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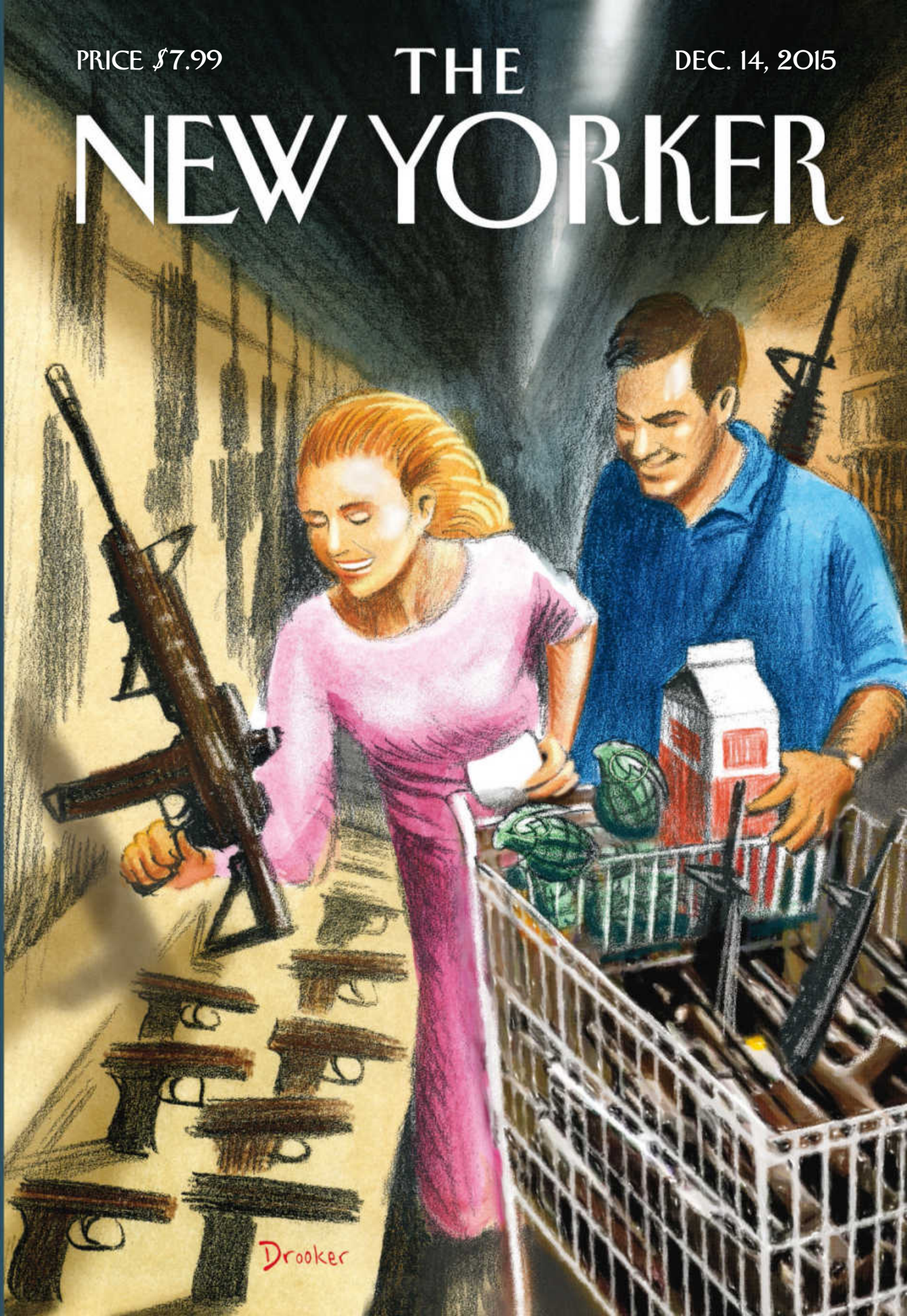
DEC. 14, 2015



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CONTRIBUTORS

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ERIC DROOKER (COVER) is the author of three graphic novels, including "Howl" and the award-winning "Flood!," a special hardcover edition of which was published in May.

THE MAIL

GENETIC CONTROL

I was thrilled to see Michael Specter write that "the central project of biology has been the effort to understand how the shifting arrangement of four compounds—adenine, guanine, cytosine, and thymine—determines the ways in which humans differ from each other and from everything else alive" ("The Gene Hackers," November 16th). Though the article focussed on the potential medical and ethical implications of CRISPR gene editing, it is important to recognize that science exists not just to vanquish disease and invent technology but also to preserve our innate childlike wonder about how things work. To this end, many labs, including mine, seek to understand how genomes evolve to generate biological diversity. Historically, scientists have laboriously sought answers in just a few species amenable to experimental manipulation. CRISPR now simplifies experimental investigation of evolutionary questions in a variety of species. Charles Darwin wrote to Thomas Henry Huxley, in 1859, "You have most cleverly hit on one point, which has greatly troubled me . . . what the devil determines each particular variation? What makes a tuft of feathers come on a Cock's head; or moss on a moss-rose?" Thanks in large part to CRISPR, we will soon find out.

David L. Stern
Howard Hughes Medical Institute, Janelia Research Campus
Ashburn, Va.

Specter highlights exciting developments in the field of gene editing, but he is too quick to dismiss the shadow side. Writing that CRISPR "offers a new outlet for the inchoate fear of tinkering with the fundamentals of life" is an inadequate characterization of the risks involved. The piece describes a nightmare of Jennifer Doudna's, in which she tutors Hitler about editing genes, but does not reference Eric Lander's sober warning, in an article on heritable genome manipulation, in the *New England Journal of Medicine*. Specter does not mention that dozens of countries, including most with developed biotech sectors, have written prohibitions on heritable genetic manipulation into their laws, and into a binding international treaty. In distinguishing the public—and its advocates—from scientists, Specter might lead readers to erroneously believe that researchers are not deeply concerned. Nearly all scientists want a broad public debate about what kind of gene editing should be pursued. This is a potentially society-altering technology, and democratic engagement with its trajectory is crucial and pressing.

Marcy Darnovsky
Executive Director, Center for Genetics and Society
Berkeley, Calif.

FROM THE BBQ FILES

Calvin Trillin's foray into North Carolina barbecue was an enjoyable read ("In Defense of the True 'Cue," November 2nd). But he missed a New York connection: Fuzzy's Bar-B-Q, of Madison. In 1978, Barry Farber, a New York radio announcer and politician who ran unsuccessfully for mayor of the city, decided to put barbecue in Times Square. Farber needed someone who could ship meat across state lines, and Fuzzy's had an in-house federal meat inspector. That summer, the owner, Fuzzy Nelson, began shipping fresh barbecue from Greensboro on a late-day flight to New York. It was sold at Café de la Bagel, in Times Square. Farber had plans to locate a commissary in the Bronx and open barbecue joints all over the city. I was a reporter in Madison at the time and witnessed Farber the showman dropping a chunk of pork in his mouth and saying, "This is the pièce de résistance." But it didn't take off in the Big Apple. Fuzzy died a few years back; his son Freddy now manages the business.

David M. Spear
Madison, N.C.

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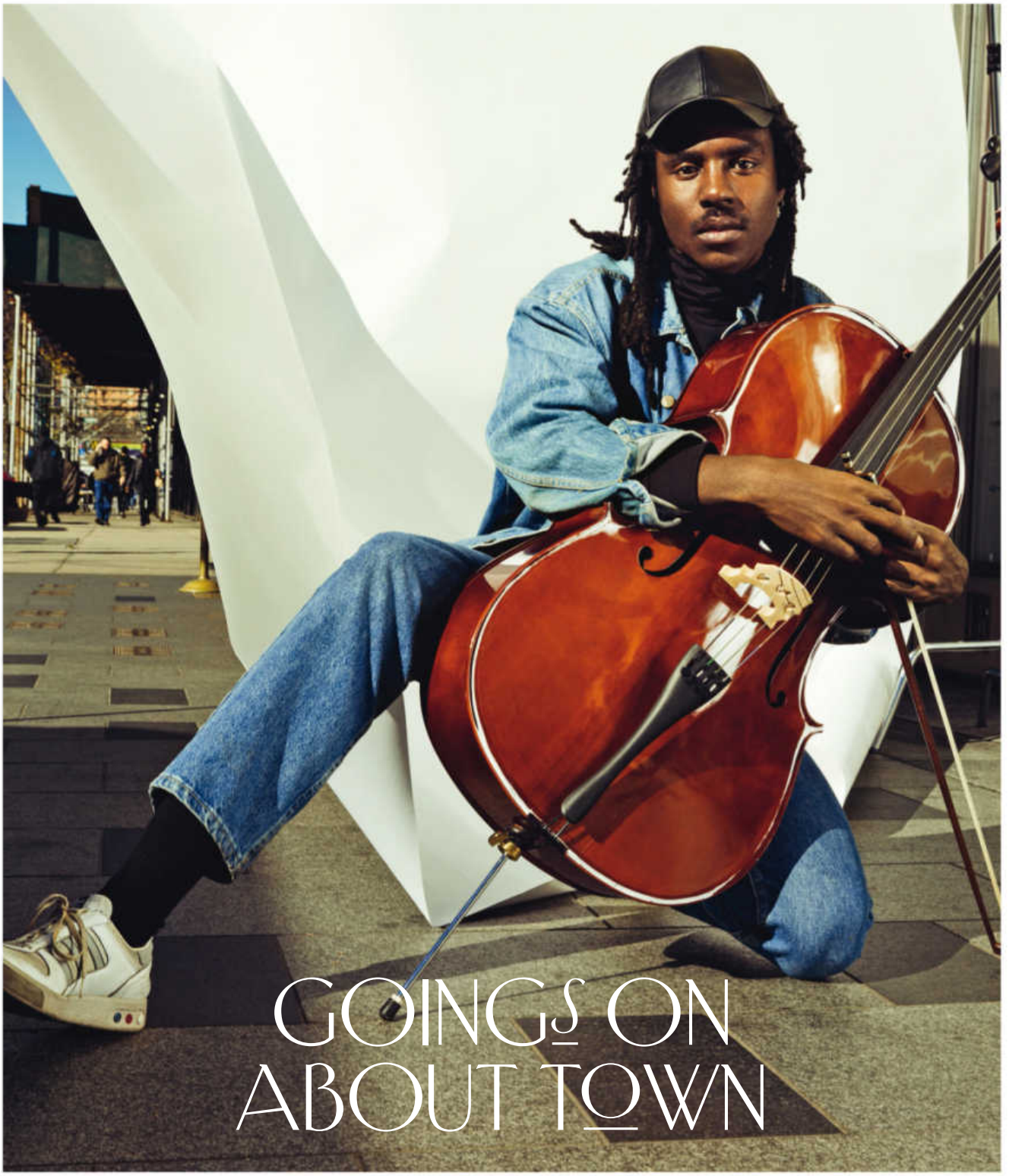

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

DECEMBER 2015 | WEDNESDAY 9TH · THURSDAY 10TH · FRIDAY 11TH · SATURDAY 12TH · SUNDAY 13TH · MONDAY 14TH · TUESDAY 15TH

IF ALTRUISM IS the new orange, Devonté (Dev) Hynes wears it well. As the recording artist and songwriter Blood Orange, formerly Lightspeed Champion, he's enjoyed a warm reception downtown and beyond, for his sharp style and affectionate mastery of nineteen-eighties pop tropes, as well as for his influential collaborations with musicians like Florence and the Machine, the Chemical Brothers, FKA Twigs, and more. "At this point in my life, all that matters to me is giving back to communities and making people happy," he said, of his Dec. 12 engagement at the Apollo, "Blood Orange and Friends." All proceeds will go to the Opus 118 Harlem School of Music. "If it wasn't for the chance to play cello or piano when I was a kid growing up in Essex," he continued, "I shudder to think where I'd be right now."

PHOTOGRAPH BY CHARLIE ENGMAN

ART

MUSEUMS SHORT LIST

METROPOLITAN MUSEUM
"Ancient Egypt Transformed: The Middle Kingdom." Through Jan. 24.

MUSEUM OF MODERN ART
"Walid Raad." Through Jan. 31.

GUGGENHEIM MUSEUM
"Alberto Burri: The Trauma of Painting." Through Jan. 6.

THE WHITNEY MUSEUM
"Frank Stella: A Retrospective." Through Feb. 7.

BROOKLYN MUSEUM
"Stephen Powers: Coney Island Is Still Dreamland (To a Seagull)." Through March 16.

FRICK COLLECTION
"Andrea del Sarto: The Renaissance Workshop in Action." Through Jan. 10.

NEW MUSEUM
"Jim Shaw: The End Is Here." Through Jan. 10.

GALLERIES SHORT LIST

UPTOWN

"Painting Tranquility: Masterworks by Vilhelm Hammershøi from SMK"
Scandinavia House
58 Park Ave., at 38th St.
212-779-3587.
Through Feb. 27.

"William Kentridge: Drawings for 'Lulu' "
Marian Goodman
24 W. 57th St. 212-977-7160.
Through Dec. 19.

CHELSEA

Claes Oldenburg and Coosje van Bruggen
Cooper
534 W. 21st St. 212-255-1105.
Through Dec. 12.

Bridget Riley
Zwirner
525 W. 19th St. 212-727-2070.
Through Dec. 19.

Matthew Weinstein
Lewis
521 W. 26th St. 212-643-6353.
Through Dec. 12.

DOWNTOWN

"The Description of a New World, Called the Blazing World"
Algus
132 Delancey St. 212-844-0074.
Through Dec. 13.

MUSEUMS AND LIBRARIES

Whitney Museum

"Rachel Rose: Everything and More"

The young artist makes her impressive New York début with a transfixing video created for the museum at the invitation of the sharp curator Christopher Y. Lew. The non-narrative collage combines footage, shot by Rose, of a space-station research facility, an E.D.M. concert, and low-tech galactic abstractions created in her studio. (Imagine a drifting Milky Way that involves real milk.) The soundtrack sifts together wordless vocals by Aretha Franklin (extracted from "Amazing Grace") and a recording of the American astronaut David Wolf talking with Rose, over the phone, about the pleasures and perils of space. The result is an ecstatic epic about gravities, literal and figurative, which unfolds onscreen for eleven minutes and orbits in the mind's eye for days. Through Feb. 7.

Studio Museum in Harlem

"A Constellation"

In this winning show, the curator Amanda Hunt elegantly pairs eighteen young artists with eight of their elders. A superb Faith Ringgold tapestry, which incorporates portraits of Harlem residents, resonates with the intriguing, domestic scenes on fabric by the young Malawian artist Billie Zangewa. A Plexiglas box by Cameron Rowland, which evokes the bulletproof windows at check-cashing stores, shares an acid critique with David Hammons's smashed piggy bank, filled with cowrie shells in lieu of coins. If the show has a weak link, it's painting: the overhyped Hugo McCloud, for one, disappoints with a red canvas that owes too much to Tachism. But such low points are more than made up for by stirring works like the tiny diorama of police brutality mounted in a jewelry box by the Canadian-Trinidadian Talwst, an uncommonly delicate elegy to Eric Garner. Through March 6.

GALLERIES—CHELSEA

Steven Arnold

Channelling the spirits of Aubrey Beardsley and Jack Smith, this California artist photographed extravagantly theatrical tableaux in black and white, in the nineteen-eighties. (He died in 1994.) He transformed his subjects, nearly all of them nudes, into gods and goddesses—winged, crowned, levitating. (Jesus also makes a homoerotic cameo.) Arnold was a protégé of Salvador Dalí, and he shared the Surrealist's eye for proliferating detail—one figure is framed by a radiating network of shells. But his approach to myth and mystery is even cheekier, anticipating the voluptuous spectacles of Pierre et Gilles. Through Dec. 19. (Cooney, 508 W. 26th St. 212-255-8158.)

Ralph Eugene Meatyard

An optician with a spiritual bent, Meatyard, the self-taught photographer from Kentucky, who died in 1972, worked in a style that veered in mood between Southern Gothic and Zen. He stayed close to home, taking pictures of his wife and children in the natural world, and in and around abandoned houses. (This big, engaging retrospective of small, black-and-white work includes a number of images that have never been previously shown.) Meatyard's eye on his family is far from idyllic. His sons and daughter, in particular, appear isolated and oddly fraught—a children's pantomime version of Beckett. Images of twigs, grasses, and wooded landscapes are more meditative, dissolving into abstraction. Through Dec. 23. (DC Moore, 535 W. 22nd St. 212-247-2111.)

Jean Tinguely

American arts institutions are waking up to the importance of Nouveau Réalisme, the French counterstrike to abstract painting. Tinguely, who died in 1991, was one of the movement's original members, best known in New York for installing a self-destructing piece in the sculpture garden at MOMA, in 1960. He hooked up welded assemblages to motors, whose herky-jerky movements still seem hazardous, even animalistic. Many of the specimens here have their original engines; the largest is rigged to a timer that agitates tractor wheels and colorful feathers. There are smaller ones that you can operate, too, using buzzers; in the 1984 work "Trüffelsau," a skeletal boar's jaw opens wide and snaps shut. Through Dec. 19. (Gladstone, 530 W. 21st St. 212-206-7606.)

GALLERIES—DOWNTOWN

Robert Attanasio

In his witty "Sound Camera Rotation," from 1977, the long-haired filmmaker and his friend stand outside the Guggenheim and mimic its spiral structure, first by spinning in place, then by riding in a taxi around the block. Though the film suggests orthodox structuralism, it's also a slapstick gem. First, they can't find a cab big enough for the camera; then, they get stuck in traffic, interrupted by children, and, finally, freak out when the camera almost runs out of film. After it opened, the show turned unexpectedly elegiac: Attanasio died last month, after a brief illness, at the age of sixty-three. Through Dec. 20. (Junior Projects, 139 Norfolk St. 212-228-8045.)

Saloua Raouda Choucair

The Lebanese modernist has her first gallery show in the U.S. a year shy of her hundredth birthday. Choucair studied with Léger in Paris before returning to Beirut in 1951, and her paintings, sculptures, and decorative objects effortlessly interlock European abstraction with the heritage of Islamic arts. Rhythmic, high-spirited compositions of colored ellipses and crescents jump from vivid gouaches to wall hangings and rugs. In three dimensions, Choucair tends toward modular stacks of terra cotta or stone. Some, like a 1973 model for public housing, could fit in your hand; three much larger stone totems invite favorable comparisons with Brâncuși. Through Dec. 20. (CRG, 195 Chrystie St. 212-229-2766.)

Gordon Parks

These lush, color photographs of an extended black family in Mobile and Shady Grove, Alabama, were shot on assignment for *Life*, in 1956. The story, part of a series on segregation, helped to spark a national conversation about race. Parks took a photojournalistic approach, but objective doesn't mean unconcerned, and his empathy for his subjects shines through. *Life* didn't print some of the most striking images here, including a portrait of a mother and daughter in pastel party dresses, standing under a red neon sign that reads "Colored Entrance." Seen six decades later, in the era of the Black Lives Matter movement, the work remains poignant, infuriating, and powerful. Through Dec. 20. (Salon 94 Freemans, 1 Freeman Alley. 212-529-7400.)

Hans Schärer

The Swiss autodidact painted with an intensity and an oddity that placed him beyond the mainstream. In the nineteen-sixties and seventies, Schärer created the dozens of gritty, kohl-eyed Madonnas seen here, often with bared teeth and a third eye. But there's no Virgin to be found in the gloriously bonkers erotic watercolors he was painting at the same time, in which nude women prostrate themselves before maypoles, rut for stadium crowds, and suckle at a three-nipple breast in the sky. Distinctions between the sacred and the profane become as meaningless as those between "outsider" and "insider" artist. Through Feb. 7. (Swiss Institute, 18 Wooster St. 212-925-2035.)

Samson Young

Throughout his exhibition, the young Hong Kong-based artist performs, for six hours a day, at a desk crowded with instruments, both traditional (a bass drum) and alternative (boxes of dirt). During a recent visit, he was busy translating video footage of the Iraq war, circa 2003, into percussive bursts via short-wave radios. Musical scores hung framed on the gallery walls and their expression markings—"Feigned withdrawal: moderato"; "Exposed flank: spirito"—inscribed the spare music with an additional martial resonance, making every bass hit sound like an exploding land mine. Through Dec. 20. (Team, 47 Wooster St. 212-279-9219.)

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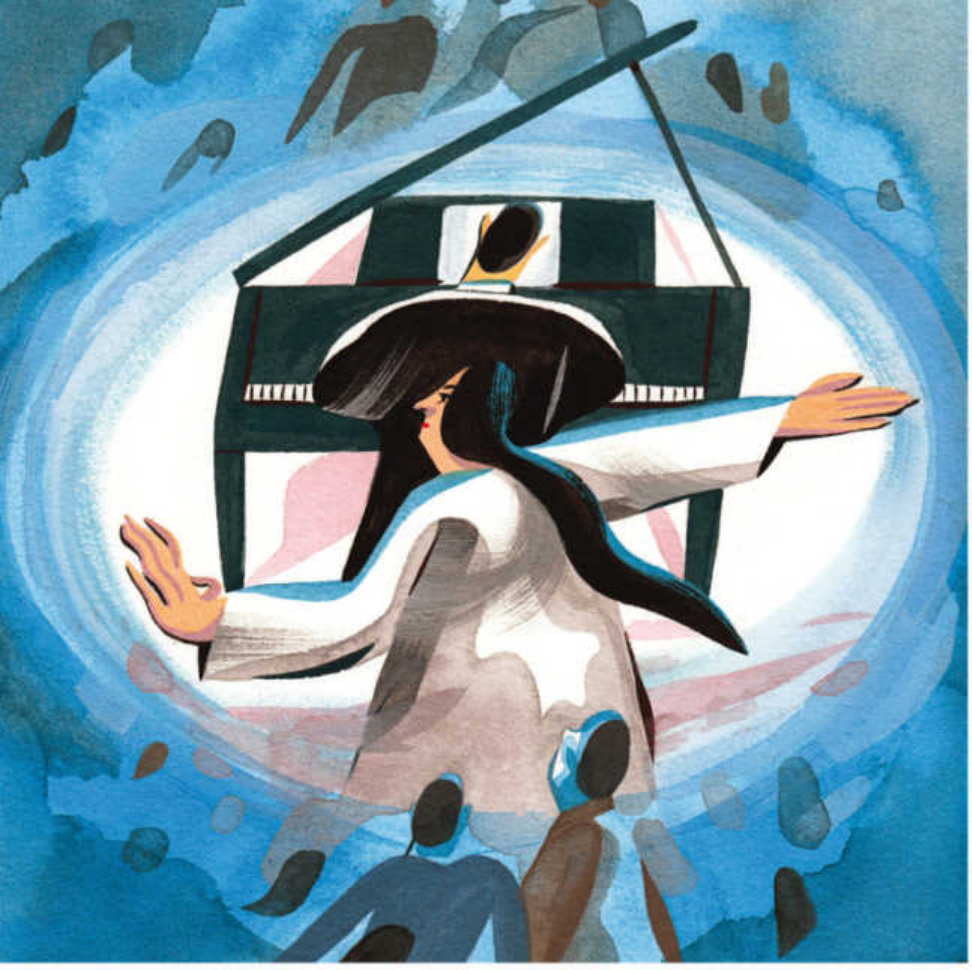

Igor Levit participates in a ritualized rendition of the Goldberg Variations, at the Park Avenue Armory.

LOUD AND CLEAR

Marina Abramović teams up with Bach.

"THE MODERN WORLD we live in is one of constant distraction, where taking the time to connect to ourselves and having the patience to do so is becoming more and more difficult." So writes the celebrated performance artist Marina Abramović, voicing sentiments that could have been expressed since the beginning of the urban industrialized era. Abramović, whose work explores, among other concepts, the metaphysical relationship between a performer and her audience, has spent her career taking simple ideas to daunting extremes—most famously in "The Artist Is Present," in which she spent more than seven hundred hours sitting at a table in MOMA, staring wordlessly at strangers, in the spring of 2010. Her next project takes place in the Wade Thompson Drill Hall of the Park Avenue Armory, where Abramović will team up with the acclaimed young pianist Igor Levit (along with the lighting designer Urs Schönebaum) to offer "Goldberg" (Dec. 7-19), an evening-length act of ritual devotion centered on J. S. Bach's Goldberg Variations.

Bach's masterpiece is hardly simple: it is a princely summation of the wondrous possibilities of Baroque counterpoint and keyboard practice, infused with the deepest emotion. To perform the Variations is itself a feat of endurance, one that Levit, in his new recording, on Sony Classical, accomplishes with dancing rhythms, gracious lyrical continuity, and a steely, formidable technique. For the Armory, Abramović has adapted the Abramović Method—a distillation of her decades of performance preparation—to classical music, which the artist calls "the most immaterial form of art." (Abramović does not participate in the performances.) Audience members will deposit their personal belongings (including cell phones) in a locker, put on a pair of noise-cancelling headphones, and then sit in lounge chairs for an extended time before removing the headphones and listening to the performance. The concept has the blitheness of a vision and the ingenuity of a gimmick. But if it helps people appreciate the majesty of Bach's music, fine.

—*Russell Platt*

CLASSICAL MUSIC

OPERA

Metropolitan Opera

Paul Curran's bare production of **"La Donna del Lago"** is an odd fit for Rossini's pastoral-tinged score, but it's an effective showcase for the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato, who, with her compact voice and sprightly technique in coloratura passages, more or less owns the Rossini-heroine repertoire. She's in good company with her fellow bel-canto specialists Lawrence Brownlee, John Osborn, Daniela Barcellona, and the conductor Michele Mariotti. (Dec. 11 and Dec. 15 at 7:30.) • **Also playing:** Franco Zeffirelli's masterly production of Puccini's midwinter tragedy **"La Bohème,"** now deep into its fourth decade, continues to cast an irresistible spell. Paolo Carignani leads a first-rate lineup of singers, including Ramón Vargas, Barbara Frittoli, Ana María Martínez, and Levente Molnár. (Dec. 9 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 8.) • The forced fun of Jeremy Sams's **"Die Fledermaus"** production won few fans two seasons ago, so the Met is making a heavier musical investment this time, bringing on the mezzo-soprano Susan Graham and the conductor James Levine—whose megawatt talent should at least be able to compete with the glamour of Robert Jones's gilded sets. Susanna Phillips and the Tony winner Paulo Szot reprise their roles from the production's première, joined by Lucy Crowe, Toby Spence, and Dimitri Pittas. (Dec. 10 and Dec. 14 at 7:30.) • Michael Mayer's exuberant but effective Las Vegas-themed production of **"Rigoletto"** turns Verdi's drama of scheming Italian courtiers into a carnival of American excess. The conductor Roberto Abbado heads up the holiday-time run, pacing a cast led by Nadine Sierra, Piotr Beczała, and Željko Lučić (in the title role). (Dec. 12 at 1.) (Metropolitan Opera House. 212-362-6000.)

Manhattan School of Music Opera Theatre: "The Dangerous Liaisons"

Pierre Choderlos de Laclos's epistolary novel about the freewheeling decadence of the Ancien Régime has inspired at least half a dozen films, but it was adapted as an opera for the first time in 1994. The school revives Conrad Susa and Philip Littell's English-language treatment in a production directed by Dona D. Vaughn and conducted by George Manahan. (Borden Auditorium, 120 Claremont Ave. 917-493-4428. Dec. 9 and Dec. 11 at 7:30 and Dec. 13 at 2:30.)

Mannes Opera: "L'Elisir d'Amore"

The New School's classical-music arm, which will celebrate its centennial in 2016, gets an early start on the festivities with a season-opening production of Donizetti's bel-canto classic. The production, which transports the rustic comedy to Little Italy in the nineteen-fifties, is conducted by Joseph Colaneri and directed by Laura Alley. (Gerald W. Lynch Theatre, John Jay College. ticketcentral.com. Dec. 11 at 7:30 and Dec. 12 at 1:30.)

ILLUSTRATION BY PING ZHU

ORCHESTRAS AND CHORUSES

New York Philharmonic

Andrew Norman, among the most talented and original of young American composers, has written "Split," a new concerto for the Philharmonic and the noted pianist Jeffrey Kahane; the composer, the master of a uniquely dazzling and mercurial style, describes it as "a Rube Goldbergian labyrinth," in which the soloist continually searches for the exit. James Gaffigan makes his subscription début with the orchestra, conducting a playful program that also features Beethoven's Fourth Symphony and Strauss's tone poem "Till Eulenspiegel's Merry Pranks." (David Geffen Hall. 212-875-5656. Dec. 10 at 7:30 and Dec. 11-12 at 8.)

Apollo's Fire: Celtic Christmas Vespers

This period-performance ensemble from Cleveland, which has earned wide renown under its director, Jeannette Sorrell, comes to the Metropolitan Museum to offer a holiday program (with the soprano Meredith Hall, among others) that re-creates the spirit of a medieval Scottish Christmas with a wealth of Celtic tunes for fiddle and bagpipes, as well as excerpts from the thirteenth-century vespers of St. Kentigern, Glasgow's patron saint. (Fifth Ave. at 82nd St. 212-570-3949. Dec. 11 at 7.)

The Juilliard Orchestra and Itzhak Perlman

One of the world's favorite musicians conducts the school's flagship orchestra this week, in the kind of big-hearted Romantic repertory he favors: an all-Tchaikovsky program that includes the "Romeo and Juliet" Overture-Fantasy, the Variations on a Rococo Theme (with the cellist Edvard Pogossian), and the Symphony No. 6, "Pathétique." (David Geffen Hall. events.juilliard.edu. Dec. 14 at 8.)

RECITALS

The Stone: Matthew Welch

The rangy span of the industrious young composer's interests—he is both the co-founder of the group Experiments in Opera and the leader of the bagpipe-heavy new-music band Blarvuster—will be in evidence during a six-day residency, which features scenes from Welch's opera-in-progress "And Here We Are," based on a wartime memoir of the composer's uncle, who was interned in the notorious Santo Tomas concentration camp during the Second World War. It also includes a solo pipe show, and excerpts from Welch's vast catalogue for Balinese gamelan, performed by Gamelan Dharma Swara. (Avenue C at 2nd St. thestonenyc.com. Dec. 8-12 at 8 and 10 and Dec. 13 at 8.)

92nd Street Y: Pacifica Quartet

The American ensemble, now in middle age, is as renowned for its interpretations of the string quartets of Elliott Carter as it is for standard repertory. It performs the late master's Fragments for String Quartet and Quartet No. 5, interspersed between quartets by Janáček (No. 2, "Intimate Letters") and Beethoven (in F Major, Op. 135). (Lexington Ave. at 92nd St. 212-415-5500. Dec. 9 at 7:30.)

"The Crypt Sessions": Lawrence Brownlee

Hamilton Heights may be—for now—one of Manhattan's less glamorous neighborhoods, but several of its institutions have a picturesque quality that derives from the architectural revivals of the nineteenth century. One such is the Church of the Intercession, which has recently allowed for concerts to take place in its evocative crypt. The next is offered by the illustrious African-American tenor (and Met star) Lawrence Brownlee, who partners with the pianist (and Harlem resident) Damien Sneed, in a program of spirituals. (Broadway at 155th St. eventbrite.com. Dec. 9 at 8.)

Daniel Gortler at the Jewish Museum

The admired Israeli pianist joins two vocalists of note—the baritone David Adam Moore and the celebrated soprano Lauren Flanigan—in a concert that deftly mixes words and music. The first half offers Brahms's seldom-programmed song cycle "Die Schöne Magelone," while the second features Schubert's Drei Klavierstücke, D. 946, as well as an excerpt from Berio's "Epifanie," which uses texts from Joyce's "Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man." (Fifth Ave. at 92nd St. thejewishmuseum.org. Dec. 10 at 7:30.)

Met Chamber Ensemble

The conductor James Levine and his ensemble of topnotch Met musicians devote themselves to three works on the Gallic modern-music spectrum: Pierre Boulez's fiercely modernist "Dérive I," Poulenc's comically surreal cantata "Le Bal Masqué" (with the baritone John Moore), and Messiaen's rapturously spiritual "Quartet for the End of Time." (Zankel Hall. 212-247-7800. Dec. 13 at 5.)

DANCE

Keigwin + Company

The New York-based choreographer Larry Keigwin brings his urban, witty, sexy vibe to the Joyce in a program of new works (plus one company favorite, "Sidewalk"). For the first time in a decade, he has created a solo for himself, "3 Ballads," set to the wry songs of Peggy Lee. Lately, Keigwin has also taken to mentoring junior choreographers; the Joyce engagement includes pieces by two of them, Adam Barruch and Loni Landon. (175 Eighth Ave., at 19th St. 212-242-0800. Dec. 8-13.)

Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre

The second week of the City Center season sees the première of "Untitled America: First Movement" by the MacArthur Award-winning choreographer Kyle Abraham. It's the first installment of a three-part work that registers the shock waves flowing from the American prison system. The company also débuts its version of Paul Taylor's steamy tango fantasy, "Piazzolla Caldera." (City Center, 131 W. 55th St. 212-581-1212. Dec. 8-13 and Dec. 15. Through Jan. 3.)

"World Ballet Stars"

Last year, the Romanian National Ballet acquired a new artistic director, the former Royal Ballet star Johan Kobborg, who is using his talents and connections to revamp the troupe. This fund-raiser evening features his fiancée, the incandescent Romanian-born ballerina Alina Cojocaru, and such famous friends as Tamara Rojo, Ulyana Lopatkina, Daniil Simkin, and Daniel Ulbricht. The program mixes gala staples with Royal Ballet classics and pieces by Kobborg, Liam Scarlett, and Edward Clug. (Rose Theatre, 60th St. at Broadway. 212-721-6500. Dec. 9.)

Urban Bush Women

John Coltrane's 1965 album "A Love Supreme" is one of the great spiritual testaments in jazz. "Walking with 'Trane," a dance suite choreographed by the founder of Urban Bush Women, Jawole Willa Jo Zollar, with the young Samantha Speis, pays tribute to the classic, offering dance equivalents for its musical structures and trying to ride its transcendent energy. A score by the electronic-music composer Philip White and the jazz pianist George Caldwell (who plays live) riffs on the Coltrane original. (BAM's Harvey Theatre, 651 Fulton St., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 9-12.)

Andy de Groat and Catherine Galasso

In the nineteen-seventies, de Groat was in the vanguard of postmodern choreography, contributing to the original "Einstein on the Beach" and generally furthering a Robert Wilsonian idea of repetitive ritual. But he decamped to France in the eighties, and now his work is almost never performed here. Galasso—whose father, Michael, composed scores for de Groat—aims to remedy that. She is remounting de Groat's "Fan Dance" and "Get Wreck," both from 1978, with original cast members performing alongside younger dancers. She has also choreographed her own trio, inspired by de Groat. (Danspace Project, St. Mark's Church In-the-Bowery, Second Ave. at 10th St. 866-811-4111. Dec. 10-12.)

Liz Gerring Dance Company

Gerring's choreography, analytic in tone and yet kinesthetically exciting, is often spare, isolating one movement after another. In her new work "Horizon," however, she experiments with a higher density of action, filling the stage with independent events. As in her last piece, "Glacier," she has excellent, simpatico collaborators in the composer Michael Schumacher and the set and lighting designer Robert Wierzel. (Alexander Kasser Theatre, 1 Normal Ave., Montclair, N.J. 973-655-5112. Dec. 10-13.)

Mark Morris Dance Group / "The Hard Nut"

In 1991, Mark Morris created a "Nutcracker" that was as brash and American as he could make it. The production, whose designs are inspired by the comics of Charles Burns, opens at a suburban, mid-century Christmas party. A Yule log crackles on the TV set, the guests' dances are pure "Soul Train," and everybody drinks way too much punch. (There's a bit of hanky-panky as well.) Then, after a battle between an army of G.I. Joes and mechanized rats, things get weird. Morris draws on the original Hoffman version of the "Nutcracker" story, which is darker, and stranger, than the one we're used to. But, worry not, all's well in the end. The production returns to BAM, after an absence of several years, with a cast that features many veterans, including Morris himself, as Dr. Stahlbaum; John Heginbotham, as his sweet and rather befuddled consort; and Kraig Patterson, as the sassy French maid. (BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House, 30 Lafayette Ave., Brooklyn. 718-636-4100. Dec. 12-13. Through Dec. 20.)

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MOVIES

NOW PLAYING

Carol

One day in the nineteen-fifties, Carol Aird (Cate Blanchett), a wife and mother, is shopping for Christmas presents at a department store in Manhattan. She comes across a salesgirl, Therese Belivet (Rooney Mara), and they fall in love, right there. Todd Haynes's film then follows the women as they meet for lunch, hang out at Carol's home, embark on an aimless journey, and go to bed—conscious, all the while, of what they are risking, flouting, or leaving behind. Therese has a boyfriend (Jake Lacy), and Carol has a husband (Kyle Chandler) and a child, although the maternal instinct gets short dramatic shrift. That feels true to Patricia Highsmith, whose 1952 novel, "The Price of Salt," is the foundation of the film. The fine screenplay is by Phyllis Nagy, who drains away the sourness of the book; what remains is a production of clean and frictionless beauty, down to the last, strokable inch of clothing and skin. Yet Haynes and his stars, for all their stylish restraint, know that elegance alone will not suffice. Inside the showcase is a storm of feeling. With Sarah Paulson, as Carol's best friend.—*Anthony Lane* (Reviewed in our issue of 11/23/15.) (In limited release.)

Creed

This stirring, heartfelt, rough-grained reboot of the "Rocky" series is the brainchild of Ryan Coogler, who directed, wrote the story, and co-wrote the script with Aaron Covington. It starts in a juvenile-detention center in Los Angeles, where young Adonis Johnson is confined. He's soon adopted by Mary Anne Creed (Phylicia Rashad), Apollo's widow, who informs him that the boxer (who died before Adonis's birth) was his father. As an adult, Adonis (played with focussed heat by Michael B. Jordan) pursues a boxing career, moving to Philadelphia to be trained by Rocky Balboa (Sylvester Stallone), his father's rival. The burly backstory doesn't stall the drama but provide its fuel. Coogler—aided by the cinematographer Maryse Alberti's urgent long takes—links the physical sacrifices of boxing and acting alike. Adonis also finds romance with the rising singer Bianca (Tessa Thompson), who has physical struggles of her own. Coogler ingeniously inverts the myth of bootstrap-tugging exertions: without family and connections, the new star of the boxing ring wouldn't stand a fighting chance.—*Richard Brody* (In wide release.)

The Danish Girl

This movie, based on historical events, is set in the nineteen-twenties. Eddie Redmayne, deploying the full arsenal of his charm, plays Einar Wegener, who is himself invested, and then engulfed, in the act of performance. With the aid of makeup, expert mimicry, a wig, and a range of elegant dresses, he enters society in the guise of Lili Elbe, supposedly the cousin of his wife, Gerda (Alicia Vikander). Yet this deception proves insufficient, and the story, which begins in Copenhagen and moves to Paris, concludes in Dresden, with transgender surgery. Not that we witness, or learn much about, the pains of that procedure; in line with the ruthlessly good taste that governs the whole film, it is the ineffable pallor of Redmayne's face that bears the burden of the agony. The skill with which the director, Tom Hooper, negotiates the pitfalls of the theme could not be bettered. Does that very surfeit of propriety, however, not risk smothering the life of the drama? With Matthias Schoenaerts, as Einar's boyhood crush, now an art dealer, and Sebastian Koch, as the surgical pioneer.—*A.L.* (11/30/15) (In limited release.)

Don Verdean

No one is spared the righteous comic wrath of the director Jared Hess, in this wild satire about the exploitation of Christian faith by Christians and others. The title character (played by Sam Rockwell) is an archeologist whose illegal excavations in Israel are meant to prove the historical truth of the Bible; he displays his findings and sells his books in American churches. With his business failing, Don seeks a spectacular treasure. Aided by his unscrupulous Israeli Jewish handler, Boaz (Jemaine Clement), he returns to the United States and pulls off a huge hoax, which sucks the two men deep into a web of crime. The loopy, comic complications involve a mercantile preacher (Danny McBride), his ex-Satanist competitor (Will Forte), and Don's steadfast assistant (Amy Ryan). Everyone betrays the faith—whether with greed or with science—and the slippery slope of worldly religion is subjected to a radical Kierkegaardian purge. But, tellingly, no one comes off as beyond redemption except Boaz, who sinks ever further into a bog of depravity. Boaz isn't merely a Jewish villain; his villainy is his Judaism. The caricature, though deployed in the service of a sacred cause, is nonetheless repellent.—*R.B.* (In limited release.)

Macbeth

The Scottish play bewitches once again; Justin Kurzel is hardly the first movie director to be lured into its mists. This new adaptation stars Michael Fassbender, at his moodiest and most hard-bitten, as the title character, with Marion Cotillard as his wife. The film begins and ends on the battlefield, as if that were Macbeth's natural hunting ground; everything in between has the quality of a bad and agonizing dream. (Could Lady Macbeth, perhaps, be sleepwalking through the whole thing?) King Duncan (David Thewlis) is knifed not in a castle but in a tent, and Shakespeare's verse is muttered, spat, and moaned without a gleam of rhetorical flourish. Nothing, in short, speaks of grandeur in this depleted land, and there's something crazed, and almost ridiculous, about fighting and killing for the chance to govern it. Fassbender seems more at ease with a blade in his hand than with a mouthful of poetry, while Sean Harris makes a vehement Macduff. Kurzel adds children throughout, to great effect: one to the trio of witches, and one—a corpse—to the opening scene, lamented by Macbeth. The movie brims, quite rightly, with blood and flame; the screen, by the close, is a terrible sea of red.—*A.L.* (12/7/15) (In limited release.)

Paris Belongs to Us

Jacques Rivette made his first feature with little money and great difficulty between 1958 and 1960. Its plot reflects his struggles, and its tone blends the paranoid tension of American film noir with the austere lyricism of modern theatre. Anne (Betty Schneider), a literature student in Paris, is drawn by her brother Pierre (François Maistre) into the intrigues of his bohemian circle—the conspiracy theories of the blacklisted American writer Philip Kaufman (Daniel Crohem) and the artistic ambitions of the director Gérard Lenz (Giani Esposito), who is staging a no-budget production of "Pericles." After Gérard lures Anne into the cast, she comes to suspect that he is being menaced by the same cabal that may have killed his friend Juan, a composer. Juan's final recording has been lost, and Anne dives into the demimonde to find it. Rivette's tightly wound images turn the ornate architecture of Paris into a labyrinth of intimate entanglements and apocalyptic menace; he evokes the fearsome mysteries beneath the surface of life and the enticing illusions that its masterminds, whether human or divine, create. In French.—*R.B.* (Film Society of Lincoln Center; Dec. 15.)

Stinking Heaven

The director Nathan Silver's new feature is a period piece, set in New Jersey in 1990—before smartphones and WiFi—and its subject is confinement and isolation. It's about recovering substance abusers who live in an unusual group home, one that's owned and run by Jim (Keith Poulson), a benevolent young man with an authoritarian streak. The residents are required to do chores, help sell homemade fermented tea at a market, and reënact, for Jim's video camera, scenes of their earlier degradations. A new resident, Ann (Hannah Gross), arrives in pursuit of another housemate, Betty (Eléonore Hendricks), and enrages Betty's husband, Kevin (Henri Douvry), with catastrophic results. The enforced amity of sing-alongs and rap sessions devolves into a self-consuming fury reminiscent of "Lord of the Flies." Filming with vintage video equipment, Silver makes the story's agonies reflect the tone of its era; his densely textured images have many planes of action, which he parses with pans and zooms, revealing the volatile bonds of a group on the verge of combustion as well as the howling horrors of unremitting solitude.—*R.B.* (Anthology Film Archives.)

Youth

Most of the new Paolo Sorrentino film is set in a peaceable spa, where Fred Ballinger (Michael Caine), a famous British composer, is taking it easy. He has largely given up work, whereas his old friend Mick Boyle (Harvey Keitel)—a movie director, trailed by a screenwriter and other hangers-on—is still entrapped in the coils of creative endeavor. Also present are Miss Universe (Madalina Diana Ghenea), a discontented film star (Paul Dano), and a lackey from Buckingham Palace who begs Fred to fulfill a royal request. Sorrentino circles these various figures with his usual suavity, compiling a collective meditation on the woes of old age and the frustrations of art. (If his last movie, "The Great Beauty," bowed to "La Dolce Vita," the tribute paid here to "8 ½" is more flagrant still.) The result feels both sumptuous and aimless, as if we were leafing idly through an album of delectable sights—of sounds, too, as when Fred gathers the natural noises of a valley into a tone poem of his own imagining. Three women lend the film fire: Rachel Weisz, as Fred's grievance-driven daughter; Jane Fonda, as an indestructible diva; and Paloma Faith, as a pop star in a funny pastiche of a music video—the energetic hot spot of the film.—*A.L.* (12/7/15) (In limited release.)


Lester Holt
Paris
We go to the story
so you get the story.
NBC NIGHTLY NEWS
WITH LESTER HOLT

Transport Group stages Mary Rodgers's 1959 musical, a cheeky retelling of "The Princess and the Pea."

ROYAL PAIN

Jackie Hoffman and John Epperson face off in "Once Upon a Mattress."

FORTY-SECOND STREET, SATURDAY AFTERNOON: a costume fitting. In one corner of a rehearsal studio, the perpetually grouchy character actress Jackie Hoffman practiced running up and down a staircase in a flowing turquoise dress. In another, John Epperson, best known for his ferocious drag alter ego, Lypsinka, was choosing among bejewelled crowns. "How ironic," Hoffman said, examining her duds. " 'Fiddler,' where they're supposed to look poor, has a budget of probably forty million. We're supposed to look rich, and we have a budget of twelve dollars."

With any luck, Transport Group's revival of "Once Upon a Mattress" (at Abrons Arts Center, through Jan. 3) will tap the same level of drollery. The 1959 Mary Rodgers musical, which retells the story of the princess and the pea, was once a vehicle for Carol Burnett. Now, in an inspired double feat of stunt casting, it will star two of downtown's prickliest divas: Hoffman, late of "On the Town," as Princess Winnifred, the loudmouthed bachelorette (her big number is "Shy"), and Epperson, as the evil Queen Aggravain, who plots her demise.

The whole thing, Epperson explained, was his idea. As a boy, he saw Carol Burnett in the 1964 television version, and later acted in a college production as a character named Sir Studley ("which was very cruel of the director"). He eventually realized that he wanted to play the queen, and in 2013 he and Hoffman performed a staged reading for a benefit, which Mary Rodgers attended. She died the next summer, but not before telling Epperson that she hoped for a full production.

Of her first princess role, Hoffman said, "At first, I was amazed at how ill suited I seemed to it"—she's typically cast as the sourpuss second banana—but she promised "that special brand of Jackie Hoffman misery." She was now in a dainty pair of pajamas. Epperson strutted out in a regal red-velvet gown. Hoffman eyed him and said, "It'll be a fight for focus."

—Michael Schulman

THE THEATRE

OPENINGS AND PREVIEWS

Annie
A holiday engagement of the perennially sunny musical. Martin Charnin, who wrote the lyrics, directs for the nineteenth time. Previews begin Dec. 15. (Kings Theatre, 1027 Flatbush Ave., Brooklyn. 718-856-5464.)

The Color Purple
Jennifer Hudson, Cynthia Erivo, and Danielle Brooks star in a revival of the 2005 musical, based on Alice Walker's Pulitzer Prize-winning novel and directed by John Doyle. In previews. Opens Dec. 10. (Jacobs, 242 W. 45th St. 212-239-6200.)

Fiddler on the Roof
Danny Burstein plays Tevye, the shtetl patriarch, in Bartlett Sher's revival of the 1964 musical, based on the stories of Sholem Aleichem. In previews. (Broadway Theatre, Broadway at 53rd St. 212-239-6200.)

Marjorie Prime
In Jordan Harrison's play, directed by Anne Kauffman and set in the near future, an elderly woman uses artificial intelligence to review her life story. In previews. Opens Dec. 14. (Playwrights Horizons, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Mother Courage and Her Children
Tonya Pinkins plays the indefatigable war profiteer in Brian Kulick's production of the Brecht play, featuring music by Duncan Sheik. In previews. (Classic Stage Company, 136 E. 13th St. 866-811-4111.)

MotherStruck!
Cynthia Nixon directs a solo play by the poet-performer Staceyann Chin, about her decision, as a lesbian and an activist, to become a mother. In previews. Opens Dec. 14. (Lynn Redgrave Theatre, 45 Bleecker St. 866-811-4111.)

A Night of Kyogen
The Mansaku-no-Kai Kyogen Company presents an evening of *kyogen*, a comedic genre that originated in medieval Japan. In Japanese, with English titles. Dec. 10-12. (Japan Society, 333 E. 47th St. 212-715-1258.)

Oh, Hello On (Off) Broadway
The comedians Nick Kroll and John Mulaney revive their characters Gil Faizon and George St. Geegland, two Upper West Siders known for the fictitious prank show "Too Much Tuna." In previews. Opens Dec. 10. (Cherry Lane, 38 Commerce St. 866-811-4111.)

Phalaris's Bull: Solving the Riddle of the Great Big World
The "underground philosopher" Steven Friedman performs this monologue-cum-lecture, in which

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DAMES AT SEA
Helen Hayes

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Studio 54

A VIEW FROM THE BRIDGE
Lyceum

he proposes a way to convert pain into beauty, drawing on a story by Kierkegaard. Previews begin Dec. 12. (Beckett, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

These Paper Bullets!

Billie Joe Armstrong and Rolin Jones wrote this musical adaptation of "Much Ado About Nothing," reset in Beatles-era London and directed by Jackson Gay. In previews. Opens Dec. 15. (Atlantic Theatre Company, 336 W. 20th St. 866-811-4111.)

Who Left This Fork Here

Daniel Fish stages an interdisciplinary work inspired by Chekhov's "Three Sisters," exploring themes of aging, death, and big data. Dec. 9-12. (Baryshnikov Arts Center, 450 W. 37th St. 866-811-4111.)

NOW PLAYING

Fool for Love

Sam Shepard's 1983 play, conscientiously directed by Daniel Aukin, is about the deep impulses that keep people together even when they're apart. Eddie (Sam Rockwell) loves May (Nina Arianda), but he's no good when it comes to love's realities, which include staying put until passion either deepens or withers into something else. To escape Eddie's ambivalence, his need for attention, and his endless bullshit, May has moved to a dingy motel room on the edge of the Mojave Desert. She has just settled into a job as a restaurant cook when Eddie shows up. The dance of love and anger they perform is choreographed; the furious partners know its steps. The only way to nail the doomed couple is to play them the way a jazz master plays a tune, and Arianda and Rockwell enact Shepard's story with lionhearted fearlessness. (Reviewed in our issue of 10/19/15.) (Samuel J. Friedman, 261 W. 47th St. 212-239-6200. Through Dec. 13.)

Gigantic

A musical comedy with a plus-size heart and a muddled message, the Vineyard Theatre's production follows eight tubby teens through a summer at Camp Overton, the "No. 3 weight-loss camp in Southern Pennsylvania!" Despite a feel-good veneer and a timely "Hamilton" parody (a rap ode to the corpulent William Howard Taft), Matthew roi Berger's cheery anthems of empowerment feel out of step with Randy Blair and Tim Drucker's book, which relies on stereotyped characters—the nerd, the slut—and unhelpful cliché. Here, fat kids love candy, cheerleaders are shrews, and a chubster could never be truly popular. Still, it's hard not to applaud the gutsy performers under Scott Schwartz's direction, particularly Ryann Redmond, as the sweetie-pie Taylor, and Max Wilcox, as the rebellious Robert. At least one skinny guy makes an impression, too—Andrew Durand, who glories in his role as a meathead junior counselor. (Acorn, 410 W. 42nd St. 212-239-6200.)

H2O

Life slavishly imitates art in this modern retelling of the Hamlet-Ophelia story, by the playwright pseudonymously known as Jane Martin. After Deborah (Diane Mair), a prissy young actor with peculiar fundamentalist beliefs—God told her to improve the world through Shakespearean acting—interrupts the attempted suicide of Jake (Alex Podulke), a depressive Hollywood bad boy, he casts her as Ophelia opposite him in a Broadway revival of "Hamlet." They're chalk and cheese: she's saving herself for marriage, and won't curse or drink (she's basically got herself to a nunnery); he's erratic, atheistic, and tormented. But there's pent-up attraction galore, which culminates, naturally, in a climactic breakdown during a performance of—you guessed it—the "get thee to a nunnery" scene. Since this premise positively broadcasts its own spoilers, it won't surprise you to learn that things don't end well. (59E59, at 59 E. 59th St. 212-279-4200. Through Dec. 13.)

Henry IV

St. Ann's Warehouse inaugurates its new building with Donmar Warehouse's tough, emotional all-female rendering of Shakespeare's two-part epic of war, honor, and the nature of courage. The director, Phyllida Lloyd, succinctly traces the rise of Prince Hal (Clare Dunne) from prankster party kid to warrior, as he defeats the rebellious Hotspur (Jade Anouka), renounces the hedonistic Falstaff (Sophie Stanton), and earns his father's crown. (Henry is played by a powerful Harriet Walter.) Lloyd's ensemble reimagines the fifteenth-century fighters as prison inmates, clad in sweats, divvying up territory, and occasionally rousted from their Shakespearean fantasies by uniformed guards. This conceit is both poignant and smart. Framing the action with chain-link fences, and illustrating it with candy-colored toys (no metal or glass, per prison regulation), Lloyd reveals the drama of honorable conquest—and the bloody terror it occasions—as so much destructive, meaningless mania. (45 Water St., Brooklyn. 718-254-8779. Through Dec. 13.)

Hir

When we first meet Arnold, a fiftysomething father (played, with beautiful timing, by Daniel Oreskes), he is dressed in a loud, frilly nightgown, his face covered with gobs of makeup, like a third-rate clown's. Arnold hardly knows how or when to move without instructions from his wife, Paige (Kristine Nielsen). These she provides with condescending relish, which the couple's son Isaac (Cameron Scoggins), a marine who hasn't spoken to his family for a year, finds as bewildering as we do. He knows that Arnold had a stroke, but why is Paige feeding him estrogen? Arnold was, to some extent, Isaac's ideal of manhood, and what happens when our ideals are rendered impotent? Taylor Mac's play, sensitively directed by Niegel Smith, is saved from potential proselytizing by Mac's awareness that his arguments have to grow in complexity in order for his characters to grow, and by Nielsen's pained and profound performance. (11/16/15) (Peter Jay Sharp, 416 W. 42nd St. 212-279-4200.)

Invisible Thread

Affecting and uncertain, this musical, by Griffin Matthews (who co-stars) and Matt Gould, is based on Matthews's experiences volunteering in Uganda. The songs set in New York can feel like imitations of "Rent," and several of the Ugandan numbers, accompanied by Sergio Trujillo's crouching choreography, seem like the sort of jingles that "The Book of Mormon" lampoons. Diane Paulus's projection-heavy staging is needlessly kinetic, and the script can't make up its mind as to whether it's about Matthews's journey of self-discovery or the less solipsistic struggles of the African characters. But the live band is dynamic, and the cast is extremely good, particularly Adeola Role, as a woman unseduced by Matthews's do-gooder impulses, and Kristolyn Lloyd and Nicolette Robinson, as a couple of teen-age orphans. In a second-act number, when the writers effectively synthesize pop, rock, gospel, and African rhythms, the show finally sings. (Second Stage, 305 W. 43rd St. 212-246-4422.)

New York Animals

The latest from the Bedlam company, with a book and lyrics by Steven Sater ("Spring Awakening"), is two competing shows in one: an episodic, tragicomic play about the intersecting lives of a (limited) range of lonely Manhattanites, which alternates, and sometimes overlaps, with a revue of new songs by Burt Bacharach. Bacharach wins: a program that consisted solely of these beautifully bittersweet tunes—especially as interpreted by the show's lead singer, the elastic, soulful Jo Lampert—would be a happy night out. As for the play, the five lead performers, playing twenty-one roles among them, are uniformly pleasurable to watch at work, but to what end? The fragments of story that surface between the songs are too fleeting to connect with and too familiar for real laughs, and the music and scenes never quite operate on the same wavelength. (New Ohio, 154 Christopher St. 866-811-4111.)

Lady Leshurr plays her viral hit "Queen's Speech Ep. 4," at Gramercy Theatre.

SOVEREIGN JESTER

An independent British rapper crosses the Atlantic.

LADY LESHURR'S QUAINT, MISCHIEVOUS VOICE is best when it jumps at you unexpectedly: during early hours at El Cortez, in Bushwick; on Alexander Wang's New York Fashion Week runway; in a Samsung ad on Hulu, before "Seinfeld." Her viral single, "Queen's Speech Ep. 4," has been pervasive in recent months. It's the latest in a series of self-shot YouTube videos, released in the past year, that reveal the pint-sized Solihull, England, native to be a nimble lyricist. Caribbean lilts tumble out in droll two-liners slandering girls who take off their heels on rave dance floors and dudes with receding hairlines. Released in August, the track has found an international audience, in part owing to a goofy hook about nasty mouths ("How could you talk my name and you ain't even brushed your teeth?"), quips about Caitlyn Jenner and Fetty Wap, and a minimalist, addictive bounce that distinguishes it from stateside contemporaries. Leshurr's going for laughs, much like Missy Elliott and Monie Love before her, and the jokes are landing: "Queen's Speech Ep. 4" has clocked a healthy amount of U.K. airplay and more than eleven million views on YouTube.

The twenty-six-year-old rapper, born Melesha O'Garro, was swept up in the sounds of London's garage and drum and bass in the early aughts, influences layered on top of the reggae music she'd heard for years, thanks to her Kittsian parents. She started writing seriously at age twelve, inspired by distinctive characters like Eminem and Eazy-E, who drew her toward a quick, colorful flow that sat well on the spiky grime beats bubbling out of London by 2005. She flirted with this scene for years, performing on pirate stations and at local clubs, and her 2011 reworkings of Chris Brown's "Look at Me Now" and Nicki Minaj's "Did It On'em" betrayed a shrewd sense for what U.S. audiences latch onto. Singles like "Lego" helped bolster her profile, but she shunned a deal with Atlantic Records, instead self-releasing a variety of EPs and collaborating with rising London artists.

Leshurr makes her New York City début at Gramercy Theatre on Dec. 12, independent but industry fluent, with a self-starting edge that has no doubt helped prepare her for the swell of attention from across the Atlantic. For years, British rap has reacted to the stylistic and cultural shifts of its American elders, but crossovers like Leshurr suggest that the Manhattan crowd may stand to gain from the Queen's English.

—Matthew Trammell

NIGHT LIFE

ROCK AND POP

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

Beenzino

This South Korean rapper pulls in the prettiest strands of the genre—designer labels, model girlfriends—and his earworm singles drip with confidence. His name is a parody of the *Source Magazine* co-founder (and largely uncelebrated rapper) Benzino; like many figures in Korean pop, Beenzino at once venerates and upends American signifiers. His sound, which can fall anywhere between gummy elevator funk ("How Do I Look") and Rootsian drum work ("Break"), is garnering a global fan base. "I want to be myself, I want to be different, so let me be imperfect," he raps on "Break." Trite, but likely true. Beenzino's five-date U.S. tour ends at this neon-coated West Side club. (Stage 48, 605 W. 48th St. 212-957-1800. Dec. 12.)

Downtown Boys

Firing out of the basements and loft parties of Providence, Rhode Island, this bilingual punk group slugs through a brawny, no-wave show without much thought to decorum, personal safety, or noise-induced hearing loss. The group's brash vocalist, Victoria Ruiz, is committed to left-wing human rights; she's worked for the public defender's office, she sings in both English and Spanish ("to speak to as many people as possible"), and she titled her group's début album "Full Communism." This week, Downtown Boys settle in at this Bushwick art collective. (Silent Barn, 603 Bushwick Ave., Brooklyn. Dec. 11.)

The Get Up Kids

Time has been forgiving to late-nineties emo, an unhip but fertile suburban musical idiom that shifted the focus of eighties hardcore squarely onto the emotional lives of sad, sensitive males. These men, much maligned during their youth, eventually grew up, and today it's not uncommon to find them congregating in packs,

ILLUSTRATION BY KRISTINA COLLANTES

drunkenly belting out minor hits, described accurately in "High Fidelity" as "sad-bastard music." The members of this Missourian quintet were the genre's prime movers, and they celebrate their twentieth anniversary at this Gowanus night spot. Expect throngs of starry-eyed man-children reliving their high-school years. (Bell House, 149 7th St., Brooklyn. 718-643-6510. Dec. 10.)

Parquet Courts
Brooklyn's pied pipers of stoner indie rock have a new mini-EP out, called "Monastic Living." While it hasn't been met with the same frantic praise as the group's previous releases—*Pitchfork* called the effort "a passionate shrug"—it has enough hooks to please a rabid fan base. This week, the band returns from a quick tour through Canada with a stop at the Warsaw, a club inside the Polish National Home, in Greenpoint. (261 Driggs Ave., Brooklyn. 718-387-0505. Dec. 11.)

Vince Staples
Why this young Long Beach rapper didn't save the song "Nate" for his début album, "Summertime '06," is a mystery. Maybe the 2014 single was simply too potent to sit on for a year. Staples brilliantly examines his childhood admiration for his father, a convicted felon who abused drugs: "Knew he was the villain, never been a fan of Superman." Staples can be counted on to lurch stomachs and lump throats with these kinds of inversions: he recently jabbed at detractors online, dryly refusing to claim nineties hip-hop as an influence, despite a clear kinship in sound and slant. This biting humor, if it can be understood as such, comes across just as strongly in his stage show: "Put your hands up if you love real hip-hop!" he recently shouted to an enthusiastic crowd, before the punchline: "Man, that shit corny as fuck." (Music Hall of Williamsburg, 66 N. 6th St., Brooklyn. Dec. 9.)

JAZZ AND STANDARDS

Geri Allen, Terri Lyne Carrington, and Esperanza Spalding
The bassist and vocalist Spalding may have the greatest marquee appeal, but she shares the spotlight in this coöperative ensemble with two dazzling and equally inquisitive players, the pianist Allen and the drummer Carrington. Eclectic and expertly played, their fearless music roams freely, yet never loses its universal touch. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Dec. 15-20.)

Bill Charlap and Renee Rosnes
The striking empathy between these two acclaimed pianists was well exhibited on a 2010 duet album, "Double Portrait," as well as in their work on the recent Tony Bennett and Bill Charlap project, "The Silver Lining: The Songs of Jerome Kern." It may help that they're married. (Jazz Standard, 116 E. 27th St. 212-576-2232. Dec. 15-20.)

Christian McBride Quartet
Last week found McBride fronting a piano trio at this venerable club; for the concluding week of his residency, the ever-astonishing bassist and enterprising bandleader jettisons the keyboard and brings on two gifted horn stylists—the saxophonist **Marcus Strickland** and the trumpeter **Josh Evans**—to fortify a compact quartet. (Village Vanguard, 178 Seventh Ave. S., at 11th St. 212-255-4037. Dec. 8-13.)

David Sanborn
Even jazz purists who can't abide Sanborn's overtly commercial recordings have to admit that the alto saxophonist has a sound that's one in a million: a gutsy, R. & B.-laden wail that can be identified from a single passionately blown note. His funky Electric Band features the keyboardist **Ricky Peterson.** (Blue Note, 131 W. 3rd St. 212-475-8592. Dec. 8-13.)

Wadada Leo Smith and Douglas Ewart
Two esteemed veterans of the longtime AACM musical collective, the trumpeter Smith and the multi-instrumentalist Ewart, along with Ewart's ensemble Quasar, present new work. Noted names among the supporting players include **Amina Claudine Myers, Thurman Barker, Thomas Buckner,** and **Adegoke Steve Colson.** (Roulette, 509 Atlantic Ave., Brooklyn. 917-267-0363. Dec. 10.)

Steve Tyrell
Tyrell's vocal skills are no match for his effortless ability to bathe a room in old-school charm; the gruff-toned singer is determined to show you a good time no matter what it takes. He must be doing something right, as this is his eleventh season at this most prestigious of cabaret night spots. (Café Carlyle, Carlyle Hotel, Madison Ave. at 76th St. 212-744-1600. Dec. 1-Jan. 2.)

Scott Wendholt and Adam Kolker Quartet
A lean and feisty foursome, heard on the 2014 album "Andthem," combines the powerful synergy of the trumpeter Wenholt, the saxophonist Kolker, and the joined-at-the-hip rhythm team of **Victor Lewis,** on drums, and **Ugonna Okegwo,** on bass. (Smalls, 183 W. 10th St. 212-252-5091. Dec. 11-12.)

ABOVE & BEYOND

Animation Nights New York
The New York-based animators Robert Lyons and Yvonne Grzenkowicz curate and host this small screening and networking event for area animators and fans alike. With local beer and wine from the in-house Market Bar on tap, attendees are invited to enjoy an evening of themed animated shorts. The latest installment is the second showcase of "NY Independents," with irreverent clips from New York artists, including surreal, hand-drawn sequences and intricately detailed stop-motion choreography. A crowd will gather at the Fulton Stall Market at South Street Seaport; early arrival is encouraged. (207A Front St. fultonstallmarket.org. Dec. 9.)

AUCTIONS AND ANTIQUES

As the end-of-year lull approaches, the auction houses roll out their most glittering jewels and finest Roman statues—just in time to wrap and put under the tree. A sale of antiquities at **Christie's** (Dec. 9) includes bronze, marble, and silver figures depicting deities of various religions—and a touchingly childlike Etruscan boy warrior—as well as amphorae, steles, and helmets for soldiers unconcerned with peripheral vision. Then, at its jewelry auction (Dec. 10), the house will offer, among other important diamonds, a spectacular Belle Époque sapphire ring, fit for a robber baron's wife. (20 Rockefeller Plaza, at 49th St. 212-636-2000.) • A chunky Art Deco diamond choker by Van Cleef & Arpels, worn by Egypt's Queen Nazli Fouad at her daughter's 1939 wedding, leads the jewelry offering at **Sotheby's** on Dec. 9. This is followed by a sale of classic sports cars held in the house's tenth-floor galleries on Dec. 10, and another, of books and manuscripts, on Dec. 14. The latter includes a most friendly letter from Abraham Lincoln to his first fiancée, Mary Owens, who later called off their engagement. (York Ave. at 72nd St. 212-606-7000.) • **Swann** holds one of its periodic sales devoted to African-American art (Dec. 15), rich in works from the Harlem Renaissance. Leading the way are an abstract composition by Norman Lewis, from the fifties ("Untitled"), and an early work by Romare Bearden ("The Annunciation"). (104 E. 25th St. 212-254-4710.) • A fantastical menagerie of beaked monsters and reptilian creatures by the Victorian pottery house Martin Brothers goes under the gavel at **Phillips,** during a day dedicated to design objects and furnishings (Dec. 15). (450 Park Ave. 212-940-1200.)

READINGS AND TALKS

Glenn Horowitz Bookseller
Maude Schuyler Clay has been photographing friends and family in her native Mississippi Delta for four decades. Her first cousin William Eggleston was a pioneering color photographer in the nineteen-seventies. (Their grandfather, Joseph Albert May, passed the passion down when the two were in their teens.) These deep roots anchor Clay's photography, which is full of symbolism and transparent affection for her subjects, who are embedded in their environments but never inundated by them. The work was relatively unknown until Eggleston shared it with Gerhard Steidl, who immediately signed on to publish a collection. Clay's portraits, shot throughout the eighties and nineties, are gathered in "Mississippi History," along with a forward by the novelist Richard Ford; both will attend this signing. (20 W. 55th St. 212-691-9100. Dec. 9 at 6.)

PHOTOGRAPH BY LAUREN LANCASTER

TABLES FOR TWO

LE VEAU D'OR

129 E. 60th St. (212-838-8133)

IT'S LONG BEEN SAID among rabbinical mystics that only the existence of thirty-six righteous men keeps the wisest one from destroying the earth. One can feel that way about dining out in New York—that the persistence of a few eating places which exist serenely above the storms of foodie fashion are all we have to justify the entire enterprise, though it may be too much to dream of enumerating thirty-six truly righteous restaurants. In the Bloomingdale's neighborhood, the disappearance of the beloved Subway Inn, whose unforgettable neon sign seemed to have gone the way of all flash (only to reappear, miraculously, a few blocks east), makes the persistence of Le Veau d'Or all the more surprising, and, in its own way, mystically comforting.

Le Veau d'Or was, and remains, Manhattan French. Reviews written thirty-five years ago (it opened in 1937 and has changed hands only a few times since) confirm its unwavering nature: those same banquettes, the same Paris street signs, and a bar up front where a few people murmur and drink vermouth. Men in sweaters and women in longish skirts make up the clientele these days, and, if they seem not exactly meatpacking-district chic, they still lean into each other happily on a cold night, obviously in the presence of a treat.

The menu is mostly unchanged, too—but does this make it timeless or merely dated? The best way to test any cuisine is to eat it in the company of a fastidious sixteen-year-old girl on a perpetual diet. There will be no polite *mmms*—each mouthful means too much to fake it. With one such teen-ager in hand, we test first the classic starters, asparagus with vinaigrette and a simple green salad. The vinaigrette, distinctly mustardy yet custardy, too, is good enough to induce a sigh in memory of Paris brasseries. You order duck breast with cherry sauce—because who sees *that* anymore?—and it is delicious, a sliced grilled breast, with the cherry sauce just a little sour. (Are cherries remotely in season? That is a question for another kind of place, and another time closer to this one.) The chicken *en cocotte* is tasty: if its sauce is a little dull, the unpretentious gratin of potatoes alongside is just what it ought to be, cheesy-sharp but creamy-rich.

You order dessert in threes, and here the sixteen-year-old cannot deny herself: the *îles flottantes* with crunchy burnt caramel, meringue with coffee ice cream, and a hot apple tart. ("Super good," she says, between mouthfuls.) Add a half bottle of Beaujolais for the adults, and if that and an espresso and Calvados cannot make you happy, nothing will. You leave and hope that the place continues as is, justifying the ways of a Manhattan fantasy of France to future generations of sad and hungry shoppers.

—Adam Gopnik

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ILLUSTRATION BY ADRIAN FORROW

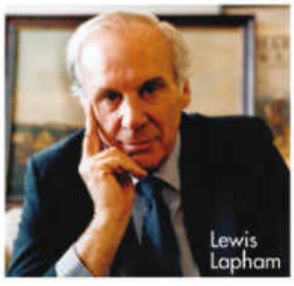
FOOD & DRINK

BAR TAB MR. FONG'S

40 Market St. (646-964-4540)

Under the Manhattan Bridge, a few feet from the jumble of cabbage crates and rodent-friendly remnants of Nissun wholesale seafood, there is a comely little alcove conspicuously lacking Chinese signage. As trim and purposefully attired as its cooler-than-thou patrons, this five-month-old bar has no door policy, but its congregation of asparagus-stalk-thin bodies slung with vintage Chanel ferrets out the interlopers just fine. On a recent Friday night, a statuesque bartender named Michaelangelo, with a topknot and a walrus moustache, gyrated to Althea & Donna's "Uptown Top Ranking" while a hollow-cheeked woman with a frosty bob posed for a selfie, sucking the lip of a man who had just downed a Popsicle-hued Tequila Zombie in one smooth arc. "It's either my second or fourth," he said, of the cocktail infused with Thai chili and Szechuan peppercorn. Two newcomers picked at some pickled daikon (three dollars a saucer) while attempting to order a Vodka Tonic (Chinese-celery vodka, lime juice) and a Salty Plum Old-Fashioned (salty-plum bourbon, bitters). The drinks, when they arrived, were simple, supple, and unconventional, prompting one to ask if they were the proprietary recipes of the titular Mr. Fong. Aisa, another barkeep (and one of the seven owners), shook his head. "He was our broker!" Has Mr. Fong visited Mr. Fong's? "He has," Aisa said. "But the good man isn't a drinker."

—Jiayang Fan



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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
GUNS AND TERROR

Syed Rizwan Farook walked out of a conference room at the Inland Regional Center, in San Bernardino, twice last Wednesday. His first departure was abrupt but not extraordinary; his colleagues at the county Department of Public Health, who had recently thrown a baby shower for him, continued to sit through a series of morning meetings, with the promise of holiday snacks ahead. Farook returned, with his wife, Tashfeen Malik, and by the time they left they had shot thirty-five people, fourteen of whom died. In the frenzy, the fire alarm went off and the sprinkler system was activated, so that when the police arrived it was as if they'd happened upon the aftermath of a storm. On a table, they found three pipe bombs, rigged to a bright-yellow remote-control toy car.

The couple had driven away in an S.U.V. stocked with two AR-15-style semiautomatic assault rifles, two 9-mm. semiautomatic handguns, and fourteen hundred rounds of ammunition for the rifles and two hundred for the handguns. After Farook and Malik were killed, in a firefight in which two officers were wounded, the police searched the house where they lived with their six-month-old daughter and found about five thousand rounds of ammunition, another rifle, and twelve pipe bombs. The authorities said that all the guns, manufactured by Smith & Wesson, Llama, and DPMS, were bought legally, either by Farook or by a friend.

The Inland Regional Center provides services to people with developmental disabilities, and at first there was shock at the idea that the center's clients might have been a target. Then the news that civil servants had been killed made the situation seem, perversely, almost normal; some people hate the government, and in America hatred of any sort is never far from gun violence. Five days earlier, Robert Dear had walked into a Planned Parenthood health center in Colorado Springs, similarly armed with multiple weapons, and killed three people. By one estimate, there has been more than one mass shooting—defined as an incident in which at least four people are shot—for every day of this year. According to the Brady Campaign, seven children are killed by guns each day. After the Newtown school shooting, in 2012, there was a push to get a pair of modest bills through Congress—a ban on some assault weapons, the closing of background-check loopholes—but it failed. Gun laws are, on the whole, more lax now than they were on the day the twenty children and eight adults were shot dead. There are as many guns in private hands in America as there are people. The barriers to atrocity are low.

By Friday, law-enforcement officials had found a Facebook post that they attributed to Malik, pledging loyalty to ISIS. In a political culture less distorted by Second Amendment absolutism, this might have been a turning point for Republican lawmakers: Why not at least make it more difficult for potential terrorists to get guns? After the shooting, President Obama said that although there would always be people who wanted to cause harm, there were basic steps that might make it "a little harder for them to do it, because right now it's just too easy." In an interview with CBS, he noted that a person on the no-fly list "could go into a store right now in the United States and buy a firearm and there's nothing that we can do to stop them"; on Thursday, a hastily prepared measure to address that died in the Senate.

Mostly, the Republican Presidential candidates seemed to see the discussion of terrorism as a route away from the topic of guns. "The first impulse I would have, rather than talking about gun control, is to make sure that we protect the homeland—and last week the metadata program was ended," Jeb Bush said on Fox News, referring to new, minor limits on the N.S.A.'s access to telephone

ILLUSTRATIONS BY TOM BACHTELL

records. The same day, at a candidates' forum held by the Republican Jewish Coalition, Ted Cruz said that the San Bernardino shooting, coming in the wake of the terror attack in Paris, "underscores that we are at a time of war." As Cruz saw it, the problem was the passivity of the President, an "unmitigated socialist who won't stand up and defend the United States of America," and who "operates as an apologist for radical Islamic terrorists." Donald Trump complained at the R.J.C. forum that Obama wouldn't mention "radical Islamic terrorism," adding, "He refuses to say it, there's something going on with him that *we don't know about*."

The pro-gun side swerves between utter complacency about gun violence and a call for war on all fronts against terror. ("As if somehow terrorists care about what our gun laws are," Marco Rubio said on Friday.) But something other than a lapse in logic is at work here. Warnings about terror and warnings about the government taking away people's guns both play to a certain anxiety. Trump, the Republican front-runner, tells audiences that they have been tricked and left vulnerable, both economically and at moments when, he says, as in Paris last month, "nobody had guns but the bad guys." Ben Carson has suggested that the Holocaust could have been prevented if it had been easier to get a gun in Berlin. Cruz has said that unfettered gun ownership isn't just for hunting or home protection; it is "the ultimate check against governmental tyranny."

To the extent that the Republican candidates recognize that the common denominator of mass shootings is guns, their answer is more guns—in the hands of everyone from preachers to Paris bartenders—and more fear, sown just as carelessly. Neither is a wise approach to addressing the real threat of terrorist attacks, whether homegrown or directed from abroad. Given the demagoguery that has characterized the G.O.P. campaign, with talk of religious databases, there are reasons for concern that, in the wake of San Bernardino, American Muslim communities will be subjected to bigotry and harassment. Already, during the past several months, there has been a spike in violence directed at mosques. This is terror, too.

What stops mass shootings from seeming routine is, ultimately, the particular stories of the people who died. Aurora Godoy and her husband eloped in 2012; she leaves behind a two-year-old son. Tin Nguyen was planning her wedding and the life she and her fiancé would share. Larry Daniel Kaufman's boyfriend dropped him off at his job at the I.R.C.'s coffee shop that morning. Michael Wetzel, a father of six, coached a soccer team of five-year-old girls that, according to the Los Angeles *Times*, "had a princess theme." The pipe bombs, which Farook and Malik appear to have assembled themselves, thankfully did not detonate, but the guns functioned just as they were built to.

—Amy Davidson

THE BOARDS
COLD READ

Ever since Winter Miller was a teenager, she has cherished an unusual alternative-career fantasy. "If I could choose a different profession, it would be to be an abortion provider," she said the other day. "I would really, truly love to offer that service to people." Miller, who is forty-two, did not follow a medical path. Instead, she became a playwright; the Public Theatre produced Miller's play "In Darfur," which was set in a refugee camp. Lately, she has been developing "Spare Rib," a non-Aristotelian, nonlinear, quasi-comic drama about abortion. Last month, Ellen McLaughlin, the actor and writer, who first encountered Miller's work while judging submissions for a Shakespeare's Sister Fellowship, enlisted Kathleen Chalfant, the actor, to host a reading at her house in Brooklyn Heights. Eight Broadway and Off Broadway professionals gathered in Chalfant's front parlor to bring the play to life.

"I did have a nightmare about this, in which everyone was naked except me," Miller told the guests. She was dressed in navy-blue pants and a navy-blue shirt, and has a shock of platinum hair.

"Why is that a nightmare?" Kathryn Grody, the writer and actor, asked silkily.

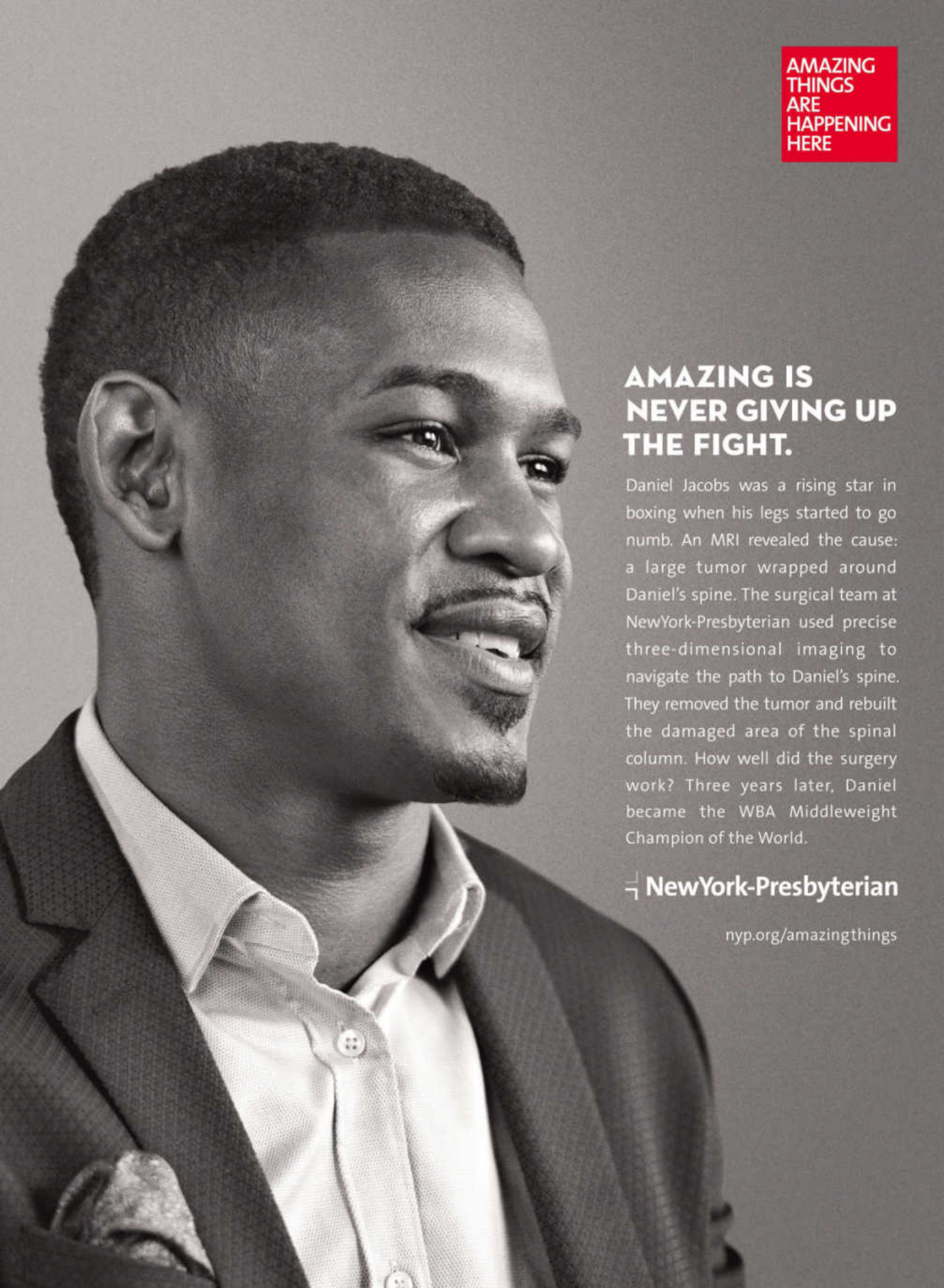
"I don't know—it wasn't," Miller said. "But here you all are, in your clothes!"

"So far," Nadia Bowers, the actor, purred.

Among the readers: Kellie Overbey, currently appearing in "Dada Woof Papa Hot," at Lincoln Center, who was wearing sparkly cat's-eye glasses; Dael Orlandersmith, the Pulitzer Prize nominee and actor, perched on a kitchen stool; Eisa Davis, another Pulitzer nominee—different year—and performer, sinking into an armchair. "I thought this was an intervention for Winter," Samantha Bee, the comedian and writer, who was there to watch, joked. One Corky Miller introduced herself as Miller's mother. "Thank you!" someone shouted. "It was *nothing*," Miller senior said. "Roe v. Wade! Roe v. Wade!" Miller chanted. Her mother took her on marches from an early age.

"This play—if you want to laugh, laugh," Miller said. "And if you feel grossed out, be grossed out. Be just as you are." The reading began—a kind of Dadaist consciousness-raising mashup. There was laughter when Overbey delivered a monologue in the voice of a bossy unborn fetus: "I want to speak freely, but I want you to shut the fuck up when you don't say what I want you to say. I have rights. My rights are God-given. Everything I do is my right. It's my right not to leave this womb. I can stay here as long as I want: eminent domain." Activities of the Jane Collective, the feminist underground-abortion service of the late sixties and early seventies, were dramatized, in an overheard phone conversation—"Is it safe?" "Safer than childbirth"—and in a toe-curling illegal D. and C., conducted in a hotel room.

Accents slid around a bit—a hazard of the cold read. "Oh, my God, she's German now!" said Ellen McLaughlin, who was taking the part of Mme. Restell, a nineteenth-century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abortionist who occupied a mansion on Fifth Avenue. "It's an accent emergency in here!" Chalfant said. There was a transcultural, trans-temporal encounter, in which a quest to hunt down Eric Robert Rudolph, the anti-abortion terrorist, was strategized by the Byzantine Empress Theodora and Kali, the Hindu deity, played by Eisa Davis. "I'm very skilled in creation and destruction," Davis said, mildly. "I don't want anyone giving me shit, so I wear this necklace of men's heads I bit off and strung on a rope."

Five days later, Robert Lewis Dear, Jr., went on a rampage with an assault rifle at a Planned Parenthood center in Colorado Springs, killing three people and wounding nine. When Miller heard the news, she was outraged but not surprised. "If we don't talk about abortion—if we don't continue to talk about abortion, and how many people have had abortions, and how important it is that they remain legal and accessible—then we continue to allow the space for these inhumane events," she said by phone, a few days later. Writing her play was part of that effort. "In researching this, I went and watched abortions," she went on. "Most people don't get to see that, though they might *have* one." Having been inside abortion clinics like the one that was attacked, she was equipped to take her audience there, too. "They get to see it that way—to be in the discomfort of it, or the familiarity of it," she said. "I think that art transforms. And you can't say 'I didn't know' if you know."

—Rebecca Mead

THE PICTURES

BIG CHILL

The climate in Paris on November 27th was bleak. In the courtyard of Les Invalides, under skies of glacial gray, President François Hollande led a service of commemoration for those who had died in the terrorist attacks two weeks before.

The chill, befitting the mood, refused to lift. In midafternoon, when Charlotte Rampling arrived at Le Rostand, a café beside the Jardin du Luxembourg, she was draped in many layers. Born in England, she is a longtime resident of Paris, and one of those rare performers who, like Jane Birkin and her daughter Charlotte Gainsbourg, can slip with frictionless ease from English to French. "There really are things about the two languages that do not mix. And if *they* don't, it means that the people themselves don't," she said. "We're hopelessly at a loss among ourselves." At Le Rostand, named after the author of "Cyrano de Bergerac," she drank Earl Grey tea.

Her new film, "45 Years," is what she calls "a homecoming"; it's set in the mists and flatlands of Norfolk, on the eastern bulge of England. She plays Kate, who has been the compliant wife of Geoff (Tom Courtenay) for decades. That explains the grim milestone of the title, and also the party that is thrown, toward the end of the movie, in honor of their anniversary. By now, the hollowness of the marriage has been exposed, and the horror is inscribed in Kate's expression. Even as Geoff makes a kindly speech, and as they dance together, to "Smoke Gets in Your Eyes," it is Rampling's face on which the camera dwells. No smoke, no fire. She is made of ice.

"I had no idea what I was going to do in that scene, right up to when I was doing it," Rampling said. "From when we both get up from the table to dance, until right to the end, is one take. We did that about twelve, thirteen times." Out of nowhere, at the café table, she switched into a high, fussing voice, like a hairdresser teasing an errant curl: "Had to get it right!" The rightness is unforgettable. Those few minutes alone make you wonder why Ingmar Bergman never gave her a call. If there is any justice, they should swing an Oscar nomination. "The only way that that scene could work was if it was completely lived, each time," Rampling said. "It couldn't be invented. I think we actually can do that, as actors—which unfortunately goes into real life. You just blank out what you've done; you just *forget;* you just don't *know* about it anymore." Pause. "And then you do it again."

Like many figures in the dramatic arts, Rampling is the product of a restless childhood. Her father was an Army officer, in the Royal Artillery; he represented Great Britain at the Berlin Olympics, in 1936, and won a gold medal in the four-by-four-hundred-metre relay. Young Charlotte was a runner, too, of sorts. "At seven or eight, I ran away from school, and was sent to boarding school, and then I ended up in Fontainebleau, in France, at nine." The family shifted around. "If you have a nomadic life, some adapt, I guess, better than others, but you usually adapt

Charlotte Rampling

to what you have as a kid, don't you?" She sipped her tea. "Perhaps that made us into actors."

She ran into success. At twenty-three, she was cast in Luchino Visconti's "The Damned." Not long ago, she saw it again. "I couldn't believe the *depth* of decadence. It was sweating. Coming out of all the pores." Her co-star was Dirk Bogarde. "Dirk was absolutely my master. Visconti and Dirk. After that, I went my own way. I was a very free spirit," Rampling recalled. "I was quite proud. There's something in my fundamental makeup that hasn't had a *hammer* put on it, from somewhere. We have the hammers put on us, and then we don't do what we really should be doing in life."

Rampling will be seventy next year: a ludicrous notion for anyone under her spell. Unhit by hammers, uncursed by the vanity that glazes most beautiful actors, she knows that time can bless as well as scar. "I started really

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HOTELS

ANI TZENKOVA *EDITOR-IN-CHIEF, TRENDLAND*

reading serious literature only when I was older," she said. "I couldn't handle it when I was younger. I knew I was missing out on something. So I had to go and get a life first, and *then* read it." She has begun to write, too. This year saw a memoir, "Qui Je Suis." The title means "Who I Am," though the work is unavailable, as yet, in her mother tongue. "The problem with the French is that they want to be loved. The English don't give a fuck about being loved."

Rampling finished her tea, bade farewell, and left. A few minutes later, an orange-and-white cat leaped onto her warm chair. Lithe and leisurely, it batted its sleepy eyes, and kept its cool.

—Anthony Lane

INK
ON THE MAT

Several heroes of John Irving's novels are members or aspiring members of the New York Athletic Club, the limestone colossus on Central Park South. They love the club's wrestling program and hate its dress code and sniffy protocols. A character from "In One Person" remarks, "That place is notoriously anti-*everything*. It's anti-*Semitic*, it's anti-*black*. . . . It's an Irish Catholic boys' club."

The protagonist of Irving's fourteenth and latest novel, "Avenue of Mysteries," a non-wrestling, pro-everything Mexican-American novelist named Juan Diego Guerrero, transects the club's gravitational field only briefly. He stops at a hotel on Central Park South, then achieves escape velocity and flies to the Philippines for the remainder of the book. Not so Irving himself, a lifetime N.Y.A.C. member. He greeted a recent visitor to the club in a black gabardine suit that had afforded him entry through the front door, rather than the rear, where casually dressed athletes slink in. "That's also where they bring in the food and take out the garbage," he said, darkly. A banty, broad-shouldered man with a companionable manner, Irving no longer keeps a locker at the N.Y.A.C., but during the eighties he hit the mats nearly every evening, from seven to nine. "One reason I still, at seventy-three, rave about the dress code is that I work all day in a T-shirt and sweatpants. I had to get all dressed up to come here—and then take off all my clothes and get changed to wrestle."

In the club's Tap Room, a Naugahyde shrine to the butter pat and the lemon wedge, Irving ordered a salmon salad. "All those years of wrestling made me, frankly, not very hungry," he said, "because I associate eating too much with gruelling self-punishment." At Phillips Exeter and the University of Pittsburgh, he often wore a rubber suit to braise his hundred-and-forty-five-pound frame. He was a textbook gym rat: "I wasn't the best of athletes, so I had to be tactical and technically proficient. My strategy was to maintain a defensive, hard-to-penetrate stance, be a counterpuncher. I was always disappointed that I wasn't a better wrestler than I was, because I loved it so."

Doesn't his boisterous fiction run counter to that approach? "With both wrestling and writing novels, you have to love the repetition, the drilling, the process of making what isn't natural become second nature," he said. "I benefitted so much from wrestling. Because the period in which novels are published and anyone is talking to you about them is very fleeting compared with how long you live with them." He worked on "Avenue of Mysteries," off and on, for some twenty-five years.

Irving took a bite of his salad and considered the surrounding conviviality. "Oh, this is hard to say," he said. "But I wasn't happy here. In the eighties, I was newly divorced, I was writing 'Cider House,' I was not well behaved in the girlfriend situation, and I remember coming out of here at nine o'clock and feeling pretty adrift." His editor at Random House, Joe Fox, had ordered him to Manhattan. "Joe said, 'Are you crazy? You can't stay in Vermont as a divorced man. The next thing you know, you'll be going out with the cleaning lady.'" He laughed. "And then, of course, after I'd been here awhile, it was Joe who said, 'Jesus, all you do here is go to that damn club. You're a hermit! You're a recluse! You should move away.' So I moved to Sagaponack full time." He pushed his half-eaten dish aside. "I probably could have saved myself a lot of grief if I had stayed in Vermont and found a perfectly wonderful cleaning woman."

After tucking some cash into the chit as an additional tip, he showed off the club's multitudinous workout areas. In the boxing room, he said, "One of my fondest memories was of my friend Jack Kendrick, a boxer who was called the Dancing Ghost. He taught me what to do if I ever got into a fight with a boxer—how not to get hit until I could take the guy down and beat the crap out of him." He tapped a photo of Kendrick on the wall, ruminatively:

John Irving

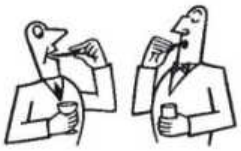
"Maybe I was happier here than I was elsewhere, chasing the Dancing Ghost around. He's dead now."

Did his lessons ever pay off?

"Yes," Irving admitted. "But I don't get in fights anymore, man, I'm an old guy!" He hesitated a moment, then passed the legacy down: "The mantra is, you want to get as close as you can, so he can't extend his arms to punch you." He came unreasonably close. "You may be able to hit me here, but you're not going to hit me very hard." He cupped the visitor's head and grinned, shifting his weight for the throw: "And then you're mine."

—Tad Friend

BROTHERHOOD DEPT.
MAD GOOD



"Try the chicken feet," Eddie Huang, the restaurateur and television personality, said to Dan Auerbach, the rock musician, one recent Saturday afternoon. The two friends were sitting in a Chinatown dim-sum parlor, with three members of Auerbach's new band, the Arcs.

Auerbach did not try the chicken feet. "O.K., fine," Huang said, and proceeded to ply his skills as an expediter, which he learned long ago from his father, also a chef. Expediting involves shouting instructions, in Chinese, toward the back of the restaurant about which dishes to bring and the order in which to bring them.

Auerbach and Huang had come from playing basketball at a playground court in Brooklyn with the band members. Huang was still in white shorts and a T-shirt, but Auerbach had changed into a tweed jacket and tapered trousers; he looked as if he were coming from a riding lesson. The Arcs, all guys in their mid-thirties—three of them attended Friends Seminary together, in Manhattan—filled up the rest of the small circular table, everyone shouting over the din.

Huang and Auerbach are not the likeliest of pals. Huang is extroverted, profane, and not very tall ("I guard much bigger"), with a hip-hop swagger, while Auerbach displays a riverboat gambler's reserve. Their friendship began on St. Bart's, last winter, where Auerbach's other band, the Black Keys, was playing at the Vice Media New Year's Eve party. Huang, whose show "Huang's World" appears on Vice, was there to cook. Huang had just broken up with his fiancée, and Auerbach was in the midst of a divorce.

Huang said, "I was going through some relationship stuff, so was Dan, so we kind of bonded over that."

"I offered to help him cook," Auerbach said.

Huang: "He's mad good at cooking. We made some Hainan chicken, pan-seared pork belly, and some cabbage. That's how we got to know each other."

"But we do everything, man," Auerbach said. "We did lasagna last week. I'm all about making the meat sauce from scratch. I like to use shredded carrot, but Eddie gave me a suggestion—shredded sweet potato. And it turned out really good. You can definitely taste the earthiness." Auerbach paused. "Wow, this is really nerdy."

"Try some of the sticky rice," Huang said.

The two men became so tight that when Auerbach remarried, in September, in his back yard, in Nashville, Huang officiated.

"It was pretty dope," Auerbach said, chewing a tofu spring roll.

But has Huang actually been ordained?

"I think he is. That's what matters, right?"

Shrimp fritters arrived. Talk turned to the Arcs, who make an excellent entourage of more carefree bros for Auerbach, who is thirty-six, to hang out with on the road.

"We've been making music for six-plus years," Auerbach explained. "We always got together, but we never had a name. But now that it's an official thing, it's taken on a new life. And now we got the Mariachi Flor de Toloache with us"—a seven-piece all-woman troupe—"and they're such good musicians, we're just at the tip of the iceberg with what we can do with them." The entire ensemble plays Terminal 5 this week.

Huang has an open invitation to join the band onstage. "I used to play piano," he said. "My mom would stand next to me at the piano, and if my wrists weren't arced right she would hit me with a ruler."

Auerbach said, "He's going to take piano with someone who specializes in traumatized piano players."

Huang noted that he had written about his romantic ups and downs in his new memoir, a follow-up to his first one, "Fresh Off the Boat." The new book is tentatively titled "Double Cup Love."

"I was in love with an Italian girl from Scranton," he said. "I took her back to mainland China. She loved China, but she hated L.A."—where they were living. "I think I actually became Alvy Singer when I was going out with her," he said, referring to Woody Allen's character in "Annie Hall." "I even suggested she take adult-education classes."

The relationship is on hiatus.

—John Seabrook

THE POLITICAL SCENE

A HOUSE DIVIDED

How a radical group of Republicans pushed Congress to the right.

BY RYAN LIZZA

On July 28th, Mark Meadows, a Republican representative from North Carolina, walked to the well of the House and filed a motion to vacate the chair. It's an obscure parliamentary tool that allows any member of the House to trigger a vote to oust the Speaker. The only other time it had been used was in 1910, during a rebellion by forty-two Progressive Republicans, the Party radicals of the day, against their Speaker, Joseph Gurney Cannon, who was accused of running the House like a tyrant.

Meadows is one of the more active members of the House Freedom Caucus, an invitation-only group of about forty right-wing conservatives that formed at the beginning of this year. Since 2010, when the Party won back the chamber, the House has been engaged in a series of clashes over taxes and spending. Two years ago, House Republicans brought about a government shutdown over the Affordable Care Act and nearly caused the United States to default on its debt. This week, as Congress raced to meet a December 11th deadline to pass the annual legislation that funds the government, the members of the Freedom Caucus had new demands: they wanted to cut funding for Planned Parenthood and restrict Syrian refugees from entering the United States, policies that, if attached to the spending bills, could face a veto from Obama and, potentially, lead to another government shutdown.

To the general public, these fights have played out as a battle between President Obama and Republicans in Congress. But the more critical divide is within the Republican Party, as House Speaker John Boehner discovered. Boehner, who is from Ohio, was elected to Congress in 1990 and rose to the Speakership in 2010. His tenure was marked by an increasingly futile effort to control a group of conservatives that Devin Nunes, a Republican from California and an ally of Boehner's, once described as "lemmings with suicide vests." In 2013, to the bafflement of some colleagues, Boehner supported the shutdown, in the hope that the public backlash would expose the group as hopelessly radical. It didn't work. The group continued to defy Boehner. He tried to regain control as Speaker by marginalizing its members, and they decided that he must be forced out.

Meadows, who was elected in 2012, spent months weighing whether to launch the attack. "It was probably one of the most difficult things I've ever done," he told me recently. "It was a lonely period of time here on Capitol Hill. Even my closest friends didn't necessarily think it was the right move."

The decisive moment came on June 4th, when Meadows and his wife were being given a private tour of the Library of Congress. In the South Exhibition Gallery of the Thomas Jefferson Building, below stained-glass ceilings etched with the names of the fifty-six signers of the Declaration of Independence, the guide showed them one of the first printed copies of the Declaration. Meadows was surprised to see, at the bottom of the document, only the name of John Hancock, in large block type. The guide explained that about two hundred copies of that version, known as the Dunlap Broadside, were printed on July 4, 1776, and one of them was sent off to King George. It was only several weeks later, in early August, that Hancock's fellow-revolutionaries convened to sign the document.

"He was committing treason," Meadows said. "When I heard that, it hit me profoundly that this motion to vacate could have only one signature. I wrestled with it for weeks."

Meadows was feeling pressure from

One of the working titles for the group was the Reasonable Nutjob Caucus.

ILLUSTRATION BY MATT CHASE

his constituents, who were angry that the G.O.P. leadership kept losing to Obama. "I got an e-mail from a gentleman back home," Meadows told me. "He said, 'I've worked hard and I've given money and yet nothing is happening.' And this was from a country-club Republican, not a Tea Party activist. That had a real impact."

On the morning of July 28th, Meadows's fifty-sixth birthday, he got a voice mail from his son, Blake, encouraging him to go forward with the anti-Boehner plot. Blake read some lines from a famous Teddy Roosevelt speech. "It is not the critic who counts," Roosevelt said. "The credit belongs to the man who is actually in the arena, whose face is marred by dust and sweat and blood," and who, "at the worst, if he fails, at least fails while daring greatly." Listening to the message brought tears to Meadows's eyes. "I still keep it on my phone," he told me.

Because there had been only one previous motion to vacate the chair, Meadows had to consult with a parliamentarian. His motion echoed the style and language of the Declaration's "long train of abuses." At about 5 P.M., during a series of votes on unrelated legislation, he waded through the crowded House floor, handed a copy of the resolution to the House clerk, and signed his name.

The resolution declared that Boehner "endeavored to consolidate power and centralize decision-making, bypassing the majority of the 435 Members of Congress and the people they represent." Boehner had "caused the power of Congress to atrophy, thereby making Congress subservient to the Executive and Judicial branches," and he "uses the power of the office to punish Members." It provided details about several rules and parliamentary maneuvers that Boehner had allegedly used to control the chamber, and it ended, "Now, therefore, be it Resolved, That the office of Speaker of the House of Representatives is hereby declared to be vacant."

The news broke about twenty minutes later, and the subject of conversation on the House floor quickly changed from the bill under debate to Meadows's effort to overthrow Boehner. "Washington, D.C., had stopped listening," Meadows told me. "It's part of why we're seeing the non-conventional candidates of both parties doing better than a number of us would have anticipated." His motion was an "act of desperation," he told me, because he "saw the power of the House of Representatives disappearing."

The next day, Boehner, asked for his reaction, responded, "You've got a member here and a member there who are off the reservation. No big deal."

Boehner's troubles and the rise of the Freedom Caucus are the product of resentments and expectations that the G.O.P. leadership has struggled for years to either address or dismiss. In 2009 and 2010, Democrats, who then controlled both the House and the Senate, pushed through the most aggressive domestic agenda since the Great Society. In response, during the 2010 midterm elections Republicans promised to overturn Obama's entire agenda—the Affordable Care Act, financial regulation, stimulus spending, climate-change regulations—and dramatically cut government. Just before the election, the three House Republican leaders, Boehner, Eric Cantor, and Kevin McCarthy, promoted a manifesto, called "A Pledge to America," that, among other things, promised to cut a hundred billion dollars from the budget and return spending to pre-Obama levels. The Republicans won sixty-three seats, taking control of the House, and expanded their ranks in the Senate. In November, 2010, House Republicans unanimously elected Boehner Speaker.

Jeff Duncan, a husky forty-nine-year-old former real-estate executive and auctioneer from South Carolina who was first elected in 2010, recently reread the "Pledge." Sitting in his office in early November, he handed me a marked-up copy and shook his head. "We came up short in so many ways," he said.

The Republicans' first budget cut only thirty-eight billion dollars. "That was the first violation of the pledge and those ideals we ran on," Duncan said. "We also said that we would repeal Obamacare and we'd use every tool at our disposal, not just feel-good votes. And we didn't. We said we would cut spending in a way that protected veterans, seniors, and the military. And the spending cuts that we got, known as the sequester, didn't do that. They adversely affected the military, they adversely affected seniors and veterans." They promised to stop borrowing money and failed, he said. Instead they kept losing to Obama, who was easily reëlected in 2012.

In January of 2013, when Boehner was reëlected as Speaker, a dozen Republicans withheld their votes. In August, Meadows sent a letter to Boehner recommending that he offer Obama a trade, which read more like a threat: if the President agreed to defund the Affordable Care Act, House Republicans would continue to fund the government.

The idea had little currency inside the House, but it found an eager audience among activists and conservative media outlets. Nunes, who is the chairman of the House Committee on Intelligence, told me that the biggest change he's seen since he arrived in Congress, in 2002, is the rise of online media outlets and for-profit groups that spread what he views as bad, sometimes false information, which House members then feel obliged to address. The change has transformed Nunes from one of the most conservative members of Congress to one of the biggest critics of the Freedom Caucus and its tactics.

"I used to spend ninety per cent of my constituent response time on people who call, e-mail, or send a letter, such as, 'I really like this bill, H.R. 123,' and they really believe in it because they heard about it through one of the groups that they belong to, but their view was based on actual legislation," Nunes said. "Ten per cent were about 'Chemtrails from airplanes are poisoning me' to every other conspiracy theory that's out there. And that has essentially flipped on its head." The overwhelming majority of his constituent mail is now about the far-out ideas, and only a small portion is "based on something that is mostly true." He added, "It's dramatically changed politics and politicians, and what they're doing."

Nunes first heard about the shutdown strategy in 2013 from a caller on a talk-radio show back home in the late summer. "I said, 'I don't know where you're hearing this from, but it doesn't work,' " he told me. Then the idea went viral. "By the time we got back here in September, you had over half the members of our caucus who really believed we could shut

the government down and ultimately Obama would repeal Obamacare."

Boehner could have brought a clean version of the funding legislation to the House floor; this could have kept the government open, but it would have passed only with the help of Democratic votes. Instead, he adopted the Meadows strategy, allowing the funding for the federal government to lapse as a demonstration against Obamacare. Tom Cole, a Republican congressman from Oklahoma and a close ally of Boehner's, was baffled. Cole has a Ph.D. in British history and has worked as a political consultant and senior official at several Republican Party organizations. A week into the sixteen-day government shutdown of October, 2013, he was having dinner with Boehner and a few other members. Republicans were universally blamed for the shutdown; cable news was filled with images of shuttered parks and federal landmarks, and the White House, as Cole, Nunes, and others had predicted, refused any demands to negotiate.

"Why in the world are we letting the guys that wouldn't vote for you effectively dictate strategy for the conference?" Cole asked Boehner. (Boehner declined to comment for this story.)

According to Cole, Boehner responded, "I've tried to teach them over and over and over again that you've got to be united, and there's a limit to what we can do, but this is a fight they wanted. Let them have the fight. Then maybe they'll learn their lesson."

The public face and strategist for the Freedom Caucus is Raúl Labrador, from Idaho, who was elected in the wave of 2010 and revels in the mischief-making that has characterized the House since then. In early October, we talked in his office, which was decorated with Idaho-potato merchandise. Labrador noted that the Idaho Potato Commission, a state agency established in 1937, had successfully turned a local product into a global brand. "It's a marketing thing," he said. "It's been amazing."

He insisted that the strategy behind the government shutdown was sound, but that its subtlety was lost when Senator Ted Cruz, who positioned himself as an ally of the House rebels, seized the credit for it. "Ted Cruz was out there saying, 'Defund Obamacare or we'll shut down the government,'" Labrador, who has endorsed Rand Paul for President in 2016, told me. "Our position was more nuanced," he added, insisting that he and his fellow hard-liners were willing to settle for a one-year delay of Obamacare.

He accused Boehner of adopting Cruz's more extreme rhetoric as a way of insuring the strategy's failure and embarrassing the right-wingers in the House. "In the meantime, he was negotiating"—with Obama—"behind closed doors for his position," he said. "Went ahead with the shutdown, and then went on national TV and said, 'Well, you know, I did what the conservatives in my caucus wanted. And those crazies caused me to shut down the government.' That was never our position."

Unlike many Republicans, Labrador did not see the shutdown as a permanent stain on the Party. He grabbed one of two large poster-board polling charts leaning against his desk; it was titled "Before/After 2013 Shutdown" and showed the Republican Party's approval ratings quickly recovering. "Within a couple of months, people forgot what happened," he said. "So our favorables went back up, and our unfavorables went back down." Boehner's lesson was meant to make the rebellious members listen; instead, they learned that they didn't need to.

Labrador then pointed to another chart, which showed that the G.O.P.'s favorable ratings this year dropped from forty-one per cent, in January, to thirty-two per cent, in July. "This is what happens when we do nothing," he said. "This is the new G.O.P. majority in 2015, when we stand for nothing." The problem, in his view, was that the Party was "governing," he said, adding air quotes to the word. "If people just want to 'govern,' which means bringing more government, they're always going to choose the Democrat."

The innovation that Labrador and his colleagues brought to the Republican conference was a willingness to use tactics that Boehner and his allies saw as beyond the pale. "We don't want a shutdown, we don't want a default on the debt, but when the other side knows that you're unwilling to do it you will always lose," Labrador said. In his view, Boehner dangerously misunderstood Obama and had an outdated view of political combat in Washington. "You have somebody in the White House who plays hardball," Labrador said. "He wants to fundamentally change America. And when you have

"Your entire family has the flu, and they won't be coming for Christmas!"

#haveKINDLEwillTRAVEL

@FURSTY, OLDEN | Tucked away in the Norwegian fjords, I spent the cold and quiet mornings by the water reading *The Martian* on my Kindle Paperwhite. The otherworldly landscape made each page feel as if I were on another planet.

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a guy whose only job is to 'govern,' and doesn't realize that the other guy is trying to fundamentally change America, you just don't have an even match."

Cole believes that Labrador and his faction have wildly unrealistic ideas about what can be accomplished in a divided government. "A lot of Boehner's critics frankly know that, and yet they still demanded that he achieve the impossible," he said. "You're not going to repeal Obamacare while a guy named Obama is President of the United States. I mean, for God's sake, I don't know what more he could do."

Cole insisted that, given the obstacles, Boehner's record since 2011 was impressive. The budget deals he negotiated with Obama reduced the deficit from $1.4 trillion in 2009 to $439 billion and achieved some entitlement reform. Boehner made most of the Bush-era tax cuts permanent; he banned earmarks, pet projects that lawmakers can insert into laws, and which were badly abused the last time Republicans were in power. Boehner also helped create the largest Republican majority since 1928.

"The tragedy is, a lot of people wanted and demanded more than he could ever deliver," Cole said. "Fast-forward to 2015, you got exactly the same people recommending exactly the same strategy, which would have exactly the same results. I'm not saying John Boehner was a bad teacher. I think he was an excellent teacher. I just don't think he had the brightest students in the world."

In mid-January, Republicans from both houses gathered in Hershey, Pennsylvania, for a retreat. Boehner now presided over a formidable majority; two months earlier, in the midterm elections, the G.O.P. expanded its control of the House by thirteen seats and captured the Senate by winning nine seats there. But Labrador and his allies saw the victory as a vindication of their approach. In Hershey, while the leadership met to plot its strategy for the new Congress, Labrador and eight colleagues met in secret to plan their own agenda. "That was the first time we got together and decided we were a group, and not just a bunch of pissed-off guys," Mick Mulvaney, a congressman from South Carolina who was a founding member of the Freedom Caucus, told me.

Despite the majority, Boehner's grip on the chamber was weakening. Ninety-eight per cent of House incumbents win reëlection, but, in June of 2014, Boehner's deputy, Eric Cantor, of Virginia, was defeated in a primary by David Brat, a fifty-one-year-old college professor whose candidacy was championed by conservative talk radio. Brat ran against Cantor's ties to Wall Street and his alleged sympathies for immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship for many undocumented immigrants. Boehner had been pondering retirement, but now his most likely successor had been defeated. The day after Cantor's defeat, Boehner called Paul Ryan, a congressman from Wisconsin and the Party's 2012 Vice-Presidential nominee, and pleaded with him to replace Cantor as Majority Leader. When Ryan declined, Boehner decided to stay on as Speaker. "He was looking to get out, and Eric screwed it up," a former top aide to Boehner told me.

Brat aligned himself with Labrador, Meadows, Mulvaney, and their allies. "Voters look at us and say, 'O.K., we'll give you the House. Get it right, start fighting,' " Brat told me recently in his office, which is decorated with pictures of the Founders, Greek philosophers, and Biblical figures. "We didn't fight. Republicans said, 'Well, if you give us the Senate, then we're going to fight like crazy against executive overreach and all of this.' We haven't fought. Boehner said we were going to fight 'tooth and nail' against amnesty. Didn't lift a finger." The "biggest factor" in his victory over Cantor, he said, was expressed by a recent poll by Fox News that found that sixty per cent of Republican primary voters "feel betrayed" by Republican politicians.

After the election, the rebels began fighting with Boehner for control of the machinery of the House. The first front was the Republican Study Committee, a sort of internal think tank that tries to push legislation to the right. In recent years, it had grown to a hundred and seventy-five members, who saw it as a seal of approval for conservative lawmakers. Labrador and his allies had a plan: if one of them was elected chairman of the R.S.C., the committee could be transformed from a sleepy policy-writing collective into an instrument for advancing their more confrontational tactics. Labrador's faction backed Mulvaney, who had voted against Boehner in 2013 and helped instigate the shutdown, for the chair, but the plan was thwarted after Boehner's allies filled the committee with supporters. In mid-November, Mulvaney was handily defeated

LITTLE RACKET

Sunday evening, evening gray. All day the storm did not quite storm. Clouds closed in, sulked, spat. We put off swimming. Took in the chairs. Finally (about seven) a rumbling high up. A wind went round the trees tossing each once and releasing arbitrary rivulets of cool air downward, this wind which came apart, the parts swaying out, descending, bumping around the yard awhile not quite on the count then a single chord ran drenched across the roof, the porch and stopped. We all breathed. Maybe that's it, maybe it's over, the weatherman is often wrong these days, we can still go swimming (roll call? glimpse of sun?) when all at once the sluices opened, broke a knot and smashed the sky to bits, which fell and keep falling even now as dark comes on and fabled night is managing its manes and the birds, I can hear from their little racket, the birds are burning up and down like holy fools somewhere inside it—far in where they keep the victim, smeared, stinking, hence the pageantry, hence the pitchy cries, *don't keep saying you don't hear it too.*

—*Anne Carson*

by the leadership's preferred candidate, Bill Flores, a former oil-and-gas executive from Texas.

"The leadership overreached," Mulvaney told me. "It took away the one relief valve that conservatives have had for a long time. If you were conservative, at least you know you could go into the R.S.C. and vent." After the vote, Labrador remarked to the defeated Mulvaney that the conservatives needed to start their own group.

On January 6, 2015, Boehner was reëlected as Speaker, but twenty-five Republicans refused to support him, thirteen more than in 2013. He began to clamp down. "Voting against the Speaker flips a switch," Brat said. "You don't get on any good committees, you don't get on the money committees, you don't get money. The leadership shuts you off from PAC funding, and so on." Jeff Duncan, of South Carolina, had voted against Boehner and he immediately felt the backlash. He was a member of the leadership's whip team, charged with rounding up votes on crucial pieces of legislation. During a reception in Hershey, it became clear that he was no longer welcome on the whip team. "I kind of felt the stares from other members and all that," he told me. He resigned from the team the next day, and eventually joined the Freedom Caucus.

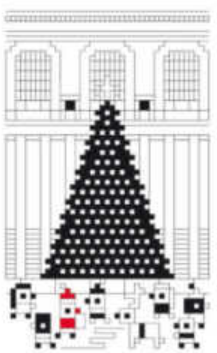
In Hershey, the new caucus struggled over a name for themselves. Mulvaney had been part of a similar group when he was in the South Carolina state senate. It was called the William Wallace Caucus, after the character from "Braveheart" who leads the Scots fighting for independence against the British. ("He's the guy who gets hung, drawn, and quartered at the end of the movie," Mulvaney said.) One of the working titles for the group was the Reasonable Nutjob Caucus. "We had twenty names, and all of them were terrible," Mulvaney said. "None of us liked the Freedom Caucus, either, but it was so generic and so universally awful that we had no reason to be against it."

The nine members needed to grow to twenty-nine, so that, when voting as a bloc with Democrats, they could defeat any Boehner priority. The group had two rules for new members: they had to be willing to vote against Boehner legislation, but they also had to be willing to support him when the legislation met some, if not all, of the Freedom Caucus's goals.

Boehner's control of the chamber relied on a firm agreement with his Republican members that, no matter how they felt about policy, they would always vote with their party on procedural measures, especially so-called rules, which define the parameters of debate on the House floor. Voting against a rule, Labrador told me, was the equivalent of "going nuclear." Brat said, "If you start threatening rules, then that starts questioning the whole process, the way the place is run." Mulvaney added, "Ever since I got here, in 2010, the one thing they said is you never ever, ever, ever vote against a rule. And what we told the guys we recruited into the Freedom Caucus was that you have to be able to do it."

Even as a founding member of the Freedom Caucus, Mulvaney had tried to stay on good terms with Boehner. And although he hadn't voted for Boehner for Speaker in 2013, he supported him in 2015 because he believed there was no viable alternative. "I took no end of crap for it from the right," Mulvaney said. "My office has never had the level of vitriol on any issue that even approached the vote for Speaker in January of 2015."

In February, Mulvaney was at a meeting of House Republicans at the Capitol Hill Club, a few blocks from the House, to which members regularly retreat to discuss fund-raising and other political matters. The Freedom Caucus was making its first play for influence, threatening to hold up funding for the Department of Homeland Security unless Obama's immigration measures were defunded. Boehner was aghast, but at the meeting he made a pitch for the members to put their differences aside. Mulvaney was encouraged.



Then he looked down at a text from a staffer. A group called the American Action Network, for which a former Boehner aide served as a board member, was running attack ads against Mulvaney in South Carolina. Similar ads ran against other House members who were holding up the Homeland Security funding, accusing them of being "willing to put our security at risk by jeopardizing critical security funding." Boehner publicly denied any knowledge of the ads, but Mulvaney was furious.

"Once you attack us in our home districts, there's really no going back from that," he said. "You can't walk into a meeting and say, 'Let's all be on the same team' while at the same moment you're attacking members of the team. It was the beginning of the end."

Once again, Ted Cruz inserted himself into the fight, backing the Freedom Caucus's tactics but also earning a private rebuke. "*You've* talked to us about the Freedom Caucus more than Ted Cruz has talked to us about the Freedom Caucus," Labrador told me when I mentioned the view among Democrats that "Speaker Cruz" controlled Labrador and his allies. But, once again, the caucus's strategy failed; Boehner relied on Democrats to pass the D.H.S. funding bill: a hundred and eighty-two Democrats and just seventy-five Republicans voted for it.

In June, the Freedom Caucus went nuclear. Boehner brought a bill to the floor that would grant Obama "trade promotion authority," the right to negotiate trade pacts with only an up or down vote in Congress for approval. Despite the Freedom Caucus's support for free trade, it opposed the bill, mostly on the ground that it would cede congressional power to the President. The caucus organized a vote against the rule that would bring the legislation to the floor.

Patrick McHenry, of North Carolina, one of the House leadership's lieutenants in charge of corralling votes on the floor, confronted Mulvaney, who told McHenry that he had thirty-four votes lined up against the rule. McHenry laughed and bet him a case of beer that he didn't have even twenty. Thirty-four Republicans voted against the rule, once again forcing Boehner to pass a top priority with Democratic support. (McHenry paid off the bet in Guinness.)

The tit-for-tat retaliation continued. Meadows was kicked off a subcommittee that he chaired. Duncan, the chairman of the Subcommittee on the

Western Hemisphere, which oversees American policy toward Latin America, says that he wasn't allowed to go on international congressional trips, a normal perk for most members. "That was one of the slaps on the hand I got from the Boehner administration," Duncan said.

After Rod Blum, who represents a swing district in Iowa, voted against Boehner, the National Republican Congressional Committee, which helps fund the reëlection efforts of House incumbents, refused to support him. "There's some anger that he's not getting N.R.C.C. support," a Republican member of Congress who often disagrees with the Freedom Caucus told me. "It's his first day in office and he votes against the Speaker, the largest funder of the N.R.C.C. What the fuck? I mean, come on. You can't help stupid."

But the leadership's efforts to punish members frequently backfired. "Some of the reward-and-punishment mechanisms that have existed in the institution effectively for decades, centuries, don't work anymore," Greg Walden, a Republican congressman from Oregon who runs the N.R.C.C. and is close to Boehner, said. "You try to provide some party discipline, and you create a martyr." At the mention of Labrador, Walden rolled his eyes. But he denied that the N.R.C.C. is used as a tool to punish members who vote against leadership. "That'd probably be illegal, but in either case it would destroy the N.R.C.C.," he said.

In July, Meadows filed his motion to vacate, despite the objections of the Freedom Caucus. "We weren't in favor," Labrador said. "The board"—the group's nine founders—"told Meadows not to." But the motion was quickly embraced by outside conservative groups and by talk radio, which turned the issue into a litmus test on the right. According to Mulvaney, one moderate Republican told Boehner that he'd likely face a primary challenge if he voted for him, so he wouldn't. "If that moderate was telling John that story, my guess is that he heard it from a lot of different people," Mulvaney said.

On Wednesday, September 23rd, Boehner was in Oregon raising money and he had breakfast with Walden. "He was really frustrated," Walden told me. "It put Republicans in a tough position to have to make that vote to have to defend him. He said, 'I'm gonna rip the scab off on Friday.' "

On Thursday, after the Pope had come and gone in Washington, an event that Boehner, who is Catholic, later described, tearfully, as the highlight of his career, Boehner called Mulvaney, Labrador, and several other Freedom Caucus members to his office. Meadows had filed the motion in a manner such that, at any point, it could be called to the floor—as "a privileged motion"—for a vote. Boehner asked Labrador and the others if they were really going to go forward with the motion to vacate. "Is there any way at all I can get you guys not to vote for this?" Boehner asked.

"Mr. Speaker, you know that we didn't want this motion to be filed," Labrador said. "But if somebody goes to the floor and does the privileged motion, I think you're in a worse position today than you were a few months ago." Labrador told Boehner that Republicans could not win the Presidency if Boehner remained as Speaker, because conservatives wouldn't be energized.

"You have two choices, Mr. Speaker," Labrador told Boehner. "Either you change the way you're running this place, which you have been unwilling to do, or you step down."

The next morning, Boehner announced that he would retire. "It is clear to me now that many of the members of this conference want a change," he told his colleagues at a private meeting, "and want new leadership to guide through the rough shores ahead."

In the late afternoon of October 29th, Boehner's last day as Speaker, Labrador found him alone in his private office, smoking a cigarette and looking out the window at Washington's monuments. Boehner's office was cleared out, and his remaining personal effects were gathered on his desk. "This is all I got left, right here," Boehner said.

That morning, Labrador and his cohort had won their biggest prize: the elevation of Paul Ryan, one of the most conservative House Republicans, to replace Boehner. Kevin McCarthy, who had moved up one slot in the leadership after Cantor was ousted, tried to secure the Speakership, but the Freedom Caucus withheld its support, and McCarthy withdrew from the race. The Party turned to Paul Ryan as the only person who could reunite the warring factions.

But first Ryan had to make sure that the Freedom Caucus wouldn't spurn him. He met with members of the group several times. "The first thing we told him was that we were not going to accept any of his demands," Labrador said. "He had five—I don't remember what they were." Labrador and his allies had their own demands, and pressed Ryan for a series of reforms that would make the House more democratic. "If the process is not opened up, the only way you have an opportunity to have your policy considered is if you kiss the ring," Labrador said. "And obviously we're not ring kissers."

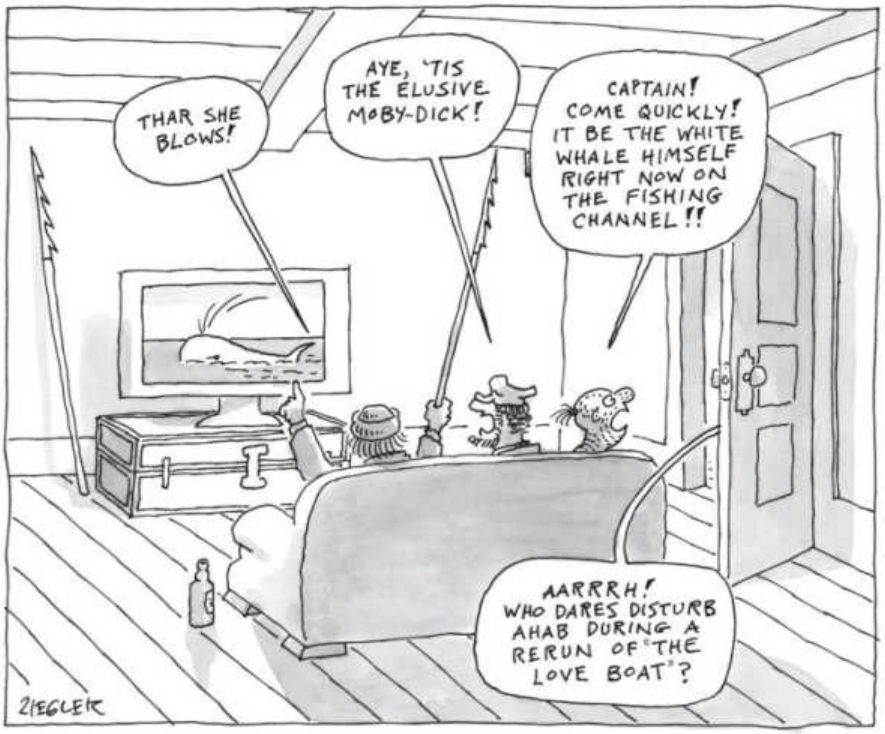
Labrador said that Ryan was "shocked" when he heard how the Freedom Caucus had been treated by Boehner. At one point, Ryan tried to commiserate by pointing out how angry members were when Boehner bypassed the Ways and Means Committee, which Ryan chaired, on a crucial piece of Medicare legislation. There was an uncomfortable silence. Mulvaney said he put his hand on Ryan's shoulder and explained, "Paul, none of us are on Ways and Means." It was a turning point. "That was the moment that we realized there was a little bit of us in Paul, and Paul realized we weren't as crazy as everybody tried to make us out to be."

The two sides got off to a decent start: Ryan was elected Speaker and lost only ten Republican votes. Brat voted against him, but Labrador, Duncan, Mulvaney, and Meadows all supported him. "In Ryan, we have somebody who understands what Obama's trying to do," Labrador said. "He understands that we have to have a bright contrast between the two sides and that only through that contrast are you going to be able to win the battle of ideas. Boehner was never about ideas. He was about the institution, which makes him a good, honorable person but doesn't make him the type of leader that we needed at this time."

This week will present Ryan with a major test of the new relationship. Boehner, in one of his last acts as Speaker, negotiated a budget deal with Obama and the Senate to raise the debt ceiling until March, 2017, after a new President is sworn in, and set funding levels for the government for the next two years. But

Boehner left the final vote on the deal for Ryan to pass, by the end of this week. Last week, Mulvaney met with Ryan, and he pressed the new Speaker to include the language on Planned Parenthood and Syrian refugees in the spending bill, which must pass by December 11th. "There has to be something that speaks to the base," Mulvaney said. Labrador told me, "Paul needs to realize the honeymoon is over and start bringing us some conservative policy." Asked if there would be another government shutdown, Labrador replied, "I'm not sure."

He added, "The final exam for Paul Ryan will be in January, 2017, when there is a Speaker election, and we will look at his body of work and determine whether he gets a passing grade or not."



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Ryan represents a bridge between Boehner's generation and the members elected since 2010, and some in the older guard told me they don't know if Ryan can control Labrador's faction any better than Boehner could. "The question remains: can we change the underlying political dynamic that brought us to this point?" Charlie Dent, the head of the Tuesday Group, a caucus of fifty-six center-right Republicans, told me. He said that the Republican conference was divided into three groups: seventy to a hundred governing conservatives, who always voted for the imperfect legislation that kept the government running; seventy to eighty "hope yes, vote no" Republicans, who voted against those bills but secretly hoped they would pass; and the forty to sixty members of the rejectionist wing, dominated by the Freedom Caucus, who voted against everything and considered government shutdowns a routine part of negotiating with Obama. "Paul Ryan's got his work cut out for him to expand the governing wing of the Republican Party," Dent said. "There shouldn't be too much accommodation or appeasement of those who are part of the rejectionist wing."

Nunes told me that Ryan needed to figure out how to counter the rising populist forces in the Party. "It's the difference between a democracy and a democratic republic," he said. "We are a democratic republic, and yet populist rhetoric, speaking in platitudes, can lead to bad things happening when it's just pure, unfettered kind of mob-style movements that are out there. And that's what we're kind of facing now." Dent agreed. "We need to help redefine what it means to be a conservative," he said. "Stability, order, temperance, balance, incrementalism are all important conservative virtues. Disorder, instability, chaos, intemperance, and anarchy are not."

Conservative critics argue that the real problem with the Freedom Caucus is that it empowers the Democrats. Tom McClintock, a California Republican, resigned from the group in September. "I had high hopes," he said. "I think that they are the most sincere conservatives in the House. But despite their good intentions the practical effect of their tactics is to dramatically shift the center of political gravity in the House to the left."

McClintock said that the same parliamentary brinkmanship that the Freedom Caucus unleashed could be turned against conservatives if a small band of moderate Republicans, such as Dent and his Tuesday Group, defied their leadership and joined the Democrats to pass immigration reform or higher spending levels or a return of earmarks. "Those are just a few of the conservative nightmares that could now escape from this Pandora's box that the Freedom Caucus has opened," he said. "Good intentions are paving the road that the Freedom Caucus is taking us down, but I don't think conservatives are going to like where it leads."

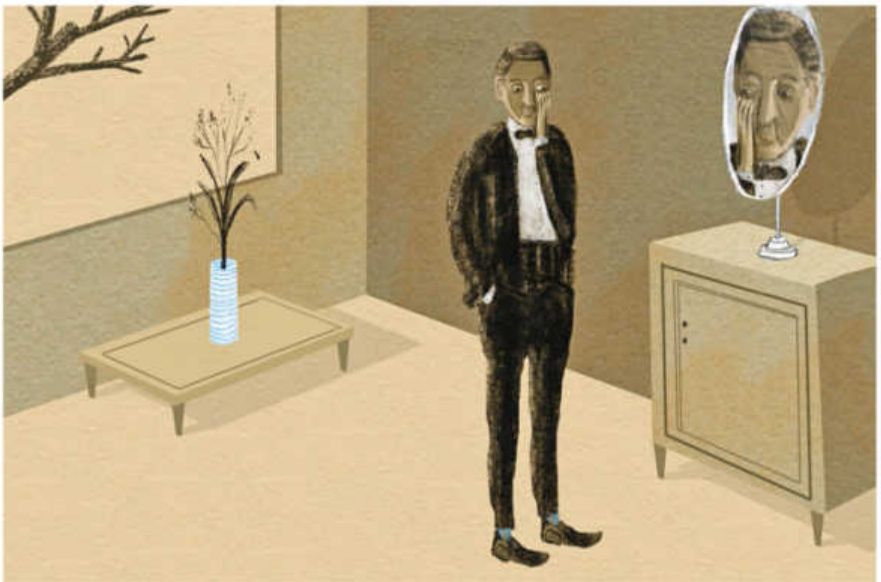
Cole argued that if the rebels didn't back off from their most radical demands they risked doing much broader damage to the Republican Party. "I guarantee you, you shut down the government, you default on the debt, you can kiss the Republican majority goodbye," he said. "Or you nominate the wrong kind of Presidential candidate that simply appeals to Republicans. If you don't get somebody to start changing the math among minorities and millennials, then we won't have a President, and, over time, this majority itself will be in danger."

Most of the Freedom Caucus members are accustomed to losing. Many of them had a hard time taking credit for how much they have transformed Congress and the Republican Party in the past few years, but during one moment of reflection Labrador basked in his achievements, including Boehner's fall. "I came here to change Washington five years ago, and I think I have accomplished that in a big way," he said. At their meeting on Boehner's last day, the two men spoke for twenty minutes and then said goodbye. "You're a good man," Labrador told him. "And I wish you luck." ♦

SHOUTS & MURMURS

EXISTENTIAL RIDDLES

BY ETHAN KUPERBERG



A farmer has to transport a fox, a chicken, and a sack of corn across a river. She can carry only one item at a time. If left together, the fox will eat the chicken, and the chicken will eat the corn. How does the farmer do it?

The farmer begins by carrying the chicken across the river. But, as she does so, she notices her reflection in the water. She can barely recognize the person staring back at her, holding a chicken. "What's happened to me?" she asks herself. She hasn't picked up a paintbrush in more than a year. Now she's carrying farm animals and sacks of grain across rivers. Is this why she spent two years at RISD?

A man sees a boat that is full of people. And yet there isn't a single person on the boat. How is this possible?

Everyone on the boat is married, so there isn't one *single* person on the boat.

The man wonders if it's legal for a transportation system to discriminate against unmarried people. It doesn't seem legal, but maybe maritime laws are different? Perhaps if things had ended differently with Heather, the man would be on the boat, too. He laughs sadly to himself. He was always single, even when he was with Heather. Love is an illusion. There are no purely unselfish actions. Heather and Dale deserve each other.

The man blows his nose. He didn't even realize he'd been crying.

Which is heavier, a ton of feathers or a ton of gold?

Everything is equal in an infinitely expanding, cruelly indifferent universe.

A town has only two barbers. One of the barbers has a neat, tidy haircut, and the other has a shaggy, messy haircut. Which barber should a townsman go to?

The man should go to the barber with the shaggy, messy haircut.

But he goes to the barber closer to his apartment. It's been years since the man cared about his appearance. He sits down in the barber's chair. Long hair, short hair, messy hair—it's just going to keep receding. He can't stop it from receding.

"Are you sure you want *me* to cut your hair?" the barber says, with a wink. "After all, how could *I* have given *myself* this neat, tidy haircut?"

"I'm going to die someday," the man whispers.

A woman lives in a yellow one-story house. Everything in the house is yellow. What color are the stairs?

There are no stairs, because the woman lives in a one-story house. The woman wishes she could afford a two-story house. Or at least one with a furnace and more natural light. But a one-story house makes sense. She lives alone. What does she need all the extra space for? Another cat? A family?

She pulls up a blanket, shivering. The yellow walls are starting to drive her insane.

A man is locked in a room with only a piano. How does he escape?

The man uses a piano "key" to escape. Then he uses religion to escape, then drugs, then a relationship that clearly won't work out in the long term, then unhealthy food, then rage, then the "key" again, because it's a cycle, it's an endless cycle, and he can never truly escape until he accepts that she's really gone.

A woman running a marathon overtakes the person in second place. What place is she in now?

She is now in second place. She's always in second place. Stephen was right.

A man turned off the light and went to bed. Because of this, several people died. Why?

The man lives in a lighthouse; when he turned off the light, two ships crashed. For months, the man is wracked with guilt—how could he forget to keep the light on? What was he thinking? Years pass. The man moves to a small inland town. He attends group therapy regularly. At one session, he meets a widow of three years. She is beautiful in a quiet way. They get married. She never questions why he refuses to turn off the lights at night. Days become decades. They don't have children, but they are happy together. One day, the man visits an antique shop and breaks down sobbing when he sees a ship in a bottle. He asks his wife to drive him to the ocean. She does. She knows not to ask why. They arrive. The man forgives himself. He finally forgives himself. ♦

RYAN PELTIER

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

DOLLS AND FEELINGS

Jill Soloway's post-patriarchal television.

BY ARIEL LEVY

In a scene from "Transparent," the television series created by Jill Soloway, a women's-studies professor stands before a room of listless undergraduates, haranguing them in the accusatory tone favored by a certain strain of academic. "Because women bled without dying, men were frightened!" the professor—played by Soloway, wearing a tent of a top and a pink dreadlock in her bun—says. "The masculine insists to cut things up with exclamation points—which are in and of themselves small rapes, the way an exclamation point might end a sentence and say, 'Stop talking, *woman!*'"

At the back of the classroom, Syd, played by Carrie Brownstein, turns to her friend Ali Pfefferman (Gaby Hoffman) and asks, "Have you ever been raped by an exclamation point?"

"Actually, once I was gang-raped: question mark, exclamation point, *and* semicolon," Ali replies.

"That's brutal," Syd says stonily. "It's very underreported."

In person, Jill Soloway looks nothing like a dowdy professor. She looks more like a wide-eyed cartoon doe. Her resting facial expression is curious, attentive, intent. She has a delicate frame, brown hair that falls to her jaw, and big brown eyes. Several of her friends describe her as "a doer." Amazon, "Transparent"'s producer and distributor, has a series of governing principles; Soloway's favorite is "bias for action." She didn't want to sit around talking when I visited her, in Los Angeles, on a warm afternoon in late October. It was a month after she won the Emmy for best director, and her star, Jeffrey Tambor, won another one, for his portrayal of Maura Pfefferman, a transgender woman who has come out at the age of sixty-eight. Soloway wanted to walk up and down the hills of Silver Lake, the hip, idyllic neighborhood where she lives, and which provides the setting for much of her show.

Sometimes, though, Soloway *sounds* not entirely unlike that women's-studies professor she played. "A patriarchal society can't really handle that there's such a thing as a vagina," she said. "The untrustworthy vagina that is discerning-receiving." Soloway, who recently turned fifty, was wearing leggings and blue nail polish and a baseball cap that said "Mister." She sped past a stretch of Craftsmen bungalows, whose front yards were studded with bicycles, jade plants, and toys. "So you can want sex, you can want to be entered, and then a minute later you can say, 'Stop—changed my mind,'" she continued. "That is something that our society refuses to allow for. You don't feel like it now? You're shit out of luck. You know why? Because you have a pussy! To me, that is what's underneath all this gender trouble: most of our laws are being formed by people with penises."

Most of our entertainment, of course, has also been formed by people with penises, and Soloway is trying to change that: through her hiring practices, her choice of subject matter, and the way she thinks and acts at work. "We're taught that the camera is male," she said, turning to walk uphill, backward, to tone a different part of her legs. "But I'm not forcing everybody to fulfill something in my head and 'Get it right—now get it *more* right.'" Directing with "the female gaze," she asserted, is about creating the conditions for inspiration to flourish, and then "discerning-receiving."

On set, Soloway thinks of her job as akin to being a good mom: "Kids come home from school, want to put on a play in the back yard. You help them build a stage; you make sure they take breaks, have a snack." (Soloway has two sons, Isaac, nineteen, and Felix, seven.) Jeffrey Tambor told me, "I have never experienced such freedom as an actor before in my life. Often, an actor will walk on a set and do the correct take, the

ILLUSTRATION BY STANLEY CHOW

expected take. Then sometimes the director will say, O.K., do one for yourself. That last take, that's our starting point."

The cast talks about "Transparent" as a "wonderful cult," but Soloway disputes this. "It's not a cult," she says. "It's feminism." Women, Soloway said, are naturally suited to being directors: "We all know how to do it. We fucking grew up doing it! It's *dolls*. How did men make us think we weren't good at this? It's *dolls* and *feelings*. And women are fighting to become directors? What the fuck happened?"

Soloway describes herself as "seditious." Her production company is called Topple, as in "topple the patriarchy." Ultimately, this trait has contributed to her success: while "Transparent" is, at its core, a family drama about California Jews who have a standing order at Canter's Deli and who bicker about which of the siblings should inherit the house where they grew up, it is also a radical exploration of gender and sexuality, unlike anything that preceded it on television.

But for many years Soloway's insurrectionary tendencies were a career obstacle. In 2011, after almost two decades as a television writer, Soloway was broke, with two kids, trying to recover from the recent writers' strike and the recession. Then her old friend Jane Lynch, who was starring on "Glee," told her about a job on the show, and Soloway went to meet with the producers. "Finally, here's this moment where I'm meeting on 'Glee,'" Soloway said. "Ryan Murphy wants to hire me. I've been best friends with Jane Lynch for about three decades—we're sisters. It's *happening*." As Soloway drove home from the meeting, her agent called to say, "Pop the champagne—they loved you." A week later, he called again: Murphy had heard that Soloway was "difficult," and wasn't going to give her the job. The agent said he'd send a check to tide her over.

That night, Soloway sat in the bathtub, while her husband, Bruce Gilbert, a music supervisor for film and television, brushed his teeth. She remembers telling him, " 'I don't want to use the money to pay off our debt. I want to be a director, and I want to make a film with it and get into Sundance. I want to double down on me.' And Bruce was, like, 'O.K.'" Then, just as Soloway was making the leap to directing her own material, her father called one afternoon and came out as transgender.

When Jill and her sister, Faith, were young, their family moved to the South Side of Chicago. Their parents—Harry, a psychiatrist who grew up in London, and Elaine, who had worked as a teacher to put Harry through medical school—wanted to raise the girls in a diverse neighborhood. They chose South Commons, a development of brown brick town houses erected by urban planners to attract members of various income brackets and races. Elaine flourished: within a month, she'd become the editor of the community newsletter, and she later worked as a press officer for the mayor of Chicago. Harry grew increasingly melancholic and withdrawn. He "missed most of the conversation," according to Jill, because he was always "listening to a Cubs game, with a skin-colored knob in his ear and beige cord down his shirt and into his pants pocket." Faith told me, "We didn't have a dad who was curious about us—but, then, I didn't see too many fathers being too into their kids."

Initially, South Commons succeeded as an integrated community, but over the years white flight took hold. "No one wanted to be the last white family in the school—except our parents," Jill recalls.

The Soloway sisters were accepted, Faith told me: "I was treated so sweetly by the kids—I was like their little white pet." But she and Jill stood out. "I remember the feeling of going on field trips and getting off the bus where the world was white," she said. For Jill, the experience provided "my most enduring view of myself, that of the Outsider." At school and at home, Jill and Faith—who are eighteen months apart—formed a united front. "My parents had their own TVs and got together for meals and arguments," Jill has written. "There was only one perfect marriage in our home, and it was between me and Faith."

The two watched lots of television: "Charlie's Angels," "Love Boat," "Fantasy Island," "The Brady Bunch." Jill began directing—gathering friends to star in stories that she made up. Robin Ruzan, Jill's friend of thirty years, said, "We used to spend hours and hours filming stuff. If you had walked in on us making dumb videos, you wouldn't know there was any difference in Jill's level of commitment than if you'd walked onto the set of 'Transparent.'"

Adolescence was a fraught time for Jill. For one thing, she told me, "I was a girl with huge tits—I mean, I was *just* my tits." (She has since had a breast reduction. "There are still people who say to me, 'Your tits are huge.' I'm, like, you don't even fucking know.") She had a contentious relationship with her father, and accumulated "mountains of resentment" toward him. "By the time I graduated college, the only conversations that didn't escalate into a fight were those about the weather," she has written. There was always something unresolved and hidden about Harry, and, as Ruzan observes, "Jill's nature is to get to the bottom of everything. She's investigative."

Jill was a communications major at the University of Wisconsin-Madison; Faith studied theatre at Indiana University. After graduation, the sisters returned to Chicago, where Faith worked as a music director for Second City, and Jill worked in production on commercials and movies. In their mid-twenties, around the time that their parents were separating, the sisters created a show at the Annoyance Theatre called "The Real Live Brady Bunch": verbatim reënactments of old episodes, starring Andy Richter and Jane Lynch, who were then unknown local comedians. The show caught on, and they toured the country with it, performing at the Village Gate, in New York, and the Westwood Playhouse, in Los Angeles. "We had a mini fame bubble," Jill said. They were pursued by agents and producers, and wrote a pilot for HBO about a female superhero called Jewess Jones.

The pilot never got made, and the bubble floated away. Faith settled in Boston, where she brought up a daughter with her girlfriend and ran a theatre program for at-risk youth. Jill moved to a pot farm in Cazadero, California, a small town near the Russian River which she describes as a kind of counterculture Eden: "Verdant, moist, little tiny grocery store." She got stoned and sold pot and wrote a novella and some pilots, along with a screenplay about "a world where all the genders are switched around." After a few years, she met a painter named Johnny, with whom she had a "soul connection." They had a loose and romantic life together. "We drove around the

country—we got a white pimp car with a purple stripe," Soloway said. "We were both trying to create artists' lives."

At thirty, Soloway decided that she wanted to be a mother, but she didn't want to have a conventional family. "I was thinking of it as a single mom," she told me. In her mind, "artists are single moms and single moms are artists." But most artists who are single moms do not have much money, so, not long after her first son was born, Soloway got a job as a writer on "The Steve Harvey Show." "Any show would have been fine," she said. "I just wanted to be a TV writer." She was there for only one season before a producer told her, "You need to go work on a white show."

Soloway's next job was writing for "Nikki," which she calls "the worst sitcom in the world"—a domestic comedy about a Las Vegas showgirl who's married to a professional wrestler. Then, in 2002, Alan Ball, the creator of "Six Feet Under," read one of her short stories, a surreal rant about the indignities of life as a personal assistant, titled "Courtney Cox's Asshole." "I remember thinking, Oh, my God—who is this person?" Ball told me. "After reading that, I was, like, O.K., she is really going to write the hell out of Claire and Brenda." They worked together until the show's finale, in 2005. Soloway went on to collaborate with Diablo Cody on "United States of Tara," a series about a woman with multiple personalities—both male and female. "Diablo and I went one year riding on our little feminist dreams," Soloway said. But the network didn't like their vision of the show. "It kind of exploded," Soloway said. "I got fired, and they brought some dudes in."

This was the beginning of a downward slide. "It starts with: You're fired from 'United States of Tara.' You're fired from 'Grey's Anatomy,' because Shonda"—Rhimes, who went on to create "Scandal"—"doesn't really feel like you're giving it your all. But, O.K., wait, you're going to go work with HBO! No, you're not—they're actually going to work with this person Lena Dunham, and everybody wonders if you guys are related. Or: 'She really seems like she was sprung from your rib, Jill.' People were, like, it's you, but younger and better." It was then that Soloway had the doomed meeting about "Glee"—in what, as it happens, is now her office on the Paramount lot.

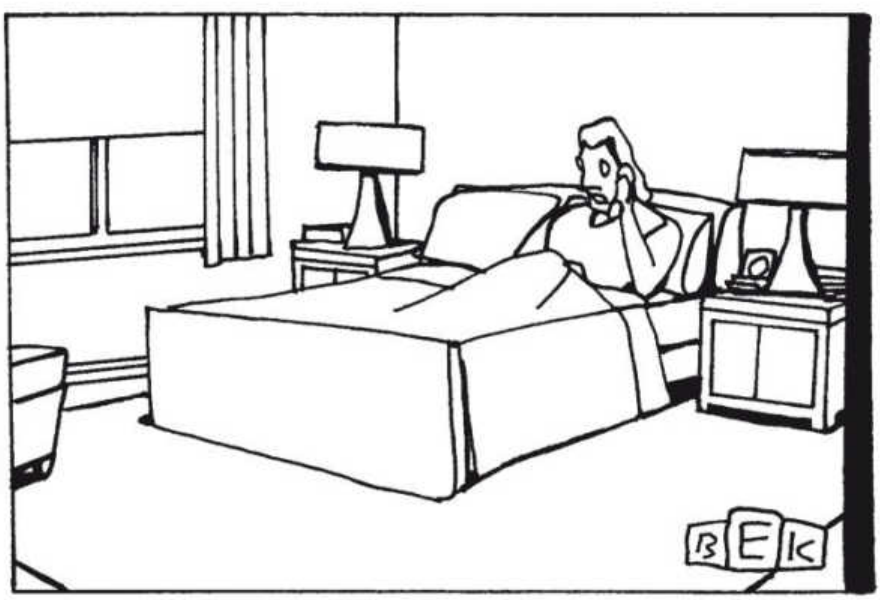
Soloway looks at every experience she had in Hollywood —"all the things that seemed like catastrophes"—as preparation. "I was getting ready to make this show, and I didn't know it," she told me. She had always been obsessed with gender, and wanted to investigate the mystery of intimacy. Then her father called to say that he was a woman named Carrie, and the most intimate patriarchy in her life toppled.

"The first response, the first sharing of emotion that Jill and I had, was shock and silliness," Faith recalled. "Like, This is the silliest thing I've ever heard." For Faith, the next experience was incomprehension: "I was, like, Who is this new person? Who have I talked to for forty years of life?" But, as a lesbian, she felt a duty to be supportive, and in some ways the experience was a welcome clarification. For her sister, it was something else. "It just rocked her world," Faith said. "For Jill, it was: *This* is why I am the way I am. This is why I have these feelings about being female in the world."

"Femininity is like alcohol," Soloway told me. "I never know how much to take before I throw up." In "Tiny Ladies in Shiny Pants," a book of essays that she published in 2005, she wrote, "Pointy shoes make me want to cry. Anything Sarah Jessica Parker ever wore makes me want to cry." She describes "an elemental nausea about the very fact of my gender," brought on by "a truth I wanted to hide from: that being a woman meant being watched. I wanted to be a watcher." Soloway talks a lot in that book about her fascination with women who are "dick candy," like strippers and porn stars: women who are watched because they have mastered—or are mastered by—the appearance of flawless femininity.

As Carrie was coming out, Jill revisited a film script that she'd started years earlier, about two Silver Lake moms who decide to get their husbands a hooker as a Father's Day present. The plot shifted as Soloway rewrote it: a bored, angst-ridden mom, Rachel, befriends a nineteen-year-old hooker, McKenna, and invites her to be her son's live-in nanny. Soloway describes the film, "Afternoon Delight," as a feminist tract: "The divided feminine. What do we owe each other as women? Especially if we are classically oppositional icons: mother and whore. And how does that harm us to be separating these two parts of ourselves to compete for access to the male gaze?"

But "Afternoon Delight," which won Soloway the best-director award at Sundance, is both subtler and more unsettling than she makes it sound—an investigation of the selfishness that can creep into what purports to be altruism. After McKenna has sex with one of the fathers in the neighborhood, she is ejected from Rachel's home—cast out by the older, wealthier, luckier people she was summoned to stimulate (and by



"I'm too tired to click on things all day."

Soloway, who never returns her to the narrative). It is hard to feel much sympathy for Rachel when she tells her husband, "I'm sorry I threw a bomb in the middle of our life—our beautiful life."

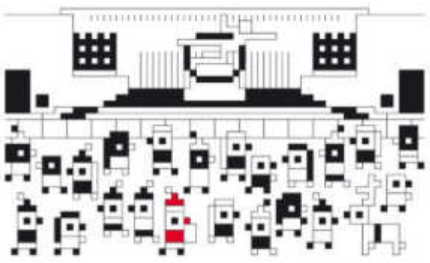
Soloway sees something different: a recognition that, to some extent, we all do what Carrie Soloway did—subsume parts of ourselves in order to exist within a family. "When I look at 'Afternoon Delight' now, and Rachel making a space for McKenna in the house, it's, like, Was I writing a yearning for Carrie to come out?" she said. Carrie Soloway told me, "Jill was very angry with me at first for keeping it a secret all those years—but you had to then." Jill now calls Carrie "Moppa"—a combination of "mom" and "poppa"—just as the Pfefferman children refer to Maura. When Soloway won her Emmy, she thanked "the Goddess," and she thanked her "moppa, for coming out."

"Transparent" is a product of the female gaze: Season 1 was directed exclusively by women, and four of the five primary characters are female. But it also reflects the gaze of a child—the perspective, colored by Soloway's experience, of the Pfefferman siblings, who are by turns baffled, disappointed, besotted, and enraged by the person who raised them.

Jeffrey Tambor's Maura is a retired professor who has, after decades of dreaming about it, finally grown her sparse gray hair past her shoulders. She wears flowing pants and long skirts and has a broad frame and a poignant ungainliness. She is wary, but also prone to radiant bursts of daring and disarming maternal love. She doesn't want to live in the big, expensive, modern house in Pacific Palisades where she spent decades being a distant father and husband and "dressing up like a man." She wants her children to live there while she finds out where she belongs. At nearly seventy, Maura has been reborn.

One consequence of rebirth is a second coming of age, and both Maura and her children act out with the heedless egocentrism of adolescents. The eldest sibling, Sarah, leaves her husband to pursue an affair with her college girlfriend, after they reunite at the school that their children attend. In the second season, their relationship moves from illicit to domestic, and Sarah finds herself trapped in her own escape plan, as restless and unmoored as ever. Her brother, Josh, keeps accidentally getting women pregnant and pitching fits: he throws a chair at his boss, and shrieks at other drivers from behind the wheel. Ali, the youngest, drifts between interests and lovers, experimenting with drugs, lesbianism, yellow eye shadow, and academia. ("You can not *do* anything!" Maura explodes at her.)

The upside of immaturity is guileless



delight, and "Transparent" has a child's sense of amazement about the world—especially secret places where different rules apply. Maura seems free for the first time at a sylvan cross-dressing camp, where she bikes along the dirt road wearing a purple dress. The Michigan Womyn's Music Festival—which ended this summer, after forty years, largely because of conflicts over whether trans women ought to be included—is re-created in the second season as a muddy, magical oasis where women receive visions by staring into bonfires. "I'm always trying to bring the concept of play into the female gaze," Soloway told me.

There is even an innocence to the sex scenes, which are radical and plentiful. Sarah gets a spanking—but in the forest, with a grin on her face. In Season 2 (which will become available online on December 11th), Maura has sex for the first time since her transition, with an earth mother played by Anjelica Huston. She says aloud what so many virgins have said in their minds: "I don't know what to do."

I walked into the den of Soloway's rambling house one morning as she was watching that scene on her computer. Originally, the Huston character felt Maura's erection pressing against her and said, seductively, "What do we have here?" To which Maura replied, "We have a penis." One of Soloway's writers—a transgender woman—had suggested that Maura might not think of her genitals that way anymore, and that she ought to say, "We have a big clit."

Soloway looked at me intently, discerning-receiving, and said, "What do you think? Too much?" (In the end, both lines were cut.)

Like Maura, the transgender movement in this country is just coming out, even though it has a long secret history. "Transparent" both reflects and advances its agenda, and the people who make the show feel an acute responsibility. "It's an extremely tough line to walk," Bridget Bedard, the head writer, told me. "We're making a comedy—or a 'trauma-dy,' we've started saying—and comedy comes from people being fallible." But they want to make the characters believably flawed without reinforcing stereotypes: "Like, a trans woman looking in the mirror and crying—don't do that."

Every decision on the show is vetted by Rhys Ernst and Zackary Drucker, trans activists and artists whose work about their relationship appeared in the most recent Whitney Biennial. "We monitor the politics of representation—if we catch things in the writing stage, it's kind of optimal because then there's time to shape it," Drucker told me. "We're kind of starting over with 'Transparent,' and with the trans tipping point in general."

Despite the uniformity of experience suggested by the label L.G.B.T., the gay community has been accepted into American life and politics in a way that trans people have not. The city of Houston elected its first lesbian mayor in 2009, but when she passed a broad anti-discrimination ordinance—which addressed race, age, and sexual orientation as well as gender identity—opponents launched a campaign with the slogan "No Men in Women's Bathrooms," and voters easily repealed the measure.

But, if trans people are scapegoats for the right, they are also requiring the left to undertake a momentous shift in thinking. "We're asking the whole world to transition with us to a less binary way of being," Drucker said. "It's the next step in the fight for gender equality: removing the habit of always qualifying a person as a man or a woman. If we start thinking of each other as just people, it allows us to identify with each other in a way that has never really been possible before."

If the point of this kind of identity

transition is to reconcile the way the world sees you with the way you see yourself, the details of perception and representation become crucial. "A really interesting thought exercise is to say 'they' and 'them' for all genders," Soloway instructed me. I was confused, so she explained. "If you said, 'I have to go pick up my friend at the airport,' I could very easily say, 'What time do they get here?' So there is a structure for talking about your friend and not knowing their gender—and it's perfect English."

I pointed out that strict grammar forbids using a plural pronoun for a single person; it would sound crazy, for instance, to describe Soloway by saying, "They are my favorite director."

Soloway shook her head vigorously. "All of the magazines and newspapers need to begin to do this," she said. "The language is evolving daily—even gender reassignment, people are now calling it gender confirmation!" She was getting excited. "The promise of this revolution is not having to say, 'Men do this, women do this.'"

In the utopia that Soloway envisions, I suggested, there would be no need to transition, because there would be no gender in the first place. Soloway parsed it differently: "In a few years, we're going to look back and say, 'When we were little, we used to think that all women had vaginas and all men had penises, but now, of course, we know that's not true.'"

One afternoon, near Soloway's house, we saw a very fit woman with a green streak in her hair, walking a big dog. "Oh, my God, it's Raelle Tucker!" Soloway said, and the two embraced.

Tucker explained that they had met twenty years ago, when Soloway saw her in a play and then phoned to praise her work and ask, "Would you come and pose naked, crucified on a Star of David, in some dude's back yard in North Hollywood?"

"We called it 'Jewcified,'" Soloway explained. "It was for a show."

"And then, because I was twenty-two and a stripper at the time," Tucker continued, "and I had no clue how anything worked, Jill's, like, 'What can I do to pay you back?' I said, 'Can you get me an agent?' And it took her years, but she did."

Tucker, who was a writer on "True Blood," said that she had just finished a pilot. "It's a female 'The Player.' You know, the Tim Robbins movie? It's about a female head of a studio who does a terrible thing and tries to cover it up."

"I love it," Soloway said, her eyes wide and bright. "I want to read it."

They agreed that Tucker would send over her pilot script, and then she and her dog walked up the hill. Soloway was excited. "See, *this* is why Steven Spielberg is working with George Lucas is working with Lawrence Kasdan—there's no mystery!" she said. "When you're creating art, you want to work with people who are like you. You are creating propaganda for *you*."

The writers Soloway assembled for "Transparent"—three men and four women, including Faith—are her playmates and her propaganda squad. Only one of them, Bridget Bedard, had experience in television before joining the show, as a writer on "Mad Men." Soloway culled the rest of her staff from academia, fiction, queer activism, film, and musical theatre. Ali Liebegott was working at a grocery co-op in San Francisco when she got an e-mail from Soloway asking if she'd ever considered writing for TV. They had met years earlier, at a queer writers' retreat that Liebegott organized. "Jill told me, 'It's easy—I could teach you in a weekend,'" Liebegott said. A statuesque blond writer who goes by Our Lady J (and who used to accompany Lady Gaga on the piano) came in through Soloway's "transfirmative action" program. Soloway wanted a "trans-feminine perspective," but couldn't find a television writer who had one. So she solicited essays from trans women and then gave half a dozen of them a weeklong tutorial. Bedard said that she'd never encountered this approach before: "I was teaching people from ground zero how television works"—from the mechanics of dividing up a story over a season to the role of the writer on set. "I actually think it's much harder than Jill says, but I also appreciate her attitude, because it's so inclusive. It's not precious. Nobody came in here saying, 'Oh, we can't do that.'"

On the day that I visited the writers' room, Soloway was just back from New York, where she had screened new episodes for a test audience. She was wearing a silk T-shirt with a print of TV static and sitting on a beanbag, talking to the writers, who were gathered in a circle eating bagels. Soloway told them that the response had been "amazing—you could just feel it." But at the airport coming home, she said, things had spun out of control: "It was a fuck show." As Soloway had sat down in the back of a black S.U.V. sent to pick her up, she saw that her driver couldn't get in, because another car had parked too close to his door. The driver of the other car, an Asian man, was smoking a cigarette, and he refused to move until he finished. "In thirty seconds, I went emotionally from O.K., they're working it out, to I want to murder him," Soloway said. She decided to crawl up to the front seat and back the car up herself, but, as she was negotiating the armrest, the smoking driver stood directly behind her S.U.V.

"Who is this guy, this future husband of mine?" Ali Liebegott—who is a butch lesbian—said. The other writers laughed. Like the show itself, the writers' room is a place where intimacy prevails. People kid about the subject matter—there is a local dialect of invented words like "mussy," a mashup of "man pussy"—but they take identity politics extremely seriously.

Soloway said that, even through her rage, "I could feel the sadness of this guy just trying to get some power." Her driver then tried to push the smoker out of the way. "There was so much white privilege, male privilege, in his reaction."

"Also the inherent sexism," Micah Fitzerman-Blue, a slim young man blessed with, as he put it, "generic Semitic good looks," added. "The driver feels justified in anything because you're a woman and he has to protect you."

The police were called. "I was thinking about how easily someone could have ended up in jail," Soloway said. "We start to understand how masculinity and testosterone can become . . . horrible."

Everyone agreed that some version of the incident might fit a road trip that they were working on for Josh, the middle child, who has the right personality to get embroiled in a flash fight: jittery rage and a wild sense of entitlement. Josh is "Transparent"'s roving male id, and—like many of the characters—he can be deeply off-putting in his narcissism. But part of the show's appeal is that it marries the marginalized idea of gender transition to

the familiar American concept of reinvention. The characters keep stumbling into small opportunities for redemption.

The next day, the writers trudged down a hibiscus-lined path from their offices to a screening room, where they sat with friends and colleagues to watch the final episodes of the second season. By the end, Josh is sobbing in the arms of a man who has suggested that he needs to grieve for his father—"Maura is not Mort," he is told—and many of the people in the audience were crying, too. Soloway seemed unsettled by the emotional response. As she walked out of the room, she shook her head and said, "God, it hits you right in the mussy."

Fitzerman-Blue, walking next to her, agreed: "It gets you in the solar plussy."

"Tag—you have measles!"

• •

The writers determined that, in the second season, Ali Pfefferman would go to graduate school for gender studies, and that she would have an affair with a magnetic and much older female professor. They decided to model the character on the iconic lesbian poet Eileen Myles—a protégé of Allan Ginsberg's who wrote the cult classic "Chelsea Girls," along with eighteen other books. "So I go on sort of a deep dive of who Eileen is, watching videos of her," Soloway told me. She felt the spiky blossoming of a crush. "I kind of get a feeling of, like, Oh, this is gonna be bad."

Soloway and her husband were in an amorphous process of separating, which is ongoing. He is the music supervisor for "Transparent," and he has a key to Soloway's house, where he keeps his drum set. "We are dissolving some particular aspects of our connection," Soloway said. "But we'll always do the Jewish holidays together."

By chance, soon after Soloway began her research, she was on a panel with Myles in San Francisco. "We had pretty much an instant connection," Soloway said. At first, though, her schedule presented obstacles. "We tried very hard to get on the phone after we met in San Francisco," Myles told me. "And, when we finally did, she goes, 'I may have to get off in a minute to talk to Caitlyn Jenner.'"

When Soloway returned to the set, she found that her writers had bought Myles's journal through a fund-raiser for a nonprofit, to help them work on character development. "I open it up, and the first thing it says is 'Whoever falls in love with me is in trouble,'" Soloway said. "It was like she wrote to me without even knowing that I existed."

In October, Myles and Soloway sat next to each other at a benefit in New York for the Feminist Press, as the city's first lady, Chirlane McCray, accepted an award onstage. They were tight in the grip of new love; they touched each other's backs and legs ceaselessly through the ceremony. Myles was wearing jeans and a button-down shirt, her hair silver and shaggy, her face set in a more lined version of the intense stare that Robert Mapplethorpe captured when he photographed her in 1980.

The next "Feminist Power Award" was given to Aydian Dowling, a muscular transgender man who had started a YouTube channel called Beefheads Fitness and who had been voted *Men's Health's* "Ultimate Guy." He wore a suit and tie and motioned toward his table to acknowledge "my beautiful wife."

"Isn't that interesting?" Myles said. "'My lovely wife . . .'" She let the thought trail off.

We spoke about it later, and Myles remembered "recoiling, because that traditionalist take on gender—which I've heard from trans women as well as trans men—it's like permission to be the person we've been running from our whole lives." What excited her about the movement was its potential to reinvent gender altogether. "I grew up thinking I was a boy and praying to God I'd become male," Myles told me. "Jill says, 'Why don't you identify as trans?' It's like, I don't want to make it your business to call me 'he.' I'm happy complicating what being a woman, a dyke, is. I'm the gender of Eileen."

When we talked, Myles was in Washington, D.C., with Soloway, who had been invited to the White House, to honor the Transgender Day of Remembrance for victims of hate crimes. "And Jill's moppa is here!" Myles said. "I just met him last night and that was great. He's British . . . she's British . . . *they're* British." (Carrie isn't particular about nomenclature. "You go into a cab as 'sir,' and you come out as 'ma'am,'" she told me. "You can't train people; they're going to say what they see.") I asked Myles if, as a poet, she struggled to refer to an individual person as "they." She said, "It's not intuitive at all. But I'm obsessed with that part in the Bible when Jesus is given the opportunity to cure a person possessed by demons, and Jesus says, 'What is your name?' And the person replies, 'My name is legion.' Whatever is not normative is many." She liked the idea of a person containing more than one self, more than one gender.

"Part of it is just the fiction of being alive," she said. "Every step, you're making up who you are." ♦

AMERICAN CHRONICLES

THE WAYFARER

A solitary canoeist meets his fate.

BY BEN McGRATH

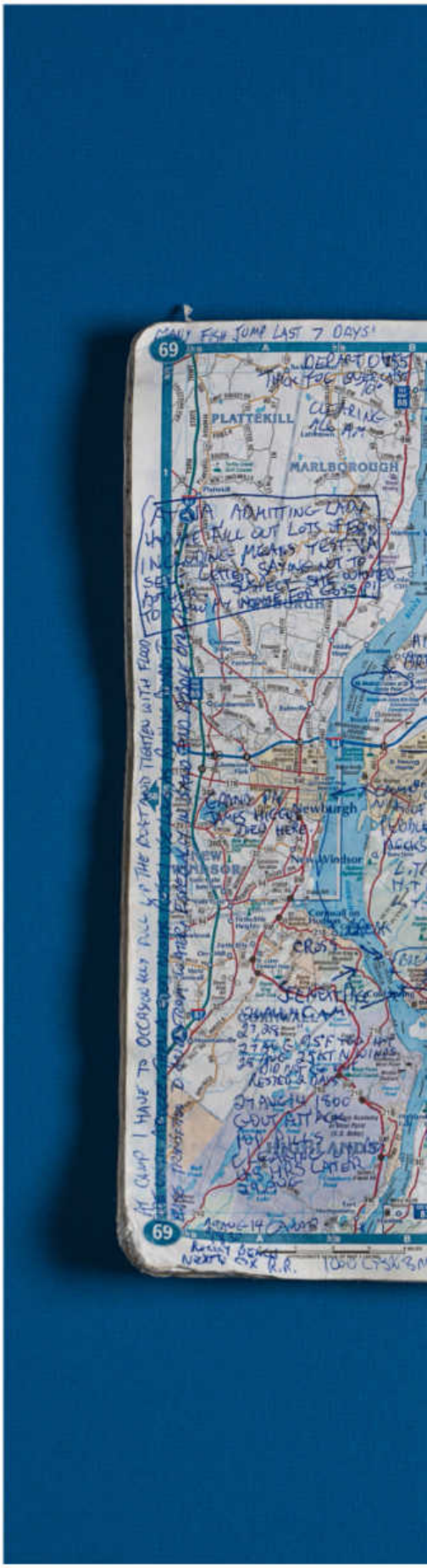
On November 29, 2014, I received a phone call from an officer of the North Carolina Wildlife Resources Commission named John Beardsley. He was investigating a missing boater, he said, and explained that some duck hunters had found a canoe and that my phone number had turned up among the gear in the boat. He wanted to know where it had come from—he hoped, in fact, that I might be the canoeist. It took me a second or two to realize that the boat must have been Dick Conant's. It had come practically from Canada, I explained—from Plattsburgh, New York, twenty miles south of the border.

Conant had paddled past my house, on the Hudson River a dozen miles above Manhattan, on Labor Day morning. As I was about to take my toddler son kayaking, a neighbor called out that there was a man in his house I might want to meet. A red canoe was tied up at the base of the seawall. It was filthy, and packed as if for the apocalypse, with tarps and trash bags and Army-surplus duffels. My neighbor, an adventurous spirit who once pedalled a bicycle from New York to Cocoa Beach, had spotted the unusual traveller in the water and waved him ashore.

Inside, Conant was sitting at the head of a table, facing down a kingly spread of caviar, sausage, doughnuts, and vodka, and holding forth for several guests. He was headed for Florida, he said, and was two months into a journey that he figured would take six more. He was sixty-three, and spoke in a mellifluous high timbre that seemed almost childlike. He wore denim bib overalls, a T-shirt, and muddy brown boots, and stood six feet one and weighed three hundred pounds. He had a rust-colored beard, with patches of white, and his face was as red as a boiled lobster shell—a riparian Santa. He laughed with great heaves of his gut. His handshake offered the firmest grip I've ever felt.

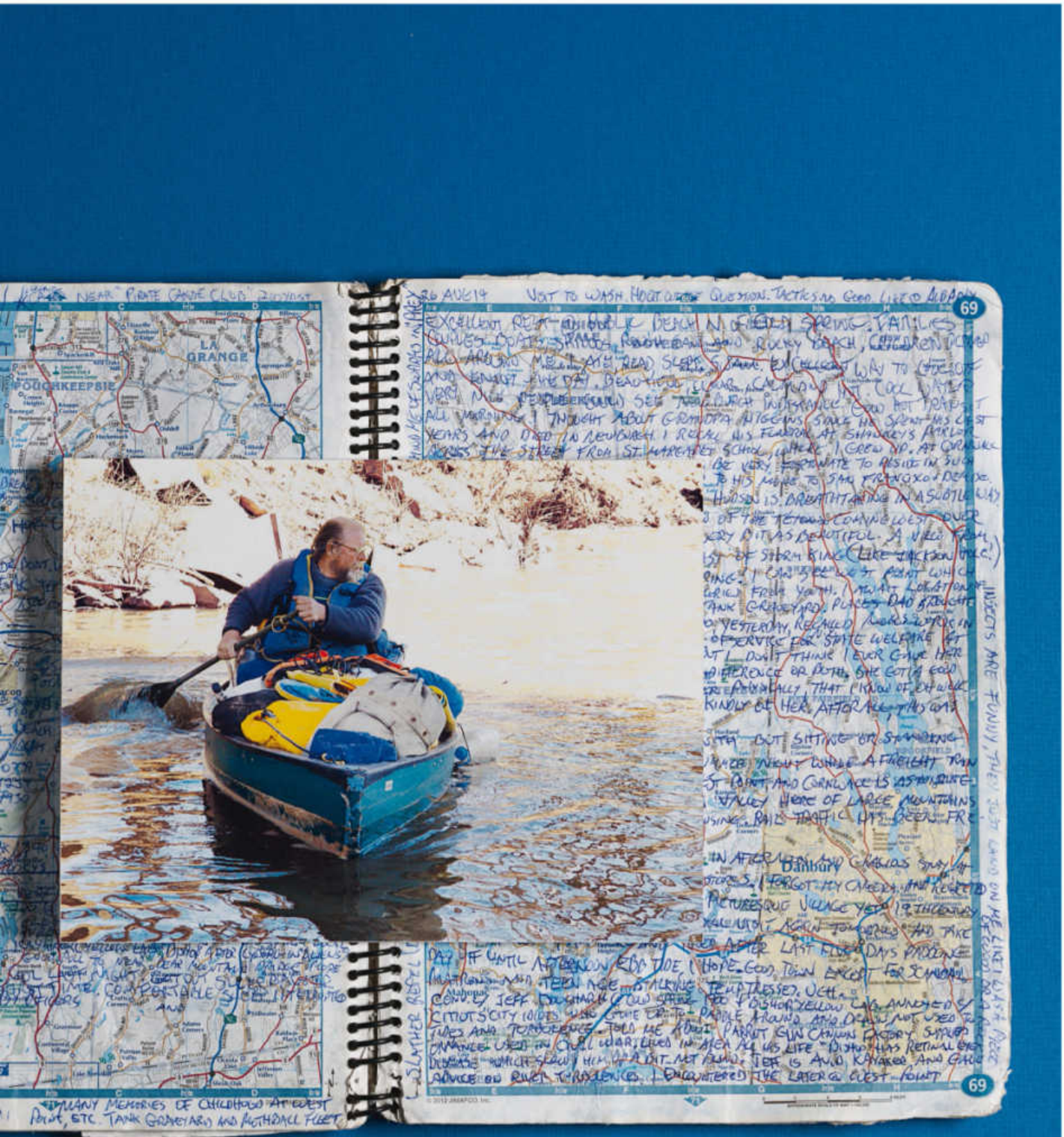
On the phone, I explained to Officer Beardsley that I was a journalist, and that I had written a short article (in this magazine) about Conant's ambitious voyage. I mentioned that he had e-mailed me a month or so earlier, in late October, and sounded healthy and happy, in spite of the fact that waves had drowned his laptop. He was at a public library in Delaware City, Delaware, "and preparing for the next leg across Chesapeake Bay," he wrote. I suggested that Beardsley check the local library, or perhaps a dive bar, where Conant might be raising eyebrows with his story about nearly getting run over by a barge one night on the Mississippi. Or was there a V.A. hospital nearby? Conant was a Navy veteran, and he suffered from gout and high blood pressure. He regularly stopped at V.A. hospitals where he could renew his scrips.

The canoe had been spotted floating upside down near the mouth of Big Flatty Creek, by a father who was fishing with his young boy and feared what they might discover if they drew their boat any closer. Big Flatty discharges into the not so flat brackish waters of Albemarle Sound, about twenty miles west of the Outer Banks. The father called his friend Grover Sanders, who had been hunting ducks nearby. Sanders, a stout soybean farmer who hadn't trimmed his beard in three and a half years, drove his skiff out to have a look. "It was flipped over and hung up in them stumps," he recalled. He was referring to the cypress knees that perforate the northern shores of the sound, giving it the color of tea. Behind the stumps was a swampy forest and, behind that, miles of tilled fields. Sanders spent fifteen minutes eying the canoe from various angles, trying to get a sense of what might



SOURCE: COURTESY THE COLUMBUS PACKET (PHOTOGRAPH)

Dick Conant in Mississippi in 2010. When not



in a canoe, he had been living under a lean-to at the edge of a swamp in Bozeman, Montana. "People call it homeless," he said. "I don't."

PHOTOGRAPH BY VICTOR SCHRAGER

be underneath, before attempting to right it.

Ropes pulsed beneath the boat like the tentacles of a jellyfish. They formed a kind of loose cage, trapping bags—or, as Sanders soon discovered, bags within bags within knotted bags, containing enough air that they amounted to a flotation device. Righting the boat without severing the ropes was impossible. Finding no body, Sanders called 911, loaded what bags he could onto his skiff, and towed the canoe inland, via a narrow canal, passing the rickety docks and large oyster middens of a shellfishing operation called Frog Island. A sheriff's deputy and Beardsley and Chase Vaughan, another wildlife officer, met him there. A light breeze blew from the northeast, a remnant of a storm that had dumped several inches of rain a few days earlier. The men began combing through the effects, looking for clues.

Among the canoe's contents were seventeen toothbrushes, three Louis L'Amour Western novels, a frying pan, a digital camera, and some soggy stapled papers, on the back of which I'd written my e-mail address and phone number, more than four hundred miles up the coast. Receipts and other assorted documents bore notes and inscriptions, written in blue and black ink:

If you allow poverty to hold you back, it means you have neither imagination nor will.

Idea ~ Sci-Fi: USB port from human nervous system directly into Internet.

I have been denied what our men are supposed to do. So I do what I want, which is to navigate.

I'm not good @ everything. I'm good @ long-distance canoe.

The nation's largest Coast Guard facility is in the nearest town, Elizabeth City; it dispatched a boat, a plane, and, eventually, a helicopter to aid in the search. The wildlife division called in a plane of its own, and Beardsley and Vaughan began searching in their boats as well.

Beardsley felt that he should alert Conant's family, and sought my advice. Conant had told me that he was one of nine siblings and mentioned that he had a brother who lived near me. But he hadn't bothered to call him (or anyone else) when passing by. "That way, they don't worry," he said. Conant had mentioned another brother, Joe, as his closest kin. "Down in Peachtree City, Georgia," he said. "He used to fly for Delta. His wife is one of those fussbudgets that everybody who has a birthday gets a card. So she's just kind of like the glue that keeps our disparate family together." I looked up the Conants in Peachtree City and sent their number to Beardsley.

"All right, let's do it again. This time, you're good at acting."

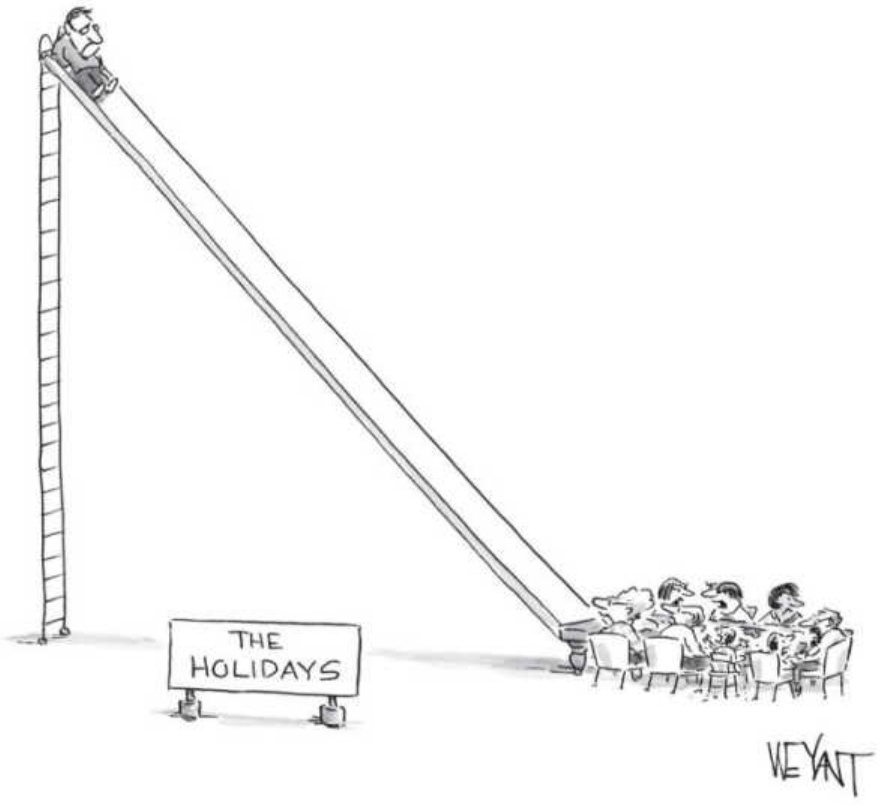
If you asked Conant about his experiences on the country's waterways, he would grin sheepishly, pause, size up your listening capacity, and then let go with a monologue as unstoppable as a river. In recalling a trip that began in July, 2009, and concluded in September, 2010, for instance, he said, "I took a Greyhound bus, like usual, out to northern Minnesota, place called Bemidji. I went to Gander Mountain, bought a boat, got some supplies at—not Walmarts, but that other big one? Kmarts! Got all my supplies ready to go, put in my boat on a lake next to Bemidji, one of a string of lakes that forms the headwaters of the Mississippi. So I took the Mississippi from Bemidji to New Orleans. I got on the Intracoastal Waterway east, going toward where Lake Borgne empties into Lake Pontchartrain, and vice versa. At Rigolets Pass, I ran into a duck hunter who also happened to be a lawyer for one of the parishes, for the sheriff's department. I was going looking for ice. We got to talking. He goes, 'Holy mackerel, you already came all that distance?' I said, 'Yeah, I'm not even halfway where I'm going!' He asked if I need anything. I said, 'If there's a hardware store nearby, I'd like to get some fixings so I can make a little cart. I got about a hundred miles portage from here to Mobile, Alabama.' He says, 'The heck with that, I'll give you a ride!' I became good friends with the guy."

Conant extolled the hospitality of the man's family, and resumed navigating aloud—describing how he went up the Mobile River to the Tombigbee, in western Alabama, and on to the

Tennessee and then up the Holston, to Kingsport.

"Now, when I had gone through Huntsville, Alabama, I met a guy who was a kayaker. He invited me to go to church the next morning. Very nice, devout people in the South. Was it Christmas? No, I think it was Easter. So that was the other big one. I said, 'Well, when I get to Kingsport I got about a two-hundred-and-thirty-mile portage,' or something like that. Take it up over the divide into western Virginia. He said, 'Well, heck, I'll give you a ride!' This guy was a NASA scientist. He did software programs for the Saturn rocket. Well, anyhow, he was just finishing up a missionary trip up in Alaska. Took a couple of days for him to sleep off some of that lag, and then he drove me over the mountains into the upper half of the James River, I'm thinking Lynchburg, Virginia. Got on the James River, and I took it down through Richmond over what they call the Fall Line. It drops, like, a hundred fifty feet in three miles. It's a rapids, big boulders and stuff. Then it turns into a tidal estuary, and the James River meanders down to the Atlantic Ocean at Hampton Roads, where the Monitor and the Merrimack had their battle in the Civil War. So I took it down to Hampton Roads, and I turned right at Norfolk and went up the Elizabeth River, and finished my journey there at Portsmouth."

The NASA man's name is Stanley Lett. (It wasn't the Saturn rocket, though; it was the J2X.) Lett still has the paddle that Conant sent him, as a gesture of gratitude for the long lift. The parish sheriff's lawyer is Chuck Hughes. Conant neglected to tell me (but wrote in a journal) that Hughes, when they met, had just saved a canoeist's life on Lake Pontchartrain—an ex-marine, who had gone out fishing, swamped, and swam to a buoy, to which he was clinging, nearly hypothermic. Hughes told me that, shortly after he picked Conant up, they ran into a young backpacker from Pittsburgh who turned out to be trekking from the Pacific Ocean to the Atlantic, after having already made the opposite journey. Hughes took a picture of the two nomads. "We called them Surf and Turf," he said. He also instructed his secretary to arrange and pay for Conant's return flight, at the conclusion of his adventure, to Bozeman, Montana—where, for the previous several years, when not in a canoe Conant had been living under a lean-to at the edge of a swamp, behind East Main Street. "People call it homeless," Conant told me. "I don't."

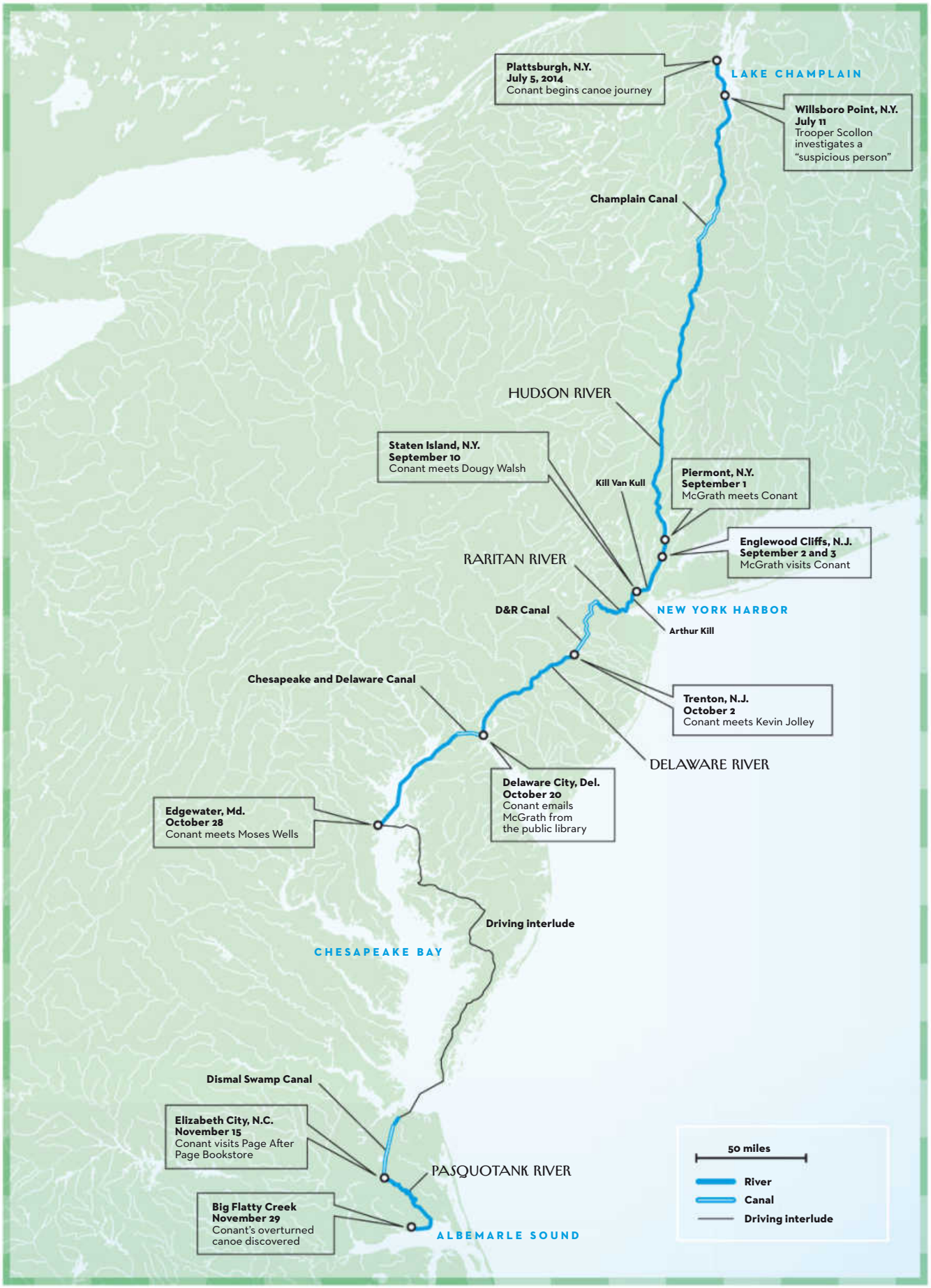


The most recent family sightings of Conant were in 2008, when he hopscotched up and down the East Coast, visiting his siblings: Joe, in Peachtree City; Mary, in Cape May, New Jersey; Roger and Jim, in Orange County, New York; and Rob and their elderly mother, Claire, in Sharon, Connecticut. He had just completed a canoe trip from Olean, New York, seventy miles south of Buffalo, to Port O'Connor, Texas, via the Allegheny, the Ohio, the Mississippi, the Atchafalaya, and the Gulf Intracoastal Waterway, into Matagorda Bay, where he fled from a blacktip shark, and then was swamped by a succession of three-foot waves from abaft and had to swim and wade ashore, towing his boat by the painter.

Those visits were mostly happy ones, although he confided to his mother that he was contending with "mental barnacles." He did not attend her funeral, in 2011. "I think a physical meeting once a decade and a Christmas card once a year is sufficient for me," he wrote to his brother Jim. "I don't want to say goodbye forever."

He wasn't estranged, exactly; just distant. It had been that way for decades. Dicky, as he was known in the family, was the middle child, born fifth, in 1951. The first seven—all boys—were each about a year apart. They lived in Germany, where their father, Perry, was stationed as an Army colonel, and then moved for a few years to Fort Knox, Kentucky. When Dicky was seven, they settled in Pearl River, New York, a Rockland County suburb that was then rustic enough to resemble "Mark Twain country," as Chris Kelly, a family friend, recalls.

The upper reaches of the Hackensack were their Mississippi. Using a small fibreglass dinghy with a rusted three-horsepower engine, the Conant boys and their friends explored the wooded inlets and dunes and swimming holes around Nauraushaun Brook and Muddy Brook, and beyond. They referred to the thicket where they



MAP BY CARL DETORRES

"I survived a terrible storm last night and woke with a resolve to go to my demise without regret," Conant wrote his brother Jim.

launched the boat, near an abandoned Revolutionary War-era cemetery, as Catfish Yacht Club. Dicky had business cards printed up, with membership numbers and titles. Chris Kelly, the club's commodore, still carries his Catfish card in his wallet.

The Conants' marriage was unhappy. The Colonel, as he was known to some, was a charismatic and imposing raconteur who boasted of his world-travelling encounters with Patton, Eisenhower, and the Pope. Returning from Vietnam, in the late fifties, he brought two tiger skins—hunting trophies—and displayed them in the house. When he drank, he could be vicious. Claire, who worked at a psychiatric hospital, was overwhelmed. Reflecting on his childhood, Conant later noted, "As I got older and visited more with friends and their families, I noticed that many adults showed affection and warmth not only to us youngsters but to each other as well! How strange."

At Pearl River High School, Dicky was a member of the National Honor Society and served as the junior-class president. With his blue eyes and wispy blond hair, he was a "magnet" for pretty girls, according to Erich Ziller, a pal since elementary school. "I always looked at Dicky like I wished I could be him—be more spontaneous," Ziller said.

Conant graduated near the top of his class, and was offered a scholarship to SUNY at Albany, where he played varsity soccer. It was the late sixties, and he also got into other things. "He was way out there," Steve Lippincott, a college friend and former teammate, remembers. Conant was an art major. Always ebullient in person, Conant the artist showed hints of torment. Of his pieces, a friend remarked, "They weren't anything happy-go-lucky or joyful. It wasn't spring. It was always winter, if you know what I mean." He cited an image of a man with his legs cut off above the knees, stumps dripping blood, muscles tensed, and an agonized expression. In the background, as he recalled, horses drooled over the severed shins and feet.

Conant belonged to the Edward Eldred Potter Club, a kind of anti-Greek fraternity. A friend from high school who accompanied him to Albany recalls that sport was made of spiking Conant's beer with LSD. "There was one guy who thought it was hilarious to watch Richard go deep under the influence," he said. His studies faltered. In 1972, he was asked to leave school, so he went home and found work at Nyack Hospital for a couple of years, first as a custodian and then as a surgical technologist, thrilling to the gore and drama of the E.R.

During this period, Dicky "just seemed different," Joe Conant, the second eldest, remembers. Rob, the fourth eldest, recalls Dicky occasionally oversleeping and accusing him or their mother of stealing his alarm clock, early inklings of a paranoid tendency.

"Then, when he came back to Albany, people said, 'Dicky came back but he won't talk to anybody,'" Steve Lippincott recalled. "I ran up to him, and I said, 'Dick! Dick!' He looked right past me. I said, 'It's me, Steve! I'm your friend.' He said, 'I don't have any friends,' and he kept walking." Lippincott never saw him again.

Conant's academic focus was now stronger, and he pursued a pre-med curriculum. Yet neither parent attended his college graduation, in 1976. They had separated, and each feared running into the other, or so the wounded son reasoned. Conant applied but was not accepted into medical school. He moved out West, following his older brother John, who had become a roughneck in the Wyoming oil boom.

He worked briefly on the rigs; underground, in a coal mine; and, on the railroad, manning freight-train cabooses for the Union Pacific, a job in which he invested particular pride, believing, as he put it, that "the efficient transportation of mail, consumer and capital goods, bulk commodities, etc., is vital to the health and growth of our country."

In 1981, John committed suicide. In the economic recession, Dick lost his railroad job. He enlisted in the Navy in the fall of 1983, and served on a frigate tracking Soviet submarines. The rigid hierarchies of Navy life didn't suit him, and his occasional bouts of insubordination attracted the attention of naval doctors. "Our medical corpsman, also known as 'Doc the pecker checker,' conspired to have me ousted from the service through a medical discharge," he later wrote. "Some time was wasted ashore as various head shrinkers examined me and tried various exotic psychotropic potions on my delightful yet non-addled brain. . . . I told them that I may have been slightly delusional for a while but that I was much better now."

He received an honorable discharge, in 1989, at the rank of quartermaster second class, but the humiliation of being placed on medical leave seems to have stuck with him. Years later, when a social worker at a V.A. clinic in Austin, Texas, asked him if he had ever received psychiatric treatment, he smelled a conspiracy. "I suspected she had access to my official medical records from naval service," he wrote. "I know to lie while applying for benefits is a crime, so I told the truth. We spoke about benefits available for men like me (there are no men like me)."

Jacksonville, Albuquerque, Phoenix, Salt Lake City, San Antonio: Conant lived seemingly everywhere, never staying put for long, and often enrolling in classes—physics, microbiology—at the nearest university, while he sought more hospital work. In 1992, he applied to medical schools again, explaining in an accompanying essay that he was particularly drawn to the growing field of neurosurgery. "It was a sense of adventure which drove me to work on the railroad," he wrote. "There I worked with heavy, noisy, dangerous equipment in all extremes of weather. In the Navy, I sailed to far corners of the world and met many good people." Neurosurgery, he continued, "is like navigation in the sense that success depends upon truthful information. Facts, good judgment, and deliberate action yield good results." His applications were denied.

Two years later, Conant sent an old friend a postcard from Idaho, saying that he had "fashioned a kayak" and was planning to paddle it to the Pacific Ocean. It was the last the friend ever heard from him. To me, Conant later characterized the trip, along the Salmon River, as a "learning experience." He left on his forty-third birthday, in a snowstorm, and covered three hundred and fifty miles in the next six weeks. He brought along three books: a Gideons Bible and biographies of Einstein and

Bismarck. It rained much of the time, and his lovingly made kayak, which looked like an angular torpedo when he began, was battered beyond reusability. He stopped far short of the Pacific, but he had established a template for channelling his frustrations into cleansing river trips. "The peace of mind I found, largely alone, on that white-water mecca, convinced me that life was capable of exquisite pleasure and undefined meaning deep in the face of failure," he wrote. "The experience itself is the reward."

In middle age, Conant continued shedding past acquaintances who might remind him of his squandered potential—his "checkered career," as he often put it—in favor of an endlessly renewable social resource: the riverbank. Working odd jobs, and with studious planning, he was able to finance ever more ambitious trips, gradually building a uniquely adventurous canoeing résumé.

He began to describe himself as "a canoeist who writes books." The books—unpublished manuscripts, some of which he shared with his siblings and other river pals—recount his journeys in vivid detail. They are by turns funny and sad and journalistic, stuffed with biographical information about ordinary strangers, as though Conant saw himself as the Studs Terkel of the waterfront. "This stuff about 'finding oneself' is a bunch of baloney," he wrote. "I repeat that I am not out here 'finding myself.' I was never lost. What I am doing is paddling around finding geography I have not seen, observing various industry and transport, experiencing wildlife, meeting new people, most of whom are worth meeting, and having a jolly good time before I die."

He was also, arguably, fleeing from the ordeal of his "paranoid disorder," as the Navy had called it, which made establishing roots fraught. "Though in most places I visit I am treated with friendship and generosity and often kindness in the extreme, I am beholden to no one," he wrote. "When I am out on the water in my canoe, I do call the shots. My time is my own, it belongs to me."

Conant moved to Montana because of a woman, or so he often said. His journal entry recording their introduction reads, "Met Tracy from Seattle & Chesapeake Bay Retriever, Haley, very nice lady, while packing boat." This was July 21, 1999, the day after what he had called "the most wonderful day in my life so far," a rigorous paddle on the Yellowstone River, in Montana's Paradise Valley, during which he negotiated Class II rapids and managed to strike only two rocks, amid clouds of snowy discharge from the cottonwood trees along the banks. He was at Sacajawea Park, in Livingston, and on his way to the Gulf of Mexico, via the Yellowstone, the Missouri, and the Mississippi. A few weeks earlier, he had quit his job at the Boise V.A. Medical Center, where he worked as a janitor, and had withdrawn from Boise State University, where he was taking biochemistry. He was, as he later wrote, "angry at my co-workers and superiors and angry at my neighbors and angry at the national Congress (due to the Clinton impeachment proceedings), and I was angry at modern life."

During his conversation with Tracy, he wrote, "She asked if I would come back. I said I would and that I expected to study bacteriology at Montana State University in nearby Bozeman, MT. I told her that I was a little rough around the edges but that I expected some lady, someday, would tame me and we'd get married. She smiled and lightly jumped at that. She was very pretty and a bit demure."

Tracy never accompanied Conant on any of his future trips, but she became a recurring character in his writing:

> At the rich man's bar I met "Pumpkin," a large, good looking blonde haired gal in her thirties. She was giggly and fun until I mentioned I had a sweetheart, Tracy, back in Montana.
>
> I assumed they thought I was out on the make. I wasn't. I never am. I've been faithful to Tracy ever since we met over 8 years ago.
>
> While I am writing I see two bright stars or planets. They are far apart and remind me of Tracy and me.

In Bozeman, where he worked at Montana State University as a custodian, and at the Greyhound depot, Conant kept mostly to himself. He told me that for entertainment he overate: "I go out to Chinese restaurants and they have these all-you-can-eat-for-ten-bucks deals." He was known as the enormous man in overalls riding a small bicycle all over town, knees splayed. At the library, he worked on his voluminous accounts of his adventures. To the extent that his journals of life in and around the swamp reflect a near-constant concern that others were wary of him, and even whispering about him, he may not have been wrong. With acquaintances and co-workers, he spoke often of Tracy, but I couldn't find anyone who ever saw her. A couple of librarians mentioned that he showed up once at a public concert on the lawn carrying a bouquet of roses—and said that they'd watched from the window as he roamed the grounds, seeming to look for a date who never arrived.

One evening, late in 2012, Conant returned to his campsite in Bozeman only to find charred ruins. The swamp, as he called it, was part of a wetland with mountain views and a soundtrack of howling coyotes and rumbling trains. It had been his residence longer than any other place had been since his childhood home in Pearl River. He suspected arson, and resolved never to spend another winter up North. The next morning, he bought a bus ticket to Austin, Texas, where he would sometimes be the lone Anglo among the transient population. "Here is my current plan of action," he wrote in a marble composition book. "I must secure Social Security benefits. Then I want to secure a small laptop computer. . . . In the spring of 2014, I will be 63 y.o. and hopefully in good health. I can live on the rivers easily for $700 a month, and less if I pinch pennies." Biding his time in Austin, listening to an astronomy radio program on his headphones and scavenging from dumpsters, he thought of himself as a locust, lying in wait, hidden from civilization until his bank account began to grow again.

In June of 2014, having amassed more than six thousand dollars, he took

a bus east, eventually alighting in Plattsburgh, to begin the trip to Florida. "When I got up there, the public was watching me like a hawk, you know?" he told me. "See if I was eyeballing any of the women, as a single man will do."

He bought a canoe at Dick's Sporting Goods, for three hundred dollars, as well as portage wheels, which he used to drag the boat a few miles along the Adirondack Northway to his put-in, on Dead Creek. It was a Coleman Scanoe—a skiff canoe, fourteen feet long and with a wider than usual thirty-eight-inch beam.

He launched on July 5th, and was almost immediately overcome by two-foot swells on Cumberland Bay. Ten gallons of water washed over his gunwales, and he camped for two nights by a dock for a fishing charter, waiting for the gusting northwest wind to let up, before proceeding south into Lake Champlain.

A few days later, he attracted the attention of a state trooper named Edwin Scollon, who wrote to me recently:

> My time with Mr. Conant was brief. He was the subject of a suspicious person complaint. A woman was enjoying a late summer afternoon on her back deck with friends. Her deck overlooks Lake Champlain and Vermont's Green Mountains from Willsboro Point. Mr. Conant paddled past her home, heading south, in his plastic canoe. Although he waved and offered a "hello," his being there unsettled her; especially when she observed him coming ashore behind a neighbor's vacant camp. She called the state police.
>
> I found Mr. Conant in a bed that he had made upon a pebbled shoreline and under a canopy of cedars. He hadn't heard me come around the house and I took a moment to size him up. He looked quite comfortable; he had a book propped up on his midsection and all that was left of his dinner was the can that had once contained it. It was readily apparent to me, from all that he had in and about his canoe, that Mr. Conant was making a long trip. If I hadn't had a job to do, I would have left him alone. He had made this little piece of shoreline his own for the night and even though he was outdoors, I did feel that I was about to disturb his privacy.
>
> As I approached, I called out a greeting to him in an attempt not to startle him. He did start a little, but I offered him my hand to put him at ease. He looked at me a little warily at first. I told him exactly why I had been summoned there and that I could understand why someone may be concerned about him being behind a vacant home. He told me that he had walked up on the lawn, had seen a realty sign posted there, and didn't think he'd be disturbing anyone. I asked him if he had made any attempt to enter the home and he assured me that he hadn't. I took him at his word. He asked me if his being there was unlawful. I told him that as far as I was concerned, it was not; and since it was getting too late to be on the water, I told him that I'd prefer that he stayed put. . . .
>
> It was a short but very cordial conversation; especially considering the circumstances under which it was initiated. He was an easy man to talk to. I couldn't help but be impressed by his wanderlust and his courage in undertaking such a long journey, all alone. I shook his hand, wished him safe travels and left him to his quiet night on the point.

Scollon continued to think about Conant in the days that followed, and stashed some old two-way radios in his cruiser, thinking that he might run into him a second time, and offer them as a parting gift. "But I wasn't fortunate enough to see him again," he said.

On the Mississippi, which he likened to "a vibrant monster you just let out of its cage," Conant typically hugged the east bank, seldom straying more than fifty yards from land. On Lake Champlain, and later on the Hudson—"an old uncle that has its moods"—he mostly stuck to the west bank, although, toward the end of July, at a narrowing south of Ticonderoga, he paddled across to Vermont, just to say that he had, and walked a short distance, spotting a bald eagle.

He recorded his observations—of wind and water conditions, eagles and ospreys, and human behavior—and other free-associative thoughts on a New York State Road Atlas, writing tidily in block letters, a habit left over from his Navy days spent keeping the ship's log:

> Pelfershire was originally called Pilfershire as local folks were renowned cattle rustlers!
>
> Sewage settling ponds. Stinky.
>
> At visitor center fellow said he was reminded of movie "The Jerk." It was a veiled insult directed at me. I said that it was not very charitable but one cannot help what they are reminded of.
>
> Insects are funny. They just land on me like I was a piece of wood or a rock.

For a few days at a time, he might not speak to a soul, content with his

"I'm pretty sure middle-aged upper-arm jiggle is the one thing there's not a niche market for."

Western novels and his chores. A circling beaver at dusk. A waning moon over the Green Mountains. Hooded Merganser ducklings at play. And then, suddenly feeling a social tug, he would beach in a river town and make several stops: a grocery, a church, a library, a bar.

Navigationally speaking, the lake and the Hudson were the easy parts: straight, wide shots (more or less), connected by a canal, with a dozen locks, which reminded him, in places, of the Louisiana bayous, flanked by high, mature trees and by swamps. The art lay in the selection of campsites, and in trying, to the extent possible, given his six or seven inches of freeboard, to keep dry. He carried as much as fifty pounds of water with him, in plastic jugs, which he stowed around the hull in varying arrangements, for ballast. When anticipating turbulence, he drew down his supplies, drinking without replenishing, to increase maneuverability. "If I'm more buoyant, I can rock and roll a lot better," he told me.

His progress was slow at first: a few miles a day, seldom more than ten. He was out of shape. His preferred contingency rations were a jar of hot dogs preserved in pickle juice. Candy, too: "Chocolate has—not endorphins, but similar compounds that make you happy, and they taste really good!"

To break the monotony of paddling, Conant counted "cycles," as he called them, or groups of four strokes—one-two-three-*one*, one-two-three-*two*, and so on, up into the thousands, in some cases, without resting. The tallies gave him a rough sense of distance covered, using a formula of about two hundred cycles per mile, give or take the current. Sometimes he imagined the cycle counts as dates on a world-historical time line, which allowed him to view his progress down the river as part of an epochal continuum. Beginning at 1951, his birth year, he'd try to think of a memory from his own life to associate with each advancing cycle. 1966: building kayaks based on an ad in *Boys' Life*, to paddle on the Delaware. 1969: Woodstock, where Jimi Hendrix made eye contact, and said, "Hey, man, keep the Pope off the moon." 1973: sleeping on a feather bed in a farmhouse, in Böchingen, Germany, with Erich Ziller. 1985: strolling through the souk in Manama, Bahrain, with a beautiful young woman dressed in a black abaya.

The nostalgic effect was amplified as he approached West Point, with a rush of memories of childhood trips with the Colonel to see the Sherman-tank graveyard and the Mothball Fleet. "From the water this part of the Hudson is breathtaking in a subtle way," he wrote. "Not as shocking as a view of the Tetons coming west over Togwotee Pass in Wyoming, but every bit as beautiful." East of Storm King, he floated in the middle, looking south, and was reminded of Jackson Hole.

Soon afterward, he suffered a gout attack; the flareup conspired with thirty-mile-an-hour gusts from the north to keep him laid up in Cold Spring for a couple of days, popping naproxen pills and discussing the phenomenon of "cityots" (city idiots) with a local dog owner who resented the weekend crowd of heedless kayakers.

A couple of days after he resumed paddling, he reached Nyack, where he had worked in the hospital, and

DEER CROSSING

You can't shove
your mind into their little
mean hooves no matter
what you do

Running at night surrounded by hair ticks and twin brothers

On sucked pavement

Broken dishes

If I flick my tail will you flick your tail and everyone flicks their tails
before the air resettles our ears

A bestiary
hangs from the roof
of my mouth

Eating grass in pharmaceutical fields

Head down
in the sicko green

*

Curves through
the deer crossing and slow
down for children

A wet ribbon

Sometimes pinballs
for eyes tongue in a drain
and a crossed-out
stomach

Soft as butter

Your legs are soft as butter

Unbroken necks twitch followed by one hundred backsides
disappearing into white clouds and canal trash

Streaming through broken apples

Apple cider

A girdle full of fruit

*

Nothing but babies
here and one or two mamas
and papas

Licking themselves into a batter

Night noses
brown river and white
bellies or
suitcases for flies
maggot bath and
shit slick

It's either spring or it's not

Crossing in the morning light without thinking there's no way
around it we sound like the rain

Tin cans

Striking sparks in high-heel shoes

—*Michael Dickman*

wandered into town for the first time in thirty-seven years. He felt, he said, like Rip Van Winkle, disoriented by the different sameness of everything.

The day after I met Conant at my neighbor's house, I went looking for him on the river. I drove south to a marina in Alpine, New Jersey, and asked some men who were smoking in the parking lot if they had seen a hillbilly in a canoe. "You mean the guy going to Florida?" one said. I drove farther south, parked, and began hiking back upriver, along the edge. After a mile or so, looking through a pair of binoculars I saw the flash of a yellow paddle blade, and there he was, bobbing in the ebb tide, riding so low that he appeared almost to be sitting on the water. He came ashore when he spotted me.

"I'm due for a good break," he said, after carefully backing his canoe into a sandy beach beneath the Palisades, near some Jet-Skiers who had come over from the Bronx side to swim. "It don't feel like much, but these damn swells are coming from the southeast," he said. "They're not hitting me in my face, but they're reducing my progress tremendously." He arranged several sticks of driftwood crosswise, as a makeshift ramp for pulling the boat above the high-water mark. His overalls were draped across the bow, air-drying after a laundry dunking earlier in the morning. He was wearing swimming trunks and a salt- and sweat-stained T-shirt that said "New Orleans French Quarter." His digital watch, I noticed, was set to Mountain Time. Rummaging around in his cooler, he asked me if I wanted a soda pop, and mentioned that he planned to have some ice water. He gave a few shakes to an old Gatorade bottle that he'd been re-using. "I got peaches," he said. "You want one?"

He spread a tarp on the ground, and said that he was going to seek "as close to a prone position as possible." Across the river from us were Spuyten Duyvil and the Henry Hudson Bridge. He had come twelve miles. Conant's tarp lay unnervingly close to some poison ivy at the southern edge of a narrow grass strip abutting the stone ruins of a bathhouse. The Palisades offered shelter from the hot sun. "God, look at this beautiful afternoon," he said. "It's nice being in the shade for once." He showed me his atlas, and began reading highlights from his notes. I didn't have much time—I had promised my wife I'd pick up our son from day care. Because Conant had no schedule to maintain, he agreed to stay there for a couple of days, so that I might visit with him some more while he rested his muscles for the difficult stretch ahead, past the city and into the harbor.

"Let me tell you one more story before you go," he said, and recalled an encounter with a great blue heron during a previous trip, a few curves north of New Madrid, Missouri. "I was doing what I call night passage, full moon and a four-knots current in the middle of the Mississippi River. He comes swooping in right next to my port gunwale, and he just flapped his wings in place, so he was hovering. This went on for probably five seconds. I could feel the wind in my face. His beak looked like a dagger. I could see his eyeballs. We're looking at each other like this." He flashed a look of alarm, and then smiled.

When I returned, the next afternoon, I found Conant napping near a

spread of cheese and condiments. I was not his first visitor. A man had come by to fish early in the morning, before work. Conant told me the man's name, age, and home town, as well as his work history (a truck driver turned dispatcher) and the whereabouts of his parents.

Then he began talking about his "sweetheart." He said, "I don't want to give you her last name, but her name is Tracy. Lovely woman. She's younger than I am. Comes from good stock. And she keeps in touch. You know, they asked me up at the V.A., when I went to get my medications up in—oh, what's the name of that town, it's north of Beacon? Castle Point, which is really in the town of— It's got an old-timey name. Wappingers! They asked me, if I had a disaster, would I want her to find out about it? I said no. I didn't tell 'em why: because she'll know about it before anybody else! She'll know about it before the Red Cross. She is an unusual woman—keeps tabs on me—and eventually she'll show up on this trip somewhere, probably in disguise."

He went on, "She might get some false stories, but anytime she's ever checked on me she's always found me to be fair and square. Plus, the other thing is she's looking to see if I'm healthy and alive. I appreciate that. I really do. Nobody else does that."

I noticed at one point that he'd been pouring himself caps full of soy sauce to drink, and sipping straight from a Tabasco bottle. "I'm energizing the flavor buds," he said. He put the condiments down. "These adventures are incredible," he went on. "They really are. They're wonderful to have. They're dangerous, and full of excitement. However, at this point in my life I've had enough of this excitement. I'd much rather be at home with a woman and a family, like you have, than out here on the water. But this is the alternative."

Conant made it from his Palisades campsite to Hoboken in what he called "an extraordinary transit": a three-hour pull on an outgoing tide, fighting through the occasional ferry wake. "Wonderful memories of NYC flood my brain," he wrote on his atlas. "Grant's Tomb, Riverside Church, G.W. Bridge, hurray!" He visited Elysian Fields, the site of the first organized baseball game, in 1846, and asked a lineman from the electric company to take some pictures of him with the city skyline in the background. "Talk about universe and he is drifting," Conant wrote. "I told him to marry his woman. It would help center things." They ended up retiring to Maxwell's Tavern. "Gave me a hug and many heartfelt compliments. Hard to say goodbye. It always is."

The next day, September 5th, he rested: "electrolytes, bananas." Police roused him from his beach camp ("blocks from where Frank Sinatra grew up") at 4:30 A.M. on the sixth, and he was under way, into New York Harbor, by six-fifteen, having promised to write the officers from Florida. Through fog, he paddled past Ellis Island and the Statue of Liberty, and was visited by more cops, this time in a motorboat, as he reached the port of Bayonne. Their warnings of heavy commercial traffic ahead were borne out, and steep waves from tugs and container ships chased Conant ashore in the Staten Island neighborhood of New Brighton, where he soon diagnosed himself with a case of anemia.

On September 10th, a fifty-seven-year-old harbor pilot named Dougy Walsh went down to the creek on the Kill Van Kull, near his house in West New Brighton, to catch some minnows to use as bait for an annual fluke tournament he liked to fish in, and noticed a red canoe, a tarp, and a bedroll. "You kidding me?" he blurted out. "You're camped in here? What about the rats?"

Smiling, Conant replied, "I'm looking for the Raritan River. You know where that is?"

They ended up talking for four hours, about the tugs, and about Walsh's sick father—also a harbor pilot—and about Conant's plans to game the tides past Newark Bay and on down, in order to ride an ebbing current south of the Rahway River mouth toward Tottenville, at the bottom of the island. "I was blown away by this guy," Walsh recalled. "He didn't have any nautical charts! He was using a road atlas!"

The next day, Conant woke up to the memorial towers of light above Ground Zero. "Unexplained trepidation but determined nonetheless," he wrote. Walsh, after visiting his father in the hospital, returned to the campsite and invited Conant back to his house, a landmarked Gothic Revival dating to the mid-nineteenth century, for crab macaroni and sangria. His wife was away, out on Long Beach Island. Conant was still weak, and struggled to climb the stairs, but he took

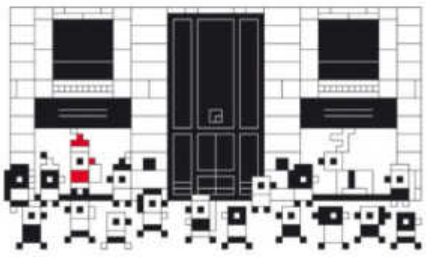
"It seems as though all this global warming has had very little effect on my bucatini carbonara."

pleasure in the house's historic significance, as a stop along the Underground Railroad.

"He cut me right to the heart," Walsh said, choking back tears. "He said, 'I thank God there's people like you.' " Walsh added, "My wife said, 'I don't believe you. You meet all these fucking weirdos.' "

Conant made his way into the industrial heart of New Jersey on the Raritan. Arriving in Princeton, via the Delaware and Raritan Canal, he put on a button-down and a clean pair of overalls and played Ivy Leaguer for a few days, visiting the Paul Robeson Center for the Arts, listening to a lecture on justice during the American Revolution, and attending a football game, under the lights (Princeton, 56; Davidson, 17). He also made himself a regular at the Yankee Doodle Tap Room, in the Nassau Inn, where he marvelled at the names carved in the wooden tables, including "Doctor Einstein." ("Brooke Shields is said to have carved her name as well but no one can find it.") Another customer, Robert Dix, Class of 1967, and a financial heavy, saved a napkin on which Conant had scribbled his e-mail and P.O.-box addresses, and stored it in his desk, hoping to maintain contact. "He did leave a very favorable impression as an authentic person," Dix said. "Pretty well dressed in ironed overalls and checkered shirt is what I remember for someone staying in a canoe."

While preparing to leave town, Conant discovered that one of his backpacks, containing months' worth of reserve medication, had been stolen. Trying not to panic, he paddled on, toward Trenton. A few of the bridges over the canal were so low that he had to lean back and retract his chin, sliding underneath, as though into an MRI scanner, while cars rolled overhead. Then, eight or nine miles north of the city, he encountered some differences between the canal as it flowed and the map in his mind, formed from advance Google satellite scouting. He spied a corrugated culvert pipe, off to the left, through which water was leaking down into a creek—the Assunpink Creek, he presumed—and he decided to have a little fun, paddling into the rusty chute. Down he went, into the dark, gaining speed as he bumped along for thirty or forty feet. He was briefly airborne before splashing out at the bottom and taking on about a gallon of water, a small price for the experience of canoeing "like a ski jumper!," as he put it. The canal runoff provided the creek with some helpful momentum, and for the next several hours he negotiated snags and shoals and descended minor rapids, all while looking for a plausibly private campsite.



He eventually stopped near some woods abutting an abandoned factory, in East Trenton. Squeezing through a gap in a fence, he walked three blocks to a bar, Choppy's Gallera, where he joined a man named Carlos, who had just got out of prison, for happy hour, to celebrate a day that had begun in fear and ended in wonderment. Conant paid for the beers and took Carlos across the street, to a bodega, for beans and sauce. "Adios, my friend, *de mi corazón*," Carlos said, as Conant slipped back through the fence and into solitude.

Nearly everyone he'd met on the trip had advised him to bypass Trenton. The objections seemed to be based mainly on the popular conception of New Jersey's capital city as a punch line for despair. But Trenton's real challenge was navigational. Assunpink Creek goes underground as it reaches downtown, buried beneath a highway interchange, some train tracks, and the D.M.V. Conant spent the morning after his ski-jumping triumph investigating options for portage. His best bet, he concluded, was to disembark beneath the Wall Street bridge, a few hundred yards from the courthouse, amid a partial dam of fallen branches, trash, and tires. For two or three strenuous hours, lugging his gear piecemeal, he scrambled up and down the overgrown bank, at the top of which lay the rotting carcass of a stray dog. Then came the challenge of dragging the canoe itself up the forty-five-degree grade, using a rope.

He was sitting at the top, recovering in the shade, in earshot of the scavenging flies, when a slender, middle-aged black man walked by, dressed in a leather jacket and a leather cap. "What'd you do? Paddle that river?" the man asked, incredulous. His name was Kevin Jolley—"like the Jolly Green Giant, except with an 'e,' " he said—and he was carrying a couple of hot meals home from a nearby soup kitchen. Jolley offered to put Conant up in his open-air garage, for a more proper rest. Conant hesitated at first, and then, an hour and a half later, reconsidered, after having reckoned with the constraints of urban portage: stoplights, crosswalks, potential thieves. At the rate he was advancing, he wasn't likely to see water again before dark. "I rested and read paper as sounds of the not-wealthy neighborhood engulfed my senses," Conant wrote of his stay with Jolley. "It was a very happy sound."

Jolley Portage, as Conant took to calling his dry-land slog through downtown Trenton, resumed early the next morning, and became a kind of slow-motion spectacle, as he traversed a couple of city miles, in small increments. He caught the attention of a young civic activist and local booster named Jon Gordon, who, inspired by the poem "In Flanders Fields," had made a habit of planting red poppy seeds in vacant lots as an urban gardener's commentary on the effect of heroin on Trenton and the surrounding region. Gordon handed Conant a Tic Tac container full of seeds, and enlisted him in some future riverbank scattering, but not before shooting commemorative videos, with his iPhone, of "this giant in overalls with a canoe in the middle of the hood," as he put it.

Scene: Conant, sitting on a street corner, leaning back against a green duffel, boots crossed, maps in his lap, hands knotted over his midsection. He has a Camaro Z28 cap on his head, and a toothbrush and a pen poking out of his breast pockets. The canoe is off to his right, parallel to the curb. A white brick building advertising

"Plumbing & Heating Materials" squats in the background. Strewn backpacks and bags, a crate, a blue bucket, a Gatorade bottle: a landlubber's boating picnic. A man in a motorized wheelchair cruises west, not on the sidewalk but in the street, against the flow of traffic, and doesn't so much as turn his head to acknowledge the strange voyager.

"Where you headed?" a voice offscreen asks.

"I'm headed down to Florida," Conant says, laughing.

"What made you stop through Trenton?" another voice asks. "Just the map?"

"Well, no," Conant says. "I want to get on the Delaware, so I can head down to—there's a Chesapeake-Delaware Canal that I can take into Chesapeake Bay. Now, Chesapeake Bay's a large body of water, and I'll be exposed. But it's not as large as the Atlantic Ocean."

The first offscreen voice asks, "Yeah, man, what's your whole purpose, though?"

Before Conant can finish answering, a black S.U.V. pulls up alongside the curb, looming over the canoeist, and the camera turns away. A woman leans out the window. "Excuse me," she says. "I'm looking for River View Plaza?"

Conant hitched a ride across Chesapeake Bay with Jim Greer, a seventy-five-year-old former Merry Prankster who was piloting a solar-panelled trimaran called the Ra and attempting to set a Guinness record for distance travelled on water under power of the sun. Greer, who went by Fish Monger on the Furthur bus, tied Conant's canoe off to a cleat on the stern, and marvelled at the fact that his passenger seemed to stay up much of the night talking—to Tracy, Conant explained. The Ra's port pontoon sprang a leak ("OUCH DISASTER," Conant wrote), and they sought help at a marina south of Annapolis in the last week of October.

From there, Conant, fearing the onset of winter and needing to re-up on meds, asked one of the shipyard hands, Moses Wells, for an overland lift. "I fell for him," Wells said. "He was one of those people you can just connect to." Conant also accompanied Wells on a fishing trip. "He enjoyed being on a boat that had a motor," Wells added. He loaded Conant's canoe into the back of his pickup truck and delivered him to the naval hospital in Portsmouth, where he had finished his long journey in 2010.

By the time I found Wells, nearly six months had passed since Conant's disappearance. I was headed to North Carolina to retrace his last known movements. When I got there, I informed John Beardsley, the wildlife officer, of the trimaran and truck rides, and that Wells believed that Conant might still be alive and had merely got sick of canoeing. "You can't fit a canoe on a Greyhound bus," Wells said. He told me that Conant had gone shopping for a tent and some propane tanks on the drive to Portsmouth, but local news reports gave no indication that those items had been recovered with the boat.

"Well, that all sounds great, but here's the problem," Beardsley said. "We found a tent." They also found sleeping bags, food cans, and credit cards—which led to a bank account that had gone inactive, with the exception of automated monthly deposits from Social Security. If Conant had intended to hop on a bus, he would have been better off abandoning his canoe in town, where there was public transportation within walking distance—whereas, through a tip line printed in the *Daily Advance*, the local paper, Beardsley had learned that Conant likely paddled on at least fifteen miles more. A father and his daughter reported seeing an old man in a canoe, with a tarped mound in the bow, approaching Wade's Point, where the Pasquotank River meets Albemarle Sound. He looked content.

By the time that lead came in, after a weekend of scattered searching, the Coast Guard had already recalled its vessels—too vast a search area, too little chance of survival. Beardsley and his colleague Chase Vaughan continued investigating for several more days. But, because it was peak hunting season, they were soon called back to their regular patrols. "You start spending a lot of money just looking," Beardsley said. "Budgets, man."

The Conant case, technically still open, nagged at him. He had been on the job for eight years, and never failed to find a missing person, dead or alive. As with others whose paths crossed briefly with Conant's, Beardsley couldn't help seeing aspects of himself in the wayward traveller, whom he now called Dicky. He asked me, "Do you ever think about doing something like that yourself—just going on a crazy adventure?"

Beardsley and Vaughan offered to take me out on the water. The wind was blowing five to ten from the northeast, producing conditions similar to those on the morning that Conant's boat was discovered. It was a pounding, hold-on-tight chop. The Pasquotank seemed about as wide as the Hudson at its broadest but without the steep slopes on either side that lend a feeling of containment. Looking south into the sound, I couldn't see any land on the horizon.

After heading east for a few more minutes, Beardsley slowed down, and picked up a pair of binoculars. "Hey, is that another tarp in there, right near the green bush?" he asked, pointing toward the cypress knees and the scrub growth behind them. I saw only an errant crab pot. Vaughan thought he saw plastic wrap from a case of bottled water. We were a few hundred yards out. Vaughan took a long boat hook, stuck it in the water until he hit muck, and then pulled it out again; the pole was wet only up to his navel. The relative lack of depth of the sound increases the frequency of waves, and can make a two- or three-foot chop more treacherous than surfable ocean swells. Had Conant capsized or been swamped, he might have been able simply to stand up and walk ashore. The problem was the shore, and hypothermia. The swampland was impenetrable, except by hounds. "Even if your life depended on it, you couldn't have walked that far," Vaughan said.

In the fall of 2014, a few weeks before they learned that he had gone missing, Jim Conant and his wife, Marie, received an e-mail from Dicky. It began:

> Dear Jim and Marie, I survived a terrible storm last night and awoke with a resolve to go to my demise without regret. I want to mend fences with you and not end my days

with any (as you term it) angst in my heart. So I am sorry if I wrote or said anything to you that was offensive or unkind or hateful. Of course you have my love as always.

In early November, Robert Peek escorted an overloaded canoeist through his post at what he likes to describe as "the oldest continuously operated man-made canal and locking system in all of the Americas." Peek has for the past twenty-one years been the lockmaster of the Deep Creek Lock, at the top of the Dismal Swamp Canal, which extends twenty-two miles down into the Pasquotank, in North Carolina. "The average boat that comes here is between a thirty- and a seventy-five-foot vessel, and I've had as much as a hundred-and-forty-foot vessel come through," Peek said. "Not even one per cent of the boats that come through here are trailerable boats, meaning something that you or I could have in our back yard." He added, "For a canoeist to actually go from one end of this canal to the other? That's odd. That's rare. That's really, really rare."

One morning about a week later, a man named Dan Smith noticed someone in a sleeping bag on the dock where he keeps his sailboat, in Elizabeth City. Smith, who is an administrator at Mid-Atlantic Christian University, or "the Bible college," as it is known locally, had his golden retriever, Baxter, with him, and had to call the dog off its sudden rush toward the interloper. "I don't need the guy getting startled with a hundred-pound golden licking his face, and then rolling into the water," Smith recalled thinking. He brought Baxter back inside and fed him breakfast, and when he returned to the dock, alone, fifteen minutes later, the sleeping bag and whoever had been using it were gone. Then Smith noticed an unfamiliar canoe tied to one of the slips, using the hitch knot of an experienced boater. "I just felt nudged," he said. "I pulled a bunch of acrylic and wool socks out of my drawer, and I had, like, fifty dollars in cash—put it in a shopping bag, double-bagged it, and just kind of tossed it into his boat."

The next day, a student at the college reported that she'd discovered a scary man sleeping under a gazebo, near the river. Smith went out again and introduced himself. The man explained that he was a Navy veteran, and that he had begun paddling up by the Canadian border. He hoped to make it as far west as Edenton, some thirty highway miles distant, before attempting to cross Albemarle Sound. "I was just enchanted," Smith said. He and his wife had long talked about how they might like to spend a few years living on their boat, after retirement. "I remember walking into the house and telling her, 'You wouldn't believe the guy who's out there.' Because you just never know who's going to wander in and out of your life. Sooner or later, we're going to be some of those wanderers."

While in Elizabeth City, Conant ate at the Colonial Restaurant and at Sidney's, on Main Street, and paid five dollars for a shower at a riverfront gym. He spent his afternoons at the library, upstairs, studying and copying maps. The librarians, whispering among themselves, called him Grizzly Adams, and occasionally had to remind him to put his shoes back on, because he was starting to get too comfortable.

On Saturday, the fifteenth, Conant walked into Page After Page, an independent bookstore on Water Street, and startled the proprietor, Susan Hinkle, who was alone and getting ready to close for the evening. "It was rainy and freezing," she said. "And he came in, and he was a very big burly guy, carrying bags, with a bright-red face, and a hat, and layers and layers of clothing." Conant bought a book, a navigational aid, and stayed nearly an hour, telling Hinkle about his travels. "He was showing me how he has to paddle along the edge, because the canoe was so loaded down, you know, that he couldn't take any waves," she said. He showed her a piece of paper that he kept in the bib of his overalls, on which he was recording the names and addresses of future pen pals. "He was planning to get married!" she said.

The next day was stormy, and Hinkle found herself unable to get Conant out of her mind. "Nice to see that there's still people like that, you know what I mean?" she said. "I was like, 'God, I hope he didn't go today,' because it was so windy, and pouring rain." In the afternoon, she went out for an errand, and she kept an eye out the window, looking at the water, but, like so many of Conant's friends, she wasn't fortunate enough to see him again. ♦

A REPORTER AT LARGE

TRAFFICKING IN TERROR

How closely entwined are the drug trade and global terrorism?

BY GINGER THOMPSON

In December, 2009, Harouna Touré and Idriss Abdelrahman, smugglers from northern Mali, walked through the doors of the Golden Tulip, a hotel in Accra, Ghana. They were there to meet with two men who had offered them an opportunity to make millions of dollars, transporting cocaine across the Sahara. Touré wore a dashiki, and Abdelrahman had on tattered clothes and a turban that hid much of his face. They tipped the guards at the entrance and then greeted Mohamed, a Lebanese radical, in the lobby. Mohamed took them up to a hotel room to see David, a drug trafficker and a member of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia, or FARC. "*Hola*, *Colombiano*," Touré said, as he entered the room. Abdelrahman tried to call David "007" in Spanish, but said "477" instead. David, who was dressed in a short-sleeved pullover and Bermuda shorts, laughed and offered his guests bottles of water.

Touré and Abdelrahman came from Gao, a parched and remote city in northern Mali which has long been used as a base for smuggling of all kinds, from immigrants to cigarettes. In recent years, the surrounding region has also been the scene of conflict between violent bands of nomadic insurgents, including members of Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM). During months of meetings and phone calls, David and Mohamed had told Touré that the FARC had some thirty thousand fighters at war with the United States, and that it wanted to work with Al Qaeda, because the groups shared the same enemy. "They are our brothers," Mohamed said. "We have the same cause." Touré had explained that he had connections to the organization: he ran a transport company, and, in return for safe passage for his trucks, he provided Al Qaeda with food and fuel.

Still, David remained skeptical. He needed assurances that Touré's organization was up to the task. The FARC had a lot of money riding on the deal and was willing to pay Touré and Abdelrahman as much as three thousand dollars per kilo, beginning with a fifty-kilo test run to Melilla, a Spanish city on the North African mainland. Loads ten times that size would follow, David said, if the first trip went well.

"If you're done, I'm going to speak," Touré said. He told David and Mohamed that he was tired of all the "blah, blah, blah." He had operatives along the smuggling route, which stretched from Ghana to Morocco. Abdelrahman, whom Touré had introduced as the leader of a Malian militia, said that he had hired a driver with links to Al Qaeda. They had also bribed a Malian military official, who would help them cross the border without inspection.

David was reassured. "I want us to keep working together, because we're not doing this for the money—we're doing this for our people," he said.

Two days later, Touré and Abdelrahman went back to the Golden Tulip to collect their initial payment. Oumar Issa, a friend from Gao who was also involved in the plan, waited at another hotel to receive his portion. Instead, the smugglers were met by Ghanaian police officers. David and Mohamed, it turned out, were not drug traffickers but undercover informants for the United States Drug Enforcement Administration. Within days, Touré, Abdelrahman, and Issa were turned over to the D.E.A., put on a private jet, and flown to New York, where they were arraigned in a federal courthouse. They were charged under a little-known provision of the Patriot Act, passed in 2006, which established a new crime, known as narco-terrorism, committed by violent offenders who had one hand in terrorism and the other in the drug trade.

In announcing the charges, Preet Bharara, the U.S. Attorney for the Southern District of New York, said, "As terrorists diversify into drugs, they provide us more opportunities to incapacitate them and cut off funding for future acts of terror." The case marked the first time that the narco-terrorism provision had been used against Al Qaeda. The suspects appeared to be precisely the kind of hybrid whom the law, which does not require that any of the targeted activities take place in the U.S., had been written to catch. Michele Leonhart, the D.E.A. administrator at the time, said, "Today's arrests are further proof of the direct link between dangerous terrorist organizations, including Al Qaeda, and international drug trafficking that fuels their activities."

As the Malians' case proceeded, however, its flaws became apparent. The defendants emerged as more hapless than hardened, childhood friends who believed that the D.E.A.'s informants were going to make them rich. "They were lying to us. And we were lying to them," Touré told me from prison. Judge Barbara Jones, who oversaw the final phases of the case, said, "There was no actual involvement by the defendants or the undercovers . . . in the activities of either Al Qaeda or the FARC." Another judge saw as many problems with the statute as with the merits of the case. "Congress has passed a law that attempts to bind the world," he said to me.

The investigation continues to be cited by the D.E.A. as an example of its national-security achievements. Since the narco-terrorism provision was passed, the D.E.A. has pursued dozens of cases that fit the broad description of crimes under the statute. The agency has claimed victories against Al Qaeda, Hezbollah, the Taliban, and the FARC and established the figure of the

The case of the three Malians was one of dozens that the D.E.A. said fit the description of the narco-terrorism statute.

ILLUSTRATION BY BEN WISEMAN

"Mom, Dad, I'm merry."

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narco-terrorist as a preëminent threat to the United States.

With each purported success, the D.E.A. has lobbied Congress to increase its funding. In 2012, Michael Braun, who had served as the D.E.A.'s chief of operations, testified before Congress about the link between terrorists and drug traffickers: "Based on over thirty-seven years in the law-enforcement and security sectors, you can mark my word that they are most assuredly talking business and sharing lessons learned."

That may well be true. In a number of regions, most notably Colombia and Afghanistan, there is convincing evidence that terrorists have worked with drug traffickers. But a close examination of the cases that the D.E.A. has pursued reveals a disturbing number that resemble that of the Malians. When these cases were prosecuted, the only links between drug trafficking and terrorism entered into evidence were provided by the D.E.A., using agents or informants who were paid hundreds of thousands of dollars to lure the targets into staged narco-terrorism conspiracies.

The D.E.A. strongly defends the effectiveness of such sting operations, claiming that they are a useful way to identify criminals who pose a threat to the United States before they act. Lou Milione, a senior official at the agency, told me, "One of the things the D.E.A. is kind of in the business of is almost all of our investigations are proactive." But Russell Hanks, a former senior American diplomat, who got a first-hand look at some of the D.E.A.'s narco-terrorism targets during the time he served in West Africa, told me, "The D.E.A. provided everything these men needed to commit a crime, then said, 'Wow, look what they did.'" He added, "This wasn't terrorism—this was the manipulation of weak-minded people, in weak countries, in order to pad arrest records."

On September 11, 2001, when American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon, D.E.A. agents were among the first to respond, racing from their headquarters, less than half a mile away. A former special agent named Edward Follis, in his memoir, "The Dark Art," recalls how he and dozens of his colleagues "rushed over . . . to pull out bodies, but there were no bodies to pull out." The agency had outposts in more than sixty countries around the world, the most of any federal law-enforcement agency. And it had some five thousand informants and confidential sources. Michael Vigil, who was the D.E.A.'s head of international operations at the time, told me, "We called in every source we could find, looking for information about what had happened, who was responsible, and whether there were plans for an imminent attack." He added, "Since the end of the Cold War, we had seen signs that terrorist groups had started relying on drug trafficking for funding. After 9/11, we were sure that trend was going to spread."

But other intelligence agencies saw the D.E.A.'s sources as drug traffickers—and drug traffickers didn't know anything about terrorism. A former senior money-laundering investigator at the Justice Department told me that there wasn't any substantive proof to support the D.E.A.'s assertions.

"What is going on after 9/11 is that a lot of resources move out of drug enforcement and into terrorism," he said. "The D.E.A. doesn't want to be the stepchild that is last in line." Narco-terrorism, the former investigator said, became an "expedient way for the agency to justify its existence."

The White House proved more receptive to the D.E.A.'s claims. Juan Zarate, a former deputy national-security adviser, in his book, "Treasury's War," says that President George W. Bush wanted "all elements of national power" to contribute to the effort to "prevent another attack from hitting our shores." A few months after 9/11, at a gathering of community anti-addiction organizations, Bush said, "It's so important for Americans to know that the traffic in drugs finances the work of terror. If you quit drugs, you join the fight against terror in America." In February, 2002, the Office of National Drug Control Policy turned Bush's message into a series of public-service announcements that were aired during the Super Bowl. Departing from the portrayal of illegal narcotics as dangerous to those who use them—"This is your brain on drugs"—the ads instead warned that getting high helped terrorists "torture someone's dad" or "murder a family."

In the next seven years, the D.E.A.'s funding for international activities increased by seventy-five per cent. Until

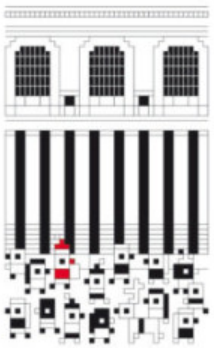
then, the agency's greatest foreign involvement had been in Mexico and in the Andean region of South America, the world's largest producer of cocaine and home to violent Marxist guerrilla groups, including the FARC, in Colombia, and the Shining Path, in Peru. Both groups began, in the nineteen-sixties and early seventies, as peasant rebellions; before long, they started taxing coca growers and smugglers to finance their expansion. The D.E.A. saw the organizations as examples of how criminal motivations can overlap with, and even advance, ideological ones.

Now the agency was focussed on Afghanistan, which had been one of the largest opium producers in the world until 2000, when the Taliban declared poppy cultivation un-Islamic and banned it. Almost as soon as the Taliban were forced from power, the country's farmers began replanting their poppy fields; the D.E.A. warned that the new crops could become a source of revenue to finance attacks by Al Qaeda. "D.E.A. has received multisource information that bin Laden has been involved in the financing and facilitation of heroin-trafficking activities," Asa Hutchinson, the D.E.A. administrator, said during a hearing on Capitol Hill in March, 2002. Hutchinson cited insurgency groups in drug-producing countries around the world, including the FARC, the Shining Path, and the Kurdistan Workers Party, in Turkey, which had historically been a significant narcotics transshipment point. And Hutchinson mentioned evidence collected by the D.E.A. that the tri-border area of Paraguay, Brazil, and Argentina—home to a large and thriving Arab business community—had become a source of financing for Hamas and Hezbollah.

With support from Congress, the D.E.A. set up the Counter-Narco-Terrorism Operations Center, a clearing house for any terrorism-related intelligence that its agents picked up around the world. The agency reopened its office in Kabul, which had been closed since the Soviet invasion, in 1979. And it brought together law-enforcement officials from nineteen countries in Asia and Europe to participate in an intelligence-sharing project known as Operation Containment, which was aimed at cutting off the flow of Afghan heroin and opium.

By 2004, Al Qaeda had largely fled Afghanistan, and the D.E.A. turned its attention to the Taliban, which agents believed would follow the same guerrilla-to-drugs trajectory as the FARC. The D.E.A. cobbled together informant networks and undercover operations aimed at traffickers linked to the insurgents. The agency had never played that role in a war zone, and it required support from the military, which wasn't forthcoming. Edward Follis, the former D.E.A. agent, told me that most American combat commanders showed the D.E.A. a "blatant and willful disregard." He said that the Pentagon "couldn't get beyond the idea of capturing or killing enemy combatants."

Later that year, the D.E.A. took its case to John Mackey, a Republican investigative counsel for the House International Relations Committee. Mackey, a former F.B.I. agent, handled counter-narcotics for the committee's chairman, Henry Hyde, a prominent Republican from Illinois. Current and former congressional staffers recall that Hyde didn't have a deep interest in anti-drug matters, allowing Mackey to take the lead. "You know how Congress works," one former staffer said. "There are all these unknown and unelected people who wield enormous influence over obscure topics. Mackey was one of them."



Under Mackey's direction, Republican legislators pressured the Pentagon to support the D.E.A.'s operations in Afghanistan. Follis said that the D.E.A. received tens of millions of dollars in additional funding, allowing it to increase the number of agents in the country from two to more than forty, and to develop its own special-forces units, known as FAST teams, which carried out raids on opium bazaars and heroin labs. The agency also identified a high-value Afghan target, Haji Bashir Noorzai, an opium trafficker with close ties to the Taliban's leader, Mullah Omar. In 2004, President Bush put Noorzai on a list of the world's most wanted drug kingpins. But, because most of Noorzai's opium and heroin exports went to Eastern Europe and not to the U.S., it was difficult for the D.E.A. to go after him. Mackey made numerous trips with the D.E.A. to Afghanistan, and warned Congress that people like Noorzai "are going to fall through the cracks unless we broaden our thinking about them."

In early 2005, Mackey helped to draft a statute that would give the D.E.A. the authority to chase drug traffickers anywhere in the world as long as the trafficking was connected to terrorism. When Hyde introduced the legislation, he made a point of drawing his colleagues' attention to its reach: "This bill makes clear that, even without direct U.S. nexus, if these drugs help support or sustain a foreign terrorist organization, the producers and traffickers can, and should, be prosecuted for material support of terrorism, whether or not the illicit narcotics are ever intended for, or enter, the United States."

The statute was passed in 2006. But questions among Justice Department officials about how to enforce it delayed implementation for another year. Some authorities worried that overzealous prosecutors might be tempted to use the narco-terrorism statute against teen-age addicts caught with Afghan heroin. Follis, half-joking, told me, "The law was so wide open you could indict a bologna sandwich." But, when officials from the Justice Department proposed adding language to the statute that would more narrowly define terrorism, Mackey balked. "There's no need to spell out what we mean by terrorism," he said. "You know it when you see it."

In the next few years, the D.E.A. lured two of the most wanted arms dealers in the world, Monzer al-Kassar and Viktor Bout, into drug-related conspiracies before arresting them, in Spain and Thailand, respectively. A former senior D.E.A. official told me that, although Kassar and Bout were not charged with narco-terrorism, the agency's expanded investigative license gave it more tools with which to pursue

them. David Raskin, a former senior prosecutor in the Southern District of New York, hailed the arrests. "They were not pure drug smugglers," Raskin said of Bout and Kassar. "But they were clearly bad people. And the D.E.A. was pushing the envelope."

By 2008, the D.E.A. was part of the so-called Intelligence Community, the military and civilian agencies that are the U.S.'s foremost espionage resources. Michael Braun, who is widely considered the architect of the agency's Afghanistan program, told reporters, "I have briefed more three- and four-star generals over the past eighteen months than the agency has in the last thirty-five years." He added, "We are seeing more and more unequivocal connection with respect to Al Qaeda being involved in drug-trafficking activities."

Some of the D.E.A.'s investigations took the agency to Africa. With large swaths of ungoverned territory, long histories of civil conflict, and ascendant jihadist groups, including Boko Haram and AQIM, the continent was viewed by the Defense Department as the next front in the war on terror. The D.E.A. had identified West Africa as a major transshipment point for South American cocaine. As in Afghanistan, most of the drugs were flowing to Europe. But the D.E.A. argued that money from that trade was ending up in the hands of terrorists. Lou Milione told me that Colombian drug traffickers who had been arrested in Eastern Europe had confessed to moving drugs through the Sahara with the help of Arab smugglers, along routes that overlapped with areas that had been occupied by AQIM. "If anything was moving through that region, AQIM had to be involved," Milione said. At the end of 2008, Derek Maltz, who led the D.E.A.'s special-operations division, was invited to a gathering of senior leaders of the Pentagon's newly established Africa Command. "I didn't want these guys thinking I was just another D.E.A. agent coming to talk to them about drugs," Maltz told me. "I was there to talk to them about a matter of national security. And I wanted them to know from the start that it was personal."

Maltz, who is bald and strapping, began his presentation with a series of photographs. The first showed the Twin Towers in flames. The second was a picture of his brother, Michael, a former member of an Air Force pararescue team, waving triumphantly. The third showed a line of helicopters parked on an airfield in Afghanistan. There was a gap, where one helicopter was missing—Michael's. He had been killed on duty, in 2003. "You guys are trained to go out and drop bombs on the enemy," Maltz told the assembled officers. "But sometimes you can't drop bombs. And that's where the D.E.A. comes in. We have other ways of taking bad guys off the playing field."

Harouna Touré was born in a small Malian farming village called Bamba, the youngest of nine children. The family lived in a one-room shelter made of wood and mud. His father was a day laborer, who built houses and dug wells, and raised goats. Harouna attended school for only a few years before he joined his father at work. As soon as he was tall enough to drive, Touré, who is broad-shouldered and has dark, expressive eyes, moved to Gao. There he began working with his eldest brother, Almatar, who ran a small trucking company that transported goods and people across the Sahel, a semi-arid region that divides southern Mali from the north, where the Sahara begins. The area has bustled with unregulated trade since the fifteenth century. Roads are minimal, and driving forty miles can take an entire day. "And by the time the trip is finished you will be sore from your head to your feet," Touré told me. But he loved it. "For me, it was fun, because every day was different," he said. "I was able to see new people and new places."

Gao is a seedy city of about a hundred thousand people on the Niger River, the region's primary thoroughfare during the rainy season. Running a business in the Sahel, Touré told me, is by definition a quasi-legal activity. He and his brother transported food, fuel, construction materials, cigarettes, and Bangladeshi workers—most of which came into the country without proper inspection or paperwork. Drivers travelled in armed convoys to protect themselves and their loads from bandits. They also paid off various military units, tribal authorities, and ethnic militias, who controlled the territory along the way. Touré told me that he never encountered Al Qaeda or its operatives during his travels, but that he did cross the territory of other armed groups. "Sometimes you had to give them money, or food, or fuel," he said. "If you didn't, you were going to have problems."

For a while, Touré thrived. He started a construction business that took on small projects in communities along his truck routes. He employed dozens of people, and made enough money to travel to Paris and to take his mother on the hajj. "I was moving so fast people used to call me the mayor," he said. But he took on new jobs before being paid for old ones, and fell into debt. By the end of 2008, he had a wife and two children. And he was paying for treatment for Almatar, who had developed diabetes and had to have one of his feet amputated.

By then, the D.E.A. had begun to plan operations in West Africa. Among the agency's targets was AQIM, which had recently bombed a United Nations office in Algiers and regularly kidnapped foreign tourists, diplomats, and journalists for ransom. But working on the ground in West Africa wasn't anything like working in Latin America, where the D.E.A. had employees in territory ranging from Tijuana to Tierra del Fuego. African operations were overseen largely from Rome. The narco-terrorism unit covering the region was based in Chantilly, Virginia. And the D.E.A. had so few agents of color who spoke African languages that it was forced to rely on informants, who were paid only if their work resulted in prosecutions. (Spokespeople for the D.E.A. denied that informants were paid according to whether their intelligence led to prosecutions, and that its conduct in Africa was substantially different from that on other continents.) "We had significant gaps in our knowledge," a former D.E.A. official who did intelligence work said. But, he added, "after we began putting money on the streets we went from zero to sixty in no time."

One of the paid informants was Mohamed, whom agents described to me only as a Lebanese businessman with ties to Arab communities in

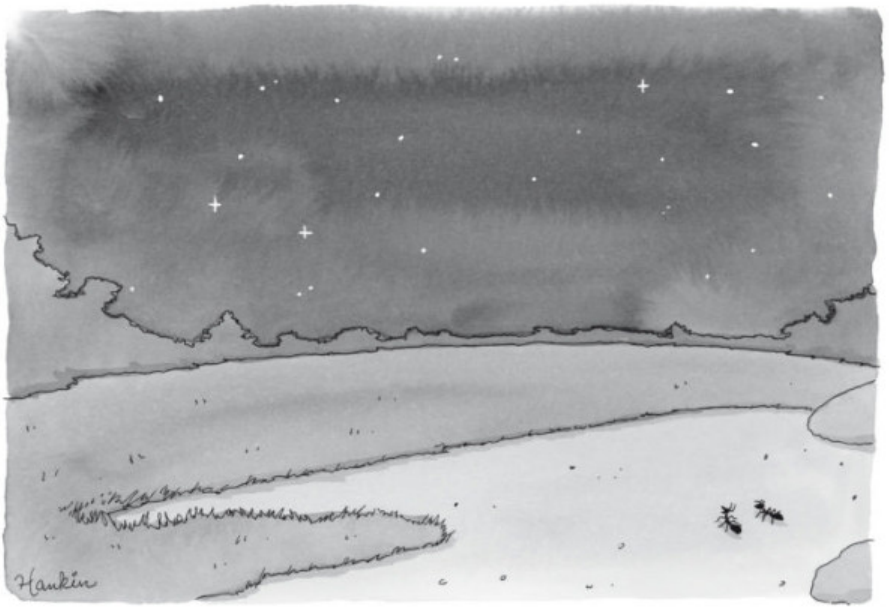
South America and West Africa. He was eventually paid more than three hundred thousand dollars for his work on the Mali case.

In September, 2009, an investigation into an unrelated plot led Mohamed to Oumar Issa, a compact Malian man with an easy smile and angular features, who worked as a day laborer and a driver at the port in Lome, Togo, another West African smuggling center. Mohamed told Issa that he was looking for someone who could help a group of wealthy Colombians move large loads of drugs from Ghana, through Mali, to Spain.

Issa said, "I have people who have a foothold in the bush." He went to Mali to fetch Touré. The two had been friends since they were teen-agers, but when Issa approached Touré about the drug deal Touré initially refused. Issa had strayed from Islam, and was known to drink too much. Touré didn't want anything to do with drugs, mostly for religious reasons. And he didn't think that he could pull off the kind of operation Mohamed wanted. Touré's contacts did not stretch all the way across the Sahara. As for Al Qaeda, Touré told me, "I could never work with them. They treat black people like slaves."

But Touré says that Issa pleaded with him to reconsider. "I thought if I could just make that money everything would be fine," Touré told me. "I could start fresh." He enlisted Idriss Abdelrahman, who sold used auto parts at an open-air market in Gao. Together, Touré says, the three men concocted a scheme as elaborate as the D.E.A.'s. While the informants pretended to be FARC operatives, Touré, Issa, and Abdelrahman pretended to be part of a criminal network with links to Al Qaeda. The plan, Touré said, was to get the traffickers to pay them a portion of the money up front and then disappear into northern Mali. It was clear that the traffickers had never been to Mali, Touré said, so it wasn't difficult to fool them.

On October 6, 2009, Touré and Mohamed met for the first time, in a hotel room in Ghana. According to a D.E.A. video recording of the meeting, Mohamed, a tall man, with a belly that hung over his belt, pulled out a map and proposed a route. Touré took it from him, and proposed another.



"Makes you feel small, doesn't it?"

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Touré told Mohamed that the trip wasn't going to be cheap. "There are Islamists, bearded guys—they're in the bush," Touré said. "You gotta give their chiefs something."

Mohamed called the Islamists "our brothers," and said, "Let them take as much as they want to fuck the Americans." He added, "You pay Al Qaeda, right?"

Touré nodded. "You pay all that."

Mohamed asked for more proof. He told Touré that he would invite a commander from the FARC to join them in Ghana, if Touré would bring a representative from Al Qaeda. The D.E.A. flew in Walter Ramirez, a convicted drug dealer from the Detroit area who had been working as an informant for the agency for nearly a decade, to play the role of the FARC commander, David. Touré brought in Abdelrahman, who played a militia leader with links to Al Qaeda.

The D.E.A. maintains that, in the meetings that followed, the Malians offered ample testimony of their Al Qaeda connections. The transcripts are hard to follow. It is clear, however, that the subject of Al Qaeda came up repeatedly, and that it was often raised by the informants, in order to elicit incriminating statements.

On one occasion, Mohamed instructed the targets to talk in a bellicose fashion if they wanted to persuade David to move forward. "I have told him you are warriors," Mohamed said. "Let it come from your mouth so that I can repeat it. You understand?"

David waved a wad of cash. "You told me you needed to buy a truck—isn't that right?" he asked Touré. "Hey. Twenty-five thousand dollars so you can buy your truck." Mohamed suggested that David's show of trust deserved one in return.

"You have to know our power," Touré said. "You have to know our networks."

"That's it," Mohamed said. "That's what he wants." Later, he asked the Malians if they really had "power in the desert."

Abdelrahman chimed in: "We have cars, the power, and the weapons." Touré added, "We have crews. We have bases. We have weapons. We have everything."

On December 18, 2009, when Touré, Abdelrahman, and Issa arrived in New York for their arraignment, the city was anticipating a major snowstorm. The three Malian men had never been so cold, or surrounded by so much concrete. They didn't understand what a cocaine deal in West Africa had to do with the United States, much less

with terrorism. And they were skeptical of their court-appointed lawyers, who were employed by the same government that had ordered their arrest. "There were a lot of people, a lot of cameras, a lot of papers, a lot of talking, and no air," Touré recalled. "I couldn't think. I couldn't breathe."

The three men were housed in the Metropolitan Correctional Center, in lower Manhattan. An Arabic-speaking psychologist met with them to evaluate their emotional state, but since Arabic was not their first language—they spoke Songhay—neither Touré nor Issa understood much of what she was saying. Abdelrahman had learned some rudimentary Arabic as a child, as a servant in the homes of wealthy Algerian families, but he didn't understand the psychologist's role. "She's asking if we want to kill ourselves," Abdelrahman told Touré and Issa. "Maybe what's coming next is so bad that we will prefer to die."

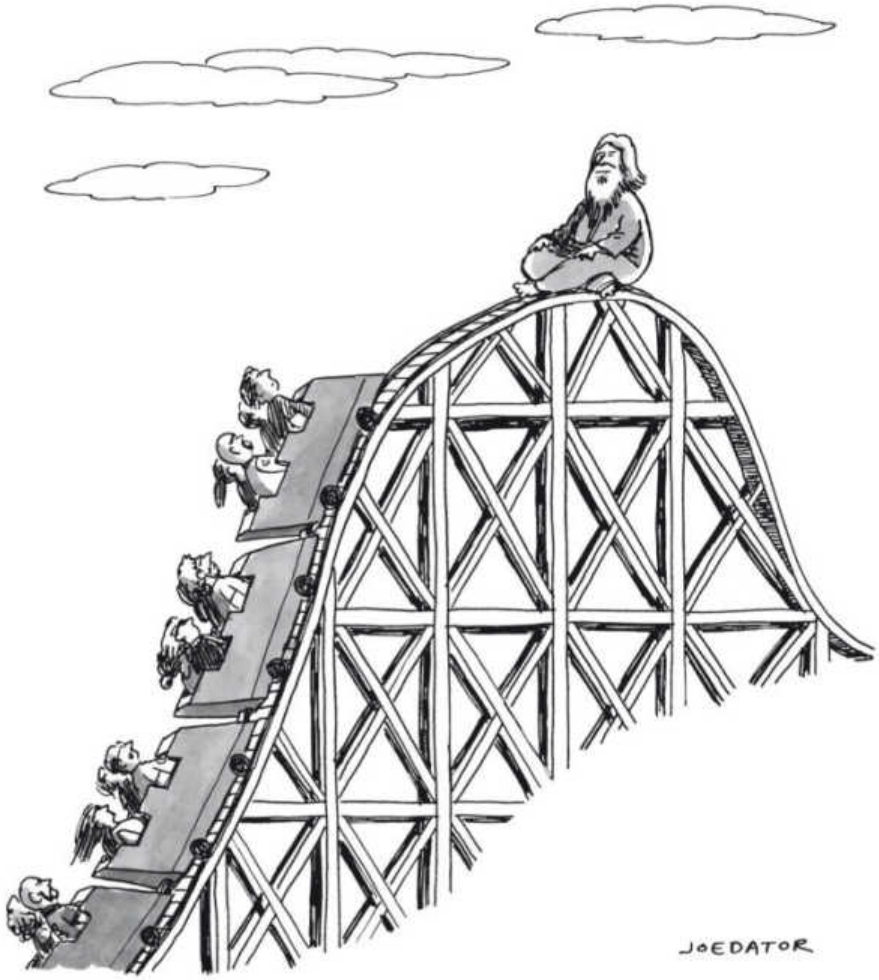
Later that day, the men made their first appearance in court. Julia Gatto, an attorney in the federal public defender's office, said of Abdelrahman, "When the judge called his name, he fell on his knees, and cried, 'I swear. I swear.'" Gatto said, "All I could think was, What kind of terrorists are these?"

Gatto was assigned to represent Issa. "Usually when I meet a client in his circumstances he understands what it is to be arrested, or who a judge is, or what bail means," Gatto said. "There were basic concepts and words that he didn't understand, because he had never been here. He had never been in the system; he had never seen an episode of 'Law & Order.'"

The Malians' lawyers warned them that, under the terms of the narco-terrorism statute, the government's case was entirely winnable, and urged them to negotiate a plea. "When a jury hears 'Al Qaeda,' it stops listening to everything else," Gatto said.

Touré thought that his lawyers either had given up on him or were plotting with the prosecution. It seemed absurd that his improvised boasts to David and Mohamed could be enough to convict him. He asked his relatives in Mali to sell his home and to finish a pending construction project, so that he could hire a private attorney. The relatives sent him thirty thousand dollars, enough only for a retainer. When the money ran out, the attorney quit. Touré then asked the judge to reappoint his original public defenders, and he immersed himself in the case. He spent nights listening to audio recordings from the sting operation, pointing out discrepancies in how the conversations were translated. Because he was illiterate, he asked his lawyers to read him all the documents filed in court, so that he would know what arguments were going to be made.

In early 2012, after the Malians had been in prison for more than two years, prosecutors announced that they had decided not to call Mohamed to testify. Abdelrahman's attorney, Zachary Margulis-Ohnuma, saw it as a breakthrough. "The government's whole case relied on Mohamed's credibility," he told me. By not calling Mohamed to testify, he believed, the prosecutors would throw his credibility into question. "I really believed we were going to win," Margulis-Ohnuma said.



On the eve of the trial, prosecutors brought up a seemingly unrelated piece of evidence: the story of an American missionary named Christopher Leggett, who had been killed by AQIM in 2009, the year that Touré, Abdelrahman, and Issa were arrested. Leggett, a thirty-nine-year-old father of four, had been shot near a school that he ran in a poor neighborhood in Mauritania. Prosecutors shared photographs showing groups of dark-skinned, turbanned men waving rocket launchers and automatic rifles over the heads of kidnapping victims—all of them white, all visibly terrified. The prosecutors argued that the murder demonstrated why terrorist conspiracies in Africa posed a threat to the United States. "It shows jurisdiction," Christian Everdell, one of the prosecutors, said.

"If you look at the people in those pictures, and you look at me and Idriss, you would think we are the same," Touré said. Margulis-Ohnuma said that he felt "sandbagged." As far as Touré

was concerned, the fight was over. The government agreed to drop the narco-terrorism charge, and Touré, Abdelrahman, and Issa pleaded guilty to charges of providing material support to a terrorist organization, the FARC.

But Abdelrahman's allocution, the procedure meant to assure the judge that he understood the charges against him and accepted his guilt, was unconvincing. "I still continue to believe that I am totally innocent," Abdelrahman said. "But I have been scared by what I heard yesterday—yesterday people were talking a lot about Al Qaeda and the pictures." Judge Jones advised Abdelrahman that she could not accept a plea if he did not think he was guilty, and suggested that perhaps the case should proceed to trial. Everdell, the prosecutor, proposed increasingly watered-down versions of what Abdelrahman was pleading guilty to. "I think what the defendant is protesting is that he didn't think, or in his mind he didn't think, that he was a terrorist, or this word 'terrorism' is causing a reaction, which I think is perfectly understandable," he said.

"I'm really confused about this whole plea issue," Abdelrahman said. "Accepting this plea means to accept things I did not do, which I find very difficult." He added, "Is that what the plea is, or is there something else?"

Jones told Abdelrahman that he would have to admit that he knew he was involved in a conspiracy that would have provided support to the FARC. Abdelrahman shook his head. "I didn't know about that," he said. "I was just helping Harouna. I wasn't helping anyone else."

Finally, Everdell allowed Abdelrahman to avoid mentioning the FARC, or even the word "terrorist." "It's not necessary that he knows the actual name of the organization," he said.

The prosecution asked the court to sentence the men to fifteen years in prison, five years short of the twenty-year mandatory sentence for narco-terrorism. But Jones sentenced Abdelrahman to slightly less than four years, and Issa and Touré to five years. The sentences included the three years the men had already served. "This was a government sting operation," Jones said. She added that she did not believe Touré was a member of Al Qaeda. He was "motivated primarily, if not entirely, by money, not the desire to influence a government, in this case anti-American ideology, or for any political reasons."

A month later, despite the reduced plea, the D.E.A.'s deputy administrator, Thomas Harrigan, mentioned the case to the Senate as an example of the national-security threats that the agency had thwarted in West Africa: "It was the first time that members of Al Qaeda . . . admitted members—we had them on video and audio recording acknowledging that they were members of AQIM—providing services for what they presumed were members of the FARC to transport cocaine." In a speech last year, Senator Chuck Grassley, Republican of Iowa, cited the case in arguing against provisions that would reduce sentences for drug-related crimes. He said that the proposal "puts our national security at increased risk."

The D.E.A. continues to pursue similar cases. In September, two Pakistani men were extradited to the U.S. for selling drugs and weapons to D.E.A. informants who posed as members of the FARC. Mark Hamlet, who succeeded Maltz as head of the D.E.A.'s special-operations division, told the press that the Pakistani defendants "illustrate once again that drug trafficking and terror conspiracies often intersect."

Neither the D.E.A. nor the Justice Department would provide me with a complete list of alleged narco-terrorists who have been captured since 9/11. But last May the D.E.A.'s Counter-Narco-Terrorism Operations Center published a report highlighting its achievements. The report notes that, of the State Department's fifty-eight officially designated foreign terrorist organizations, twenty-three have been linked by the D.E.A. to "some aspect of the global drug trade," including Al Qaeda, Somalia's Al Shabaab, Pakistan's Lashkar-e-Taiba, and Nigeria's Boko Haram. It also gives brief descriptions of more than thirty investigations involving defendants captured around the world. Some have been charged under the narco-terrorism provision of the Patriot Act. In other cases, the D.E.A. used the expanded authority it had been given under the law more as an investigative license. After the agency brought the defendants to the United States, they were charged with different crimes.

Most of the arrests resulted from sting operations, in which the connection between drug trafficking and terrorism was established in court as a part of conspiracies that were conceived by the D.E.A. An Afghan named Taza Gul Alizai sold heroin to an undercover D.E.A. agent, and then, according to his lawyer, was lured onto a plane to the Maldives by the promise of a visit to a licensed dentist. In his case, the connection to terrorism came from the testimony of a D.E.A. informant, who arranged the deal and pretended to represent the Taliban.

Among those caught in the narco-terrorism stings are government officials such as Bubo NaTchuto, a former head of Guinea Bissau's Navy, who was arrested for drug smuggling in 2013, after an operation led by two D.E.A. informants posing as members of the FARC. The same year, Dino Bouterse, the son of the President of Suriname, was arrested for conspiring to import drugs. The investigation involved a group of D.E.A. informants who posed as Mexican drug traffickers with connections to Hezbollah.

In a New York courtroom last year, Bouterse pleaded guilty to participating in a conspiracy to support Hezbollah. Not long afterward, however, Judge Shira Scheindlin said that the plea did not make the defendant a terrorist, much less a threat to the United States. "There's no evidence that this defendant was actively looking for an opportunity to become involved with any terrorist organization," she said, during sentencing. "Nor is there any evidence that he had any interest in attacking Americans, prior to the approach of these agents."

Most of those accused under the narco-terrorism statute negotiated plea deals, but the three defendants who chose jury trials were convicted. Among them were an alleged Taliban sympathizer named Khan Mohammed, who was found guilty of plotting to fire rockets at an American airfield, and an Afghan opium dealer, known as Haji Bagcho, convicted of

selling drugs and using the proceeds to pay the Taliban. Both men were given life sentences.

The case that may come the closest to representing the vision that gave rise to the narco-terrorism statute involved a Colombian trafficker allied with the FARC named José María Corredor Ibague, who was arrested in 2006 and convicted under the Patriot Act provision. Juan Manuel Santos, Colombia's Defense Minister at the time, applauded the arrest, which did not occur as part of a sting operation. But, when asked whether he considered Corredor Ibague a terrorist, Santos told reporters that he was "more of a drug trafficker than a guerrilla."

Referring to the D.E.A., Margulis-Ohnuma, the lawyer who represented Abdelrahman, said, "What's happening is that they're using techniques they've used to fight organized crime, because they're familiar with them. Those techniques might work to infiltrate money-making groups. But they don't work with terrorists. That's not how we caught bin Laden. That's not how we caught Awlaki."

The D.E.A. argues that there is much more to its narco-terrorism cases than what is presented in court. Before every sting, the agency uses wiretaps and its network of sources to investigate targets for links to drugs and terrorism. Once the connections are established, it stages a sting to capture the targets before they can do more harm. In order to protect the secrecy of its investigative methods, the D.E.A. says, it withholds much of the evidence collected previously, unless it's necessary to make a case. Most of the time, officials say, it's not. Under U.S. law, the statements and activities recorded during stings are usually sufficient for prosecutors to file some combination of federal charges.

But the fact that the narco-terrorism cases, when brought to court, rely almost entirely on evidence gleaned from sting operations has fuelled debate among some security experts about the degree to which the alliances that they target pose a threat to the U.S. Benjamin Bahney, of the RAND Corporation, who is a leading expert on the financing of Al Qaeda and ISIS, told me, "The national-security community has had a laser focus on this question for a long time, and the fact that there are no clear examples of it that have bubbled to the surface says to me that there's no there there."

ISIS, currently the foremost terrorist threat, is funded by oil revenues, taxes, and extortion but not by drug trafficking. Though Al Qaeda is listed by the D.E.A. as a drug-trafficking organization, the 9/11 Commission found "no substantial evidence" to support that characterization. Its report said, "Although there is some fragmentary reporting alleging that Bin Ladin may have been an investor, or even had an operational role, in drug trafficking before 9/11, this intelligence cannot be substantiated and the sourcing is probably suspect." The Senate Foreign Relations Committee came to the same conclusion in August, 2009. "A lot of people have been looking for an Al Qaeda role in drug trafficking, and it's not really there," one State Department official told committee members.

In the Afghan drug trade, the Taliban may be the least of the culprits. In 2009, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that the Taliban earned an estimated hundred and twenty-five million dollars from narcotics each year, about four per cent of the estimated $3.4 billion generated in Afghan opium sales. The bigger problem, according to Barnett R. Rubin, who served as an adviser to the late Richard Holbrooke, the U.N. Ambassador, might be America's allies. "The empowerment and enrichment of the warlords who allied with the United States in the anti-Taliban efforts, and whose weapons and authority now enabled them to tax and protect opium traffickers, provided the trade with powerful new protectors," he has written.

Brian Michael Jenkins, a counterterrorism expert at RAND, recently wrote that alliances between drug traffickers and terrorists "create dangers for both." Terrorists understand that criminal activities can "turn religious zeal into greed, transform political causes into for-profit enterprises, corrupt individuals and tarnish the group's reputation." For the drug traffickers, "When law enforcement problems morph into national security threats, the rules of engagement change," Jenkins wrote. "Drone strikes could replace arrests and prosecutions."

Skepticism about the extent to which terrorists engage in the drug trade also runs deep among numerous counterterrorism and national-security officials I spoke to at the F.B.I., the Pentagon, the White House, and the State and Treasury Departments. "In all these years, there's never been a smoking gun in any of the cases I've seen," Rudy Atallah, a former counterterrorism adviser at the Pentagon, told me.

A former official at the Treasury Department who has investigated terrorist financing in Africa said that D.E.A. agents posted there often scolded the intelligence community for not taking seriously the links between drug trafficking and terrorism. But, when pressed for proof, the agents said that the information was privileged or part of an ongoing investigation. "There was no corroborating evidence that senior terrorist leaders of Hezbollah, AQIM, or any other African groups had decided to get involved in the drug trade," the former official said.

Lou Milione, who oversaw many of the investigations listed in the D.E.A.'s narco-terrorism report, and Mark Hamlet, the head of the D.E.A.'s special-operations division, acknowledged that other national-security agencies, including the C.I.A. and the F.B.I., didn't necessarily see a link between drugs and terror. "I have lunch with those guys all the time," Hamlet said. "They look at our cases and say, 'Interesting work, but I wouldn't put it in my terrorism box.' And I say that's fine."

Milione strongly defended the agency's operation against the Malians. He said that while there may not have been evidence to corroborate Touré's links to Al Qaeda, nothing indicated that those links didn't exist. He said that the D.E.A. could have spent more time conducting surveillance against Touré in the hope of obtaining evidence to corroborate his statements about being affiliated with Al Qaeda. But agents worried that an opportunity to infiltrate

Al Qaeda could have slipped away, with potentially disastrous consequences. "I was in New York when the towers were hit," Milione said. "I often wonder would we be better off if we had used a sting to try to get inside that group before the attack."

Last October, about a month after Touré was released and returned to Mali, I went to see him. He suggested that we meet in Bamako, the capital, since Gao has become dangerous. In 2012, Mali's President, Abdoulaye Toumani Touré, resigned as a result of a military coup, and left the country. Gao, along with all of northern Mali, was attacked by a loose coalition of Tuareg tribesmen, extremists, and AQIM. Touré's wife and sons fled the city to live with relatives in Bamako. The new President, Ibrahim Boubacar Keïta, who was elected after he promised that he would have "zero tolerance" for corruption, promptly used forty million dollars in public funds to buy an airplane. Poor harvests have caused serial food crises, and increasing poverty has pushed Mali close to the bottom of the U.N.'s Human Development Index.

The north, which covers two-thirds of the country but contains less than ten per cent of the population, has been hit the hardest. When Touré returned, tourism and trade, the most significant sources of income for people in the region, had dried up. Hotels, restaurants, and night clubs were either closed down or protected by armed guards who imposed strict curfews on the guests, mostly journalists and diplomats. Rocket attacks and gun battles have killed dozens in recent months. Touré said that his homecoming was less than joyous. There was nothing left of his business. He found his wife distant. His sons, who were six and eight, were undernourished and were uncomfortable around him. The boys, he said, are so frightened of anything related to terrorists that he can't tell them that he was accused of being one. "I'll wait until they are a little older," he said. "First, I need to find a job."

Abdelrahman, after getting out of prison, moved with his mother and four children to Bamako. He had lost both of his wives; one had left him for another man after his arrest, and the other died shortly after he returned home. "She got sick when I was in America," Abdelrahman said. "It was very hard for her. A woman with children and no husband in Mali—sometimes she had to beg for food." He added, "She stayed strong, I think, because of the children, and because she wanted to see me one more time. Then she died."

"No more jolly. This year, Christmas is gonna be jacked."

• •

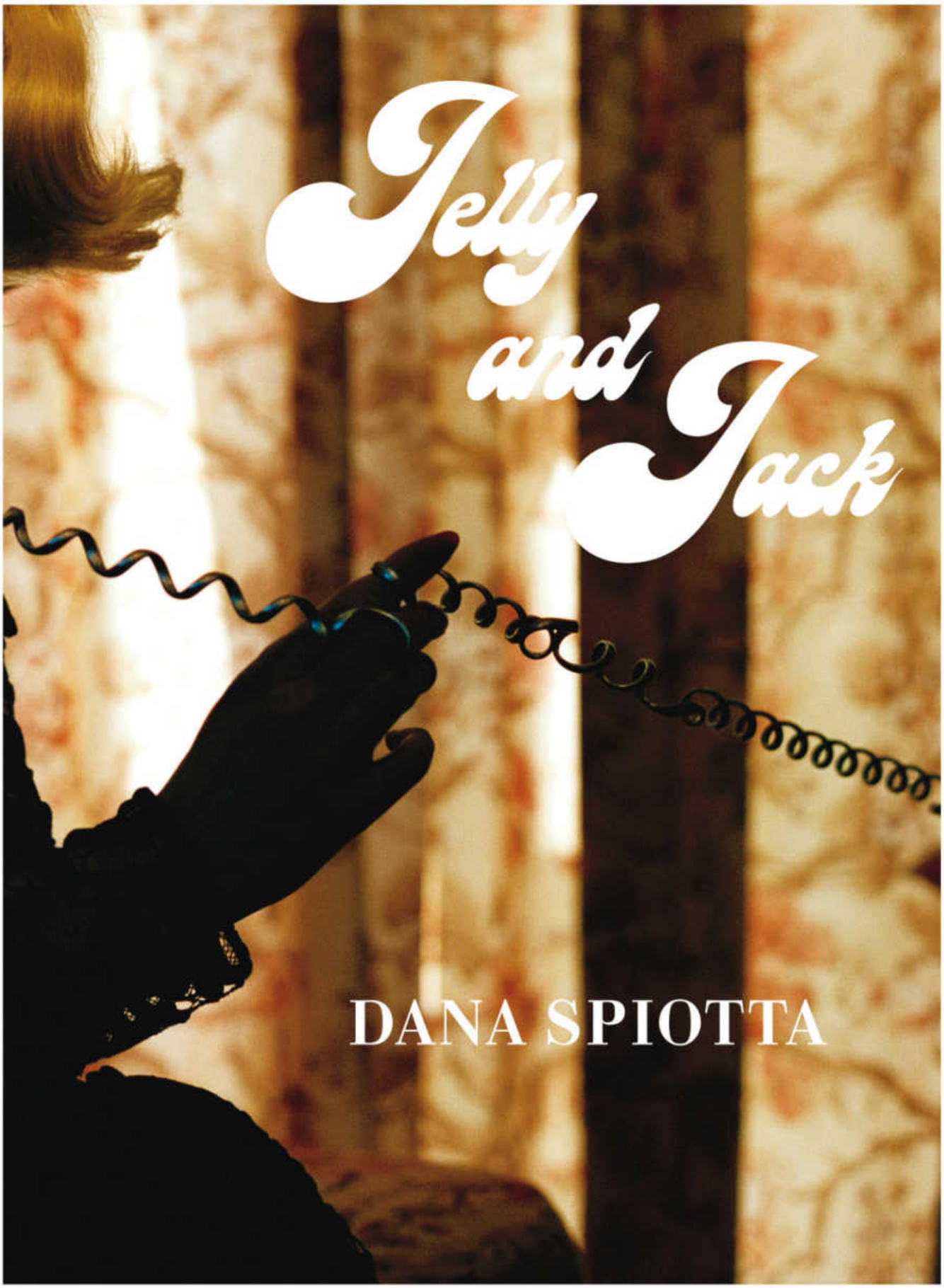
Touré told me that he was thinking about leaving Gao, too. He even admitted that there were things he missed about the United States, or, at least, the version he had seen in prison. He remembered working out in the gym every day, and the English classes he took in the afternoon. Most nights, he said, he and other inmates would gather around a television set to watch basketball. He recalled that, after the Miami Heat lost the 2014 N.B.A. championship series to San Antonio, he didn't sleep for several nights.

Since returning to Mali, he had felt himself sliding back into the same uncertainty that had landed him in trouble. Starting over with a terrorist charge on his record wasn't easy. "The name Touré has respect in Mali," he told me. "Just to say that I have been involved in this is a big shame for my family. People ask am I really Muslim, or am I just playing with God."

The more time I spent in Mali, the less I saw of Touré. But one day he showed up at my hotel neatly shaved, wearing a charcoal-colored pin-striped suit, a magenta shirt, and polished, square-toed alligator shoes. We sat in the restaurant of my hotel on the Niger River, drinking tall glasses of water. Touré explained that a friend from prison had bought him the suit for the trip back to Mali. He was about to meet with a member of parliament who had previously helped him get work with international aid organizations that needed goods transported across the Sahel.

"I know it's going to happen," he said, about securing employment. "I just wish I knew when." When asked about the gap in his work history, Touré had begun telling people that he had gone to the United States to work for a few years. "There are many people with the name Harouna Touré in Mali," he said. "Even if people know what happened, I can say that wasn't me."

I asked whether he saw the irony in his plan—lying about his identity was what had got him into trouble. "If I'm lying to find a job, God won't punish me," he said. Then he looked up with a smile, and said, "If I don't find a job, maybe I'm going to have to join Al Qaeda for real." ♦



Jelly and Jack

DANA SPIOTTA

DESIGN BY KELLY BLAIR

PHOTOGRAPH BY ALEX PRAGER

In the damp late spring of 1985, Jelly picked up the handset of her pink plastic Trimline phone and the dial tone hummed into her ear. She tilted the earpiece slightly away from her and heard the sad buzz of a distant sound seeking a listener. How many times had she fallen asleep after saying goodbye and not managed to get the thing on the cradle? The little lag when he had hung up but she was still on the line, semiconnected, in a weird half-life of the call, followed by the final disconnection click, then silence, and then, if she didn't hang up, sharp insistent beeps. These were the odd ways in which the phone communicated: urgent beeps to say, "Hang up"; long-belled rings to say, "Answer"; rude blasts of the busy signal to say, "No." The phone was always telling her things.

She pushed the eleven buttons—the 1, the area code, the number, zeroing in, the nearly infinite combinations ousted—her fingertips not needing to feel the groove of the numbers but feeling it nevertheless. So many distractions, unneeded and unwanted. She had to concentrate to keep the information away. There was a bird outside, trilling at her. It was at least fifteen feet from the closed window, but it still bothered her. It was probably in the Chinese oak in the courtyard. The ring of another person's phone sounded so hopeful at first, and then it grew lonelier. It lost possibility, until you could almost see the sound in an empty house.

He didn't have an answering machine. Make a note of that. A distinction. She could let it ring all day. Was that true? Had anyone ever tried it? The plastic handset rubbed against her jaw and her ear. She tilted it away again. If she lay on her side and let it rest on her head, using a hand only for balance, she could talk for hours.

"Hello?" said a male voice, clearing itself as it spoke, so that the end of the word had a cough pushing through it. Then came another cough. Was this the first time he had spoken today? Or had she woken him up? Talking to someone just roused from sleep offered a special, intimate opportunity. But it carried high risk, also. The woken person could feel startled or vulnerable, and then grow angry as the reality of the call's interruption reached his conscious mind. It had happened to Jelly once: "Why the fuck are you disturbing my sleep? You have no idea how hard it is for me to fall asleep. And now. Well, now I'm awake for the goddam duration, you bitch." Even Jelly couldn't break through a feeling like that. But this man just finished coughing and waited. She closed her eyes and focussed on the white of ease, of calm, of joy. The pure and loving human event of calling a stranger, reaching across the land and into a life.

"Hello," she said. Her voice sliding easily through the "l"s, to the waiting, hopeful "o." She always took her time. Nothing made people more impatient than rushing.

"Who is this?"

"It's Nicole."

"Nicole? Nicole who? I think you have the wrong number."

This was a crucial moment.

"Is this Mark Washborn?"

"Uh, no. I mean, Mark. It isn't. Who is this again?"

"Nicole. I'm a friend of Mark's. I thought this was his new number."

"No. That's weird. I know Mark. I mean, he's a good friend of mine."

"Oh, my. How awkward. I am so sorry I disturbed you, uh . . ." She rarely used "uh," but it was an important wordish sound that introduced a powerful unconscious transaction. Used correctly, not as a habit or a rhythmic tic, it invited the other person to finish the sentence. It was an opening without content, just the pull of syntax and the human need to complete.

"Jack. Jack Cusano."

"Jack Cusano? Not Jack Cusano the record producer?"

"Uh, yeah."

"Jack Cusano who also composes film scores? You did that gorgeous work on those Robert DeMarco films."

"That's right." He laughed. His laugh cleared out his throat a bit more. She lay back on the pillow, held the phone so that it barely touched her cheek. She imagined her voice going into the transmitter, sound waves being turned into electrical pulses, sent up the wires to the phone lines to a Syracuse switching station, then turned into microwaves speeding across the country with the memory—the imprint—of her exact tone, her high and low frequencies, her elegant modulations, to the switching station in Santa Monica, which sent electric current up the P.C.H. to a Malibu beach house and into Jack's receiver, undoubtedly a sleek black cordless phone. So fast, too: instantly turned back into a sound wave by the tiny amplifier near his ear. All that way, all those transformations, but no distortions. A miracle of technology. The sound was as clear as speech in a room. She could—amazing—hear the ocean in the background. A gull, the sound of water pulling back from beach. She could almost hear the sun shining through his west-facing windows.

This was another crucial moment. She knew that she could not initiate anything more. She had to wait for him to open it further. She could not get anxious. She crossed her legs at the ankles, pulled her kimono robe over her knees. She was a little cold. She wanted to be in that room with the beach smell and the sun on the windows. She waited, closed her eyes. She heard him cough.

"So how do you know Mark?" he said. He sounded friendly and a bit amused now.

Jelly made an "em" sound in her throat, with a little push through her nose. It sounded thoughtful, vaguely affirmative. She knew that, even if she had to say no at some point, she would say it low and round and long, so that it sounded as if it had a yes in it somehow. Or an up-pitched-down-pitched mmm-mmm, like a hill. The hum took you for a ride, just under the nose with the mouth closed.

"We talk a lot. Early-morning talks, middle-of-the-night talks. Sometimes we talk for hours."

"Yeah? What about? Are you a girlfriend?"

Jelly laughed. These men all had "a" girlfriend, meaning several at any time. She never wanted to be one of a number. What Jelly wanted was to be singular. Not even "a friend." She wanted a category of her own construction. Something they never knew existed.

"No," she said. "Actually, he talks to me about his writing. He reads me what he's written that day. I listen and tell him what I think. He says it gives him motivation, knowing that I'll call, and he has to have something good to read to me."

"Really?"

"He never told you about me?" she said.

"No, but I don't listen to everything

Mark says. He tends to fill the air with static. At a certain point, it's just ambient noise."

She laughed. He laughed. Jelly sat up, stretching her back straight, feeling her spine arrange itself in a line above her hips. She switched the phone to the other ear and relaxed the tension in her neck. She took a breath. So much of this involved waiting, silence, timing.

"So I have to go, Jack. I am so sorry I disturbed you."

"No. I mean, no problem. I had to get up. I usually don't sleep this late. But I was working all night on this piece."

"You probably want to make some coffee and get back to work."

"Yeah, but not really."

"Is it for a film score?"

"You know, it isn't. It's just a thing I had in my head, and I was playing with it. Using the keyboard. It'll end up in a film score at some point, I'm guessing."

"Really? You don't watch the film and then compose to it?" she said.

"Yeah, I do. But I also import melodies and musical ideas I have. On file, so to speak."

"Fascinating."

"So, would you like to hear some of it?"

"Really?"

"Sure."

"Oh, wow, I would really love that. Yes, please."

"O.K., good," he said. "Hold on."

Jelly closed her eyes and leaned back again. She called this body-listening. It was when you surrendered to a piece of music or a story. By reclining and closing your eyes, you could respond without tracking your response. Some people started to speak the second the other person stopped talking or playing or singing. They were so excited to render their thoughts into speech that they practically overlapped the person. They spent the whole experience formulating their response, because their response was the only thing they valued. Jelly had a different purpose in listening to anything or anyone. It had something to do with submission, and it had something to do with sympathy. She would lie back and cut off all distraction. The phone was built for this. It had no visual component, no tactile component, no scent wafting, no acid collection in the mouth, no person with a hopeful or embarrassed face to read. Just vibrations, long and short waves, and to clutch at them with your own thoughts was just wrong. A distinct resistance to potential. A lack of love, really. Because what is love, if not listening, as uninflected—as uncontained—as possible.

She took a deep breath, relaxed, and let the music find her.

"So that's it," he said, and let out a tight, nervous laugh.

Jelly opened her eyes, expelled a small sigh into the receiver. "It's wonderful," she said.

"Yeah?" he said.

"Yes," she said. "Thank you."

"Good," he said.

"There were these little leaps with each reprise."

"That's right," he said.

Only after she was done listening did she form her response. And it worked like this: you found the words—out of a million possible words—that truly described the experience. That part, the search for the right language, was fun, almost like solving a puzzle. You thought of the word, and then you felt it in your mouth, pushed breath into it, and said it out loud. The sound of it contained the meaning—she had to hear the words to know if she had it right. Then, as it hung there, she revised it, re-attacked it, applied more words to it.

"It gave me a remarkable feeling of lifting. Not being picked up or climbing. Not even like rising in an elevator," she said. "Or an escalator. Not quite. More float in it. Maybe like . . . levitating."

"You levitated while listening to my little piece. Right on."

It did feel like levitation. Waves of sound. Waves on the ocean. Floating on the water. Floating on sound waves. Levitation. What Jack didn't know was how easily this came to her.

"I have to go, Jack. I'm afraid I'm late."

"Oh, no, really?" he said. She heard the hard fizzle of a match strike, and then a sharp intake of breath followed by a blowing sound: lighting a cigarette. She knew the sounds that people made on the phone: the bottle unscrewed or uncorked, the pour of liquid over ice and the cracking of the ice. The sip—so slow it was painful. The delicate, discreet sound of a swallow. And this sound, lighting a cigarette. But with a match, not a lighter. He was a smoker who used matches instead of a lighter, which made him a certain kind of person. Because a match had drama. A match left you with a flame to shake or blow out. And a match left a pleasant phosphorus smell lingering in the air.

"So nice to talk with you this morning. Nice to meet you, Jack," she said.

"The pleasure, Nicole, is mine. So when can we talk again? Can I call you sometime?"

Jelly sat up. Held the phone back for a minute. She moved slowly in these moments. The giveaway was not his request. The giveaway was that he'd used her name. She had him.

"I do have to run. I promise I'll call you soon," she said.

"I look forward to it. Anytime," Jack said.

"Goodbye," she said.

"Bye."

She would not call anytime. She would call on Sunday, at the same time. Only Sunday, and it would only be her calling him. Parameters. Predictability. That was the way it would work best for both of them, for this thing they were building between them. He wouldn't understand. He would want to call her, to have her number. He would want to talk at other times, more often. But she knew what was best, how to do this. Pace was important. She would make him her Sunday call, and, as the weeks of talks went by, he would accept her terms. He would begin to get great pleasure out of counting the days until Sunday.

"Hey, babe," Jack said when he answered the phone.

"Hi, Jack," Jelly said. She was sitting on her couch. She had the trade papers—*Variety* and *The Hollywood Reporter*—on the coffee table in front of her. Next to the papers were a large magnifying glass and a highlighter. The rain was coming down hard. Later it would turn into wet, sticky snow. The news called it a "wintry mix." It would freeze up and make the sidewalks ice sheets by morning. The weather made it difficult for her: if the sun wasn't out, it was low-lit, low-contrast gray with hidden ice. If she was lucky, she would hear and feel the ice cracking under her

feet as she stepped, but mostly it was silent slick surfaces, which made walking frightening. And if the sun came out it was high-glare, every surface a beautiful but painful shimmer of reflected light. The winter was different every day, and you had to plan and react and accommodate it. There were easier places for a low-vision person like her. For anyone, really.

"Congratulations on the Grammy nomination," she said.

"Thank you. To tell the truth, it doesn't mean that much. They can barely find five people who qualify in that category. Some of these things, if you submit and your name is known, you're automatically nominated," he said.

"But you've won before, and surely there's nothing automatic in that?" Jelly pulled her thick chenille robe around her. She had a cold, and she'd spent the morning sipping tea with lemon and honey. Her throat felt swollen, and even swallowing her saliva caused a sharp pain, but it hadn't affected her voice yet. She held an ice pack wrapped in a dishtowel. As she listened to Jack, she pressed the cold compress to her throat.

"True," he said.

"And it's such a perfectly realized recording. The production is outstanding—anyone would recognize that," she said. She heard him light a cigarette.

"I watched 'A Woman Under the Influence' yesterday," Jelly said. Jack loved John Cassavetes movies, and he had sent her a private video copy, impossible to find.

"Yeah? What did you think?"

"I think it's my favorite one. Gena Rowlands is mesmerizing, the way her vulnerability just crushes everyone around her."

"I never thought of it that way," he said. "I love that scene where she's waiting for her kids to get off the bus."

"Yes, she's so excited she's jumping from foot to foot, looking down the street, asking people for the time."

"Right! I love that. That's what I'm really like, way too much. When I was working at home and my daughter was little, I used to get so excited when it was three o'clock and she was coming home."

"You?"

Jack laughed. "Nicole, inside I am Gena Rowlands."

"If you seek the bathroom key, answer first these riddles three."

• •

"I believe it. I'm glad," she said. She made herself swallow a sip of tea. She felt the movement in her ears. "So how did it go last night?"

"Shitty. I'm not feeling it these days."

Jack frequently stayed up all night working. Jelly called at 2 P.M., about an hour after he got up, by which time he had eaten his eggs and drunk his coffee. Read the Sunday New York *Times*.

"You always say that, and then you have an amazing breakthrough," she said. "A few weeks ago you said you felt spent and uninspired, and then you wrote that perfect, haunting melody for the new DeMarco film."

"That's true. I mean, I do usually feel shitty about what I'm working on, but that's no guarantee that the piece will ever get better. And then I complain about it, which must be boring."

"You feel bad because you care deeply and you're hard on yourself. Maybe it's all just part of your process."

"What?"

"Feeling hopeless makes room for something, maybe," she said. She heard him exhale.

"You think I need to despair and give up in order to get to something?"

Jelly cooed a sound that concurred with but did not interrupt his thoughts. "Mmm."

"Maybe." A long drag on his cigarette. "Maybe I have to push the obvious cliché crap out of my head. I have to exorcise it, throw it all out, and then, when all the bullshit has been heard and rejected, there's only something new—or, at least, interesting—left." Jelly heard the *ting* of a spoon stirring coffee, a sip, and then an exhale. "Maybe that's true. But it's a hell of a way to do it."

"What you are doing works. You always get what you need in the end. Inspiration comes."

"I really do that, don't I?" he said. "Never thought of it like that before. But I wonder if I could be more deliberate about it? Know that I'm clearing out the cobwebs, so to speak. Going through the litany of the obvious. The

first wave of crap. Maybe I could be more efficient about the process."

"You could feel confident that, after you've rid yourself of it, the real work will start," she said.

"I'd avoid the feeling of utter despair," he said. "Just by telling myself a different story about what I was doing."

"If you can reassure yourself in the midst of it, it won't cost you so much," she said. "Because you need—you deserve—the feeling of competence. You know what you're doing, and your bad moments are just part of a process."

"Now I feel a little better about working again tonight," he said.

"Wonderful," she said.

"You always make me feel better," he said.

"I hope so," Jelly said. She pressed the ice to her throat. "Shall I go and let you get back to work? I don't mind."

"No!" he said. "Don't you dare hang up yet."

"All right," she said, though she usually didn't let herself get talked out of her instinct for exit timing. Most Sundays, they talked for an hour, sometimes only half an hour. The times when she was on the line for two or even three hours were unusual but had been more frequent lately. Jack would play music—his or someone else's—or they would watch a movie together, talking during the breaks in the action. He now regularly sent her VHS cassettes in the mail, along with letters and other little gifts. She had given him her Syracuse address, and if he got the impression that she was a graduate student at Syracuse University it wasn't from anything she said directly. She left gaps, and Jack filled them in. The contours were a collaboration, built of his desires and her omissions. She didn't think of these as lies. And she did feel like a graduate student. She was a kind of graduate student in sociology. She had been helped by social workers when she'd really needed help, after a meningitis infection nearly killed her and blinded her overnight. Then, slowly, she had recovered some sight. And now she volunteered to work with blind kids at the Center. Helped their parents. She felt like a grad student in the same way that she felt blond and supple and young when she talked to Jack. She felt elegance in her hands and wrists.

Here is what she did not feel: She did not feel dowdy and heavy. She did not feel the doughy curve of her large belly. She did not feel the flesh of her thighs growing into her knees, making them dimpled and lumpy. She did not feel knots of spider veins or calluses or stretch marks. Was it fair that she hadn't even had a baby, that mere quick adolescent growth had given her red stripes that had faded to permanent white ridges in the skin of her breasts, her upper arms, and thighs? Did it make sense that, before she had even shown anyone her body, her body had felt old and damaged? She did not feel like a forty-one-year-old woman, did not feel like being this heavy, invisible, unremarkable creature. She felt young and taut, a person who could beguile, a person who loved and understood men. That was the truth, and the rest was not of import to either of them.

"But I have to go soon," she said.

"No, Nico," Jack said.

Jelly wanted to hang up while he was still wanting her, long before he'd had his fill. But Jack was hard to resist. She liked the way he called her Nico. The way he asked things of her so openly.

"No? Why not?" she said, her sore throat making her voice crack slightly.

"Because your voice sounds so sultry today, and I need to listen to it," he said. His naked want worked on her. It skirted toward the sexual, but she never let it go there. She was reserved about overt sexuality, and the men she talked to got that somehow. They knew that some women were butterflies in your hands. You didn't say crude things to them. You breathed gently and you didn't make any sudden moves.

However, it was also true that a few men she had called in the past hadn't got her at all. They didn't understand her, despite her guidance, her clear vision for them, her parameters. They weren't interested in her, not truly.

"You are making me so hard," one unworthy contact had said, apropos of nothing she had told him. This despite her subtle, demure approach, and the fact that she knew someone in his circle. She'd hung up immediately and never called him again.

Jack was polite. He cursed and he hacked his cigarette cough, but he was gentle. A gentleman.

"I don't have to go yet," she said. "Are you feeling sad? You sound a little sad."

"Maybe a little."

"It isn't just about your work?"

"I don't know. It's a nice Sunday sad, some old-fashioned melancholy. Sometimes I sit around and just feel sad about

"See? That's how it starts, with the sniffles."

things. Is that odd? I am odd—you know I am. It isn't just loneliness. I miss certain people, or feel sad about certain people, which is different, I think."

"Who?"

"I miss my Uncle Joe. He died a few years back, but I thought of him today. He was a funny guy. He didn't really understand me or what I do, but that didn't matter. We were family, and he always liked me and made me feel that. Up until he died, he gave me money every time I saw him. Even though he was a retired insurance salesman and I was making a lot of money, a successful guy, an adult with a kid, when he'd see me at a family dinner or whatever, when he was leaving he'd press a hundred dollars into my hand and say, 'A little gas money,' and wink. I'd try to refuse, but it was his way of showing he was looking out for me. An Italian thing, I guess. I miss that little jolt of family." Jack coughed. "I should have, I don't know, asked his advice or something, instead of just talking to my cousins. And I miss my dog Mizzie. She was a mutt with these droopy hound eyes and long velvet ears. I got her when I was in my twenties and had her through my first divorce and second marriage. I never walked her as much as she wanted me to. I rushed her or let the housekeeper do it. Now I wish she were here so I could take her for a long walk."

"Oh, you are being very hard on yourself," she said.

"Not just that." She heard him light another cigarette and exhale. "Not just that. I miss my daughter and my mother. I mean, my daughter is still around, but—" He laughed.

"What's funny?" she asked.

"I don't know. My spiel of regrets."

Jelly fingered her tender throat and listened to Jack smoke.

"It's difficult," she said. "So difficult."

"Do you miss anyone, Nico?" he said. "Maybe you're too young—"

"No, I do," Jelly said, starting to talk before Jack finished, which was something she tried never to do.

"Yeah? Who?"

"My father died when I was sixteen," Jelly said. "He never lived with us, so I didn't see him too often. Once a week he'd take me out. Usually we saw a movie and then went to a diner and had hamburgers. It was hard, because he died suddenly, of a heart attack, and I kept thinking about the last time I saw him. I was in a bad mood, and I didn't want to go out to dinner with him. I wanted to be with my friends. So I went, but I sulked. I didn't want to see a movie, and I barely ate my dinner. I remember peeling the label off the Coke bottle and how he kept asking awkward questions about my life. I found everything he said irritating and boring. And then, after he died, I felt bad about that dinner. I remember sitting on my bed and realizing that I could actually count the number of times I had seen my father. One night a week, plus a full week every summer. Multiplied by my age, or at least the years I could remember, so let's say twelve. That was all we had, and yet I couldn't be bothered to even look at him the last time I saw him." This was a true story that she had never told anyone before. Part of her thought, Stop. What are you doing? But she pushed that thought away. Jack would love her; she knew it.

"Oh, no," Jack said. "I'm sorry. But you were a kid. He knew you loved him under the sulk. My daughter did the same thing—all kids do it. I promise you he understood that."

"Yes," Jelly said. The word squeezed through her tight throat. She could feel patches of heat on her cheeks and her eyes started to sting.

"I mean, my daughter—I haven't seen her in months," he said. He made a loud exhale, half sigh, half noise. "We had a stupid thing a few months ago. We—I mean, I—I should be able to do better, but every day I don't." Jelly said nothing, just waited for what he would say or sound next. A sniff. "It's O.K.," he said. "It's good sometimes to feel this way, even if it fucks me up a little." Jelly could hear that his voice had a catch in it—a failure of breath mid-word—and it undid her. Her own throat caught.

"I know," she said, and she heard the unmistakable sounds of a man weeping, a man unused to it, and she let him get it all out. She could hear his hard breaths, his sniffs, the little human noises of feeling. "I know." She did know.

"Yes," he said. "I'm sorry."

"Don't be sorry, Jack. You're O.K. with me."

"Yeah, yeah. I am O.K. with you. I am."

She felt so close to Jack that she did something she had never done before. She stopped calling other men, her other phone dates. She gave Jack her number and let him call her whenever he felt like it. They began to talk every day. This thing between them was quickly escalating, and she tried not to worry or think about where it would lead. She tried, in her own soft, quiet way, to maintain a little reserve and slow things down. But it was hard, because, well, she was in love with Jack. She felt connected to him in ways that made her happy all the hours of her day.

He trusted her and she trusted him, and when she hung up the phone she felt so loved. But then all at once her life—her real life, her harsh, real life—was all around her. She looked down at her hand holding the phone, at her legs in her robe, at her notebook full of notes about her phone conversations. She squinted up at her apartment, and imagined how she'd look to anyone else. She tried to tell herself that things might work out, but the gap was so big. It made her gasp.

The phone rang very early one morning. Jelly woke in her bed, the room dark. She had fallen asleep talking to Jack but must at some point have returned the phone to its cradle on the nightstand. She reached out from under the covers and picked up the phone. She held it to her ear and, half-asleep, whispered, "Hello?"

"Nico," Jack said in a low voice.

"Are you O.K.?" she asked, and her voice sounded drowsy and girlish.

"Yes," he said. "Are you asleep?" Jelly pulled the covers over her head and held the phone to her ear as she closed her eyes.

"A little," she said, and she sighed into the mattress by the receiver.

Years earlier, when she was in college, she had rented her first apartment, just off campus. She'd been excited to have her own space and her own phone. One night the phone woke her. She was still partially asleep when a man's voice said, "Hi," as if he knew her.

"Hi," she said.

"It's me," he said. "Did I wake you?"

"No," she said.

"You sound sleepy."

"I am a little sleepy," she said.

"Good," he said. And then she heard something in his voice. "So good," he

whispered. "And you like it, don't you?"

"Who is this?" she said, now awake and angry, and he moaned a little into the phone. She heard it, paused for just a moment, and slammed the phone onto the cradle. It wasn't anyone she knew. He'd just randomly called her, a crank call. He called women in the phone book, probably, and got them to talk to him by acting intimate, by whispering to them while they were disoriented after being woken in the middle of the night. What upset Jelly the most was how he'd sounded—gentle and easy. She replayed the voice in her head, and it wasn't a deviant voice. It was sexy. He'd never called again, although she almost wished he had. It was the first time she'd understood what the phone could be—a weapon of intimacy.

Jelly closed her eyes and said his name into the receiver: "Jack." She lay on her stomach with the phone next to her. "I'm in bed." And she listened to him breathe.

"Good morning," he said.

"Good morning! How are you?"

There was a long pause. Jelly pulled a velvet pillow onto her lap. She rested her elbows on it, the phone cradle on the pillow between her arms, the receiver held lightly by her ear. The room was bright. It was midmorning. She was still in her silk pajamas. Her kimono robe opened to the morning air. The sun was strong and warmed her face as she spoke. She heard Jack light a cigarette. She resisted the urge to fill in, talk. She waited for him to speak.

"What if I said something crazy?"

Jelly waited some more. But she knew what was coming. It always came.

"What if I bought you a ticket and you got on a plane to come see me?"

She laughed. Not a mocking laugh but a fluttery, delighted laugh. It was a delicate situation. She could feel his want. All down the wires the want travelled. In his scratchy morning voice, his cigarette voice, his sentence didn't sound like a question until it went up a half-register on the word "me." It was touching.

Still she didn't speak. This was the moment she'd been longing for but also dreading. Things always fell apart after this.

"I mean it. I've been thinking. I think—well, not thinking. That's the wrong word. Feeling. I have these feelings for you. I want to be with you."

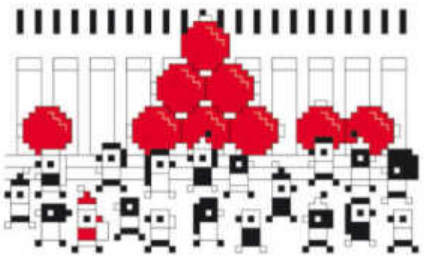
"I have feelings for you, too," she said.

"I'm in love with you," he said.

"Yes," she said.

"Is that crazy? Never meeting in person, and feeling this way."

After she got off the phone, Jelly



began to cry. She let herself feel loved, in love, immersed in their particular devotion, however fleeting. But there was no chance for them, not after what she had done. She had no choice.

The first time Jelly had come to such a pass was with another man she called, Mark Jenks. He was a mildly successful film director. Things had gone on for months; things had gone as far as they could (nothing stays in one place, people always want more), and one day he asked her what she looked like. She described herself accurately but not specifically: long blond hair, fair skin, large brown eyes. Those true facts would fit into a fantasy version of her. She knew, because she had the same fantasy of how she looked. But, after a few weeks of that, there came the request for a photograph.

She had taken some photographs of her friend Lynn. She'd met Lynn through the Center. She was the mother of one of the low-vision kids Jelly worked with. Lynn was lovely to look at: a slender girl with delicate but significant curves. She was not that bright and had a flat, central-New York trailer accent, but she also had a most appealing combination of almost too pouty lips, heavy-lidded eyes, and an innocent spray of freckles across her tiny nose. Lynn had invited her to the beach with her son, Ty, who was six. Jelly met with Ty once a week to help him adjust to his fading eyes. Although she had regained nearly all of her own sight, she still had to use extremely thick glasses; she was tunnel-visioned and had difficulty in low-contrast situations. Like Ty, she didn't fully belong in either world, sighted or blind. She was like a character in a myth, doomed to wander between two places, belonging nowhere. That was the word, "belong." How much she would like to be with someone, and *be long*—not finite, not ending—with someone.

At the beach that day, Lynn had looked even more beautiful than usual. She wore very little makeup. She had a tan and a white macramé bikini. She looked happy, relaxed. Jelly took three shots of her. Just held up her cheap camera and clicked. One showed Lynn looking away, thoughtful. One was blurred. The third showed her smiling into the camera. Lynn looked sexy but not mean. A happy, open, sweet-looking girl. Jelly knew as she took the photos what she would do with them. She dropped the film at the Fotomat to be developed. She made sure she kept the negatives in a safe place.

The photos bought her some time with Mark, but they also escalated things. She knew there was no coming back from the lie. She tried to enjoy the moment, the delicious male desire directed at her. In her fantasies, she often imagined herself looking like Lynn and being worshipped by Mark. She was always Jelly but not Jelly, even as she lay in her bed with the lights out, after Mark had whispered his love for her and she had replaced the phone on the cradle. She closed her eyes and leaned back into her pillow. Her hand found the elastic top of her panties, the curly hair, and then the tiny wet bump. With all the possibilities of the world at her beckon, she never imagined Mark loving Jelly, squishy middle-aged Jelly. She was herself, but in Lynn's body. She imagined Mark undressing her and touching her perfect, pink-tipped breasts as they spilled out of her bra, her smooth thighs under her skirt, her supple but taut midsection, her round high ass. She watched her fantasy as if it were a movie. After she came, she didn't think too much about it. Was it unusual to exclude your own body from your fantasy? Why not, if anything is possible, imagine him loving you as

you are? Because (and she knew this absolutely, without ever saying it to herself) her desire depended on her perfection in the eyes of the man. The fantasy—and her arousal—was about her perfect body. And how a man like Mark—a man who already loved her in theory—would worship her in that body. Her fantasy was impossible to fulfill, and she was never dumb enough to believe that Mark could love her as she actually was.

After Mark, she had used the photos with two other men. Things always proceeded in the same direction, and when a meeting became unavoidable she ended them.

But what about Jack? Some part of her thought that maybe Jack would love her no matter what. She thought about sending a neck-up flattering photo of herself, just to see what happened. Before he asked for a photo, before he invited her to visit him, he'd asked her the question they'd all asked at some point. Though Jack's version was artful, gentle: "You sound so young when you laugh. How old are you?"

Jelly laughed again. She knew how to avoid answering questions. But you couldn't laugh off questions forever. And all his circling around eventually came to the point. *What do you look like*? It wasn't that she didn't expect it or that she didn't understand it; it was just so hopeless to always wind up against it. And how could she answer it? After she hung up the phone, she sat on the couch for a long time, staring into the faint dusk light.

What do I look like? If you look, or if I look? It is different, right? There is no precision in my looking. It is all heat and blurred edges. Abstractions shaped by emotion—that is looking. But he wants an answer.

What do I look like? I look like a jelly doughnut.

Jelly got up and went to the mirror. What to do if what you look like is not who you are? If it doesn't match?

I am not this, this woman. And I am not Lynn-in-the-photograph. Jack must know. Jack knows who I am. I am a window. I am a wish. I am a whisper. I am a jelly doughnut. Sometimes, when my hair falls against my neck and my voice vibrates in my throat, I feel beautiful. When I am on the telephone, I am beautiful.

How would it go? Jelly knew, just as she knew so many things without having experienced them. She knew that if she met Jack he would be disappointed, even if she were beautiful in the common sense of "beautiful." "Common" was an interesting word. It could be comforting if you meant what we all have in common. But it also meant ordinary—something we've all seen many times or can find easily. So a common beauty was agreed upon by all and also dull, in a way.

Still, his disappointment would come out of something human and inescapable: the failure of the actual to meet the contours of the imaginary. As he listened to her words come across the line and into his ear, he imagined a mouth saying them. As he spoke into the receiver, he imagined a face listening, and an expression on that face. Maybe he imagined a woman made up of an actress he'd seen on TV the night before, plus a barely remembered photograph of his mother when she was very young, and a girl with long hair he'd once glimpsed at the beach. But there was no talking without imagining. And, when imagining preceded the actual, there was no escaping disappointment, was there?

What about Jelly? Would Jelly feel disappointment with Jack if he showed up sweaty, old, smelling of breath mints and cigarettes? It never occurred to her to think this way. She would be so focussed on him that her own feelings wouldn't matter. She would feel disappointed if he felt disappointed. She would hear it in his voice, and she would know that she was losing everything, all the perfect, exquisite moments that she had made with him.

"I want to see you," Jack had said. "I need to see you."

"I know. I know. O.K.," Jelly had said. "I will send you some pictures."

Of course she was right to send the photographs of Lynn; she needed to make things last just a little longer. But she cried as she sealed the envelope, because for a moment she thought it might have gone a different way. ♦

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Dana Spiotta on "Jelly and Jack."

THE CRITICS

BOOKS

TOUGH MEDICINE

A disturbing report from the front lines of the war on cancer.

BY MALCOLM GLADWELL

In the fall of 1963, not long after Vincent T. DeVita, Jr., joined the National Cancer Institute as a clinical associate, he and his wife were invited to a co-worker's party. At the door, one of the institute's most brilliant researchers, Emil Freireich, presented them with overflowing Martinis. The head of the medical branch, Tom Frei, strode across the room with a lab technician flung over his shoulder, legs kicking and her skirt over her head. DeVita, shocked, tried to hide in a corner. But some time later the N.C.I.'s clinical director, Nathaniel Berlin, frantically waved him over. Freireich, six feet four and built like a lineman, had passed out in the bathtub. Berlin needed help moving him. "Together, we pulled him up, threw his arms over our shoulders, and dragged him out through the party," DeVita writes, in his memoir, "The Death of Cancer" (Sarah Crichton Books). "Out front, Freireich's wife, Deanie, sat behind the wheel of their car. We tossed Freireich in the backseat and slammed the door."

Half a century ago, the N.C.I. was a very different place. It was dingy and underfunded—a fraction of its current size—and home to a raw and unruly medical staff. The orthodoxy of the time was that cancer was a death sentence: the tumor could be treated with surgery or radiation, in order to buy some time, and the patient's inevitable decline could be eased through medicine, and that was it. At the N.C.I., however, an insurgent group led by Frei and Freireich believed that if cancer drugs were used in extremely large doses, and in multiple combinations and repeated cycles, the cancer could be beaten. "I wasn't sure if these scientists were maniacs or geniuses," DeVita writes. But, as he worked with Freireich on the N.C.I.'s childhood-leukemia ward—and saw the fruits of the first experiments using combination chemotherapy—he became a convert.

DeVita decided to try the same strategy on another seemingly hopeless cause, Hodgkin's lymphoma, a cancer that begins as a solid tumor in the lymph nodes and steadily spreads throughout the body. He teamed up with a fellow-associate named Jack Moxley. Over a few beers one night, at Au Pied de Cochon in Georgetown, the two sketched out a protocol, based loosely on what Frei and Freireich were doing with leukemia. Given the ability of cancer cells to adapt and mutate in the face of threats, they figured they needed four drugs, each effective against Hodgkin's in its own way, so that whatever cells survived one wave had a chance of being killed by the next. They also had to be careful how frequently they gave the drugs: doses needed to be high enough to wipe out the cancer cells but not so high that they killed the patient. After several months, they settled on a regimen called MOMP: three eleven-day rounds of nitrogen mustard, Oncovin (a brand of vincristine), methotrexate, and prednisone, interspersed with ten-day recovery cycles.

"The side effects were almost immediate," DeVita writes:

> The sound of vomiting could be heard along the hallway. Night after night, Moxley and I paced outside the rooms of our patients, fearful of what might happen. Over the weeks that followed, they lost weight and grew listless, and their platelet counts sank lower and lower to dangerous levels.

Then came the surprise. Twelve of the fourteen patients in the initial trial went into remission—and nine stayed there as the months passed. In most cases, the tumors disappeared entirely, something that had never before been seen in the treatment of solid tumors. In the spring of 1965, DeVita went to Philadelphia to present the results to the annual meeting of the American Association for Cancer Research. He stood up before the crowd and ran triumphantly through the data: " 'Our patients were, therefore,' I said, savoring the dramatic conclusion, 'in complete remission.'"

What happened? An illustrious cancer expert named David Karnofsky made a narrow point about the appropriateness of the term "complete remission." After that, nothing: "There were a few perfunctory questions about the severity of the side effects. But that was it." History had been made in the world of cancer treatment, and no one seemed to care.

Vince DeVita served as the head of the National Cancer Institute from 1980 to 1988. He went on to serve as the physician-in-chief of the Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center, in New York, and then ran the Yale Cancer Center, in New Haven. For the past half century, he has been at the forefront of the fight against one of the world's most feared diseases, and in "The Death of Cancer" he has written an extraordinary chronicle. DeVita's book is nothing like Siddhartha Mukherjee's magisterial "The Emperor of All Maladies." Mukherjee wrote a social and scientific biography of the disease. DeVita, as befits someone who spent a career at the helm of various medical bureaucracies, has written an *institutional* history of the war on cancer. His interest is in how the various factions and constituencies involved in that effort work together—and his conclusions are deeply unsettling.

When his first go-round as a clinical associate at the N.C.I. was up, DeVita took a post as a resident at Yale. At what was supposed to be a world-class hospital, he discovered that the

ABOVE: JENNIFER DANIEL

We have cancer therapies, Vincent DeVita says, that could cure another hundred thousand patients if used to their full potential.

ILLUSTRATION BY HARRY CAMPBELL

standard of care for many cancers was woefully backward. Freireich had taught DeVita to treat Pseudomonas meningitis in leukemia patients by injecting an antibiotic directly into the spinal column—even though the drug's label warned against that method of administration. That was the only way, Freireich believed, to get the drug past the blood-brain barrier. At Yale, DeVita writes, "you just didn't do that kind of thing. As a result, I watched leukemic patients die." Leukemia patients also sometimes came down with lobar pneumonia. Conventional wisdom held that that ought to be treated with antibiotics. But N.C.I. researchers had figured out that the disease was actually a fungal infection, and had to be treated with a different class of drug. "When I saw this condition in patients with leukemia and pointed it out to the chief of infectious diseases at Yale, he didn't believe me—even when the lab tests proved my point," DeVita continues. More patients died. Leukemia patients on chemotherapy needed platelets for blood transfusions. But DeVita's superiors at Yale insisted there was no evidence that transfusions made a difference, despite the fact that Freireich had already proved that they did. "Ergo, at Yale," DeVita says, "I watched patients bleed to death."

Later, when DeVita and his fellow N.C.I. researcher George Canellos wanted to test a promising combination-chemotherapy treatment for advanced breast cancer, they had to do their trial overseas, because they couldn't win the coöperation of surgeons at either of the major American cancer centers, Memorial Sloan Kettering or M. D. Anderson. When the cancer researcher Bernard Fisher did a study showing that there was no difference in outcome between radical mastectomies and the far less invasive lumpectomies, he called DeVita in distress. He couldn't get the study published. "Breast surgeons made their living doing radical or total mastectomies, and they did not want to hear that that was no longer necessary," DeVita writes. "Fisher had found it difficult to get patients referred to his study, in fact, because of this resistance." The surgeons at Memorial Sloan Kettering Cancer Center were so stubborn that they went on disfiguring their patients with radical mastectomies for years after Fisher's data had shown the procedure to be unnecessary. "The Death of Cancer" is an angry book, in which one of the critical figures in twentieth-century oncology unloads a lifetime of frustration with the obduracy and closed-mindedness of his profession. DeVita concludes, "There are incredibly promising therapies out there. If used to their fullest potential for all patients, I believe we could cure an additional 100,000 patients a year." He is not the first to point out the shortcomings of clinical practice, of course. What sets "The Death of Cancer" apart is what he proposes to do about it.

After DeVita was rebuffed at the American Association for Cancer Research meeting, he and Moxley went back to the drawing board. They needed to do more than push patients into remission.

Their first step was to alter the combination of drugs in their protocol, replacing methotrexate with a newer compound called procarbazine. Next, they reëxamined the schedule of treatment. Combination chemotherapy is a delicate balancing act. Cancer drugs are typically so toxic that they can be given only in short bursts, so that patients can regain their strength. If the breaks are too long, though, the cancer comes roaring back. In the first trial, they had simply followed the schedule that Freireich used in treating leukemia. Hodgkin's cells, however, were different. They divided more slowly—and, since cancer cells are most vulnerable when they are dividing, that suggested that the Hodgkin's schedule needed to be a lot longer.

So MOMP became MOPP: two full doses of nitrogen mustard and vincristine on the first and the eighth days, and daily doses of procarbazine and prednisone for fourteen days, followed by two weeks of rest. Since only twenty per cent of Hodgkin's cells would divide during the course of that cycle, the regimen would have to be repeated at least six times. A second trial was launched, and the outcome was unequivocal: the regimen had beaten the disease.

When the new results were published, in 1970, the response was better, but there was still considerable resistance. A crucial presentation at Memorial Sloan Kettering was met with "tepid" applause,

after which one oncologist after another got up to complain that MOPP didn't work. DeVita was told that his data must be wrong.

Baffled, he asked one of the hospital's leading oncologists, Barney Clarkson, to explain exactly how he was administering the MOPP protocol. Clarkson answered that he and his colleagues had decided to swap the nitrogen mustard in DeVita's formula for a drug called thiotepa. This was a compound they had developed in-house at Memorial Sloan Kettering and felt partial to. So MOPP was now TOPP. DeVita writes:

> They'd also cut the dose of procarbazine in half, because it made patients nauseous. And they'd reduced the dose of vincristine drastically because of the risk of nerve damage. They'd also added, at a minimum, an extra two weeks between cycles so that patients would have fully recovered from the toxic effects of the prior dose before they got the next. They gave no thought to the fact that the tumor would have been back on its feet by then, too, apparently.

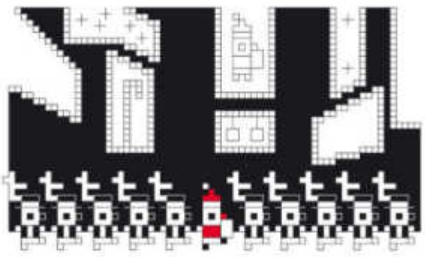
These alterations had not been tested or formally compared with DeVita's original formula. They were simply what the oncologists at Memorial Sloan Kettering felt made more sense. After an hour, DeVita had had enough:

> "Why in God's name have you done this?" he asked.
>
> A voice piped up from the audience. "Well, Vince, most of our patients come to us on the subway, and we don't want them to vomit on the way home."

Here were physicians at one of the world's greatest cancer hospitals denying their patients a potentially lifesaving treatment because their way *felt* better. Stories like this are why DeVita believes that a hundred thousand cancer patients in the United States die needlessly every year. The best innovations are sometimes slow to make their way into everyday medical practice. Hence the sustained push, in recent years, toward standardizing treatments. If doctors aren't following "best practices," it seems logical that we should write up a script describing what those best practices are and compel them to follow it.

But here "The Death of Cancer" takes an unexpected turn. DeVita doesn't think his experience with the stubborn physicians at Memorial Sloan Kettering or at Yale justifies greater standardization. He is wary of too many scripts and guidelines. What made the extraordinary progress against cancer at the N.C.I. during the nineteen-sixties and seventies possible, in his view, was the absence of rules. A good illustration was Freireich's decision to treat Pseudomonas meningitis by injecting an antibiotic directly into the spinal fluid. DeVita writes:

> The first time Freireich told me to do it, I held up the vial and showed him the label,



> thinking that he'd possibly missed something. "It says right on there, 'Do not use intrathecally,' " I said. Freireich glowered at me and pointed a long bony finger in my face. "Do it!" he barked. I did it, though I was terrified. But it worked every time.

Clinical progress against a disease as wily and dimly understood as cancer, DeVita argues, happens when doctors have the freedom to try unorthodox things—and he worries that we have lost sight of that fact. By way of example, he tells the story of a friend of his, Lee, who was diagnosed with advanced prostate cancer at the age of sixty. According to the practice guidelines, the best option for Lee was androgen-deprivation therapy, or A.D.T., which slows down the cancer cells by denying them testosterone. That's what Lee's doctor recommended. DeVita understood why: there are strong incentives—like the threat of malpractice suits—for doctors to adhere to treatment protocols. But DeVita judged that Lee's cancer was so aggressive that A.D.T. would buy him only a short reprieve. The guidelines limited Lee's treatment options at a moment when he needed maximum flexibility.

"Over the years, we've gained more tools for treating cancer, but the old ability to be flexible and adapt has disappeared," DeVita writes:

> Guidelines are backwards looking. With cancer, things change too rapidly for doctors to be able to rely on yesterday's guidelines for long. These guidelines need to be updated frequently, and they rarely are, because this takes time and money. . . . Reliance on such standards inhibits doctors from trying something new.

DeVita's first thought was to get Lee enrolled in a pioneering trial at the Mayo Clinic, where surgeons were removing the prostate along with all surrounding lymph nodes. Fifteen per cent of patients who underwent the procedure survived free of disease. The Mayo doctors wouldn't operate on Lee, however. His cancer was too advanced. So DeVita found someone who would. "I can be very persuasive," he writes. Then he managed to get Lee enrolled in an experimental-drug trial for relapsed prostate-cancer patients—only to discover that the study's protocol called for treatment to end after a fixed number of doses. DeVita felt that Lee needed a much longer course. Lee sought an exemption from the rules of the study, which required a judgment from the hospital's institutional review board. The lead investigator declined to take it up. DeVita was devastated, though hardly surprised. The system was built to be inflexible.

DeVita's struggle to keep his friend alive goes on for years. He finagles his way into one experimental trial after another. He improvises. He works his contacts. Finally, with Lee at the end of the line, DeVita hears of an experimental drug called abiraterone. But he can't get Lee into the trial: the study's protocol forbids it. DeVita tries to find his way around the rules and fails—and he's heartbroken when he learns, after Lee finally succumbs to the disease, that abiraterone is so effective against advanced prostate cancer that the trial is stopped in mid-course and the patients in the control group are switched over to the new drug. "I could have told you a story with a happy ending," DeVita writes, speaking of what he is sure was his friend's premature death. "I instead chose to tell you one that could have had a happy ending because it illustrates what has been, for me, a source of perennial frustration: at this date, we are not limited by the science; we are limited by our ability to make good use of the information and treatments we already have."

Here we have a paradox. The breakthroughs made at the N.C.I. in the nineteen-sixties and seventies were the product of a freewheeling intellectual climate. But that same freewheeling climate is what made it possible for the stubborn doctors at Memorial Sloan Kettering to

concoct their non-cure. The social conditions that birthed a new idea in one place impeded the spread of that same idea in another. People who push for greater innovation in the marketplace often naïvely assume that what is good for the innovator is also, down the line, good for the diffusion of their ideas. And people worried about diffusion often position themselves as the friends of innovation, as if a system that does well at spreading good ideas necessarily makes it easier to come up with good ideas. The implication of "The Death of Cancer" is, on the contrary, that innovation and diffusion can sometimes conflict.

Practice guidelines would have made the task of curing Hodgkin's patients with DeVita's regimen a lot easier. But had those guidelines been in place in the mid-sixties, when DeVita was making the rounds on behalf of his new treatment, they would have imposed a tax on other innovators. The obstacles he encountered in trying to save his friend Lee, similarly, were not capricious or arbitrary. They were there to insure that the results of clinical trials were as clear and persuasive as possible. It's just that they had a cost—Lee's death—and in DeVita's mind that cost was too high.

The angriest chapter of "The Death of Cancer" is devoted to the Food and Drug Administration, because DeVita believes that it has fundamentally misunderstood the trade-off between diffusion and innovation. The agency wants all new drugs to be shown to be safe and efficacious, to be as good as or better than existing therapies (or a placebo) in a randomized experiment involving the largest possible number of patients. For example, the F.D.A. might ask that patients getting an experimental treatment have better long-term survival rates than those receiving drug treatments already in use. The F.D.A. is the country's diffusion gatekeeper: its primary goal is to make sure that good drugs get a gold star and bad drugs never make it to market.

DeVita reminds us, though, that this gatekeeping can hinder progress. A given tumor, for instance, can rarely be stopped with a single drug. Cancer is like a door with three locks, each of which requires a different key. Suppose you came up with a drug that painlessly opened the first of those three locks. That drug would be a breakthrough. But it can't cure anything on its own. So how do you get it through a trial that requires proof of efficacy—especially if you don't yet know what the right keys for the two remaining locks are? Since cancer comes in a dizzying variety of types and subtypes, each with its own molecular profile, we want researchers to be free to experiment with different combinations of keys. Instead, DeVita argues, the F.D.A. has spent the past two decades pushing cancer medicine in the opposite direction. He continues:

> Drugs are now approved not for a specific cancer or for general use in a variety of cancers but for a specific *stage* of a specific cancer and specifically after and only after patients have had all current treatments, which are listed drug by drug, and the treatments have all failed. Doctors risk F.D.A. censure if they use an approved drug under any other circumstances, and patients are penalized because insurance companies won't pay for treatments not approved by the F.D.A.
>
> The vital insight gained by using an approved drug in a different way for a different tumor has been lost.

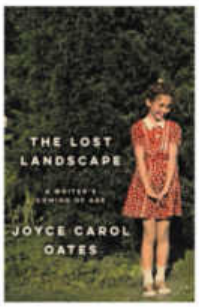
There's a second problem with the "efficacy" requirement. Suppose Drug A, the existing treatment for a certain type of cancer, wipes out all but a billion cells in the typical patient's tumor. Drug B, your alternative, wipes out all but a handful. DeVita points out two curious facts. First, a typical tumor has so many billions of cells that even a drug that leaves a billion cells untouched will look good after an initial treatment cycle. More important, after five years the patients on both Drugs A and B may have identical survival rates. That's because of something called the Norton-Simon effect: smaller populations of cancer cells grow back faster than larger populations. But, in reality, Drugs A and B aren't identical. If you are designing a combination of drugs to cure a cancer, DeVita writes, "the treatment that reduced the population to a few cells is the one you want to go forward with." How many researchers and companies sit on promising therapies because they don't want to spend several hundred million dollars on a clinical trial, only to fall short of the F.D.A.'s high bar?

DeVita would have the F.D.A. take a step sideways—away from worrying exclusively about standards and safety, and closer to the innovation end of the continuum. In this respect, his position echoes that of Peter Huber, who in his 2013 book, "The Cure in the Code," called on the F.D.A. to stop evaluating drugs as cures and start evaluating them as tools—"molecular scalpels, clamps, sutures, or dressings, to be picked off the shelf and used carefully but flexibly down at the molecular level."

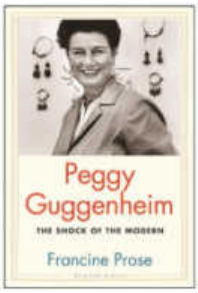
What critics like DeVita want, in other words, is a return to the world of Freireich's N.C.I., where clinicians had the freedom to tinker and improvise, and DeVita's portrait of the way things were gives us a glimpse of what the future may look like. Discretion means more MOPPS. But it also, inevitably, means more TOPPS. Discretion means Freireich, the great genius, growling "Do it." But surely Barney Clarkson growled "Do it" as well, when some fresh-faced clinical associate questioned the wisdom of substituting thiotepa for nitrogen mustard. Modern medicine is intent on addressing "practice variation"—on bringing bad doctors up to the level of the good ones. Going back to the days of the old N.C.I. makes that problem worse, not better. If you think that there are more Freireichs than Barney Clarksons out there, that is a trade worth making. But DeVita does not acknowledge how difficult that change might prove to be.

When DeVita faced the naysayers at Memorial Sloan Kettering, who worried about their Hodgkin's patients on the subway ride home, he informed them curtly, "If you told those patients that the choice was between being cured and vomiting, or not vomiting and dying, don't you think they might have opted to take a cab?" This is how diffusion happens in a world without a diffusion gatekeeper. But how many doctors are capable of that kind of hand-to-hand combat? Life on the innovation end of the continuum is volatile, fractious, and *personal*—less a genteel cocktail party, governed benignly by bureaucratic fiat, than the raucous bender where your boss passes out in a bathtub. When DeVita returned to Memorial Sloan Kettering years later, as the physician-in-chief, the hospital got better. But DeVita didn't last, which will scarcely come as a surprise to anyone who has read his book. "The problem with Vince," the hospital's president reportedly said, in announcing his departure, "is that he wants to cure cancer." ♦

BRIEFLY NOTED

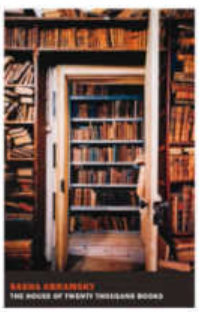


THE LOST LANDSCAPE, *by Joyce Carol Oates (Ecco)*. This intimate yet sweeping memoir of a writer's development begins on a weather-worn farm in upstate New York. "It was a time of nerves," Oates writes of her childhood, in the nineteen-forties, in a family in which "no one had (yet) gone beyond eight years of schooling," with parents whose lives were shaped by a "premature and violent death." We learn of Oates the graduate student, unhappy and "suffocated by books," of her encounter with a fellow-student who became her husband, and of the couple's tumultuous years in Detroit during the sixties. Most illuminating, however, are the portraits of those around her, old school friends and hardened relatives, "lives to be spoken of cautiously."



PEGGY GUGGENHEIM, *by Francine Prose (Yale)*. Weaving together Guggenheim's work as a fine-arts patron with her often tumultuous private life, this vibrant biography shows that her cultural influence went far beyond mere philanthropy. Born to wealth, Guggenheim became a curator of the interwar and postwar art world. Her galleries in London and New York, and her personal collection, in Venice, were pivotal to the development of modern art, and she saved many crucial works from destruction at the hands of the Nazis. Powerful but deeply insecure—she detested her nose, both before and after a botched rhinoplasty—she was a complex and vivacious woman with a lifelong "urge to unnerve."

AGENTS OF EMPIRE, *by Noel Malcolm (Oxford)*. Dramatic and richly researched, this history views the sixteenth-century Mediterranean through the lens of a single extended Albanian family that wielded influence in both of the region's dominant powers—the Ottoman Empire and the Venetian Republic. Malcolm argues that the ability to traverse cultural lines was typically Albanian. The family included a Venetian diplomat, a Catholic archbishop, a papal knight, an Ottoman vizier, and an interpreter at the Sultan's court. During the Battle of Lepanto, the archbishop, now a galley slave, was likely on the Ottoman galley that rammed a ship captained by his brother. Later, Spanish soldiers, disbelieving his claims about who he was, killed him as his brother stood some hundred yards away.



THE HOUSE OF TWENTY THOUSAND BOOKS, *by Sasha Abramsky (New York Review Books)*. This family memoir chronicles the life of the author's grandfather, who amassed a vast collection of Soviet literature and Judaica. Born in Minsk to a line of distinguished rabbis, Chimen Abramsky fled to London in the nineteen-thirties. There he exchanged traditional Judaism for militant Communism and worked at a bookstore owned by his wife's family. For decades, the couple's home was "one of left-wing London's great salons," with friends arguing ideas and politics into the night. The author's room-by-room tour through his grandfather's books opens onto various historical vistas—the Jewish enlightenment in Europe, postwar British Communism—all evoked with tender erudition.

THE ART WORLD

OUTSIDE IN

Jean Dubuffet's campaign for art brut.

BY PETER SCHJELDAHL

Heinrich Anton Müller's "Untitled" (c. 1927–29), from Dubuffet's collection.

COURTESY COLLECTION DE L'ART BRUT, LAUSANNE; PHOTOGRAPH: CLAUDE BORNAND

"Ah Jean Dubuffet / when you think of him / doing his military service in the Eiffel Tower / as a meteorologist / in 1922 / you know how wonderful the 20th Century / can be." That's how Frank O'Hara began his poem "Naphtha." The lines, befitting the offbeat charisma of the great French artist, come to mind regarding "Art Brut in America: The Incursion of Jean Dubuffet," at the American Folk Art Museum. It's a fascinating show of outsider art from a collection with which Dubuffet (1901-85) sought to beget a climate change in the artistic cultures of Europe and, not least, the United States, where the collection resided from 1951 to 1962. Starting in 1945, he sought out, acquired, and documented works by untutored prisoners, children, people hospitalized for mental illnesses, and eccentric loners, mostly French, Swiss, or German, to make a point: "civilized" art was false to human nature and redeemable only by recourse to primal authenticities. He formed an organization, the Compagnie de l'Art Brut, with an international board of prominent artists, poets, and intellectuals (Wallace Stevens was a member), but, having no special program, it soon lapsed.

Was the cause, besides being quixotic, self-serving? Art brut's stylistic character was of a piece with the raucous figuration and coarse materiality of Dubuffet's painting and sculpture, and its fame, though limited, accorded with the rise of a brisk market for his work, especially in America. But his success was already assured. In 1946, Clement Greenberg identified him as perhaps—and, as it turned out, in truth—"the most original painter to have come out of the Paris School since Miró." And no motive, however ulterior, can negate the force of Dubuffet's thinking or the appeal of the art that he saved from obscurity. Nearly all of the thirty-seven named artists in the show—especially the formidable Adolf Wölfli, a Swiss psychiatric-hospital patient for thirty-five years, before his death, in 1930—reward particular attention.

In 1951, Dubuffet shipped the collection, of some twelve hundred works, to The Creeks, the immense East Hampton villa of his friend Alfonso Ossorio, a wealthy Filipino-American artist and socialite. In part, Dubuffet wanted to be relieved of a distraction from his own artmaking; but he also hoped to evangelize the members of the New York art world who frequented Ossorio's salons. (Unlike most postwar Parisians, Dubuffet respected the insurgent American avant-garde.) Many, including Jackson Pollock, Willem de Kooning, and Barnett Newman, viewed the works, though to scant effect. Dubuffet, disappointed on that score—except in Chicago, where, the same year, he gave a lecture, "Anticultural Positions," that powerfully influenced artists, including Leon Golub, who craved an alternative to New York fashions—repatriated the collection in 1962, and installed it in a private museum that he opened near his Paris home. Today, swelled to sixty thousand works, it belongs to the Collection de l'Art Brut, in Lausanne.

The New York episode of Dubuffet's campaign is worth studying as background to today's renewed interest in outsider art. (The late untaught marvels Henry Darger, Martín Ramírez, and Bill Traylor now verge on the status of modern masters.) The phrase "outsider art" was coined in 1972 by a British art historian, Roger Cardinal, to translate the sense of "art brut," which Dubuffet had considered rendering as art "raw," "uncouth," "crude," or "in the rough." But the term misses the full

thrust of Dubuffet's elevation of "people uncontaminated by artistic culture," as he called them. He aspired not to make outsiders respectable but to destroy the complacency of insiders. He disqualified even tribal and folk artists, and spirited amateurs like Henri Rousseau, for being captive to one tradition or another. Art brut must be sui generis, from the hands and minds of "unique, hypersensitive men, maniacs, visionaries, builders of strange myths." Women could make it, too; there are works by seven of them in the show.

Dubuffet's claim to have tapped a universal creative wellspring can seem murky. For one thing, there's an inevitable period bias in any collection. (Ghosts of Joan Miró and Paul Klee haunt this one.) For another, naïveté is never absolute. The biographies of the artists on exhibit betray varied cultural roots and degrees of sophistication. An Austrian prince, Alfred Antonin Juritzky-Warberg, going by the name Juva, was well-educated and never institutionalized. Late in life, in the nineteen-forties, he decided that pieces of flint resembling people and animals, found on his country walks, were prehistoric artifacts, which he enhanced with carving and painting. (The resulting little sculptures are intensely expressive.) Still, Juva's touch of madness was warranty enough for Dubuffet—who, incidentally, rejected the term "insanity" except to characterize the obtuseness of "school teachers and dignitaries" and other upholders of high-art pieties. He acknowledged the human toll that derangement takes, and admitted that a "true artist is almost as rare among the mentally ill as among normal people." Yet he insisted on the gains of "a direct connection to the mechanisms of the mind."

Dubuffet was a driven late bloomer. Born to a family of well-to-do wine merchants, in Le Havre, he moved to Paris in 1918 to study art. He befriended Juan Gris and Fernand Léger, and did indeed track Parisian weather from the Eiffel Tower. Academic training repelled him, however, and other enthusiasms—in literature, music, and languages—dispersed his energies. Giving up on the art world, in 1925, he returned to the wine business; during the war years, his clients included the German occupiers. (It seems that no one held this against him.) He returned to painting in 1942. At the age of forty-three, shortly after the Liberation, he had a sensational début at the René Drouin Gallery, with densely packed and encrusted, richly colored pictures of wacky characters on the Métro, in the streets, or in landscapes. The works both absorbed and countered, with zest, French demoralization.

Dubuffet shrugged off other art styles, including Surrealism, though he didn't object when André Breton claimed him as an heir to that etiolated movement. Welcoming allies from any quarter, Dubuffet disdained partisanship, preferring to assault the generality of "so-called civilization." His ideas failed to catch on in America, because the formerly provincial country was, at mid-century, finally becoming big-time civilized. But the imp of art brut bedevils anew whenever tastes in art are established as objective values. Strangely, it seems to have inspired Dubuffet never so well as during his collection's absence. Much of his strongest work, including earthy abstractions that are, at times, literally earthen, dates from the fifties. His subsequent art extended rather than developed his achievement, with the exception of his tour-de-force black-and-white biomorphic sculptures, such as "Group of Four Trees" (1969-72), in lower Manhattan. He called the trees "semblances of the thrust and fertility of human thought." It's terrific, in any case.

"Art Brut in America" leaves hanging the question of a gray zone between outsider genius and insider professionalism. This pertains, in the show, to large, scrawled abstract drawings, cut out in woozy shapes, by Ossorio, a hit-or-miss artist who was a close friend of Pollock's and aspired to a similarly liberated, but histrionically primitivist, style. Dubuffet honored him with inclusion in an "annex" of the collection. It's striking how much more chaotic Ossorio's work looks than that of the hospitalized patients, who commonly strove to get the content of their unbidden visions exactly right. Unlike them, Ossorio could go that far because he had a return ticket to equilibrium. A certain air of Romantic slumming mars the exercise. Madness may be imitable, but absent a share in the suffering it is a realm off-limits to tourists. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

HARD BARGAINS

"The Big Short" and "Chi-Raq."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Easy, Chill, Combo, Bounce, and Sleep, and not forgetting Lebowski: just add "The Big" to any of those words and you've got yourself a ready-made film. The latest contender is "The Big Short," directed by Adam McKay, and in this case the title, swaying on the verge of an oxymoron, is a perfect fit for the theme. There was nothing small about the disaster that struck the economy in 2008, and, as for shortness, the movie is peopled, from first to last, with the morally myopic and the emotionally stunted. Some characters are invented and some are all too real. You'll love them.

Meet Michael Burry (Christian Bale), who works for an investment firm named Scion Capital. He has a medical background, and prefers to be called Dr. Burry, as if to suggest that he's still involved in one of the caring professions. He also possesses a glass eye, an ear for heavy metal, and a busted internal radar. Socially, he makes Steve Jobs look like David Niven. (Bale can be such a chilly actor, but here he plays a chilly man, whose very gait spells bewilderment, and the result is unexpectedly touching.) As early as 2005, Burry has a hunch, grounded in laborious research, that the housing market, famed as a rock of reliability, could soon be washed away. He decides to bet against it, and word of his gamble spreads. Largely, it is greeted with derision, but it piques the interest of Jared Vennett (Ryan Gosling), at Deutsche Bank, a kind of lizard with sideburns, who in turn persuades Mark Baum (Steve Carell), the head of a rancorous hedge fund, to join the game.

If you happen to understand credit-default swaps and collateralized debt obligations, or C.D.O.s, you might well enjoy "The Big Short." If you don't understand them, however, you'll have a *much* better time. The movie is made for you. It trades on the fact that, ten years ago, no one outside the fortress of finance had the time, the will power, or the math to follow the fathomless chicanery that was taking place inside. (No wonder it could flourish with such abandon.) McKay and his co-screenwriter, Charles Randolph, working from a book by Michael Lewis, are so alert to this ignorance that, every so often, they halt the movie as sharply as a dog walker yanking on a leash. We suddenly hear the voice of Vennett, say, on the subject of Wall Street verbiage: "Does it make you feel bored? Or stupid?" He has an unusual solution: "Here's Margot Robbie in a bubble bath." Cut to Robbie—whom many viewers will have last seen in "The Wolf of Wall Street"—swathed in foam and holding a glass of champagne. Briskly, she unravels the problem of subprime mortgages, and adds, "Got it? Good. Now fuck off."

Adam McKay's all-star cast takes on the 2008 financial crisis.

What is Robbie doing here? Pretty much what Marshall McLuhan was doing in "Annie Hall," when Woody Allen pulled him into the frame. McKay, who made the "Anchorman" films, is not on entirely unfamiliar territory; he stuffed the end credits of "The Other Guys" (2010) with animated graphics about Ponzi schemes. From those, you could argue, the whole of "The Big Short" has burst. His method here is to take the choppy, skittish, and impatient mood of modern comedy and paste it onto the story of a fiasco. The rants are exhilarating; the editing, by Hank Corwin, is a riot of faces in closeup, chats to the camera, and neon-bright montages of pop culture; even a trip to Florida, made by Baum and his team, who want to see the mortgage market in all its dysfunctional glory, comes off as a riff of jocund disbelief. Ramin Bahrani's "99 Homes," released in September, took a far less hasty look at the catastrophe in Florida, and at the families who felt the brunt. But that film was—no surprise—a downer, and audiences stayed away.

Robbie is not the sole provider of a cameo. We also get Anthony Bourdain, comparing a financial deal to three-day-old fish soup, and, better still, Selena Gomez and a professor of behavioral economics, who sit at a blackjack table and demonstrate how a synthetic C.D.O. functions and, ergo, to what high heaven it stinks. Do such nuggets of education succeed? They do. So, is it the solemn purpose of "The Big Short" to leave us properly informed? Give me a break. When Frank Capra made "American Madness," in 1932, with the Wall Street crash fresh in the public mind, he dramatized a run on a bank, taking care not to let the outbreak

ILLUSTRATION BY CONCEPCIÓN STUDIOS

of chaos send the movie into a spin. At every turn, we knew where the story stood. McKay, by contrast, can't get enough of the spinning. The film is nearly as mad as the world that it sets out to expose.

That is why, with everything at its most hectic, McKay tugs at yet another strand of plot, reeling in Charlie Geller (John Magaro) and Jamie Shipley (Finn Wittrock), out-of-towners who trade from their garage. Hearing, by chance, of the plan to short the housing market, and yearning to cash in, they call Ben Rickert (Brad Pitt), a neighbor with a beard like a hedgerow and a diet to match. He was once a wizard of Wall Street, before quitting in disgust, and now, for reasons that are never clarified, he agrees to help. By this stage, McKay has got so many characters in play that only one of them, Mark Baum, is given much of a backdrop; we learn of a private sorrow, wrestled over in conversations with his wife (Marisa Tomei). Harrowed though Carell is in these scenes, we don't really need them, because his comic tenseness has always depended on something—some disgrace or hurt—wadded down within his roles, and we latch on to Baum just by hearing him say to his colleagues, "I'm happy when I'm unhappy."

That desperate confusion lurks at the root of "The Big Short." Can you, in all honesty, enroll in the pursuit of happiness if it makes you wretched and leaves the happiness of others—millions of them, perhaps—in ruins? Yes, but if you do it in all dishonesty the pursuing is a lot more fun. And here's the kicker: no one will put you in jail. McKay spends the final act attempting to whip us into a froth of outrage at the villainy that was perpetrated in the financial crisis, and at the well-dressed villains who slipped through the bars of justice. Nice try. By now, his movie has long since succumbed to its own brio. So expert are the performers that you wind up rooting for Burry, Baum, and the others despite yourself, knowing full well that they are fuelled by cynicism—by an ardent faith that the system will and must fail. They are little better than the bankers whose downfall they so gleefully engineer. "The Big Short" is a feel-good film about doom, and it pays the price. It bets on our indignation, and loses.

What's the best way to break the fourth wall? Should you throw a quick glance at the viewers, drawing them into sly conspiracy, or pal up with them, in a more sustained act of concord? In truth, we need both methods. We need Eddie Murphy, in "Trading Places," looking up at us, just the once, when a rich condescender explains what a B.L.T. is; the look means, "Spare me this old white fool." But we also need Ferris Bueller, keeping us up to speed with every twist in his day off, and we need Ryan Gosling, in "The Big Short," fingering his paycheck for forty-seven million dollars and telling us, "I can feel you're judging me. It's palpable."

And so to Samuel L. Jackson, resplendent in a three-piece orange suit, approaching the camera in the new Spike Lee film, "Chi-Raq," and hailing us as guests. "Welcome to Chi-Raq, land of pain, misery, and strife!" he declares, in the tone of someone offering milk, honey, and a chance to dance. He is the chorus, and the movie is based on Aristophanes' "Lysistrata," first performed in 411 B.C., in which the title character strives to end the Peloponnesian War by urging the women of Greece to stop having sex with their menfolk. Lee and his fellow-writer, Kevin Willmott, shift the action to the ganglands of present-day Chicago, whose citizens are being slain by the gun in numbers that rival American military casualties abroad. Hence the title.

The topic is so grave, and the corralling of ancient Greek comedy so audacious, that you long for "Chi-Raq" to succeed. Sad to report, it's an awkward affair, stringing out its tearful scenes of mourning, and going wildly astray with its lurches into farce. When Lysistrata (Teyonah Parris), the queen of the revolt, enters the Armory (much as female Athenians stormed the Acropolis, in the original play) and humiliates the commander, who is left half-naked and shackled to a Confederate cannon, you don't know where to look. Still, if you can handle a collage of provocation and fury, rather than a tale well told, the movie has its moments, as well as its roster of prophets: Angela Bassett as a peace activist, John Cusack as an inflammatory preacher, and the majestic Jackson, bringing bad news like a merry Jeremiah. It isn't just the fourth wall that Lee wants to break. There's a castle of oppression out there, and he wants to bring it down. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM

Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Toro, must be received by Sunday, December 13th. The finalists in the November 30th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the January 4th issue. The winner receives a signed print of the cartoon. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"Quick! Your pen!"
Corey Keller, New York City

THE FINALISTS

"It's big and blue. You can't miss it."
Sam Reisman, Brooklyn, N.Y.

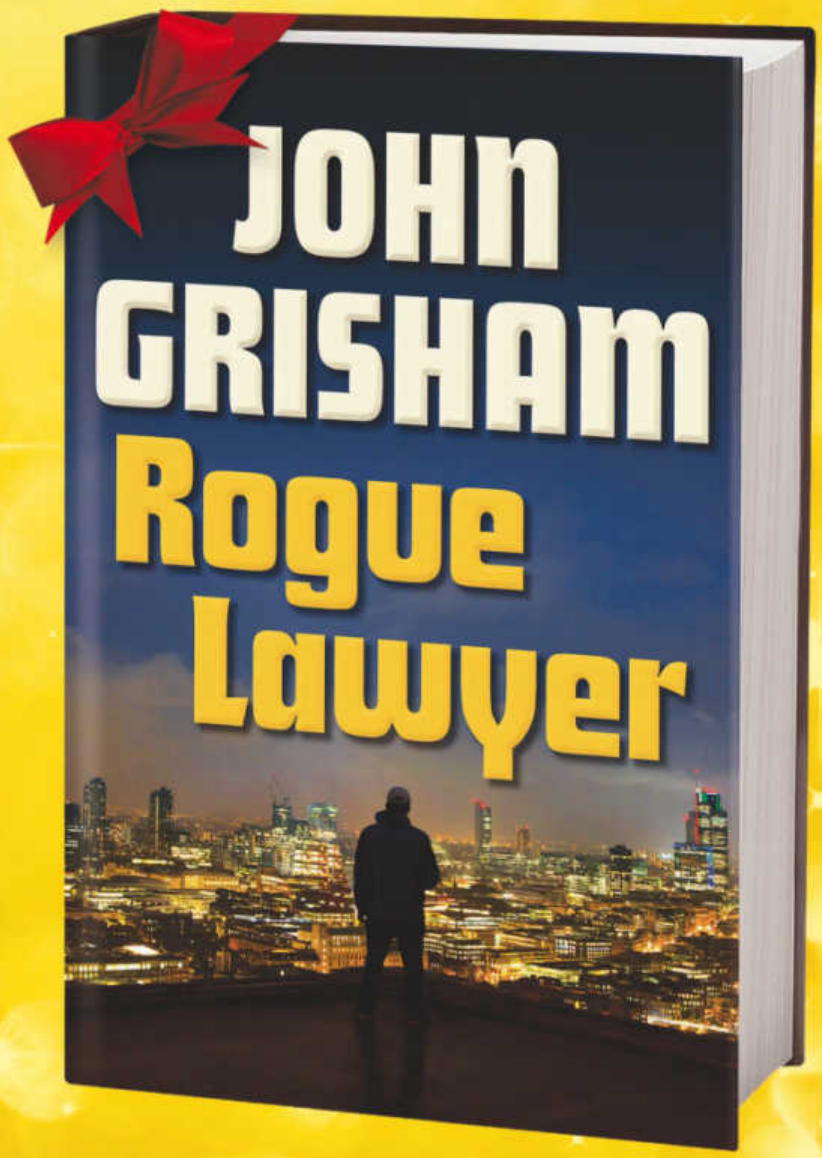
"Your first rodeo?"
Joe Ayella, Wayne, Pa.

"Looks like you boys could use some water."
Chris Sunami, Columbus, Ohio

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST

" "

THE MOST WILDLY ENTERTAINING GIFT OF THE SEASON



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