the soup in front of her, and crunches into a string of pearls. (The gems are a source of humiliation: Charles has bought the same present for his wife and for his mistress.) The necklace reappears later, fully intact, making it clear that Diana is mentally unravelling. "The piano wire snaps way quicker than I thought," Stewart said, when I asked her about the scene. "Spencer" has less in common with "The Crown," the Netflix series about the Royal Family, than it does with "Rosemary's Baby" or "Gaslight," films in which the mental breakdown of the female lead is the rational response to conspiracy, and madness looks something like resistance.

Thirteen years ago, at the age of eighteen, Stewart became internationally famous as the star of "Twilight," the adaptation of a young-adult novel about vampires and werewolves in the Pacific Northwest. The film and its sequels gave Stewart a legion of fans but, in other quarters, fixed an impression of her as the oddly inexpressive star of mawkish teen movies. Online, a host of memes appeared featuring images of Stewart with captions such as "Five movies, one facial expression," or "I don't always smile, but when I do, I don't." The jokes captured something about Stewart's naturalism and restraint, qualities of her acting that some find captivating and others inscrutable.

"There are certain actors and actresses that can become, in my eyes, transparent," Pablo Larraín told me, sitting on a bench in a park in Telluride between screenings. He meant the adjective pejoratively. He went on, "You can see sometimes a movie that is too transparent, so I don't understand what I'm doing as an audience," because the filmmakers are "giving it to me completely digested." Larraín, who grew up in Santiago, Chile, is thoughtful and bearded. He made his first English-language film, "Jackie"—as in Kennedy Onassis—in 2016. That same year, Stewart starred in "Personal Shopper," an eerie art-house film about an American in Paris trying to connect with the spirit of her dead brother. In Stewart's depiction of the isolation of grief, Larraín saw the qualities that he wanted in his Diana. Both of Larraín's parents have served in the Chilean government; his mother, a descendant of one of the country's wealthiest families, was always interested in Diana, he has said. "There's something that needed to be magnetic and, at the same time, very mysterious," he told me of the role as he envisioned it. The veteran British screenwriter Steven Knight wrote a script for him, and he sent it to Stewart. Then he called her up, and, "with her perfect American accent," she said, "Dude, I'll do it."

"Spencer" makes use of Stewart's mystery and magnetism but also pushes her into styles of performance that her previous roles have not. She does an accent, of course, and plausibly mimics Diana's familiar mannerisms; she also imbues the character with a melodramatic hyperbole that takes her beyond historical depiction and, at times, into comedy. Her Diana tries to shape-shift her way out of powerlessness—eyes downcast and voice breathy in moments of pliancy, chin raised with imperiousness when breaking rules, her moods oscillating unpredictably as she strides through the castle halls at a rapid clip, like a woman pursued.

The day after the screening, Stewart

Stewart used to learn her lines right before filming, so that it would seem, on camera, as if they had just occurred to her.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELLE PÉREZ

went paragliding off a cliff, then attended a press reception for the film at an Italian restaurant on Telluride's main drag. She was accompanied by a few friends and her fiancée, the screenwriter Dylan Meyer, whom she began dating in 2019, and who proposed to her this past summer. Stewart has publicly dated women for most of her adult life, shrugging off the heteronormativity of traditional Hollywood stardom with a nonchalance that seems partly temperamental and partly generational. She mostly shies away from social media, though she occasionally makes cameos on Meyer's Instagram. Her friends, practiced in the art of standing on the sidelines, made their way to the bar as she shifted into professional mode, ready to be led around the room by a publicist.

I joined her, and watched as two ecstatic organizers of a film festival in Indianapolis volleyed effusive compliments her way. Stewart cracked jokes and stretched her quadriceps. Her California locution, full of f-bombs and "dudes," seems to put people at ease. "I wish I was able to go to some of the more micro festivals," she said, before adding, "Not that your festival is micro!" She grabbed her foot and mimed putting it into her mouth. They shooed her away, charmed. I stayed for another drink with one of the pair from Indiana, who confided to me over a Cosmo that, as much as he liked "Spencer," he loved "Twilight."

A few weeks later, I made plans to meet Stewart in Los Angeles. She wanted to golf. Her dad taught her how when she was a child, and she had recently resumed the habit. She suggested that we meet at a city course in Griffith Park. The dry September air hung hazy above brown hills, hummingbirds sipped at flowers, and elderly men shuffled around the green.

If you Google Stewart's name on any given day, you are likely to find, on several Web sites, detailed descriptions of what she wore while getting an iced coffee or picking up groceries. She arrived at the course, without any apparent paparazzi in pursuit, wearing jeans and a T-shirt, pink-tinted sunglasses, and Adidas. "I haven't really figured out my golf look," she admitted. She walked behind the clubhouse to do reconnaissance. "I like to gopher it out first," she said, squinting up at the driving range, where a crowd of mostly male golfers dressed in khaki pants practiced their drives. Someone was occupying her preferred spot, a shady corner on an upper level with a bench. "Maybe he'll leave," she said. We walked back to her black minivan—its name is Beth, she told me—and she retrieved her golf bag. After filling a basket with balls from a vending machine, she unpacked her gear and put on a white leather glove, keeping an eye on her spot. Then she turned to me. "So," she said, "what do you want to talk about?"

Stewart grew up in Woodland Hills, a suburban L.A. neighborhood in the San Fernando Valley. Her dad was a stage manager, overseeing the rehearsals that precede a shoot, and her mother was a script supervisor, responsible for insuring that there was continuity between the scenes of a film. Both parents often came home late, with candy pilfered from craft services and stories about the long hours on location. Stewart thinks that it was her proximity to the energy of a movie set, with its punishing schedules and coördinated effort, that drew her to acting. She dates her career as a performer to the second grade, when, riddled with anxiety, she sang a dreidel song as part of a holiday pageant. Shortly afterward, a schoolmate's parent advertised a workshop to teach children how to audition for TV and movies, and Stewart surprised her mother by asking to sign up.

The Stewarts were a crew-oriented family, she told me, and playing stage mom on someone else's set came with some embarrassment for her mother. "I

think when I presented her with this she was, like, 'Shit, I've told her she can do anything she wants, now I have to drive her to these fucking auditions.'" Stewart tried out for a number of commercials, but the artifice of advertising didn't come naturally to her. "I was so bad at auditioning for commercials—like 'Try the soda pop,' or whatever," she told me. But, when she was about ten, she got the part of Patricia Clarkson's tomboy daughter in the indie drama "The Safety of Objects." A year later, David Fincher cast her as Jodie Foster's tomboy daughter in his thriller "Panic Room."

The movie took several months to shoot, much of which Foster and Stewart spent in a small room together. Foster, who began acting as a toddler and was famous by the time she was fourteen, told me, of her co-star, "I can't say she's my doppelgänger, but I do feel like, when she was little, I felt everything that she was feeling, and processed things the same way." In Fincher's film, Foster plays a recently divorced mom re-starting her life in an Upper West Side town house that is soon invaded by a dopey rich kid and his partners, who are trying to find a hidden stash of money. Stewart, zooming down hallways on a scooter, wearing a Sid Vicious T-shirt and a thumb ring, is a figure of loyalty in a feminized opposition. Even then, Foster told me, Stewart was an unusual performer: "She shows onscreen how she struggles with demonstrating emotion."

"He's made a move," Stewart said, referring to the golfer in her spot. We walked to the shady corner, which was littered with cigarette butts despite the flammability of drought-stricken Los Angeles. Stewart set down the basket of balls and selected a club. She hadn't thought about "Panic Room" in a while, she said, teeing up for a drive. What she remembers from her early years of acting is a fear of letting people down, which was often so intense that she came to the set feeling nauseated, with sweaty palms. She also remembers the satisfaction of pleasing grownups. "I hope this doesn't sound totally arrogant, but adults in the room were moved," she said. "Compared to what was going on in the third grade, it seemed really cool."

Apart from the elementary-school audition class, Stewart never studied acting. For a long time, she rarely rehearsed, or even practiced her parts in front of a mirror. She preferred to learn her lines on set, right before filming, so that it would seem, on camera, as if they had just occurred to her. The Method, an approach to acting in which one draws on personal memory, struck her as an alienating prospect. But her focus on real feeling, rather than the outward expres-

sion of it, does have some kinship with that technique. "Maybe I'm extremely Method," she acknowledged, "because it is me, and there's no separation, and I believe it so fully when it's good."

"She has an unrealistically high bar for her own authenticity," Jesse Eisenberg told me. Eisenberg co-starred with Stewart in "Adventureland," when she was seventeen and he was twenty-four. Later, they appeared together in the action comedy "American Ultra" and the Woody Allen film "Café Society"; for a moment, they seemed like the millennial answer to Tracy and Hepburn. "She once called 'Cut' in the middle of a take and said, 'I'm sorry, I was lying to you,'" Eisenberg recalled. When they filmed "Adventureland," a dramedy about college kids working at an amusement park during summer vacation, Stewart had not yet been cast in "Twilight," but Eisenberg felt distinctly that he was working with a movie star. "I don't understand how to articulate that," he said. "Which is why we have the words 'movie star.' But: an enigmatic quality, mixed with a naturalism, mixed with an emotional depth."

While they were filming, in Pittsburgh, Catherine Hardwicke, the director who had been hired to adapt "Twilight," flew there to audition Stewart for the role of Bella Swan, the girl who falls in love with a tortured vampire named Edward Cullen. Hardwicke had seen Stewart in an early cut of "Into the Wild," about a young man who leaves society behind and ends up dying in the Alaskan wilderness. Stewart plays a girl who falls for him along the way; in one scene, he does sit-ups, oblivious, as she gazes at him with exasperation and desire. Hardwicke saw in her the kind of longing she needed for Bella. She brought a young actor, Jackson Rathbone, with her to Pittsburgh, and had him and Stewart rehearse scenes in a hotel room and improvise in a park. "At the end of it, I was just convinced," Hardwicke said. "She's Bella. She's got to be Bella, because she keeps it so grounded and so real." She added, "I built the whole film around her."

One day, Hardwicke said, Stewart "just kind of mentioned that she was raised with wolves, real wolves—that the family took care of wolves." (They were actually wolf hybrids, as Stewart's mom, Jules, told *Us Weekly* in 2013, after a neighbor accused her of harboring wolves on her property.) Of the director, Stewart said, "I just thought she was—she felt *crazy*." Stewart had seen Hardwicke's teen drama "Thirteen," which cleared her bar for authenticity. "She was kind of the perfect person to do a young-adult novel that had these dark romantic elements. She had this childlike openness and teen-age triggers, and her whole sensibility was that the movie was going to feel horny and overconfident."

To cast Edward, Hardwicke had actors come to her house in Los Angeles to read with Stewart and make out. "It was so clear who worked," Stewart said, grinning. "I was literally just, like . . ." She mimicked a swoon, dropping her golf club at the memory of Robert Pattinson, the British actor who became her co-star and, for several years, her boyfriend. Pattinson, she said, had an "intellectual approach that was combined with 'I don't give a fuck about this, but I'm going to make this sing.' And I was, like, 'Ugh, *same*.'" She picked up her club and smiled. "And, whatever, we were young and stupid and, not to say that we made it so much better, but that's what it needed, and that's what anybody playing those parts needed to feel."

According to Hardwicke, Summit Entertainment, the studio that produced "Twilight," thought that the movie was comparable in scale to "The Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants," a 2005 teen movie that made about forty million dollars at the box office. "Twilight" made nearly that much on its first day, and the franchise went on to earn more than three billion dollars worldwide. Although the books are ostensibly pro-abstinence—their author, Stephenie Meyer, is a devout Mormon—Stewart approached the film's make-out scenes as though she were the one going in for the kill. Bella drives an old pickup truck and wears leggings to the prom. Edward, who reads minds, cannot penetrate hers. "She confounds us all!" another vampire exclaims.

Stewart had to recite such lines as "There was a part of him, and I didn't know how dominant that part might be,

"So, when you looked up your symptoms, did it say to complain about it incessantly but never seek treatment?"

that thirsted for my blood," and "Hello, biceps!" She and her castmates had to answer an endless barrage of questions from reporters and Comic-Con attendees about what it was like to kiss one another or to act out some of the franchise's weirder plot twists, such as when Bella gives birth to a half-human, half-vampire who bonds with Jacob, the blue-collar werewolf played by Taylor Lautner.

"It was very naïve, in the best way," Stewart told me. She had spent her adolescence being tutored during film shoots; "Twilight" was college for her. It also gave her a public scrim that she found useful. "Like, how fun for people to think they know you," she said, smiling slyly. "Did you think I was going to do 'Twilight' forever? Is that how you saw me? If that's how you saw me, then you really set me up for success, because I can do way more than that."

Stewart shot a handful of smaller films between "Twilight" installments. Then, around the time that filming wrapped on the fifth and final part, she was cast as the lead in "Snow White and the Huntsman," which execs envisioned as the start of a major franchise. A few weeks after its release, *Us Weekly* published photographs of Stewart making out with the movie's married, forty-one-year-old director, Rupert Sanders. Although the film made about four hundred million dollars, a planned sequel was reworked as a spinoff, with different actresses. "The work, to me, genuinely was ignored in a really sort of frivolous, silly, petty way for a group of adult people who were supposed to be running studios and making films," Stewart said later.

For the next several years, Stewart made mainly independent movies—three or four of them nearly every year. She was "pridefully reckless" in choosing roles, she told me. "If there was one scene in a script that I really wanted to do, and I hated the rest of it, I would still do it," she said. She would think that the movie might not turn out so bad; she would often be wrong. She recently told an interviewer that she had "probably made five really good films" in a career of about fifty so far. "There are movies that I look at, in retrospect, and I think, Valiant effort, sure, but we jumped the gun," she told me. When a production did not meet her expectations, she would occasionally vent to her makeup artist, whom she has worked with since her teens. "There are times," Stewart said, "when I will literally go over to her and be, like, 'What the fuck are we doing with our lives? We need to get out of here. I'm going to call in a bomb threat.'" She added, "It really sucks to be on a movie set that's clearly not nailing it, but I'm really used to it. You get better at crossword puzzles."

The best movies mostly told stories of ordinary lives. In "Still Alice," Stewart plays the daughter of a professor with Alzheimer's (Julianne Moore, who won an Oscar for her performance). Stewart gives the character an unflinching steadiness, refusing to turn away in embarrassment or change her tone of voice as her mother's cognition declines. In Kelly Reichardt's anthology film "Certain Women," Stewart is a mousy Montana lawyer who deflects an unwanted friendship without words. In sweet but slowly devastating two-handed scenes, she wears the kind but frozen expression of someone who doesn't want to acknowledge another person's vulnerability. Reichardt was struck by the fact that Stewart wanted to come to Montana to play a supporting role in her quiet ensemble movie. "My take was she was out looking for experiences," she said. "Maybe once you've done your early stuff and you've hit it already, you're kind of free, and you do what you want."

Stewart told me that she can now talk to a director for a few moments, even one whose films she admires, and know that it won't work out. She looks for filmmakers with a sensibility that is "spiritual, unarticulated, emotional," she said, adding, "There are certain directors that feel otherworldly to me."

Last year, the sixty-six-year-old French director Olivier Assayas gave a speech called "Cinema in the Present Tense," in which he addressed, among other things, the state of Hollywood. "I have practically nothing positive to say about it," he declared, "except that this industry's prosperity and new modalities do not delight me, they frighten or even repulse me." Assayas lamented, in particular, "the confiscation of screens in the service of (mostly Disney-studio) franchises, whose hegemony now seems absolute."

The quasi-feminism of a "Wonder Woman" or a "Black Widow" notwithstanding, the tentpole franchises of Hollywood have been especially dismal for female actors. While Stewart was finishing the "Twilight" series, the French actress Juliette Binoche told Assayas that she wanted to work with him. In response, he wrote "Clouds of Sils Maria," an English-language film set in Switzerland that can be seen, in part, as a critique of the dominant machinery of contemporary movies, in which the greatest actors of our time are subjected to the indignities of the Marvel Cinematic Universe and audiences watch minor variations on the same six or seven characters every three or four years until we die. Binoche plays a French film star, Maria, who has been cast in a play opposite a Hollywood ingénue named Jo-Ann, whose career (which includes a starring role in a Hollywood franchise) and brush with scandal (a fling while in a highly publicized relationship) bear a striking resemblance to those of Kristen Stewart.

Assayas offered Stewart the role of Jo-Ann, but she told him that she would rather play Maria's assistant, a young woman named Val, who talks Maria through her anxieties and, in one scene, defends the incorrigible Jo-Ann, who was ultimately played by Chloë Grace Moretz. "She's not completely antiseptic like the rest of Hollywood," Val says. "She's brave enough to be herself. At her age, I think that's pretty fucking cool."

"I think Kristen had fun just toying with her own fame and her own relationship with that tabloid stuff," Assayas told me, on a video call from a set in Paris, his hair rumpled by a pair of headphones. He was shooting a TV adaptation of his 1996 film "Irma Vep." (Stewart has a small part in the series.) Playing Val, he said, gave Stewart "a chance to turn a new leaf and start from somewhere else. Somewhere else being herself." Binoche told me that she was struck by Stewart's openness, and also by "her capacity of learning lines in a minute." She added, "As for me, it takes

ages—it's like I need to go over and over and over so it gets into my body. As for her, she just comes and she has it in her. Also, it was her language, so she felt comfortable changing it and making it hers, like a glove for her soul."

For her performance, Stewart won a César, the French equivalent of an Oscar. (She is the only American woman to have done so.) The film was partly financed by Chanel, and its release roughly coincided with the beginning of Stewart's own relationship with the fashion house, which has gone beyond the usual advertorial arrangements, at times resembling the partnership that Audrey Hepburn once had with Givenchy. (Karl Lagerfeld cast Stewart as an actress playing Coco Chanel in a short film he directed in 2015, and the brand also contributed costumes to "Spencer.") "There's an elevated ambition to wanting to work with them," Stewart told me, speaking of Chanel. "You're, like, 'Oh, so that's the best one? Cool, I guess I'll do that.' When I was younger, I just wanted to be a winner."

After "Sils Maria," Assayas wrote "Personal Shopper," which centers on another assistant, Maureen, whose visits to the Chanel showroom, on behalf of the model who employs her, become an element of the plot. The movie is part ghost story and part murder mystery; the role of Maureen seems written for Stewart, though Assayas told me that, if he wrote it for her, he did so subconsciously. The exquisite dresses that Maureen tries on in the course of her job—her hair unkempt, her face without makeup—do nothing to hide the grief she holds in her body. Driving in Paris on a motor scooter, weaving through traffic, Maureen mumbles to herself, trapped in recursive thoughts about someone who is no longer there. Recalling an image of a bloodied corpse while on a video call with her boyfriend, she shudders and half rubs her eyes, as if she could physically shed the memory. Some actors, tasked with the portrayal of traumatic encounters amid personal loss, might tend toward sobbing or hyperventilation. Stewart shows a person whose mind is operating on multiple tracks; it's a mesmerizing struggle, the visual rendering of a divided intelligence.

"I felt that I was directing the film from the outside and she was directing it from the inside," Assayas told me. The movie is full of long takes in which Stewart dictates the pace of the action, he noted. "She appropriated the character," he went on, "and put herself in a situation where the invisible, or the magic of cinema, or the world around her, becomes natural."

When Stewart portrayed the actress Jean Seberg, in the 2019 bio-pic "Seberg," she tried to get some of the puffiness that Seberg, a heavy drinker, had in her face. To get the young Joan Jett's cadence, in "The Runaways," she listened to letters on tape which Jett recorded when she was thirteen. Playing Diana, one of the most documented women of her era, required preparation on another level. Stewart worked with a dialect coach for four months. "It's such an all-encompassing, physical, head-to-toe experience sounding like that," she told me. "It changes what you look like completely." She also studied endless photographs and videos of Diana. She recalled a particular video, of Diana on a boat, in which she turns and lights up at the sight of her children, and another in which she emits a strange and incongruous laugh. Stewart noticed how uncomfortable Diana could look when she was dressed up, "just jutting out in every way possible," as Stewart put it, trapped in a tyranny of ridiculous hats. (Diana's "human awkwardness and emotional incontinence showed in her every gesture," the novelist Hilary Mantel once wrote.)

Most of "Spencer" was shot in castles in Germany, in early 2021, during the bleak pandemic winter. Stewart was expecting a big crew and the elaborate staging of a historical drama, but she often worked in near-solitude, with Larraín and Claire Mathon, the cinematographer. Mathon shot on film, frequently in closeup, and, to Stewart, it felt as though the trio became a "three-headed animal," whose movements were propelled by Larraín's "fervent, insane, psychotic confidence." Upon entering the set, Larraín would tell Stewart to "inhabit the space," an old mantra from his days in the theatre. As he recalled, Stewart would reply, "What the fuck does that mean?" But she rarely needed him to articulate further, he said. Stewart, for her part, felt that Larraín had got inside Diana's head. "There were times where he would repeat something, or say something that I was about to say, and he would channel Diana in a way that was just striking," she told me. "There were days on the movie where I was, like, 'Do you want to wear the dress? Because I'll give it to you.' He doesn't look right for the part, but he could have played her."

As a child, in the eighties, I had a set of Princess Diana paper dolls that came with a variety of accessories: wedding dress, suits, a riding outfit, babies. I thought of them while watching the unexpected climax of "Spencer": a wordless and cathartic dance montage. Diana, caught between the end of her marriage

"Hold on—Mommy's just trying to finish reading the Internet."

"On the plus side, you get to blame her for everything forever."

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and the life still to come, spins down castle halls and runs through gardens, pivoting and gliding to Greenwood's surging score, wearing iconic outfits that represent various stages of her life. For this sequence, Stewart did not prepare at all. In pre-production, she said, she sometimes asked Larraín what she would be wearing in the scene, and whether there would be choreography. Every time, he would tell her, "Yeah . . . I don't know."

Rather than shoot the sequence all at once, they filmed a piece of it at the end of nearly every day. Stewart would put on a chiffon gown or a suit; Larraín would pick a hallway or a ballroom for her to move in, and play music through a large speaker: LCD Soundsystem, or Bach, or Sinéad O'Connor, or Lionel Richie (a favorite of Diana's). "I don't know how to move like Diana," Stewart told me. "She was a dancer. I'm not a fucking dancer." And so there was always an element of discovery. "It was so unbridling and so shocking at times, and so emotional," Stewart said. "It's like doing yoga and you suddenly stretch your hips in a certain way and start crying, and you're, like, What is that?" What resulted is a scene that, for a few moments, gives you a glimpse of a person who was not allowed to exist.

The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences loves a portrayal of a historical figure. In the past decade, it has awarded Best Actress to Meryl Streep for playing Margaret Thatcher, to Olivia Colman for playing Queen Anne, and to Renée Zellweger for playing Judy Garland. "I've never been in the running, if you want to put it like that," Stewart told me. For each golden statuette, there is a get-to-know-you campaign that, at times, has all the glamour of a race for state senate. "I do not want to seem like an ass, but it's so embarrassing and so tiring," she said. "It is highly political. You have to go talk to people. You feel like you're a diplomat."

So it was that, a few hours after golf, Stewart arrived for a post-screening Q. & A. with members of the Academy. She had been coiffed and styled in a blazer and heels. (Before reaching the stage, she replaced the heels with sneakers.) The screening was held at the headquarters of the Directors Guild of America, where the lobby is decorated with black-and-white photographs of famous directors on set. Afterward, in a wood-panelled reception room outfitted with gilt chairs and fairy lights, the audience gathered for a British-themed reception: cucumber sandwiches, shepherd's pie, fish and chips. The mood was that of a wedding at which distant relatives await their turn to congratulate the bride.

I was crunching through the confectionery pearls that decorated a frosted vanilla cupcake when a man with white hair struck up a conversation. His name was Andrzej Bartkowiak. ("You've seen my work," Bartkowiak, a cinematographer, said. He was right.) Bartkowiak had a few minor issues with "Spencer," he told me, but not with Stewart's performance, which he described as "captivating" and "flawless." This seemed like a good sign: despite the Academy's efforts to diversify in recent years, men of Bartkowiak's approximate generation and credentials remain an important demographic. Before leaving, he went over to share these thoughts in person, and I watched Stewart accept his congratulations.

Stewart has already filmed "Crimes of the Future," with David Cronenberg, and she's about to shoot "Love Me," which will co-star Steven Yeun. She describes the latter as a love story between a satellite and a buoy; it has something to do with getting computers to love one another, she said, and the machines "sort of morphing in and out of every gender and race, and, like, there's no orientation, there's just humanity." Stewart is also working on her début feature as a director, an adaptation of "The Chronology of Water," a memoir by Lidia Yuknavitch.

The book came to Stewart as an al-

gorithmically generated recommendation on her Amazon Kindle. In it, she saw something that she'd never seen on-screen. "It kind of celebrates a certain taboo," she told me, "that shame finds itself sexually in women. The ways that she acknowledges being embarrassed, and self-hating, but that it also really turns her on, is one of the really difficult and complicated relationships we have with being women in this body in a fully patriarchal society." The memoir follows Yuknavitch through a stillbirth, multiple husbands, and the pursuit of sexual experience with lovers male and female; it has cameos from literary mentors including Ken Kesey, Kathy Acker, and Lynne Tillman. The memoir was a word-of-mouth hit, and Yuknavitch told me that there were others who wanted the film rights. Stewart, she said, won her over with a long letter "written in the language of a visionary." Yuknavitch shared with me a single, out-of-context line: "And to those who dwell similarly in this fuck me, fuck it realm of crippling self doubt and fortified albeit false EGO, be proud because today, 'fuck it' won."

The memoir's prose is visceral, and its structure is decidedly unchronological; it does not seem, at first glance, easily adaptable, and Stewart has been toiling at the script for years. At one point, she spent three weeks living in a van outside Yuknavitch's house, in Oregon. Stewart's fiancée, Meyer, whose screenwriting credits include an adaptation of the young-adult novel "Moxie," which came out on Netflix earlier this year, has read drafts. "I've been with people where work isn't at the forefront of the thing and therefore you don't do it as much," Stewart, who seems to work constantly, told me. "That's not good for me. I don't like that. When you find somebody that, every aspect of your life—well, I guess I don't have many aspects. I want to make movies. That's primarily what I want to work on, and we share that, luckily."

On a sunny afternoon in October, I went to see Stewart at an Italian restaurant in Los Feliz. In the weeks since I'd last seen her, she'd travelled to Paris, for Fashion Week, and to London, for the British première of "Spencer." She was starting to get a little tired of talking about the movie, she confessed. She sounded happy to be back in L.A.

I found her sitting in the corner of a pandemic-era outdoor seating area, where plywood walls shielded her from the street. She had a MacBook open and was chatting with a close friend, who briskly excused himself even as I apologized for being early. Stewart quickly scanned her surroundings—a large man coming rapidly down the sidewalk momentarily startled her—before settling in to talk. Not until we'd left did she mention that a photographer had been lurking nearby the whole time. (The *Daily Mail*, a few hours later: "Kristen Stewart nails an effortlessly cool look in jeans while carrying a backpack over her shoulder as she leaves lunch in Los Angeles.")

In addition to "The Chronology of Water," Stewart is writing a TV series with Meyer and developing a gay ghost-hunting reality show with a friend, which she has described to me as "a paranormal romp in a queer space," with elevated aesthetics. "Gay people love pretty things," she added. "So we are aiming for a richness." She showed me a couple of pitch decks on her laptop. In 2017, Stewart directed a short film, called "Come Swim," which has the moody atmospherics of a music video: rain on windowpanes, saturated color correction, anxious smoking. The look book for "The Chronology of Water" had images of blood, swimming pools, grim nineteen-seventies living rooms, the grassy bed of the Ichetucknee River, in Florida, a childhood photograph of Yuknavitch and her sister. "I want to fuck with a split screen," Stewart said, studying my reaction as I scrolled through the images. "Like, genuinely shredded memories. I want seasons. I want the movie to have scope."

Stewart will pitch the movie to studios with the lead role already cast. She had been watching dozens of audition videos for weeks, and had narrowed her choices down to four women. In the coming days, she would workshop the role with them, as Hardwicke had done with her for "Twilight." She needed someone with stamina, she said, because the movie would be shot in the course of several months. She hoped to find someone familiar with the writers who appear in the book—an actress in her early thirties, preferably, who doesn't look too old for the scenes when the character is in her twenties or too young for those set in her forties. Someone who is not yet wildly famous.

"I see this as being one of the greatest roles for a woman," Stewart said. "Like, someone could be so good at it, you know?" Whenever she talked about directing, something in her manner changed—a hungrier self emerged, a side of her enlivened by the prospect of being undefined, and concerned with making the right impression. She had sent the script to previous collaborators whom she admired, including Julianne Moore. "I want to make something that's gonna, like, stink and be horribly embarrassing but also make you fucking wet, and just be really honest," she said. "Do you know what I mean? I want to do a coming-of-age movie that actually considers young women. They've never fucking done it."

The scene that the actresses read for their auditions was a conversation with Ken Kesey, who offers the lead character some of the first encouragement she receives as a writer. Stewart watched intently, her mind not yet made up. "She would be such a fucking friend in this—like, I can trust her," she said, of one actress. Of another: "She feels it—it's real for her." Still, she was waiting for a definitive sign. "Someone is going to do the right thing and is going to get the part in the moment that they get it," she said. "I'm gonna be, like, 'And there the fuck you are! O.K., great. Let's go.' But somebody needs to take it."

I asked Stewart if she was looking forward to being in charge, but she said that, for her, directing would be a kind of letting go. "I cannot wait to share the weight of this," she told me. Usually, she sees it as her responsibility to take on all the feeling of a movie and project it into the world. "I'll be fully feeling all these things with the person, but I have to give it to someone, and I've never done that," she said. "I've always been, like, 'I got it, I got it, I got it, I can do this.' It's going to be interesting to let someone else have their own experience with it, and fall more in love with that than what I could have ever dreamed of." ♦

DETECTIVE DOG

Gish Jen

PHOTOGRAPH BY JUSTIN J. WEE

"No politics, just make money," Betty's mother, Tina, liked to say. And when it came to China: "See nothing, hear nothing, say nothing. Do you hear me?"

"I hear nothing," Betty had wanted to say sometimes. Or, well, many times, really. But instead she'd said nothing and, as directed, made a lot of money. After all, she was the good daughter.

And that was how it was that when umbrellas took over Hong Kong she had a nice place in Vancouver. And that was how it was, too, that when racism took over Vancouver she could up and move to New York. It was convenient to be rich, you had to say. In New York, she didn't even have to buy an apartment. She and her husband and the boys just moved into her sister's old place, which they liked so much that they bought the apartment next door, and then the apartment on the other side, too. They figured they'd turn the extra kitchens into bathrooms.

"Buy another one!" Betty's father, Johnson, bellowed over FaceTime from Arizona. "Buy the whole floor!" Johnson, who had always loved acquisition, had recently started a list called "Ghost Towns of the World." One of these days, Betty's husband, Quentin, said, Johnson was going to buy them all up. Corner the market.

"Every time he says, 'Too many people in China,' I can hear his pitch," Quentin said, with a hint of awe in his voice; he did think Johnson a genius. " 'Now people who don't like where they live can move somewhere else. No problem.' "

Betty laughed. "Does that mean there'll be a ghost town for us?"

"Maybe." Quentin seemed to be considering this seriously.

But never mind. "Three apartments for four people is enough," Betty told Johnson now, smiling but firm. "We are not buying any more." And, when he continued arguing, she shrank him down from full screen to half.

In Vancouver, her neighbors had complained about her. "The Chinese are taking over," they said. "The Chinese are buying up everything." That was when they weren't yelling, "Go back to where you came from!" Betty had tried to reason with them. If she were the sort of Chinese who wanted to buy in Vancouver but not live in Vancouver, if she were the sort of Chinese responsible for Vancouver's empty houses and empty apartments, she wouldn't be standing right there for them to yell at, right? And she was not an invader, by the way, she was a parent who had worried that her eleven-year-old would go out protesting on the street with his friends. And then what? Then he would get teargassed, that's what. And, by the way, tear gas wasn't so great for the baby they'd adopted during the 2012 unrest, either.

But a Chinese was a Chinese was a Chinese to them.

"When people want to yell, all they can hear is what they want to yell," Tina liked to say.

Which was why, after five years, Betty and her family had moved from Vancouver to New York, where all anybody said was "We are so happy you are willing to chip in for the new elevator" and "Did you know the building needs a new roof?"

"Yes," she said. "Yes, yes." And, "Anything else?"

Now, in the gilt lobby mirror by the striped chairs, she looked happier to herself. A little plump, it was true; she did not like her chin joining up with her neck, as if they just needed to be together. But she liked her short-short hair and her cheery cashmere hoodies, and look how she could just push her oversized sunglasses up onto her head—no puffy eyes to hide. When the Hong Kong police stormed the universities, she and her family just sat here in New York on their lilac leather couch and watched on their computers. Lined up like ladies at a hair salon—one, two, three, four. Even when COVID came, at least they worried about sickness and death but not jail.

Of course, Theo, now seventeen, was upset all the time. All his old Hong Kong friends were involved in the protests; sometimes he thought he spotted them on his screen, although it was hard to say for sure because they'd grown up and because everyone was wearing gas masks. Really, it was crazy to take screenshots and zoom in the way he did—running his fingers through the long hair on top of his head and scratching the short hair on the sides. "Is that Victor? Is that Pak? Don't you think that's Pak?" he'd say. Or "That must be Wingman, I recognize that scar."

Whether Theo would have been so riled up were it not for the ambulance sirens going and going was hard to say. It shook Betty up, too, that even nine-year-old Robert knew "ventilator" was spelled with an "or"; she was just glad he wasn't sure how to spell "morgue." Although, as imaginative and intense as he was, he was writing a story about dancing morgues for the mystery unit in his English class. It was a murder mystery, he told her, in his quiet, unnerving way. He was not like the other boys at all. The last story he'd written was about mind-reading hats that looked like regular fur hats but then stole your thoughts right through your scalp. How they did it was the mystery.

Betty herself almost never told stories, but, having read a book about Western creativity growing up like a flower out of the soil of curiosity, she was trying to at least ask a lot of questions, and not just any questions but the right questions. Meaning, not questions like "What do you mean you were out all night? Where were you?"—the sort of question she was prone to ask Theo—but questions that showed interest. Like "Do the morgues ever stop dancing?" Playfulness, too—she had underlined that in her book. She tried to ask questions that showed playfulness.

"Do the morgues ever stop dancing?" she asked now.

"Yes, and when they stop dancing all the people are going to come out, alive again," Robert said. He had what would have been a perfect bowl cut if he hadn't started trimming his hair himself. Now he looked as if he'd been transitioning into Mark Zuckerberg, only to change his mind halfway.

"And then what?" Betty asked. She relied a little heavily on "And then what," she knew, but she couldn't think of anything else to ask. "Will they breathe O.K.?"

"Yes, but they'll be a little dizzy," he said.

"Interesting." Another thing she said too much, but oh well. "And what will the people say?"

"They'll say, 'It's great to be alive, what happened to my phone?' " he said. "But I'm not sure what the morgues will say back." He touched his tongue to his nose; he had a tongue like a dog's.

"How about 'We're not responsible for personal effects'?" she said—thinking that he wouldn't know what that

meant. But Robert, being an avid chaser of what he called true facts, did know. He retracted his tongue and laughed as he wrote—by hand, as he liked to, with a pencil:

"It's great to be alive, what happened to my phone?"

"We're not responsible for personal effects."

"What kind of a morgue are you? Didn't your mother teach you anything?"

"No, we're the worst of the worst. Because of the virus, they had to scrape the bottom of the barrel."

Betty laughed. "Great!" she said.

"I still have to figure out what the mystery is."

"The mystery is how this whole COVID craziness could be happening," she said.

Robert's handwriting had deteriorated since he had come to the U.S., but if Betty had ever had the energy to nag him about it she did not anymore. Remote learning! Robert's school theoretically went from eight-twenty-five to two-twenty-five, but that included ninety minutes of independent study, thirty minutes for lunch, and thirty minutes for recess. Why did the kids get a break when it was the parents who needed a break? And how could the teachers still be complaining about how much they worked? Why did they not even make the kids show their faces on Zoom? Right now, for example, Theo was playing Liberate Hong Kong on his computer while in trigonometry class at the same time. How could that be O.K.?

"You realize that stories about morgues are not normal, right?" Theo said, looking up from his game.

"So? It's not normal to be jamming virtual surveillance cameras as if you were a real protester, either," Robert said.

"I am so a real protester."

"The kind who shouts '*Gaa yau!*' from the couch, you mean."

"If I were there, I'd be on the streets," Theo said.

"Not now during COVID, you wouldn't."

"Even now, I'd be there. And as soon as things really started up again I'd be throwing petrol bombs, don't worry."

"You can tell we're not really brothers," Robert observed to the air. "I would never say something violent like that."

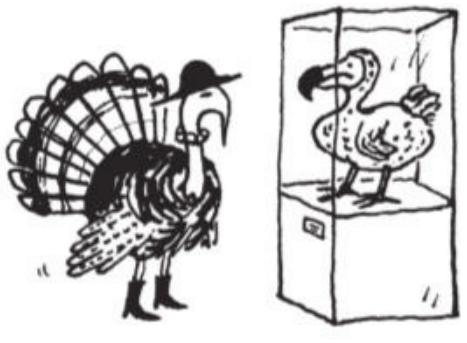
"Adopted brothers are still brothers." Quentin's nostrils flared when he was being serious, and today this did make the boys settle down. When Theo started up Animal Crossing, with its desert islands full of protest banners, Quentin was even able to say, "Aren't you supposed to be in class?"

Theo switched sullenly back to full screen.

But what Robert had said was true. He wasn't violent like his older brother. He didn't say the sorts of things that made Betty and Quentin thank the Lord they were safely on the other side of the world, far away from what their friends in Hong Kong called "protest trouble." "This generation, they are like firecrackers. One explodes, and then the whole string goes," they said in WeChat posts. And "Do they realize they are not dealing with a paper tiger? This is a real tiger, with teeth. They are going to get themselves killed." There were friends who approved of the protests: "I give my kids food every day to take with them to share. Bottled water is also important, and when they come home I wash their clothes right away to get the smell out." But others wished they had got their kids interested in sports. "Better for their health, better for their college applications, better for everything," they wrote. "However, you need to be athletic."

"You know what your grandmother always says," Betty told Theo. "No politics, just make money. That's good advice."

But although she had listened, Theo did not. Theo was her biological child, but his outrage reminded her of her



older sister, Bobby—Bobby, who had, unbelievably, tried to send them a letter last week. After all these years! Betty was shocked and apprehensive. And, maybe because she was worried, annoyed. Who sent real letters anymore, much less a letter via a personal family messenger? Only Bobby would somehow enlist Uncle Arnie, through his Shanghai factory, as if they were all in a spy movie. She had apparently even instructed Uncle Arnie to hide the letter in his shoe, which he did not do in the end; he was afraid airport security would make him take his shoes off. Instead, he tore it up and flushed it down a toilet—because he knew it was trouble, he told Betty later, and because he didn't want to upset Tina and Johnson. As for why he had even told Betty about the letter, he claimed it was because he was too honest, but Betty knew the truth: there was something in the letter that he couldn't keep inside. He swore he hadn't read the thing before tearing it up, but of course he had. He had! And where was Bobby? she demanded. Her parents had been desperate to know for years, she said, the whole family had. Uncle Arnie insisted that he didn't know. The letter and some instructions had been left for him in a plain envelope, he said, and the security cameras had found no trace of whoever had sneaked it into the factory.

"Anyway, no politics, just make money. Isn't that what your mother always says?" he finished.

In other words, the letter had to do with politics. Probably, if she were Uncle Arnie, she, too, would have thrown it out.

It was amazing how many things her mother's words could mean. To Theo, for example, they meant that Betty and Quentin were going to Hell.

"Is that how you want to live your life?" he yelled. "Is that your motto? Just make money?"

"All it means is that that is the way to be safe," Betty said. "It is like 'The tallest tree catches all the wind.' That does not mean a short tree is a good tree. It means that a tall tree pays a price for sticking up."

She didn't know how to tell Theo that when a son yelled at a mother the mother cried for a week. She kept that inside, though she was sure that Robert knew anyway. Never mind that he was the adopted child—Robert would shoot her that quick look of his, like a flash of light in the dark that could only be a signal. He understood her, while all Theo understood was his opinion of his family.

"I hate you," he would say, for example. "I hate your values and your way of

life, and I do not respect you. What have you ever done but look the other way no matter what was going on? Did you ever tell the truth? Did you ever speak up? No matter who was being killed and who was being jailed? You know what the word is for people like you? The word is 'complicit.' I bet you don't care about the Uyghurs, either."

So he ranted—ranted and ranted—as if he had not been the first to complain when Betty said that because of COVID there would be no maid and no cook. Even though there was pretty good takeout in New York and she knew how to make a few dishes herself, he had objected. And now every day Theo brought up colleges farther away than the colleges they'd talked about before. Colleges in Alaska. Scotland. New Zealand. He wasn't applying until the fall, but still they discussed the possibilities constantly.

"How about a semester in Antarctica?" Quentin suggested at dinner. "There must be semesters abroad in Antarctica."

Betty glared, but Quentin just winked and kept going.

"You can study penguins," he said, showing Theo an article on his phone. "Did you know they poop out so much laughing gas that their researchers go cuckoo?"

"They do?" Robert said. "Let me see, that's so cool."

Theo, though, stood up without a single bite of the Oreo mousse cake Betty had made specially for him, from a recipe he'd found and asked her to try.

Should they buy one more apartment after all? For the sake of family sanity? Quentin and Betty talked it over. But just when they had decided yes, Theo needed more space, more independence, more something, he got the hang of online poker. Betty had heard about online poker from her friend Susu, whose son had made a lot of money playing it, which you wouldn't think would upset Susu but did. Because once her son made a lot of money she lost control of him, she said; she just hoped he wasn't doing drugs. Hearing which, Betty had shaken her head in sympathy—and later, when she told Quentin the story, she had said how glad she was that Theo was no good at math.

"Although sometimes a quick calculation can mean millions," Quentin pointed out.

"Still," she said. "Poor Susu."

"Poor Susu is right," Quentin agreed.

But now it seemed that Theo was better at math than they'd thought.

"I underestimated myself," he said. "I guess I did just need to work harder." And, "All I needed was to put more time into it."

Time that he had now, thanks to COVID.

It was hard to know whether to cheer or to worry when he won a hundred dollars. Then he won a thousand dollars. Then he lost five hundred dollars.

"Thank God he learned a lesson," Quentin said. "In Macau, at least you have to book a hotel room to gamble. On the computer you can gamble with no overhead."

"Terrible," Betty said.

Then Theo won five thousand dollars. Then he won ten thousand dollars. Then he won another ten thousand dollars.

"Beginner's luck," he said modestly. And, to be sure that he didn't gamble away all that he'd won, he bought a car.

"A car?" Betty said. "How did you buy a car?"

"With cash, that's how," Robert said, when Theo didn't answer.

He'd picked a little red Miata with a pop-off roof; it got great mileage, he said, and Susu, too, said it was an excellent deal, a real COVID deal, which she knew because her son had co-signed the papers—which he could do because he was old enough, and which he had thought was O.K. because Theo had a license he'd got before COVID so that he could go visit friends in the suburbs.

"At least it's not drugs," Susu said.

As for whether Betty and Quentin preferred Theo angry or rich, they could not agree.

"It is as if his heart is hidden. Disappeared under a blanket where no one can see it," Betty said, adding, "I think he just wants to get away from us."

"Away from us?" Quentin said, astounded.

"Susu says this is what seventeen-year-olds are like, especially in the U.S. They are separating. It's their psychological stage."

"Away from us?"

She didn't answer.

"And when do they stop?"

His question hung in the air like the kind of smog that used to drift down from the Mainland and choke them. They tried to sleep.

It did not occur to them that Theo would use his car to leave them. There he was, though, two days later, packing up.

"Where are you going?" Betty asked.

"You cannot use our charge cards," Quentin warned.

But, having his own money now,

"They become aggressive when you recline them."

Theo just knit his eyebrows and kept packing. One duffelbag, two, three. Children his age did not believe in suitcases.

And, the next morning, he really was gone.

"He made his bed," Quentin said quietly.

Of course, they were shaken up anyway. But the bed! They hadn't even known that Theo knew how to make his bed.

"Complicit," he had called them. Complicit. And what was it that he liked to yell?

Betty remembered. "I think it was 'Did you ever tell the truth?'"

"What truth?" Quentin said.

Betty kept it inside that she kept a lot of things inside.

Instead, she asked Theo's bed, Where are you, Theo? She asked the kitchen counter and the apartment buzzer, too. Where are you? Where are you? She did not tell any of her friends what had happened. Nor did she post anything about it on WeChat. She told his school that he was sick. A fever and a cough, she said, no loss of taste but they were having him tested. And yes, yes, of course, confining him to his room. The school was mostly interested in the confinement part of the story.

Besides that, she and Quentin simply watched their chats and e-mail, hoping. Theo would be back soon, they agreed. And just about any place was safer than New York. So that was good. If only they were among the friends on his Find My Friends app.

"He went to visit someone," they told Robert.

"But he was supposed to stay home," Robert said. "Everyone is."

"You're right," Betty said. "He was. I hope he brought enough masks. I hope he is being careful. I hope he is using hand san."

She hoped, too, that Robert would know enough not to ask whom Theo was going to visit. And, thankfully, he did know enough.

Instead, he said, "I'm sick of COVID. I want to play soccer. I want to see my friends." And, "I want a new dog."

"Is there something the matter with Bongbong?" Betty asked.

"I want an upgrade."

"An upgrade?" Quentin said.

"I don't want another of the same kind of dog. I want, like, an original dog."

He said this because Bongbong was not their first dog. Bongbong was a replacement dog they'd got after Yappy died, you might even say a carbon copy of Yappy, whom everyone in the family had loved. But, of course, "everyone" had not included Robert, who hadn't been born yet, much less adopted. Betty could see his point in a way. Still. An upgrade?

What a way to think.

When Robert had wanted to be paid for making his bed, they had paid him. Because the maid used to get paid, he had argued, and that was true. It seemed fair. Then he had wanted to be paid for getting out of bed in preparation for making it. To which Quentin said O.K., without even asking Betty. Now Robert wanted to be paid for brushing his teeth.

"Does your price include flossing?" Quentin asked.

Meanwhile, Tina and Johnson were so upset when they heard about Theo that Betty did not even tell them about Bobby's torn-up letter, much less that Bobby had once told Betty she had written a last letter, the way many of the Hong Kong dissidents had, just in case something happened to them. The letters declared that they were protesters and had not died by suicide—that being what they'd felt they had to write, given how many more people had been detained than were in jail. Given, that is, how many people had disappeared.

And, later, Betty thought she should have told her parents all this during their FaceTime call—she should have! But at the time she didn't see how she could—they were so busy reassuring her that Theo wasn't going to disappear the way Bobby had. He wasn't, they said. He couldn't. Although—five days? She should hire a private detective right away, the way they should have with Bobby. "Before she got too far away." Even after all these years there was a catch in Tina's voice.

"One good thing is that it is very difficult to transport a Miata to Hong Kong. So Theo probably didn't go there," Johnson said.

"If you don't want to call a detective yourself, we can call for you," Tina said.

"In fact, we can call right now," Johnson said.

It was all Betty could do to divert them to the subject of Robert's demanding to be paid for everything. Finally, though, Tina said, "You know who gets paid for everything?"

"Who?" Betty said.

"American children," she said. "And let me tell you, if you allow Robert to

FORMER LIVES

It can lead to the practice of tolerance, the notion
That the soul returns to earth more than once
And remembers at least a few faint glimmers
Of the life just prior to the one at hand.
It can prompt you to be more patient with a friend
Who's linked her fate to the fate of a man
She knows is liable to wander off
Just when she needs him. Better this life,
You'll hear her telling herself, than the dull
Fifty-year marriage she dimly recalls
To a husband too sluggish to go anywhere.

And think how much easier it will be
To put up with the spendthrift cousin of yours,
Who has to borrow from you most months
To pay his mortgage, if you can suppose
He recalls enough of his prior life
As a penny-pincher to make him decide
To err this time on the side of extravagance.

Better by far to be left with nothing, he reasons,
Than to die as he did the last time,
With the shame of an unspent hoard.

As for your cousin's daughter, who plays the cello
As only a few can play it but who limits her audience
To herself and a few close friends,
No need for you to pity her for suffering
From the same self-doubt that may have thwarted
Her mother's career as a performer,
Not if you can suppose she devoted
Her prior life to pleasing crowds
Of concertgoers on every continent
And is eager now for a life more private.

At last to focus on playing each piece
As she believes the composer would want to hear it.
How refreshing, it seems to her,
And how challenging, after playing for thousands,
To play for one.

—Carl Dennis

become American you will regret it."

"Do you think so?" Betty said.

"You will! Your mother is right!" Johnson thundered. "Become American citizen is great. Hold American passport is great. But do not let Robert get American ideas. You know what they are, those American ideas?"

Betty waited.

"Twentieth century," he said. "They are one hundred per cent twentieth century."

As for whether she should have told her parents that what Robert wanted money for was to support Black people, why would she do that? Knowing that they would have said, "Black people! Only Americans are so concerned about Black people!" But this was what happened when you sent children to school in New York—they joined the People of Color Club. No politics! Tina would have said, and Betty herself wanted to tell him, We are not people of color, Robert. We are rich.

But unfortunately he was the president of the club. Thanks to COVID, the kids had nothing else to do but to Zoom and discuss whether or not they were racist, as a result of which Robert was elected president because everyone agreed that, being of Chinese origin, he was probably the most racist. "The Chinese are the worst!" they said, to which Robert happily agreed.

Betty was happy for Robert that he had found a kind of acceptance Theo never had at his age. Still, like Susu, she wished they could all have just stayed in Hong Kong. In Hong Kong, there was no People of Color Club, because they were all the same color, and if you said bad things about white people it wasn't racism, it was resistance, unless you said it to their faces. Then it was speaking truth to power.

Now Quentin mused, "If I pay Robert five dollars to get up, and five dollars to brush his teeth, at least he will have some pocket money and not take up poker."

But Betty did not like Quentin's approach.

"In my opinion, it will make him as money-crazy as everyone else in the family, including you," she said. "Please, please do not pay him anymore." But what is a mother but someone who cannot stop anyone?

Before Theo left, they had noticed the ambulance sirens mostly at night. Now that there was less yelling, though, the sirens seemed to go on all day as well. How long was this going to last, this New York "on pause"? And why was wearing a mask such a big deal in America? In Hong Kong, people didn't complain about their glasses fogging up; they just wore their masks, and not in such a way that their noses stuck out. Of course, as Quentin pointed out, their noses were smaller, and flatter noses fit better under the masks. Still.

Betty wrote to Robert's teacher, "Could you give him some extra work? Because your homework about the Canarsee tribe of the Lenape people only took him a half hour to complete. That was better than the gravity assignment, which took fifteen minutes, but never mind. Please—we parents are going crazy."

Of course, she knew that Miss Strange was just going to say what she always said to what everyone knew she called "pushy Asian parents"; namely, "The curriculum is age-appropriate." And so she did, though this time she added that there would be "NO CHANGE" to the no-grades-this-semester policy no matter how much extra work the kids did. Which Betty couldn't really blame her for saying, since some of the Asian parents really were complaining. What's more, as Miss Strange herself complained, it had been everything she could do to shift her entire class online. Parents had no idea how stressful it was, she wrote, especially since she had three children, four dogs, no husband, and a phobia about technology, which was why she had gone into teaching to begin with. However, just this one time she would provide an extra-credit assignment for interested students.

"Thank you," Betty typed. "Thank you." For she really was grateful.

If only the extra-credit assignment was not to tell a family mystery to a pet.

"To a pet?" Betty said. "You have to tell a mystery to a pet?"

"It doesn't have to be a real pet," Robert said. "It can be an imaginary pet." And, "Miss Strange said parents could help."

Betty sighed. It was revenge. It was the revenge of Miss Strange.

"How about a story about your grandpa," Quentin said. "How about a story about Yeye and Bongbong meeting in Heaven? Yeye could feed him people food, and Bongbong could ask

why he never got to eat food like that on earth."

"That's not a mystery," Robert said.

"It's a mystery to Bongbong," said Quentin, at whose feet Bongbong was even now sitting obediently, looking hopefully up at a cookie. His white tail thumped as if it had a special chip in it.

"And I don't want to use Bongbong anyway," Robert said. "Bongbong is a lapdog. I'm going to use an upgraded dog."

"Like?" Betty said.

"Like a German shepherd Seeing Eye dog," Robert said.

"Do you know what a Seeing Eye dog is?"

"It's a dog with superpowers." And, true-fact finder that he was, he spoke with an air of authority.

"Well, a Seeing Eye German shepherd would make the story more interesting," Betty conceded. It was going to be a long homework session, she could see.

Quentin left the room—having work to do, he said. How was it that he was now the boss of the business that she had founded over his strenuous objection? His bottom left an imprint on the leather stool seat, which was lilac to match the couch; the decorator had done that.

"What's the dog's name going to be?" she asked, trying to be playful.

"His first name is Detective."

"And his last name?"

"Dog."

"So—Detective Dog?"

"Yes. His name is Detective Dog, and he is interested in missing people." Robert raised a big round magnifying glass to his eye—one of Quentin's, which he kept on the kitchen counter in case he ever wanted to do a crossword puzzle.

"Theo isn't missing," Betty said calmly. "Theo is coming back."

"From his friend's house," Robert said.

"Yes."

Robert gave her his quick look. Then he squinted through the magnifying glass, which fit right into the gap he'd cut in his hair.

"I want you to tell me a mystery so I can solve it," he said.

Betty sighed. With Theo gone, it was as if she and Robert were on a desert island in that Animal Crossing game, except that, instead of protest banners, they had sirens. He was so quiet and intense, the whole apartment was quiet and intense.

"Is it my job to help you solve a mystery or my job to tell you one?" she asked.

"To tell me one."

"Are you sure that's what Miss Strange said?"

"Yes."

Betty sighed again. "I don't know how good a mystery it will be, Detective. I'm not a storyteller like you."

"It doesn't have to be good," he said. And, "We can start today and finish tomorrow. I'll ask you questions."

"Well, O.K." How could she say no? She thought, then began, "Once upon a time there was a No. 1 daughter who everyone agreed was the best daughter in the family."

Robert cocked his head. "What do you mean, 'the best daughter'?"

"I mean that, out of three sisters, she was the smartest. She got into all those top schools. Andover and M.I.T. and Harvard Business School. In fact, everywhere she applied she got in. She got an internship on Wall Street, and then she got a job on Wall Street. She was making a lot of money. But, all of a sudden one day, she dropped out and ran off with an American. And not just a regular American. A drummer."

"Why a drummer?"

"I don't know. All I know is that, when her family later heard that she had left the drummer, they celebrated! They had a dinner for her, even though she could not come. But after that she disappeared completely."

"Like Theo?"

Theo has not disappeared, she wanted to say.

Instead she said, "She went somewhere—no one knew where. For many years her parents cried. Then one day, guess what? I saw her again."

"Are you in the story?"

Quentin came back into the kitchen for a bag of chips, and not a lunchbox-size bag but a large one—meaning, Don't bother me.

"Are you in the story?" Detective Dog asked again when Quentin left.

"Yes, Detective," she admitted. "It was almost by mistake that I saw her a couple of years ago. We were about to move to New York, but we still had a business in Kunshan and sometimes stayed in Shanghai, as you probably remember. In the French Concession, where there are a lot of old European buildings, and restaurants and cafés and yoga studios. Do you remember?"

He nodded. "Shanghai was great."

Betty smiled. "It was. And, well, one day I went out to a café, and who did I see? She did not look the same as the last time I saw her. The last time I saw her she had blond hair and tattoos and a gas-mask pouch. Now she had plain hair and plain clothes, as if she were in disguise. We had some coffee. Of course, she was surprised to see me, too. I waited for her to tell me what she was up to. But she did not tell me right away. Instead, she raised an eyebrow and tilted her head. Meaning, there were cameras everywhere. I told her I needed to stop by my apartment, which I did, so that I could 'forget' my phone there, and no one could trace me with it. Then I met her in a park. I was not surprised to hear that she was trying to evade the police, because actually I had seen her once before, when she was involved in the protests in Hong Kong."

"You saw her before but didn't tell anyone?"

Betty looked away.

"Why?"

"Because I promised."

"So you knew other people she knew. Who would have wanted to know."

Betty hesitated but finally nodded.

"But you're telling me now."

"It's your homework," she said. Though what she really wanted to say was "Because you'll find out one day, I can see. Because you are like a mind-reading hat." And, "Because I don't want you to leave one day, like Theo."

"And why didn't she want you to tell?"

"Because the Chinese government likes to know all your family members. So if it isn't enough to pressure you, they can pressure them."

"Meaning, it was her family you didn't tell."

She nodded.

"Who were your family, too."

She nodded.

"Meaning, she was your sister."

Somehow it was a shock to hear it aloud.

"Yes," she said bravely. "Who, you know, did not want to be in trouble anymore. Or at least that's what she told me. She said she had come to Shanghai to try to give up her dangerous work. In fact, she had been effective—very effective, I think. She was so smart. And for a while she had believed that things would work out—as a lot of people did. So many people were involved in the protests. How could Beijing arrest them all?

"But now all she could think about was 2047, when Hong Kong would be swallowed up by the Mainland forever. Of course, back when the Mainland first started to rise up, we were proud to see Chinese people stand up to the West. Talk about bullies! The West always had to humiliate everyone and, by the way, now that Hong Kong needs help, do you see them? But in the end the Mainland turned on us, too. They attacked us the way they fired on their own people in Tiananmen. Of course, you were a baby, so you didn't know too much about what was happening."

"I am a dog," he reminded her.

"Oh, that's right. I mean, you were just a puppy," she said. Playful, the way she was supposed to be.

He gave a woof.

"You were only two and a half. But Theo never got over leaving his school and his friends, especially since he got bullied in Vancouver."

"That's why he became a bully himself."

"He's not a bully."

"And how was Shanghai going to help her give up her work?"

"I think we should take a break here." Betty glanced at the oven clock. "Time to start dinner."

They made an American-style tuna-noodle casserole with cream-of-mushroom soup. Then they played video games and looked for new recipes to try. Robert wanted to make peanut-butter-Snickers-cheesecake whoopie pies, which Betty said they could if he would do a yoga video with her once a day without pay. He said he would.

"Of course, the real mystery is where Theo is," she told Quentin in bed that night.

"He'll come back."

"I don't know. He has all that money." She pulled the quilt up under her chin. Though it was nowhere near summer, Quentin liked the A.C. up high; he said it reminded him of Hong Kong. "And now another headache: Robert's homework."

"Why don't you charge Robert for every five minutes you help him?"

"I can't charge him," Betty said. "I'm his mother."

"Mothers should charge," Quentin said, yawning.

The next day, Robert ate his cereal without a spoon, with his snout in his bowl.

"Detective Dog here, reporting for duty," he said. He licked his lips.

"In this house, dogs eat dog food," Betty warned. "Purina Puppy Chow."

"Not detective dogs," he said, crunching. "Detective dogs eat granola. So why did your sister move to Shanghai?"

Betty sighed, adding a scoop of vanilla ice cream to her decaf. She used to allow herself this only in the afternoon, but ever since Theo had left she'd been allowing herself to have it in the morning, too.

Detective Dog raised his magnifying glass. "Why didn't she just move to New York?"

Betty drank—slurped, really. "Because, Detective, even if, way back when, she had married the drummer and become a U.S. citizen, which anyone else would have done, she could have had trouble getting an exit visa. And, anyway, she hadn't. She had to hide in China someplace. And so she thought she would hide with her boyfriend's family outside of Shanghai."

"She had a boyfriend?"

Betty drank, then answered, "He was also a dissident—played the guitar and apparently knew how to talk to journalists and get them to write things. I guess you could call him a kind of press agent. But his family was originally from this little village. And so the plan was to go live there for a while—to retire from protesting and live a simple life with chickens and a garden. Of course, a lot of the protesters were worried about getting arrested; they were worried they

would be tried in a court on the Mainland. Some attempted to escape by boat to Taiwan. But she thought that, if she and her boyfriend just kept quiet, the government might realize they were done causing trouble. And then she thought she might finally be able to reconnect with our family. She said that it was torture being separated, and that she had never imagined we would be separated for this long."

"And then what happened?"

"Well, the boyfriend's family had no money. So she decided to do some teaching, first in a little school, and then in an international school. English language and U.S. history, since she had, after all, studied in the U.S. And these were international kids who could use some history beyond, you know, George Washington and Abe Lincoln."

"And then?"

"Well, she had a spy in her class. The spy was up front about sharing things with her father. 'My father this, my father that,' she would say—not to scare Bobby, exactly, really just to say, 'Someone is watching.' Bobby shrugged it off. She said there were informants in all the classes."

"So this was Aunt Bobby?"

Betty started a little but nodded. There it was. She had not meant to say Bobby's name, but she had.

"The missing one no one talks about?"

Betty nodded again.

"Can I have some milkshake?"

She pushed her coffee forward. It really was practically a milkshake, what with all the melted ice cream.

Detective Dog slurped. "And so, what about the spy?" he said.

"Well, one day, Bobby taught Thoreau's essay 'Civil Disobedience'—a famous essay about disobeying the law when your conscience won't let you just go along with it. She did not think this was so sensitive; after all, the point of the discussion was not whether the Chinese should disobey the law—she knew better than to encourage anything like that. The point was how important that idea was to some Americans, and how not all Americans agreed with it. And she was cautious. She did not use the words 'civil disobedience' in the file name, for example. She called it 'Thoreau.' Luckily, too, the spy happened to be absent the day she taught the essay. But then the spy came to office hours. And, as Bobby explained the essay, the spy recorded her. With the result that she was invited to tea by the authorities." Betty paused.

"So what's the matter with that?"

"Tea is never just tea. It's intimidation. Which worried her enough that she asked me not to tell anyone. Though she wanted me to know."

"That?"

"That they might think she would never stop being a dissident. That they might think she was the kind who would always stoke the fire under the cauldron. The kind who would not only make trouble but also spread trouble."

"And then?"

Betty got herself another scoop of ice cream.

"And then?" Detective Dog asked again.

"Well, and then I believe she was arrested. Every now and then, I wrote to her boyfriend and asked if he had written any new songs. And, if he had, I asked, Were they happy songs or sad songs? He always answered, Not too happy. Then he asked what you were up to."

"Changing the subject, you mean."

Betty drank.

"And what about the letter?"

She startled. Had Robert overheard her and Quentin talking? "I have not received a letter," she said.

"Interesting," he said.

She said it again. "I have not received a letter."

But there was his quick look, and finally she admitted, "There was a letter. But I did not receive it, because it was torn up."

"Do you know what it said?"

As Detective Dog held the magnifying glass up to his face once again, Betty heard Theo. *Did you ever speak up? Did you ever tell the truth?* Outside, the sirens went on and on.

"In Shanghai, Bobby told me that she had once written a letter to say goodbye just in case, and that she had told her boyfriend to make sure we got it if the time came. A last letter, she called it."

"So was that the letter?"

"I don't know, Detective."

"Why was it torn up?"

A ghost town. She wished they could all move to a ghost town.

"I think because Uncle Arnie knew it would break our hearts," she said finally.

"Uncle Arnie was the messenger."

"Yes. Also he maybe knew in his heart that in our hearts we already knew."

"So why did he tell you that he had it at all?"

The ambulances. The sirens. "Now you know why your grandmother always says, 'No politics,'" she wanted to say. Because that was the moral of the story. No politics.

Instead she said, "Because some things you cannot keep inside." She watched the strobe lights move along the tops of the window frames. They sped up, then slowed, then sped up again as Detective Dog pressed his nose to the magnifying glass.

"Why do you always call me Robert?" he asked, his nose flat and distorted. "Why do you never call me Bobby?"

If she wasn't crying, she might have been able to answer.

"Is it because you promised my mother?" he asked. He was still holding up the glass.

"She was the best of us," Betty managed. "The smartest and the bravest."

"Was." Robert put down the magnifying glass, pulled at his shirt sleeve, and wiped his eyes on the stretched-out material.

"We don't actually know," she said. "We may never know." She tried to hug him but he struggled away.

"My name is not Detective Dog," he said, his nose in his shirt.

"No," she said. And, trying to be playful, she said, "To begin with, you are a boy, not a dog."

"My name is Bobby Koo," he said.

"She was trying to protect you."

"Maybe Uncle Arnie will tell us where she is."

She tried again to hug him but hugged his shirt more than his small body. "And maybe Theo will come back," she said.

"The Chinese government likes to know all your family members," he said.

"Yes. And here you are safe. So it worked. But she loved true facts, you know. She spoke up. She wasn't like me."

"You speak up, too," Robert said.

But Betty shook her head no. "Not like Bobby. She was the best of us. And you," she said, "you, Detective Dog, are her son." ♦

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BOOKS

THINK TWICE

The hard choices of Elizabeth Hardwick.

BY MAGGIE DOHERTY

Elizabeth Hardwick was a master of the opening sentence. Few writers have the guts to begin so boldly—or with so many adjectives. Here's the first line of her 1955 essay on George Eliot: "She was melancholy, headachey, with a slow, disciplined, hard-won, aching genius that bore down upon her with a wondrous and exhausting force, like a great love affair in middle age." An essay about the poet Dylan Thomas begins more briskly, but with equal intrigue: "He died, grotesquely, like Valentino, with mysterious weeping women at his bedside." Her biography of Herman Melville, from 2000, carries on the tradition: "Herman Melville: sound the name and it's to be the romance of the sea, the vast, mysterious waters for which a thousand adjectives cannot suffice."

Sound Hardwick's name, however, and it's at least a thousand and one adjectives; they paint an enticing portrait, though not necessarily a clear one. To William Phillips, the co-founder of *Partisan Review*, she was "charming even when most devastating or malicious." To

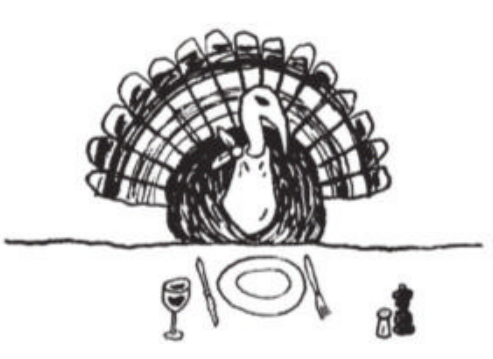
the philosopher Isaiah Berlin, she was "bitchy," with a "feminine mind." Her friend Susan Sontag said that she wrote "the most beautiful sentences, more beautiful sentences than any living American writer." There was Hardwick the merciless reviewer, who co-founded *The New York Review of Books;* Hardwick the exile, who left the South; Hardwick the young bohemian, who wanted to write fiction. In the years since her death, in 2007, she's been praised as "inimitable," a "landmark" critic, and a writer who grasped "the relentlessness of collective experience," which is to say—and it really cannot be said enough—that she often wrote about the struggles of the poor.

With "A Splendid Intelligence: The Life of Elizabeth Hardwick" (Norton), Cathy Curtis joins the chorus of admirers. Curtis—who has published three other biographies, all of female painters—clearly appreciates her subject. "Elizabeth" was not just splendidly intelligent but "an attractive, beguiling woman," "a writer of minute distinctions and fine-grained opinions," and a "literary lion." The first biography of Hardwick, the book capitalizes on renewed interest in her work. Her "Collected Essays" were published in 2017, to great fanfare; two years later came "The Dolphin Letters," which included correspondence between Hardwick and her husband, the poet Robert Lowell, as they navigated divorce and rapprochement. Her "Uncollected Essays" are due to be published this spring, and one anticipates another round of praise for her syntax, her similes, her eccentric use of the comma.

This focus on Hardwick as a stylist, however well deserved, has obscured other aspects of her life. Curtis, to her credit, attempts illumination. Reading the biography, we learn that tobacco was a "defining element" in Hardwick's home town of Lexington, Kentucky. We learn, too, that she and Lowell rented a Renault during a trip to the Loire Valley in 1951; that their house in Duxbury, thirty-five miles south of Boston, was built in 1740; and that she installed cable TV in their summer home in Maine, so that she could watch tennis. Awash in such details, one can't help but recall Hardwick's review of a Hemingway biography: "The bland, insistent recording of the insignificant, respectful, worshipful as it is, cannot honor a human being and it is particularly useless in the case of a writer—outstandingly inappropriate."

The best way to understand a writer is to interpret the work, something that Curtis mostly refuses to do. This is what Hardwick herself did in her criticism, as she toggled between a writer's life and his art, looking for resonances, obsessions, origin stories. Her approach was biographical, but unconventionally so: she was less interested in locating the real-life model for a character than in understanding a writer's sensibility, whether shaped by region, religion, or social class. New York City formed Henry James and Edith Wharton. John Cheever was an "Episcopalian anarch." And Sylvia Plath's rootlessness—her lack of a definitive regional identity—was partly responsible for the brutality of her poetry.

If we subject Hardwick to her own method, certain themes emerge. She had an exile's fascination with place, and used it as a lens through which to view people. Caught in a difficult marriage, she returned again and again to "the clash between the sexes." Most strikingly, in both her fiction and her essays, we see her exploring the tension between autonomy—what she sometimes called "self-reliance"—and dependency. This was not an unusual preoccupation for a writer at mid-century, a moment when politicians, intellectuals, and activists championed "freedom," that most



American of ideals, and contrasted it with Soviet citizens' reliance on the state. But Hardwick inverted these values: for her, freedom, even when desired, could be lonely, and dependence, so often limiting, could sometimes be sweet.

Hardwick was born in the South, seemingly against her will. Her father, Eugene, owned a plumbing-and-heating business in Lexington; her mother, Mary, labored in the home, cleaning, cooking, and gestating. (Hardwick was the eighth of eleven children.) The family was not poor, but Eugene's career was unstable, and he much preferred singing or chatting to working, anyway. Mary, more sombre, worshipped at the First Presbyterian Church, where Hardwick began to feel "a prying sympathy for the victims of sloth and recurrent mistakes, sympathy for the tendency of lives to obey the laws of gravity and to sink downward."

At an early age, Hardwick resolved to resist the laws of gravity. Bookish and ambitious, she wanted more for herself than a "local teaching certificate, a celestial and long-delayed reward for girls." More specifically, she wanted to get out, and she succeeded, earning a master's degree in English from the University of Kentucky, in 1939, then enrolling in a Ph.D. program at Columbia. She dropped out in two years—she couldn't stomach the idea of writing "some dull little textual thing"—but she remained in the city, eventually living in a run-down apartment with a gay man she knew from back home. An aspiring fiction writer, she spent her nights at the clubs on Fifty-second Street, listening to Billie Holiday.

Hardwick, who had felt like "some provincial in Balzac, yearning for Paris," was now living an exciting, independent life in the country's cultural center. But the heroines of her early fiction—wry little stories, narrated by women too smart for their own good—are much more ambivalent about such a life than we might expect. They kill time in drugstores, drinking cup after cup of coffee, or they endure tedious dates with men they don't respect. The narrator of "The Temptations of Dr. Hoffmann," a short story from 1946, is a young woman living in a co-op near Columbia with other single women, whom she finds "lonely and idle and . . . pathetic." Like many of Hardwick's early protagonists, she came to New York for adventure, but found herself bored.

Hardwick tells another version of this story—her story—in "The Ghostly Lover," her début novel, published in 1945. Following a young woman named Marian, the book explores the nature of female independence, suggesting that it is both difficult to attain and often disappointing. Marian lives in an un-

PREVIOUS PAGE: PHOTOGRAPH BY MAX VADUKUL FOR THE NEW YORKER

named Kentucky town with her grandmother, a nearly illiterate shut-in, and her dud of a brother. Her mother, Lucy, is a girlish, irresponsible figure who is excessively attracted to her husband, and who trails him from state to state as he searches for business opportunities. Intelligent and curious, Marian follows an older suitor to the wrong side of town; later, with his financial help, she goes to college in New York. She learns that her mother had once longed to do the same: "Always I dreamed of going away to school, but my husband and children were given to me when I was very young and that made further education impossible."

Marian is thus living out her mother's dream of autonomy—and yet she's not sure that she wants it. As in Hardwick's short stories, the independent urban life is not all that it seems. The landscape is bleak: "Fat, lascivious pigeons strutted up the walk. An iron-colored boat broke through the gray water." Marian dislikes the other single women in her hotel—"intelligence clung to them like some functionless appendage"—and she yearns to go home. She attaches herself to Leo, a kind, dull stranger who once offered her his umbrella, and reflects that she might as well marry him. Throughout the book, Marian assumes that she will always need a man for protection, much as one needs an umbrella—any umbrella—in the rain. It is only at the end of the novel that she chooses full independence: coming back from her grandmother's funeral, she sees Leo waiting for her at the train station and, avoiding his gaze, swiftly walks away.

Closely observed as it is, "The Ghostly Lover" is also very much a first novel: the shifts in focalization can be jarring, and the descriptions can be overwrought. (A woman, lying "over the painted flanks of her dead husband," reaches out to touch his "fiber-filled nostrils" and finds them "cold as iron.") But something about the novel earned Hardwick the attention (and, briefly, the erotic interest) of Philip Rahv, another co-founder of *Partisan Review*. He commissioned Hardwick to review books and accepted one of her short stories. She débuted in the Spring, 1945, issue, and was soon ensconced in a crowd of thinkers and writers, many of them members of the anti-Stalinist left, that included Hannah Arendt, Irving Howe, Dwight Macdonald, and Mary McCarthy, who became a lifelong friend.

"I think it's time to consider the possibility that you might never reuse your old jars."

Hardwick's early reviews—of such material as the diaries of Paul Valéry and the letters of Hart Crane—were incisive and uncompromising. She passed judgment swiftly: Crane was "a genius from Cleveland" who had no guilt about his homosexuality, while Simone de Beauvoir's "The Second Sex" was "madly sensible," "brilliantly obscure," and, ultimately, unpersuasive. (It's no surprise that, in her great 1959 essay "The Decline of Book Reviewing," she would go on to criticize the "bland commendations" proffered by most reviewers.) There is very little hedging, and even less catering to her audience: if you don't know why a comparison between Jo March and Edna St. Vincent Millay is scandalous, well, too bad for you. One looks for Hardwick's critical juvenilia—the equivalent of her promising but flawed early fiction—and one does not find it. It is as if, as a critic, she'd sprung from anonymity fully formed.

Indeed, there's a sense of destiny about Hardwick's journey, as if she succumbed to her role as a New York Intellectual rather than choosing it. Her trajectory resembles that of the narrator of "Evenings at Home" (1948), a young woman who, having left the South, has returned home for her first visit in years. While there, the narrator grapples with her status as an outsider: Is this a pose that she's adopted, or is it a position thrust upon her? "There is something false and perverse in my playing the observer," she admits. "Still these bright streets do not belong to me and I feel, not like someone who chose to move away, but as if I had been, as the expression goes, 'run out of town.'"

If Hardwick's success was a given, the great choice of her life was her tumultuous marriage. According to Curtis, Hardwick first met Robert Traill Spence Lowell IV in 1947, at a

"The endless parade of murder and pillaging really spoke to me."

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party in Greenwich Village hosted by the Rahvs. Lowell was with his first wife, Jean Stafford. The encounter didn't stick with Hardwick—though she did remember meeting the poet Allen Tate at the same party—but she apparently made an impression: in Lowell's poem "Man and Wife," the speaker recalls himself as "too boiled and shy/and poker-faced to make a pass,/while the shrill verve/of your invective scorched the traditional South."

The two writers reunited in 1948, at Yaddo, and soon became involved. Hardwick's friends tried to dissuade her: though they admired the poet, who'd won the Pulitzer Prize in 1947, for his collection "Lord Weary's Castle," they knew about his history of mania and his occasional episodes of violence. He had twice broken Stafford's nose: once by driving a car into a wall, and once by striking her in the face. (That his nickname, Cal, stood for both Caligula and Caliban is telling.) "Cal is dangerous," Tate wrote to Hardwick. "There are definite homicidal implications in his world, particularly toward women and children. . . . You must not let him in your apartment."

Hardwick let him not just into her apartment but into her life. It was hardly an auspicious start: Lowell suffered several mental collapses during their first years together. His illness was with them in Europe, in Boston, in New York, in Brazil. When Lowell was manic, he would insult his wife ("Everybody has noticed you're getting pretty dumb lately"), pledge his love to other women, and threaten divorce. Throughout twenty-one years of marriage, Hardwick shouldered the bulk of the household labor, managing their finances, mediating between him and his doctors, finding apartments for them to rent, and making decisions about the education of their daughter, Harriet. All this work freed Lowell up to do what he did best: write poetry. He won the National Book Award in 1960, for "Life Studies."

Hardwick didn't seem to resent these constraints. Lowell's mind, his education, perhaps even his need for care—it was all wildly attractive to her, especially when set off against the parade of boring young men she depicted in her early fiction. (According to Curtis, Hardwick had "a string of lovers" and terminated two pregnancies during her years in New York.) It seems clear that Hardwick wanted that rarest of things—a marriage of true minds—and thought Lowell might provide it. With him, she could live the literary life, which she portrayed, in an essay about George Eliot's partnership with George Henry Lewes, as days spent "working, reading, correcting proofs . . . planning literary projects, worrying, doubting their powers, experiencing a delicious hypochondria." Marrying him was the adventure within the New York adventure, the intimate intellectual dyad within the larger intellectual circle. "The quality of his mind—quite the most thrilling I have known," she told an interviewer.

The betrayal came in 1970, when Lowell left Hardwick for another, younger writer: Lady Caroline Blackwood, whom he took up with while teaching at Oxford. He described himself as facing "the awful pains of improvisation and innovation," and the result was "The Dolphin," his 1973 sequence, which traced the breakdown of his marriage to Hardwick and drew, nearly verbatim, from letters she had written to him in distress, altered as Lowell saw fit. When questioned on these choices by friends, including Elizabeth Bishop, Lowell cited artistic autonomy. ("Fiction—no one would object if I said Lizzie was wearing a purple and red dress when it was yellow," he wrote to Bishop.) Hardwick was deeply hurt. Written into someone else's story, her words were no longer her own: a sacrifice that she'd never agreed to make.

Hardwick scrapped her own memoir of the period, but she wrote about it indirectly in her strongest work of criticism, "Seduction and Betrayal" (1974). The collection brings together her essays from the early seventies, in *The New York Review of Books*, on female writers; its themes are victimization, loneliness, and abandonment, and it portrays women's self-reliance not as a condition to be won—as feminists at the time would have it—but as a circumstance to be endured. As in all her criticism, Hardwick moves easily between fiction and life, analyzing Henrik Ibsen's Hedda Gabler with the same acuity as she does Charlotte Brontë and Zelda Fitzgerald.

But the essays are less sprightly than her earlier work; the tone is world-weary, the insights awful in their accuracy. Writing about Brontë, single for most of her life, Hardwick concludes, "Independence is an unwanted necessity, but a condition much thought about. All of one's strength will be needed to maintain it; it is a fate, a destiny to be confronted if not enjoyed." The life of Jane Carlyle, wife of the historian Thomas, prompts an even darker thought: "Wives are to be paid in a peculiar coin—consideration for their feelings. And it usually turns out that this is an enormous, unthinkable inflation few men will remit, or if they will, only with a sense of being overcharged."

Hardwick's approach in these essays is clearly informed by her experiences: it is *her* independence that is unwanted, *her* feelings that have not been considered. She had been thinking about the marriage contract long before the separation—at least since the early fifties, when she reviewed "The Second Sex." In that review, Hardwick reaffirmed women as the weaker sex and explained why they couldn't match the great male novelists. (In short, because they could neither go to war nor sail the high seas.) She would come to renounce this view, but, explaining her thinking decades later, she said that she was grappling with the existentialist idea "that one can choose and not be dominated by the given." For Hardwick, it wasn't clear that you could simply choose freedom, the way you might choose a lipstick color or a rental car. Some people submitted not by choice but by chance: they were born Black in America, or they were born women, or poor. Others had to accommodate themselves to a freedom they never wanted, and bend it to their own terms.

In her early thirties, Hardwick had chosen an adventure with Lowell. Now, as she neared sixty, the adventure had repudiated her. She became grudgingly self-reliant: taking on freelance assignments, giving paid lectures, selling the family's vacation home in Maine. She continued to teach at Barnard, where she first began working in 1965. And there were, of course, her commitments to her teenage daughter.

It was thus not a given that Hardwick would return to fiction, much less produce her masterpiece. "I am alone here in New York, no longer a *we*," Hardwick writes in "Sleepless Nights," from 1979. Narrated by a writer named Elizabeth, the novel has no plot to speak of; instead, there is a compressed, collagelike series of memories, meditations, and associations. Elizabeth remembers her family in Kentucky, her youth in New York, men and women she has known. She describes her present life, too: a drink with a bachelor named Alex, a train ride from Montreal. These reflections are interspersed with references to Borges, Pasternak, Nietzsche, and Sartre. The narrative is not stream of consciousness—it's too elliptical and self-evidently crafted—but it's clearly the product of a literary consciousness, a mind that lives in books as much as it does in the world.

Although the book resembles some of Hardwick's short stories, particularly the self-reflexive "Evenings at Home," it marks a radical departure. Whereas Hardwick's stories aimed to build immersive fictional worlds, "Sleepless Nights," which at times resists the reader's absorption, tries to unmake a real one: the self-contained world of her marriage. Hardwick describes this place as "a flat empty plain" that "soon turns into a town of rooms and garages, little grocery stores in the pantry, dress shops in the closets, and a bank with your names printed together for the transaction of business." Exiled once again, Hardwick had to find a way to write about the world she had lost without reinvesting it with power. This was an emotional issue as much as a formal one: how to describe a life, a love, that no longer exists.

Hardwick's solution was to take up, as the subject of the novel, the problem of writing it. Throughout, she calls attention to her choices to include one thing or to omit another. "Make a decision and what you want from the lost things will present itself," Elizabeth says early in the novel. "You can take it down like a can from a shelf." The Presbyterian church in winter, an older seducer, Elizabeth's mother: all these are inserted into the narrative. But, the narrator tells us, "I have left out my abortion, left out running from the pale frightened doctors and their sallow, furious wives." Her husband is also notably absent, referred to only in passing: "He is teasing, smiling, drinking gin after a long day's work." It is as if Hardwick is repeating her loss by excising Lowell—this time voluntarily—from her life.

With "Sleepless Nights," Hardwick found a strange kind of freedom: not to write about life as it might have been, or as she wished it were, but to write about the painful commitments that enfold it. Lowell had no trouble with the liberties of fiction, changing a dress color, or the nature of a relationship, without hesitation; Hardwick, always more disciplined, believed that every choice mattered. ("Shall I turn his devastated brown hair to red?" Elizabeth muses at one point.) It's never clear whether Elizabeth is the subject of the story, material to be shaped and molded, or the author exerting control. But then Hardwick never arrived at firm answers to the questions that preoccupied her, about dominance and submission, independence and intimacy, autonomy and sacrifice. Like the most attuned among us, she could recognize the ways that each experience, or desire, also contained its opposite: autonomy was usually enabled by the support of others; the weak sometimes wanted to be dominated as much as they wanted to be free.

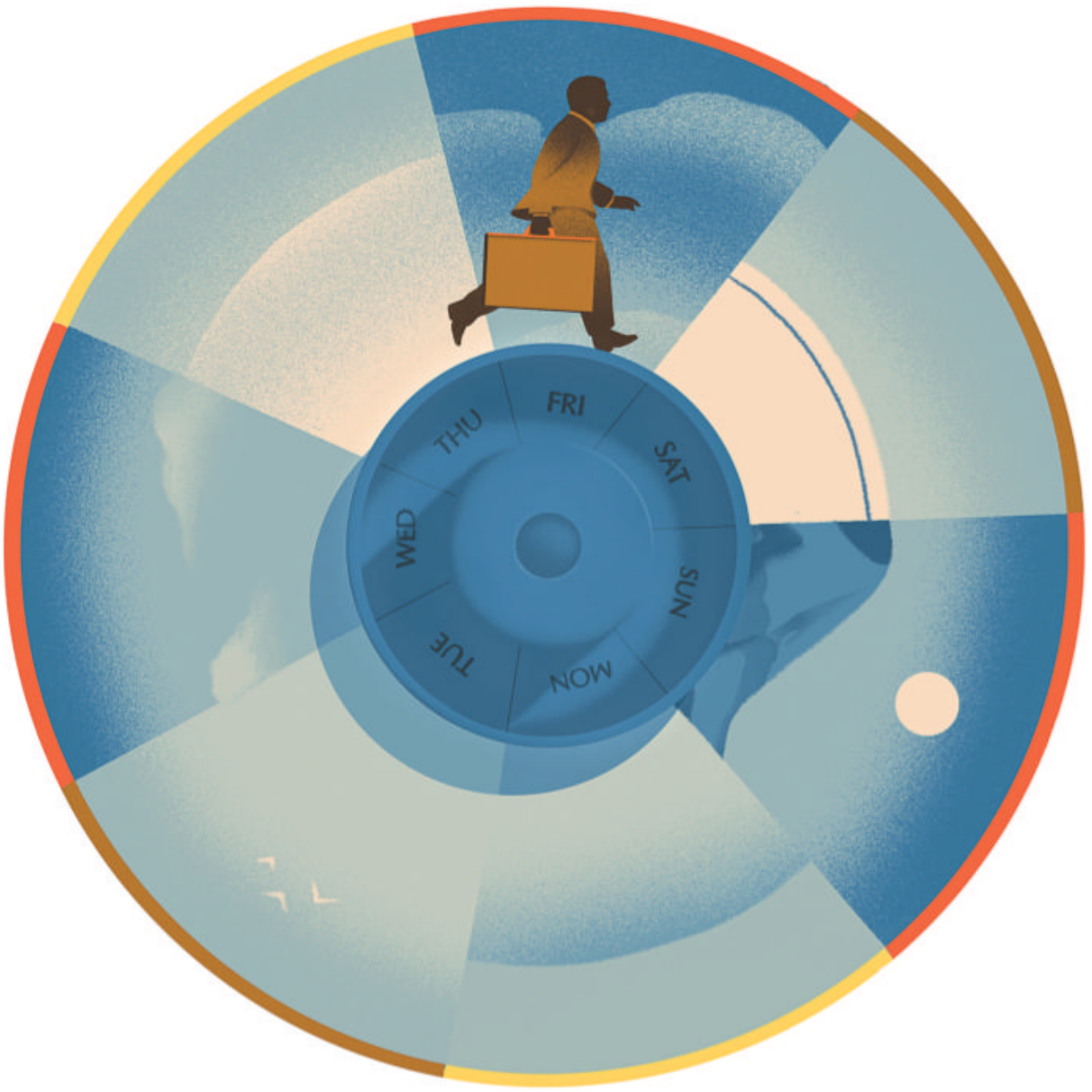
The best moments for Hardwick were when these binaries fell away, when she could be alone and bound to others simultaneously. This is what she experienced with Lowell, in their final months together. His marriage to Blackwood had failed, just as Hardwick predicted, and he was staying with his ex-wife. Writing to McCarthy, Hardwick said that they were having a "perfectly nice time, both quite independent and yet I guess dependent." They spent the summer of 1977 in Maine; Lowell died that September, in a taxi, on his way to Hardwick's apartment. A part of her life had ended, but she knew, as she did on the page, how to begin again. ♦

BOOKS

WEEKLINGS

Counting the days.

BY JILL LEPORE



In a sagging desk drawer crammed with Magic Markers that have lost their magic, a rubber-banded collection of expired passports, and user manuals for printers I no longer use or even own, I keep a stash of decades-old wallet-size leather-bound appointment books marked with now meaningless meetings, obsolete assignations, assorted obligations, and inscrutable notes to self: *Dept mtg, lunch w/Leah, S to dentist, cancel $14.9*. The books have printed, on the left-hand page, the days of the week from Monday to Wednesday and, on the right, from Thursday to Sunday, and my favorite ones come with a red silky ribbon bookmark, a lolling tongue, glued into the binding. On the back, the books are stamped "Made in Great Britain" and "Letts of London," the trademark of a printing house and bookbindery established in 1796. Early editions of Charles Dickens's novels contained advertisements for Letts diaries. You can get them pretty cheap, and I used to buy a new one every November from a neighborhood stationery store on an annual pilgrimage in search of an ordered life. *Don't make meetings!* I wrote to myself all over the last week of March, 2007, verso and recto. (Spring break.) And, on every day that the Red Sox played at Fenway Park, I always wrote one word: *Baseball*.

Once the week went global, reformers noted how poorly it fit with the year.

The stationery store has long since disappeared—at the moment, it's being turned into a day-care center—but Letts is still in business. The company claims to be the inventor of the first commercially printed diary but says on its Web site, "We know how important it is for our products to evolve with the ever-changing times." Some Letts diaries are now sold less for the planning of weeks than for the pursuit of wellness. "Self care for men should absolutely be a priority," the company advises, marketing little books in which people can write about how they feel, not what they're supposed to be doing. Planning your week is what Google Calendar is for: *Degree cmte (zoom), staff mtg, Mrs. Pickles to vet*. I haven't bought a Letts of London since the second Obama Administration.

The sun makes days, seasons, and years, and the moon makes months, but people invented weeks. What makes a Tuesday a Tuesday, and why does it come, so remorselessly, every seven days? A week is mostly made up. There have been five-day weeks and eight-day weeks and ten-day weeks. If asked, as a kindergartner, what makes a week, I'd have said five quarters and five dimes. Every Sunday night, my mother piled dimes on top of quarters on the kitchen counter, making a grid of four rows, one for each of her children, and five columns, one for each school day. Every school morning, we were supposed to take a quarter, for lunch money, and a dime, for milk money. I didn't think Saturday and Sunday counted as part of the week.

There's got to be a reason for seven, but people like to argue about what it could possibly be. On the one hand, it seems as though it must be an attempt to reconcile the cycles of the sun and the moon; each of the four phases of the moon (full, waxing, half, and waning) lasts about seven days, though not exactly seven days. On the other hand, the number seven comes up in Genesis: God rested on the seventh day. Another reason for seven lies in the heavens. Many civilizations seem to have counted and named days of the week for the sun

ILLUSTRATION BY SÉBASTIEN PLASSARD

and the moon and the five planets that they knew about, a practice that eventually migrated to Rome. Norse as well as Roman gods survive in the English names, too: Thursday, for Thor; Saturday, for Saturn. In "The Week: A History of the Unnatural Rhythms That Made Us Who We Are" (Yale), the historian David M. Henkin calls the heavenly version the astronomical week and the Genesis kind the dominical week. Lately, there's also the pandemic week, every day a Blursday.

"For much of its long history, the seven-day week widened its geographical reach along paths of conquest, trade, and proselytization forged by Islam and especially Christianity," Henkin writes. Still, he maintains that weekliness became relentless only about two hundred years ago, and that this development was most driven and widespread in the United States. Very few things in America used to take place on a particular day of the week, Henkin says, aside from worship and, in some places, market days. In time, though, elections tended to be held on Mondays and Tuesdays, public feasts and weddings on Thursdays, and public executions on Fridays. Then came factory life and wages and paydays: Saturdays. Saturday night was a night out. Put that together with Sunday as a day of rest and you've got a weekend. And, since workers tended to turn up late or not at all on Mondays, bosses began insisting that they turn up, promptly, on Monday morning. Monday through Saturday morning became the workweek and the school week. Monday became laundry day. Henkin finds evidence for the emergence of these patterns in ingenious places: at a murder trial in 1842, the defendant's lover, recalling the clothes he'd worn around the day of the crime, happened to mention that she'd put off her washing from Monday to Wednesday.

It wasn't only laundry that got done weekly. Soon Catharine Beecher and other writers of treatises on housekeeping were advising women to plan all their household chores around a particular day of the week. Mend on Mondays, iron every Wednesday, sweep the floors on Friday, inspect the pantry every Saturday. Meanwhile, schools began to assign the teaching of different subjects across the days of the week, "to secure, first, the recurrence of each subject at certain intervals; and secondly, to indicate the manner in which its several parts should be taken up in successive lessons," as one teaching manual recommended, "so as to avoid a desultory and confused method of teaching on the one hand, or the neglect of any material point on the other."

People read newspapers and magazines that they called "weeklies." And printers, not least Letts of London, began printing books, arranged by week, for recording attendance, and for making appointments. In the American countryside during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, the mail came once a week, on the same day, providing a nice rhythm for epistolary romances and a chance to scold relatives. "I can't tell you how much we were disappointed in not receiving a letter from you by Monday's mail," a lady from Georgia complained to her sister. People began to picture time in the shape of weeks. You could feel that it was Monday. You could smell that it was Thursday. You could hear that it was Wednesday or Saturday, if you lived near a theatre, since those were the days that theatres held matinées. In the eighteen-fifties, New York's baseball clubs played games on Mondays and Thursdays, Tuesdays and Fridays, or Wednesdays and Saturdays, because they shared a field.

The development that really established the seven-day week as insurmountable, Henkin contends, came in the middle of the twentieth century: the television schedule. "Saturday afternoon movies, weekly sitcom serials, and colossal cultural institutions such as *Monday Night Football* played a far greater role in structuring the American week than Wednesday theater matinees a century earlier, because they reached so many more people and faced so little competition," he writes. I'm not so sure. What really convinced me of the importance of weeks, in those years, is an artifact that Henkin never mentions. If asked, as a ten-year-old, I'd have guessed that the seven-day week came from the menstrual cycle, which my mother always called "your monthlies" but which, inspecting boxes of contraceptives in medicine cabinets at houses where I babysat, I understood to be a weekly affair: twenty-eight pills in four rows of seven columns, each column labelled with a day of the week and each row for a different week: the week when you don't have your period; the week you'd ordinarily ovulate, if you weren't on the Pill; the week you can tell your period is coming; and the week it comes. Maybe the packaging of the Pill, beginning in the nineteen-sixties, was worth a mention in the history of the idea, in America, of dividing time into weeks. In archives, menstruation is the notation that I find most often while paging through dead women's calendars and week-at-a-glance appointment books: ticks or hash marks and, very often, the letter "P," in red ink, or pink, every four weeks. There are apps for that now, their back screens plastered with flowers, icons of blood, and calendars of days, week upon week, period after period.

No one has ever really been able to topple the seven-day week. French revolutionaries tried to institute a ten-day week. Bolsheviks aimed for a five-day week. No one tried harder than Miss Elisabeth Achelis, a New York socialite, heir to the American Hard Rubber Company fortune, and an admirer of Melvil Dewey, he of the Dewey decimal system and simplified spelling. (He dropped the final "l" and "e" from his name, as a youngster, to save time.)

Achelis was born in Brooklyn in 1880, a twin, and moved, with her family, to 9 East Fifty-seventh Street and then to Park Avenue. After her sister married and her parents and brother died, she inherited a fortune. Achelis encountered Dewey in 1929, when she was forty-nine and vacationing in Lake Placid. Dewey was giving a lecture called "How to Simplify Life." One of his topics was the need to reform the calendar. "I had never given the calendar particular thought," Achelis later wrote, but "now I was

"Just once, I'd like to be called an intelligent dog."

• •

learning that it had been changed before and could be changed again."

Even as the seven-day week was "going global," as Henkin puts it, toward the end of the nineteenth century lots of people began pointing out how awkward it was that the sixteenth of April fell on a Saturday in 1881 but on a Sunday in 1882. Especially after the adoption of an international standard of time, in 1884 (and the promulgation of time zones), many commentators expected a global standardization of the calendar, to remedy the quirkiness of the moon. In the eighteen-nineties, Moses B. Cotsworth, an Englishman who worked as a statistician for a British railway company, began pondering the possibility of a more efficient calendar, one that would make it easier to compare revenues from month to month and week to week. He devised the International Fixed Calendar, which consisted of thirteen months of twenty-eight days each, with one extra day following the last day of December and one more, at the end of June, in leap years. The new month, between June and July, would be called Sol. (Auguste Comte had come up with nearly the same solution in 1849; under his plan, the extra day every year would be devoted to "all the dead" and the three-hundred-and-sixty-sixth day in leap years to "holy women.") In the nineteen-twenties, as Vanessa Ogle writes in "The Global Transformation of Time," "Cotsworth quit his job to become a full-time calendar reformer," establishing the International Fixed Calendar League. Cotsworth's proposal found support among leading American businessmen, notably George Eastman, at Kodak, and was adopted, in the nineteen-twenties and thirties, by a slew of American businesses, including Sears, Roebuck. As Achelis later pointed out, the thirteen-month calendar drew support in the United States on the claim that it was patriotic, because the country had thirteen states at its founding and its flag had thirteen stripes. "The Fourth of July would fall on the seventeenth of Sol," Achelis, who came to view Cotsworth as her archnemesis, fumed. "Imagine!" Eventually, this proposal failed, as Achelis put it, because "not only did tradition oppose, but mathematically the number 13 was a difficult one with which to cope."

Achelis advocated a different calendar, "simplified and steadfast," as she described it, "for everybody's use." It was based on a scheme first proposed in the eighteen-thirties, by an Italian priest, and she found it beautiful. Achelis adored time, and wanted it to be more ordered: "Can you imagine what life would be without a calendar that tells of intervals and associations of events? Would we not be laboring in a hopeless labyrinth of unrelated events? Every act would be one of isolation without focus, direction or meaning."

In 1930, Achelis founded the World Calendar Association, with offices on Madison Avenue. She also began publishing the *Journal of Calendar Reform*. "I hav red with great interest yur Journal," Melvil Dewey wrote to her. Achelis endorsed a calendar of twelve months made up of four equal quarters of thirteen weeks, or ninety-one days. "Each year begins on Sunday, January 1," she explained; every quarter begins on a Sunday, and ends on a Saturday. "Every year is comparable to every other year; and what is of utmost importance, *days and dates always agree*." If you were born on a Friday, your birthday would always fall on a Friday. In deliberations at the League of Nations, the World Calendar beat out many rivals, including a proposal for a year of four thirty-five-day months plus eight twenty-eight-day months, and proposals for a five-, six-, and ten-day week.

The World Calendar created new days: Year-End Day, Leap-Year Day, extra Saturdays in December and June. Once every year and twice every four years, in other words, the World Calendar had an eight-day week. If adopted, it would have thrown out of whack the seventh-day Sabbath of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, as the League for Safeguarding the Fixity of the Sabbath Against Possible Encroachment by Calendar Reform explained. "Six days do they labor and do all that they have to do but the seventh they worship and rest," *Time* reported in 1934. "If one extra day alone were introduced into their year they would eventually be observing the Sabbath on weekdays while the rest of the world worked."

Achelis valued years, and cherished days. She did not admire weeks: "It's very disturbing to have five Saturdays in one month every now and then." In her view, "a new and better world cannot be built on a calendar with its faulty pattern of yesterday." She

wanted each year to be the same, the seven-day week be damned. "She is particularly opposed to the wandering Easter," Geoffrey Hellman wrote of her, in a 1939 Profile that appeared in this magazine. "If her plan ever gets adopted," he wrote, "her name may make as profound an imprint on the history of measuring time as that of Julius Caesar, who gave the world the Julian Calendar, or Pope Gregory XIII, who established the Gregorian."

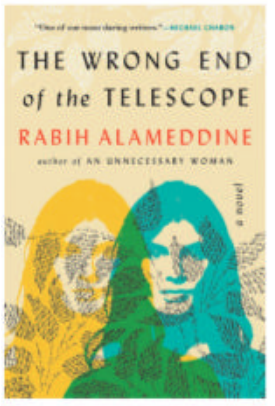
In 1955, when the United Nations proposed yet another study group to take up the subject of the World Calendar, the U.S. State Department opposed it. So did Congress. The Michigan congressman Gerald Ford observed, "Congress is in no mood to tamper with the calendar."

I tampered every which way with my Letts calendars, particularly on the pages, at the front and the back, that came with tables I never consulted—useless lists of wine vintages, metric conversions, toll-free numbers. Especially during meetings, restless, mind wandering, I scribbled all over those pages, writing down words I'd come across in my reading, and wanted to remember. *Trifle, singular, perplexity,* I scrawled across a page that was dedicated to "Notable Dates" but that I, in blue ballpoint, retitled *Grave Circumstances.* I am sure of the day of the week I wrote that. It would have been a Tuesday: *Fac mtg.*

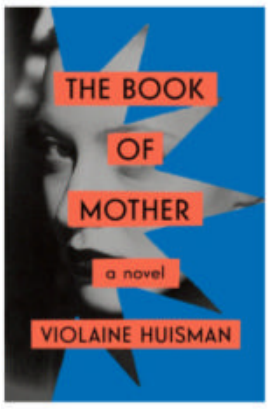
There is no Achelian calendar, with its fixed dates and its supplemental Saturdays and sedentary Easters. Instead, more than five hundred million people around the world use Google Calendar, where you can toggle from days to weeks to years. Google knows where you are every day this week, and where you'll be every day next week, and you don't much need to mind the day, or know whether it's a Thursday or a Tuesday, even if you've got someone to meet, or a train to catch; Google will send you a reminder. It will ring like a doorbell. It will blink like a traffic light.

Elisabeth Achelis died in her sleep on Sunday, February 11, 1973, at the age of ninety-three. This year, the anniversary of Achelis's death fell on a Thursday, an irregularity that she would have found intolerable. ♦

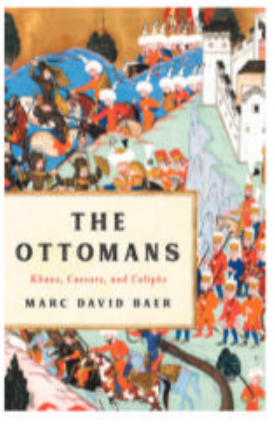
BRIEFLY NOTED



The Wrong End of the Telescope, *by Rabih Alameddine (Grove).* Don't "call it 'A Lebanese Lesbian in Lesbos,'" a character jokes, apparently to the author, in this sardonic meta-novel. The lesbian in question is a Chicago surgeon, who, amid the rising anti-immigrant sentiment of 2016, goes to Greece to help refugees. The experience sparks thoughts about her Syrian Lebanese family, who cut her off when she came out as a trans woman. The narrative, in which she tends to a dying mother and sees virtue-signalling volunteers taking selfies and getting mocked by refugees, is interspersed with accounts of the migrants' pasts and questions about the utility of telling their stories: the surgeon asks, "Did you believe that if you wrote about Syrian refugees the world would look at them differently?"



The Book of Mother, *by Violaine Huisman, translated from the French by Leslie Camhi (Scribner).* "Excess was always welcome in our household," the narrator of this unsparing autobiographical novel writes. Her mother—proud, intoxicating, and manic-depressive—still carries the confusion and loneliness of her own childhood and is determined to hold her daughters close. Hiding "neither her body nor her lovers," Maman tells stories from her life "continuously, ad nauseam, an unbearable monologue." Huisman initially narrates from her childhood perspective, then zooms out to cover the whole of Maman's life, in a tableau that captures a filial love as fierce and frank as its central figure.



The Ottomans, *by Marc David Baer (Basic).* This forceful history takes aim at the notion that the Ottomans represent the antithesis of Western Europe, asking readers "to conceptualise a Europe that is not merely Christian." Ottoman history is European history, the book argues: Ottomans were intricately bound up in European affairs and were full participants in the Age of Discovery and the Renaissance. They were also the innovators of values often seen as Western, including tolerance, which Ottoman sultans established throughout the multiethnic, multireligious empire of the fifteenth century. Atrocities such as the Armenian genocide are carefully dissected, too, in an account that, Baer writes, "seeks neither to glorify the house of Osman nor to condemn it."

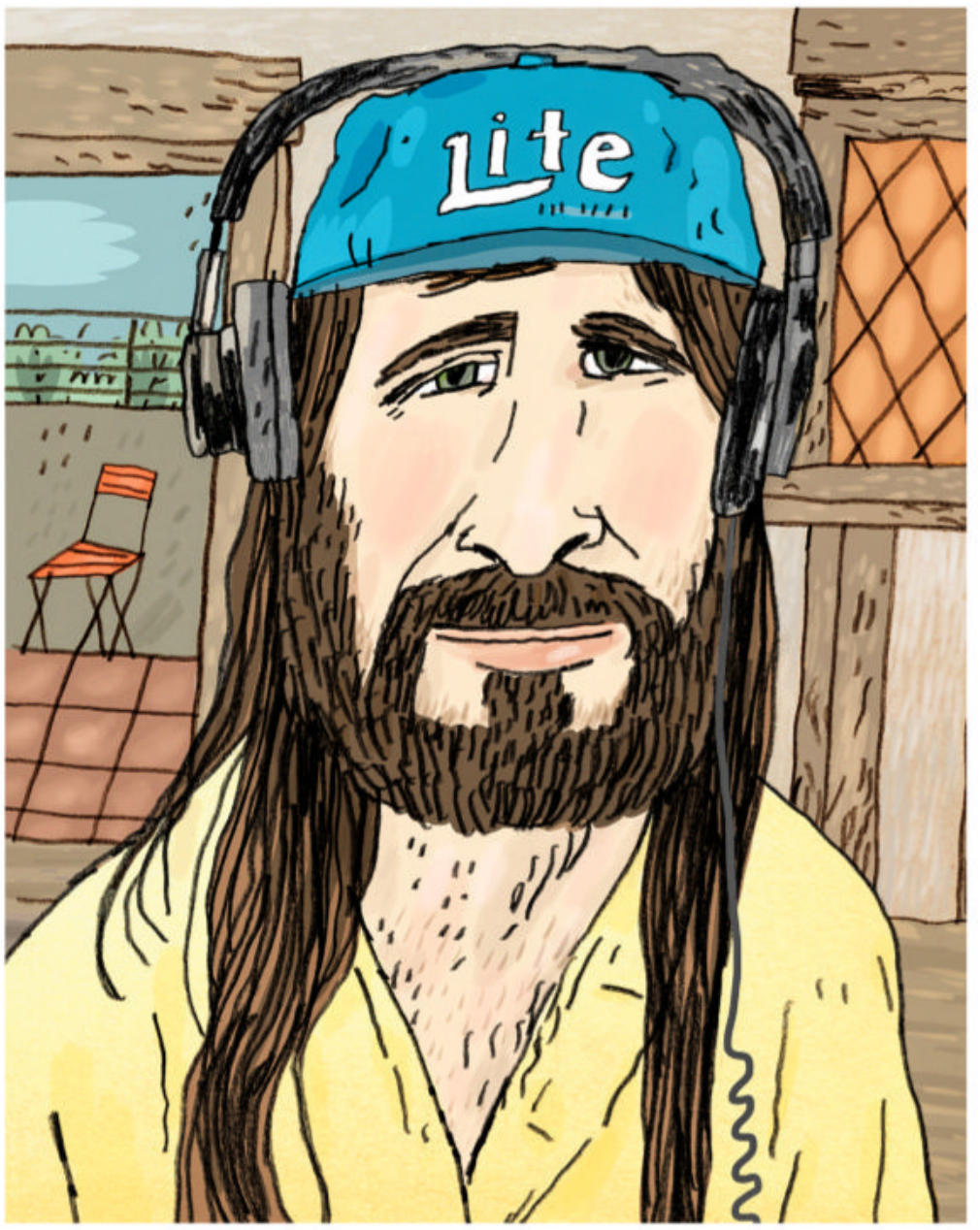
After One Hundred Winters, *by Margaret D. Jacobs* (Princeton). Combining history and polemic, this study of American treatment of Indigenous peoples notes that, even today, phrases like "opening the West" commonly obfuscate the reality of stolen lands. The book recounts massacres and broken treaties, and pays particular attention to the Friends of the Indian movement, white activists whose misguided assimilationist enterprises further eroded Indigenous nations. Jacobs, who is not herself Indigenous, emphasizes the importance of centering Native Americans' own understanding of this history. She also highlights people of settler descent who have amplified Native voices and pushed for justice—not to portray them as heroes but to illuminate a potential path toward reconciliation.

POP MUSIC

FUNNY FEELING

The earnest songs and absurd TikToks of Petey.

BY KELEFA SANNEH



Making money from viral videos buys Petey "complete freedom" in his music.

When Peter Martin, who performs as Petey, noticed that he was getting popular on social media, he was pleased but confused—he couldn't quite figure out whether the seven-digit numbers beneath his videos had any real-world corollary. He remembers thinking, "Are these bots? Are these people? What the fuck is this?" Petey lives in Los Angeles, and although he spent three years working in the mailroom of a talent agency, he never really thought that he might get drawn into the city's star-making industry. His first real celebrity experience came last year, in Mendocino, the Northern California beach town, where he was approached by a woman in a coffee shop. "I'm way too old to be on TikTok, and this is embarrassing, but I love your shit," she told him.

Petey responded with thanks, and with empathy. "I'm way too old to be on TikTok, too," he said.

Petey is twenty-nine, skinny, and recognizable (though hardly anomalous) in California coffee shops because of his stoner-Jesus beard and long hair. His videos last about a minute, and he typically plays multiple characters, all of them expressing different degrees of certainty or perplexity as they carry on an inane conversation. In one of his clips, the discovery of tiny handprints on a cement walkway inspires escalating conjecture:

Petey No. 1 (*in sunglasses and a baseball cap*): Must be some sort of fossil . . .

Petey No. 2 (*crouching near the handprints, wearing a different cap*): Baby-hands fossil.

Petey No. 3 (*strolling up, hatless*): Strong baby . . .

No. 2: You've got to penetrate this hard rock—you'd have to be a strong baby.

No. 1: Incredibly strong, scary baby.

No. 3: Strongest baby ever, maybe . . .

No. 2: I can't even make a dent in this rock, and I'm a full-grown man.

No. 1: Babies were a lot stronger back then.

No. 3: Back when?

No. 1 (*authoritatively, lighting a cigarette*): Back when fossils were made.

By the time the minute-long video is over, you may feel, rather pleasantly, as if you had wasted an entire afternoon with these three Peteys. It has been watched nearly ten million times, drawing an audience far larger than the audience for the work that these videos were originally meant to promote. Before Petey built a big fan base with his comedy, he was building a smaller one with his music, which might strike some of his new fans as surprisingly earnest and, perhaps, surprisingly enjoyable. One of his best-known songs is "Apple TV Remote," about a guy whose ex is mainly—but not completely—gone. "Apple TV slide show / Yeah, we can never find the remote," he sings, softly. "See, I don't need ya anymore / Check the couch, man, check the floor." In a few weeks, Petey is setting off on his first-ever tour—a music tour, although he knows that his TikTok fame helps explain why the tickets disappeared so quickly. Not long ago, Petey was living in a homemade tent in his friends' back yard; now he has two successful entertainment careers, even if he is not sure exactly how they relate to each other.

"I've got complete freedom," Petey told me on a recent afternoon, as he prepared to shoot a video at his home, in Silver Lake. Then he gestured, smiling, at his friend and roommate Will Crane, who directs and edits his videos and also helps manage his musical career. "Unless *he* decides to put his foot down." Inspired by an evening spent among wine obsessives, Petey had written the script for a sketch featuring two clueless drinkers accosted by an addled

ILLUSTRATION BY MARK TODD

sommelier who extolls the virtues of natural wine. They worked fast: Petey had selected different shirts and pants for the three characters, and Crane shot a few takes of each line of dialogue, using an iPhone. (For a time, they had switched to a professional-quality camera, but video views mysteriously declined, so they went back to using an iPhone.) "Grapes grows from the ground," Petey the sommelier explained, talking to the table where the other two Peteys would later sit; he was holding a bottle of wine while hiccupping and swaying slightly.

After about half an hour, they were finished, and Crane went off to splice together a rough draft. "I don't know if it's going to be funny—it might be really shitty," Petey said. "We're still going to put it up, because I don't care! It's literally throwing spaghetti at the wall. That's the only thing that's brought me any sort of success." Petey is shy about promoting his music on his TikTok account, which currently has 1.1 million followers. But he is happy enough to promote other things, including Alexa, Amazon's virtual assistant, and Chaco, the sandal company, for which Petey created a groovy summer-camp character known as Chaco Tony, who bore a striking resemblance to every other character in his TikTok videos. "It's such a corporate-capitalism thing," he told me. "But this is buying me freedom to make whatever weird-ass music that I want."

In fact, Petey's music is not particularly weird; its appeal owes a lot to the way he murmurs and occasionally yelps his talky lyrics, sometimes evoking one of his favorite groups, Modest Mouse, the long-running indie band. Before Petey was a comedian, he was a singer, but before he was a singer he was a drummer: he grew up outside Chicago, and played for a time with Young Jesus, a local emo act that has since grown more enigmatic, and more acclaimed. (Pitchfork recently referred to Young Jesus as a "philosophy jam band.") He went to Loyola University in New Orleans and then arrived in California, where he found himself unmotivated and sometimes unmoored. At one point, he lived in an apartment that had a recurring bedbug infestation, which, combined with his preëxisting depression, drove him into what he now calls a dissociative state. By comparison, life in a homemade tent seemed refreshingly simple—his biggest worry was fending off raccoons and coyotes, for which purpose he armed himself with a BB gun and a baseball bat. He wrote songs by creating musical loops and burning them onto CDs that he could play on the stereo of his auxless Honda, singing or shouting along as he drove an hour to his talent-agency job. When an indie label he liked, Terrible Records, responded positively to a direct message, he quit the job, but managed to play only a handful of concerts before the pandemic. It was a precarious situation, but he says he was not particularly concerned. "I've never had an idea of what my life is going to look like beyond two weeks," he told me.

One word that some viewers use to describe the friendly absurdity of Petey's videos is "wholesome," a term that fits his music just about as well. His first proper album, "Lean Into Life," appeared earlier this year, and it includes "DON'T TELL THE BOYS," a wry but touching ode to fraternal affection: "We're howling at the moon, hell yeah, we're making lots of noise / You know I hate to say 'I love you,' but there ain't no other choice / Don't tell the boys." Petey had been noncommittal at first when Crane and some of the other people he works with suggested that he promote himself on an app called TikTok; he knew it was popular with teenagers, but he had no account, and no particular interest in starting one. He did, however, have an unproduced script for a silly one-minute movie, written for a friend's film festival, and he saw no good reason not to try to film it. It was an immediate success, and so were the follow-ups—people just seemed to enjoy watching Petey talk to himself.

Less than an hour after he disappeared to edit the footage, Crane returned with a video that met with Petey's approval, and he sent it from his laptop to his phone, and then uploaded it to TikTok. Like most online creators, Petey and Crane regard their chosen network with a mixture of gratitude and wariness, as if praying to an unpredictable God. Crane, for instance, never uploads from his laptop, because he has come to believe that TikTok prioritizes videos that are sent directly from phones, to reward genuinely user-made content. A few months ago, Petey jeopardized his livelihood by posting a video about grizzled detectives who are horrified by footage of a man wearing shoes and socks and a shirt, but no pants. (The images, of course, were censored, but apparently the characters overused the term "shirt-cocking," which is associated with the Burning Man festival, where this kind of self-presentation is vigorously discouraged.) TikTok is known as an unusually cheerful online destination, and it maintains that reputation through strict censorship; administrators took the video down, and for a few anxious days Petey worried that he might be thrown off the platform altogether. "I was really anxious for, like, a week," he says. "I was walking on eggshells—like, 'Holy shit! This thing is fragile.'"

Compared with the mysteries of TikTok celebrity, music seems to Petey like a more predictable and perhaps more sustainable way to earn a living. For his first proper concert in his adopted home town, next month, he has sold out the Echoplex, an indie landmark in Los Angeles, which holds nearly eight hundred people. People who watch a video may or may not enjoy it; even those who do enjoy it may or may not remember it, years or even weeks later. But people who buy concert tickets are typically dedicated fans—even if, in the case of Petey, some of them may be hoping to laugh, as well as sing along.

"All right," Crane said. "It's up."

The natural-wine video had officially arrived on TikTok, and Petey was looking at the view-count number on his phone. "See, it does this thing where it sits at zero for a sec," he said. But after a few minutes the number started ticking up. (Within a few weeks, the video had attracted a million views, which is about average for Petey.) As comments started coming in, Petey responded to some of the commenters, not all of whom were, in fact, people. The corporate account of Jimmy John's, the sandwich chain, quoted a line that was swiftly emerging as a crowd favorite: "Grapes grows from the ground," accompanied by a red grape emoji.

"Ya," Petey replied. And perhaps he was already thinking of a script about sandwiches, or a song about exactly how his life ended up this way. ♦

A CRITIC AT LARGE

PASSION AND PROPHESY

The war within H. G. Wells.

BY ADAM GOPNIK

H. G. Wells is remembered today mostly as the author of four visionary science-fiction perennials with premises so simple and strong that they can sustain any amount of retelling: "The War of the Worlds," "The Invisible Man," "The Time Machine," and "The Island of Doctor Moreau." Social historians recall Wells as one of the brighter technological optimists and left-wing polemicists of the early part of the twentieth century. He is also remembered, among Brits with a taste for evergreen gossip, as perhaps the most erotically adventurous man of his generation, the satyr of the socialists. "I have done what I pleased," he wrote. "Every bit of sexual impulse in me has expressed itself." The case is sometimes even made that Wells invented the word "sex"—that he pioneered its modern use, in his 1900 novel, "Love and Mr. Lewisham," as a shorthand for the totality of the activity. Like most "first use" claims—the number of words that Shakespeare supposedly used first has decreased as Elizabethan data banks have enlarged—this is probably overstated, but Wells certainly made the word, well, sticky. A case can even be made—indeed, to make it you can draw on Claire Tomalin's new biography, "The Young H. G. Wells: Changing the World" (Penguin Press)—that his eroticism was in no small part feminist in its promotion of a woman's right to choose her own sexual partners, unconstrained by the strictures of a father or a husband.

Wells's worldly thinking was chastened by the clarity of his romantic imagination.

Wells was a very big deal in his day. Sinclair Lewis, the first American to receive the Nobel Prize in Literature, named his oldest son Wells before he'd ever met the man. But Wells got hit hard by fate. First, after two World Wars, his belief in perpetual progress came to seem fatuous, and then, in the age of Woolf and Joyce, his Victorian style looked baggy and gassy. Even an affectionate fictional portrait by David Lodge, "A Man of Parts" (2011), gives us a Wells who's more a left-wing Toad of Toad Hall than a coherent artist. In the surviving newsreels that feature him, we see a portly little pundit whose pie-faced, high-pitched, condescending singsong tones make him sound like a "Beyond the Fringe" character. *This* guy was the Fabio of the Fabians? Apparently so—a reminder that erotic charisma is a spell cast by action, not a collection of enumerable traits.

Yet Wells's life is so diverting, to use an old-fashioned word, that we can overlook the running current of his literary career. He didn't just dabble in fantasy; he made the idea of extrapolating the future from the present a foundation of modern sensibility. Though there is a note of strenuous optimism in his political writing—as in the 1920 "The Outline of History," a standard document of technological boosterism for two generations, or in his 1938 collection, "World Brain," which eerily anticipates the World Wide Web and Google—he struck a still more strenuous note of pessimism in his early science-fiction books.

The contradictions of materialism was his great theme. He was captivated by the arrival of a completely discontinuous force in the world. He called it "power," meaning something like industrial energy, and tried to trace its transformation of what had been a manual-labor agricultural planet, with his tiny rain-swept island suddenly emerging as a steam engine pulling other nations behind it. This revolution in power, he realized, would have psychological as much as political effects. In this way, his sexual obsessions,

ILLUSTRATION BY NINA BUNJEVAC

instead of dangling comically around his head like a cap and bells, are part of what makes him an interesting and prescient writer. He saw sex as a humanizing force, not as a bestial one. In Lodge's novel, Wells plays a kind of Peter Sellers role, moving from one hapless assignation to the next in trains and garden sheds and one-room cottages, stopping to make pious progressive speeches while seeing only the shapely ladies who have gathered to listen. This is funny but not entirely fair. Sex is to Wells what the speed of light was to Einstein, at about the same time: the universal constant that would remain the same no matter how the frame of reference around it altered. A new wave of modernity would burst through barriers; but where others revelled in the sound of breaking glass Wells also saw the sharp shards lying all over the ground.

To read Tomalin's fine new biography alongside the David Lodge novel is an exercise in overlaid maps: they chart the same journey but with different compass orientations. Add Wells's 1911 novel, "The New Machiavelli," a lightly fictionalized account of his rise and early crises, told by an alter ego named Richard Remington, and you have yet a third overlay. (The title of the novel refers not to our usual sense of "Machiavellian," the use of cunning in pursuit of power, but instead to the condition of writing about politics while in exile, Machiavelli having been banished from Florence, as Remington, who becomes what we now call "cancelled," is from London.) All three works tell the story of Wells's ascent to the very top of the political and intellectual establishment in his time, and all three make a special survey of his love affair with the brilliant Amber Reeves.

It was a vertiginous and sudden ascent. Wells, born in 1866, was a lower-middle-class boy who wanted to become someone of the same scale and sort as his sometime friend Bertrand Russell—a university wit, a man of science, a popularizer, a magus of the mind. (And, like Russell, a Don Juan.) Yet he suffered a cruel variety of class prejudice. To go from proletariat or peasant class to popularity is a sound English form of elevation, of the Dick Whittington kind; Wells had a harder climb, from the more despised servant class into the intellectual upper crust. Truly poor people are, for snobs, out of sight, and it's a nice surprise to see them suddenly successful. But maids and grocers are too much in sight already, so one is only embarrassed by their success. The point of a class system is to make those immediately adjacent to their superiors conscious of their place. (In Shaw's "Pygmalion," Higgins never thinks of making one of the servants in the house into a lady—that is for a Cockney flower girl.)

Wells's parents, as he was acutely aware, were themselves household servants, who then became shopkeepers and apprenticed Wells to a draper when he was fourteen. Through his own exertions, he managed to get into a decent school and begin his adventures. He won a college scholarship to study biology, receiving an education that, though lower in status than the classical kind, proved ultimately more valuable, introducing him to scientific speculation. Early on, he was conscious of how scientific and industrial energy was pulsating through the world, and this was made all the more vivid by being poised against a class system still rooted in premodern prejudices and an educational system still rooted in teaching two dead languages to the upper reaches of that class system. "Something got hold of the world, something that was destined to alter the scale of every human affair," Remington reflects in "The New Machiavelli." "That something was machinery and a vague energetic disposition to improve material things. Without warning or preparation, increment involving countless possibilities of further increment was coming to the strength of horses and men. 'Power,' all unsuspected, was flowing like a drug into the veins of the social body."

Wells's elevation was made easier by the booming press of the time. P. G. Wodehouse, who was, improbably, a good friend of Wells's, recalled, "There were so many morning papers and evening papers and weekly papers and monthly magazines that you were practically sure of landing your whimsical article on 'The Language of Flowers' or your parody of Omar Khayyám somewhere or other after about say thirty-five shots." Wells, after a stint as a science teacher at a private school in London, was recruited as a book reviewer and a drama critic. It was in the latter capacity that, on the opening night of Henry James's doomed play "Guy Domville," in January of 1895, he bumped into the only critic not in evening clothes, a young Irishman named Bernard Shaw, and a friendship began.

It was Shaw who helped introduce Wells to the group that the novelist helped make famous, and that proved the real watershed of his life: the Fabian Society. The Fabians were incrementalist socialists—the name came from a Roman general famous for avoiding pitched battles and defeating his enemy through attrition—and were very much under the sway of the remarkable couple Beatrice and Sidney Webb. Even as Wells became an advocate of their creed, science-fiction classics poured out of him: "The Time Machine," in 1895; "The Island of Doctor Moreau," in 1896; "The Invisible Man," in 1897; "The War of the Worlds," in 1898; and "The First Men in the Moon," in 1901. (The sequence was interrupted by the publication of that Dickensian novel of the lower-middle classes "Love and Mr. Lewisham," in 1900.)

Productivity in literature is more a sleight of hand than a triumph of will. Write only three pages a day, and you will look as industrious as the ant. Once a writer has found a voice, it is a question of finding the daily energy to drill down and make it flow again. Wells, with his fluid but far from meticulous style—Lodge has a funny scene in which one of Wells's lovers breaks off mid-assignation to complain about his sentences—had plenty of time to write a book a year and still engage in his other preoccupations, love and work within the Fabian circle.

The Fabians had a reputation for self-righteousness and for supporting the rights of working men without knowing any; even understanding the name of the society depended on a classical education. But they recognized in Wells a potent voice. The Webbs were a very odd couple indeed, both compelling and absurd; they had an affectionate, evidently sexless marriage ("It is the head only that I am marrying,"

Beatrice confided in her diary), and, a rarer thing, were said to be sexless outside of marriage, too. Wells's own segments of the Fabian circle carried on in that weird British way in which everybody sleeps with everybody, no one breaks off with anyone else, but nobody seems particularly happy about it all.

His constant affairs with what Tomalin calls "attractive and high-spirited Fabian girls" led to roundelays of misunderstanding. In an episode from 1907, Clifford Sharp, the first editor of *The New Statesman*, learned that Wells was urging Sharp's beloved Rosamund Bland to go off on an escapade with him. Sharp then notified Rosamund's father, Hubert Bland, a newspaper columnist and a fellow-Fabian who shared his suburban house with six children by three women, two of whom he still lived with, including his wife, Edith Nesbit. Sharp and Bland confronted Rosamund and Wells "on the platform at Paddington, poised to take a train on their way to France," Tomalin writes. "Bland struck Wells a blow and forced Rosamund to go home with him." Edith then wrote to Wells's wife, Jane, "complaining of Wells' behavior. Shaw tried to calm everyone down."

Wells was unapologetic about his erotic attachments. They were endured by Jane, a former student of his, a woman whose picture appears next to "long suffering" in the dictionary. (This was Wells's second marriage; his first, to a cousin, lasted three years.) Tomalin suggests that there was "a formal agreement between them, by which Jane agreed not to be jealous of what he called *passades*—meaning light-hearted sexual encounters—while he in exchange seems to have assured her that the marriage would never be in danger." But Tomalin wonders what Jane really made of his "long drawn-out love affairs with other women who did their best to monopolize him, bore him children and tried to persuade him to get a divorce." She concludes, "All this hardly bears thinking of."

His involvement with a twenty-one-year-old Cambridge student, Amber Reeves, cannot be passed over as a passade. Staggeringly beautiful—beauty tends to dull or date in vintage photographs; hers doesn't—and legendarily brilliant (she got a double first at Cambridge), she was called Dusa, short for Medusa, by Wells. The Medusa of mythology petrified warriors with her glance. Medusa seems to be the name male writers give to any curly-haired woman who looks their way and makes them weak, even when the paralysis she induces is merely their own indecision rising to the surface.

Amber was a femme fatale only to those who were looking for fatality. What comes through in Tomalin's biography, and in the more reflective parts of Wells's "The New Machiavelli," is that she was an exceptionally self-possessed woman who was clear in her ambitions and her appetites, chose her lovers from among people she admired, and wanted only to love Wells, without further encumbrances. Having become pregnant by him, she chose to marry one of her innumerable admirers rather than have the child alone. She remained in this marriage for the rest of her life and had a first-rate career as an educator and an author.

In "The New Machiavelli," Amber becomes the character Isabel—oddly, the name of Wells's first wife—and Wells makes their affair, and her eventual pregnancy, far more melodramatic than it was in life. The revelation of their relationship ends Remington's career as a left-wing M.P., and he and Isabel must flee England for Italy. Wells is excellent on the emotional pressure, a kind still familiar today, of a public scandal on its victims:

> I think there can be nothing else in life quite like the unnerving realisation that rumour and scandal are afoot about one. Abruptly one's confidence in the solidity of the universe disappears. One walks silenced through a world that one feels to be full of inaudible accusations. One cannot challenge the assault, get it out into the open, separate truth and falsehood. It slinks from you, turns aside its face. Old acquaintances suddenly evaded me, made extraordinary excuses; men who had presumed on the verge of my world and pestered me with an intrusive enterprise, now took the bold step of flat repudiation. I became doubtful about the return of a nod, retracted all those tentacles of easy civility that I had hitherto spread to the world.

Remington is a British politician, and, in that way, his fate makes some sense. Wells wasn't in Parliament, but he was a public man and political figure, and the scandal barely winged him. There were painful, nasty newspaper notices.

"Just get yourself a sweater and a nice, warm laptop."

But nothing really happened: Reeves had the baby and her marriage of convenience and her work, and Wells had the gossip and his marriage of convenience and his work.

Why did he feel so compelled to imagine the worst? Partly from dramatic necessity: a story that ends with scandal and exile is a better story than one that ends with domestic embarrassment and scolding words in a newspaper. But also because Wells's chief imaginative gift was to extrapolate the worst that could happen if we abandoned ourselves to a romantic idea. What if he *had* fled for Italy with Amber?

Wells has been wildly misrepresented as a hyper-rationalist, inclined to believe narrowly in systematic organization and procedural oversight. In "The New Machiavelli," he offers what he pretended was an affectionate caricature of the Webbs as Oscar and Altiora Bailey; his ego allowed him to mistake his malice for mere joshing. Yet a key passage in his novel is the deeply felt and lucid revelation of all that the Bailey ideology cannot contain or understand:

> At the Baileys' one always seemed to be getting one's hands on the very strings that guided the world. You heard legislation projected to affect this "type" and that; statistics marched by you with sin and shame and injustice and misery reduced to quite manageable percentages. . . .
>
> And then with all this administrative fizzle, this pseudo-scientific administrative chatter, dying away in your head, out you went into the limitless grimy chaos of London streets. . . . Under the lamps you were jostled by people like my Staffordshire uncle out for a spree, you saw shy youths conversing with prostitutes, you passed young lovers pairing with an entire disregard of the social suitability of the "types" they might blend or create, you saw men leaning drunken against lamp-posts whom you knew for the "type" that will charge with fixed bayonets into the face of death, and you found yourself unable to imagine little Bailey achieving either drunkenness or the careless defiance of annihilation.

In 1911, Wells published, alongside "The New Machiavelli," a collection of fantasy tales, including the greatest story he ever wrote, "The Door in the Wall." The story, which combines Mary Poppins-like elements with "Twilight Zone" ones, is about a distinguished man of state who turns out to have been haunted, since boyhood, by a vision. As a child, he explains to the narrator, he took a wrong turn down a street in West Kensington and wandered into a fantastic garden, complete with a pair of huge, velvety panthers:

> One looked up and came towards me, a little curious as it seemed. It came right up to me, rubbed its soft round ear very gently against the small hand I held out and purred. It was, I tell you, an enchanted garden. I know. And the size? Oh! it stretched far and wide, this way and that. I believe there were hills far away. Heaven knows where West Kensington had suddenly got to. And somehow it was just like coming home.

Near the end of the story, he falls to his death in a London construction site that he mistakes for a way back to the garden. "At any rate, you will say, it betrayed him in the end," the narrator reflects, of the statesman's vision. "But did it betray him? There you touch the inmost mystery of these dreamers, these men of vision and the imagination. We see our world fair and common, the hoarding and the pit. By our daylight standard he walked out of security into darkness, danger and death. But did he see like that?"

When Wells's imagination truly got to work, it was usually to consider, against all his progressivism, what would happen if you abandoned yourself to an irrational passion. Typically, it leads to what looks to others like self-destruction. In another story from the same prewar period, "The Sea Lady," a mermaid washes up on a pebbly British beach to seduce a respectable man, eventually bringing him into her underwater world. What distinguishes this tale, told in a comic vein, from the symbolist vein of the femme-fatale tale, is the carefree nature of the man's leap. He may drown with his mermaid; he doesn't mind.

It is here that Wells's sexual energies and excesses connect to his central creative act, the invention of modern science fiction. His classic works might almost have been written by G. K. Chesterton or C. S. Lewis—that is, by the most mystical-minded critics of Fabian

progressivism. In "The Time Machine," the future world is divided into the realms of the Eloi, the fastidious fruit-eaters that live above ground, and the Morlocks, the proletariat that labor underground. This seems at first like an extrapolation of the British class conflicts that Wells knew—a cosseted upper class and the brutalized working masses. But it turns out that the gentle Eloi are merely cattle, being ranched for consumption by the dominant Morlocks. This is far from an acceptable Fabian moral, where the laws of history would produce a more egalitarian society. Nor is it even a Fabian warning of what will happen if things are not fixed. It is instead a dark dystopian joke, a mordant allegory—a case where, in the best sense, Wells's imagination ran away with him.

What links his sci-fi and his sexual imaginings is a fascination with conjuring the ultimate. What if the spacemen came? What if you slept with whomever you wanted? The common fuel of romantic excess illuminates the machines and animates the Martians. In the final vision of planet Earth, a vast insect dominates a parched landscape. But, having envisaged the ultimate, Wells knew how to draw back to the close at hand. If the extravagance of his imagination made him famous, the precision of his description makes him live. He gave a very big subject an almost pointillist treatment. This made him incorporate human fragility into the technological future. When he thought of an invisible man, he thought of all that would be necessary to hide his transparency: the costume of bandages and hat and trenchcoat that have remained the Invisible Man iconography ever since.

Wells was less a scientific optimist than a psychological realist. The theme of his work is continuity: everything will change, and nothing will change. We will go to Mars with the same lusts and jealousies that we had on Earth, and the Martians, when they come for us, will treat us just as we treated the Maoris. Though Wells thought that our freedom to have sex would expand, he didn't think that the nature of desire itself would change, or that erotic liberation would rescue us.

In real life, Wells wrote Amber Reeves a letter near the end of their affair, which he may or may not have mailed, laying out what would likely happen if they did run away together. Although it's full of passion and appreciation—he'll do it if she wants to!—his catalogue of everything that they wouldn't be able to do and of all the drawbacks they would face (not least being condemned to lifelong fidelity) makes his hesitation plain. As Tomalin points out, Amber was perfectly content with her devoted husband, and went on to a life of scholarship and public service, never turning on her lover but never again needing him, either.

Wells persisted, as a writer and a pundit, past the stopping point of both Tomalin's biography and Lodge's novel, which end with the coming of the Great War, when Wells was in his late forties. But, like Shaw, he was never again as central to his time. Chesterton, in a jest of genius, or at least a jest borrowed with genius, said that Wells "had sold his talent for a pot of message." It is telling that, after the war, he was unable to write a memorable work of fantasy, though he often tried. His most notable effort, "The Shape of Things to Come" (1933), is a futurist fable, later made into a movie, that gets many big things wrong: the secular World Police descend to shut down Mecca, the Nazis are too disorganized to persecute the Jews, and the Germans are outmatched by the Poles. As Orwell said once, Wells was too sane a man to understand twentieth-century craziness; the world had outstripped his imagination. (The movie, "Things to Come," released in 1936, is notable chiefly for Vincent Korda's sleek designs.)

Wells never stopped writing—or loving, for that matter. His most famous engagement, beginning not long after the end of his love affair with Amber Reeves, was with Rebecca West, the formidable author of "Black Lamb and Grey Falcon," the still matchless study of the mystique of the Balkans. (She also covered the Nuremberg trials for this magazine.) Wells was the father of her son Anthony West, who wrote a more or less affectionate biography of his father, and a more or less discontented novel, in the same thinly disguised vein as Wells's "The New Machiavelli," about his mother. (He then reviewed books for this magazine for three decades; literary circles tend to row tight.) Later, Wells had a long love affair with the Dutch travel writer Odette Keun. Wodehouse, on a visit to the house in the South of France which Wells shared with her, was so appalled by a sentimental placard reading "Two Lovers Built This House" that he included a reference to it in "The Code of the Woosters."

Wells lived until 1946, long enough

to see his surprisingly passionate fan Winston Churchill in power and winning a "war by air" of the kind Wells had imagined. Churchill wrote before the war that, on first reading "Time Machine," "I shouted with joy. Then I read all his books. I have read them all over since. I could pass an examination in them. . . . Here are prophecies of the future, not a few of which we have lived to verify and endure." Proof of Churchill's catholic taste, and also of the appeal, beyond political categories, of Wells's imagination. Wells also lived long enough to see the Labour Party he had been in the vanguard of for half a century take power in 1945 and impose socialist policies of the kind he had long envisioned—though not long enough to see Churchill return to power after the equivocal results of that victory. A sign of changing London mores: the house where Wells lived and died, near Regents Park, a fine house for a writer in his time, though not one thought resplendent or ostentatious, sold last year for eighteen million dollars. The class system that Wells faced as a London child has been replaced by an oligarchic system, squeezing out even the upper-middle professional class to which Wells ascended, and the Fabians belonged.

Most of us believe—as we upgrade our iPhones and, for that matter, welcome a newfangled vaccine—in some form of technological optimism, however hedged. Wells's science fiction remains a warning against the excesses of that faith: What if we build a future world where social division gets worse, not better? What if the higher civilization is out to get us, not help us? What if invisibility isolates rather than liberates you? The sometimes self-pleased materialism of Wells's worldly views was chastened by the clarity of his romantic imagination; the progressivism of his Fabian tenets was buffered by the pessimism of his fiction.

No one was as right about as much, no one could have been utterly wrong about more. In "The New Machiavelli," Wells accurately predicted that Great Britain would leave India peacefully once an indigenous liberation movement arose—and catastrophically assured his readers, three years before the Great War, that no military confrontation with Germany was possible. Still, punditry passes; poetry remains. It is touching to learn that people as practical and *dans le vrai* as the Fabians could still be passionate lovers of the verse and the drawings of William Blake, and part of the Zeitgeist that made his "Jerusalem" a hymn of the left, first for the suffragettes and eventually for the Labour Party. "Till we have built Jerusalem / In Englands green & pleasant Land." Everything that was standing in the way of that New Jerusalem is essentially gone: the World Brain has arrived; no serious impediments to divorce or, for that matter, to free love remain; if social equality is still remote, it is much greater than any that Wells's laboring parents could have known; the dark satanic mills are silent or else shipped off to China. And yet we are as we were. Maybe, as Wells would have insisted polemically, Blake's Jerusalem still waits to be built. Or maybe, as he would have known poetically, this is just what Jerusalem looks like after you build it. The shining next is our lamplit now, and always will be.

A house divided against itself cannot stand, but a writer who is not divided against himself has little chance of enduring. We love Dickens for darkness and domesticity together; we are drawn to George Eliot for her cool wide-screen view and her closeup tenderness; we delight in Jane Austen for her lack of sentimentality about human relations and her happy affirmation of the relations that remain after the sentimentality is drained off.

Wells is not an integrated writer, whose politics and imagination move hand in hand. He is someone who has the ability to envisage the worst—to see that nothing works out as one would have hoped—but gets up and tries to do his best. He foretold a future in which intellectuals were cannibalized by construction workers, and then everyone got devoured by a big bug. Yet he went on working to improve the municipal sewers. That's the paradox of H. G. Wells, an optimistic credo constantly belied by mystical intuitions. His subject is the fateful pressure of the romantic imagination on dutiful progressivism; his liberal worthies lose their careers, and lives, to the lure of romantic entanglement—are drawn to their deaths by the panthers of childhood, by the women of the sea. Then they wake up and are worthy again. His great question was how, in the epoch of sex and science, public-spirited people can make peace with their private passions. Leaving it unanswered, he reminds us that it is unanswerable. ♦

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Jason Adam Katzenstein, must be received by Sunday, November 21st. The finalists in the November 8th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 6th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

"

"

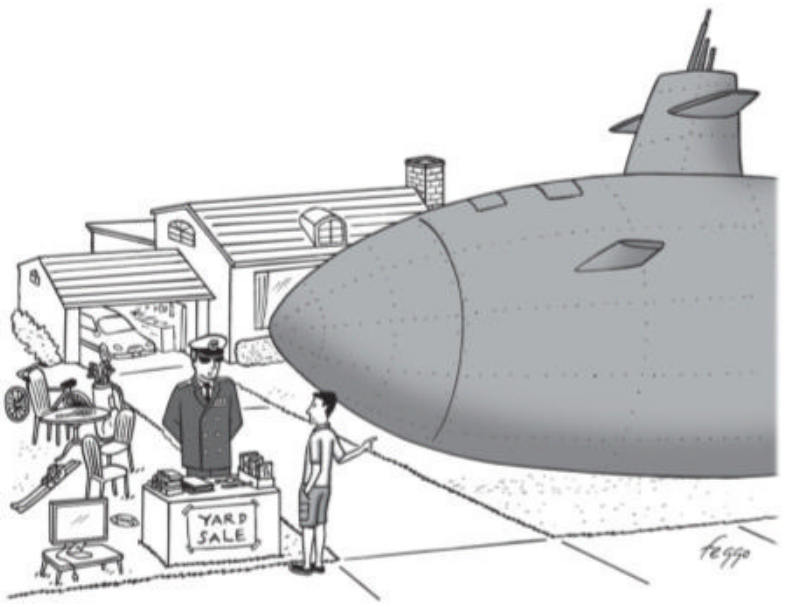
THE FINALISTS

"I want to speak with my lawyer."
Susan Breitman, West Hartford, Conn.

"At first, I just wanted a sip of water. Then things got out of hand."
Bert Berdis, Los Angeles, Calif.

"Technically, the fish is still in the bowl."
Rick Farber, West New York, N.J.

THE WINNING CAPTION



"It works fine—we're just no longer a nuclear family."
Jake Warr, Portland, Ore.

On it.

Ending the hate and harassment against the Asian Pacific Islander (API) Community requires all of us to work together and take real action.
What can *you* do to help?

- Learn the Facts about why many API adults fear for their safety here in the U.S.
- Reflect on the assumptions and stereotypes made about the API community and how that contributes to a culture of hate, harassment and violence.
- Reach out to those affected by the rising hate.
- Support organizations and small businesses that are owned by or serve the API community.
- Stand up against hate crimes by intervening or reporting an incident.

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Visit lovehasnolabels.com

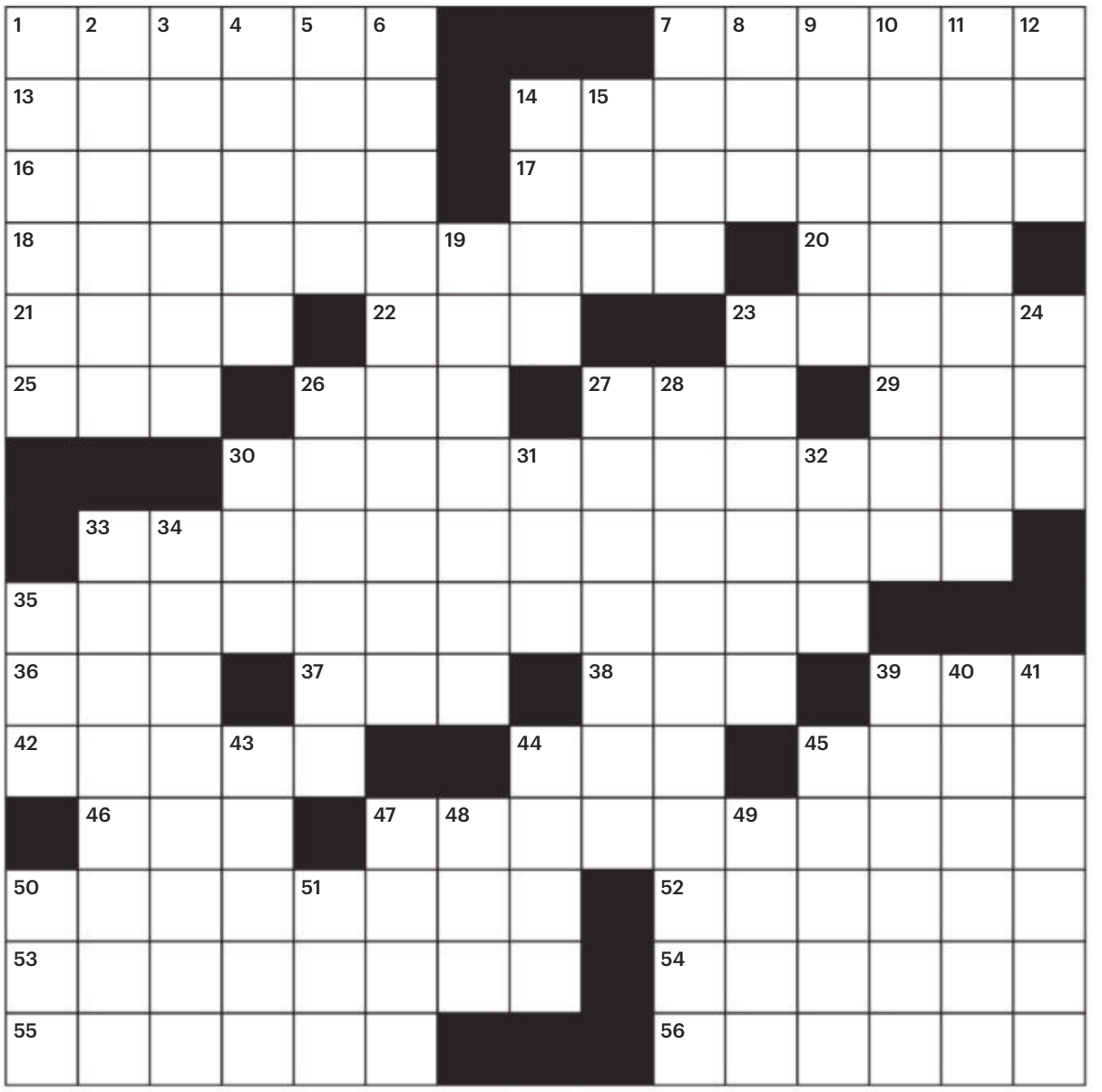
ad COUNCIL

PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A lightly challenging puzzle.

BY ERIK AGARD



ACROSS

1 Wind ___ (tinkly instrument)
7 Singer-songwriter Grace
13 Cheese named for a capital city
14 "What, you're gonna tell me you disagree with me?"
16 Brand named for two neighboring states
17 Order from Captain Picard
18 Sentiment expressed by a light-blue, light-pink, and white flag
20 "However . . ."
21 Pine-tree dropping
22 Elevating its head might help with acid reflux
23 2-Down, for example
25 Part of some transitions, colloquially
26 Term of address in London
27 Alphabetically consecutive first name
29 Expected back at the library
30 "The First Time Ever I Saw Your Face" singer
33 Panther food?
35 Piercing healing method
36 Fernando Tatis, Jr., to Fernando Tatis
37 "Didn't I tell you?"
38 Fearsome mouth
39 ___ will
42 Pissed off
44 Artificially inflate
45 Purple fruit
46 "The Search for General ___" (2014 documentary)
47 Ey, ze, or bun, for example
50 Trays for grills
52 Cause harm to
53 Preside over a panel
54 With 56-Across, Paganini's Twenty-four Caprices, e.g.
55 Seinabo Sey's country
56 See 54-Across

DOWN

1 Pants part
2 "___ Noire" (2019 documentary about movies)
3 "To rephrase that . . ."
4 The Pine Tree State
5 Comes to a close
6 Shimmering orb produced by a wand
7 Long carnivorous fish
8 Female sheep
9 The Puyallup, for example
10 Buildings with circular floor plans
11 Teach
12 Something boosted by a compliment
14 Surrounded by
15 Pissed off
19 "I put my thing down, flip it, and ___ it": Missy Elliott
23 Loud laugh
24 "Sounds scary"
26 Hold back one's full competitive effort
27 Chart with constellations
28 Enjoy some scenic roads, say
30 Sleep-phase letters
31 Suggestion, for short
32 Go on the ___
33 Like some primo seats
34 Like some primo seats
35 Ad in an awareness campaign
39 "That's *one* option . . ."
40 Gymnast Hernandez
41 Bedsheets, tablecloths, and the like
43 ___ in (persuaded to participate)
44 Show on which Dominique Jackson played Elektra
45 Pear variety
47 Bread sometimes stuffed with keema
48 Doctor hidden in "patients"
49 Phrase said right before doing something
50 They're sent on Twitter and Insta
51 ___-K

Solution to the previous puzzle:

Find more puzzles and this week's solution at **newyorker.com/crossword**

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