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AUGUST 15, 2022

DRAWINGS *Benjamin Schwartz, Jason Adam Katzenstein, Seth Fleishman, Ali Solomon, E. S. Glenn, David Sipress, Roz Chast, William Haefeli, Julia Suits, Frank Cotham, Amy Hwang, Asher Perlman, Zachary Kanin, Navied Mahdavian, Dan Misdea, Sofia Warren, Lars Kenseth, Shannon Wheeler* SPOTS *Christoph Abbrederis*

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Susan B. Glasser and Peter Baker (*"Trump's Last General," p. 36*), a staff writer and the *Times'* chief White House correspondent, respectively, are the authors of "The Divider: Trump in the White House, 2017-2021," which is due out in September.

Alex Ross (*"Laughter in the Dark," p. 30*) became *The New Yorker's* music critic in 1996. His latest book is "Wagnerism."

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Jane Mayer (*"Goodbye, Columbus," p. 22*), the magazine's chief Washington correspondent, won a 2021 Freedom of the Press Award. She is the author of "Dark Money."

Craig Morgan Teicher (*Poem, p. 43*) was a 2021 Guggenheim Fellow. His books include "Welcome to Sonnetville, New Jersey" and "We Begin in Gladness."

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THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

THE POLITICAL SCENE
Benjamin Wallace-Wells on Liz Cheney, who has put her career on the line to end Trump's.

CULTURE DESK
Lauren Collins recounts how the name Kevin fell from grace in France, where some now consider it gauche.

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LEFT: MARK PETERSON / REDUX; RIGHT: SIMON LANDREIN

THE MAIL

SAVING OUR SWAMPS

Annie Proulx's inspiring article about the importance of preserving our swampland reminded me of a time, in the early nineteen-sixties, when the Port Authority of New York and New Jersey, seeking to relocate and expand Newark Airport, decided to put a new complex in the Great Swamp, a twelve-square-mile wetland ("Swamped," July 4th). It seemed like a done deal until a local resident, Helen Fenske, began promoting the swamp as an invaluable habitat for wildlife and migrating birds, and warned that an airport on the site would threaten the area's water sources.

My family and I lived near the swamp then. We wondered what, besides mosquitoes and the odd turtle, could possibly want to live in that bog. But we certainly didn't want an airport in our back yard, so we listened—and became alarmed. Numerous garbage collectors were using the swamp as a landfill, polluting the streams. So the community rallied behind Fenske and her proposal to save the Great Swamp.

Today, the Great Swamp National Wildlife Refuge, which lies just twenty-six miles west of Times Square, is a vital nature preserve and hiking area; the Helen Fenske Visitor Center educates people of all ages on the urgency of conserving wetlands. And Newark's airport is thriving, right where it always was.

Mary Carey Churchill
West Palm Beach, Fla.

The dewatering of North America that Proulx describes was under way well before the nineteenth century, when westward expansionists began cutting down forests and farmers began draining and tilling fields. By the time those people were "reclaiming" land for their use, fur traders had been wreaking havoc on our wetlands for almost two hundred years, through the commodification of beavers. Their dams had once slowed and spread water through virtually every watershed on the continent. But, as beavers were removed from the landscape, streams and rivers sped up, becoming channelized and disconnected from their floodplains. This hydrologic transformation resulted in the loss of millions of acres of wetland habitat—an ecological nightmare.

Proulx is spot on in capturing "the unequalled joy" of wetland restoration. Those efforts are immensely more successful when paired with the reintroduction of the North American beaver, which is well suited to nurturing, repairing, and resaturating our drying continent.

Dave Schaub
Executive Director
Inland Northwest Land Conservancy
Spokane, Wash.

SOUNDS RIGHT

Anna Wiener's piece about Foley artists and their pursuit of the ideal sound was a delightful read ("Noise Makers," July 4th). I've worked as a sound-effects editor in film and television for thirty years, and I can attest to the great excitement that people in my profession feel when they find the sound that fits the moment. I've also felt that pleasure when witnessing my peers' creative decisions in action. A favorite example was produced by the remarkable Foley artist Andy Malcolm and the sound-effects editor David Evans for David Cronenberg's 1991 film, "Naked Lunch." In one scene, a character's use of hallucinogens turns his typewriter into a scarab-like beetle. When the insect tries to escape capture, it runs into a door. The sound we hear is not that of a giant bug crashing against it but, rather, the sharp ding of the typewriter's margin bell. It's a perfect artistic choice.

Jane Tattersall
Supervising Sound Editor
Formosa Group
Toronto, Ont.

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AUGUST 10 – 16, 2022

GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN

The Brooklyn-based sculptor and L.G.B.T.Q. activist Leilah Babirye, who was born in Kampala, Uganda, in 1985, was granted asylum in the U.S. in 2018, after being outed by her country's notoriously homophobic press. Through Nov. 27, "Agali Awamu (Togetherness)," a towering ensemble of wooden figures (pictured above), which Babirye carved with a chisel and a chainsaw, is on view in Brooklyn Bridge Park as part of **"Black Atlantic,"** a group exhibition from the Public Art Fund reflecting on themes of the African diaspora.

PHOTOGRAPH BY DONAVON SMALLWOOD

FALL PREVIEW

K-Pop, New Stoppard, Revivals with a Twist

Five years ago, the sly, spectacular musical **"KPOP"** transformed two floors of a building in Hell's Kitchen into a fictitious Korean hit factory. Audience members, divided into groups, shuffled through various rooms, following stars in the making through choreography sessions and plastic-surgery consultations, all culminating in a full-on concert. The show was a flashy, immersive hit, but how could it translate to Broadway? We'll find out this fall, when it opens at the Circle in the Square (beginning previews Oct. 13), starring the real-life K-pop singer Luna.

The show joins a busy Broadway season, including a revival of **"1776,"** the Nixon-era musical that follows John Adams as he corrals his fellow Founding Fathers into signing the Declaration of Independence. Taking a cue from "Hamilton," Jeffrey L. Page and Diane Paulus's Roundabout production (Sept. 16, American Airlines) tweaks American history, here with an entirely female, nonbinary, and trans cast. The West End hit **"& Juliet"** (Oct. 28, Stephen Sondheim) also puts a twenty-first-century twist on an old tale, using pop anthems written and produced by Max Martin ("Since U Been Gone," "Roar") to imagine what post-Romeo life might have been like for Shakespeare's heroine. Other musicals include **"Kimberly Akimbo"** (Oct. 12, Booth), David Lindsay-Abaire's adaptation of his play, from 2000, about a New Jersey teen-ager with a condition that causes her to rapidly, prematurely age; Victoria Clark stars in Jessica Stone's production, with music by Jeanine Tesori. And Cameron Crowe adapts his film **"Almost Famous"** (Oct. 3, Bernard B. Jacobs), based on his stint as a teen rock journalist for *Rolling Stone*, with a score by Crowe and Tom Kitt.

Tom Stoppard's Olivier Award-winning new play, **"Leopoldstadt"** (Sept. 14, Longacre), arrives from London under the direction of Patrick Marber; inspired by Stoppard's own ancestry, it traces half a century in the life of a Jewish family in Vienna. Martyna Majok's **"Cost of Living"** (Sept. 13, Samuel J. Friedman), which won the Pulitzer Prize for drama in 2018 and braids together two stories, each about a person with a disability and a caretaker, makes its belated Broadway début, at Manhattan Theatre Club. And three revivals showcase an abundance of Black talent: August Wilson's **"The Piano Lesson"** (Sept. 19, Barrymore), set in Pittsburgh in the thirties, directed by LaTanya Richardson Jackson and starring Samuel L. Jackson, John David Washington, and Danielle Brooks; Miranda Cromwell's revival of Arthur Miller's **"Death of a Salesman"** (Sept. 17, Hudson), starring Wendell Pierce and Sharon D. Clarke as Willy and Linda Loman; and **"Topdog/Underdog"** (Sept. 27, Golden), Suzan-Lori Parks's Pulitzer-winning play, from 2001, starring Yahya Abdul-Mateen II and Corey Hawkins as small-time-hustler brothers.

Off Broadway, the intrepid Elevator Repair Service stages **"Baldwin and Buckley at Cambridge"** (Sept. 24, Public), a retelling of the famous 1965 debate between James Baldwin and William F. Buckley, Jr. Ralph Fiennes plays the New York power broker Robert Moses in David Hare's **"Straight Line Crazy"** (Oct. 18, the Shed). And Ivo van Hove's staging of **"A Little Life,"** the harrowing Hanya Yanagihara novel, comes to BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House (Oct. 20).

—Michael Schulman

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOSH COCHRAN

FALL PREVIEW

Odissi, Fall for Dance, Kaatsbaan Festival

Some dancers transcend form. **Bijayini Satpathy** is one of them. As a member of the ensemble Nrityagram, based near Bangalore, Satpathy was one of the most compelling exponents of the classical Indian form Odissi. Since leaving the group, she has gone even further, exploring new themes, movements, and musical worlds. She has spent the past year taking in, and creating solos in response to, the Metropolitan Museum of Art's paintings and sculptures, as the museum's artist-in-residence. Her reflections have led to her latest work, "Dohā," in which she considers the relationships between prayer and play, precision and spontaneity. It premières in the Met's theatre on Sept. 13.

At New York City Center's **Fall for Dance Festival** (Sept. 21-Oct. 2), twenty dollars gets you a triple bill of dance works, often in wildly contrasting styles. Take Program 3: it opens with "Morani/Mungu"—Jamar Roberts's extraordinary solo for himself, a reflection on violence and power that is half exorcism, half molting—and ends with one of Spain's most inventive young flamenco stars, María Moreno, accompanied by the singer María Terremoto, whose voice, as her name suggests, moves mountains. On Program 4, the Kyiv City Ballet, exiled from Ukraine by the war, performs a work inspired by Ukrainian folk dance, "Men of Kyiv."

Kaatsbaan Cultural Park, on the grounds of a former horse farm in Tivoli, N.Y., has established itself as an idyllic spot to watch dance. This year's **Kaatsbaan Fall Festival** (Sept. 16-Oct. 1) includes "The Glass Etudes," a series of five new pieces set to Philip Glass's "Études for Piano" by various choreographers, including the eminent postmodernist Lucinda Childs, the ballet choreographer Justin Peck, and the Brazilian tap artist Leonardo Sandoval. Another highlight: a revival of Mark Morris's "Gloria," from 1981, in which the dancers crawl, run, fall, and exult to Vivaldi's exuberant choral work of the same name, suggesting the joy and the dejection that come with being human.

Kyle Abraham, whose first work for **New York City Ballet,** "The Runaway," had people whooping in their seats, has made a new piece for the company that premières as part of N.Y.C.B.'s fall season (Sept. 20-Oct. 16, David H. Koch). And **American Ballet Theatre** returns (Oct. 20-30, David H. Koch) with a new work by Christopher Rudd ("Lifted"), featuring an all-Black cast of dancers. The company also performs Alexei Ratmansky's "The Seasons," a windswept suite inspired by the weather and set to music by Glazunov.

—Marina Harss

As ever, it's advisable to check in advance to confirm engagements.

THE THEATRE

The Butcher Boy

"What's so great about being a grownup anyway?" Francie Brady (Nicholas Barasch), whose tale will never be mistaken for Peter Pan's, sings. This new musical—based on Patrick McCabe's 1992 novel and directed by Ciarán O'Reilly, with a book, music, and lyrics by Asher Muldoon—is set in the small Irish village of Clones, in the early nineteen-sixties. Francie is a high-spirited lad whose ma (Andrea Lynn Green) has mental-health issues and whose da (Scott Stangland) is an unhappy drinker, but he navigates his small-town, small-minded environment with optimism and enthusiasm. He's fuelled by comic books and TV; that "Twilight Zone" episode in which people have pig faces has really got into his head. Porcine demons invade his thoughts—and our stage—encouraging Francie to act out in increasingly sociopathic ways. Barasch is a fine singer and an energetic presence, but the script and the songs are prosaic, the scene transitions are clunky, and the mix of lightheartedness and violence just doesn't work.—*Ken Marks (Irish Repertory Theatre; through Sept. 11.)*

Romeo and Juliet

With color- and gender-blind casting becoming more common in today's theatre, the Hudson Valley Shakespeare Festival is making a strong case for age-blind role-playing as well. Nance Williamson, playing Juliet, and Kurt Rhoads, playing Romeo, a married couple in real life, have been gracing the company for more than twenty years, longer than this play's titular pair have been alive. Friar Laurence, the lovers' parents, and the Prince of Verona are all played by younger actors. It doesn't matter. Rhoads and Williamson bring their customary intelligence, humor, passion, and clarity to the roles. The director, Gaye Taylor Upchurch, hasn't fashioned a high-concept take; there's no winking at the lines that reference the characters' youth. It's just actors playing parts, with a fine-tuned ear to Shakespeare's ever-clever language and construction. Lauren Karaman and Luis Quintero shine, as the Nurse and Mercutio, respectively. Some skillful textual concision and a bit of novel stage business during the final embrace, in the Capulet burial vault, produce a creepier-than-usual climax.—*K.M. (Running in repertory with "Mr. Burns, a Post-Electric Play," Garrison, N.Y.; through Sept. 18.)*

DANCE

A.I.M by Kyle Abraham

The requiem in Abraham's new work "Requiem: Fire in the Air of the Earth" (part of Lincoln Center's Summer for the City) is Mozart's, thoroughly remixed by the E.D.M. producer Jlin. The costumes are by Giles Deacon: silk tunics, body bustles,

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smock-shirt short suits. The dance language is Abraham's, a mix of classical, contemporary, and social styles. Dancers fall to the floor, convulse, and are revived.—*Brian Seibert (Rose Theatre; Aug. 11-13.)*

BAAND Together Dance Festival

For the second summer in a row, five of New York's top dance companies—Alvin Ailey American Dance Theatre, American Ballet Theatre, Ballet Hispánico, Dance Theatre of Harlem, and New York City Ballet—share the stage for free, open-air samplers at Lincoln Center. Each program is a little different, with the troupes offering some of their most crowd-pleasing short works, but all the shows include "One for All," a new, made-for-the-occasion piece, by Annabelle Lopez Ochoa, that features dancers from all five organizations.—*B.S. (Damrosch Park; Aug. 9-13.)*

Battery Dance Festival

Situated in a park at the very southern tip of Manhattan, with a view of New York Harbor and the Statue of Liberty, this fun, free-form festival is a mainstay of late summer in the city. In the course of a week, the Battery Dance Company hosts more than thirty-five of its fellow artists and ensembles, from as far afield as Singapore (Lasalle Dance Singapore) and Spain (Dos Proposiciones Dance Theatre), representing an eclectic mix of styles. Each show includes up to a dozen short works, ranging from the human-rights-inspired "Threads," by Buglisi Dance Theatre, to jazz and tap, as in Sydney Burtis's "The Difference," and Balkan rhythms and harmonies, as in "Balkan Bacchanal," performed by Tina Croll + Company. As day turns to night, the audience gets another, equally dramatic display: the sun setting over the Hudson.—*Marina Harss (Robert F. Wagner Jr. Park; Aug. 13-19.)*

Rennie Harris

The Philadelphia hip-hop master Rennie Harris is no stranger to the spiritual buoyancy of house music. In "Lifted: A Gospel House Musical," now making its New York City début at the Joyce, he tells the "Oliver Twist"-like tale of an orphan tempted by a life of crime. What saves the boy is his church—in the glorious form of a live gospel choir soaring over the groove of gospel house. As drama, the show is clunky and unsophisticated. As dance and music, it rises, raises, even saves.—*B.S. (Joyce Theatre; Aug. 9-14.)*

Jacob's Pillow Dance Festival

On the outdoor stage this week, Dance Heginbotham revives and extends a collaboration with the pianist Ethan Iverson, combining "Easy Win," a quirky satire of a ballet class, with "Dance Sonata," a kind of sequel. The program also features a new duet, "The Understudies," performed by John Heginbotham and Amber Star Merkens. Indoors, at the Ted Shawn Theatre, Hubbard Street Dance Chicago brings a slick collection of work by Ohad Naharin, Aszure Barton, and others. In the festival tent, Aug. 10-13, Liz Lerman summons witches and their suppressed knowledge in "Wicked Bodies."—*B.S. (Becket, Mass.; Aug. 10-14.)*

ART

"The Clamor of Ornament"

With equal parts rigor and whimsy, this exhibition at the Drawing Center celebrates global decorative traditions—vegetal, calligraphic, geometric—in materials ranging from textiles and furniture to street art and pâtisserie, spanning the fifteenth century to the present. The show's title is a play on the British architect Owen Jones's canonical design compendium from 1856, "The Grammar of Ornament," which attempted to establish universal principles of style and motif. The curators—Emily King, Duncan Tomlin, and Margaret-Anne Logan—draw attention to the disorderly dynamics of inspiration, cross-pollination, and theft. The pairing of two nineteenth-century designs, one by an unknown artist from present-day Pakistan, the other by the Kentish shawl designer George Haité, illustrates the proliferation of the pattern known to Anglophones as paisley. Photographs of the "Second Coming House" in Niagara Falls, the home of Prophet Isaiah Robertson, document the self-trained Christian artist's adaptation of Islamic motifs. Throughout the exhibition, the embellishing impulse, which might, in another context, come across as merely striving for opulence, appears as something closer to reverie. In a winning gesture of flamboyance on a budget, the informative wall labels are displayed in curved brackets made not of elaborate metalwork but of brightly colored card stock.—*J.F. (Drawing Center; through Sept. 18.)*

"New York: 1962-1964"

This spectacular historical show of art and documentation addresses an era of season-to-season—at times almost monthly or weekly—advances in painting, sculpture, photography, dance, music, design, fashion, and such hybrid high jinks as "happenings." With Pop art and nascent Minimalism, New York artists were turning no end of tables on solemnly histrionic Abstract Expressionism, which had established the city as the new wheelhouse of creative origination worldwide. Instrumental to the moment was a brilliant critic and curator, Alan Solomon, who, as the director of the Jewish Museum during the years bracketed here, consolidated what he called "The New Art," mounting the first museum retrospectives of the trailblazers Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns and elevating such newbie Pop phenoms as Andy Warhol, Roy Lichtenstein, and James Rosenquist in tandem with radically formalist abstract painters like Frank Stella and Kenneth Noland. The eruptive early sixties launched many folks on all sorts of trajectories. Some artists, at the margins of fame, hung fire for unjustly belated recognition, as demonstrated here by the achievements of the Spiral Group, a cadre of stylistically diverse Black artists who banded together in 1963. Few women at the time were given their due, which should accrue to them in retrospect. A garish relief painting, from 1963, by the underknown Marjorie Strider, of a glamour girl chomping on a huge red radish, could serve as an icon of Pop glee and sexual impertinence crossed with proto-feminist vexation.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Jewish Museum; through Jan. 8.)*

"Photographic Pictures"

This excellent group exhibition, curated by the artist Anne Collier, is an elegant rumination on photography—one that, with its pictures-of-pictures theme, pertains to Collier's own appropriationist strategies. (In her cropped closeups of women's tears, she seems to wring the essence of a mythic, pop-cultural femininity from found imagery.) But the concerns of this show, which takes its title from the brooding lyrics of the band Depeche Mode, are as varied as they are interrelated. Among the nearly twenty artists in this meditation on mediation are Julie Becker, who achieves a mise-en-abyme effect in her characteristically charged interior "Whole (Scene)," from 1999; Luigi Ghirri, known for capturing the accidental photomontages of signage and ads in urban space; and Melanie Schiff, whose photos featuring album covers—including a waterlogged copy of Joni Mitchell's "Blue," seen in the disorienting, poignant "Reflecting Pool," from 2007—underscore the show's thread of self-aware nostalgia.—*Johanna Fateman (Anton Kern; through Aug. 26.)*

MUSIC

Bill Frisell Three

JAZZ Not every contemporary jazz guitarist deserves to be the subject of a five-hundred-plus-page biographical opus, but Bill Frisell is a special case. The subtitle of Philip Watson's new book, "Bill Frisell, Beautiful Dreamer: The Guitarist Who Changed the Sound of American Music," may be hyperbolic, but it's undeniable that the mild-mannered maverick has made a colossal impact. Frisell seemingly finds his space in any musical idiom, yet his stylistic approach has little to do with flashiness. He has an uncanny feel for making each of his carefully chosen notes fit, no matter the eclectic context. An oddly configured trio with the saxophonist Gregory Tardy and the drummer Johnathan Blake is just the kind of setting that can set off Frisell's brilliance.—*Steve Futterman (Village Vanguard; Aug. 10-14.)*

Maya Jane Coles

ELECTRONIC In late 2010, the British tech-house d.j. Maya Jane Coles skyrocketed to fame in the club world, and in the ensuing years the forthrightness of her selections, and her evident pleasure in playing them, has kept her at the scene's forefront. Indeed, the more her style has moved away from bassy house and toward bleepy techno, the more buoyant her sets have become; it helps that bleepy techno is itself in a particularly buoyant phase. Coles headlines over Danielle and Despina in the Hall at Elsewhere; in Zone One is Bring Dat Ass with Turtle Bugg, Toribio, and Alicia.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Elsewhere; Aug. 13.)*

Joyce Manor

POP PUNK A song by the pop-punk fixture Joyce Manor is like a one-way ticket to the band's native Southern California: heart tattoos and faded summer crushes are notable themes. The sensitive charm and sly edge of the music's tattered emotions, blown-out melodies, and diverting abandon have placed the group's work in the league of modern punk-rock classics. "Looking at your face in the dark / You don't even look that smart," the vocalist and guitarist Barry Johnson sings on the opener of the

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FALL PREVIEW

Cubism, Edward Hopper, Meret Oppenheim

A picture by **Wolfgang Tillmans** might be an intimate nude or a galactic abstraction, in color or black-and-white, extra-large or the size of a postcard, displayed framed or just taped to the wall. This fluid approach has made the fifty-three-year-old queer German photographer one of the most influential figures of his generation. MOMA surveys his beautiful, transgressive, and empathetic œuvre in "To Look Without Fear." (Opens Sept. 12.)

In 1974, Linda Goode Bryant opened a gallery in Manhattan called Just Above Midtown (JAM, to those in the know). Before closing, in 1986, it spotlighted such daring artists as David Hammons, Lorraine O'Grady, and Howardena Pindell, who are all now mainstays of major museums. MOMA pays homage to Goode Bryant's still evolving legacy in the exhibition **"Just Above Midtown: Changing Spaces."** (Opens Oct. 9.)

Imagine a dynastic drama that opens with Henry VII seizing the English throne and ends with the death of his granddaughter, Queen Elizabeth I. No, it's not Netflix's prequel to "The Crown"—it's the Met's exhibition **"The Tudors: Art and Majesty in Renaissance England,"** a gathering of magnificent paintings, sculptures, textiles, manuscripts, armor, and more from that turbulent period in British history, when the court flexed its power through its patronage of Europe's finest artists and artisans. (Opens Oct. 10.)

Edward Hopper, the bard of American solitude, lived for more than half a century on Washington Square, in lower Manhattan. The Whitney—whose collection of the painter's output includes hundreds of his letters, notebooks, and personal photographs—considers the role of the city as muse in **"Edward Hopper's New York."** (Opens Oct. 19.)

In the late nineteen-forties, while the construction of the Guggenheim Museum was being planned, the painter **Alex Katz**—a Brooklyn native, born in 1927—was sketching straphangers on the subway. Those drawings are the earliest works on view in "Gathering," a retrospective of the artist's signature portraits and epic landscapes at the museum. (Opens Oct. 21.)

The tradition of painters tricking the eye with still-lifes of startling realism dates back to the ancient Greeks. But, because the Cubists essentially dismantled realism in the twentieth century, it's unlikely that you have ever looked at a piece by Georges Braque, Juan Gris, or Pablo Picasso in light of Pliny the Elder, who wrote about real birds pecking at painted grapes. The radical proposition of the Met's blockbuster **"Cubism and the Trompe l'Oeil Tradition"** is that those modernists were, in fact, engaged in a lively conversation with centuries of European and American artists who shared their interest in visual games. (Opens Oct. 22.)

The first piece by a female artist to enter the collection of MOMA was a fur-lined teacup, saucer, and spoon, made by **Meret Oppenheim** in 1936 and shown at the museum that year. Now it's joined by nearly two hundred other ingenious works by the Swiss Surrealist, who died in 1985, in the six-decade survey "My Exhibition." (Opens Oct. 30.)

—Andrea K. Scott

wishfully titled 2014 LP "Never Hungover Again." Nonetheless, the band has rarely produced material that "slams," as Johnson recently put it. This changes on the group's new album, "40 oz. to Fresno," a riff on the title of a Sublime record. (The working title was "Hungover Again.") The ripping lead single, "Gotta Let It Go," introduces Joyce Manor's most seismic alt-rock pivot, and its most gripping chorus.—*Jenn Pelly (Brooklyn Steel; Aug. 12.)*

Tashi Wada and Julia Holter

EXPERIMENTAL Last year, at Brooklyn's Blank Forms gallery, the Los Angeles avant-gardists Julia Holter and Tashi Wada performed a dreamlike set of dark keyboard works that subsumed the tiny space. Holter is best known for graceful, baroque pop records that, during the past decade, have made her one of the most distinctive voices in independent music. During the same period, Wada maintained a regular collaboration with his father, Yoshi Wada, a Kyoto-born Fluxus artist and a bagpipe visionary who died in 2021. The Wadas' album "Nue," from 2018, created for RVNG's esteemed "FRKWYS" series, featured Holter as a guest performer, and the younger Wada has reissued his father's recordings on his own label. Their work's ecstatic drones, unconventional tunings, and spirit of infinity remain alive in Wada and Holter's concerts.—*J.P. (Public Records; Aug. 13.)*

MOVIES

A Better Life

The director Chris Weitz brings a personal touch and a keen focus to the story of Carlos Galindo (Demián Bichir), an undocumented Mexican immigrant in Los Angeles who works as a gardener and struggles, as a single father, to keep his fourteen-year-old son, Luis (José Julián), in school and out of gangs. When Carlos, hoping to move to a neighborhood with better schools, buys his boss's truck and seeks advancement as an independent businessman, the movie veers into the territory of "The Bicycle Thief," but Weitz avoids pastiche and arch aestheticism as he captures the constant fear of the authorities and the threat of deportation. The story unfolds without pity or inflated heroics, presenting the lives of everyday people with modest compassion and imaginative sympathy. As Carlos, returning home from work, gazes through the truck window at the faces of the city—prosperous white people at leisure, clusters of Asian people and Orthodox Jews, tough-looking gang members—he reflects Weitz's own curiosity about the lives of others, which the warmhearted, clear-eyed film raises to a matter of morality. Released in 2011.—*Richard Brody (Streaming on Peacock, Prime Video, and other services.)*

Emily the Criminal

The powers and the pitfalls of the writer-director are laid bare in this vigorous yet bare-bones drama, which puts Aubrey Plaza's fierce performance front and center. She plays the title role, a hard-nosed woman with a refined sensibility. An artist who's saddled with student debt, Emily lives in Los Angeles and can't find an office job because of a felony on her record. She's lured into a well-organized scheme of

FALL PREVIEW

Gothic Americana, Pop Divas Across Generations

After a buzzing summer slate that saw the return of many stars to bigger indoor stages, the fall calendar continues to deliver, with even more options and many artists giving back-to-back concerts to satisfy eager fans.

Brooklyn Steel plays host to a rousing, diverse collection of shows. On Oct. 1, the twins behind **Ibeyi** share their stirring experimental soul. The recently reunited avant-pop band **Stereolab** explores twenty years' worth of post-rock jams across two nights (Oct. 10-11), and the smooth-talking Compton native **Channel Tres** tinkers with his blend of West Coast rap and house music (Oct. 15). On Oct. 28, the laid-back British bedroom-pop musician **beabadoobee** presents her second album, "Beatopia." And, on Nov. 8, the Nashville-based singer-songwriter Sophie Allison unveils the O.P.N.-produced "Sometimes, Forever," her latest album as **Soccer Mommy**.

At Radio City Music Hall, pop divas across generations grace the stage: the dance icon **Diana Ross** brings her decades of pageantry (Sept. 13), the flamenco innovator **Rosalía** makes two stops along her "MOTOMAMI" world tour (Sept. 18-19), and the multimedia savant **Lil Nas X** continues to milk his début album, "Montero" (Sept. 20-21). Stadium shows feature a colorful array of music, mostly oriented around movement. The baroque-pop outfit **Florence and the Machine** celebrates its first album in four years, "Dance Fever," at Madison Square Garden (Sept. 16-17). A few days later, on Sept. 20, the reggaetón pioneer **Daddy Yankee** performs there on his farewell tour. For electronic-dance enthusiasts, the English d.j.s and producers **Jamie xx** and **Four Tet** play Forest Hills Stadium (Sept. 23). And **Gorillaz,** the virtual project of Damon Albarn, best known as the front man of Blur, sets up shop at Barclays Center (Oct. 12).

Elsewhere, unconventional sounds from off-center musicians find homes: at Bowery Ballroom, the gothic Americana artist **Ethel Cain** (Sept. 9-10) and the Shabaka Hutchings-led jazz-fusion band **The Comet Is Coming** (Oct. 19) perform; Terminal 5 dispatches the kamikaze rapper **Denzel Curry** (Oct. 6); BAM's Howard Gilman Opera House hosts the experimental Brainfeeder founder **Flying Lotus** (Oct. 6-7); and Webster Hall presents the emerging Travis Barker-approved punk **Kenny-Hoopla** (Oct. 14), the sludge-pop group **Let's Eat Grandma** (Nov. 4), and the sleek synth-pop duo **Magdalena Bay** (Nov. 15).

—*Sheldon Pearce*

FALL PREVIEW

New Homes, Old Wounds, a Chapel's Light

It goes without saying that new seasons indicate new beginnings, but the **New York Philharmonic** has an extra reason to celebrate: the reopening of David Geffen Hall after a two-year renovation. The ensemble and its music director, Jaap van Zweden, christen their remodelled home with some self-awareness, performing Etienne Charles's **"San Juan Hill—A New York Story"** (Oct. 8), a piece named for the African American and Caribbean neighborhood on the Upper West Side that was razed to make room for Lincoln Center.

Across the plaza, **Sondra Radvanovsky,** a soprano of rare power and agility, stars as the vengeful sorceress of Cherubini's "Medea," a role closely associated with Maria Callas, in the **Metropolitan Opera's** season-opening production (Sept. 27-Oct. 28).

Perhaps sharing Medea's fondness for curses, the composer and soprano **Kate Soper** writes and stars in "HEX"—in which a contemporary-music group manages to accidentally open the gates of Hell—accompanied by the **Wet Ink Ensemble,** at a venue to be announced (Sept. 14). The bass-baritone **Davóne Tines** stars in two other alt-theatre shows: Tyshawn Sorey's **"Monochromatic Light (Afterlife),"** inspired by the Rothko Chapel, in a production by Peter Sellars at the Park Avenue Armory (Sept. 27-Oct. 8), and **"Everything Rises,"** a personal reflection on BIPOC experiences, created with the violinist Jennifer Koh, at BAM's Next Wave Festival (Oct. 12-15).

With a Carnegie Hall début (Nov. 3), Tines joins a roster that includes the pianist **Igor Levit,** who plunges into Shostakovich's engrossing Twenty-four Preludes and Fugues, Op. 87 (Oct. 18); the **Los Angeles Philharmonic** and its maestro, **Gustavo Dudamel,** presenting New York premières by Gabriela Ortiz (Oct. 25-26); and the **Berlin Philharmonic** and its baton-wielder, **Kirill Petrenko,** playing emphatic symphonies by Mahler and Korngold (Nov. 10-12).

Experiments in Opera, a composers' collective that treats opera like a sandbox for quirky invention, rolls out a ten-episode streaming miniseries, **"Everything for Dawn"** (allarts.org; Oct. 7-Nov. 4). **Miller Theatre,** another hotbed of contemporary music, opens its season with the **JACK Quartet,** playing Liza Lim's "String Creatures" (Sept. 29).

At the 92nd Street Y, in something of a coda to the Philharmonic's opener, the cellist **Seth Parker Woods** performs "Difficult Grace," a narration of the Great Migration, which brought millions of Black Americans to the North in search of better fortunes (Nov. 19).

—Oussama Zahr

credit-card fraud, which she takes to like a natural, while also building a relationship with her handler, a young Lebanese man named Youcef (Theo Rossi). But as her ardor for the scam—and for him—increase apace, the ramped-up stakes of her intersecting commitments involve ever-greater legal and physical dangers. John Patton Ford, as the movie's screenwriter, sets up clear, tense situations and establishes an array of characters whose traits seem solely devised to fit the plot; as its director, he merely sets the story into rapid, choppy, and occasionally sentimental motion, missing the chance to challenge and expand his own premise. The result is an appealing but insubstantial showcase for a fine cast.—*R.B. (In theatrical release.)*

Four Months, Three Weeks, and Two Days

This forbidding drama from 2007, by the Romanian director Cristian Mungiu, is set in Bucharest in 1987. Anamaria Marinca stars as Otilia, a young student trying to help a friend and finding herself thwarted, at every turn, by a jaded and hostile world. Her roommate, the hapless Gabita (Laura Vasiliu), wants to be rid of the baby she is carrying; abortion, however, is illegal, and thus, like almost everything in the city, is subject to the vagaries (and the perils) of the black market. So much about this story could have grown gruesome and sensational; instead, even the central deed—performed by the foul-hearted Mr. Bebe (Vlad Ivanov)—is filmed with unerring control. As for Marinca, she draws us ever nearer with her balance of composure and exasperation; why didn't the Academy take notice of this actress? In truth, what Mungiu has made is not only an abortion picture—it is a study of a system too exhausted to handle love and death.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 1/28/08.) (Streaming on the Criterion Channel, Prime Video, Kanopy, and other services.)*

Last Year at Marienbad

Alain Resnais's second feature, from 1961, is widely considered the ultimate art-house puzzle. But history has caught up to its subject; the story's obscurity results from its protagonists' own efforts to blur their painful past. An unnamed man (Giorgio Albertazzi) pursues an unnamed woman (Delphine Seyrig) through the baroque splendors and ornamental gardens of a palatial hotel; he tries to convince her that they'd met there a year earlier, which she—under the harsh gaze of her husband (Sacha Pitoëff)—tries to deny. The timelessly hermetic setting evokes Europe in the nineteen-thirties; Resnais conjures an exquisite air of haut-bourgeois and aristocratic ease that spotlights the role of such obliviousness in the arrival of the Second World War. The man and the woman share in the graceful pleasures but struggle with the agonized circumstances of their previous encounter; the drama is centered on her need to face her trauma and his need to face his guilt. In its vision of memory as liberation, the non-ideological story, written by Alain Robbe-Grillet, is as intensely political as Resnais's celebrated first feature, "Hiroshima Mon Amour."—*R.B. (Screening Aug. 14-15 at Film Forum and streaming on the Criterion Channel, Apple TV, and other services.)*

For more reviews, visit
newyorker.com/goings-on-about-town

FALL PREVIEW

Fantasy Prequels, Remakes, Back to School

The fall television season kicks off with duelling fantasy spinoffs, milking some of the most valuable fire-breathing franchises in Hollywood. On Aug. 21, HBO releases a "Game of Thrones" prequel, **"House of the Dragon,"** which follows the ice-blond Targaryen clan as it attempts to tame scaly beasts some two hundred years before the start of the original series. Then, on Sept. 2, Amazon Prime Video débuts a big-budget "Lord of the Rings" prequel, **"The Lord of the Rings: The Rings of Power,"** following the rise of the nefarious wizard Sauron. Which will be the one binge to rule them all? Only time—and Nielsen ratings—will tell.

In general, this season of television is all about rebooting, remixing, or resuscitating existing intellectual property—so much so that you might wonder if anything is truly new at all. On Sept. 9, Showtime airs a series remake of the 1980 neo-noir film **"American Gigolo,"** with Jon Bernthal stepping into the Richard Gere role of an élite male escort embroiled in a murder case. On Sept. 19, NBC débuts a remake of **"Quantum Leap,"** and on Oct. 2 AMC releases a series-length adaptation of Anne Rice's novel **"Interview with the Vampire,"** starring Sam Reid as the sybaritic vampire Lestat and Jacob Anderson as his erudite mentee. The CW has its own reboot in **"Walker: Independence"** (Oct. 6), a prequel to the meanderings of the Texas ranger, and Showtime has yet another rehash on deck with an updated version of the chilly vampire drama **"Let the Right One In"** (Oct. 9). On Disney+, Warwick Davis returns as **"Willow,"** in a pastoral fantasy series set two decades after the events of the 1988 Ron Howard film (Nov. 30). The revamps are so plentiful that they have become the punch line of a brand-new comedy: **"Reboot"** (Sept. 20, Hulu), a romp from the creator of "Modern Family," starring Rachel Bloom, Keegan-Michael Key, Judy Greer, and Johnny Knoxville, follows the cast of a beloved nineties sitcom as they reunite to make new episodes.

If fresh content is what you're after, there are several intriguing offerings featuring major actresses. Samantha Morton plays a scheming Catherine de Medici in **"The Serpent Queen"** (on Starz, starting Sept. 11). Hilary Swank stars as a struggling journalist in ABC's **"Alaska Daily"** (Oct. 6), created by Tom McCarthy, who directed the film "Spotlight." Riley Keough channels a bohemian nineteen-seventies rock singer in **"Daisy Jones & the Six"** (Amazon Prime Video, fall date to be announced); Susan Sarandon plays a country-music matriarch in **"Monarch"** (Fox, Sept. 11). And the great Lesley Manville steps into the role of a book editor turned amateur sleuth in a much anticipated PBS adaptation of Anthony Horowitz's suspenseful novel **"Magpie Murders"** (Oct. 16).

Perhaps the most exciting show of the fall season is one that is not new but has been gaining steam: hot on the heels of nabbing seven Emmy nominations, Quinta Brunson's kindhearted teachers'-lounge comedy, **"Abbott Elementary,"** is back in session (on ABC) on Sept. 21. If you haven't yet leaped into Brunson's warm, tender, and breezily funny world, now is the time to do your homework.

—Rachel Syme

FALL PREVIEW

Medieval England, Historical Drama, A Crocodile

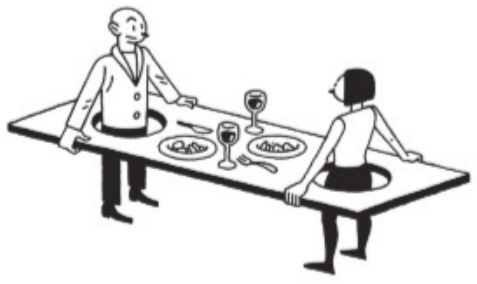
Historical events figure prominently in this season's releases, including **"Moonage Daydream"** (Sept. 16), a documentary portrait of David Bowie, centered on his audiovisual archive, directed by Brett Morgen. Phyllis Nagy directed **"Call Jane"** (Oct. 14), a drama based on the real-life Jane Collective, a Chicago group that provided abortions at a time when the procedure was illegal. The story, set in 1968, follows a housewife (Elizabeth Banks) who, after having an abortion, joins the group. **"Till"** (Oct. 14), directed by Chinonye Chukwu, dramatizes the effort of Emmett Till's mother, Mamie Till-Mobley (Danielle Deadwyler), to seek justice for her son's lynching and to publicize the facts of his murder.

Family stories are being told with a wide variety of approaches, starting with **"The Cathedral"** (Sept. 2), the daringly original second feature by Ricky D'Ambrose, a quasi-autobiographical coming-of-age story about a young man from the New York suburbs who, growing up amid conflicts and secrets, develops a unique aesthetic sensibility—which the movie's own style reflects. Lena Dunham wrote and directed **"Catherine, Called Birdy"** (Sept. 23), based on a novel by Karen Cushman, about the life of a teen-age girl (Bella Ramsey) in medieval England. The Queens native James Gray fuses personal reminiscences and political drama in **"Armageddon Time"** (Oct. 28); it's set in 1980 and is centered on a white sixth-grader (Banks Repeta) who becomes friends with a Black classmate (Jaylin Webb) in public school and discovers the grim power of privilege—and then, in a private school, crosses paths with the Trump family. Anne Hathaway, Jeremy Strong, and Anthony Hopkins co-star.

The risks of life in the public eye are portrayed in a number of movies this season. **"Honk for Jesus. Save Your Soul."** (Sept. 2), the first feature directed by Adamma Ebo, is a serious comedy about a pastor of a megachurch (Sterling K. Brown) who, after a sex scandal, attempts to rebuild the congregation with the help of his wife (Regina Hall). **"Blonde"** (Sept. 28), adapted from the novel by Joyce Carol Oates, is the director Andrew Dominik's bio-pic about Marilyn Monroe (Ana de Armas), which delves into the crises of celebrity. Cate Blanchett plays an orchestra conductor in **"TÁR"** (Oct. 7), a drama set in the world of classical music, written and directed by Todd Field.

It wouldn't be Hollywood without fantasy, as in **"Don't Worry, Darling"** (Sept. 23), Olivia Wilde's second feature as director, a dystopian thriller, set in the nineteen-fifties, about a planned community that harbors mysteries. She co-stars in it with Florence Pugh and Harry Styles. **"Lyle, Lyle Crocodile"** (Oct. 7), Will Speck and Josh Gordon's live-action adaptation of the children's-book series by Bernard Waber, presents a New York family (Constance Wu, Scoot McNairy, and Winslow Fegley) that adopts the titular reptile (Shawn Mendes). In **"Black Panther: Wakanda Forever"** (Nov. 11), the sequel to the 2018 Marvel adventure, the residents of Wakanda defend their country after the death of their king, T'Challa; the director Ryan Coogler and the actors Letitia Wright, Lupita Nyong'o, Danai Gurira, and Winston Duke return from the earlier installment.

—Richard Brody



TABLES FOR TWO

Ipanema / Bica
3 W. 36th St.

In 1979, Alfredo Pedro—who was born in Portugal and moved to Flushing, Queens, as a teen-ager—quit his job as an engineer at IBM and bought a restaurant: Brazilian Coffee, on West Forty-sixth Street. Opened seven years prior, it was the harbinger of Manhattan's Little Brazil, attracting all manner of Brazilian and Portuguese entrepreneurs to set up shop nearby. In 1988, Pedro changed the name to Ipanema, for the famous stretch of beach in Rio de Janeiro, and through the decades he upsized several times, without leaving the street. The menu, drawing generations of regulars, was a constant: *coxinhas* (shredded-chicken croquettes), *bitoque* (Portuguese-style strip steak with a fried egg and rice and beans), *moqueca* (coconut-milk-based seafood stew from Bahia).

By 2020, pre-pandemic, the place that had started it all was one of Little Brazil's last standing establishments. When Ipanema reopened after the first lockdown, it had been transplanted to South Norwalk, Connecticut, near the home of Pedro's son Victor, who, with his brother Carlos, had largely taken over the business. But in 2021 Victor and Carlos—who grew up, they told me, as "those restaurant kids that would sleep on chairs pushed together under a table, and be at the bar just, like, mixing random stuff"—took out a new lease on West Thirty-sixth Street. In May, Ipanema hung its shingle in Manhattan again, down the block from Keens Steakhouse, which opened in 1885 and is the last survivor of the Herald Square theatre district.

Where Ipanema's original iterations tended toward kitsch, the latest interior is pure glamour, a controlled riot of luxe materials: curving wood, gleaming marble, jungle-green tiles, cascades of tropical foliage, performance velvet, romantic lighting, Getz and Gilberto on the stereo. The food, too, from a Brazilian-born chef named Giancarlo Junyent, who cooked at Tom Colicchio's Temple Court, veers fancy, in a slightly outmoded way. On a recent night, a perfectly round mold of foie-gras mousseline was capped with a translucent layer of passion-fruit gelée, and *bacalhau*, or salt cod, came elegantly molded, too, one layer in a tower that also included shredded potato, egg yolk, and olive tapenade.

Entrées were homier. An excellent *feijoada*, an inherently rustic Brazilian black-bean stew, thick with kielbasa and pork loin, was served in a ceramic cauldron alongside miniature clay pots of white rice and steamed collard greens and a dish of *farofa*, or toasted cassava. More satisfying still was lunch a week later, at the daytime-only café within the restaurant called Bica, which is shorthand for the Portuguese equivalent of an espresso (and an acronym, some say, for "*beba isto com açúcar*," meaning "drink it with sugar"). Here are the *coxinhas*, the *pastéis de nata* (Portuguese egg tarts), the *pão de queijo*, gently blistered, chewy cassava-flour-and-cheese rolls ubiquitous in Brazil.

It's easy to roll your eyes at an açai bowl, but what's become a manic health-food craze in America, smacking of snake oil, originated as a normal, delicious beachy breakfast in Brazil, where açai berries grow. The thick, tart, sweet frozen slurry, topped with sliced banana and strawberry, might not hit the same, as the kids say, on the sun-baked sidewalks of midtown as it does on the famous mosaic pavement of Copacabana, but it's undeniably refreshing. If Bica's variety of bowls could technically be described as fast-casual, there would be nothing sad about having any of them for lunch at your desk. For the Lagos, tiny, garlicky shrimp, roasted fingerling potato, and a zingy chickpea salad are piled onto red quinoa. For the Amazon, a bed of baby spinach and kale is decked with candied cashews, dried fig, purple sweet potato, pink chicory, and green apple, as colorful and as cheerful as confetti. *(Ipanema dishes $15–$48. Bica dishes $8–$18.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY CAROLINE TOMPKINS FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATION BY JOOST SWARTE

I Am Not a Bracelet

I sipped sake with the Empress of Japan

I flirted with fisherman on the Amalfi Coast

I sat front row for the Beatles

I danced with nobles along the Aegean Sea

My next adventure awaits...

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

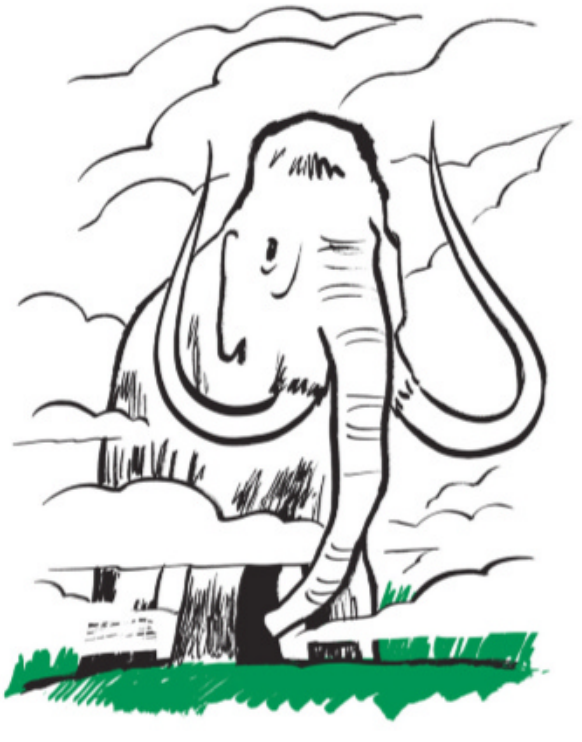
COMMENT
BRINGING UP BABIES

This Fourth of July, in Brattleboro, Vermont, marching bands and fire departments and Vietnam veterans and baton twirlers and a motorcycle convoy paraded down Main Street, past Sam's Outdoor Outfitters and Mocha Joe's Coffeehouse, and up the hill toward Brown and Roberts Ace Hardware and the Brooks Memorial Library. You had to arrive early to get a spot on the sidewalk. Kids handed out tiny paper American flags glued to wooden toothpicks. A naked man covered in red paint decided to walk, silently, in the middle of the street, in the other direction. No one stopped him; later, he told the town paper that he had been protesting the Supreme Court's decision in Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization. Love the country, hate the Court, Brattleborovians seemed to agree. "Hey, hey, ho, ho, the Supreme Court has got to go!" marchers chanted. Two people carried a sheet lashed between tree branches, painted with lines from Marge Piercy, "I am not your cornfield, not your uranium mine, not your cow for milking."

Also in the parade: an eight-foot-tall woolly mammoth, on wheels, made out of plywood, chicken wire, PVC pipes, burlap, coconut husks, white birch bark, nails, box springs, buttons, rusty iron tools, and deer bones. For tusks, it had coiled metal tubing and, for a trunk, a chimney liner. "It's a climate prophet," Kevin O'Keefe, who built it, said. O'Keefe is a circus artist and a writer. From a gray plastic bucket, he handed out prophecies to paradegoers. One read "Humankind, animal kind, and earth are ALL one, all belong to the same home." True, but one of us is a homewrecker.

Since 1970, wildlife populations have fallen by two-thirds, according to the World Wildlife Fund. The World Animal Foundation has predicted that a third to a half of all nonhuman animal species will have become extinct by 2050. A study published this month in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*—citing the latest projections from the United Nations' Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change and evidence of the accelerating mass extinction of nonhuman species—reports that "previous mass extinction events occurred due to threshold effects in the carbon cycle that we could cross this century." What does the woolly mammoth have to do with all this?

If "Save the Whales" was the motto of the environmental movement in the nineteen-seventies, "Bring Back the Woolly Mammoth" is something of a slogan for the twenty-twenties. Woolly mammoths, which were as big as the African elephant but closer, genetically, to the Asian elephant, lived across Asia, Europe, and North America until about ten thousand years ago—although in some places they survived until about four thousand years ago. They are the first species whose extinction humans came to understand, and could prove. The reason was harder to know. Humans were first believed to have played a role, by hunting them, but climate change more likely caused the decline, by ending the last Ice Age. The mammoths left behind bones and giant tusks, which Western naturalists began collecting in the seventeenth century, before the discovery of dinosaurs.



The mammoth, often confused at the time with the American mastodon, was "the dinosaur of the early American republic," as the historian Paul Semonin wrote in "American Monster"—evidence of antiquity, of greatness, and, apocalyptically, of possible doom. Two centuries before Charles Darwin boarded the Beagle, analysis of mammoth remains proved that Earth is much older than the account given in Genesis and that, contrary to a Christian doctrine of divine design, not every species that God created lasts forever. The unearthing of the mammoth proved the existence of a time before time. Its disappearance was taken as a warning of the possibility of an end of time; a way to imagine, for the first time, the extinction of humankind.

Woolly mammoths keep being unearthed. In June, in the Yukon, in the territory of the First Nation people the

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in, a gold miner hacking into the permafrost came across a baby mammoth, about a month old, exquisitely preserved, her legs tucked under, as if she'd just fallen asleep. Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in elders decided to name her Nun cho ga, big baby animal. "She is beautiful, one of the most incredible mummified Ice Age animals ever discovered," Grant Zazula, the Yukon's government paleontologist, said. "She has a trunk. She has a tail. She has tiny little ears." She died alone, very likely, having wandered off and got stuck in the mud.

Creating a baby woolly mammoth today is the objective of Colossal, a bioscience and genetic-engineering company founded last year by the Harvard geneticist George Church and the serial entrepreneur Ben Lamm, who had earlier launched the similarly named A.I. firm Hypergiant. "Extinction is a colossal problem facing the world," the startup's Web site announces. "And Colossal is the company that is going to solve it." The plan is to reconstruct the DNA of the woolly mammoth, use CRISPR to combine it with the DNA of an (endangered) Asian elephant, make an embryo, implant it in an Asian elephant—or, perhaps, into a not yet invented artificial womb—and begin to "de-extinct" the species. Resurrected mammoths would populate the permafrost and avert its melting by turning wet tundra into dry grasslands, which better sequester carbon and reflect sunlight, keeping the permafrost cooler and helping, thereby, to save the planet.

After Colossal had raised its first fifteen million dollars from venture capitalists (among them the Winklevoss brothers), Lamm, who is the C.E.O., said that the company expects to have its first calves as soon as 2025. Last month, Colossal announced that, together with the Vertebrates Genomes Project, it had completed the reconstruction of the DNA of the Asian elephant. Aside from the countless ethical problems, technological hurdles, and scientific improbabilities of this venture, it makes almost no sense as climate-change mitigation; it's too little, too late. And that's not even considering the plight of the motherless baby mammoths, alone and wandering helplessly.

By the end of the nineteenth century, the dinosaur had dethroned the woolly mammoth as an American emblem—and become the favorite megafauna of Gilded Age oligarchs. Robber barons loved the idea of giant reptilian carnivores. In 1906, J. P. Morgan financed the installation of a T. rex in the American Museum of Natural History. Colossal is funded, in part, by Musky, tusky tech billionaires keen to "futureproof" the world. They're hoping to build animals out of bitcoin and code. Meanwhile, back in Brattleboro, a homespun and better-beloved hope for humanity made out of chicken wire and birch bark and burlap rolls along, through pine-dark woods.

—Jill Lepore

POOL SHARK

IT'S A BIRD . . . IT'S A PLANE . . .

Make of it what you will, but the sharks appear to be coming for us: a foot laceration at Jones Beach, a punctured calf off Fire Island, a bloody chest at Smith Point. Four attacks in Suffolk County alone. They were soon followed by the washing ashore of a great white in Quogue, baring teeth that looked hungry for elbows and knees. New Jersey is more often spared these visitations, although a twelve-footer swam laps around a fishing boat in June, near Townsends Inlet. And then, in neighboring Avalon, there was the recent case of the shark that showed up in Erin Doyle's swimming pool.

Doyle, a television producer, was Zooming on her phone, with colleagues, from the back porch of her beach house, when something dark and "baguette-sized" caught her eye. "Guys, sorry to interrupt," she said, getting up to investigate. "But I think I found a shark in my pool." She was kidding—sort of. It was near the bottom step in the shallow end, it had two dorsal fins, and it wasn't moving. She figured it for a toy, an impressive replica, not that she could recall buying one for her three-year-old daughter or her one-year-old son. Using the skimmer, she poked at it—and let out a scream, before running inside to fetch her husband, Sam, who was also on Zoom.

Sam scooped it out. The shark was dead but must not have been for long.

There was a small blemish behind the gills, and a scratch on the right side; otherwise, Doyle recalled the other day, "it was anatomically perfect, like a massive great white but just shrunk down to a tiny size." Its texture reminded her of a hot dog, a food that she says she now has trouble eating without gagging. "My three-year-old didn't even think it was weird," she went on. "She was, like, 'Yeah, of course there's a shark. Sharks are everywhere.' She just picked it up by its tail."

Fearing greater skepticism from grownups, Doyle prepared a bed of ice in a cooler, in order to preserve the evidence. Over the phone, and on social media, theorizing commenced. "Oh, it must have swam through the pipe!" someone suggested. Doyle dismissed this as a beach-town variation of the urban legend involving alligators and toilets. Nevertheless, she consulted her "pool guy," who reassured her that she was dealing with a "closed circuit," unlike a city sewer, not to mention a chlorinated one.

"Some people were, like, 'Do you have any enemies?'" Doyle said. "And I'm, like, 'Yeah, and they happen to be my neighbors.'" She confessed that she and Sam have been known to host par-

ties that run a little late and loud—belting out show tunes at midnight—and a couple of curmudgeons have confronted her. She didn't ask them about the pool surprise, she said. A friend of a friend told Doyle that he could relate: shortly after moving to a house near the Hudson River, upstate, he'd found a decomposing fish—menhaden, he later concluded—in the garden, and wondered if it was some kind of territorial message about proper yard maintenance. Then he mentioned it to the foreman of a construction crew, across the street, and learned that one of the workers had been struck in the head by a fish from the sky. (Good thing for hard hats.) The culprit was an osprey.

"Down here you just see seagulls," Doyle said, insisting that her shark was too big to be "seagull-liftable." From her pool to the Atlantic is a third of a mile, an impressive distance for any bird whose talons had managed to leave so little evidence of pierced skin. "Poor guy," she reflected. "I wonder if he was alive when he landed." Google has convinced her that it was not a great white, as she once imagined, but a dusky smooth-hound, otherwise known as a dog shark, with teeth too blunt to have posed any threat. After keeping it on ice for a few days, she bagged it and walked over to the town dump, leaving a gift for the vultures.

—Ben McGrath

L.A. POSTCARD

CLOSEUP

The stars are ageless. So says Norma Desmond, the forgotten silent-movie queen at the center of "Sunset Boulevard." Desmond is written as an inconceivably ancient fifty—the age of Gloria Swanson, the actress who played her. Swanson died in the early eighties, shortly after her co-star, William Holden. Nancy Livingston, then an ingenue named Nancy Olson, who portrayed a novice screenwriter and Holden's love interest, is the last surviving member of the cast.

Livingston is ninety-four, and lives just north of Sunset, in a one-story L-shaped house graciously appointed with animal-print velvet, much like the interior of Norma Desmond's Isotta Fraschini. She has coiffed medium-blond hair, high Scandinavian cheekbones, and a trim figure. "I'm the same weight I was in college, that's not an issue," she remarked breezily on a recent afternoon. In October, "A Front Row Seat," a memoir about her life in and around show business, will be released. "I have to stay well through the end of the publishing of the book," she said. "And then will you just please leave me alone and let me be, so I don't have to look wonderful every day."

When she was cast in "Sunset," Livingston was a junior at U.C.L.A., signed to a seven-picture contract at Paramount. College nickname: Wholesome Olson. The lot was full of starlets, but Billy Wilder, the film's director and co-writer, homed in on her. "He'd say, 'Are you going to the commissary? I'll walk with you,'" she recalled. "He would ask me questions: 'What was it like growing up in Wisconsin? What is U.C.L.A. like?' It was clear to me years later that he had the character, the aspiring young writer, in mind. He did not want a starlet with barely a high-school education." Edith Head designed the costumes, but Wilder asked Livingston to wear her own clothing. "By the way, I did not have a great wardrobe," she said. "I didn't know where to shop. I was from Milwaukee!" When Howard Hughes pursued her briefly, her strategy was to bore him into retreat with stories of her Midwestern childhood.

Not long before the movie came out, in 1950, Livingston met and married her first husband, the librettist Alan Jay Lerner. "I was his third wife. He was ultimately married eight times," she said. "He was writing 'An American in Paris' when I met him. Then he wrote 'Paint Your Wagon.' Then he wrote 'My Fair Lady,' which he dedicated to me. Then he wrote 'Gigi.' And he was reading 'The Once and Future King,' about King Arthur, and thinking about 'Camelot,' when we were divorced."

Next, she married Alan Livingston, the president of Capitol Records, who earlier in his career had written "Bozo the Clown," made a soloist of Nat King Cole, and created "Bonanza," which ran for fourteen seasons. As president of Capitol, she writes in the book, he helped design the company's iconic record-stack headquarters; it was his idea that the aircraft-warning light on the top of the building blink out "H-o-l-l-y-w-o-o-d," in Morse code. He signed the Beach Boys, the Beatles, and the Band.

In 1965, Livingston hosted a party for the Beatles at the house above Sunset and invited all the most interesting

Nancy Olson

people in Hollywood: Rock Hudson, Hayley Mills, Natalie Wood. Tony Bennett was at the piano, singing the American songbook. McCartney charmed; Lennon didn't try. "John was so difficult," Livingston said. He was standing alone by the pool when she approached to offer him a drink. "Leave me alone," he said. Distressed, Livingston asked Gene Kelly to intercede. "He did, and the two of them hit it off, and then John was the last to leave."

She went on, "What was it like being married to two Alans?" Livingston wondered aloud. "First of all, I never made a mistake—'Alan, darling.' And my monogram has been the same since I was twenty-one. On my jewelry, my linens, my luggage, my silver, it is NOL." According to Livingston, in 2009, when her husband was dying, he said, "Oh, darling, I'm so sorry you're never going to be able to marry again. There are

only so many Alan L's in the world."

Not long after "Sunset Boulevard," Livingston, who was nominated for an Academy Award for her performance, decided to quit acting. Too narrow a life, she said, too much waiting around. Or maybe it was that the dark moral of the movie struck her, even from that side of the actuarial looking glass.

"Gloria Swanson was the one person on that set who understood what a great film this was, because she understood the truth of it," Livingston said. "She was beautiful, but she was over the hill for them." Not everyone wanted the truth. Wilder screened the movie for Louis B. Mayer, the producer who co-founded M-G-M. Livingston said, "When it was finished, Billy was walking up the aisle and Louis B. Mayer says, 'How could you do this to us?' And Billy said, 'Go fuck yourself.'"

—Dana Goodyear

GREEN THUMB
BENT

Stocking up on trees at Marders or Whitmores plant nursery to shade your Hamptons manse can cost a small fortune. By comparison, Benjamin Keating's bonsai sculptures—on view a short jaunt down Route 27, outside Tripoli Gallery, in Wainscott—are a steal at between five and a hundred thousand dollars. Especially when you take into account the obstacles Keating had to overcome in order to get sufficiently *in* with the "famous bonsai guys" to purchase their plants and learn the art of the diminutive tree.

"It's like they don't want to talk to you. They don't want to deal with you," Keating, who is forty-five and has thick sideburns and an old-school Brooklyn accent, said of the nation's far-flung bonsai experts. "You develop kind of a crackhead-type mentality—I was coming in with five, six grand, and they were still not answering my calls. To buy trees!"

Keating, who wore a snap-button checked shirt, white jeans, and blue mirrored Ray-Bans, stood in front of one of his larger works—a near-horizontal bonsai supported by a bronze sculpture that discreetly featured the words "nothing pinned." (In addition to making his own sculptures, and writing poetry, Keating owns a foundry in New Jersey, and is a master caster of bronze for, among others, the artists Robert Longo, Nicole Eisenman, and Terence Koh.)

"There's something in bonsai that's called the 'raft style,'" he said, gesturing toward the sideways tree. "It happens in nature—a tree falls over, then it grows. What happens in nature, though, when it keeps growing and growing, the plant can kill itself. So the sculpture here becomes integral to the raft for perpetuation—the bronze is going to hold this thing together."

Artfully arranged around the tree's trunk were rocks and small plants, including an heirloom dwarf strawberry that Keating had grown in the back yard of his house on Fort Hamilton Parkway, in Windsor Terrace, where his family has lived since 1898. "My great-grandfather planted a tree for my grandmother when she was born, in 1910," Keating said. "I planted trees for my kids"—three spruces.

He recalled his introduction to the upper echelons of bonsai society. After taking a Zoom class with an expert in Oregon "to learn the dialogue of trees" ("The tree kind of talks to you—each tree has its own statue in it"), Keating approached Paul Graviano, who has run Bonsai of Brooklyn since 1976, and offered to clean up his "cat-pee-stinking mess" of a garden, for twenty dollars an hour, in exchange for some pointers and a discount. Keating courted another one of his "bonsai trainers," Jim Doyle of Nature's Way Nursery, in Pennsylvania, via his belly. He sent him "a care package of tomato sauce and fresh pasta, FedEx style."

The whole tree-sculpture idea first came to Keating while vacationing in Maine, where he had visions of casting enormous trees in bronze. "But that would cost me a hundred and something thousand dollars," he said. In Wainscott, he strolled up to a mini tree planted in an aluminum cast of a plastic bag. (Other bases feature cast bricks, baby shoes, and Nike Dunks.) "Ever since I was a kid I always noticed the plastic bags in trees," Keating went on. "Before plastic was a bad thing, ya know?" A bee alighted on a branch, and Keating smiled. "They attract little predator insects, which is good. I have very few mosquitoes in my back yard since I've been doing the trees."

Keating gestured toward another bonsai. "This tree is an estimated two hundred and fifty years old. The reason we know that? Andy Smith." Keating explained, "Andy works for the Forest Service. So Andy's job is to core-sample trees. This hasn't been core-sampled, but he's done so much that he can guesstimate by the height of the tree and its elevation. He collected this tree twenty years ago"—six thousand feet up in the Rockies, likely saving it from prescribed burning or clear-cutting—"and I bought this off someone who's been training it for fifteen years."

So what happens if an art collector has a less-than-green thumb? "The bonsais are not as complicated as you think," Keating said. "They need not too much and not too little attention." And the sculptures come with a certificate that offers restoration services. "All these trees are replaceable," he continued. "So if this piece is sixteen thousand dollars, if you bought the work and the tree didn't survive I would send you three or four different trees and you could pick one and we would come and reinstall the tree."

Also, he noted, comparing his sculptures with other fragile art works, "Let's say you have a Peter Voulkos vase or something, or a Dale Chihuly"—glasswork—"and it breaks. You're in worse shape. Or a Gober wax! Let's say your maid moves that into the sun—it's gonna melt on you." Regardless, he added, "anyone that buys art has a gardener."

—Emma Allen

DEPT. OF *SIDEKICKS*
PLEASE TOUCH

The other day, a professional cuddler who goes by the name Trevor James and who cuddles for up to ten hours a day, sat down for an intake session at his home office, in Hollywood.

"People come to me because they are not being touched," he said. He wore a cross pendant, a muscle T-shirt, red athletic shorts, and flip-flops. "When the client comes through the door, I ask, 'May I give you a hug?'" They embrace, or not, and James guides the client to an L-shaped couch for an "ice-breaking conversation" before entering his treatment room for eye-gazing and breathing exercises. "Then the cuddle starts," he said. Eighty different positions are available; he charges ninety dollars an hour for cuddling and has a two-hour minimum. During the sessions, jazz or classical music plays softly in the background.

A registry of certified cuddlers can be found on Cuddlist, a sister company to hearme.app, an online therapy platform. Cuddlist has a roster of professional cuddlers in thirty-four states: Missouri and Utah have one each; Ohio has three; California has seventeen. James, who is Ghanaian, calls himself an "ethical-touch therapist"; he used to work as a social companion, under an offshoot business called the Sidekick Bromance Experience. James moved to L.A. eighteen years ago while working as a producer for live events, including award shows and pageants. Then he read the seventies self-help book "What Color Is Your Parachute?" to determine his passion. He learned that he was warm and nurturing. "Cuddling was a niche market, and it's impactful," he said, and proceeded to get two cuddling certifications from Cuddle Professionals International, in the U.K., and Cuddle Sanctuary, in Los Angeles.

"In some ways, it's sad that people resort to a stranger for this," James said. "At home, in Ghana, we touch a lot." He considers practicing his profession, he said, to be "an honor," adding, "It's satisfying, and it involves a lot of intuition. People cry a lot."

He presents new clients with a menu of cuddling experiences to choose from, including "the classic cuddle" (cuddle positions on a sofa or a bed); "binge cuddling" ("cuddle up in front of the silver screen and binge-watch whatever your current favorite show is"); and "culture club" ("spend an afternoon at the latest exhibition linking arms and discussing the artwork").

"The scariest part is knowing that someday something'll come along that will make us go, 'Even the spider mutants weren't this bad.'"

• •

Frequency? "It could be once in four months, or maybe twice in one week," James said. "Some people come constantly." His most regular client is an eighty-five-year-old man, who comes to cuddle several times a week. A college student had booked an afternoon cuddle. Another regular is a married man who comes for an hour in the evening. "I don't ask questions," James said.

Mark, another of James's regular clients, who works as an archivist at a movie studio, said, "My work is my life. At least at church you get a hug or something, but during the pandemic that went away." He and James cycle through a selection of cuddling positions. "I haven't been held in the arms of somebody in that way since I was a child," he said.

James has Zoom sessions for people who feel safer cuddling alone. "That was huge during the pandemic," he said. "I suggest they wrap a blanket around their shoulders and embrace themselves." Down a hallway hung with Robert Mapplethorpe photographs is the carpeted treatment room. James lay on a bed and took up the "stargazing position," flat on his back, and indicated where a client would be stretched out next to him. He then moved through a series of greatest hits, beginning with arm-stroking. "I usually start with low-contact cuddle positions," he explained. He demonstrated the "peas in a pod" position, in which he and a client hold hands and face each other.

"We're in a touch-deprivation crisis," James said. "We are currently living in an epidemic of skin hunger." Cuddlist has about a hundred and forty professional cuddlers in the United States, with different business models. The Snuggery, another cuddling service, offers overnight sessions, like sleepovers for adults, for four hundred and twenty-five dollars.

James meets with other professional cuddlers each month to debrief. "You know, what's it like working with a client who is a quadriplegic?" he said. "What positions would you use? What about a client who's autistic? Of course, some people ask, 'Is this sexual? Can you get naked?' And, when they realize that it's not, they are disappointed. One man scheduled a session for what I thought would be board games, but then he asked me to walk him on a leash, like a dog. I left."

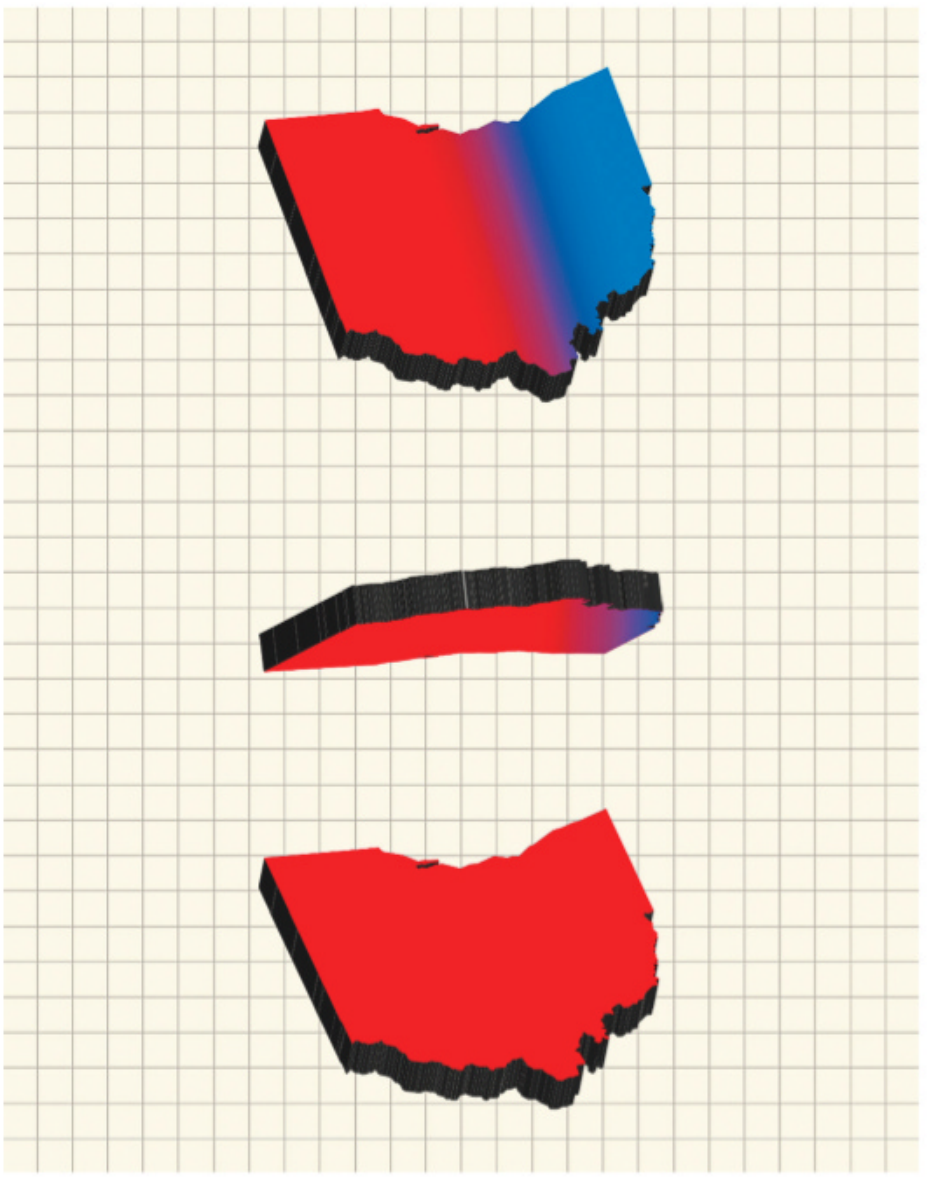
—Antonia Hitchens

A REPORTER AT LARGE

GOODBYE, COLUMBUS

How an extreme minority has upended democracy in Ohio.

BY JANE MAYER



As the Supreme Court anticipated when it overturned Roe v. Wade, the battle over abortion rights is now being waged state by state. Nowhere is the fight more intense than in Ohio, which has long been considered a national bellwether. The state helped secure the Presidential victories of Barack Obama in 2008 and 2012, then went for Donald Trump in 2016 and 2020. Its residents tend to be politically moderate, and polls consistently show that a majority of Ohio voters support legal access to abortion, particularly for victims of rape and incest. Yet, as the recent ordeal of a pregnant ten-year-old rape victim has illustrated, Ohio's state legislature has become radically out of synch with its constituents. In June, the state's General Assembly instituted an abortion ban so extreme that the girl was forced to travel to Indiana to terminate her pregnancy. In early July, Dr. Caitlin Bernard, the Indiana obstetrician who treated the child, told me that she had a message for Ohio's legislature: "This is your fault!"

Longtime Ohio politicians have been shocked by the state's transformation into a center of extremist legislation, not just on abortion but on such divisive issues as guns and transgender rights. Ted Strickland, a Democrat who served as governor between 2007 and 2011, told me, "The legislature is as barbaric, primitive, and Neanderthal as any in the country. It's really troubling." When he was governor, he recalled, the two parties worked reasonably well together, but politics in Ohio "has changed." The story is similar in several other states with reputations for being moderate, such as Wisconsin and Pennsylvania: their legislatures have also begun proposing laws so far to the right that they could never be passed in the U.S. Congress.

Ohio's law prohibits abortion after six weeks—or even earlier, if doctors can detect fetal cardiac activity—unless the mother is at risk of death or serious permanent injury. Dr. Bernard noted that the bill's opponents had warned about the proposed restrictions' potential effect on underage rape victims. "It was literally a hypothetical that was discussed," she told me. Indeed, at a hearing on April 27th, a Democrat in the Ohio House, Richard Brown, declared that if a thirteen-year-old girl "was raped by a serial rapist . . . this bill would require this thirteen-year-old to carry this felon's fetus."

The bill's chief sponsor, State Representative Jean Schmidt, is an archconservative Republican who represents a district east of Cincinnati. At the hearing, she responded to Brown by arguing that the birth of a rapist's baby would be "an opportunity." She explained, "If a baby is created, it is a human life. . . . It is a shame that it happens. But there's an *opportunity* for that woman, no matter how young or old she is, to make a determination about what she's going to do to help that life be a productive human being." The rapist's offspring, she suggested, could grow up to "cure cancer." Her remarks were deemed so outlandish that they were denounced everywhere from the *Guardian* to the New York *Post*.

According to David Niven, a political-science professor at the University of Cincinnati, a 2020 survey indicated that less than fourteen per cent of Ohioans support banning all abortions without exceptions for rape and incest. And a 2019 Quinnipiac University poll showed that only thirty-nine per cent of Ohio voters supported the kind of "heartbeat" law that the legislature passed. But the Democrats in the Ohio legislature had no way to mount resistance: since 2012, the Republicans have had a veto-proof super-majority in both chambers. The Democratic state representative Beth Liston, a pediatrician and an internist in Ohio, who voted against the bill, told me, "Doctors are going to be afraid of providing ordinary care. Women are going to die."

Ohio's voters are moderate, but its legislature is to the right of South Carolina's.

ILLUSTRATION BY ALEX MERTO

In a referendum on August 2nd, Kansas voters strongly rejected an abortion ban, indicating that even voters in deep-red states—when given the chance to express themselves—oppose radical curtailments of reproductive rights. Yet Ohio voters have had no such recourse, and the General Assembly is poised to pass even more repressive restrictions on abortion when it returns from a summer recess. State Representative Gary Click—a pastor at the Fremont Baptist Temple and a Republican who serves the Sandusky area—has proposed a "Personhood Act," which would prohibit any interference with embryonic development from the moment of conception, unless the mother's life is endangered. If the bill passes, it could outlaw many kinds of contraception, not to mention various practices commonly used during in-vitro fertilization. In an e-mail, Click told me that "the ultimate question that needs to be answered" is "When does life begin?" He added, "I believe the answer to that question is self-evident." Click is a graduate of an unaccredited Christian school in Michigan, Midwestern Baptist College, whose Web site says that "civil government is of divine appointment" and must be obeyed "except in things opposed to 'the will of our Lord Jesus Christ.'"

Click acknowledged that the story of the ten-year-old rape victim is discomfiting, adding that "we all have a visceral reaction" to such a scenario, "regardless of one's political leaning." But the news had not made him question his position; rather, he questioned the girl's story, calling it "suspicious," and noting that the incident "fit too neatly" with the pro-choice agenda. (According to law-enforcement authorities, a twenty-seven-year-old Ohio man confessed to twice raping the girl when she was nine. He has since pleaded not guilty.) Click also echoed an argument made by Ohio's Republican attorney general, Dave Yost, who claimed that the ten-year-old—"if she exists"—would have qualified for the new statute's medical-emergency exception. This assertion, however, has been disputed by various doctors, including State Representative Liston. "I don't know the child's health condition," she acknowledged to me. "But it's hard to say that simply because she is young she would meet the requirement of risk as defined by the new law." Mortality rates are generally higher for pregnant girls who are younger than fifteen, but, Liston said, "there's nothing in the law that states that age is a sufficient exception."

Click, who is a close ally of the Republican congressman Jim Jordan, is one of Ohio's most extreme legislators, but he's hardly out of place among the General Assembly's increasingly radical Republican majority. Niven, the University of Cincinnati professor, told me that, according to one study, the laws being passed by Ohio's statehouse place it to the right of the deeply conservative legislature in South Carolina. How did this happen, given that most Ohio voters are not ultra-conservatives? "It's all about gerrymandering," Niven told me. The legislative-district maps in Ohio have been deliberately drawn so that many Republicans effectively cannot lose, all but insuring that the Party has a veto-proof super-majority. As a result, the only contests most Republican incumbents need worry about are the primaries—and, because hard-core partisans dominate the vote in those contests, the sole threat most Republican incumbents face is the possibility of being outflanked by a rival even farther to the right. The national press has devoted considerable attention to the gerrymandering of congressional districts, but state legislative districts have received much less scrutiny, even though they are every bit as skewed, and in some states far more so. "Ohio is about the second most gerrymandered statehouse in the country," Niven told me. "It doesn't have a voter base to support a total abortion ban, yet that's a likely outcome." He concluded, "Ohio has become the Hindenburg of democracy."

Three days before the Supreme Court overturned Roe, I went to a luncheonette in Columbus, Ohio, to meet with David Pepper, an election-law professor, a novelist, a onetime Cincinnati city councilman, and a former chairman of the state's Democratic Party. Pepper, who is fifty-one, looked boyish and preppy in a polo shirt. He had recently become a small phenomenon on Twitter, having posted videos in which he delivered impassioned short lectures, punctuated with frantic scribbles on a whiteboard, about the growing crisis of democracy in America's state legislatures. When he attended Yale Law School, in the nineties, his geniality and Buckeye boosterism had led his classmates to name him the Most Likely to Be President of the Cincinnati Board of Tourism, but he spoke to me with an almost desperate alarmism.

Last year, Pepper wrote a book, "Laboratories of Autocracy," whose title offers a grim spin on a famous statement, attributed to the Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis, calling America's state legislatures "laboratories of democracy." The subtitle of Pepper's book, "A Wake-Up Call from Behind the Lines," is a bit more hopeful. He is determined to get the Democratic political establishment to stop lavishing almost all its money and attention on U.S. House, Senate, and gubernatorial races (say, the current Senate race in Ohio between Tim Ryan and J. D. Vance) and to focus more energy on what he sees as a greater emergency: the collapse of representative democracy in one statehouse after another.

Pepper understands that few Americans share his obsession. "No one knows anything about statehouses," he said. "They can't even name their state representatives. And it's getting worse every year, since the local media's dying and the statehouse bureaus are being hollowed out." Columbus has an unusually strong press corps, but it is an exception. And it is precisely because so few Americans pay attention to state politics that the legislatures have become ideal arenas for manipulation by extremists and special interests—who often work in tandem. "I'm banging my head against the wall," Pepper told me. With a nod to the political consultant James Carville, he added, "My God, Democrats, don't you see it? It's the statehouse, stupid! That's where the attack is happening!"

Pepper scoffed at recent claims, made by conservative Justices on the U.S. Supreme Court, that the state legislatures are more suited than the judiciary to adjudicate the divisive issue of abortion. In Dobbs v. Jackson Women's Health Organization, the case that overturned Roe, Brett Kavanaugh issued a concurring opinion in which he argued that the Court was merely restoring "the people's authority to address the issue of abortion through the processes of democratic self-government." Pepper said of Kavanaugh's concurrence, "It's so disingenuous—total gaslighting. Many statehouses

no longer *have* representative democracy. Because they've been gerrymandered, they don't reflect the will of the people."

With Trump, he believes, the situation became a lot worse—the former President "made people a little more willing to be lawless, and he gave oxygen to white supremacy." But Pepper thinks that "people make a huge mistake when they equate the attack on democracy entirely with him." In his view, Democrats, including President Joe Biden, who have portrayed Trump as a singular aberration are failing to see that "the Republican attack on democracy preceded him"—and that "if Trump was locked up tomorrow it would continue."

The shift began, Pepper believes, with the shock of Obama's 2008 victory. The election of the country's first Black President provoked a racial and cultural backlash, and many Republican officials panicked that their party, which was overwhelmingly white, was facing a demographic demise. Swept out of power in Washington, the Republican Party's smartest operatives decided to exploit the only opening they could find: the possibility of capturing state legislatures in the 2010 midterm elections. They knew that, in 2011, many congressional and local legislative districts would be redrawn based on data from the 2010 census—a process that occurs only once a decade. If Republicans reshaped enough districts, they could hugely advantage conservative candidates, even if many of the Party's policies were unpopular.

In 2010, the Supreme Court issued its controversial Citizens United decision, which allowed dark money to flood American politics. Donors, many undisclosed, soon funnelled thirty million dollars into the Republicans' redistricting project, called REDMAP, and the result was an astonishing success: the Party picked up nearly seven hundred legislative seats, and won the power to redraw the maps for four times as many districts as the Democrats.

Gerrymandering the shapes of districts to create safe seats is an old trick that has been used by both sides in American politics. I recently spoke with Jonathan Jakubowski, the chairman of the Republican Party in Wood County, Ohio, and the author of "Bellwether Blues: A Conservative Awakening of the Millennial Soul," and he emphasized that, in the nineteen-eighties, it was the Democrats who gerrymandered the state's districts. "We're *all* equal-opportunity offenders," he said. But the REDMAP project—powered by advances in digital mapping and by billionaire donors such as the fossil-fuel magnates Charles and David Koch—took electoral distortion to a new level. And Ohio, which had become one of the most fiercely fought battleground states in Presidential politics, was subjected to an especially tortured dissection.

The journalist David Daley tells the story of REDMAP in his 2016 book, "Ratf**ked." By 2012, he writes, the Republicans' plan had already begun to pay off handsomely: even though Obama was reëlected in Ohio that year, by three percentage points, and Sherrod Brown, a progressive Democrat, was easily reëlected to the Senate, Republicans had a resounding triumph in the state legislature. They won a 60–39 super-majority in the House.

The Ohio statehouse has grown only more lopsided in the past decade. Currently, the Republican members have a 64–35 advantage in the House and a 25–8 advantage in the Senate. This veto-proof majority makes the Republican leaders of both chambers arguably the most powerful officeholders in the state—and they proved it when they undermined Governor Mike DeWine's initial public-health-minded approach to the COVID-19 pandemic. DeWine is a Republican, yet he was a leader in imposing such emergency health orders as mask mandates and the closing of schools and businesses. Ohio voters had widely supported these measures. But anti-vaccine and anti-mask extremists in the statehouse passed a law stripping the Governor and his health director of the authority to issue such orders. (One Republican lawmaker, a doctor, suggested that "the colored population" was more vulnerable to COVID-19 because "they do not wash their hands as well as other groups." The lawmaker was subsequently named the chairman of the Ohio Senate's health committee.) Since the legislature's rebellion, DeWine—once regarded as a centrist conservative—has increasingly capitulated to his party's radical base, on public-health policy and much else. (Reached for comment, a spokesperson for the Governor said that "we disagree with that sentiment.") Daley told me that the REDMAP campaign "took a state that was slightly red and gave it a hue more like Elizabeth Taylor's lipstick," adding, "The upshot has been some of the most far-right, noxious, pay-for-play politics we've seen over the last decade. That's what gerrymandering enables. When voters lose the ability to throw the rascals out, the rascals do whatever they please."

Matt Huffman, the influential president of the Ohio Senate, recently said as much himself. Speaking in May to the Columbus *Dispatch* about the Republicans' super-majority, he said, "We can kind of do what we want."

For Pepper, the state's transformation has been crushing. He has watched the reputation of Ohio's public-school system slide as Republicans have siphoned off public funding to support failing, politically connected charter schools. In 2010, *Education Week* ranked the state's schooling as the fifth best in the country; in 2021, *U.S. News & World Report* ranked it thirty-first. Last year, F.B.I. agents told *USA Today* that public-corruption cases in Ohio were the most egregious in the country. In the past five years, the state has had five speakers of the House, because two were forced out as a result of the biggest bribery scandals in Ohio's history. Larry Householder, who was removed from office in July, 2020, is scheduled to be tried on federal racketeering charges this coming January.

This wasn't the path that Pepper had foreseen for his state. A native of Cincinnati, he grew up in a relatively apolitical, upwardly mobile household: his father climbed the ranks at one of Ohio's largest companies, Procter & Gamble, ultimately becoming its chairman. After Pepper graduated from Yale Law School, he returned to Cincinnati and clerked for Nathaniel R. Jones, a Black federal judge, who ignited in him an interest in public service. In 2001, Pepper ran for the city council, and to everyone's surprise he won, partly owing to a catchy slogan: "Just Add Pepper." After two terms in office, he moved up to the county com-

mission, eventually presiding over it, and in 2010 he was recruited by the state's Democratic governor, Strickland, to run for auditor, a statewide office. At the time, the auditor was one of five state officials on a commission overseeing the redistricting process, and could therefore act as an effective curb against gerrymandering. On the campaign trail, Pepper recalls, "I was running around, talking about gerrymandering, and no one knew what the hell I was talking about." Meanwhile, his opponent was getting a torrent of suspicious contributions from people who worked for out-of-state energy companies—many of which, Pepper deduced, had ties to the controversial coal baron Bob Murray, the chief executive officer of Murray Energy, an Ohio-based company. Such donations initially made little sense to Pepper—the auditor's role had nothing to do with coal mines—until he discovered that REDMAP had targeted his state, and that his candidacy stood in the project's way. He lost the race. In 2014, he made a second bid for statewide office, running this time for Ohio attorney general. Again, he was defeated. In 2015, he became the chairman of the state's Democratic Party, a position that he stepped down from at the end of 2020.

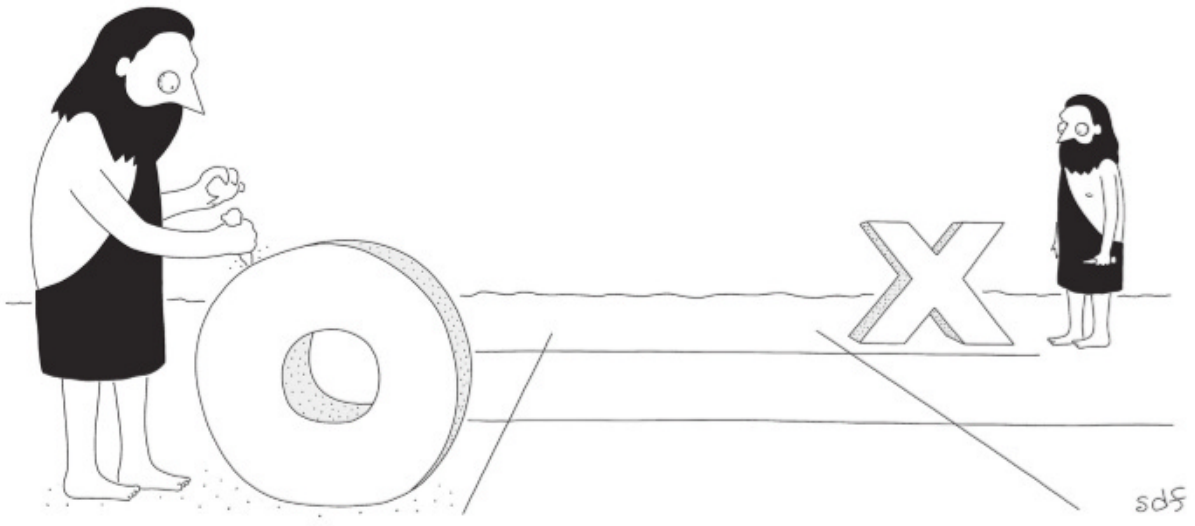
Pepper had become consumed by the problem of gerrymandering, but the subject drew only blank stares from Democratic Party officials. To counter this apathy, he told me, he decided "to write a novel about gerrymandering—which, of course, is a *horrible* idea." In the book, "The People's House," a Russian oligarch modelled on Vladimir Putin rigs an American election after figuring out that, thanks to gerrymandering, he needs only to flip a few dozen swing districts. The book appeared in the summer of 2016, when Putin's clandestine efforts on behalf of Trump were making headlines; Politico called the book "the thriller that predicted the Russia scandal." Pepper was pleased about the media attention, but he was disappointed that more people didn't focus on the novel's message: "how bad gerrymandering is." With evident frustration, he told me that media and political insiders prefer "to talk about politics in terms of personalities."

A recent study by the Institute for Research and Education on Human Rights, a nonpartisan nonprofit, documents how deeply right-wing extremism has infiltrated U.S. statehouses. Of the 7,383 people who served in state legislatures in the 2021–22 session, eight hundred and seventy-five had joined far-right Facebook groups. (All but three were Republicans.) The study describes the fringe beliefs that many of these members shared, including "the idea that Christians constitute a core of the American citizenry and/or that government and public policies should be reshaped to reflect that." A group promoting this view, the Ohio Christian Alliance, counts eleven Ohio state legislators among its Facebook members, including Gary Click. Last year, the organization helped block a bill, the Ohio Fairness Act, that would have barred housing and employment discrimination against the L.G.B.T.Q. community.

State Representative Casey Weinstein, a second-term Democrat from a suburban swing district between Akron and Cleveland, and one of the General Assembly's two Jewish members, told me that he's recently become "really concerned" about a new level of extremism. On January 23, 2022, a protest outside his house shattered a peaceful Sunday afternoon with his wife and young children. Some thirty vehicles blocked the entrance to his driveway; one had a flag bearing the message "KNEEL FOR THE CROSS." Weinstein told me, "I thought it was a Trump group, but it turned out to be a church, Liberty Valley, near Macedonia, Ohio. Some of these churches are militant, and some are basically militias operating under the guise of religion. They're weaponizing religion into a power grab." He went on, "So, I'm the Jew, and they came to my house to try to intimidate me and my family. That's what's happening, and where this is going."

Weinstein became further alarmed this past March, when Republicans in the statehouse pushed legislation prohibiting public-school teachers from teaching "divisive concepts." The bill, aimed at censoring class discussions of critical race theory—which was never part of the Ohio public-school curriculum to begin with—threatened teachers with suspension unless they neutrally instructed students about "both sides of a political or ideological belief." When Morgan Trau, an enterprising statehouse reporter for a television station in Cleveland, pressed one of the bill's co-sponsors, Sarah Fowler Arthur, for details, the lawmaker provoked an uproar by offering the Holocaust as an example of a topic that required a "both sides" approach. "You should talk about these atrocities that have happened in history, but you also do have an obligation to point out the value that each individual brings to the table," Fowler Arthur said, adding that students should consider the Holocaust "from the perspective of a German soldier." As Fowler Arthur went on, she

"Well, this is me."



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seemed to misunderstand both the scope and the nature of the Holocaust, referring to it as an event in which "hundreds of thousands," rather than six million, Jews were killed, and suggesting that victims were murdered "for having a different color of skin." Weinstein and other Jewish leaders in Ohio vociferously denounced what came to be known as the Both Sides of the Holocaust Bill. "That was enough for me," Weinstein told me. "What unique value did the German Nazis bring to the table?" He noted that Fowler Arthur, who sits on the Ohio House's Primary and Secondary Education Committee, "was homeschooled her entire life, has never set foot in a public school, and elected not to go to college." Weinstein added, "There's nothing wrong with that, *until* she starts censoring what can and cannot be taught in public schools." (Fowler Arthur declined to comment.)

The real intent behind attacking public-school curricula, Weinstein believes, was to "fire up the Republican base" about the teaching of slavery, the Civil War, and the civil-rights movement—in other words, to get out the conservative vote by inflaming the racial grievances of white Ohioans. The "divisive concepts" bill championed by Fowler Arthur opposes teaching any reading of American history suggesting that "the United States and its institutions are systemically racist."

Pepper noted that the efforts to control the curriculum in Ohio are "very similar to the meltdown in democracy in other places." Like Russia's attempts to censor what is taught to students about Ukraine, he said, the legislation promoted by Fowler Arthur represents an attempt to put forth a sanitized view of history—in this case, "to ban teaching parts of our history that cast a bad light on white America." Pepper asked me, "If this was happening in another country, what would you say? You'd say, 'Oh, my gosh—your democracy is under attack!' Well, it's happening in Columbus." Indeed, he warned, it's happening in state capitols across the country.

Ohio Republicans put the "divisive concepts" bill on hold after the idea of teaching neutrally about the Holocaust provoked national condemnation. But Ohio's General Assembly otherwise proceeded at a breakneck pace this past spring—debating a bill enabling the inspection of the genitals of transgender student athletes, and passing a raft of legislation about guns. Many of these new laws were so extreme that they inspired fierce protests from Ohio residents.

A 2018 poll conducted by Baldwin Wallace University, in Berea, Ohio, showed that Ohioans, by clear majorities ranging from sixty-one to seventy-five per cent, wanted the state legislature to enact new gun-control laws: banning high-powered semi-automatic rifles, including the AR-15; banning extended ammunition magazines; banning bump stocks that, in effect, make semi-automatic rifles automatic; enacting a mandatory waiting period for gun purchases; raising the minimum age to buy semi-automatic rifles from eighteen to twenty-one. But no such measures were passed. Instead, the state legislature has turned Ohio into a so-called "stand your ground" state, where it is legal for residents to kill a trespasser without first attempting to de-escalate the situation. Lawmakers also passed a bill that allows Ohioans aged twenty-one or older to carry concealed handguns virtually anywhere, without first obtaining a permit or undergoing a background check and firearms training. In response to the school massacre in Uvalde, Texas, the Ohio General Assembly rushed through a law that enables any school board to arm teachers and other staff—including cafeteria workers and bus drivers—after only minimal gun training. The legislation was written by a lawmaker who owns a business in tactical-firearms training, and the lawmaker's business partner gave testimony in the Ohio Senate in support of the bill, which specified that armed school personnel needed only twenty-four hours of firearms training. (Law-enforcement officers in Ohio must undergo some seven hundred hours of training.) The bill was so extreme that it was denounced in hearings by more than three hundred and fifty speakers—including representatives of the Ohio Federation of Teachers and of the state's largest police organization, the Fraternal Order of Police of Ohio.

In an interview, Michael Weinman, the head of government affairs for the Ohio chapter of the Fraternal Order of Police, which represents some twenty-four thousand law-enforcement officers, described the new gun laws as "dangerous" and "insane." Thanks to the legislation, he explained, "anyone can come into Ohio and carry a concealed firearm," and need not mention having the gun if stopped by law enforcement. Weinman pointed out that the law about arming school employees contains no provision requiring that lethal weapons be locked safely, adding, "Can you imagine a kindergarten student sitting down to be read to, and there's a gun in the kid's face?" He noted that, other than teachers, most employees of a school "haven't been taught how to discipline people—and most school shooters are students." Melissa Cropper, the president of the Ohio Federation of Teachers, told me, "It's unbelievable. The more guns you have in schools, the more accidents and deaths can happen, especially with such minimal training." She added, "We are every bit as bad as Texas and Florida when it comes to these laws. We

are becoming more and more extreme."

Weinman said that the rightward turn on guns in Ohio has been driven, in no small part, by "very aggressive gun groups," some of which profit from extremism by stoking fear. This helps to sell memberships and to expand valuable mailing lists. "These groups are very confrontational," Weinman said. He recently testified in the Ohio General Assembly against loosening state gun laws; afterward, he told me, Chris Dorr, the head of a particularly militant group called Ohio Gun Owners, chased him out of the room and down a hallway, demanding that he be fired. In an online post, Dorr, who maintains that the National Rifle Association is too soft in its defense of gun rights, posted a closeup shot of Weinman with the caption "REMEMBER THIS FACE," adding in another post that Weinman is "the most aggressive gun-rights hater in Ohio." Dorr and his two brothers, Ben and Aaron, operate affiliated gun groups around the country, which share the slogan "No Compromise." During the pandemic, the Dorrs' groups expanded into other vehemently anti-government causes, and helped lead anti-mask and anti-vax protests. Niven, the political scientist, said that the Dorrs "cultivate relationships with the hardest-right members of the state legislature, and can get their bills heard." Ninety per cent of Ohio voters favor universal background checks for people trying to buy guns, Niven noted, "but the Democrats can't get a hearing."

Teresa Fedor, a Democratic state senator who has served in the General Assembly for twenty-two years, described Ohio's new gun and abortion laws as the worst legislation that she has ever witnessed being passed. She told me, "It feels like Gilead"—the fictional theocracy in Margaret Atwood's novel "The Handmaid's Tale." Fedor added, "We've got state-mandated pregnancies, even of a ten-year-old."

The issue is personal to her. Fedor, a grandmother, is a former teacher; in her twenties, when she was serving in the military, she was raped. She had an abortion. Fedor was a divorced single mother at the time, trying to earn a teaching degree. "I thought my life was going to be over," she said. "But abortion was accessible, and it was a way back. To me, that choice meant I'd be able to have a future. I feel like I made it to the other side, and have the life I dreamed of as a little girl, because I had that choice." Without the freedom to have an abortion, she said, "I wouldn't be a state senator today."

In 2015, during a floor debate over abortion policy, Fedor testified about her experience. As she was speaking, she was enraged to notice that another lawmaker, who opposed her view, was chuckling. She said that Republicans who serve in districts that have been engineered to be impervious to voters are "just not listening to the public, period—there's no need to." Many of the most extreme bills, Fedor believes, have been written not by the legislators themselves but by local and national right-wing pressure groups, which can raise dark money and turn out primary voters in force. Nationally, the most influential such group is the American Legislative Exchange Council, an organization that essentially outsources the drafting of laws to self-interested businesses. In Ohio, Fedor told me, it is often extreme religious groups that exert undue influence. She then noted that one such organization is about to have "an office right across from the statehouse chamber."

Facing Ohio's Greek Revival statehouse is a vacant six-story building that is slated to become the new headquarters of the Center for Christian Virtue, a once obscure nonprofit that an anti-pornography advocate founded four decades ago, in the basement of a Cincinnati church. In 2015 and 2016, the left-leaning Southern Poverty Law Center classified the organization as a hate group, citing homophobic statements on its Web site that described "homosexual behavior" as "unhealthy and destructive to the individual" and "to society as a whole." The group subsequently deleted the offending statements, and, according to the Columbus *Dispatch*, it has recently evolved into "the state's premier lobbying force on Christian conservative issues." In the past five years, its full-time staff has expanded from two to thirteen, and its annual budget has risen from four hundred thousand dollars to $1.2 million. The group's president, Aaron Baer, told me that the new headquarters—the group bought the building for $1.25 million last year, and plans to spend an additional $3.75 million renovating it—is very much meant to send a signal. "The message is that we're going to be in this for the long haul," Baer said. "We're going to have a voice on the direction of the state—and the nation, God willing."

The center already commands unusual influence. E-mails obtained by a watchdog group, Campaign for Accountability, show that Baer has been in regular contact with Governor DeWine's office about an array of policies. The center's board of directors includes two of the state's biggest Republican donors, one of whom, the corporate lobbyist David Myhal, previously served as DeWine's chief fund-raiser. A third director, Tom Minnery, who has served as the center's board chair, is a chairman emeritus of the Alliance Defending Freedom, a powerful national legal organization that was created as the religious right's answer to the American Civil Liberties Union. And, until earlier this year, a fourth director at the center was Seth Morgan, who is currently the vice-chairman of the A.D.F.

The most recently available I.R.S. records show that the center and the A.D.F. share several funding sources—notably, the huge, opaque National Christian Foundation—and have amplified each other's messages. In April, the center celebrated the A.D.F.'s legal defense of an Ohio college professor who refused to use a student's preferred pronouns. In addition, the center works in concert with about a hundred and thirty Catholic and evangelical schools, twenty-two hundred churches, and what it calls a Christian Chamber of Commerce of aligned businesses. Jake Grumbach, a political scientist specializing in state government who teaches at the University of Washington, told me that the center illustrates what political scientists are calling the "nationalization of local politics."

The Center for Christian Virtue appears to be the true sponsor of some of Ohio's most extreme right-wing bills. Gary Click, the Sandusky-area pastor serving in the Ohio House, acknowledged to me that the group had prompted him to introduce a bill opposing gender-affirming care for transgender youths, regardless of parental consent. The center, in essence, handed Click the wording for the legislation. Click confirmed to me that the center "is very proactive on Cap Square"—the Ohio capitol—adding, "All legislators are aware of their presence." Click's transgender bill isn't

yet law, but a related bill, also promoted by the center, has passed in the Ohio House. It stipulates that any student on a girls' sports team participating in interscholastic conferences must have been born with female genitals. The legislation also calls for genital inspections. Niven observed that "many anti-trans sports bills were percolating" in Republican-ruled statehouses, but "leave it to Ohio to pass a provision for mandatory genital inspection if *anyone* questions their gender." He went on, "That's gerrymandering. You can't say 'Show me your daughter' and stay in office *unless* you have unlosable districts."

In a phone interview, Baer told me that his mother and father, who divorced, were Jewish Democrats. But his father converted to Christianity, and became a Baptist pastor. After a rocky adolescence, Baer himself converted to a more conservative form of evangelical Christianity. He told me that the only "real hope for our nation is in Jesus, but we need safeguards in the law." He described gender-confirming health care for transgender patients as "mutilation." Baer believes that the Supreme Court should overturn the legalization of same-sex marriage, and he opposes the use of surrogate pregnancy, which he called "renting a womb," because it "permanently separates the children from their biological mothers." He supports the Personhood Act—State Representative Click's proposal to ban abortions at conception. As for Ohio's much publicized ten-year-old rape victim, Baer told me that the girl would have been better off having her rapist's baby and raising it, too, because a "child will always do best with the biological mother."

"Even if the mother is in grade school?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

Baer is untroubled by the notion that gerrymandering has enabled minority rule. "I think the polls that matter are the polls of the folks turning out to vote," he said.

The vast majority of Ohio residents clearly want legislative districts that are drawn more fairly. By 2015, the state's gerrymandering problem had become so notorious that seventy-one per cent of Ohioans voted to pass an amendment to the state constitution demanding reforms. As a result, the Ohio constitution now requires that districts be shaped so that the makeup of the General Assembly is proportional to the political makeup of the state. In 2018, an even larger bipartisan majority—seventy-five per cent of Ohio voters—passed a similar resolution for the state's congressional districts.

Though these reforms were democratically enacted, the voters' will has thus far been ignored. Allison Russo, the minority leader in the House, who is one of two Democratic members of the seven-person redistricting commission, told me, "I was optimistic at the beginning." But, she explained, the Republican members drafted a new districting map in secret, and earlier this year they presented it to her and the other Democrat just hours before a deadline. The proposed districts were nowhere near proportional to the state's political makeup. The Democrats argued that the Republicans had flagrantly violated the reforms that had been written into the state constitution.

This past spring, an extraordinary series of legal fights were playing out. The Ohio Supreme Court struck down the map—and then struck down four more, after the Republican majority on the redistricting commission continued submitting maps that defied the spirit of the court's orders. The chief justice of the Ohio Supreme Court was herself a Republican. Russo told me, "If norms were being obeyed, we would expect that there would have been an effort to follow the first Ohio Supreme Court decision. But that simply didn't happen."

The Republicans' antics lasted so long that they basically ran out the clock. Election deadlines were looming, and the makeup of Ohio's districts still hadn't been settled. "They contrived a crisis," Russo told me. At that point, a group allied with the Republicans, Ohio Right to Life, urged a federal court to intervene, on the ground that the delay was imperilling the fair administration of upcoming elections. The decision was made by a panel of three federal judges—two of whom had been appointed by Trump. Over the strenuous objection of the third judge, the two Trump judges ruled in the group's favor, allowing the 2022 elections to proceed with a map so rigged that Ohio's top judicial body had rejected it as unconstitutional.

On Twitter, Bill Seitz, the majority leader of the Ohio House, jeered at his Democratic opponents: "Too bad so sad. We win again." He continued, "Now I know it's been a tough night for all you libs. Pour yourself a glass of warm milk and you will sleep better. The game is over and you lost."

Ohio Democrats, including David Pepper, are outraged. "The most corrupt state in the country was told more than five times that it was violating the law, and then the federal court said it was O.K.," he told me. "If you add up all the abnormalities, it's a case study—we're seeing the disintegration of the rule of law in Ohio. They intentionally created an illegal map, and are laughing about it."

Russo likens the Republicans' stunning contempt for the Ohio Supreme Court to the January 6th insurrection: "People are saying, 'Where is the accountability when you disregard the rule of law and attack democracy?' Because that's what's happening in the statehouses, and Ohio is a perfect example."

Pepper has resorted to giving nightly Zoom lectures to small groups of Democratic activists and donors from across the country, in the hope of opening their eyes to what's happening at the ground level in the statehouses. Meanwhile, he recently co-founded a group called Blue Ohio to fund even seemingly doomed races in deep-red local districts. Even if these Democratic candidates lose in 2022, he says, they will at least be making arguments that voters in many districts would never otherwise hear. "You can't just *abandon* half the country to extremism," he warns.

As Pepper sees it, Republicans understand clearly that, "if it were a level playing field, their positions would be too unpopular to win." But "this is not a democracy to them anymore."

He told me, "There are two sides in America, but they're fighting different battles. The blue side thinks their views are largely popular and democracy is relatively stable—and that they just need better outcomes in federal elections. The focus is on winning swing states in national elections. The other side, though, knows that our democracy isn't stable—that it can be subverted through the statehouses. Blue America needs to reshape everything it does for that much deeper battle. It's not about one cycle. It's a long game." ♦

WHY YOU SHOULDN'T ROOM WITH JAMES TAYLOR

BY JENN KNOTT

Your last roommate left hair everywhere, but James Taylor leaves guitar picks.

James Taylor is always saying he's your handyman, but when you ask if he'll unclog the toilet he says he can only fix broken hearts.

When you confront him about his late rent check, he insists that his manager was supposed to send it.

Deep greens and blues are not the colors you choose, but he's painted your entire apartment in a mind-bending swirl of them anyway.

You wanted to decorate the mantel with tasteful dried flowers and candles, but James insists that's where all six of his Grammys go.

He's always bragging about his Starbucks CD and asking if you've ever released something that can be purchased with your morning Frappuccino. When you tell him that no one drinks a Frappuccino in the morning, he just rolls his eyes.

Your parents now visit you constantly . . . but only after asking if James Taylor will be there.

You've never known anyone who owned so much denim. Somehow his dark-indigo laundry always sneaks into your load of whites.

You're sick of his annoying friend Jackson Browne coming over for a beer, because it's never just a beer—it's Jackson and James getting into an endless argument about who's sold more albums, and then Jackson crashing on your couch until noon.

You can't listen to him quote the *Time* cover story from 1971 that refers to his "Heathcliffian inner fire" even one more time.

When you're in the shower, James Taylor pokes his head in and yells, "Shower the people you love with love!," and then laughs maniacally.

When you watch Peter Jackson's eight-hour Beatles documentary, "Get Back," James interrupts every five minutes, saying, "Hey, I know those cats!"

He insists that you sing "Sweet Baby James" to him as a lullaby. While it's a beautiful song, James is not a baby but a seventy-four-year-old man who could probably afford his own place by now.

If it rains and you build a fire in the fireplace, James Taylor smugly goes, "I've seen both of those before."

He's started writing songs for his new album which are obviously about you even though he denies it, including "Sun's Shining (and the Dishwasher Don't Unload Itself)" and "God Damn, Never Heard a Woman Snore So Loud."

One morning, after James has spent a raucous evening with Jackson, you wake to find his room cleaned out and both singer-songwriters gone. On the mantel, you discover a hastily scribbled note that says, "Decided to move back to North Carolina. Left a Grammy to cover next month's rent. Sorry 'bout turning all your shirts blue. Best of luck, J.T. (& J.B.)"

He's just too folksy. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

LAUGHTER IN THE DARK

The subtly incisive film comedy of Ernst Lubitsch.

BY ALEX ROSS

SCHERL / SÜDDEUTSCHE ZEITUNG PHOTO / ALAMY

In the summer of 1943, the playwright and screenwriter Samson Raphaelson received word that Ernst Lubitsch, the Berlin-born director of such incandescent Hollywood comedies as "Trouble in Paradise," "The Shop Around the Corner," and "Heaven Can Wait," had suffered a fatal heart attack. Raphaelson, who had written scripts for those films and for many others, set about composing a tribute to Lubitsch, extolling him in terms that few other directors of the era elicited: "However great the cinema historians will eventually estimate him, he was bigger as a person. He was genuinely modest. He never sought fame or coveted prizes. . . . He was as free from guile and pretense as children are supposed to be, and this made him endlessly various and charming."

Lubitsch had not died, it turned out, though he never fully regained his grinning, cigar-chewing buoyancy. When, in 1947, he worked with Raphaelson again, he let it slip that he had read and appreciated the premature memorial. Out of habit, the two men began going over the text, as if it were a bit in a script. Was it true, Lubitsch wondered, that his pants and coats frequently clashed? Perhaps an overstatement, Raphaelson admitted, but a humanizing touch. About the phrase "free from guile," Lubitsch said, "You know better than to call me honest"—a line that could fit into any of his films. Only once did he show serious discomfort, and that was at the mention of the historians: "What historians? They'll laugh at you. A movie—any movie, good or bad—ends up in a tin can in a warehouse; in ten years it's dust." He expressed envy for Raphaelson, whose stage plays counted as literature and might live on. Eventually, Lubitsch decided that the tribute was perfect as it was, exaggerations be damned. It was published unaltered when, later that year, Lubitsch's heart did give out. He was fifty-five.

Raphaelson told the story of Lubitsch previewing his own eulogy in an article for this magazine in 1981. By then, it was evident that the director would not be forgotten—indeed, that Raphaelson would go down in history mainly as a screenwriter. Still, there is no question that Lubitsch's renown has faded in recent decades. He is best remembered as the purveyor of the so-called Lubitsch Touch, which is understood to mean some blend of cosmopolitan sophistication and winking innuendo. His movies radiate those qualities in abundance, but categorizing him as a kind of cinematic cosmetician sells him short. Technically virtuosic and visually poetic, he elevated comedy to the realm of the sublime. The late Peter Bogdanovich, who knew many of the major filmmakers of the mid- and late twentieth century, wrote that Lubitsch was "the one director whom nearly every other director I ever interviewed mentioned with respect and awe as among the very best." Jean Renoir put it pithily: "Lubitsch invented the modern Hollywood."

Billy Wilder, another of the awestruck, enjoyed telling an anecdote from the making of the 1939 classic "Ninotchka," which he co-wrote and Lubitsch directed. Greta Garbo plays a dour Bolshevik ideologue who falls prey to capitalist temptations in Paris. Wilder and his writing partners, Charles Brackett and Walter Reisch, were struggling to convey the stages of Garbo's transformation. One day, Lubitsch emerged

Technically virtuosic, visually poetic, he elevated comedy to the realm of the sublime.

from the bathroom saying, "It's the hat." Here is Wilder's recounting, more than five decades after the fact:

> We said, "What hat?" He said, "We build the hat into the beginning!" Brackett and I looked at each other—this is Lubitsch. The story of the hat has three acts. Ninotchka first sees it in a shop window as she enters the Ritz Hotel with her three Bolshevik accomplices. This absolutely crazy hat is the symbol of capitalism to her. She gives it a disgusted look and says, "How can a civilization survive which allows women to wear this on their heads?" Then the second time she goes by the hat and makes a noise—tch-tch-tch. The third time, she is finally alone, she has gotten rid of her Bolshevik accomplices, opens a drawer and pulls it out. And now she wears it.

Wilder can be excused for missing a few details: the hotel is called the Clarence, and Ninotchka actually says, "How can such a civilization survive which permits their women to put things like that on their heads?" (She adds, "Won't be long now, comrades.") Adding to the intricacy of the joke is the unambiguous ridiculousness of the hat in question: it looks a bit like an upside-down drinking goblet of Bronze Age manufacture. Bolshevism is being lampooned, but so is capitalist taste. Lubitsch prizes, above all, the freedom to be ridiculous, in the context of whatever ideology.

In a curious twist, Wilder, Lubitsch's most devout acolyte, has a stronger hold on the public imagination. "Sunset Boulevard," "The Apartment," and "Some Like It Hot" are pop-culture monuments, and books about Wilder have piled up: the latest include Joseph McBride's "Billy Wilder: Dancing on the Edge," a critical study of the director's films, and Noah Isenberg's "Billy Wilder on Assignment," a selection of his youthful journalistic writing in Vienna and Berlin. Lubitsch, in contrast, is mostly the terrain of academics, though McBride pleaded for a broader reassessment in a 2018 study, "How Did Lubitsch Do It?"—the title based on a sign that hung in Wilder's office.

How he did it, no one knows. His films, with their interweaving of formal elegance, sly wit, and emotional ambiguity, resist analysis. His entire career is a singular event: arguably, no director maintained so distinctive an identity within the Hollywood studio system. McBride's deeply researched, impassioned book nudged me into a Lubitsch obsession, which involved viewing prints at the Museum of Modern Art, exploring archives at the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences, and visiting the director's daughter, Nicola. I found Lubitsch to be the rare case of a major artist who becomes more likable the more one learns about him. He had nothing dark or demonic in him, even if there were chambers of sadness behind his suggestively closed doors.

The fate of Lubitsch is a familiar one for the comic auteur. The genres on which he thrived and that he helped to establish—romantic comedy, the movie musical, warm-blooded social satire—are routinely overlooked in catalogues of directorial genius. Wilder escaped that lot by demonstrating a flair for drama: "Double Indemnity" and "Ace in the Hole" count among the boldest, bleakest films ever made in Hollywood. Lubitsch's occasional ventures into "serious" territory are less persuasive. His 1932 antiwar picture, "Broken Lullaby," about a French veteran who falls in love with the former fiancée of a German soldier he killed, labors under tearjerker tropes, although its raging sorrow at the waste of war commands respect.

An added problem for Lubitsch is that the early-twentieth-century German cinema, from which he emerged, tends to be defined by its artier, eerier products: "The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari," "Nosferatu," "Metropolis," and other staples of college classes. The focus on Expressionist styles reflects the long-standing influence of Siegfried Kracauer and Lotte Eisner, émigré critics who interpreted German film in light of the country's slide toward Nazism. As latter-day scholars complain, Kracauer and Eisner emphasized tales of madness and horror over comedies, operettas, melodramas, adventures, and other popular fare of the day. After the First World War, the movie that reopened the American market for German filmmakers was not "Caligari" but "Madame DuBarry" (1919), a vibrant epic of French decadence and revolution. Its director was Lubitsch, whom Eisner dismissed as a "one-time shop assistant" with a penchant for "telling love stories in sumptuous period costume."

Like so many film pioneers, Lubitsch had Eastern European Jewish roots. His father, Simon, was a Russian-born tailor who had settled in Berlin; his mother, Anna, grew up east of the city. Lubitsch gravitated to the theatre at an early age and was mentored by Victor Arnold, who played comic roles in Max Reinhardt's celebrated company. Lubitsch, too, became a Reinhardt actor. Although he never advanced beyond bit parts, he was able to study at close range Reinhardt's brilliant direction of onstage movement. Those lessons are reflected in the vitality of Lubitsch's party scenes, where everyone seems to be having the time of his life, probably because there was no better party to be found.

Lubitsch received his first film-acting credit in 1913, when he was twenty-one, and made his début as a director a year later, in a short titled "Miss Soapsuds." He achieved considerable popularity playing a certain comic type: a Jewish schlemiel who, despite his vulgarity and klutziness, maneuvers his way up the social ladder. Critics have debated whether these "milieu films," usually set in the garment business, indulge anti-Semitic stereotypes. McBride follows scholars like Enno Patalas and Valerie Weinstein in concluding that Lubitsch treats his subjects with a "complex blend of affection and mockery." Weinstein calls it a form of Jewish camp, dismantling clichés through "exaggerated, theatrical masquerade." As a performer, Lubitsch is a relentless but irresistible ham; it's a pity that he stopped acting in 1920.

The German film industry benefitted from its isolation during the First World War; with foreign movies effectively banned, it could develop free of Hollywood's growing domination. Lubitsch took the opportunity to broaden his template. In "I Don't Want to Be a Man," from 1918, Ossi Oswalda plays a rebellious tomboy who decides to dress as a man. On the town, she encounters her natty male guardian (Curt Goetz), who fails to recognize her and goes drinking in her company. Attraction grows, leading to a kiss in broad daylight. When everything is sorted out, the guardian recovers remarkably quickly. He asks, "You let me kiss you?" She answers, "Well, was it not to your taste?" We are only a step away from the gender-bending antics of "Some Like It Hot,"

except that Lubitsch is really a step ahead: the casualness about sexuality is thoroughly modern.

The following year, Lubitsch made "The Oyster Princess," again starring the gleefully anarchic Oswalda. The plot is standard-issue operetta material—an American millionaire's daughter woos an impoverished European prince—but the visual invention is electrifying. In one scene, the prince's servant is kept waiting in a palatial room at the millionaire's mansion. Out of boredom, he becomes absorbed in an elaborate pattern in the floor, and amuses himself by balletically prancing across it. As in the comedies of Jacques Tati, quizzical mischief warms up a cold environment. Later, a stuffy wedding party is overcome by a "foxtrot epidemic." The exquisitely choreographed chaos—couples kicking their legs in mass formation, the kitchen staff joining in while balancing trays, a bandleader wiggling his butt—is a convulsively musical experience, even without music.

Several other films from Lubitsch's German period display avant-garde features: surrealist sets, geometrical manipulations of the screen image, self-referential cameos by the director. At the same time, he was devising lavish costume pictures that adroitly mix comedy and drama. In "Madame DuBarry," aristocratic shenanigans go off with the expected saucy wit; more startling are the helter-skelter scenes of revolution. "The Loves of Pharaoh" (1922) contains sequences of staggering complexity, with thousands of extras in motion. Such proficiency in the epic mode caught the attention of Hollywood, which saw Lubitsch as a European counterpart to D. W. Griffith. Thankfully, he turned out to be something quite different.

When Lubitsch moved to Los Angeles, in December, 1922, his background caused unease. The First World War was not long in the past, and some rabid patriots took umbrage at the idea of a German-speaking filmmaker working in Hollywood. Unlike his predecessor Erich von Stroheim, who had come to America at the age of twenty-four and spoke English fluidly, Lubitsch retained a strong accent. During the Second World War, his Germanic delivery led to a cherished incident on the streets of Bel Air. Lubitsch was serving as the local air-raid warden, identifying blackout infractions as he patrolled the neighborhood in a white helmet. Outside the home of Walter Reisch, an Austrian who tailored scripts for M-G-M, he barked, "Walter—your lights! You have forgotten!" Reisch answered, "Ach, yes, *was gibt's*?" ("What's going on?") The American director Mervyn LeRoy, hearing this exchange from a neighboring house, merrily yelled, "German paratroopers have taken over!"

The jest had some truth in it: Lubitsch had been the advance agent for a mighty squadron of German-speaking directors, actors, screenwriters, producers, composers, and technicians. Even before Hitler and Goebbels drove hundreds of film people into exile, a substantial German-Austrian colony had formed in Hollywood, with Lubitsch at its center. The director didn't Americanize himself—nor could he, really. Instead, he fused European and American traditions. "Every good film is by nature international," he wrote in 1924.

In defiance of commercial nostrums, Lubitsch trusted in the intelligence of his audience. The way to win the hearts of moviegoers, he once told Wilder, was not to tell them that two plus two equals four but to let them do the addition themselves. The hat in "Ninotchka" is a case in point: when Garbo puts it on,

no one reminds the viewer that she castigated the same hat half an hour earlier. Lubitsch's reliance on the oblique, the elliptical, and the unsaid leads the audience to suspect innuendo where none may have been intended. When Genevieve Tobin, in the marital-temptation comedy "One Hour with You," asks, "Do you play Ping-Pong?," we giggle at God knows what.

Lubitsch's early American films have a cool, polished look. When I went to MOMA, which has restored prints of several Lubitsch silents, I was struck by the elemental beauty of the images. "Lady Windermere's Fan," released in 1925, is based on the Oscar Wilde play, though none of the original text appears in the intertitles. Instead, Lubitsch discovers cinematic analogues to Wilde's aphoristic razzle-dazzle. The claustrophobia of the upper crust is captured in hard gazes, sidewise looks, stolen glances, and flashes of raw desperation. The characters drift through strangely vast rooms, dwarfed by the architecture of their station. The central figure is the social outcast Mrs. Erlynne, whom Irene Rich endows with wounded power. In a tour-de-force racetrack scene, she withstands the scrutiny of half a dozen binoculars. At the climax, she glides majestically into a room full of scandal-seeking men, saving Lady Windermere from ruin.

Women are objectified in Lubitsch's world, but so are men. The 1924 film "Forbidden Paradise," which MOMA has returned to gleaming condition, is a comic take on the story of Catherine the Great, with a libidinous Tsarina (Pola Negri) delighting in a handsome guardsman (Rod La Rocque). Movies of the twenties fetishized beautiful men like Rudolph Valentino and Ramon Novarro; Lubitsch is plainly having fun with that trend, reducing his male lead to a stupid sex object. In one scene of deafening innuendo, La Rocque's chest swells so muscularly that a button bursts off his tunic, causing the Tsarina's eyes to open wide. At the end, she moves on to a new conquest, without having paid any great price for her exercise of lust. Lubitsch, in a later discussion of the roguish 1933 comedy "Design for Living," said that women in film should do "what all the male Don Juans have been doing for ages—and attractively."

So absolute was Lubitsch's mastery of the silent-film medium that he might have been expected to stumble with the introduction of sound. Instead, starting in 1929, he launched another ebullient revolution, codifying the film musical with a run of movies, most of them featuring Maurice Chevalier: "The Love Parade," "Monte Carlo," "The Smiling Lieutenant," "One Hour with You," and "The Merry Widow." In retrospect, it was obvious that the man who made "The Oyster Princess" would

thrive in the new genre. A famous sequence in "Monte Carlo"—Jeanette MacDonald at the window of a speeding train, singing "Beyond the Blue Horizon" to peasants in fields—was described by the film scholar Gerald Mast as the "first sensational Big Number" in Hollywood history.

In the matter of gender relations, the musicals have aged less well. The empowerment of the female gaze in the silent films gives way to a male-dominated perspective, a sacralizing of Chevalier's roué persona. Characters played by MacDonald and Claudette Colbert are not granted the freedom that Oswalda and Negri earlier enjoyed. McBride argues, in Lubitsch's defense, that the movies address the "emotional consequences of male abandon." The rake is often exposed as a grownup boy who fears both loneliness and commitment. As it happens, the cinematic bard of sexual laissez-faire was himself unlucky in love. Lubitsch's first marriage, to Helene Kraus, ended when Kraus had an affair with the screenwriter Hanns Kräly, who had been working with Lubitsch since the garment-comedy days. A second marriage, to Vivian Gaye, fell apart following a passionate beginning.

After Kräly made his exit, in 1930, Lubitsch turned to Raphaelson, one of many New York writers who went west when sound came in. In 1932, the two concocted "Trouble in Paradise," which is to film comedy what "The Marriage of Figaro" is to comic opera. McBride rightly says of it, "Nothing could ever be more perfect." Miriam Hopkins and Herbert Marshall play Lily and Gaston, master thieves on a debonair rampage through high society. Kay Francis is Madame Colet, an eccentric perfume executive who is initially Gaston's mark but then becomes the object of his conflicted affections. The thieves inhabit a world of pure artifice, which allows for pitch-perfect parodies of tony movie dialogue ("Out there in the moonlight everything seemed so perfect, so simple—but now . . . "). Colet, a mesmerizing Francis creation, has a way of puncturing illusions with regal candor: "You see, François, marriage is a beautiful mistake which two people make together. But with you, François, I think it would be a mistake."

"Trouble in Paradise" was made during the Great Depression, and at first glance it seems frivolously detached from its historical moment. There is, however, a political undertow beneath the froth. Aaron Schuster, in the 2014 essay collection "Lubitsch Can't Wait," tracks recurrences of the phrase "in times like these": well-off people use it to gesture emptily toward the Depression while justifying their usual behavior. The chairman of Colet's board says to her, "If your husband were alive, the first thing he would do in times like these—cut salaries." This is, as Schuster says, the cruel politics of austerity, and Colet nobly, if daffily, rejects it: "Unfortunately, Monsieur Giron, business bores me to distraction. Besides, I have a luncheon engagement. So I think we'd better leave the salaries just where they are." Naturally, Giron is unmasked as the biggest thief of all. Gaston boasts that he can at least count himself a "self-made crook."

Gaston is another Lubitsch rake who rethinks his two-timing ways. Marshall, hinting at vulnerability beneath an impeccable veneer, makes the transition more believable than Chevalier ever could. A bittersweet atmosphere infiltrates the relationship between Gaston and Colet, culminating in an almost shockingly expressive series of shots. Colet, embracing Gaston in her bedroom, says, "We have a long time ahead of us, Gaston—weeks, months, years . . . " First, we see the couple reflected in a circular mirror over the bed; then, at the word "months," they appear in a small cosmetic mirror; and finally, at "years," they dematerialize into shadows on the bed. It's like an abyss opening and then quickly closing.

"Someday, you can turn this crippling loss into a really triumphant college essay."

The final decade and a half of Lubitsch's career unfolded under the cloud of the dreaded Production Code, with its prudish horror of sexuality and its callow fear of politics. The mechanism of studio self-censorship took shape in 1930 but wasn't fully enforced until 1934, when the Motion Picture Producers and Distributors of America handed control of the process to Joseph Breen, a conservative Catholic journalist. The

following year, Breen barred a reissue of "Trouble in Paradise" on moral grounds. In the same period, Lubitsch accepted an offer from Paramount to become the studio's head of production. Putting a director in charge of other directors invites conflict, and Lubitsch was soon skirmishing with Josef von Sternberg, Paramount's other paragon of Continental style. The experiment lasted only a year, and Lubitsch emerged with his reputation diminished and his creative path uncertain.

After two much debated outings—"Angel," an absorbing but imperfect vehicle for Marlene Dietrich, and "Bluebeard's Eighth Wife," a fitfully funny pairing of Colbert with Gary Cooper—Lubitsch returned to peak form in "Ninotchka," released in 1939 by M-G-M. This was the director's second collaboration with Brackett and Wilder, who had first joined forces to work on "Bluebeard." As McBride points out, the duo imported the raucousness of screwball comedy, which in "Bluebeard" clashed with Lubitsch's airier sensibility. Wilder, who had arrived in Hollywood in 1934, may have adulated Lubitsch, but he had different cultural roots, his voice having formed in Jazz Age Berlin. Lubitsch was whimsical; Wilder was savage. In "Ninotchka," the two met on fertile middle ground.

The Turner/M-G-M script collection at the Margaret Herrick Library, the home of the Academy archives, contains hundreds of pages of drafts for "Ninotchka," which had undergone many iterations before Lubitsch got involved. The idea for a story about a cold Bolshevik fanatic finding love in Paris originated with the playwright Melchior Lengyel, who had also helped to conceive "Forbidden Paradise." Several other writers, including S. N. Behrman, fleshed out the screenplay. By late 1938, the pivotal scene was in place—one in which Ninotchka's worldly lover, Leon, gets her to guffaw in a restaurant, enabling the promotional tagline "GARBO LAUGHS"—but acres of clunky dialogue surrounded it.

When Lubitsch took over the project, in early 1939, he first brought in Reisch, a wizard of plot construction, and then the verbally dexterous Brackett and Wilder. Reading the team's drafts, you can almost hear the kibbitzing in the room as ideas were bandied about, rejected, altered, and perfected. Here are successive versions of a line that Ninotchka utters to her Russian comrades after arriving in Paris:

> The last trial was a big success. People are confessing more and more.

> The last mass trials were a great success. We are going to be fewer but better Russians!

> The last mass trials were a great success. There are going to be fewer but better Russians.

According to Brackett, this line originated with Lubitsch, who had visited the Soviet Union in 1936, coming away with a grim view of the Stalinist state.

Yet "Ninotchka" is by no means an anti-socialist tract. The title character may succumb to the silly hat, but Leon (Melvyn Douglas) experiences his own evolution, and Ninotchka fires some sharp quips in his direction: "I have heard of the arrogant male in capitalistic society. It is having a superior earning power that makes you that way." The two end up in Constantinople, in what feels like a geographical and ideological compromise. A lovably rascally trio of Bolshevik functionaries, played by the émigré actors Alexander Granach, Sig Ruman, and Felix Bressart, exemplify the make-the-best-of-it types who populate any system.

Bressart, a lanky, twinkling, birdlike man who had been a star of German comedies before fleeing the Nazi regime, is a mainstay of Lubitsch's later films. In "The Shop Around the Corner," he portrays a meek clerk who assiduously avoids any confrontation with the shop's overbearing owner, played by Frank Morgan. Three times Morgan asks those around him for an "honest opinion," and three times Bressart acrobatically vanishes. In a very Lubitschean way, this gag undergoes a diminuendo as it is repeated, until, by the end, we catch only a glimpse of Bressart's legs at the top of a spiral staircase, taking a few steps down and then scam-

"No, it's not exactly 'on' the water, but it's near the water and it has a lot of character."

pering back up. A similar trick is performed in "Ninotchka," as the Bolshevik buffoons furtively check out the grand lobby of the Hotel Clarence one by one. Granach, the last in the series, merely takes a turn in the revolving door, staring wide-eyed through the glass.

The most memorable of Bressart's performances is in "To Be or Not to Be," Lubitsch's anti-Nazi comedy of 1942. The deliciously convoluted script, which Edwin Justus Mayer wrote in league with the director, imagines a troupe of Polish actors who pass themselves off as Nazis in a scheme to protect the resistance. Jack Benny, as the self-infatuated thespian Joseph Tura, first pretends to be a Gestapo colonel, in order to obtain information from the treacherous Professor Siletsky; then he pretends to be Siletsky, in a meeting with the actual colonel (a magisterially simpering Ruman). All the while, Tura fumes over an affair between his free-spirited wife (Carole Lombard) and a hunky airman (Robert Stack). At the climax, a fake Hitler stages a distraction at a theatre where the actual Hitler is in attendance. Lubitsch's message is clear enough: the Nazis are themselves a gang of ham actors who bamboozled the world.

Bressart plays Greenberg, an actor who dreams of a starring role as Shylock but is relegated to the part of a spear-carrier in "Hamlet." This makes him an obvious stand-in for Lubitsch, an erstwhile Second Gravedigger for Max Reinhardt. At three points in the film—Lubitsch's law of three in operation again—Greenberg recites phrases from Shylock's "Hath not a Jew eyes?" speech. First, it serves as an expression of artistic longing; then it communicates mourning amid the ruin of war. Finally, during the resistance action at the theatre, the monologue becomes an act of heroic defiance, as Greenberg speaks the lines to Hitler's face. That he is addressing the fake Hitler and not the real one hardly matters in the movie's topsy-turvy world.

Although Greenberg is never explicitly identified as Jewish, we surmise that he is, not only because of his identification with Shylock but also on account of a groan-worthy exchange with another actor. (Greenberg: "Mr. Rawitch, what you are, I wouldn't eat." Rawitch: "How dare you call me a ham!") The Hollywood studios, in deference to the German market, had long discouraged representations of Nazi anti-Semitism, and even as late as 1942 such references were rare. Lubitsch knew how to circumvent the Code, however, and in "To Be or Not to Be" he got in a joke at Breen's expense. On the eve of the German invasion of Poland, the actors are told that they cannot stage an anti-Nazi play they've been rehearsing, because it "might offend Hitler." Benny replies, with brittle sarcasm, "Well, wouldn't that be too bad!"

Wartime America wasn't quite ready for this brand of labyrinthine satire. Critics of the day took particular exception to Colonel Ehrhardt's comment about Tura's acting: "What he did to Shakespeare, we are doing now to Poland." Bosley Crowther, in the *Times*, called the movie "callous and macabre." Lubitsch, in a response published in the newspaper, argued that the best way to combat Nazis onscreen was to ridicule them, thereby puncturing their negative mystique. He also sought to transcend the conventional division between "drama with comedy relief" and "comedy with dramatic relief"; his aim was not to "relieve anybody from anything at any time."

Wilder made that formula his own in his great string of black comedies and screwball tragedies. Whether Lubitsch himself could have capitalized on the advance of "To Be or Not to Be" is unknowable. He completed two more high-end entertainments—"Heaven Can Wait" and "Cluny Brown"—but health issues curtailed his energies and ambitions. As his heart disease advanced, he was often housebound. According to his biographer, Scott Eyman, friends found him gentler and more reflective in mood. Increasingly, the chief joy of his life was Nicola, his only child.

Nicola Lubitsch did some acting in her youth, and later worked as a radio producer and announcer in Los Angeles. She lives in Brentwood, in a house stocked with mementos of her father. An honorary Oscar that Lubitsch received the year of his death stands on the piano on which he improvised operetta-style melodies. Nicola was nine when her father died, and she can't shed much light on what he thought about weighty matters. Yet she remembers him vividly and fondly.

"All the beautiful things in his films—the luxurious textures, the objects—Daddy didn't really care about any of that at home," Nicola told me. "He was a man of fixed habits. He had prunes every morning for breakfast, listening to Fred Waring or 'The Breakfast Club' on his portable radio. If the car broke down, he'd tell Otto, our chauffeur, to go buy another big black car. He lived in his own world: he was consumed by his work, and by music, and by me. And, of course, he loved having interesting people around."

Nicola brought out a guestbook that documented gatherings at the Lubitsch home, on Bel Air Road. The roster of names includes Alfred Hitchcock, Fritz Lang, Gary Cooper, Claudette Colbert, Charles Laughton, Jack Benny, Franz Waxman, Salka Viertel, Bruno Walter, Alma Mahler-Werfel, and Billy Wilder, who gives his middle name as "Valentino." Nicola told me, "All these great musicians would be at the house, and Daddy would always be at the piano, even though he couldn't actually read music. Vladimir Horowitz and Arthur Rubinstein would be sitting there listening to Daddy's Viennese café music. But they all loved him."

The headline in *Daily Variety* on December 1, 1947, might have made the Master laugh: "LUBITSCH DROPS DEAD." The interment was at Forest Lawn, in Glendale. Nicola and her mother were shown several grandiose burial sites, including one in a walled-in garden with piped-in Muzak. Nicola said, "Daddy couldn't possibly live in a place with such awful music." Instead, Lubitsch took up residence out on the rolling lawn, under a simple, flat headstone.

After the burial, Wilder walked glumly next to his colleague William Wyler. "Well, no more Lubitsch," Wilder said. "Worse than that," Wyler replied. "No more Lubitsch films." ♦

LETTER FROM WASHINGTON

TRUMP'S LAST GENERAL

How did the Pentagon handle the national-security threat posed by its own Commander-in-Chief?

BY SUSAN B. GLASSER AND PETER BAKER

In the summer of 2017, after just half a year in the White House, Donald Trump flew to Paris for Bastille Day celebrations thrown by Emmanuel Macron, the new French President. Macron staged a spectacular martial display to commemorate the hundredth anniversary of the American entrance into the First World War. Vintage tanks rolled down the Champs-Élysées as fighter jets roared overhead. The event seemed to be calculated to appeal to Trump—his sense of showmanship and grandiosity—and he was visibly delighted. The French general in charge of the parade turned to one of his American counterparts and said, "You are going to be doing this next year."

Sure enough, Trump returned to Washington determined to have his generals throw him the biggest, grandest military parade ever for the Fourth of July. The generals, to his bewilderment, reacted with disgust. "I'd rather swallow acid," his Defense Secretary, James Mattis, said. Struggling to dissuade Trump, officials pointed out that the parade would cost millions of dollars and tear up the streets of the capital.

But the gulf between Trump and the generals was not really about money or practicalities, just as their endless policy battles were not only about clashing views on whether to withdraw from Afghanistan or how to combat the nuclear threat posed by North Korea and Iran. The divide was also a matter of values, of how they viewed the United States itself. That was never clearer than when Trump told his new chief of staff, John Kelly—like Mattis, a retired Marine Corps general—about his vision for Independence Day. "Look, I don't want any wounded guys in the parade," Trump said. "This doesn't look good for me." He explained with distaste that at the Bastille Day parade there had been several formations of injured veterans, including wheelchair-bound soldiers who had lost limbs in battle.

Kelly could not believe what he was hearing. "Those are the heroes," he told Trump. "In our society, there's only one group of people who are more heroic

As the President's behavior grew increasingly erratic, General Mark Milley told his staff, "I will fight from the inside."

than they are—and they are buried over in Arlington." Kelly did not mention that his own son Robert, a lieutenant killed in action in Afghanistan, was among the dead interred there.

"I don't want them," Trump repeated. "It doesn't look good for me."

The subject came up again during an Oval Office briefing that included Trump, Kelly, and Paul Selva, an Air Force general and the vice-chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Kelly joked in his deadpan way about the parade. "Well, you know, General Selva is going to be in charge of organizing the Fourth of July parade," he told the President. Trump did not understand that Kelly was being sarcastic. "So, what do you think of the parade?" Trump asked Selva. Instead of telling Trump what he wanted to hear, Selva was forthright.

"I didn't grow up in the United States, I actually grew up in Portugal," Selva said. "Portugal was a dictatorship—and parades were about showing the people who had the guns. And in this country, we don't do that." He added, "It's not who we are."

Even after this impassioned speech, Trump still did not get it. "So, you don't like the idea?" he said, incredulous.

"No," Selva said. "It's what dictators do."

The four years of the Trump Presidency were characterized by a fantastical degree of instability: fits of rage, late-night Twitter storms, abrupt dismissals. At first, Trump, who had dodged the draft by claiming to have bone spurs, seemed enamored with being Commander-in-Chief and with the national-security officials he'd either appointed or inherited. But Trump's love affair with "my generals" was brief, and in a statement for this article the former President confirmed how much he had soured on them over time. "These were very untalented people and once I realized it, I did not rely on them, I relied on the real generals and admirals within the system," he said.

It turned out that the generals had rules, standards, and expertise, not blind loyalty. The President's loud complaint to John Kelly one day was typical: "You fucking generals, why can't you be like the German generals?"

"Which generals?" Kelly asked.

"The German generals in World War II," Trump responded.

"You do know that they tried to kill Hitler three times and almost pulled it off?" Kelly said.

But, of course, Trump did not know that. "No, no, no, they were totally loyal to him," the President replied. In his version of history, the generals of the Third Reich had been completely subservient to Hitler; this was the model he wanted for his military. Kelly told Trump that there were no such American generals, but the President was determined to test the proposition.

By late 2018, Trump wanted his own handpicked chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. He had tired of Joseph Dunford, a Marine general who had been appointed chairman by Barack Obama, and who worked closely with Mattis as they resisted some of Trump's more outlandish ideas. Never mind that Dunford still had most of a year to go in his term. For months, David Urban, a lobbyist who ran the winning 2016 Trump campaign in Pennsylvania, had been urging the President and his inner circle to replace

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY KLAWE RZECZY

"Michael, your father and I are worried that you're awfully young to be singing the blues."

Dunford with a more like-minded chairman, someone less aligned with Mattis, who had commanded both Dunford and Kelly in the Marines.

Mattis's candidate to succeed Dunford was David Goldfein, an Air Force general and a former F-16 fighter pilot who had been shot down in the Balkans and successfully evaded capture. No one could remember a President selecting a chairman over the objections of his Defense Secretary, but word came back to the Pentagon that there was no way Trump would accept just one recommendation. Two obvious contenders from the Army, however, declined to be considered: General Curtis Scaparrotti, the NATO Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, told fellow-officers that there was "no gas left in my tank" to deal with being Trump's chairman. General Joseph Votel, the Central Command chief, also begged off, telling a colleague he was not a good fit to work so closely with Mattis.

Urban, who had attended West Point with Trump's Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo, and remained an Army man at heart, backed Mark Milley, the chief of staff of the Army. Milley, who was then sixty, was the son of a Navy corpsman who had served with the 4th Marine Division, in Iwo Jima. He grew up outside Boston and played hockey at Princeton. As an Army officer, Milley commanded troops in Afghanistan and Iraq, led the 10th Mountain Division, and oversaw the Army Forces Command. A student of history who often carried a pile of the latest books on the Second World War with him, Milley was decidedly not a member of the close-knit Marine fraternity that had dominated national-security policy for Trump's first two years. Urban told the President that he would connect better with Milley, who was loquacious and blunt to the point of being rude, and who had the Ivy League pedigree that always impressed Trump.

Milley had already demonstrated those qualities in meetings with Trump as the Army chief of staff. "Milley would go right at why it's important for the President to know this about the Army and why the Army is the service that wins all the nation's wars. He had all those sort of elevator-speech punch lines," a senior defense official recalled. "He would have that big bellowing voice and be right in his face with all the one-liners, and then he would take a breath and he would say, 'Mr. President, our Army is here to serve you. Because you're the Commander-in-Chief.' It was a very different approach, and Trump liked that." And, like Trump, Milley was not a subscriber to the legend of Mad Dog Mattis, whom he considered a "complete control freak."

Mattis, for his part, seemed to believe that Milley was inappropriately campaigning for the job, and Milley recalled to others that Mattis confronted him at a reception that fall, saying, "Hey, you shouldn't run for office. You shouldn't run to be the chairman." Milley later told people that he had replied sharply to Mattis, "I'm not lobbying for any fucking thing. I don't do that." Milley eventually raised the issue with Dunford. "Hey, Mattis has got this in his head," Milley told him. "I'm telling you it ain't me." Milley even claimed that he had begged Urban to cease promoting his candidacy.

In November, 2018, the day before Milley was scheduled for an interview with Trump, he and Mattis had another barbed encounter at the Pentagon. In Milley's recounting of the episode later to others, Mattis urged him to tell Trump that he wanted to be the next Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, rather than the chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Milley said he would not do that but would instead wait to hear what the President wanted him to do. This would end whatever relationship the two generals had.

When Milley arrived at the White House the next day, he was received by Kelly, who seemed to him unusually distraught. Before they headed into the Oval Office to meet with Trump, Milley asked Kelly what he thought.

"You should go to Europe and just get the fuck out of D.C.," Kelly said. The White House was a cesspool: "Just get as far away as you can."

In the Oval Office, Trump said right from the start that he was considering Milley for chairman of the Joint Chiefs. When Trump offered him the job, Milley replied, "Mr. President, I'll do whatever you ask me to do."

For the next hour, they talked about the state of the world. Immediately, there

PREVIOUS SPREAD: SOURCE PHOTOGRAPHS FROM GETTY; NATIONAL ARCHIVES / NEWSMAKERS

were points of profound disagreement. On Afghanistan, Milley said he believed that a complete withdrawal of American troops, as Trump wanted, would cause a serious new set of problems. And Milley had already spoken out publicly against the banning of transgender troops, which Trump was insisting on.

"Mattis tells me you are weak on transgender," Trump said.

"No, I am not weak on transgender," Milley replied. "I just don't care who sleeps with who."

There were other differences as well, but in the end Milley assured him, "Mr. President, you're going to be making the decisions. All I can guarantee from me is I'm going to give you an honest answer, and I'm not going to talk about it on the front page of the Washington *Post*. I'll give you an honest answer on everything I can. And you're going to make the decisions, and as long as they're legal I'll support it."

As long as they're legal. It was not clear how much that caveat even registered with Trump. The decision to name Milley was a rare chance, as Trump saw it, to get back at Mattis. Trump would confirm this years later, after falling out with both men, saying that he had picked Milley only because Mattis "could not stand him, had no respect for him, and would not recommend him."

Late on the evening of December 7th, Trump announced that he would reveal a big personnel decision having to do with the Joint Chiefs the next day, in Philadelphia, at the hundred-and-nineteenth annual Army-Navy football game. This was all the notice Dunford had that he was about to be publicly humiliated. The next morning, Dunford was standing with Milley at the game waiting for the President to arrive when Urban, the lobbyist, showed up. Urban hugged Milley. "We did it!" Urban said. "We did it!"

But Milley's appointment was not even the day's biggest news. As Trump walked to his helicopter to fly to the game, he dropped another surprise. "John Kelly will be leaving toward the end of the year," he told reporters. Kelly had lasted seventeen months in what he called "the worst fucking job in the world."

For Trump, the decision was a turning point. Instead of installing another strong-willed White House chief of staff who might have told him no, the President gravitated toward one who would basically go along with whatever he wanted. A week later, Kelly made an unsuccessful last-ditch effort to persuade Trump not to replace him with Mick Mulvaney, a former congressman from South Carolina who was serving as Trump's budget director. "You don't want to hire someone who's going to be a yes-man," Kelly told the President. "I don't give a shit anymore," Trump replied. "I want a yes-man!"

A little more than a week after that, Mattis was out, too, having quit in protest over Trump's order that the U.S. abruptly withdraw its forces from Syria right after Mattis had met with American allies fighting alongside the U.S. It was the first time in nearly four decades that a major Cabinet secretary had resigned over a national-security dispute with the President.

The so-called "axis of adults" was over. None of them had done nearly as much to restrain Trump as the President's critics thought they should have. But all of them—Kelly, Mattis, Dunford, plus H. R. McMaster, the national-security adviser, and Rex Tillerson, Trump's first Secretary of State—had served as guardrails in one way or another. Trump hoped to replace them with more malleable figures. As Mattis would put it, Trump was so out of his depth that he had decided to drain the pool.

On January 2, 2019, Kelly sent a farewell e-mail to the White House staff. He said that these were the people he would miss: "The selfless ones, who

work for the American people so hard and never lowered themselves to wrestle in the mud with the pigs. The ones who stayed above the drama, put personal ambition and politics aside, and simply worked for our great country. The ones who were ethical, moral and always told their boss what he or she NEEDED to hear, as opposed to what they might have wanted to hear."

That same morning, Mulvaney showed up at the White House for his first official day as acting chief of staff. He called an all-hands meeting and made an announcement: O.K., we're going to do things differently. John Kelly's gone, and we're going to let the President be the President.

In the fall of 2019, nearly a year after Trump named him the next chairman of the Joint Chiefs, Milley finally took over the position from Dunford. Two weeks into the job, Milley sat at Trump's side in a meeting at the White House with congressional leaders to discuss a brewing crisis in the Middle East. Trump had again ordered the withdrawal of U.S. forces from Syria, imperilling America's Kurdish allies and effectively handing control of the territory over to the Syrian government and Russian military forces. The House—amid impeachment proceedings against the President for holding up nearly four hundred million dollars in security assistance to Ukraine as leverage to demand an investigation of his Democratic opponent—passed a nonbinding resolution rebuking Trump for the pullout. Even two-thirds of the House Republicans voted for it.

At the meeting, the Speaker of the House, Nancy Pelosi, pointed out the vote against the President. "Congratulations," Trump snapped sarcastically. He grew even angrier when the Senate Democratic leader, Chuck Schumer, read out a warning from Mattis that leaving Syria could result in the resurgence of the Islamic State. In response, Trump derided his former Defense Secretary as "the world's most overrated general. You know why I fired him? I fired him because he wasn't tough enough."

Eventually, Pelosi, in her frustration, stood and pointed at the President. "All roads with you lead to Putin," she said. "You gave Russia Ukraine and Syria."

"You're just a politician, a third-rate politician!" Trump shot back.

Finally, Steny Hoyer, the House Majority Leader and Pelosi's No. 2, had had enough. "This is not useful," he said, and stood up to leave with the Speaker.

"We'll see you at the polls," Trump shouted as they walked out.

When she exited the White House, Pelosi told reporters that she left because Trump was having a "meltdown." A few

hours later, Trump tweeted a White House photograph of Pelosi standing over him, apparently thinking it would prove that she was the one having a meltdown. Instead, the image went viral as an example of Pelosi confronting Trump.

Milley could also be seen in the photograph, his hands clenched together, his head bowed low, looking as though he wanted to sink into the floor. To Pelosi, this was a sign of inexplicable weakness, and she would later say that she never understood why Milley had not been willing to stand up to Trump at that meeting. After all, she would point out, he was the nonpartisan leader of the military, not one of Trump's toadies. "Milley, you would have thought, would have had more independence," she told us, "but he just had his head down."

In fact, Milley was already quite wary of Trump. That night, he called Representative Adam Smith, a Washington Democrat and the chairman of the House Armed Services Committee, who had also been present. "Is that the way these things normally go?" Milley asked. As Smith later put it, "That was the moment when Milley realized that the boss might have a screw or two loose." There had been no honeymoon. "From pretty much his first day on the job as chairman of the Joint Chiefs," Smith said, "he was very much aware of the fact that there was a challenge here that was not your normal challenge with a Commander-in-Chief."

Early on the evening of June 1, 2020, Milley failed what he came to realize was the biggest test of his career: a short walk from the White House across Lafayette Square, minutes after it had been violently cleared of Black Lives Matter protesters. Dressed in combat fatigues, Milley marched behind Trump with a phalanx of the President's advisers in a photo op, the most infamous of the Trump Presidency, that was meant to project a forceful response to the protests that had raged outside the White House and across the country since the killing, the week before, of George Floyd. Most of the demonstrations had been peaceful, but there were also eruptions of looting, street violence, and arson, including a small fire in St. John's Church, across from the White House.

In the morning before the Lafayette Square photo op, Trump had clashed with Milley, Attorney General William Barr, and the Defense Secretary, Mark Esper, over his demands for a militarized show of force. "We look weak," Trump told them. The President wanted to invoke the Insurrection Act of 1807 and use active-duty military to quell the protests. He wanted ten thousand troops in the streets and the 82nd Airborne called up. He demanded that Milley take personal charge. When Milley and the others resisted and said that the National Guard would be sufficient, Trump shouted, "You are all losers! You are all fucking losers!" Turning to Milley, Trump said, "Can't you just shoot them? Just shoot them in the legs or something?"

Eventually, Trump was persuaded not to send in the military against American citizens. Barr, as the civilian head of law enforcement, was given the lead role in the protest response, and the National Guard was deployed to assist police. Hours later, Milley, Esper, and other officials were abruptly summoned back to the White House and sent marching across Lafayette Square. As they walked, with the scent of tear gas still in the air, Milley realized that he should not be there and made his exit, quietly peeling off to his waiting black Chevy Suburban. But the damage was done. No one would care or even remember that he was not present when Trump held up a Bible in front of the damaged church; people had already seen him striding with the President on live television in his battle dress, an image that seemed to signal that the United States under Trump was, finally, a nation at war with itself. Milley knew this was a misjudgment that would haunt him forever, a "road-to-Damascus moment," as he would later put it. What would he do about it?

In the days after the Lafayette Square incident, Milley sat in his office at the Pentagon, writing and rewriting drafts of a letter of resignation. There were short versions of the letter; there were long versions. His preferred version was the one that read in its entirety:

> I regret to inform you that I intend to resign as your Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Thank you for the honor of appointing me as senior ranking officer. The events of the last couple weeks have caused me to do deep soul-searching, and I can no longer faithfully support and execute your orders as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. It is my belief that you were doing great and irreparable harm to my country. I believe that you have made a concerted effort over time to politicize the United States military. I thought that I could change that. I've come to the realization that I cannot, and I need to step aside and let someone else try to do that.
>
> Second, you are using the military to create fear in the minds of the people—and we are trying to protect the American people. I cannot stand idly by and participate in that attack, verbally or otherwise, on the American people. The American people trust their military and they trust us to protect them against all enemies, foreign and domestic, and our military will do just that. We will not turn our back on the American people.
>
> Third, I swore an oath to the Constitution of the United States and embodied within that Constitution is the idea that says that all men and women are created equal. All men and women are created equal, no matter who you are, whether you are white or Black, Asian, Indian, no matter the color of your skin, no matter if you're gay, straight or something in between. It doesn't matter if you're Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Jew, or choose not to believe. None of that matters. It doesn't matter what country you came from, what your last name is—what matters is we're Americans. We're all Americans. That under these colors of red, white, and blue—the colors that my parents fought for in World War II—means something around the world. It's obvious to me that you don't think of those colors the same way I do. It's obvious to me that you don't hold those values dear and the cause that I serve.
>
> And lastly it is my deeply held belief that you're ruining the international order, and causing significant damage to our country overseas, that was fought for so hard by the Greatest Generation that they instituted in 1945. Between 1914 and 1945, 150 million people were slaughtered in the conduct of war. They were slaughtered because of tyrannies and dictatorships. That generation, like every generation, has fought against that, has fought against fascism, has fought against Nazism, has fought against extremism. It's now obvious to me that you don't understand that world order. You don't understand what the war was all about. In fact, you subscribe to many of the principles that we fought against. And I cannot be a party to that. It is with deep regret that I hereby submit my letter of resignation.

The letter was dated June 8th, a full week after Lafayette Square, but Milley still was not sure if he should give

it to Trump. He was sending up flares, seeking advice from a wide circle. He reached out to Dunford, and to mentors such as the retired Army general James Dubik, an expert on military ethics. He called political contacts as well, including members of Congress and former officials from the Bush and Obama Administrations. Most told him what Robert Gates, a former Secretary of Defense and C.I.A. chief, did: "Make them fire you. Don't resign."

"My sense is Mark had a pretty accurate measure of the man pretty quickly," Gates recalled later. "He would tell me over time, well before June 1st, some of the absolutely crazy notions that were put forward in the Oval Office, crazy ideas from the President, things about using or not using military force, the immediate withdrawal from Afghanistan, pulling out of South Korea. It just went on and on."

Milley was not the only senior official to seek Gates's counsel. Several members of Trump's national-security team had made the pilgrimage out to his home in Washington State during the previous two years. Gates would pour them a drink, grill them some salmon, and help them wrestle with the latest Trump conundrum. "The problem with resignation is you can only fire that gun once," he told them. All the conversations were variations on a theme: " 'How do I walk us back from the ledge?' 'How do I keep this from happening, because it would be a terrible thing for the country?' "

After Lafayette Square, Gates told both Milley and Esper that, given Trump's increasingly erratic and dangerous behavior, they needed to stay in the Pentagon as long as they could. "If you resign, it's a one-day story," Gates told them. "If you're fired, it makes it clear you were standing up for the right thing." Gates advised Milley that he had another important card and urged him to play it: "Keep the chiefs on board with you and make it clear to the White House that if you go they all go, so that the White House knows this isn't just about firing Mark Milley. This is about the entire Joint Chiefs of Staff quitting in response."

Publicly, Lafayette Square looked like a debacle for Milley. Several retired generals had condemned his participation, pointing out that the leader of a racially diverse military, with more than two hundred thousand active-duty Black troops, could not be seen opposing a movement for racial justice. Even Mattis, who had refrained from openly criticizing Trump, issued a statement about the "bizarre photo op." The Washington *Post* reported that Mattis had been motivated to do so by his anger at the image of Milley parading through the square in his fatigues.

Whatever their personal differences, Mattis and Milley both knew that there was a tragic inevitability to the moment. Throughout his Presidency, Trump had sought to redefine the role of the military in American public life. In his 2016 campaign, he had spoken out in support of the use of torture and other practices that the military considered war crimes. Just before the 2018 midterms, he ordered thousands of troops to the southern border to combat a fake "invasion" by a caravan of migrants. In 2019, in a move that undermined military justice and the chain of command, he gave clemency to a Navy SEAL found guilty of posing with the dead body of a captive in Iraq.

Many considered Trump's 2018 decision to use the military in his preëlection border stunt to be "the predicate—or the harbinger—of 2020," in the words of Peter Feaver, a Duke University expert on civil-military relations, who taught the subject to generals at command school. When Milley, who had been among Feaver's students, called for advice after Lafayette Square, Feaver agreed that Milley should apologize but encouraged him not to resign. "It would have been a mistake," Feaver said. "We have no tradition of resignation in protest amongst the military."

Milley decided to apologize in a commencement address at the National Defense University that he was scheduled to deliver the week after the photo op. Feaver's counsel was to own up to the error and make it clear that the mistake was his and not Trump's. Presidents, after all, "are allowed to do political stunts," Feaver said. "That's part of being President."

Milley's apology was unequivocal. "I should not have been there," he said in the address. He did not mention Trump. "My presence in that moment, and in that environment, created a perception of the military involved in domestic politics." It was, he added, "a mistake that I have learned from."

At the same time, Milley had finally

come to a decision. He would not quit. "Fuck that shit," he told his staff. "I'll just fight him." The challenge, as he saw it, was to stop Trump from doing any more damage, while also acting in a way that was consistent with his obligation to carry out the orders of his Commander-in-Chief. Yet the Constitution offered no practical guide for a general faced with a rogue President. Never before since the position had been created, in 1949—or at least since Richard Nixon's final days, in 1974—had a chairman of the Joint Chiefs encountered such a situation. "If they want to court-martial me, or put me in prison, have at it," Milley told his staff. "But I will fight from the inside."

Milley's apology tour was private as well as public. With the upcoming election fuelling Trump's sense of frenetic urgency, the chairman sought to get the message to Democrats that he would not go along with any further efforts by the President to deploy the machinery of war for domestic political ends. He called both Pelosi and Schumer. "After the Lafayette Square episode, Milley was extremely contrite and communicated to any number of people that he had no intention of playing Trump's game any longer," Bob Bauer, the former Obama White House counsel, who was then advising Joe Biden's campaign and heard about the calls, said. "He was really burned by that experience. He was appalled. He apologized for it, and it was pretty clear he was digging his heels in."

On Capitol Hill, however, some Democrats, including Pelosi, remained skeptical. To them, Lafayette Square proved that Milley had been a Trumpist all along. "There was a huge misunderstanding about Milley," Adam Smith, the House Armed Services Committee chairman, recalled. "A lot of my Democratic colleagues after June 1st in particular were concerned about him." Smith tried to assure other Democrats that "there was never a single solitary moment where it was possible that Milley was going to help Trump do anything that shouldn't be done."

And yet Pelosi, among others, also distrusted Milley because of an incident earlier that year in which Trump ordered the killing of the Iranian commander Qassem Suleimani without briefing congressional leaders in advance. Smith said Pelosi believed that the chairman had been "evasive" and disrespectful to Congress. Milley, for his part, felt he could not disregard Trump's insistence that lawmakers not be notified—a breach that was due to the President's pique over the impeachment proceedings against him. "The navigation of Trumpworld was more difficult for Milley than Nancy gives him credit for," Smith said. He vouched for the chairman but never managed to convince Pelosi.

How long could this standoff between the Pentagon and the President go on? For the next few months, Milley woke up each morning not knowing whether he would be fired before the day was over. His wife told him she was shocked that he had not been cashiered outright when he made his apology.

Esper was also on notice. Two days after Lafayette Square, the Defense Secretary had gone to the Pentagon pressroom and offered his own apology, even revealing his opposition to Trump's demands to invoke the Insurrection Act and use the active-duty military. Such a step, Esper said, should be reserved only for "the most urgent and dire of situations." Trump later exploded at Esper in the Oval Office about the criticism, delivering what Milley would recall as "the worst reaming out" he had ever heard.

The next day, Trump's latest chief of staff, Mark Meadows, called the Defense Secretary at home—three times—to get him to recant his opposition to invoking the Insurrection Act. When he refused, Meadows took "the Tony Soprano approach," as Esper later put it, and began threatening him, before eventually backing off. (A spokesperson for Meadows disputed Esper's account.) Esper resolved to stay in office as long as he could, "to endure all the shit and run the clock out," as he put it. He felt that he had a particular responsibility to hold on. By law, the only person authorized to deploy troops other than the President is the Secretary of Defense. Esper was determined not to hand that power off to satraps such as Robert O'Brien, who had become Trump's fourth and final national-security adviser, or Ric Grenell, a former public-relations man who had been serving as acting director of National Intelligence.

Both Esper and Milley found new purpose in waiting out the President. They resisted him throughout the summer, as Trump repeatedly demanded that active-duty troops quash ongoing protests, threatened to invoke the Insurrection Act, and tried to stop the military from renaming bases honoring Confederate generals. "They both expected, literally on a daily basis, to be fired," Gates recalled. Milley "would call me and essentially say, 'I may not last until tomorrow night.' And he was comfortable with that. He felt like he knew he was going to support the Constitution, and there were no two ways about it."

Milley put away the resignation letter in his desk and drew up a plan, a guide for how to get through the next few months. He settled on four goals: First, make sure Trump did not start an unnecessary war overseas. Second, make sure the military was not used in the streets against the American people for the purpose of keeping Trump in power. Third, maintain the military's integrity. And, fourth, maintain his own integrity. In the months to come, Milley would refer back to the plan more times than he could count.

Even in June, Milley understood that it was not just a matter of holding off Trump until after the Presidential election, on November 3rd. He knew that Election Day might well mark merely the beginning, not the end, of the challenges Trump would pose. The portents were worrisome. Barely one week before Lafayette Square, Trump had posted a tweet that would soon become a refrain. The 2020 Presidential race, he warned for the first time, would end up as "the greatest Rigged Election in history."

By the evening of Monday, November 9th, Milley's fears about a volatile post-election period unlike anything America had seen before seemed to be coming true. News organizations had called the election for Biden, but Trump refused to acknowledge that he had lost by millions of votes. The peaceful transition of power—a cornerstone of liberal democracy—was now in doubt. Sitting at home that night at around nine, the chairman received an urgent phone call from the Secretary of State, Mike Pompeo. With the possible exception of Vice-President Mike Pence, no one had been more slavishly loyal in public, or more privately obsequious, to

BIRTHDAY POEM

She's a clever dog, but she can't understand
that the leash—a fifty footer I staked
out back so she can explore our patch of land—
is tangling, trailing her like a wake
or like a crayon's line looping through
a placemat maze. She ambles a few feet
to sniff a clump of leaves, slaloms between two
poles beneath the deck, then visits the slab of concrete
where I sit at the pandemic picnic table writing.
Then she doubles back to find a place to pee.
The leash has been recording
her every turn, and her territory,
which was the whole wide yard, is diminishing.
Bewildered, suddenly stuck, she's me.

—Craig Morgan Teicher

Trump than Pompeo. But even he could not take it anymore.

"We've got to talk," Pompeo told Milley, who was at home in Quarters Six, the red brick house that has been the official residence of chairmen of the Joint Chiefs since the early nineteen-sixties. "Can I come over?"

Milley invited Pompeo to visit immediately.

"The crazies have taken over," Pompeo told him when they sat down at Milley's kitchen table. Not only was Trump surrounded by the crazies; they were, in fact, ascendant in the White House and, as of that afternoon, inside the Pentagon itself. Just a few hours earlier, on the first workday after the election was called for Biden, Trump had finally fired Esper. Milley and Pompeo were alarmed that the Defense Secretary was being replaced by Christopher Miller, until recently an obscure mid-level counterterrorism official at Trump's National Security Council, who had arrived at the Pentagon flanked by a team of what appeared to be Trump's political minders.

For Milley, this was an ominous development. From the beginning, he understood that "if the idea was to seize power," as he told his staff, "you are not going to do this without the military." Milley had studied the history of coups. They invariably required the takeover of what he referred to as the "power ministries"—the military, the national police, and the interior forces.

As soon as he'd heard about Esper's ouster, Milley had rushed upstairs to the Secretary's office. "This is complete bullshit," he told Esper. Milley said that he would resign in protest. "You can't," Esper insisted. "You're the only one left." Once he cooled off, Milley agreed.

In the coming weeks, Milley would repeatedly convene the Joint Chiefs, to bolster their resolve to resist any dangerous political schemes from the White House now that Esper was out. He quoted Benjamin Franklin to them on the virtues of hanging together rather than hanging separately. He told his staff that, if need be, he and all the chiefs were prepared to "put on their uniforms and go across the river together"—to threaten to quit en masse—to prevent Trump from trying to use the military to stay in power illegally.

Soon after Miller arrived at the Pentagon, Milley met with him. "First things first here," he told the new acting Defense Secretary, who had spent the previous few months running the National Counterterrorism Center. "You are one of two people in the United States now with the capability to launch nuclear weapons."

A Pentagon official who had worked closely with Miller had heard a rumor about him potentially replacing Esper more than a week before the election. "My first instinct was this is the most preposterous thing I've ever heard," the official recalled. But then he remembered how Miller had changed in the Trump White House. "He's inclined to be a bit of a sail, and as the wind blows he will flap in that direction," the official said. "He's not an ideologue. He's just a guy willing to do their bidding." By coincidence, the official happened to be walking into the Pentagon just as Miller was entering—a video of Miller tripping on the stairs soon made the rounds. Accompanying him were three men who would, for a few weeks, at least, have immense influence over the most powerful military in the world: Kash Patel, Miller's new chief of staff; Ezra Cohen, who would ascend to acting Under-Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security; and Anthony Tata, a retired general and a talking head on Fox News, who would become the Pentagon's acting head of policy.

It was an extraordinary trio. Tata's claims to fame were calling Obama a "terrorist leader"—an assertion he later retracted—and alleging that a former C.I.A. director had threatened to assassinate Trump. Patel, a former aide to Devin Nunes, the top Republican on the House Intelligence Committee, had been accused of spreading conspiracy theories claiming that Ukraine, not Russia, had interfered in the 2016 election. Both Trump's third national-security adviser, John Bolton, and Bolton's deputy, Charles Kupperman, had vociferously objected to putting Patel on the National Security Council staff, backing down only when told that it was a personal, "must-hire" order from the President. Still, Patel found his way around them to deal with Trump directly, feeding him packets of information on Ukraine, which was outside his portfolio, according to testimony during Trump's first impeachment. (In a statement for this article, Patel called the allegations a "total fabrication.") Eventually, Patel was sent to help Ric Grenell carry out a White House-ordered purge of the intelligence community.

Cohen, who had worked earlier in his career at the Defense Intelligence Agency under Michael Flynn, had initially been hired at the Trump National Security Council in 2017 but was pushed out after Flynn's swift implosion as Trump's first national-security adviser. When efforts were later made to rehire Cohen in the White House, Bolton's deputy vowed to "put my badge on the

table" and quit. "I am not going to hire somebody that is going to be another cancer in the organization, and Ezra is cancer," Kupperman bluntly told Trump. In the spring of 2020, Cohen landed at the Pentagon, and following Trump's post-election shakeup he assumed the top intelligence post at the Pentagon.

Milley had firsthand reason to be wary of these new Pentagon advisers. Just before the election, he and Pompeo were infuriated when a top-secret Navy SEAL Team 6 rescue mission to free an American hostage held in Nigeria nearly had to be cancelled at the last minute. The Nigerians had not formally approved the mission in advance, as required, despite Patel's assurances. "Planes were already in the air and we didn't have the approvals," a senior State Department official recalled. The rescue team was kept circling while diplomats tried to track down their Nigerian counterparts. They managed to find them only minutes before the planes would have had to turn back. As a result, the official said, both Pompeo and Milley, who believed he had been personally lied to, "assigned ill will to that whole cabal." The C.I.A. refused to have anything to do with Patel, Pompeo recalled to his State Department staff, and they should be cautious as well. "The Secretary thought these people were just wackadoodles, nuts, and dangerous," a second senior State Department official said. (Patel denied their accounts, asserting, "I caused no delay at all.")

After Esper's firing, Milley summoned Patel and Cohen separately to his office to deliver stern lectures. Whatever machinations they were up to, he told each of them, "life looks really shitty from behind bars. And, whether you want to realize it or not, there's going to be a President at exactly 1200 hours on the twentieth and his name is Joe Biden. And, if you guys do anything that's illegal, I don't mind having you in prison." Cohen denied that Milley said this to him, insisting it was a "very friendly, positive conversation." Patel also denied it, asserting, "He worked for me, not the other way around." But Milley told his staff that he warned both Cohen and Patel that they were being watched: "Don't do it, don't even try to do it. I can smell it. I can see it. And so can a lot of other people. And, by the way, the military will have no part of this shit."

Part of the new team's agenda soon became clear: making sure Trump fulfilled his 2016 campaign promise to withdraw American troops from the "endless wars" overseas. Two days after Esper was fired, Patel slid a piece of paper across the desk to Milley during a meeting with him and Miller. It was an order, with Trump's trademark signature in black Sharpie, decreeing that all four thousand five hundred remaining troops in Afghanistan be withdrawn by January 15th, and that a contingent of fewer than a thousand troops on a counterterrorism mission in Somalia be pulled out by December 31st.

Milley was stunned. "Where'd you get this?" he said.

Patel said that it had just come from the White House.

"Did you advise the President to do this?" he asked Patel, who said no.

"Did you advise the President to do this?" he asked Miller, who said no.

"Well, then, who advised the President to do it?" Milley asked. "By law, I'm the President's adviser on military action. How does this happen without me rendering my military opinion and advice?"

With that, he announced that he was putting on his dress uniform and going to the White House, where Milley and the others ended up in the office of the national-security adviser, Robert O'Brien.

"Where did this come from?" Milley demanded, putting the withdrawal order on O'Brien's desk.

"I don't know. I've never seen that before," O'Brien said. "It doesn't look like a White House memo."

Keith Kellogg, a retired general serving as Pence's national-security adviser, asked to see the document. "This is not the President," he said. "The format's not right. This is not done right."

"Keith, you've got to be kidding me," Milley said. "You're telling me that someone's forging the President of the United States' signature?"

The order, it turned out, was not fake. It was the work of a rogue operation inside Trump's White House overseen by Johnny McEntee, Trump's thirty-year-old personnel chief, and supported by the President himself. The order had

"Something tells me you're the kind of guy who always wears his baseball cap backward."

been drafted by Douglas Macgregor, a retired colonel and a Trump favorite from his television appearances, working with a junior McEntee aide. The order was then brought to the President, bypassing the national-security apparatus and Trump's own senior officials, to get him to sign it.

Macgregor often appeared on Fox News demanding an exit from Afghanistan and accused Trump's advisers of blocking the President from doing what he wanted. "He needs to send everyone out of the Oval Office who keeps telling him, 'If you do that and something bad happens, it's going to be blamed on you, Mr. President,'" Macgregor had told Tucker Carlson in January. "He needs to say, 'I don't give a damn.'"

On the day that Esper was fired, McEntee had invited Macgregor to his office, offered him a job as the new acting Defense Secretary's senior adviser, and handed him a handwritten list of four priorities that, as Axios reported, McEntee claimed had come directly from Trump:

1. Get us out of Afghanistan.
2. Get us out of Iraq and Syria.
3. Complete the withdrawal from Germany.
4. Get us out of Africa.

Once the Afghanistan order was discovered, Trump's advisers persuaded the President to back off, reminding him that he had already approved a plan for leaving over the following few months. "Why do we need a new plan?" Pompeo asked. Trump relented, and O'Brien then told the rest of the rattled national-security leadership that the order was "null and void."

The compromise, however, was a new order that codified the drawdown to twenty-five hundred troops in Afghanistan by mid-January, which Milley and Esper had been resisting, and a reduction in the remaining three thousand troops in Iraq as well. The State Department was given one hour to notify leaders of those countries before the order was released.

Two nightmare scenarios kept running through Milley's mind. One was that Trump might spark an external crisis, such as a war with Iran, to divert attention or to create a pretext for a power grab at home. The other was that Trump would manufacture a domestic crisis to justify ordering the military into the streets to prevent the transfer of power. Milley feared that Trump's "Hitler-like" embrace of his own lies about the election would lead him to seek a "Reichstag moment." In 1933, Hitler had seized on a fire in the German parliament to take control of the country. Milley now envisioned a declaration of martial law or a Presidential invocation of the Insurrection Act, with Trumpian Brown Shirts fomenting violence.

By late November, amid Trump's escalating attacks on the election, Milley and Pompeo's coöperation had deepened—a fact that the Secretary of State revealed to Attorney General Bill Barr over dinner on the night of December 1st. Barr had just publicly broken with Trump, telling the Associated Press in an interview that there was no evidence of election fraud sufficient to overturn the results. As they ate at an Italian restaurant in a Virginia strip mall, Barr recounted for Pompeo what he called "an eventful day." And Pompeo told Barr about the extraordinary arrangement he had proposed to Milley to make sure that the country was in steady hands until the Inauguration: they would hold daily morning phone calls with Mark Meadows. Pompeo and Milley soon took to calling them the "land the plane" phone calls.

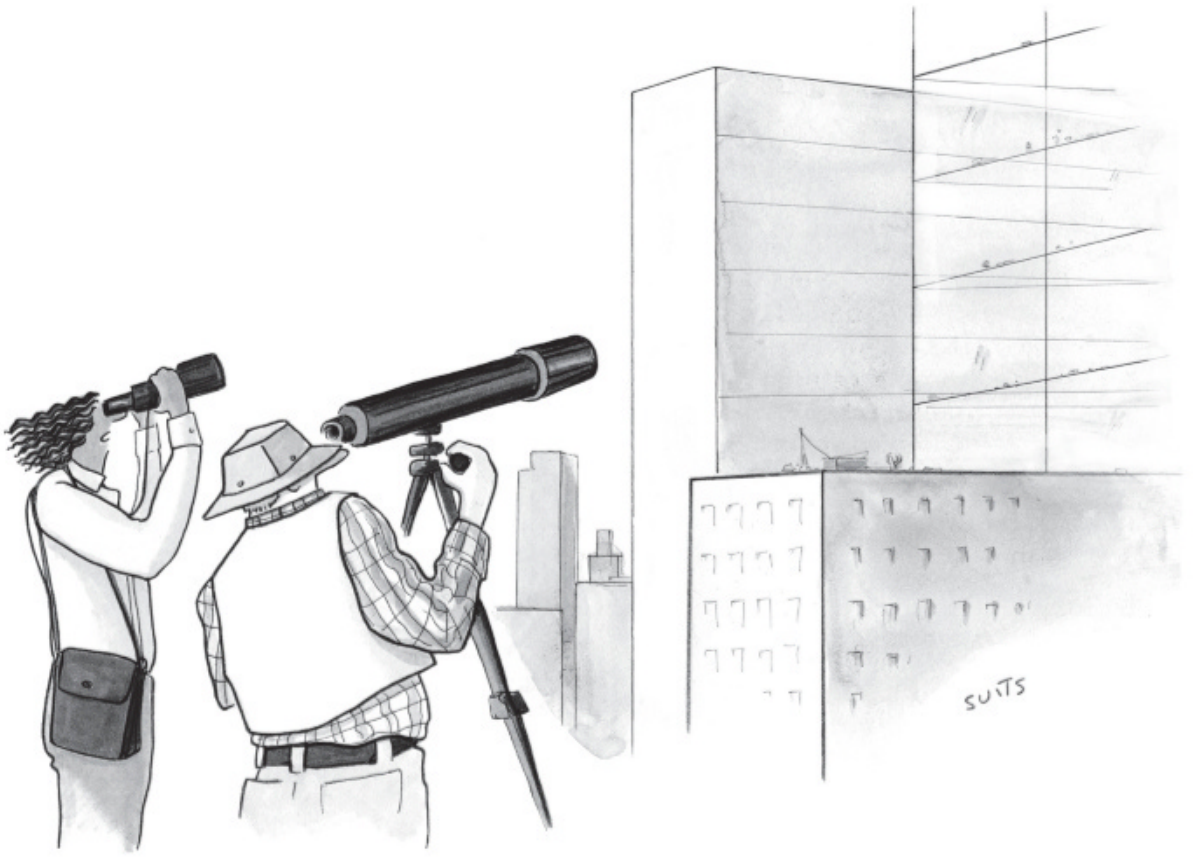
"Our job is to land this plane safely and to do a peaceful transfer of power the twentieth of January," Milley told his staff. "This is our obligation to this nation." There was a problem, however. "Both engines are out, the landing gear are stuck. We're in an emergency situation."

In public, Pompeo remained his staunchly pro-Trump self. The day after his secret visit to Milley's house to commiserate about "the crazies" taking over, in fact, he refused to acknowledge Trump's defeat, snidely telling reporters, "There will be a smooth transition—to a second Trump Administration." Behind the scenes, however, Pompeo accepted that the election was over and made it clear that he would not help overturn the result. "He was totally against it," a senior State Department official recalled. Pompeo cynically justified this jarring contrast between what he said in public and in private. "It was important for him to not get fired at the end, too, to be there to the bitter end," the senior official said.

Both Milley and Pompeo were angered by the bumbling team of ideologues that Trump had sent to the Pentagon after the firing of Esper, a West Point classmate of Pompeo's. The two, who were "already converging as fellow-travellers," as one of the State officials put it, worked even more closely together as their alarm about Trump's post-election conduct grew, although Milley was under no illusions about the Secretary of State. He believed that Pompeo, a longtime enabler of Trump who aspired to run for President himself, wanted "a second political life," but that Trump's final descent into denialism was the line that, at last, he would not cross. "At the end, he wouldn't be a party to that craziness," Milley told his staff. By early December, as they were holding their 8 A.M. land-the-plane calls, Milley was confident that Pompeo was genuinely trying to achieve a peaceful handover of power to Biden. But he was never sure what to make of Meadows. Was the chief of staff trying to land the plane or to hijack it?

Most days, Milley would also call the White House counsel, Pat Cipollone, who was hardly a usual interlocutor for a chairman of the Joint Chiefs. In the final weeks of the Administration, Cipollone, a true believer in Trump's conservative agenda, was a principal actor in the near-daily drama over Trump's various schemes to overturn his election defeat. After getting off one call with Cipollone, Milley told a visitor that the White House counsel was "constructive," "not crazy," and a force for "trying to keep guardrails around the President."

Milley continued to reach out to Democrats close to Biden to assure them that he would not allow the military to be misused to keep Trump in power. One regular contact was Susan Rice, the former Obama national-security



"Yep, a rare gray-suited office worker."

• •

adviser, dubbed by Democrats the Rice Channel. He also spoke several times with Senator Angus King, an Independent from Maine. "My conversations with him were about the danger of some attempt to use the military to declare martial law," King said. He took it upon himself to reassure fellow-senators. "I can't tell you why I know this," but the military will absolutely do the right thing, he would tell them, citing Milley's "character and honesty."

Milley had increasing reason to fear that such a choice might actually be forced upon him. In late November, Trump pardoned Michael Flynn, who had pleaded guilty to charges of lying to the F.B.I. about his contacts with Russia. Soon afterward, Flynn publicly suggested several extreme options for Trump: he could invoke martial law, appoint a special counsel, and authorize the military to "rerun" an election in the swing states. On December 18th, Trump hosted Flynn and a group of other election deniers in the Oval Office, where, for the first time in American history, a President would seriously entertain using the military to overturn an election. They brought with them a draft of a proposed Presidential order requiring the acting Defense Secretary—Christopher Miller—to "seize, collect, retain and analyze" voting machines and provide a final assessment of any findings in sixty days, well after the Inauguration was to take place. Later that night, Trump sent out a tweet beckoning his followers to descend on the capital to help him hold on to office. "Big protest in D.C. on January 6th," he wrote at 1:42 A.M. "Be there, will be wild!"

Milley's fears of a coup no longer seemed far-fetched.

While Trump was being lobbied by "the crazies" to order troops to intervene at home, Milley and his fellow-generals were concerned that he would authorize a strike against Iran. For much of his Presidency, Trump's foreign-policy hawks had agitated for a showdown with Iran; they accelerated their efforts when they realized that Trump might lose the election. In early 2020, when Mike Pence advocated taking tough measures, Milley asked why. "Because they are evil," Pence said. Milley recalled replying, "Mr. Vice-President, there's a lot of evil in the world, but we don't go to war against all of it." Milley grew even more nervous before the election, when he heard a senior official tell Trump that if he lost he should strike Iran's nuclear program. At the time, Milley told his staff that it was a "What the fuck are these guys talking about?" moment. Now it seemed frighteningly possible.

Robert O'Brien, the national-security adviser, had been another frequent cheerleader for tough measures. He said, according to Esper's memoir, "Mr. President, we should hit 'em hard, hit 'em hard with everything we have." Esper called this O'Brien's "tedious signature phrase." (O'Brien disputed this, saying, "The quote attributed to me is not accurate.")

In the week of Esper's firing, Milley was called to the White House to present various military options for attacking Iran and encountered a disturbing performance by Miller, the new acting Defense Secretary. Miller later told Jonathan Karl, of ABC, that he had intentionally acted like a "fucking madman" at the meeting, just three days into his tenure, pushing various escalatory scenarios for responding to Iran's breakout nuclear capacities.

Miller's behavior did not look intentional so much as unhelpful to Milley, as Trump kept asking for alternatives, including an attack inside Iran on its ballistic-weapons sites. Milley explained that this would be an illegal preëmptive act: "If you attack the mainland of Iran, you will be starting a war." During another clash with Trump's more militant advisers, when Trump was not present, Milley was even more explicit. "If we do what you're saying," he said, "we are all going to be tried as war criminals in The Hague."

Trump often seemed more bluster than bite, and the Pentagon brass still believed that he did not want an all-out war, yet he continued pushing for a missile strike on Iran even after that November meeting. If Trump said it once, Milley told his staff, he said it a thousand times. "The thing he was most worried about was Iran," a senior Biden adviser who spoke with Milley recalled. "Milley had had the experience more than once of having to walk the President off the ledge when it came to retaliating."

The biggest fear was that Iran would provoke Trump, and, using an array of diplomatic and military channels, American officials warned the Iranians not to exploit the volatile domestic situation in the U.S. "There was a distinct concern that Iran would take advantage of this to strike at us in some way," Adam Smith, the House

Armed Services chairman, recalled.

Among those pushing the President to hit Iran before Biden's Inauguration, Milley believed, was the Israeli Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu. On December 18th, the same day that Trump met with Flynn to discuss instituting martial law, Milley met with Netanyahu at his home in Jerusalem to personally urge him to back off with Trump. "If you do this, you're gonna have a fucking war," Milley told him.

Two days later, on December 20th, Iranian-backed militias in Iraq fired nearly two dozen rockets at the American Embassy in Baghdad. Trump responded by publicly blaming Iran and threatening major retaliation if so much as a single American was killed. It was the largest attack on the Green Zone in more than a decade, and exactly the sort of provocation Milley had been dreading.

During the holidays, tensions with Iran escalated even more as the first anniversary of the American killing of Suleimani approached. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei warned that "those who ordered the murder of General Soleimani" would "be punished." Late on the afternoon of Sunday, January 3rd, Trump met with Milley, Miller, and his other national-security advisers on Iran. Pompeo and Milley discussed a worrisome new report from the International Atomic Energy Agency. But, by the end, even Pompeo and O'Brien, the Iran hawks, opposed a military strike at this late hour in Trump's Presidency. "He realized the clock ran out," Milley told his staff. Trump, consumed with his election fight, backed off.

At the end of the meeting with his security chiefs, the President pulled Miller aside and asked him if he was ready for the upcoming January 6th protest. "It's going to be a big deal," Milley heard Trump tell Miller. "You've got enough people to make sure it's safe for my people, right?" Miller assured him he did. This was the last time that Milley would ever see Trump.

On January 6th, Milley was in his office at the Pentagon meeting with Christine Wormuth, the lead Biden transition official for the Defense Department. In the weeks since the election, Milley had started displaying four networks at once on a large monitor across from the round table where he and Wormuth sat: CNN and Fox News, as well as the small pro-Trump outlets Newsmax and One America News Network, which had been airing election disinformation that even Fox would not broadcast. "You've got to know what the enemy is up to," Milley had joked when Wormuth noticed his viewing habits at one of their meetings.

Milley and Wormuth that day were supposed to discuss the Pentagon's plans to draw down U.S. troops in Afghanistan, as well as the Biden team's hopes to mobilize large-scale COVID vaccination sites around the country. But, as they realized in horror what was transpiring on the screen in front of them, Milley was summoned to an urgent meeting with Miller and Ryan McCarthy, the Secretary of the Army. They had not landed the plane, after all. The plane was crashing.

Milley entered the Defense Secretary's office at 2:30 P.M., and they discussed deploying the D.C. National Guard and mobilizing National Guard units from nearby states and federal agents under the umbrella of the Justice Department. Miller issued an order at 3:04 P.M. to send in the D.C. Guard.

But it was too late to prevent the humiliation: Congress had been overwhelmed by a mob of election deniers, white-supremacist militia members, conspiracy theorists, and Trump loyalists. Milley worried that this truly was Trump's "Reichstag moment," the crisis that would allow the President to invoke martial law and maintain his grip on power.

From the secure facility at Fort McNair, where they had been brought by their protective details, congressional leaders called on the Pentagon to send forces to the Capitol immediately. Nancy Pelosi and Chuck Schumer were suspicious of Miller: Whose side was this unknown Trump appointee on? Milley tried to reassure the Democratic leadership that the uniformed military was on the case, and not there to do Trump's bidding. The Guard, he told them, was coming.

It was already after three-thirty by then, however, and the congressional leaders were furious that it was taking so long. They also spoke with Mike Pence, who offered to call the Pentagon as well. He reached Miller around 4 P.M., with Milley still in his office listening in. "Clear the Capitol," Pence ordered.

Although it was the Vice-President who was seeking to defend the Capitol, Meadows wanted to pretend that Trump was the one taking action. He called Milley, telling him, "We have to kill the narrative that the Vice-President is making all the decisions. We need to establish the narrative that the President is still in charge." Milley later dismissed Meadows, whose spokesperson denied Milley's account, as playing "politics, politics, politics."

The Guard finally arrived at the Capitol by 5:40 P.M., "sprint speed" for the military, as Milley would put it, but not nearly fast enough for some members of Congress, who would spend months investigating why it took so long. By 7 P.M., a perimeter had been set up outside the Capitol, and F.B.I. and A.T.F. agents were going door to door in the Capitol's many hideaways and narrow corridors, searching for any remaining rioters.

That night, waiting for Congress to return and formally ratify Trump's electoral defeat, Milley called one of his contacts on the Biden team. He explained that he had spoken with Meadows and Pat Cipollone at the White House, and that he had been on the phone with Pence and the congressional leaders as well. But Milley never heard from the Commander-in-Chief, on a day when the Capitol was overrun by a hostile force for the first time since the War of 1812. Trump, he said, was both "shameful" and "complicit."

Later, Milley would often think back to that awful day. "It was a very close-run thing," the historically minded chairman would say, invoking the famous line of the Duke of Wellington after he had only narrowly defeated Napoleon at Waterloo. Trump and his men had failed in their execution of the plot, failed in part by failing to understand that Milley and the others had never been Trump's generals and never would be. But their attack on the election had exposed a system with glaring weaknesses. "They shook the very Republic to the core," Milley would eventually reflect. "Can you imagine what a group of people who are much more capable could have done?" ♦

ANNALS OF INQUIRY

DO BETTER

The gospel of effective altruism.

BY GIDEON LEWIS-KRAUS

The philosopher William MacAskill credits his personal transfiguration to an undergraduate seminar at Cambridge. Before this shift, MacAskill liked to drink too many pints of beer and frolic about in the nude, climbing pitched roofs by night for the life-affirming flush; he was the saxophonist in a campus funk band that played the May Balls, and was known as a hopeless romantic. But at eighteen, when he was first exposed to "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," a 1972 essay by the radical utilitarian Peter Singer, MacAskill felt a slight click as he was shunted onto a track of rigorous and uncompromising moralism. Singer, prompted by widespread and eradicable hunger in what's now Bangladesh, proposed a simple thought experiment: if you stroll by a child drowning in a shallow pond, presumably you don't worry too much about soiling your clothes before you wade in to help; given the irrelevance of the child's location—in an actual pond nearby or in a metaphorical pond six thousand miles away—devoting resources to superfluous goods is tantamount to allowing a child to drown for the sake of a dry cleaner's bill. For about four decades, Singer's essay was assigned predominantly as a philosophical exercise: his moral theory was so onerous that it had to rest on a shaky foundation, and bright students were instructed to identify the flaws that might absolve us of its demands. MacAskill, however, could find nothing wrong with it.

By the time MacAskill was a graduate student in philosophy, at Oxford, Singer's insight had become the organizing principle of his life. When he met friends at the pub, he ordered only a glass of water, which he then refilled with a can of two-per-cent lager he'd bought on the corner; for dinner, he ate bread he'd baked at home. The balance of his earnings was reserved for others. He tried not to be too showy or evangelical, but neither was he diffident about his rationale. It was a period in his life both darkly lonesome and ethically ablaze. As he put it to me recently, "I was very annoying."

In an effort to shape a new social equilibrium in which his commitments might not be immediately written off as mere affectation, he helped to found a moral crusade called "effective altruism." The movement, known as E.A. to its practitioners, who themselves are known as E.A.s, takes as its premise that people ought to do good in the most clear-sighted, ambitious, and unsentimental way possible. Among other back-of-the-envelope estimates, E.A.s believe that a life in the developing world can be saved for about four thousand dollars. Effective altruists have lashed themselves to the mast of a certain kind of logical rigor, refusing to look away when it leads them to counterintuitive, bewildering, or even seemingly repugnant conclusions. For a time, the movement recommended that inspirited young people should, rather than work for charities, get jobs in finance and donate their income. More recently, E.A.s have turned to fretting about existential risks that might curtail humanity's future, full stop.

Effective altruism, which used to be a loose, Internet-enabled affiliation of the like-minded, is now a broadly influential faction, especially in Silicon Valley, and controls philanthropic resources on the order of thirty billion dollars. Though MacAskill is only one of the movement's principal leaders, his conspicuous integrity and easygoing charisma have made him a natural candidate for head boy. The movement's transitions—from obscurity to power; from the needs of the contemporary global poor to those of our distant descendants—have not been altogether smooth. MacAskill, as the movement's de-facto conscience, has felt increasing pressure to provide instruction and succor. At one point, almost all of his friends were E.A.s, but he now tries to draw a line between public and private. He told me, "There was a point where E.A. affairs were no longer social things—people would come up to me and want to talk about their moral priorities, and I'd be, like, 'Man, it's 10 P.M. and we're at a party!'"

On a Saturday afternoon in Oxford, this past March, MacAskill sent me a text message about an hour before we'd planned to meet: "I presume not, given jetlag, but might you want to go for a sunset swim? It'd be very very cold!" I was out for a run beside the Thames, and replied, in an exacting mode I hoped he'd appreciate—MacAskill has a way of making those around him greedy for his approval—that I was about eight-tenths of a mile from his house, and would be at his door in approximately five minutes and thirty seconds. "Oh wow impressive!" he replied. "Let's do it!"

MacAskill limits his personal budget to about twenty-six thousand pounds a year, and gives everything else away. He lives with two roommates in a stolid row house in an area of south Oxford bereft, he warned me, of even a good coffee shop. He greeted me at his door, praising my "bias for action," then led me down a low and dark hallway and through a laundry room arrayed with buckets that catch a perpetual bathroom leak upstairs. MacAskill is tall and sturdily built, with an untidy mop of dark-blond hair that had grown during the pandemic to messianic lengths. In an effort to unwild himself for reëntry, he had recently reduced it to a dimension better suited to polite society.

MacAskill allowed, somewhat sheepishly, that lockdown had been a welcome reprieve from the strictures of his previous life. He and some friends had rented a home in the Buckinghamshire countryside; he'd meditated, acted as the house exercise coach, and taken in the sunset. He had spent his time in a wolf-emblazoned jumper writing a book called "What We Owe the Future,"

"The world's long-run fate depends in part on the choices we make in our lifetimes," the philosopher William MacAskill writes.

PHOTOGRAPH BY ULYSSES ORTEGA

which comes out this month. Now the world was opening up, and he was being called back to serve as the movement's shepherd. He spoke as if the life he was poised to return to were not quite his own—as if he weren't a person with desires but a tabulating machine through which the profusion of dire global need was assessed, ranked, and processed.

He was doing his best to retain a grasp on spontaneity, and we set off on the short walk to the lake. Upon our arrival, MacAskill vaulted over a locked gate that led to a small floating dock, where he placed a Bluetooth speaker that played a down-tempo house remix of the 1974 pop hit "Magic." The water temperature, according to a bath-toy thermometer, was about fifty degrees. He put on a pair of orange sunglasses with tinted lenses, which enhanced the sunset's glow, and stripped off his shirt, revealing a long abdominal scar, the result of a fall through a skylight as a teen-ager. He reassured me, "If all you do is just get in and get out, that's great." I quickly discharged my duty and then flung myself, fingers blue, back onto the dock. MacAskill did a powerful breaststroke out into the middle of the lake, where he floated, freezing, alone and near-invisible in the polarized Creamsicle sunset. Then he slowly swam back to resume his obligations.

MacAskill, who was born in 1987 as William Crouch, grew up in Glasgow and attended a vaunted private school. He excelled at almost everything but was the first to make fun of himself for singing off-key, juggling poorly, and falling out of treehouses. Though his mother grew up in conditions of rural Welsh privation, his family had little political color—as a child, he was given to understand that all newspapers were right-leaning tabloids. From an early age, however, he demonstrated a precocious moral zeal. At fifteen, when he learned how many people were dying of AIDS, he set out to become a successful novelist and give away half of his earnings. He volunteered for a disabled-Scout group and worked at a care home for the elderly, which his parents found baffling. In his milieu, the brightest graduates were expected to study medicine in Edinburgh, but MacAskill, as class dux, or valedictorian, won a place to read philosophy at Cambridge. Robbie Kerr, MacAskill's closest schoolmate, told me, "The Glasgow attitude was best summed up by a school friend's parent, who looked at Will and said, 'Philosophy. What a waste. That boy could have cured cancer.'"

MacAskill found Cambridge intellectually and socially satisfying: he discussed meta-ethics on shirtless walks, and spent vacations at friends' homes in the South of France. But he also remembers feeling adrift, "searching for meaning." "There weren't a lot of opportunities for moral activism," he told me. He spent a summer volunteering at a rehabilitation center in Ethiopia and, after graduation, another as a "chugger," a street canvasser paid to convert pedestrians to charitable causes. "We used to say it only cost twenty pence to save a life from polio, and a lot of other stuff that was just wrong," he said, shaking his head. Nevertheless, he continued, "it was two months of just sitting with extreme poverty, and I felt like other people just didn't get it." In graduate school, "I started giving three per cent, and then five per cent, of my income," he said. This wasn't much—he was then living on a university stipend. "I think it's O.K. to tell you this: I supplemented my income with nude modelling for life-drawing classes." The postures left him free to philosophize. Later, he moved on to bachelorette parties, where he could make twice the money "for way easier poses."

He told me, "I was in the game for being convinced of a cause, and did a bunch of stuff that was more characteristically far-lefty. I went to a climate-justice protest, and a pro-Palestinian protest, and a meeting of the Socialist Workers Party." None passed muster, for reasons of efficacy or intellectual coherence. "I realized the climate protest was *against* cap-and-trade, which I was *for*. The Socialist Workers Party was just eight people with long hair in a basement talking about the glory of the Russian Revolution." He surveyed working philosophers and found that none felt like they'd done anything of real consequence. George Marshall, a friend from Cambridge, told me, "He was at dinner in Oxford—some sort of practical-ethics conference—and he was just deeply shocked that almost none of the attendees were vegetarians, because he thought that was the most basic application of ethical ideas."

When MacAskill was twenty-two, his adviser suggested that he meet an Australian philosopher named Toby Ord. In activist circles, MacAskill had found, "there was this focus on the problems—climate is so bad!—along with intense feelings of angst, and a lack of real views on what one could actually do. But Toby was planning to give money in relatively large amounts to focussed places, and trying to get others to do the same—I felt, 'Oh, this is taking action.'" At the time, Ord was earning fifteen thousand pounds a year and was prepared to give away a quarter of it. "He'd only had two half-pints in his time at Oxford," MacAskill said. "It was really hardcore." Unlike, say, someone who donates to cystic-fibrosis research because a friend suffers from the disease—to take a personal example of my own—Ord thought it was important that he make his allocations impartially. There was no point in giving to anyone in the developed world; the difference you could make elsewhere was at least two orders of magnitude greater. Ord's ideal beneficiary was the Fred Hollows Foundation, which treats blindness in poor countries for as little as twenty-five dollars a person.

MacAskill immediately signed on to give away as much as he could in perpetuity: "I was on board with the idea of binding my future self—I had a lot of youthful energy, and I was worried I'd become more conservative over time." He recalled the pleasure of proving that his new mentor's donations were suboptimal. "My first big win was convincing him about deworming charities." It may seem impossible to compare the eradication of blindness with the elimination of intestinal parasites, but health economists had developed rough methods. MacAskill estimated that the relief of intestinal parasites, when measured in "quality-adjusted life years," or QALYs, would be a hundred times more cost-effective than a sight-saving eye operation. Ord reallocated.

If Peter Singer's theory—that any expenditure beyond basic survival was akin to letting someone die—was simply too taxing to gain wide adherence, it seemed modest to ask people to give ten per cent of their income. This number also had a long-standing religious precedent. During the next six months, MacAskill and Ord enjoined their friends and other moral philosophers to pledge a secular

tithe. MacAskill told me, "I would quote them back to themselves—you know, 'If someone in extreme poverty dies, it's as if you killed them yourself,' and other really severe pronouncements—and say, 'So, would you like to sign?'" Singer said yes, but almost everyone else said no. On November 14, 2009, in a small room in Balliol College, MacAskill and Ord announced Giving What We Can. MacAskill said, "At the launch, we had twenty-three members, and most of them were friends of Toby's and mine."

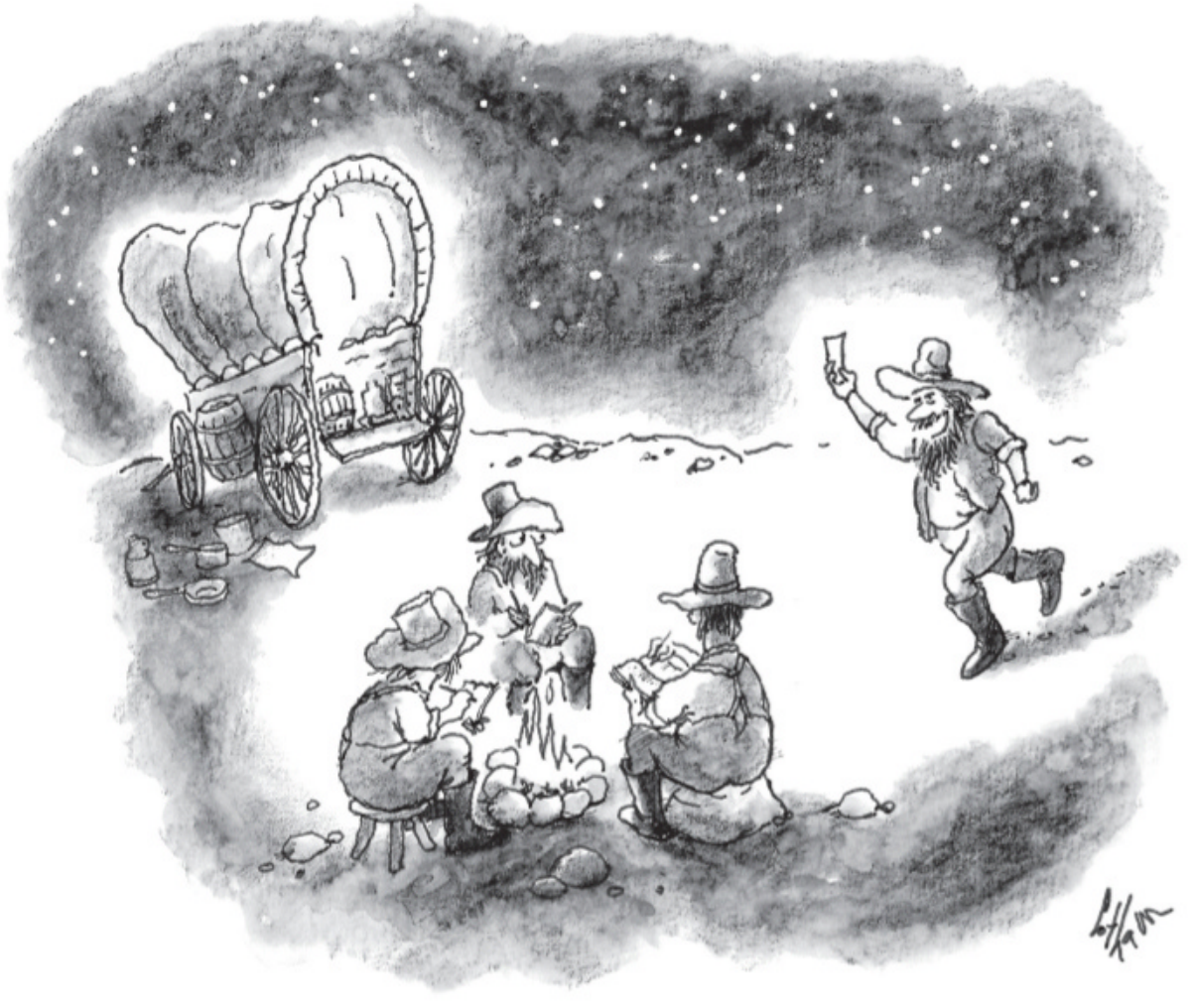
When MacAskill took his vow of relative poverty, he worried that it would make him less attractive to date: "It was all so weird and unusual that I thought, Out of all the people I could be in a relationship with, I've just cut out ninety-nine per cent of them." This prediction was incorrect; in 2013, he married another Scottish philosopher and early E.A., and the two of them took her grandmother's surname, MacAskill. Later, a close relative found out what MacAskill had been doing with his stipend and told him, "That's unethical!" If he wasn't using his scholarship, he should return it to the university. He loves his family, he told me, "but I guess if I'd spent that money on beer it would have been O.K."

Like agriculture, echolocation, and the river dolphin, the practice that would become effective altruism emerged independently in different places at around the same time. Insofar as there was a common ancestor, it was Peter Singer. Holden Karnofsky and Elie Hassenfeld, young analysts at the hedge fund Bridgewater Associates, formed a club to identify the most fruitful giving opportunities—one that relied not on crude heuristics but on hard data. That club grew into an organization called GiveWell, which determined that, for example, the most cost-effective way to save a human life was to give approximately four thousand dollars to the Against Malaria Foundation, which distributes insecticide-treated bed nets. In the Bay Area "rationalist" community, a tech-adjacent online subculture devoted to hawkish logic and quarrelsome empiricism, bloggers converged on similar ideas. Eliezer Yudkowsky, one of the group's patriarchs, instructed his followers to "purchase fuzzies and utilons separately." It was fine to tutor at-risk kids or volunteer in a soup kitchen, as long as you assigned those activities to a column marked "self-interest." But the pursuit of a warm glow should be separate from doing the most impartial good.

When I asked Singer why the late two-thousands were a time of great ferment for applied consequentialism, he cited the Internet: "People will say, 'I've had these ideas since I was a teen-ager, and I thought it was just me,' and then they got online and found that there were others." Julia Wise, then an aspiring social worker, had been giving for years to the point of extreme personal sacrifice; she met Ord in the comments section of the economist Tyler Cowen's blog, and made the Giving What We Can pledge. She told me that she was attracted on a "tribal basis" to the movement's sense of "global solidarity."

Proto-E.A. attracted people who longed to reconcile expansive moral sensibilities with an analytical cast of mind. They tended to be consequentialists—those who believe that an act should be evaluated not as it conforms to universal rules but based on its results—and to embrace utilitarianism, a commitment to the greatest good for the greatest number. Their instinct was to see moral interventions as grand optimization problems, and they approached causes on the basis of three criteria: importance, tractability, and neglectedness. They were interested in thought experiments like the trolley problem, in part because they found such exercises enlivening and in part because it emphasized that passive actors could be culpable. It also made plain the very real dilemma of resource constraints: if the same amount of money could save one person here or five people there, there was no need for performative hand-wringing. As the rationalists put it, sometimes you just had to "shut up and multiply." A kind of no-hard-feelings, debate-me gladiatorialism was seen as a crucial part of good "epistemic hygiene," and a common social overture was to tell someone that her numbers were wrong. On GiveWell's blog, MacAskill and Karnofsky got into a scrap about the right numbers to assign to a deworming initiative. Before Wise met MacAskill, she had e-mailed to say that he had got some other numbers wrong by an order of magnitude. "A few months later, here I was having a beer with Will," she said.

In late 2011, in the midst of the Occupy movement, MacAskill gave a talk at Oxford called "Doctor, NGO Worker, or Something Else Entirely? Which Careers Do the Most Good." That year



"Any of you boys interested in fresh gossip for your diaries?"

saw the launch of 80,000 Hours, an offshoot of Giving What We Can designed to offer "ethical life-optimisation" advice to undergraduates. His advice, which became known as "earning to give," was that you—and the "you" was pretty explicitly high-calibre students at élite institutions—could become a doctor in a poor country and possibly save the equivalent of a hundred and forty lives in your medical career, or you could take a job in finance or consulting and, by donating intelligently, save ten times as many.

A young Oxonian named Habiba Islam was at that talk, and it changed her life. "I was the head of Amnesty International at university, I was volunteering at the local homeless shelter in Oxford—that kind of thing," she told me. "I know people who were committed to climate change as their thing—a pretty good guess for what's important—before getting involved in E.A." Islam was considering a political career; 80,000 Hours estimated that an Oxford graduate in Philosophy, Politics, and Economics who embarked on such a path has historically had about a one-in-thirty chance of becoming an M.P. She took the pledge, agreeing to give away everything above twenty-five thousand pounds a year, and became a consultant for PwC. She told me, "It was just obvious that we privileged people should be helping more than we were."

Matt Wage, a student of Singer's at Princeton, decided that, instead of pursuing philosophy in grad school, he would get a job at the trading firm Jane Street. If you rescued a dozen people from a burning building, he thought, you would live out the rest of your days feeling like a hero; with donations, you could save that many lives every year. "You can pay to provide and train a guide dog for a blind American, which costs about $40,000," Wage told the reporter Dylan Matthews, for a Washington *Post* piece called "Join Wall Street. Save the world." "But with that money you could also cure between 400 and 2,000 people in developing countries of blindness from glaucoma." Matthews, convinced by his sources in the movement, went on to donate a kidney. "You go to an E.A. conference and things feel genuinely novel," he said. "Someone will give a talk about how, if we regulate pesticides differently, we can reduce suicide. I don't have to agree with everything they say, or think Will is the Pope, for it to be a very useful way to think about what deserves attention."

In the movement's early years, MacAskill said, "every new pledge was a big deal, a cause for celebration." As E.A. expanded, it required an umbrella nonprofit with paid staff. They brainstormed names with variants of the words "good" and "maximization," and settled on the Centre for Effective Altruism. Wise donated thousands of dollars; it was the first time her money was going not to "object-level" work but to movement-building. She said, "I was an unemployed social worker, but I felt so optimistic about their work that I gave them most of my savings."

In 2015, MacAskill was hired as an associate professor at Oxford and, at twenty-eight, was said to be the youngest such philosophy professor in the world. It should have been a moment of vindication, but he felt conflicted. "It was easy and high-status," he said. "But I didn't want to be too comfortable." The same year, his marriage deteriorated—he kept the surname; his ex didn't—and he published his first book, "Doing Good Better," an extended case that Westerners were in a situation akin to "a happy hour where you could either buy yourself a beer for five dollars or buy someone else a beer for five cents." That summer, 80,000 Hours was accepted into Y Combinator, a prestigious startup incubator. The Effective Altruism Global summit was held at the Googleplex, and Elon Musk appeared on a panel about artificial intelligence. (MacAskill told me, "I tried to talk to him for five minutes about global poverty and got little interest.") By then, GiveWell had moved to San Francisco, and the Facebook cofounder Dustin Moskovitz and his wife, the former journalist Cari Tuna, had tasked its new project—later known as Open Philanthropy—with spending down their multibillion-dollar fortune. Open Philanthropy invested in international development and campaigns for broiler-chicken welfare, and expanded into causes like bail reform. For the first time, MacAskill said, the fledgling experiment felt like "a force in the world."

MacAskill, too, was newly a force in the world. For all E.A.'s aspirations to stringency, its numbers can sometimes seem arbitrarily plastic. MacAskill has a gap between his front teeth, and he told close friends that he was now thinking of getting braces, because studies showed that more "classically" handsome people

"They like you because you're allergic to them."

were more impactful fund-raisers. A friend of his told me, "We were, like, 'Dude, if you want to have the gap closed, it's O.K.' It felt like he had subsumed his own humanity to become a vehicle for the saving of humanity."

The Centre for Effective Altruism now dwells, along with a spate of adjacent organizations with vaguely imperious names—the Global Priorities Institute, the Forethought Foundation—in Trajan House, an Oxford building that overlooks a graveyard. Nick Bostrom, a philosopher whose organization, the Future of Humanity Institute, also shares the space, disliked the building's name, which honors a philanthropic Roman emperor, and proposed that it be called Corpsewatch Manor. The interior, with shelves of vegan nutritional bars and meal-replacement smoothies, resembles that of a pre-fiasco WeWork. MacAskill struggles with the opportunity cost of his time. He told me, "It's always been an open question: What weight do I give my own well-being against the possible impact I can have?" Many evenings, he has a frozen vegan dinner at the office. (He wasn't sure, when feeding me, whether the microwave time for two dishes would scale linearly.) He schedules his days down to the half hour. He and one of his assistants recently discussed reducing some slots to twenty-five minutes, but they ultimately decided that it might seem insulting.

In a rare free moment, MacAskill, who wears tight-fitting V necks that accentuate his lack of sartorial vanity and his biceps, took me on a tour of the movement's early sites. We passed Queen's Lane Coffee House. "That's where Bentham discovered utilitarianism," he commented. "There should be a plaque, but the current owners have no idea." Most of the colleges were closed to visitors, but MacAskill had perfected the flash of an old I.D. card and a brazen stride past a porter. He paused reverently outside All Souls College, where the late moral philosopher Derek Parfit, one of the guiding lights of E.A., spent his life in a tower.

Parfit believed that our inherited moral theories were constructed on religious foundations, and aspired to build a comprehensive secular moral framework. Effective altruism, in that spirit, furnishes an all-encompassing world view. It can have an ecclesiastical flavor, and early critics observed that the movement seemed to be in the business of selling philanthropic indulgences for the original sin of privilege. It has a priestly class, whose posts on E.A.'s online forum are often received as encyclicals. In the place of Mass, E.A.s endure three-hour podcasts. There is an emphasis on humility, and a commandment to sacrifice for the sake of the neediest. Since its inception, GiveWell has directed the donation of more than a billion dollars; the Against Malaria Foundation alone estimates that its work to date will save a hundred and sixty-five thousand lives. There have been more than seven thousand Giving What We Can pledges, which total almost three billion dollars. In an alternate world, a portion of that sum would presumably have been spent on overpriced tapas in San Francisco's Mission District.

As effective altruism became a global phenomenon, what had been treated as a fringe curiosity became subject to more sustained criticism. A panel convened by the *Boston Review* described E.A.s as having cast their lot with the status quo. Though their patronage might help to alleviate some suffering on the margins, they left the international machine intact. As hard-nosed utilitarians, they bracketed values—like justice, fairness, and equality—that didn't lend themselves to spreadsheets. The Stanford political scientist Rob Reich wrote, "Plato identified the best city as that in which philosophers were the rulers. Effective altruists see the best state of affairs, I think, as that in which good-maximizing technocrats are in charge. Perhaps it is possible to call this a politics: technocracy. But this politics is suspicious of, or rejects, the form of politics to which most people attach enormous value: democracy." The Ethiopian American A.I. scientist Timnit Gebru has condemned E.A.s for acting as though they are above such structural issues as racism and colonialism.

Few of these appraisals were new; many were indebted to the philosopher Bernard Williams, who noted that utilitarianism might, in certain historical moments, look like "the only coherent alternative to a dilapidated set of values," but that it was ultimately bloodless and simpleminded. Williams held that the philosophy alienated a person "from the source of his actions in his own convictions"—from what we think of as moral integrity. Its means-end rationality could seem untrustworthy. Someone who seeks justification for the impulse to save the life of a spouse instead of that of a stranger, Williams famously wrote, has had "one thought too many."

The Oxford philosopher Amia Srinivasan, whom MacAskill considers a friend, wrote a decidedly mixed critique in the *London Review of Books*, calling MacAskill's first book "a feel-good guide to getting good done." She noted, "His patter is calculated for maximal effect: if the book weren't so cheery, MacAskill couldn't expect to inspire as much do-gooding." She conceded the basic power of the movement's rhetoric: "I'm not saying it doesn't work. Halfway through reading the book I set up a regular donation to GiveDirectly," one of GiveWell's top recommended charities. But she called upon effective altruism to abandon the world view of the "benevolent capitalist" and, just as Engels worked in a mill to support Marx, to live up to its more thoroughgoing possibilities. "Effective altruism has so far been a rather homogenous movement of middle-class white men fighting poverty through largely conventional means, but it is at least in theory a broad church." She noted, encouragingly, that one element was now pushing for "systemic change" on issues like factory farming and immigration reform.

Some E.A.s felt that one of the best features of their movement—that, in the context of near-total political sclerosis, they had found a way to do *something*—had been recast as a bug. The movement's self-corrections, they believed, had been underplayed: a high-paying job at a petrochemical firm, for example, was by then considered sufficiently detrimental that no level of income could justify it. But others found Srinivasan's criticisms harsh but fair. As Alexander Berger, the co-C.E.O. of Open Philanthropy, told me, "She was basically right

that early E.A. argued for the atomized response—that you as an individual should rationally and calculatedly allocate a portion of your privilege to achieve the best outcomes in the world, and this doesn't leave much space for solidarity." During the next few years, however, the movement gained a new appreciation for the more sweeping possibilities of systemic change—though perhaps not in the ways Srinivasan had envisioned.

One of the virtues of effective altruists—which runs counter to their stereotype as mere actuaries—is that, when they feel like it, they're capable of great feats of imagination. A subset of them, for example, has developed grave concern about the suffering of wild animals: Should we euthanize geriatric elephants? Neutralize predator species? What should be done about the bugs? The prime status marker in a movement that has abjured financial reward is a reputation for punctilious (and often contrarian) intelligence. The community has a tendency to overindex on perceived cerebral firepower, which makes even leading lights like MacAskill feel a perennial sense of imposture. This means that genuinely bizarre ideas, if argued with sufficient virtuosity, get a fair hearing. Holden Karnofsky told me, "If you read things that E.A.s are saying, they sound a lot crazier than what they're actually doing." But the movement—constrained by methodological commitments rather than by substantive moral ones—has proved vulnerable to rapid changes in its priorities from unexpected quarters.

In retrospect, "Doing Good Better" was less a blueprint for future campaigns than an epitaph for what came to be called the "bed-nets era." During the next five years, a much vaster idea began to take hold in the minds of the movement's leaders: the threat of humanity's annihilation. Such concerns had been around since the dawn of the nuclear age. Parfit had connected them to an old utilitarian argument, that the protection of future lives was just as important as the preservation of current ones. The philosopher Nick Bostrom contended that, if humanity successfully colonized the planets within its "light cone"—the plausibly reachable regions of the universe—and harnessed the computational power of the stars to run servers upon which the lives of digital consciousnesses might be staged, this could result in the efflorescence of approximately ten to the power of fifty-eight beings. For any decision we made now, an astronomical number of lives hung in the balance.

In the first month of the pandemic, Toby Ord published a book called "The Precipice." According to Ord's "credences," the chances of human extinction during the next century stand at about 1–6, or the odds of Russian roulette. The major contributor to existential risk was not climate change—which, even in a worst-case scenario, is unlikely to render the planet wholly uninhabitable. (New Zealand, for example, might be fine.) Instead, he singles out engineered pathogens and runaway artificial intelligence. DNA editing might allow a scientist to create a superbug that could wipe us out. A well-intentioned A.I. might, as in one of Bostrom's famous thought experiments, turn a directive to make paper clips into an effort to do so with all available atoms. Ord imagines a power-hungry superintelligence distributing thousands of copies of itself around the world, using this botnet to win financial resources, and gaining dominion "by manipulating the leaders of major world powers (blackmail, or the promise of future power); or by having the humans under its control use weapons of mass destruction to cripple the rest of humanity." These risks might have a probability close to zero, but a negligible possibility times a catastrophic outcome is still very bad; significant action is now of paramount concern. "We can state with confidence that humanity spends more on ice cream every year than on ensuring that the technologies we develop do not destroy us," Ord writes. These ideas were grouped together under the new heading of "longtermism."

When Ord first mentioned existential risk, MacAskill thought that it was a totally crackpot idea. He was uneasy about how it related to his own priorities, and remembers attending a meeting about A.I. risk and feeling frustrated by the vagueness of the potential impacts. But profound improvements in the past half decade (DeepMind's AlphaGo, OpenAI's GPT-3), combined with arguments about the exponential gains in computational power compared to biological benchmarks, cited by Ajeya Cotra, of Open Philanthropy, brought him around. Ord believed that if we made it through the next century or two we would have about even odds of achieving the best possible long-haul future—a universe filled with the descendants of humanity, living lives of untold, unimaginable, and unspecified freedom and pleasure. MacAskill worries in his new book that annihilation per se might not be the only risk. He believes in the radical contingency of moral progress; he argues, for example, that, without the agitation of a small cohort of abolitionists, slavery might have lasted much longer. Even a benign A.I. overlord, by contrast, might produce "value lock-in": a world governed by code that forever stalls the arc of moral progress. (On the other hand, if we don't avail ourselves of the possibilities of A.I., we might face technological stagnation—in over our heads on a deteriorating planet.)

MacAskill understands that worries about a sci-fi apocalypse might sound glib when "there are real problems in the world facing real people," he writes. The distant future, however, is likely to be even more crowded with real people. And if spatial distance is irrelevant to our regard for starvation overseas, temporal distance should be an equally poor excuse. "I now believe the world's long-run fate depends in part on the choices we make in our lifetimes," he writes. This amounts to nothing less than a "moral revolution."

In 2012, while MacAskill was in Cambridge, Massachusetts, delivering his earning-to-give spiel, he heard of a promising M.I.T. undergraduate named Sam Bankman-Fried and invited him to lunch. Bankman-Fried's parents are scholars at Stanford Law School, and he had been raised as a card-carrying consequentialist. He had recently become vegan and was in the market for a righteous path. MacAskill pitched him on earning to give. Bankman-Fried approached an animal-welfare group and asked its members whether they had more use for his volunteer time or for his money, and they strongly preferred the money. The next year, Bankman-Fried invited MacAskill to stay at his coed nerd frat, where everyone slept in the attic to preserve the living area for video and board games.

In 2014, Bankman-Fried graduated

with a degree in physics, and went to work at Jane Street. He says that he donated about half his salary, giving some to animal-welfare organizations and the rest to E.A. movement-building initiatives. In 2017, he started Alameda Research, a crypto-trading firm that sought to exploit an arbitrage opportunity wherein bitcoin, for various reasons, traded higher on Japanese exchanges. The scheme was elaborate, and required that his employees spend a lot of time in bank branches, but he made a ten-per-cent profit on every trade. One crypto impresario told me, "We all knew that was possible in theory, but S.B.F. was the one who actually went and did it."

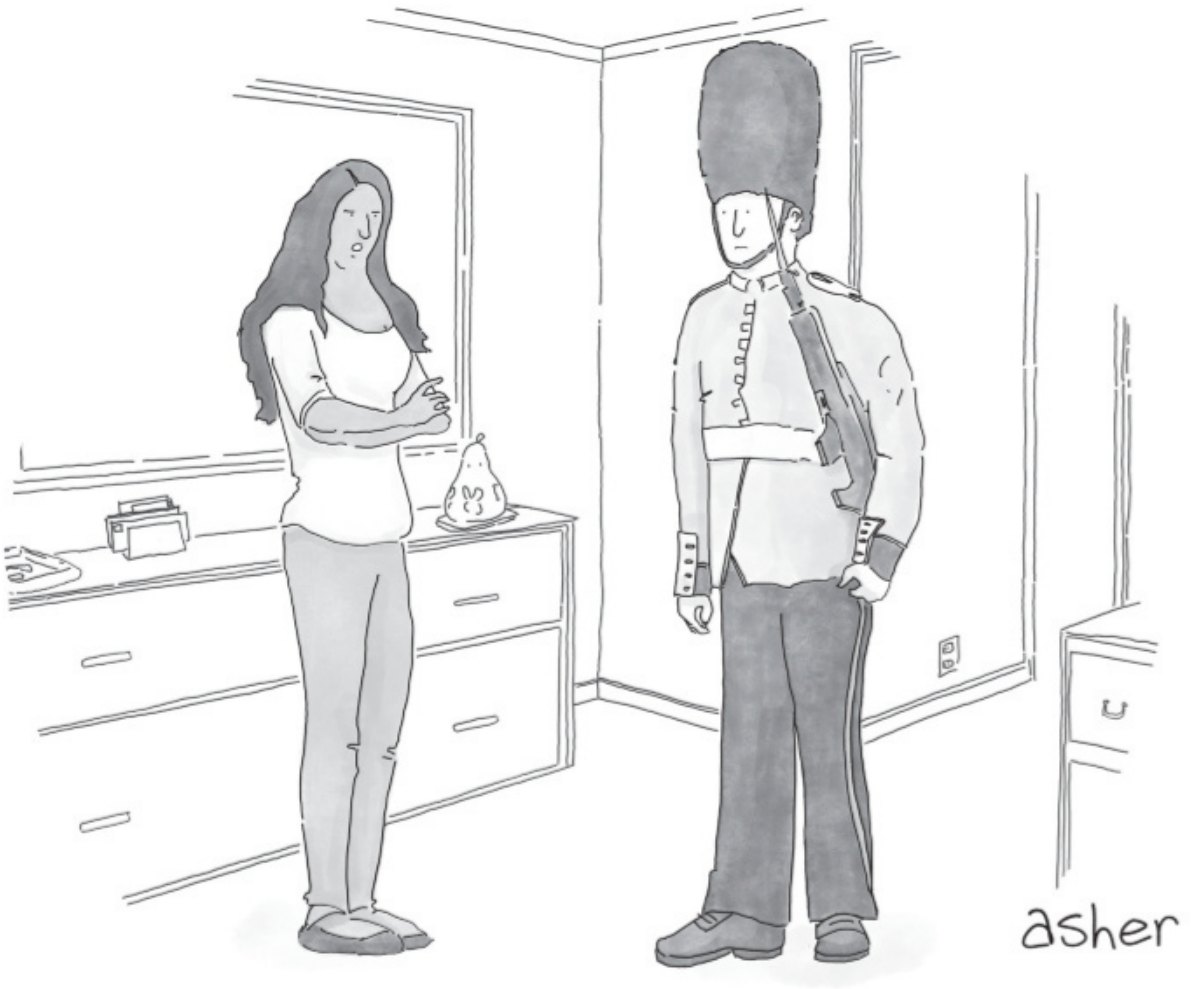
In 2019, Bankman-Fried founded a user-friendly crypto exchange called FTX. One of the exchange's most profitable products is not yet legal in the United States; he shopped for more congenial jurisdictions and set up in the Bahamas. By the time Bankman-Fried was twenty-nine, *Forbes* estimated his net worth at about twenty-six billion dollars, making him the twenty-fifth-richest American. At least three of his co-workers, depending on the fluctuating price of crypto assets, are also E.A. billionaires. Nishad Singh had been working an earning-to-give job at Facebook when Bankman-Fried invited him to join. Singh told me, "I had been somewhat dishonest with myself. I might have been picking a path that let me lead the life I wanted to lead, but I was not picking the path of maximal good."

Bankman-Fried has refined the persona of a dishevelled, savantlike techno-fakir. He has been widely advertised for his fiscal chastity—he drives a Toyota Corolla and, on the rare occasion that he leaves the office, lives with nine roommates. Even when beds are ready to hand, he pitches down on a beanbag. According to the *Times*, visitors are sometimes scheduled to arrive for meetings during his naps; they watch from a conference room as he wakes up and pads over in cargo shorts. But his marketing efforts have been splashy. FTX spent an estimated twenty million dollars on an ad campaign featuring Tom Brady and Gisele Bündchen, and bought the naming rights to the Miami Heat's arena for a hundred and thirty-five million dollars.

Last year, MacAskill contacted Bankman-Fried to check in about his promise: "Someone gets very rich and, it's, like, O.K., remember the altruism side? I called him and said, 'So, still planning to donate?'" Bankman-Fried pledged to give nearly all his money away; if suitable opportunities are found, he's willing to contribute more than a billion dollars a year. Bankman-Fried had longtermist views before they held sway over MacAskill, and has always been, MacAskill remembers, "particularly excited by pandemics"—a normal thing to hear among E.A.s. Bankman-Fried set up a foundation, the FTX Future Fund, and hired the longtermist philosopher Nick Beckstead as C.E.O. This past December, MacAskill finished the manuscript of his new book, and hoped to spend more time with his partner, Holly Morgan, an early E.A. and the biggest single input to his stability. Instead, Bankman-Fried enlisted him as a Future Fund adviser. (He offered MacAskill a "generous" six-figure salary, but MacAskill replied that he was just going to redistribute the money anyway.)

Overnight, the funds potentially available to E.A. organizations more than doubled, and MacAskill was in a position not only to theorize but to disburse on a grand scale. The Future Fund's initial ideas included the development of early-detection systems for unknown pathogens, and vast improvements in personal protective equipment—including a suit "designed to allow severely immunocompromised people to lead relatively normal lives." With the organization's support, someone might buy a large coal mine to keep the coal in the ground—not only to reduce our carbon footprint but to insure that humanity has available deposits should some desperate future generation have to reindustrialize. The foundation was keen to hear proposals for "civilizational recovery drills," and to fund organizations like ALLFED, which develops food sources that could, in a nuclear winter, be cultivated without sunlight. (So far, it's mostly mushrooms, but seaweed shows promise.) Inevitably, there were calls for bunkers where, at any given time, a subset of humanity would live in a sealed ark.

Along with the money came glamorous attractors. Last week, Elon Musk tweeted, of MacAskill's new book, "This is a close match for my philosophy." (For



"You can't just put on the uniform whenever you don't want to have a conversation, Barry."

a brief period, Musk reportedly assigned responsibility for the charitable distribution of nearly six billion dollars to Igor Kurganov, a former professional poker player and a onetime housemate of MacAskill's; in MacAskill's book, Kurganov is thanked for "unfettered prances round the garden.") MacAskill has long been friendly with the actor Joseph Gordon-Levitt, who told me, "Last year, Will called me up about 'What We Owe the Future,' to talk about what it might be like to adapt the book for the screen." MacAskill felt that such movies as "Deep Impact" and "Armageddon" had prompted governments to take the asteroid threat more seriously, and that "The Terminator"'s Skynet wasn't a bad way to discuss the menace of A.I. Gordon-Levitt said, "We've started figuring out how it could work to build a pipeline from the E.A. community to my creative one, and seeing if we can't get some of these ideas out there into the world."

Bankman-Fried has made an all-in commitment to longtermism. In May, I spoke with him over video chat, and he seemed almost willfully distracted: he didn't bother to hide the fact that he was doing things on several monitors at once. (As a child, his brother has said, Bankman-Fried was so bored by the pace of regular board games that it became his custom to play multiple games at once, ideally with speed timers.) He told me that he never had a bed-nets phase, and considered neartermist causes—global health and poverty—to be more emotionally driven. He was happy for some money to continue to flow to those priorities, but they were not his own. "The majority of donations should go to places with a longtermist mind-set," he said, although he added that some intercessions coded as short term have important long-term implications. He paused to pay attention for a moment. "I want to be careful about being too dictatorial about it, or too prescriptive about how other people should feel. But I did feel like the longtermist argument was very compelling. I couldn't refute it. It was clearly the right thing."

The shift to longtermism, and the movement's new proximity to wealth and power—developments that were not uncorrelated—generated internal discord. In December, Carla Zoe Cremer and Luke Kemp published a paper called "Democratising Risk," which criticized the "techno-utopian approach" of longtermists. Some E.A.s, Cremer wrote in a forum post, had attempted to thwart the paper's publication: "These individuals—often senior scholars within the field—told us in private that they were concerned that any critique of central figures in EA would result in an inability to secure funding." MacAskill responded solicitously in the comments, and when they finally had a chance to meet, in February, Cremer presented a list of proposed "structural reforms" to E.A., including whistle-blower protections and a broad democratization of E.A.'s structure. Cremer felt that MacAskill, the movement leader who gave her the most hope, had listened perfunctorily and done nothing. "I can't wear the E.A. hoodie to the gym anymore," she told me. "Many young people identify with E.A. as a movement or a community or even a family—but underneath this is a set of institutions that are becoming increasingly powerful."

Last year, the Centre for Effective Altruism bought Wytham Abbey, a palatial estate near Oxford, built in 1480. Money, which no longer seemed an object, was increasingly being reinvested in the community itself. The math could work out: it was a canny investment to spend thousands of dollars to recruit the next Sam Bankman-Fried. But the logic of the exponential downstream had some kinship with a multilevel-marketing ploy. Similarly, if you assigned an arbitrarily high value to an E.A.'s hourly output, it was easy to justify luxuries such as laundry services for undergraduate groups, or, as one person put it to me, wincing, "retreats to teach people how to run retreats." Josh Morrison, a kidney donor and the founder of a pandemic-response organization, commented on the forum, "The Ponzi-ishness of the whole thing doesn't quite sit well."

One disaffected E.A. worried that the "outside view" might be neglected in a community that felt increasingly insular. "I know E.A.s who no longer seek out the opinions or input of their colleagues at work, because they take themselves to have a higher I.Q.," she said. "The common criticism thrown at the Tory Party here is that they go straight from Oxford to a job in Parliament. How could they possibly solve problems that they themselves have never come into contact with? They've never been at the coalface. The same criticism could be said of many E.A.s." The community's priorities were prone to capture by its funders. Cremer said, of Bankman-Fried, "Now everyone is in the Bahamas, and now all of a sudden we have to listen to three-hour podcasts with him, because he's the one with all the money. He's good at crypto so he must be good at public policy . . . what?!"

The bed-nets era had been chided as myopic, but at least its outcomes were concrete. The same could not be said of longtermism. Among the better objections was a charge of "cluelessness," or the recognition that we have trouble projecting decades down the line, let alone millennia. It does, in any case, seem convenient that a group of moral philosophers and computer scientists happened to conclude that the people most likely to safeguard humanity's future are moral philosophers and computer scientists. The movement had prided itself on its resolute secularism, but longtermist dread recalled the verse in the Book of Revelation that warns of a time when the stars will fall from the sky like unripe figs. Rob Reich, the Stanford political scientist, who once sat on the board of GiveWell, told me, "They are the secular apocalypticists of our age, not much different than Savonarola—the world is ending and we need a radical break with our previous practices." Longtermism is invariably a phenomenon of its time: in the nineteen-seventies, sophisticated fans of "Soylent Green" feared a population explosion; in the era of "The Matrix," people are prone to agonize about A.I. In the week I spent in Oxford, I heard almost nothing about the month-old war in Ukraine. I could see how comforting it was, when everything seemed so awful, to take refuge on the higher plane of millenarianism.

Longtermism also led to some bizarre conclusions. Depending on the probabilities one attaches to this or that outcome, something like a .0001-per-cent reduction in over-all existential risk might be worth more than the effort to save a billion people today. (In the

literature, this argument is called "fanaticism," and, though it remains a subject of lively scholastic debate in E.A. circles, nobody openly endorses it.) Referring to such regrettable episodes as all previous epidemics and wars, Nick Bostrom once wrote, "Tragic as such events are to the people immediately affected, in the big picture of things—from the perspective of humankind as a whole—even the worst of these catastrophes are mere ripples on the surface of the sea of life." Nick Beckstead, the philosopher at the helm of the Future Fund, remarked in his 2013 dissertation, "Richer countries have substantially more innovation, and their workers are much more economically productive. By ordinary standards—at least by ordinary enlightened humanitarian standards—saving and improving lives in rich countries is about equally as important as saving and improving lives in poor countries, provided lives are improved by roughly comparable amounts. But it now seems more plausible to me that saving a life in a rich country is substantially more important than saving a life in a poor country."

Beckstead's comment may formalize what many philanthropists already do: the venture capitalist John Doerr recently gave a billion dollars to already over-endowed Stanford to bankroll a school for studying climate change. But such extreme trade-offs were not an easy sell. As Holden Karnofsky once put it, most people who sit down to reason through these things from a place of compassion don't expect to arrive at such conclusions—or want to. E.A. lifers told me that they had been unable to bring themselves to feel as though existential risk from out-of-control A.I. presented the same kind of "gut punch" as global poverty, but that they were generally ready to defer to the smart people who thought otherwise. Nishad Singh told me that he, like many longtermists, continues to donate to alleviate current misfortune: "I still do the neartermist thing, personally, to keep the fire in my belly."

One of the ironies of the longtermist correction was that, all of a sudden, politics was on the table in a new way. In 2020, Bankman-Fried donated more than five million dollars to Joe Biden's campaign, making him one of the top Democratic contributors. Given anxieties about the nuclear codes, his action wasn't hard to justify. But Bankman-Fried has his own interests—the only times he's been known to wear pants is in front of Congress, where he urges crypto deregulation—and electoral interventions are slippery. This year, Bankman-Fried's super PAC gave more than ten million dollars to support Carrick Flynn, the first explicitly E.A.-affiliated congressional candidate, in a crowded Democratic primary in a new Oregon district. Flynn ran on a longtermist message about pandemic preparedness. (His background was in A.I. safety, but this was clearly a non-starter.) He did little to tailor his platform to the particular needs of the local constituency, which has a substantial Latino population, and he lost by a large margin.

Part of the initial attraction of the movement, for a certain sort of person, was that E.A. existed in a realm outside the business of politics as usual. Now its biggest funder was doing something that looked a lot like an attempt to buy an open congressional seat. There wasn't necessarily anything wrong, from a means-end perspective. But it did seem as though, overnight, the ground had shifted underneath the movement's rank and file. From the perspective of the early days of hard benchmarks, the opportunity cost of ten million dollars spent on a long-shot primary was about twenty-five hundred lives.

One of the reasons MacAskill is so venerated by his followers is that, despite his rarefied intellect, he seems to experience the tensions of the movement on a somatic level. In late March, he gave a talk at EAGxOxford, a conference of some six hundred and fifty young E.A.s. MacAskill had celebrated his thirty-fifth birthday the night before—a small group of largely E.A.-unaffiliated friends had gone out into the fields in pagan costumes to participate in a Lithuanian rite of spring. MacAskill told me that he'd never been happier with his life, and he definitely looked a little worse for wear. At the conference, he was introduced, to rapturous applause, under a portrait of George III wearing a gold damask suit. The room featured a series of ornately carved wooden clocks, all of which displayed contrary times; an apologetic sign read "Clocks undergoing maintenance," but it was an odd portent for a talk about the future. Afterward, MacAskill had a difficult time negotiating his exit from the marbled hall—he was constantly being stopped for selfies, or interrupted to talk about some neglected nuclear risk by a guy dressed like Mad Max, or detained by a teen-ager who

"Remember, he created us in his image a really long time ago."

wanted to know how he felt about the structural disadvantages that kept poor countries poor.

One young woman, two months shy of her high-school graduation, told him that she had stayed up all night fretting—she felt bad that she had paid for private lodging for the weekend, and wanted to know how to harmonize her own appetites with the needs of others. When MacAskill speaks, he often makes a gesture that resembles the stringing of gossamer in midair, as if threading narrow bridges across pitfalls in understanding. He told the young woman that he tried to cultivate his own disposition so that the contradictions disappeared: "E.A. has motivated me to do stuff that's hard or intimidating or makes me feel scared, but our preferences are malleable, and these activities become rewarding." He warned her, however, that it was "pretty easy to justify anything on altruistic grounds if your reasoning is skewed enough. Should I have a less nice apartment? Should I not have Bluetooth headphones?" He sighed and fluttered his eyelids, unable to provide the answers she sought. "After all this time, I guess I don't have a better suggestion for what to do than to give ten per cent. It's a costly signal of your moral commitment." Beyond that, he continued, "try to do the best you can and not constantly think of the suffering of the world."

MacAskill, who still does his own laundry, was deeply ambivalent about the deterioration of frugality norms in the community. The Centre for Effective Altruism's first office had been in an overcrowded firetrap of a basement beneath an estate agent's office. "I get a lot of joy thinking about the early stages—every day for lunch we had Sainsbury's baguettes with hummus, and it felt morally appropriate," MacAskill told me. "Now we have this nice office with catered vegan lunches. We could hire a hedge-fund guy at market rates, and that makes sense! But there's an aesthetic part of me that feels really sad about these compromises with the world."

I asked about the slippage, in his response, from moral to aesthetic propriety. He said, "Imagine you're travelling through a foreign country. During a long bus ride, there's an explosion and the bus overturns. When you come to, you find yourself in a conflict zone. Your travel companion is trapped under the bus, looking into your eyes and begging for help. A few metres away, a bloody child screams in pain. At the same time, you hear the ticking of another explosive. In the distance, gunshots fire. That *is* the state of the world. We have just a horrific set of choices in front of us, so it *feels* virtuous, and morally appropriate, to vomit, or scream, or cry." MacAskill replenishes his own moral and aesthetic commitment through his personal giving, even if he can now fund-raise more in an hour than he could donate in a year.

In "What We Owe the Future," he is careful to sidestep the notion that efforts on behalf of trillions of theoretical future humans might be fundamentally irreconcilable with the neartermist world-on-fire agenda. During a break in the conference, he whisked me to a footpath called Addison's Walk, pointing out the fritillaries, and a muntjac deer in the undergrowth. "We need to stay away from totalizing thinking," he said. "These thought experiments about suffering now versus suffering in the future—once you start actually doing the work, you're obviously informed by common sense. For almost any path, there's almost always a way to do things in a coöperative, nonfanatical way." Pandemic preparedness, for example, is equally important in the near term, and some people think that A.I. alignment will be relevant in our lifetimes.

Members of the mutinous cohort told me that the movement's leaders were not to be taken at their word—that they would say anything in public to maximize impact. Some of the paranoia—rumor-mill references to secret Google docs and ruthless clandestine councils—seemed overstated, but there was a core cadre that exercised control over public messaging; its members debated, for example, how to formulate their position that climate change was probably not as important as runaway A.I. without sounding like denialists or jerks. When I told the disaffected E.A. that MacAskill seemed of two minds about longtermism as an absolute priority, she was less convinced of his sincerity: "I think Will does lean more toward the fanatical side of things, but I think he has the awareness—off the merit of his own social skills or feedback—of the way the more fanatical versions sound to people, and how those might affect the appeal and credibility of the movement. He has toned it down in his communications and has also encouraged other E.A. orgs to do the same." In a private working document about how to pitch longtermism, extensive editing has reduced the message to three concise and palatable takeaways.

The disaffected E.A. warned me to

be wary whenever MacAskill spoke slowly: these were the moments, she said, when he was triaging his commitment to honesty and the objectives of optimized P.R. With so many future lives at stake, the question of honor in the present could be an open one. Was MacAskill's gambit with me—the wild swimming in the frigid lake—merely a calculation that it was best to start things off with a showy abdication of the calculus?

But, during my week in Oxford, it was hard to shake my impression of him as heartrendingly genuine—a sweaty young postulant who had looked into the abyss and was narrating in real time as he constructed a frail bridge to the far side. I asked him what made him most apprehensive, and he thought for a moment. "My No. 1 worry is: what if we're focussed on entirely the wrong things?" he said. "What if we're just wrong? What if A.I. is just a distraction? Like, look at the Greens and nuclear power." Panic about meltdowns appears, in retrospect, to have driven disastrously short-term bets. MacAskill paused for a long time. "It's very, very easy to be totally mistaken."

We returned to the conference courtyard for lunch, where an eclectic vegan buffet had been set up. The line was long, and MacAskill had only five minutes free. He tried to gauge the longest amount of time he could spend queuing, and in the end we contritely cut in at about the halfway point. The buffet table had two stacks of plates, and a fly alighted briefly on one of them. In MacAskill's presence, it's difficult not to feel as though everything is an occasion for moral distinction. I felt that I had no choice but to take the plate the fly had landed on. MacAskill nodded approvingly. "That was altruistic of you," he said.

The Future Fund has offices on a high floor of a building in downtown Berkeley, with panoramic views of the hills. The décor is of the equations-on-a-whiteboard variety, and MacAskill told me that the water-cooler talk runs the gamut from "What are your timelines?" to "What's your p(doom)?"—when will we achieve artificial general intelligence, and what's your probability of cataclysm?

When I visited recently, Nick Beckstead, the C.E.O., assembled the team for a morning standup, and began by complimenting Ketan Ramakrishnan, a young philosopher, on his dancing at an E.A. wedding they'd all attended. The wedding had been for Matt Wage, the early earning-to-give convert. The employees had planned to go to Napa for the weekend, but they were completing their first open call for funding, and there was never a moment to spare. First, some had skipped Friday's rehearsal dinner. Then they figured that they wouldn't be missed at the Sunday brunch. In the end, they'd left the reception early, too. Wage understood. The opportunity cost of their time was high. The Future Fund agreed to finance sixty-nine projects, for a total of about twenty-seven million dollars. The most heavily awarded category was biorisk, followed by A.I.-alignment research and various forecasting projects; the team had funded, among other things, the mushroom caterers of the coming nuclear winter.

Beckstead's new role, and accumulated life experience, seemed to have mellowed his more scholarly inclinations. "I personally find it tough to be all in on a philosophical framework in the fanatical sense," he said. "Longtermism has been my main focus, and will be my main focus. But I also feel like there's some value in doing some stuff that does deliver more concrete wins," and which shows that "we're morally serious people who are not just doing vanity projects about fancy technology." It remains plausible that the best longtermist strategy is more mundanely custodial. In 1955,

the computer scientist John von Neumann, a hero of E.A.s, concluded, "What safeguard remains? Apparently only day-to-day—or perhaps year-to-year—opportunistic measures, a long sequence of small, correct decisions." MacAskill had worried that one of the best new initiatives he'd heard about—the Lead Exposure Elimination Project, which was working to rid the world of lead poisoning—might be a hard sell, but everyone had readily agreed to fund it.

From the outside, E.A. could look like a chipper doomsday cult intent on imposing its narrow vision on the world. From the inside, its adherents feel as though they are just trying to figure out how to allocate limited resources—a task that most charities and governments undertake with perhaps one thought too few. "A.I. safety is such an unusual and uncertain area that it's tempting to simply hope the risks aren't real," Ramakrishnan said. "One thing I like about the E.A. community is that it's willing to deal with the knottiness, and just try to reason as carefully as possible." There were also signs that E.A.s were, despite the hazard of fanaticism, increasingly prone to pluralism themselves. Open Philanthropy has embraced an ethic of "worldview diversification," whereby we might give up on perfect commensurability and acknowledge it is O.K. that some money be reserved to address the suffering of chickens, some for the suffering of the poor, and some for a computational eschatology. After almost a decade of first-principles reasoning, E.A.s had effectively reinvented the mixed-portfolio model of many philanthropic foundations.

One sweltering afternoon, MacAskill and I went for a walk in the Berkeley hills. What had begun as a set of techniques and approaches had become an identity, and what was once a diffuse coalition had hardened into a powerful but fractious constituency; the burden of leadership fell heavily on his shoulders. "One of the things I liked about early E.A. was the unapologetic nature of it," he said. "Some charities are better by a lot! There was this commitment to truth as a primary goal. Now I constantly think of how people will respond to things—that people might be unhappy." He strung another invisible thread in the air. "Am I an academic who says what he thinks? Or am I representative of this movement? And, if so, what responsibilities do I have? There are some things that become compromised there." We passed People's Park, which had become a tent city, but his eyes flicked toward the horizon. "Sometimes, as I think about what I'm going to do after the book comes out, I think, I have a job as the intellectual face of this broader movement, and sometimes I just want to be an independent pair of eyes on the world." ♦

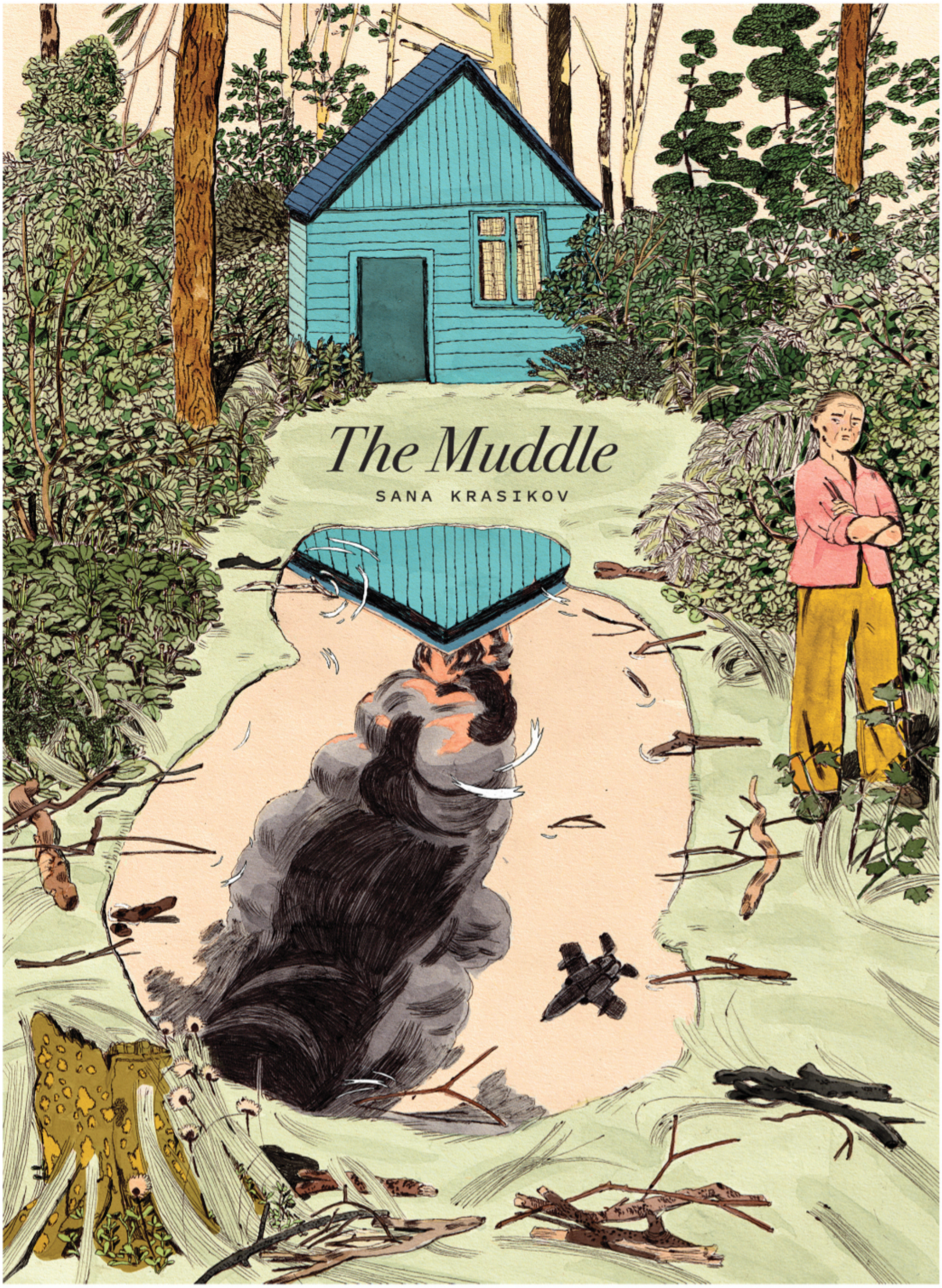


ILLUSTRATION BY KARLOTTA FREIER

Shura was trying to reach Alyona and Oleg, first over Skype and WhatsApp, then Facebook, on which Alyona kept an account she barely used. It should not have been so hard to get hold of them. Alyona had not posted recently, but she'd checked her messages, Shura could see that. Maybe she thought Shura was being dramatic—hadn't she always thought so? With her digital silence, Alyona was making a big show of her own calm, doubling down on her refusal to treat anything as a catastrophe. Well, goody for her, Shura thought, and shut her laptop. If Alyona wasn't panicked, why should she be? It was day three and there were still no Russian boots in central Kyiv. There was the battle at the Hostomel airport, and a rocket had crashed into a building in Obolon, but that was not near where Alyona and Oleg lived, in the Shevchenkivskyi district. From the security of her own house in Croton-on-Hudson, Shura tried not to think about the last conversation she'd had with Alyona. It had been a rather unpleasant chat, but now there was a war on and it seemed unnecessary to be holding a grudge, one of the very few they'd had in their sixty-odd-year friendship.

On day five, a reply came over Skype. "We're alive." Two words in a pale-blue bubble. It should have taken the tension out of her lungs, but it only agitated Shura more. She'd expected a bit more emotiveness—did they have groceries? Were they spending nights in their building's basement, or in the metro? *We're alive*. The bare minimum.

She would write back, Shura decided, but not yet. She dialled Pavel's number in Winnipeg instead. "All right, Pavel," she said briskly. "What's going on with your parents?"

"They're waiting it out in the apartment."

She gathered from his voice that he'd understood her meaning. Not *Are they O.K.*? but *What's wrong with those two*?

"Why aren't they on their way to Winnipeg?"

Shura could hear Pavel exhale. He'd likely been asked this a dozen times by now. "Have they become patriots all of a sudden?" she said, unable to resist.

But he wasn't hurt, having some of his own bitterness to shed. "Last time she was here, Mama said she didn't find Winnipeg 'cozy.'"

"Meaning what—it's too Canadian?"

"Too Ukrainian."

"Oh, for heaven's sake." Oleg, to be sure, was Russian, the son of a colonel. But Alyona was Ukrainian, on both sides, as she'd proudly told Shura when they were girls. Her father's family was from the Vinnytsia area; her mother's, from Donbas.

Pavel said, "Mama I understand better than I do him. She's always been under his thumb. But I think he'd rather spend his old age living on canned *tushonka* than accept help from me."

Pavel had been more of a joker when he'd arrived in Winnipeg, twenty years ago. The long shift into a Canadian had turned him, Shura thought, more earnest, and a touch more righteous.

"Oh, Pavel." She sensed that he would tell her more if she egged him on a little. But she hesitated, not wanting to give the impression that she was disparaging his mother. "So what's their situation with groceries?"

"No worries about that. Last time we spoke, she was making veal *the French way*."

•

At School No. 6, French had been Alyona's favorite subject, and, by extension, Shura's. Chattering in broken French was how they got to pretend that they were more than provincial Soviet schoolgirls in a quasi-industrial railroad city. In their sixth-grade production of "Cinderella," Alyona, with her shining blond head and biscuit skin, was cast as Fée Marraine, the fairy godmother. Shura, slight, pale, with dark braids and eyes that could narrow suspiciously, had played an evil stepsister. Alyona was one of only five Ukrainian kids in their class of twenty-nine. *Zhidovskaya shkola*—the Jew school—was how the Ukrainians and the Jews both referred to School No. 6, a neighborhood Russian school known to be one of the best in the city. Not a snide designation, just fact. There was a Ukrainian school in the same neighborhood, so parents had a choice. Alyona's parents, engineers at the mechanical plant, had chosen the Jew school.

All Shura remembered now of her French was that song they'd sung at the top of their voices, walking home. "*Les Russes veulent-ils la guerre*?" Do the Russians want war? A refrain that, fifty years later, could land you in prison. Alyona had kept up her French, reading classics in the original. When Shura had spoken to her by Skype last year, while Alyona and Oleg were living in Winnipeg (no, not living, only visiting, as it turned out), Alyona had been working through a copy of Colette's "Le Blé en herbe." Into the corporate-issued Mac that Shura had inherited in her retirement, she'd nearly shouted, "What are you doing with *that*? You're wasting your time. It's Winnipeg, not Quebec! Start practicing your English."

Foolishly, she'd imagined herself and Alyona forming a study group the way they'd done as girls, a tight unit to beat out the boys in their class. She advised Alyona on the best language software and told her that she would dig up her old E.S.L. coursework from night classes. She'd held on to it, sentimentally, even after her daughters had left home and she'd decluttered the place. "I'll mail you everything," she promised overeagerly, too pleased to have her friend on the same continent to hear her demurrals. "I have my grandson here if I need to practice conversation," Alyona had said. "And, anyhow, I prefer to work on my French."

Shura had never asked what it had taken Pavel to get his parents Canadian residency cards. Years of paperwork, she imagined. Regular checks mailed to lawyers. And yet, after only three months in Winnipeg, they'd packed up and flown home. "Not for us" was all Alyona had told her.

Shura could understand Alyona protecting her pride—she certainly had enough of it. But practicing her French? It made no sense. She would have thought her friend more pragmatic than that.

•

They'd sat at neighboring desks since the first grade, Korolenko and Kravetz, their friendship alphabetically predestined, but it wasn't until the second grade that they'd become close. Their teacher that year was young and rigid, without the heavyset authority of their first-grade teacher, who'd hand-selected

children for her class, insuring that the brightest (in her clairvoyant estimation) would remain with one another until their college-entrance exams. By contrast, the young teacher exercised her rule through public embarrassment.

It was March, and they were starting their painting unit. (Shura's father had bought her a new watercolor set, the waffles of pigment arrayed in a tin like tiny gems.) The assignment was to paint the spring outside. The teacher brought in an easel with her own painting, a primitively pastoral scene with a leafy tree supporting a yellow-breasted bird, and a blue pond accommodating one duck. Two clouds, major and minor, floated toward a conical sun wedged in a corner. Shura had not understood that she was supposed to copy directly from the teacher's example. She'd made the mistake of looking out the window, where spring had arrived in a wash of mud-streaked sidewalks and oily puddles. In truth, she'd hewed closely to her teacher's design, altering only the palette, graying the blues, daubing brown along the picture's grassy bottom edge. She'd covered the sun with a gray cloud.

Moving down the rows of desks, their teacher had stopped and, with pincered fingers, lifted Shura's wet paper as an example of what the others should not do: muddy their colors, soak their parchment with water, fail to pay attention to the assignment. Shura had sat wordlessly, her cheeks growing hot. It was true she'd used too much water, but the charge of not paying attention to the assignment seemed utterly unfair. "But I did paint the spring," she protested, turning to the window as proof. The young teacher, still looking at her picture, had declared, "This is not spring. This is a muddle."

That afternoon, Alyona and Shura walked home together, and Shura's outrage unleashed itself in her gait. She didn't avoid the mud on the sidewalks, despite owning only one pair of school shoes, which her mother would have to scrub that night. She made herself leap in puddles, as if the damage to her wool stockings and coat would stand as proof of the treachery that the spring was capable of. Each time Shura was about to jump, Alyona would take a step back, protecting her own neat ensemble. Yet she did not tell Shura to stop. "You saw! You saw!" Shura kept insisting, because it seemed to her that only Alyona did not think her crazy, even if Alyona herself had decided to ignore the world outside the window. Finally, seeing that Shura's tantrum would not end without some concession on her part, Alyona said, "She wanted us to paint spring as it *should* be." Her voice was filled with quiet, tidy exhaustion at having to deliver an explanation too obvious to be spoken aloud.

Only it hadn't been obvious to Shura. For the next eight years of her schooling, she'd learn to adopt a kind of vigilance toward herself, to ferret out what a teacher really wanted from her, to stop herself before her hunger to excel tipped over into intellectual extravagance. She found it helpful to follow Alyona's lead in this regard. Later, when Shura began to study computer science in Leningrad, the word "requirements" would come to mind whenever she thought of her friend (studying the same subject in Kyiv). She thought of Alyona's ability to ascertain the implicit expectations of a task while ignoring anything unnecessary.

•

The conversation that had left a bad taste in Shura's mouth, a week before the invasion began, had been about bread. Shura was watching the massing of troops on the border with a growing dread and had called Alyona.

"You aren't worried?"

"About?"

"War."

"Is that what you all are placing your bets on?"

"You all?" Shura said. "It's me you're talking to."

"Your media, then, putting chips on different squares on the calendar."

These didn't sound like Alyona's words—perhaps they were Oleg's. "So you're not placing a bet, then?"

That was when Alyona said it: "Why? In Kharkiv, their hands are already tired from baking *karavai*."

Shura wasn't sure she'd heard correctly. Did Alyona understand what she'd just said? *Karavai*? Did she mean the bread and salt with which some Ukrainians had greeted the Germans back in '41? "You mean celebrating the takeover? What about you—are you baking *karavai*, too?"

If Alyona was taken aback by the sharpness of Shura's voice, she didn't show it. "You know I never bake," she said. But they'd both felt a shift then, as if each had suddenly discovered something distasteful about the other and wanted to get past it as quickly as possible.

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After that conversation, Shura had slept badly. Plenty of her friends in North America had relatives or old classmates still in Ukraine. But none of them, as far as she knew, had mentioned anyone speaking the way Alyona had. Shura *was*, in fact, placing bets on a war, and the morning that it finally happened she felt so weakened that her vision blurred from an abrupt drop in blood pressure. She had experienced these sudden drops occasionally since the conclusion of her chemo, three years before, an uncommon but not life-threatening side effect. For the first time in two years, Shura wondered if things would be easier now if she hadn't retired, if her mind had blocks of code to occupy itself with, instead of the movements of troops and tanks across three separate fronts. After her treatment, she hadn't gone back to work, and she'd been surprised at how quickly many of her friendships thinned out without common deadlines and office gossip. Still, life was too short to code yourself into the grave. Throughout the years, she and Alyona had been in touch sporadically, but during her recovery they'd started talking again almost every week. Until now.

•

On days six and seven, Shura tried Skyping Alyona but couldn't reach her. On day eight, she called Pavel again. He said that his parents had packed up and headed to their dacha. He

couldn't vouch for the reliability of their Internet when they arrived.

Shura did not want to second-guess herself. Most likely Alyona was busy escaping the city. Perhaps her devices had died. And still Shura felt that Alyona's failure to give her updates was payback for their argument about *karavai*, when Alyona had accused her of not having a clue about what was really happening in "the East."

"They act like they're the cops, roaming the streets after dark and stopping anyone they want, asking for papers," Alyona had said of the Ukrainian militias. "They say they're hunting separatists. You get a mass riot in America every time one of your police tries half the stuff these fascists pull."

"Really?" Shura said. "Are they shooting people?"

"Well, they're not exactly walking around *unarmed*. And they're anti-Semites."

She suspected that Alyona had thrown in the anti-Semite charge to press her buttons. "Are they pogroming?" she inquired.

"Are you out of your mind?"

"So it's just words."

"You think that isn't enough? The police let the nationalists run rampant. They're afraid to stop them."

"In Kyiv?"

"Not here, but . . . even here they come out on Independence Square in their sunglasses and stupid bandannas, and their wrong-side-up swastikas painted on their cars."

"Democracy is messy," Shura said, though she wasn't sure why she was defending Ukraine to a Ukrainian.

"Democracy, are you kidding? They've colonized the state. Our Nouvelle Droite."

Alyona sometimes used French when she wanted to make a point, but "colonized the state" hardly sounded like her.

"How could the fascists have colonized the state," Shura said, "when your President is a Jew? And the defense minister, too."

"You think *that* proves anything? Your Trump was practically a Jew himself with his Kushners running the shop. Did that stop him saluting *your* neo-Nazis when he got up on a balcony?"

Shura had complicated opinions on this matter but kept them to herself.

"Zelensky's afraid they'll topple the government if he doesn't kiss their asses. You should hear them talk. An army of lions being led by sheep. Big deal, Jewish President—we change Presidents every five years."

"Better than every twenty-five," Shura said.

•

On the evening before day eleven, NATO was still rejecting a no-fly zone, and the nuclear plant in Zaporizhzhia had been seized, but that morning Shura felt as though her body had somehow acclimated to the new state of alarm. She was squinting at the expiration date on a Vitamin-D bottle when Skype's cartoonish jingle rang on her laptop. "Alyona, where are you?" she shouted as the screen revealed, behind Alyona's halo of pulled-back blond hair, a narrow kitchen with old metal dishes stacked on hanging shelves. "Are you at the dacha?"

"We arrived two nights ago. Pavel said you called him?" Alyona hadn't wanted to Skype from Kyiv, she said. "Too noisy. Hard to talk over the sirens."

"Right."

"A mess." She made a few limp hand motions like waving a lazy goodbye. "Oleg and I are tired of this whole muddle."

Her face looked puffy, dark satchels of exhaustion under her eyes. It was always unsettling for Shura to see a woman like Alyona not looking her best. At school, the boys had all been in love with her, but Shura hadn't really understood the measure of Alyona's beauty until she'd come to America and watched "Tootsie" at a party thrown by one of the seasoned immigrants, who'd screened it for the new arrivals as a kind of cultural tutorial. Watching Dustin Hoffman's love interest, played by Jessica Lange, had suddenly made her feel both nostalgic and comforted in this new land. It was as though Alyona had appeared onscreen, with the same soft brown eyes and feathery waves, the same slow smile. Now Lange was skinny and Botoxed, her fine features sharpened into aggressive angles, while Alyona's, each time Shura saw her, seemed to be blurring and becoming more lost in the fleshiness of her face, her softening jawline.

Oleg's meaty head entered the frame as he crouched down to say, "Greetings, Shurochka!"

"How are you two?"

The couple glanced at each other, an inscrutable message passing between

"Be honest—do these glasses make me look scarier?"

them. "No worse for wear," Oleg answered. Which meant what, exactly?

"Where are you, again?"

He gave the name of the town, in the Zhitomir area.

"It's really quieter around Zhitomir?" Shura said, powerless to keep the distress out of her voice, as she quickly typed in the city on Google Maps, employing the Ukrainian "Zhytomyr," the more guttural sound of which she still felt too pretentious to say. Hadn't they been shelling Zhitomir all night?

"Tell her to take a breath," Oleg said. "We're nowhere near the city."

Alyona confirmed. "Not even close."

Shura liked Oleg well enough, but he had a way of making you feel slightly foolish for asking reasonable questions—either giving you an excessively long and detailed answer, and getting impatient if you wanted to hurry it along, or else making some joke of your inquiry so that you felt it was superfluous. Their dacha was closer to Kyiv than to the Belarus border, he now explained, giving the full coördinates. Still, it seemed odd to Shura that they should have travelled in that direction, with troops still filtering down from the north. "How long do you plan to stay?" she asked.

"Oh, the usual—probably through September."

Shura tried not to let the surprise show on her face. Pavel had been right about them making no plans to leave.

"Do you have food with you?"

Oleg was silently laughing at her again. "We brought plenty from Kyiv, even red wine. Packed the whole car."

"I suppose you'll grow the rest, then?"

"Well, sure," Alyona said. "We'll need to get the ground ready for planting soon."

"In March?"

"Why not?" Oleg cut in. "The carrots and dill we can plant already. We can start the seeds for the cabbage and squash in the greenhouses."

Alyona gave him a look. "You know I like to use those for the strawberries." For a few moments, the screen seemed to freeze.

When the connection returned to normal, Alyona was talking about moving the tomato pots indoors.

Shura said, "I guess you've got it all sorted out." She wasn't sure what game they were playing, chatting as if it were another spring at the dacha, as if Alyona and Oleg had retired to the countryside for a vacation instead of fleeing a city under attack. Then again, what *should* Alyona be doing? All day long, Shura watched the news on YouTube, zooming in on crowds flooding into train stations, people shouting, "Please, please," and conductors shouting back, "No space." Occasionally, someone begged for a mother with a child to be let on, as in the war tales she'd heard growing up. Except this time everything was in bright color. She could hardly blame her friend for not wanting to be stuck among all those jostling bodies. And yet she could not help thinking that these people had nowhere to go, while Alyona did—to her son. It baffled her. "All that planting sounds like a lot of work," she said.

Alyona gave her Jessica Lange smile. "It *always* is."

•

The next day, she called Pavel again. "There are flights from Warsaw to Toronto. If they can just get themselves to Lviv first—all the trains are running, I've checked the schedules."

"Aunt Shura, they *know*."

"They're almost seventy years old, and that estate is at least an acre! If the Russians move another few inches south, your parents are going to be feeding three types of squash to those bandits."

"My father is impenetrable. If it was just her, I could convince her to come back, get some proper care. But as long as she's around him . . ."

A feeling like embarrassment fluttered through her at his words. She thought of Alyona, with her sense of decorum, hearing them talk like this. "What happened, Pavel? Why did they leave Winnipeg so soon?"

She hadn't dared to ask this question before, and he was quiet for so long that she had to say his name again.

"I don't know where to start," he said. "He's contemptuous of the way I live. He said that I do nothing but work, I barely see my child. It's true, I had a

MANIFEST

Hawks, rivers, cities, ochre, us.

A species whose right hand sketches its left hand
but can't draw itself.

Whales.
Geosynchronous satellites.
A truck hauling folded tarps under a tarp.

Wars, hunger, jail cells, praises, pratfalls, puns,
gold circuits on phone-card connectors—
all cargo, manifest,
circling the sun together
each three hundred and sixty-five days
plus a few remnant hours.

A story here ribboned with lightning,
there dimmed by clouds,
on a nitrogen-, oxygen-,
carbon-dioxide-, and dust-cushioned bundle,
whose glaciers depart, insects quiet, seas rise.

To that which is coming, I say,
Here, take what is yours.

But forget, if you can, what-is-coming,
find not worth pocketing,
let fall unnoticed as weed seed,
one small handful of moments and gestures.

Moments mouse-colored, minor.
Gestures disturbing no one,
slipped between the ones that were counted,
the ones in which everything happened.

A petroglyph's single fingerprint.

A spider awake in an undusted corner.

Let stay, if you can, what-is-coming,
one or two musical notes,
hummed in a half hour that couldn't be herded or mined,
made to save daylight or spend it.

Leave one unfraudulent hope,
one affection like curtains blown open in wind,
whose minutes, seconds, fragrance,
choices,
won't sadden the heart to recall.

—Jane Hirshfield

tight delivery schedule when they were here—the company had just gone public. I was managing a new team. I didn't argue with him. He started going on about how when he and Mama were working at the Informatics Institute, they never kept anyone past six—how after work there was a *life*, culture, a theatre circle, a chess club—people *did* things together. I said, Papa, I'm sorry my e-commerce firm doesn't have a chess club, I'm sorry it doesn't have an a-cappella group."

"What did he say?"

"He thought I was mocking him. He said, 'Your problem is you believe that the whole world wants to live like you.' I was foolish enough to think I could prove him wrong. We had a party, a few friends from work, but mostly my wife's from the Ukrainian church, people who helped us out when we first came. We started talking about Crimea, Donbas. He got up from the table and left the room. I thought, Good riddance. But then he came back. He sat down, lifted his glass, and started singing one of those old Russian-veteran songs—'We Need Only Victory!'"

"Was he drunk?"

"Not at all. He was trying to get Mama to sing along with him. He was waving his hand up and down like a choirmaster—to get her to harmonize."

"And did she?"

"Oh, yes. She may have been a little embarrassed at first, but then she did it. She got into it, or pretended to. I can't tell with her anymore. She did her best to carry his tune, like she always does."

"What do you mean *always*?"

"He talks to me about how *I* live." There was a river of grievance waiting to come out now. "His mother waited on his father, and on him, hand and foot, and when *she* died he expected the same treatment from Mama. Couldn't care less if she had her own job or life."

"He's a man of the old generation," Shura said, disingenuously. She thought of her husband, Misha, donning volleyball kneepads to clean the kitchen tile. Oleg might laugh at that. But then he wasn't exactly a gentleman of leisure. He did most of the work at the dacha, Alyona had told her: planting, fixing pipes, rigging the Internet, building a sauna.

"That isn't why," Pavel objected. "It's because they ran the show, those Russian military guys. They still expect everyone to roll over for them. He feels hurt that my son speaks only English and Ukrainian."

She understood now that Pavel had forsaken his Russianness completely. "But your father *knows* Ukrainian, almost as well as your mother."

"I explained that they teach the language at Sunday school, but Papa shook his head. He thinks our church is a bunch of *banderovtsy* stuck in a time capsule, and that groups like them fund everything that's wrong at home. But I think what really kills him is that the community here has done more for me than he ever did."

Or *could* do, Shura thought. What good would Oleg's family connections have done for Pavel after the great collapse? The economy had still been reeling when Pavel had left on a summer work visa to pick fruit on a farm in England, when he'd befriended some local guys at an Internet café in Cambridge and offered to write code for them, when he'd been hired by the startup they worked for, then by the corporation that had bought the startup and transplanted him and his young wife to Winnipeg. That his father dared to judge him for having clawed his way to the life he had must have felt exceedingly unfair. But how fair was it to judge his parents, Shura thought, who'd had so little to offer him?

"My wife and I had a big fight that night. The next day I told him that if he ever did that in my house again he was free to leave. When I woke up the morning after, they were packing their suitcases."

"But you said your mother needed medical attention?"

Her diabetes had worsened, Pavel admitted. Alyona had had appointments coming up.

Preoccupied with her own health, Shura had not pressed Alyona on her diabetes, which Alyona always played down, perhaps not wanting to compete over their ailments. Shura regretted this now. "They wouldn't even wait

until the next doctor's visit," Pavel said, his voice strained with helpless petulance. "Mama said she could get it all in Kyiv."

"But she's not in Kyiv now."

"They loathe the city almost as much as they do Winnipeg."

"But why?"

"The Ubers, the new street names, the ads in Ukrainian and English. Last time I was there, everything annoyed them." It had never looked so modern, Pavel added. Like Prague or London. They'd changed the parking rules, put up those stone planters so cars couldn't nose up on the sidewalks anymore. But his mother had kept stubbing her toe on the planters, almost as if she didn't see them, or didn't want to. "What frightens them is that there's no trace of anything Soviet anymore. I can't get through to her, Aunt Shura. Maybe you can."

Shura felt panic touch her chest. "What are you asking, Pavel?" she said, suddenly switching to English.

"She needs care. She listens to you, Aunt Shura."

"You mean she should come alone?"

"It's the only way."

When she hung up the phone, Shura reminded herself that she'd agreed to nothing. She wasn't completely sure what Pavel had asked her to do—persuade Alyona to go to Winnipeg for medical care, or to stay for good? Because it also sounded to her like what her friend's son was asking her to do was break up his parents' marriage.

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Shura had never given much thought to Alyona and Oleg as a pair, though initially she had found Alyona's choice perplexing. In the letters they exchanged throughout college, Alyona had not once mentioned Oleg. Then, in her second-to-last year, she'd written to Shura to announce that she was getting married. Oleg was a year ahead. They'd known each other as acquaintances but never dated. One day, late in his final semester, he'd asked to walk her to her dormitory. He'd been hoping for a while to speak to her, he said. It was not hard for Shura to imagine a boy taking months to work up the courage to approach Alyona. But Oleg was not timid. On their walk, he laid it out simply. He wanted to marry her. His father was a colonel in the Soviet Army, and his parents had a three-bedroom apartment on the Right Bank in Kyiv, and would help them get their own place soon. He'd given Alyona one day to decide.

"Only a day?" Shura had been a little stunned to confirm this when she'd come home from Leningrad that July, to attend the wedding.

But Alyona saw this as a sign of character. "He said twenty-four hours should be enough time."

"What did you like about him?" Shura ventured to ask. She'd meant besides his Kyiv residency papers.

"He's tall. And he has confidence."

Of course, a colonel's son had the confidence of his position, but Alyona had meant more than that. She meant certainty about what he wanted from life, and what he was entitled to. In this case, her.

Shura had always thought of Alyona's ability to intuit what was required of her as a kind of mental elegance, something of a piece with the physical elegance. But a different memory had come to her then: in high school, they'd made a pact to travel to Leningrad and sit for their university exams together. After they'd already bought the train tickets, Alyona announced that she wasn't going. Her father wanted her to go to a college closer to home. Shura had known even then that Alyona would not argue with this.

Nonetheless, Shura did not think that Pavel's version of his mother as

the long-suffering wife was accurate. Whenever Shura had returned to Ukraine for visits, it was always Alyona who'd picked her up at the airport, in any kind of weather, first on the bus and later in her own car. At the train station in Kyiv, while Shura waited for her connection back to the town where they'd grown up, the young women would drink tea and talk. Alyona had seemed happy, or at least content. "I have a lot of freedom," she'd admit, almost guiltily. Shura assumed she was referring to her roomy apartment, close to Oleg's parents, and to the fact that Oleg's mother took Pavel to day care every morning and picked him up, and also did the grocery shopping and errands. (Shura's own life, except for these brief trips home, had been a series of increasingly narrow constrictions. She'd married Misha, her college sweetheart, and moved to his native Azerbaijan. Not even to Baku, but to an industrial town that made the one she'd grown up in seem like a botanical garden.) Later, however, she had wondered if Alyona's allusion to her freedom had meant something more. Sometimes Alyona made references to a colleague, a man with whom she ate lunches that stretched into matinées at a nearby movie house. Just a friend from work, she said.

The last time Alyona and Shura had met in Kyiv, Shura had confessed that she and Misha had received permission to emigrate, and Alyona, in turn, had confessed that her friend's wife had died abruptly, a few months earlier, and that he had asked her to leave Oleg to be with him. They had not acted on their affection and she was asking Shura what to do.

Maybe it was the giddiness of knowing that everything in her own life was about to change that made Shura say, "Do it! Pavel is in high school. If you don't now, when?"

"Yes, you're right." Alyona had breathed slowly, bracing herself, it seemed, for escape. She'd taken the wide collar of her blouse and raised it to her face, knuckles at her nose as if protecting herself from a freezing gale, though it was June.

When they got back in touch, two years later, Shura learned that Alyona had stayed with Oleg.

"I thought you loved him—your friend."

"I do."

"But?"

"He doesn't have the same, I don't know . . . force of will."

Shura hid her disappointment. She liked the idea of giving up everything for a great love. (She believed, in a pri-

vate way, that she'd done just that for Misha.) But Alyona wasn't interested in talking about a decision once it was made, and Shura let it drop.

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"So, what have you planted so far?" Shura asked when they spoke next, on day sixteen. Alyona said that she'd sown the beets and carrot seeds and spring onions. She wanted to plant spinach, but there was a shortage of fertilizer, so she'd settled for peas.

"All that in two weeks?"

Alyona smiled, glad at Shura's exaggerated awe. "Well, then, what have you and Pavel been talking about?"

Shura hesitated. "We were talking about your health. He said you need an update to your blood-sugar monitor."

"You don't know the whole story."

"You're right, I know nothing," Shura admitted. "But it sounds like he wants to take care of you."

Alyona said that they could take care of themselves well enough. Indeed, they could, Shura concurred.

Privately, it made Shura manic. Those goddam vegetable gardens! She'd grown up on a little homestead herself—right in the middle of their town—helping her parents tend a sizable piece of property that had been in the family since before the Bolsheviks, complete with apple trees and chickens. Shura's parents had wanted her to "inherit" this patch of soil they'd somehow managed to hold on to under the system. (Did they really think she, an only child, a professional, would have time to tend any of it?) Not until her mid-forties did she acquire a taste for gardening again, after she and Misha had saved up and moved to their house in Croton. They'd bought across the street from a woman named Trish, who worked as a real-estate agent and was obsessed with helping her neighbors keep their yards nice in order to maintain the neighborhood's property values. Trish had been generous with her time, showing Shura which boxwoods were better for light and for shade, how to keep her grass from yellowing.

When the war started, Trish had come over with a basket of begonia bulbs and said, "Are you *all right*? Tell me what I can *do*." Her eyes as plaintive as if she'd just learned that Shura had cancer again. It was how all her American friends spoke to her now, calling and asking what they could *do*, flexing their empathy muscles. Shura appreciated it, even if it felt infantilizing. What she liked about this country was the unfailing optimism of its people, the faith they had that something could always be *done*, that things could be improved. They were certain that, with enough aid, enough sanctions, enough deprivation, "the regular Russian people" would take it upon themselves to overthrow the Turd. It didn't occur to them that these same "regular people" might take a vengeful pleasure, even a national pride, in their own deprivation and humiliation. That this pride could propel them, at a moment's notice, to head to their little dachas and plant their little gardens, to pickle and can their vegetables until Armageddon.

Harder to explain was the sentiment of some of her Jewish immigrant friends, who in spite of shaking their heads compassionately, in spite of sending money to Ukraine's Army fund, said among themselves, *But, still, are we supposed to forget*? They meant Bandera and Shukhevych and the Odesa and Proskurov pogroms and all the rest of it. Oh, how Shura detested that "but, still." In the chemo room, she'd watched Zelensky's victory—a kind of sunlight trickling into her veins along with the drugs. The surprise was not just that they'd elected a Jew but that this seemed of so much less consequence to the Ukrainians themselves than it was to the press. It had made her feel that the world really could change, that its surprises were worth sticking around for.

"No, I think I get it. So if I were to throw, say, an amateur grammarian off the boat, that would be jetsam, not flotsam?"

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Shura had started calling on Tuesdays at 7 P.M. Alyona's time, noon hers. This was the hour, Alyona had told her, when Oleg was usually out visiting a neighbor for a drink.

"How's settlement life going?"

Alyona said she'd been up since dawn pruning fruit trees. It seemed to Shura that her enthusiasm had somewhat waned. She said two of the greenhouses had torn siding and finding replacement plastic was turning out to be a nightmare.

"Well, at least you did a lot of the ground planting."

"That's true." Alyona sighed. "Then

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again, fish, meat, and butter don't grow in neat little rows, do they?"

It was a sign, Shura thought, that Alyona was letting her guard down. The self-sufficiency she'd opted for wasn't without its burdens. Still, it was not the same as being captive. Something Shura could not explain to Pavel: that when you reached a certain age, when you'd peered down that canyon, your mate, if they happened to still be alive and healthy, was the luck you held on to by your fingernails.

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The next time Shura called, Alyona picked up right away, instead of returning the missed call. "Did you see about O——?" Shura said, naming the town they'd grown up in.

A look of naked worry crossed Alyona's face. "I heard something. What happened?"

"They bombed the railway station."

Even if Shura hadn't been compulsively following the war, she would have heard about the bombing on Facebook, where her old classmates posted news like this within minutes of its announcement. Still, it was strange that she knew more about each round of shelling from her kitchen in Croton than Alyona, forty miles away from it. "Schools No. 5 and 2 also got hit," she said.

"Anyone inside?"

"I don't think so."

"What about No. 6?"

"No, ours is still standing."

On the screen, Alyona sat, her shoulders fallen. She was looking away from the camera, toward what must have been the window, the last of the day's pink sun touching the wooden posts of her chair.

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They were making progress, Shura thought. Sometimes, after Oleg turned in for the night, Alyona called her. They avoided talk of the war, instead recalling moments of their youth. "Remember Felix Smolyar, in the green brigades with us?" Shura said.

"Not too bright with numbers?"

"He wrote me from California, asked if I was still in contact with you."

"He did?"

"We all thought he was a dummy, but turns out he had dyslexia."

Shura asked if she remembered their second-grade teacher, the one she'd argued with about painting spring. Alyona shook her head. "You don't remember telling me I should paint spring as it *should* be?" She didn't know why it should sadden her that Alyona had forgotten. "You always did insist on your way of things," Alyona finally said.

It was April now, and through her bay window Shura could see her tulips peeking up, her daffodils already blooming. She thought of the news analysis she'd heard that morning, that all Ukraine needed to turn the war around was tree cover. The country had a long tradition of guerrilla warfare. Once everything was in bloom and the forests dense, the Russians were in for a bitter slog. She repeated none of this to Alyona.

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Shura couldn't remember when she'd stopped counting the days. Maybe after the Russians had been pushed out of Kyiv and thousands of Ukrainians had returned. Each week, Alyona seemed closer to changing her mind. One evening, watching Shura scoop ice cream into a bowl, Alyona said, "What I wouldn't do for some of that."

Shura stopped moving the spoon toward her mouth, feeling the illusion of their proximity suddenly disappear. "I'd love to give you mine."

"We couldn't take any in the car. It would melt, that's all."

"I bet you could make some."

But Alyona said that she was almost out of cooking butter. What cream she could get her hands on, she'd make into that first.

"You could go back to Kyiv for a bit," Shura suggested.

For a long moment, Alyona didn't speak, looking somewhere past the camera. "There's not enough fuel in the cans for leisure trips," she said. Meaning, Oleg wouldn't do it.

"Anyone you could get a ride with?" Shura knew she was treading on delicate ground now. "To get some supplies," she added.

Alyona was gazing out the window again. It would be good for her, Shura thought, to be in a city that had just won its freedom, however precarious. "You have a cousin in Kyiv, don't you?"

Alyona seemed to consider this. But

there were parallel creases between her eyes when she looked in the camera again. "You don't know what it's like to be treated as an enemy because you want peace," she said.

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Was it the cousin she was talking about, or Pavel? Shura couldn't say. But that night, calling Pavel, she said, "If she felt she could have a place to herself, in Winnipeg . . . it might be easier to persuade her to come back."

He said that he had already put his parents on a list for subsidized apartments in the greater Winnipeg area. There was a housing help center he could appeal to. He could guarantee their rent. The problem, he explained, was that filling out more paperwork wouldn't do the job. They had to show up, physically, at various offices. Or at least Alyona did.

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But Shura found herself unable to talk about this with Alyona, their common ground now being, quite literally, the ground. Shura shared her own difficulties with her dry, rock-filled soil, the challenges of untangling perennial tubers. "Planting is not so bad," Alyona said. "There's hope in it, at least. It's the weeding I can't bear. It's endless." She presented her pale arms to the camera so Shura could see the map of red scratches from thickets she'd tried to rip out. Her knees were rubbed raw, she said.

Shura suggested a hot bath to soak them, and knew her mistake immediately.

"What in? I can't fill it with more than five centimetres of warm water, or he says we're wasting heating oil." But suddenly Alyona looked embarrassed by her complaint. "I've lived through worse."

"Well, of course you have. But you don't have to anymore, right? You have options this time."

"Options?"

"Stocked shelves. Good health care. It's nothing to laugh at, at our age. You need to be taking walks, not digging a spade in the ground eight hours a day."

"Sounds like you and Pavel have been talking about more than just my health."

But Shura was tired of being coy. "Look, he's found you an apartment. In your kind of situation, you'll go right to the top of the line." She didn't know how true this was but hoped it was true enough.

Alyona swung her head in an I-don't-know gesture. It wasn't enough for her to have the facts. She had to be seduced. "Change is hard only at first, but then it's just . . . life," Shura said. "Look at me. I've done it three times already."

"You think I haven't lived through enough changes?" Alyona's face was amused and cool, and Shura saw her own error. Of course she'd witnessed bigger upheavals just staying put.

"Look, even if Oleg wanted to leave Winnipeg that doesn't mean you have to . . ."

"Oleg?"

"Pavel said they were quarrelling . . ."

"Yes, and they would have gone on quarrelling for eternity if I hadn't said we were going home."

Shura felt something like a tremor in her breastbone. "*You* wanted to go back?"

"I just wanted peace, Shura. Pavel invites friends over who he knows will make Oleg upset. What can we do? We're there at his good will, so he reminds us."

The irony of this struck Shura like a blow to the temple. Her blood pressure was doing funny things again. How silly of her to think that Alyona was being kept in Ukraine against her will, that she'd lived too long on the milk of others' admiration to know what she really desired. That, like her country,

all she needed was an opportunity to decide her own fate. "Leave or stay," Shura said. "You'll have to adapt either way—it's never going back to how it was, you know. The country won't let itself be occupied."

Alyona almost, but not quite, laughed. "It already is," she said. Did Shura think it was free? That it wasn't already occupied by an army of government consultants? "By ones like Hunter Biden sitting on every board?"

It wasn't that Shura was shocked by this parroting of worn propaganda. Shura had no wish anymore to argue about the particulars. What she had failed to see was that in Alyona's view the choice was always between two compromises. The idea of an unadulterated liberty was another sham Shura had fallen for. Had Alyona always felt this way, or had it come from a lifetime of making her bargains and sticking with them? Before they hung up, she said, "You'll forgive me if I don't want to end my days in a waiting room, holding out for Canada's promises."

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Shura's aversion to that term—waiting room—still rises in her throat five days later, while she sits in her oncologist's waiting room, expecting to be called in for her marker test. The words make her think of the Turd's latest speech, accusing defectors who have left Russia of selling out their mothers for a chance to sit in the waiting rooms of the West. When the tests come back normal, she takes a long, sustaining breath, then tries to Skype Alyona. No answer. She tries the following day. Maybe they have lost their jiggered Internet. Maybe they have gone back to Kyiv. She is too embarrassed to call Pavel, not that she'd ever tell him that it was his mother's decision to leave Winnipeg, or admit what her last words to Alyona had been. "And yet who could have imagined you, Alyona Korolenko," she'd said, "living out your days as a farmer's wife?" In her parting shot, she'd gone after the one thing she'd known would make Alyona turn away: her vanity.

For weeks, she continues to hope that her friend might be the one to call her, for once. That Alyona should feel so out of place outside her country, or in it, strikes Shura as a failure of imagination much worse than her own failures of discretion. In her garden, on her knees, Shura breaks up the soil, mixing in the compost, removing the winter mulch. Afterward, she washes her hands in the kitchen, where the birds can be heard tweeting from a dogwood in bloom over her deck. The season, as it should be, has arrived at last. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Sana Krasikov on war and friendship.

POP MUSIC

JUST DANCE

Beyoncé's exuberant night-club record.

BY CARRIE BATTAN

The stakes could not be higher for Beyoncé—an artist who has challenged herself at every turn—to do more, to be more, to say more. She has, throughout her solo career, rewritten the rules of album releases, of stage performance, of music videos, of Black representation, of cultural legacy, and of self-expression. The final frontier of innovation, the only thing left for her to achieve, is to walk away from it all. And that's what she's trying to do these days—sort of. "I just quit my job," she announces on "Break My Soul," a clubby and joyous house track, on her new album, "Renaissance." "I'm looking for new motivation."

It's been six years since Beyoncé released "Lemonade," an album (and film) on which she laid bare her marital strife, and subsequent reconciliation, with Jay-Z. The album was a feat of storytelling so ambitious that it made us reconsider what a modern pop star could accomplish. For years after its release, Beyoncé worked to expand the cultural footprint of "Lemonade," first touring it in arenas around the world. In 2018, at Coachella, she blew it out into a baroque theatrical production honoring the legacy of Black collegiate marching bands. She followed that performance with a documentary about her preparation for the show, along with an accompanying live album called "Homecoming." That year, she and Jay-Z released "Everything Is Love," a joint album that was more a "Lemonade" victory lap than a new musical chapter. And yet the "Lemonade" era was so monumental that its long tail felt justified. Each iteration seemed to pump new fuel into the project.

After such a personal and cultural tour de force—not to mention six years of sociopolitical turmoil and a pandemic—Beyoncé, like so many, is now looking to lighten the mood. She's chosen the dance floor as her new spiritual home for her seventh solo album. Where "Lemonade" showcased a broad musical palette and a narrow, intensely personal subject matter, "Renaissance," which came out at the end of July, is the inverse: a work of sonic hyper-specificity with an egalitarian spirit. Stylistically, it's a tribute to Black dance music and to queer cultural touchstones, with inspirations drawn from early-nineties Chicago house music and the drag-ball culture of New York City. It's a swaggering, high-octane record: Beyoncé seems to be holding defibrillator paddles, attempting to shock some life into a culture gone inert.

In the past two decades, Beyoncé has gradually found her voice as a performer. Now, on "Renaissance," she's more interested in playing the role of a member of the world-weary masses: on a song called "Pure/Honey," she's another frustrated employee, with a "quarter tank of gas, world's at war, low on cash." "Break My Soul," the album's lead single, is a populist call to arms that interpolates the iconic synth melody of Robin S.'s "Show Me Love," one of the most beloved—and widely recycled—house tracks in history. "They work me so damn hard / Work by nine, then off past five / And they work my nerves, that's why I cannot sleep at night," Beyoncé sings. Later in the song, she brings in her longtime collaborator Big Freedia, the New Orleans bounce icon. "Release your anger, release your mind, release your job, release the time," Freedia bellows. Beyonce's proletarian swerve is almost convincing until she indirectly reminds listeners, on "Pure/Honey," of her material status. "It should cost a billion to look like this," she purrs.

At one point, the record deceives you into thinking that it's about to take a political turn with a track called "America Has a Problem," but it's a playful bait and switch: the song is a deliciously grimy ode to Southern cocaine-dealer rap of the early nineties, complete with a sample of a song called "Cocaine." "Renaissance" is an album designed to be consumed like a d.j. set, with few real song breaks. Its meticulously crafted transitions reflect the shifting moods and the physicality of the dance floor, not the constraints of a radio station or a playlist. The record ventures with an innate intelligence between mild, soulful disco grooves and discordant techno samples. Beyoncé, like the best d.j.s, understands that clubgoers' needs shift over the course of a night. At times, dancers must be gently eased along; at others, they must be abruptly jolted out of a lull.

Beyoncé seldom explains herself, but when she announced "Renaissance" she posted an unusually expository Instagram caption about its origins. She created the record, she said,

ABOVE: LALALIMOLA

Beyoncé wrote that creating "Renaissance" helped her "feel free and adventurous in a time when little else was moving."

ILLUSTRATION BY DEBORA CHEYENNE

"during a scary time for the world"—presumably a reference to the pandemic lockdown. Making the album had allowed her to "feel free and adventurous in a time when little else was moving . . . a place to be free of perfectionism and overthinking." And yet there is nothing casual or ill considered on "Renaissance," which is a grand feat of research, sampling, resource marshalling, and talent mining. Queer totems like drag balls have had plenty of mainstream moments over the years, including Madonna's single "Vogue" and "RuPaul's Drag Race," but Beyoncé is intent on proving that she is more dutiful student than fickle voyeur. A whole lot of thinking went into a record designed for feeling and moving, and each song seems to warrant its own syllabus. Beyoncé is a meticulous curator; the record creates bridges between unknowns and superstar collaborators, between mega-hits of the past and micro-genres of the present, between mass culture and subculture. (It also has built-in ethical controls: Beyoncé reportedly ran background checks on the dozens of artists involved in the record to insure that none had been accused of sexual abuse.) "Move," a spiky, bossy track, incorporates spoken-word vocals from Grace Jones and from a breakout Nigerian singer named Tems. "Pure/Honey," a ballroom house track, braids together samples sourced across decades of drag-culture history. Jay-Z's name is nestled in the lengthy writing credits of the song "Alien Superstar."

"Renaissance" is not the first time that a star of Beyoncé's stature has turned to dance music to escape the claustrophobia of the pop marketplace. Dance music, house in particular, has deep roots in Black culture, but has been perennially neutered by white artists refashioning it into generic pool-party soundtracks. Exploring the Black and Midwestern origins of club music has become a rite of passage for some Black artists at the vanguard of contemporary pop, who are perhaps looking to reclaim a piece of musical history. For years, Kanye West mined the genre as a sample-hungry producer, using Chicago house tracks to breathe life into his songs. In 2019, Frank Ocean announced that he was working on a new album inspired by house and techno music. (The album has yet to materialize.) Earlier this summer, Drake released a surprise album called "Honestly, Nevermind," a work of night-club escapism that, like "Renaissance," draws on the strident, exhilarating sounds of Jersey club, and on assorted strains of chilled-out global lounge music. It was a noble experiment from one of pop's most innovative talents, but the album often felt limp and vacant. Beyoncé's new album, thanks in part to its sense of celebratory queer flamboyance and libidinal femininity, feels more alive. The only song on "Renaissance" that sounds oddly bloodless is "Heated," which was written by Drake.

There is something bracing about a pop figurehead like Beyoncé committing to "Renaissance"'s level of aesthetic specificity. It's a bold choice and a rejection of commercial interests in the streaming-music era, which has ushered in a protracted dissolution of genre barriers. In theory, the shift to streaming should have enabled innovation; instead, it has helped squash distinct points of view, and nudged many artists in the maudlin direction of easy listening. Beyoncé's and Drake's experiments in genre might help shift things back toward specificity. It is refreshing to imagine a future in which Taylor Swift records a pure country album, Rihanna releases a dancehall album, Adele makes a gospel record, and Rosalia returns to her flamenco roots.

Over time, Beyoncé has become America's most complete performer, creating elaborate stage shows and ornate video collections to accompany each album. Nothing about this new era of Beyoncé signals that she's low on ambition: "Renaissance" is the first chapter in a trilogy of albums she's planning to release this year. But the album is missing two of her customary weapons. There are no ballads. There are also no music videos for the songs, which is perhaps another gesture of deference to the dance floor. Maybe Beyoncé means for this album to produce more feelings than thoughts. Maybe "Renaissance" is intended to be enjoyed not in front of a computer screen but among human bodies, in a night club. ♦

BOOKS

SHADOW AND ACT

Josephine Baker's war.

BY LAUREN MICHELE JACKSON

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A chameleonic gift for moving among identities aided Baker's turn at espionage.

The Negro, historically, has always been in the espionage business. Subalterns survive by being watchful, warily gathering intelligence about those for whom they labor. The flight from servitude, even from an identity, involves spycraft, too. Harriet Tubman was called Moses for a liberator who slipped the confines of caste when his mother placed him undercover among the reeds in that pitch-daubed basket. Brown skin could be cloaked in soot and stereotype or in learned airs. George Harris, one of Harriet Beecher Stowe's high-yellow fugitives, attained an inscrutable foreignness with the assistance of walnut bark: "A slight change in the tint of the skin and the color of his hair had metamorphosed him into the Spanish-looking fellow he then appeared; and as gracefulness of movement and gentlemanly manners had always been perfectly natural to him, he found no difficulty in playing the bold part he had adopted."

In this respect, Josephine Baker, who clowned her way into the heart of *les Années folles*—France's Roaring Twenties—and played the civilized primitive when she got there, might have been the smoothest operator of the twentieth century. A dancer, a singer, and the most celebrated night-club entertainer of her era, she was at once inescapable and elusive. She first captivated Parisians in 1925 when she appeared on the stage of the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, nude save for her feathers. The next year, at the Folies Bergère, audiences saw stretches of brown skin intersected by pearls and a skirt strung with tumescent bananas. As her star rose, Baker was known to stroll the streets of Paris with her fellow-performer Chiquita, a cheetah collared by a rope of diamonds. Without actually laying eyes on the woman, a visitor to Paris would see her everywhere: in photographs and on those Paul Colin posters, as a doll in a shop window, in the style of Parisiennes palming their heads with Bakerfix pomade.

Who was she, really? Baker homages are usually unsubtle and beatifying, embodied by contemporary Black denizens of the arts who managed to do what Baker couldn't: carve out stardom on American soil. Diana Ross, Beyoncé, and Rihanna have played in her silhouette; Lynn Whitfield received an Emmy when she starred in HBO's "The Josephine Baker Story" (1991). In "Frida" (2002), Baker has an affair with the title character, a nod to the free sexuality of each; she rumbas through "Midnight in Paris" (2011). Cush Jumbo staged an acclaimed tribute show, "Josephine and I," in 2015, and Carra Patterson recently played her, with strange showgirl malaise, in an episode of the horror series "Lovecraft Country." Ruth Negga and Janelle Monáe are now slated to take their turn, in a pair of TV series about her. Last November, Baker was inducted into the French Panthéon, the first woman of color to grace the hallowed monument, among such figures as Victor Hugo and Marie Curie. "Stereotypes, Joséphine Baker takes them on," President Macron said. "But she shakes them up, digs at them, turns them into sublime burlesque. A spirit of the Enlightenment ridiculing colonialist prejudices to music by Sidney Bechet."

Even if Baker's career had been restricted to her role as an entertainer, it would have had the allure of a thriller. The racecraft of the day was bound to give rise to spycraft: all identities are impostures, and Baker had a chameleonic gift for moving among them. But during the war years she was also—as a new book, "Agent Josephine" (PublicAffairs), by the British journalist Damien Lewis, chronicles with much fresh detail—a spy

in the most literal sense. There was, after all, little that La Bakaire didn't understand about resistance.

"This is not a book telling Josephine Baker's life story," Lewis cautions. His saga, though it stretches across five hundred pages, is mainly concerned with Baker's service as a secret agent, and mainly confined to the years shadowed by the Second World War. There's another sense, too, in which it isn't her life story: the account is largely told by an assemblage of third parties. Lewis's bibliography and notes make clear how deeply he has drawn on interviews with veterans, memoirs by agents, the private family archives of a British spymaster, and the wartime files of intelligence bureaus, some of which were not made available to the public until 2020. But Baker maintained a code of silence about the seven years she spent fighting the Nazis and, Lewis writes, "went to her grave in 1975 taking many of those secrets with her."

She could be sly about other facts, too. Like many colored women intent on arranging their destiny, Baker subjected her origin story to copious revisions. "I don't lie," she said. "I improve on life." Her autobiographies can generously be called loose collaborations: "Les Mémoires de Joséphine Baker," published in 1927, when she was twenty-one, and updated in later years, was in drafts before she and her co-author, Marcel Sauvage, shared a language. And once they did? "It would then be thoroughly funny—and at times, very difficult," Sauvage wrote in the book's preface. "Miss Baker does not like to remember." Her third autobiography, "Josephine," was published in 1977, two years after her death, produced from folders of notes, press clippings, documents, and the rough draft of a memoir that her last husband, Jo Bouillon, pulled together with the assistance of a co-author. The resulting Baker is another assemblage, an "I" laid alongside the testimony of others who were enlisted, as Bouillon writes, "whenever there was information lacking." More candid was the biography "Josephine: The Hungry Heart," published in 1993 and written by her adopted son Jean-Claude Baker with the journalist Chris Chase; the effort to sort through his mother's various fictions is notated in its pages. "Josephine was a fabulist," he writes. "You couldn't hold her to strict account as you could a tailor who measured slipcovers."

She had her reasons. "A black childhood is always a little sad," Baker told Sauvage. Hers began on June 3, 1906, in St. Louis, when a dance-hall girl of local renown, Carrie McDonald, delivered a baby whom she named Freda Josephine. The baby was plump, and came to be called Tumpy (for Humpty Dumpty), a moniker that persisted well after poverty had thinned her into a ragamuffin. The identity of her father remains disputed, and became an opportunity for Baker to improvise. Lewis notes, "She had variously claimed that her father was a famous black lawyer, a Jewish tailor, a Spanish dancer, or a white German then resident in America." The shifting myth was mirrored in the ethnic promiscuity of her on-screen roles: the tropical daughter of a colonial official, possibly Spanish, in "La Sirène des Tropiques" (1927), a Tunisian Eliza Doolittle, in "Princesse Tam-Tam" (1935).

Little Tumpy wanted to dance, but opportunities were scarce. By 1921, Baker had fled her St. Louis life and her second husband—she was all of fifteen when she married the man, William Howard Baker—and was performing as a comic chorine among the Dixie Steppers, a travelling vaudeville troupe. Aiming higher, she booked a one-way passage to New York, where she ended up working as a backstage dresser for the all-Black revue "Shuffle Along." When a member of the touring cast fell ill—it was just a matter of time—Baker stepped in with fizzing style. After the show's successful run, she landed a role in the 1924 Broadway musical "The Chocolate Dandies," playing a blackface version of Topsy. She was nineteen when she was recruited by a society woman and impresario named Caroline Dudley Reagan for a new production across the Atlantic. "La Revue Nègre" opened at the Champs on October 2nd that year. That evening, a *vedette* was born.

You surely had to be there. Reviewers tripped over gerunds in their efforts to commit the wriggling thing to print. In the jungle dreamscape "Danse Sauvage," Baker, wearing little more than a feathered loincloth, entered on the shoulders of her male dance partner, upside down and in a full split. André Levinson, perhaps the foremost ballet critic of the day, wrote:

> It was as though the jazz, catching on the wing the vibrations of this body, was interpreting word by word its fantastic monologue. . . . The gyrations of this cynical yet merry mountebank, the good-natured grin on her large mouth, suddenly give way to visions from which good humor is entirely absent. In the short *pas de deux* of the savages, which came as the finale of the Revue Nègre, there was a wild splendor and magnificent animality.

He was sure he had glimpsed "the black Venus that haunted Baudelaire."

At a certain point, her efflorescence seems to depart from linear narrative, demanding a form suited to the artistic flights of the era: collage. The appeal of La Joséphine—in Europe, at least; America never ran quite as hot for her—exhausted hyperbole. "The most sensational woman anyone ever saw," Ernest Hemingway pronounced. "Beyond time in the sense that emotion is beyond arithmetic" was E. E. Cummings's estimation. Le Corbusier, a lover of hers, dressed himself in Baker drag, blackening his skin and wearing a feathered waistband. George Balanchine gave her dance lessons; Alexander Calder sculpted her out of wire. Adolf Loos, after a chance meeting, started sketching an architectural wonder to be called Baker House, with viewing windows cut into an indoor swimming pool. But Baker's power wasn't a matter of being hoisted upon the shoulders of great men; she regarded most of them with equable indifference. In a 1933 interview, she flubbed the name of a notable Spanish painter: "You know, Pinazaro, or what is his name, the one everyone talks about?" As Margo Jefferson has observed of Baker, "She was her own devoted muse."

By the thirties, Baker had refined her visual signature. The show "Paris Qui Remue," at the illustrious Casino de Paris, made this plain. The feathers were gone. Writing for this magazine, in 1930, Janet Flanner reported, "Her caramel-colored body which overnight became a legend in Europe is still magnificent, but it has become thinned, trained, almost civilized." A Paris critic announced, with greater enthusiasm, "She left us a négresse, droll and primitive; she comes back a great artist."

Not everyone was entertained. Aus-

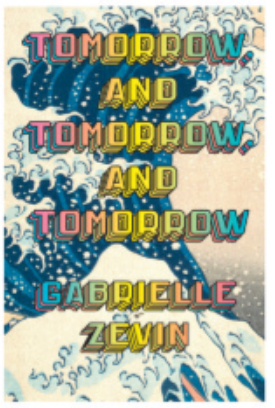
trian headlines denounced the "Black Devil" touring the country's cities; at the Theater des Westens, in Berlin, Baker was hounded out of town three weeks into a scheduled six-month engagement. In the late nineteen-thirties, her face appeared on a leaflet issued by the Nazi propaganda minister Joseph Goebbels, as a potent representative of degenerate, *untermenschlich* art. Shortly thereafter, Benito Mussolini banned Baker from Italy. Such enmity was intense, and intensely reciprocated.

How could a named target of the Fascists serve as a secret agent? Her very celebrity would provide camouflage, or so the theatre manager Daniel Marouani argued when he brought up her name with the French counter-intelligence agency, the Deuxième Bureau. For certain Bureau officers, the prospect called to mind the case of Mata Hari, the Dutch dancer who was recruited by the French during the First World War and then executed by them when she was revealed to have been a double agent for the Germans. Fame coupled with inexperience could prove costly.

Still, the Deuxième Bureau was in dire straits: cash-strapped, understaffed, and, worse, ignored by political officials. "It was far easier to gather intelligence than it was to get those in power to act upon it," Lewis writes. Counter-espionage would require the deployment of amateur, loyal, and—vitally—unpaid sources, who were designated Honorary Correspondents.

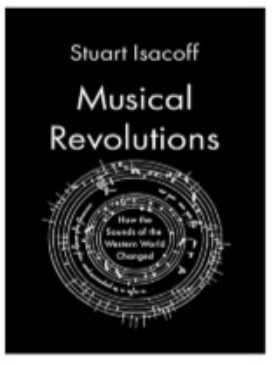
If Baker has a co-star in Lewis's book, it's Captain Jacques Abtey, an agent at the Deuxième Bureau. He was thirty when, in September of 1939, he went to meet La Joséphine. His mission was to determine whether she was willing and able to be entrusted with undercover service. Arriving at her mansion in the posh Paris suburb of Le Vésinet, he found her wearing not the expected finery but a felt hat and faded trousers that were suited to her current task—scrounging for snails in the garden to feed to her ducks. Soon enough, though, champagne was served, and Baker made a toast: "To France." Abtey was taken by her fierce French nationalism and, Lewis writes, by "her almost childlike quality, at turns playful and pensive, and her schoolgirlish habit of wrinkling her forehead when

BRIEFLY NOTED



Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, and Tomorrow, *by Gabrielle Zevin (Knopf)*. Having met as children, playing Super Mario Bros. in a hospital, Sam and Sadie, whose relationship forms the core of this novel, become reacquainted in college. There they develop a video game, featuring a child who "ages and takes the damage inflicted by the narrative and time itself," which makes them famous and rich. Their friendship lasts for almost twenty years but frays amid fights and a shocking tragedy. Woven throughout are meditations on originality, appropriation, the similarities between video games and other forms of art, the liberating possibilities of inhabiting a virtual world, and the ways in which platonic love can be deeper and more rewarding—especially in the context of a creative partnership—than romance.

Hurricane Girl, *by Marcy Dermansky (Knopf)*. Allison, the protagonist of this subversively wry, post-Weinstein thriller, is a screenwriter specializing in horror who leaves an abusive Hollywood boyfriend for the North Carolina coast. When a hurricane destroys her home, she appears on the TV news; an initially helpful cameraman later becomes violent after she rejects his advances. The narrative teases suspense from the trauma (and possible brain damage) caused by the attack, as Allison becomes increasingly erratic and lashes out at almost everyone around her. Her resentment of power imbalances—doctor-patient, male-female, older-younger siblings—vacillates between perspicacity and paranoia.



Musical Revolutions, *by Stuart Isacoff (Knopf)*. Attempting to chart the most important turning points in Western classical and jazz music, this history traverses immense territory, drawing unexpected connections between artists—for instance, the harmonic links between Debussy and Charlie Parker. The spirit of revolution reverberates most potently in an almost novelistic account of the eleventh-century monk Guido D'Arezzo's crusade to standardize music notation. Isacoff's descriptions frequently help us see anew things we might take for granted: in polyphony, tones are "coiled around" a cantus firmus "like climbing vines"; the lines of the musical staff that Guido invents are "like rungs of an imaginary ladder."

Yield, *by Anne Truitt (Yale)*. The sculptor, who died in 2004, at the age of eighty-three, began keeping a journal in 1974, in an effort to understand herself. This latest volume, the fourth to be published, gathers entries from 2001 to 2002. Its subjects include family life (she had three children) and the ruthlessness and "dumb tenacity" with which she defended her artistic career from the demands of motherhood and marriage; her friendships; her ongoing projects; anecdotes from the lives of other artists; and her favorite books and works of art. The last entry finds Truitt contemplating Aristotle and planning to order armatures for a new sculpture, "content because I was secure, curious because being alive was new."

lost in thought." He was also "struck by the dichotomy of this superstar: her split life." The agent did not seem to consider an alternative geometry, in which she wore many more than two faces.

After he anointed her "one of us," she was asked to exploit her Italian and Japanese contacts for any useful information they might let slip. Four years earlier, Baker had expressed support for Italy's invasion of Ethiopia, believing that it would emancipate the country's enslaved people. That otherwise unfortunate show of faith gained her the devotion of a loose-lipped attaché at the Italian Embassy. "She'd realised the best way to pump him for information was to provoke and contradict him, in response to which he had fallen into the habit of whispering reassurances into her ear," Lewis writes. Whatever she learned, she passed along to Abtey.

It was the start of a partnership, professional and romantic. Both Baker and Abtey were married; both were at least nominally separated. Abtey had sent his wife and child to the French countryside as the war heated up. Baker's situation was more honorable. In 1937, as the bride of the French industrialist Jean Lion, she cast off her U.S. citizenship and renounced her flashy life style. "I have finished with the exotic," she told the press. She was prepared to be "just plain Madame Lion." But domesticity on patriarchal terms didn't suit her. After learning that Lion was catting around, and spending her money, she filed for divorce in 1939.

As Hitler's troops advanced, Baker maintained her life in and around Paris for as long as she could, making use of her piloting skills—flying lessons had been a gift from Lion—to transport aid to refugees in the Low Countries, and performing for troops along the Maginot Line. Early in June of 1940, Baker, prompted by Abtey, left her beloved city, days before German troops stalked its avenues. Her car carried petrol-filled champagne bottles, along with an elderly Belgian Jewish couple, fugitives she had taken in.

Her destination, the Château des Milandes, overlooking the Dordogne, was a place she had leased three years earlier as a country idyll. The fifteenth-century castle now became a fortress once again, harboring a ragtag Resistance group. Amid mobilizations for de Gaulle's Free French forces, Baker and Abtey found time to take lazy canoe trips along the river. He also taught her how to use a pistol, and equipped her with a cyanide pill in the event of capture.

Although Milandes was situated in the "free zone" of Vichy, the terms of armistice required that all French security forces report to the newly throttled government. Officially, there was no longer a Deuxième Bureau; unofficially, its agents had simply gone to ground, including the crew at Milandes. One fall day, as Baker met with two former Bureau agents, a group of Nazi officials arrived at the château. Baker, after shooing her *résistantes* into hiding, struck her pose as the lady of the house, hotly impatient with the German intrusion, especially once a search warrant appeared. In Lewis's account, drawn from the writings of a Resistance veteran named Gilbert Renault (nom de guerre: Colonel Rémy), her sheer effrontery assuaged suspicion. She acted as if she had nothing to hide.

Baker and Abtey could not lie in wait forever, though, and a former commander at the Bureau, Paul Paillole, had a job for them. He had already set up a shadow network in the city of Marseille, under the cover of an agricultural service. But he urgently needed to reëstablish lines of communication with Great Britain. Otherwise, whatever intelligence he gathered couldn't be put to

use, and Britain would be left ignorant of the enemy's movements on the Continent and in North Africa. He compiled a dossier, which included details about Nazi airbases across France, known Abwehr agents roaming Britain and Ireland, and Axis plans for taking Gibraltar. The information was to be transported by someone who could move freely, and who knew how to use her incandescence to cast shadows.

Shadows had long been a Baker specialty. In the 1934 film "Zouzou," Baker, in the title role, discovers her immense, dancing shadow against the back wall of a stage. She is entranced, and then so are we, as the camera strays from the human in favor of a thrown silhouette that remains unmistakably Baker's. What we're watching "is neither pure illusion nor authentic embodiment," the scholar Anne Anlin Cheng writes in a book-length study of Baker's art. Cheng nicely describes Baker's idiosyncratic method—enlisting shadows, gold lamé, animal hides, and her own golden skin—as "disappearance into appearance."

Now, in November of 1940, Baker and Abtey made their way by train through Franco's Spain, with Baker wrapped in furs and Abtey, as Lewis writes, "lurking in her shadow." The cover story was that Baker was touring again, assisted by "Jacques Hébert," her nondescript tour manager. Alongside costumes and makeup, her trunks held Paillole's dossier, written in invisible ink among the notes on Baker's sheet music. As Baker disembarked, nobody concerned himself with her luggage or with the man attending to it. Instead, Lewis recounts, French, Spanish, and German officials "crowded around Josephine, desperate to see, to feel, to touch; to bask in the radiance of that famous smile." In Lisbon, as Baker drew attention—"I come to dance, to sing," she told reporters—Abtey saw to it that the files passed from the British Embassy there into the hands of Wilfred Dunderdale, a spymaster in London's Secret Intelligence Service. "Her stardom was her cloak," Lewis writes.

In the summer of 1941, Baker and Abtey were in Morocco, having gained, Lewis says, another vital link to Britain, this time through a group of wily American diplomats. Then Baker fell ill. She was diagnosed with peritonitis and was essentially bedridden for more than a year. According to Lewis, her sickbed, in Casablanca's Comte Clinic, became a rendezvous point, as contacts arrived as "visitors" to give their best to an ailing performer. "Josephine Baker's celebrity was global, which meant that practically anyone might want to pay a visit," Lewis tells us. It made for an ideal intelligence hub.

The toll her illness had taken was apparent, though. Baker grew "bone thin," her nurse recalled, and had fits of weeping when she wasn't putting on a

show for visitors. One day, Maurice Chevalier, a quondam co-star of hers who happily performed in Occupied Paris, showed up at the Comte Clinic but was turned away. Afterward, Lewis recounts, he spun the story of Baker "dying in a small room of a Casablanca hospital." As word spread, Baker received memorial tributes, including from her friend Langston Hughes. On December 6, 1942, a month after the Allied invasion of North Africa, the *Times* ran the headline "JOSEPHINE BAKER IS SAFE."

After her recovery, Baker resumed performing for Allied troops, in a fund-raising and morale-boosting tour alongside the likes of Laurence Olivier and Vivien Leigh. She and Abtey also assembled a final docket of intelligence for Free France. As she performed in Alexandria and Cairo and Damascus and Beirut, hobnobbing with the beau monde, the energy of the region was clear. Europeans were not the only ones seeking freedom.

"They're talking about birdhouses again. Time to send them birdhouse ads."

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Baker and Abtey's romance scarcely outlasted the war. She later wrote that he was someone she could have settled down with. But, Lewis tells us, Abtey confided to a friend that "he could not countenance being 'Monsieur Baker'; in other words, living in her shadow." In 1947, Baker bought the Château des Milandes outright and married the French composer Jo Bouillon. Still, she and Abtey continued to support each other throughout the next decades, testifying to the heroism of each other's exploits, with Abtey even returning to reside at Milandes. Did his stories about those exploits improve on life? It's impossible not to wonder: deception, manipulation, and pretense were, in various ways, part of his and her professional repertoire. But French officials made their own assessment. In 1957, Baker was awarded the Légion d'Honneur for military service.

For her, there were battles still to be waged. She had promised the Black American G.I.s. she encountered on the African front that a war on segregation would follow the war on Fascism. Throughout the nineteen-fifties and sixties, Baker reasserted her racial egalitarianism, refusing to perform in segregated clubs, and shaming establishments that declined to serve Black patrons. Manhattan's Stork Club was one such establishment, and, on a fateful night in 1951, Baker made a show of walking out of the place. (So did Grace Kelly, in solidarity.) The newspaper columnist Walter Winchell, who was present at the club, did nothing, and Baker reproached him for condoning discrimination. Winchell, a staunch supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy, responded in print, accusing Baker of harboring "Communist sympathies." Her visa was revoked, returning her to France. The F.B.I., once the recipient of intelligence facilitated by Baker's wartime activity for the Resistance, opened a dossier on her.

Baker sometimes described herself as a fugitive from injustice: "I ran away from home. I ran away from St. Louis. And then I ran away from the United States of America, because of that terror of discrimination, that horrible beast which paralyzes one's very soul and body." Yet she thrived on the tension between shadow and act. As a cabaret performer, she played to the colonial imagination even as she declared her own independence. Both artist and fetish, she was a chorine who evaded Jim Crow's reach for the embrace of *la négrophilie*—then placed that fetishized body in the service of liberation. She was fifty-seven when she spoke at the 1963 March on Washington, one of two women (the other was Daisy Bates) who were permitted a speech that day. She came dressed in the stately, decorated uniform of the Free French Air Force.

"I am not a young woman now, friends," she told the quarter-million people gathered on the Mall. "My life is behind me." She pledged to use her ebbing flame to light a fire in them. But although her performance schedule had slowed to a crawl, and her finances had grown tight, she embarked on the creation of a new race, adopting a dozen children from various continents and countries. She called them the Rainbow Tribe, summoning them either to another dreamscape or to another form of resistance. In a Christmas card, she wrote of "twelve tiny tots who were blown together by a soft wind as a symbol of universal brotherhood." (Unsurprisingly, Jean-Claude Baker describes a distinctly chaotic mode of child-rearing.) In 1975, she managed to perform at a Paris tribute revue, celebrating a half century in entertainment. When she died, a few days later, of a cerebral hemorrhage, she became the only woman from America whose funeral saw full French military honors.

What most beguiles us today is the sense that a proud revolutionary lurked beneath the winsome savage, the snowy smile. Spycraft wasn't so much what Baker did as who she was. The most public of figures in her heyday, she pulled off the trick of vanishing into visibility, of disappearing into the limelight. She still does. Now as then, however, the silhouette remains. ♦

ON TELEVISION

PRACTICE MAKES PERFECT

"The Rehearsal," on HBO.

BY NAOMI FRY

The opening gambit of "The Rehearsal," on HBO, is deceptively simple. "I've been told that my personality can make people uncomfortable," the show's creator and host, Nathan Fielder, explains, in a voice-over, as he enters the apartment of a middle-aged man named Kor. "Shoes off? . . . Shirt off?" Fielder cracks to Kor, adding, in his narration, that, when meeting someone for the first time, "every joke is a gamble." Luckily, there's a solution to this uncertainty: Fielder has found that rehearsing uncomfortable life events before they take place can produce a "happy outcome." We then watch him, in a flashback, prepare for his meeting with Kor, using a full-scale model of the man's apartment—the details of which were underhandedly obtained by actors posing as technicians sent to investigate a fake gas leak. "Shoes off? . . . Shirt off?" we see Fielder practice with an actor playing Kor, who bursts into laughter.

"The Rehearsal," like any reality show, is dependent on its participants' willingness to do almost anything in front of a camera. Kor, whom the production team found on Craigslist, doesn't seem disturbed by the revelation that Fielder broke into his apartment, and, when he is given the opportunity to rehearse his own life event, he replies, "That would be extremely appealing."

The Canadian comedian Nathan Fielder is a savant of cringe.

For more than a decade, Kor has been lying to his bar-trivia team about having a master's degree, and he hopes to come clean to one of his teammates, Tricia. To that end, Fielder builds a meticulous replica of the Alligator Lounge, the Brooklyn bar that holds the trivia night, to allow Kor and an actress playing Tricia to rehearse the minutiae that will lead to his moment of unburdening. Fielder helps run the simulation, aided by a flowchart: if Tricia arrives in a bad mood, then Kor will make a joke about someone "plucking" her nerves before moving on to conversation topics such as "twins" and "Presidents." Fielder, who wears a laptop strapped to his chest, hovers over the proceedings like a bizarro middle-management emissary.

This is just the beginning of the performative refractions of reality that Fielder sets in motion. He arranges a way for the Tricia impersonator to meet the real Tricia, in an intricate scheme that involves the actress posing as a birdwatcher, so that she can mimic Tricia more accurately. Once it becomes clear, after several rehearsals, that Kor won't be able to go through with the confession unless he is having a "good trivia night," Fielder himself poses as a blogger and meets with the trivia night's host, so that he can get the answers to the questions in advance and surreptitiously teach them to Kor, who is willing to cut corners when it comes to emotional authenticity in his social life but would never dream of cheating at a quiz game.

Fielder, a thirty-nine-year-old comedian from Canada, is a savant of cringe. His previous project, "Nathan for You," which ran on Comedy Central from 2013 to 2017, deconstructed the "Kitchen Nightmares"-style expert-advice reality-show genre. Fielder acted as a consultant for struggling small businesses, but his shtick was that he proposed absurd ideas, which ranged from getting a frozen-yogurt shop to develop a poop flavor to having a car mechanic wear a lie detector while giving price estimates. Sometimes the bad ideas were wildly successful, and this was part of the show's meta-joke; "Nathan for You" was a Canadian's sendup of the American Dream. But most of the humor came from watching Fielder persuade the business owners to compromise themselves. "So, it's a trade-off between living lon-

ILLUSTRATION BY ZACK ROSEBRUGH

ger, or dying and getting to be Santa," a poker-faced Fielder tells a gentle mall Claus he is advising, whose doctor has encouraged him to lose weight. In another hard-to-watch segment, Fielder convinces a travel agent to start offering funeral services to her elderly clientele, as a "last-ditch effort to squeeze out as much as you can from your customers before they're gone for good."

"The Rehearsal" relies on the same dynamics that made "Nathan for You" work; both shows foreground Fielder as an apparently vulnerable, receding weirdo—his shoulders a touch hunched, his graying hair molded into a tech worker's slablike coif—who also happens to be uniquely skilled at manipulating the people around him. But if "Nathan for You" made consistent use of the disruptive "is he fucking with us or is he for real?" tactics of the late anti-comedian Andy Kaufman, "The Rehearsal"—brilliant, audacious, occasionally disturbing—takes things a step further, by borrowing from the byzantine narrative configurations of another Kaufman: the film director Charlie. Much like "Being John Malkovich," "Adaptation," and "Synecdoche, New York," in which the protagonists engage with reality by confronting a nutty metafictional version of it, "The Rehearsal" probes the divide between art and life, and the potential of the former to transform the latter. What happens, the show asks, when people who struggle to find connection and meaning attempt to achieve it by layering their lives with the scrim of performance?

The second episode of the series takes Fielder to Oregon, where a single, childless fortysomething named Angela signs up to rehearse the raising of a son from infancy to age eighteen. For the simulation, which spans multiple episodes, the production moves Angela into a house outfitted with surveillance cameras, where the process of child rearing is accelerated by a rotating cast of young actors and, at night, a robot baby. Meanwhile, other strands are spun out: Fielder helps a man named Patrick rehearse a confrontation with his brother over their late grandfather's estate, an exercise that somehow comes to involve Patrick wiping the butt of an old man playing—get ready for a mouthful—the grandfather of the actor who is playing Patrick's brother. (Even in his most convoluted setups, Fielder doesn't forget the simple pleasures of toilet humor; it's as if he's reciting a math theorem and capping it with a fart noise.) Later, Fielder travels to Los Angeles, where he establishes an ad-hoc acting school designed around "the Fielder Method," in order to train thespians to participate in rehearsals. The whole thing is very "Dogville" on steroids.

Watching "The Rehearsal," I marvelled at Fielder's ability to beat a premise into the ground harder and more inventively than I'd ever seen before. There is something intensely comical, and demented, about the disproportionate effort at play here, the enormous labor devoted to minor, otherwise much more easily solvable problems. (HBO, too, deserves props for entrusting Fielder with a seemingly unlimited budget for such an unconventional project.) But there is also the potentially ugly issue of control. Writing for this magazine's Web site, my colleague Richard Brody noted that Fielder's demeanor struck him as "arrogant, cruel, and, above all, indifferent." Certainly, Fielder's style of comedy includes, in its grasp, other people—people who definitionally cannot be in on the joke. In one episode of "Nathan for You," Fielder advises a young Latina woman who runs a housekeeping service to offer "the fastest clean in the country," by sending dozens of her female employees to simultaneously work on one man's apartment. "Are you interested in any of them?" Fielder jokes to the man after the women are done. (The service's owner recently told Vulture that she wouldn't have participated had she known the show was a comedy.)

We probably wouldn't have "The Rehearsal" without eighties and nineties candid-camera programs, or without Sacha Baron Cohen's "Borat" movies. (Fielder directed a couple of episodes of Baron Cohen's TV show "Who Is America?") The series also calls to mind the docu-naïf-style œuvre of Louis Theroux or Nick Broomfield, not to mention reality shows like "Big Brother" and recent nonfiction offerings like Netflix's "Tiger King." All these works are, at their very worst, aloofly voyeuristic, implicating not just their creators but also their viewers in a kind of theatre of humiliation, specifically vis-à-vis the weirder, more colorful areas of contemporary American culture.

Often, these works try to obfuscate the mechanisms of power that drive them. But I was struck by Fielder's commitment to exposing the web he weaves for "The Rehearsal"'s participants. "Nathan . . . likes to manipulate people," Angela, whose hatred for Fielder becomes more apparent with each episode, says. "He lies a lot." Early on, Fielder encourages Angela, a Christian with a deep belief in conspiracy theories, to find a co-parent for her rehearsal (and, hopefully, for real life). She hits it off with a like-minded man named Robbin. (He is hyper-attuned to so-called angel numbers; she thinks that the Devil runs Google.) He temporarily moves in with her, but he is driven away by Fielder's enhanced-interrogation-style tactics. At night, while viewing real-time surveillance footage, Fielder demands more noise from the robot baby—"Keep him crying! Don't let up!"—leaving Robbin sleepless and frustrated. Once he departs, Fielder decides to step into the role of co-parent and to complete the rehearsal with Angela. How much of this was planned is unclear, but a subsequent scene in which Fielder calls the parents of the child actors to inform them of his new, fatherly involvement is another object lesson in the way that power can seep into even the most professedly intimate of nooks. A flowchart script guides Fielder through the calls: "If you're feeling even the slightest bit uncomfortable and would like to opt out, that is no problem. There are many families eager to take your spot and receive the generous participation fee."

Can intimacy also emerge from the wreckage of power, beyond doll babies and playacting, beyond the reliance on self-conscious artifice? The thing about emotions, Fielder realizes, is that "they're not easy to engineer." How does one not only act authentically but feel authentically? "The Rehearsal" is a self-portrait of a man trying to reach past his relentless solipsism. "Every now and then, there are these glimmers," Fielder says over footage of him playing with one of the many child actors. "These moments where you forget and you just feel like a family. That's when you know the rehearsal is working." ♦

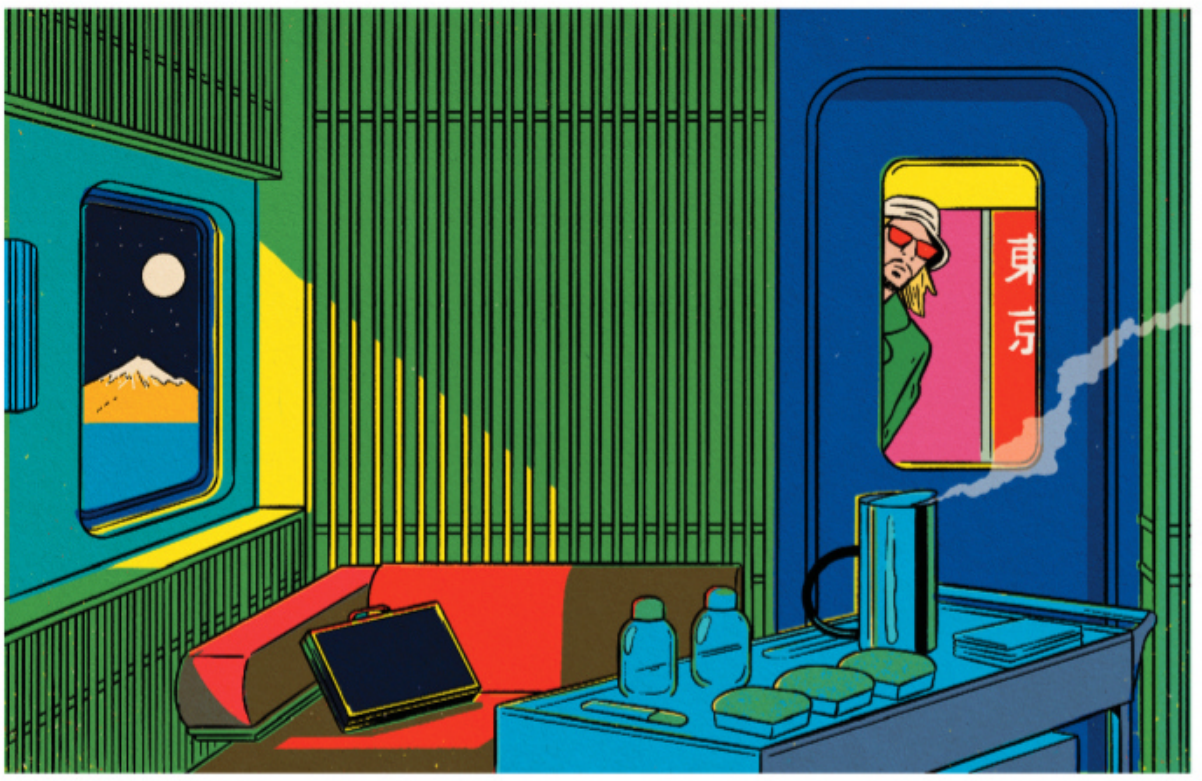
THE CURRENT CINEMA

MIDSUMMER MURDERS

"Bullet Train" and "Bodies Bodies Bodies."

BY ANTHONY LANE

Asked why he chose to wear a skirt to the Los Angeles première of his latest film, "Bullet Train," Brad Pitt replied, "We're all going to die, so let's mess it up." An excellent point. With geopolitical and ecological crises set to deepen, I am already looking forward to whatever Chanel creation Pitt will sport at the Oscars of 2023. His comic nihilism is certainly of a piece with "Bullet Train," which—viewed in tandem with another new release, "Bodies Bodies Bodies"—suggests a thoughtful tactic on the part of the movie industry. As the pandemic very gradually ebbs, and as the next doom waits in line, we are not only being treated to multiple spasms of extreme violence but invited to laugh along with them. Talk about messed up.



In David Leitch's film, Brad Pitt stars as an assassin on assignment in Japan.

Pitt's role in "Bullet Train" is that of Ladybug, who is an assassin by trade—an honorable calling, which happens to be shared by most of the other characters. We have Tangerine (Aaron Taylor-Johnson) and Lemon (Brian Tyree Henry), commonly referred to as the Twins. We have a couple of female killers, the Hornet (Zazie Beetz) and the Prince (Joey King), a vision of youthful innocence in pink, who is not to be trusted for an instant. We have a snake (a proper snake, not an insidious human), with a bite that makes your eyes bleed. In the final act, we have the White Death (Michael Shannon), whom Ladybug addresses as Mr. Death. And we have the Wolf, played by Benito Antonio Martínez Ocasio, familiar to rap fans as Bad Bunny. It seems that Mr. Bunny is using "Bullet Train" to branch out into acting. He may want to branch back in.

The film is directed by David Leitch, and it comes with a central kick: all the homicidal specialists are on a train, running from Tokyo to Kyoto. Though superfast, as befits the slam-bang plot, the train is also illogically slow, stretching an itinerary of two or three hours into an all-night ride. (To be fair, a regular tension does arise at the station stops, when the doors open for one minute exactly.) Isn't there something old-school about this labored mustering of maleficents? For all the fountains of gore, are we not basically watching a juiced-up version of "Murder on the Orient Express"? At least Agatha Christie gave us a narrative nut to crack; here, bamboozling is in short supply. The story turns on a briefcase full of ransom money, which Ladybug is bidden to retrieve, and for which his fellow-professionals will fight him to the death. The fighting is relentless, and, in the hands of the resourceful Ladybug, the briefcase itself becomes both weapon and shield.

Anyone who has, presumably under duress, sat through the collected works of Guy Ritchie, or Matthew Vaughn's "Kick-Ass" (2010) and "Kingsman" flicks, will recognize the unlovely breed to which "Bullet Train" belongs. Cocky, conceited, and apostolically eager to touch the hem of Tarantino, such movies delight in pummelling our senses while drawing us in with a conspiratorial wink. Take Tangerine and Lemon, to whom a great deal of Leitch's film is devoted. Because they can't agree on whether it was sixteen or seventeen victims whom they offed on a previous job, a flashback shows them in mid-slaughter, accompanied by Engelbert Humperdinck on the soundtrack singing "I'm Forever Blowing Bubbles." (A lurid title even flashes up, confirming that it's Humperdinck. Thanks for that.) Similarly, Lemon is obsessed with Thomas the Tank Engine, carrying around a page of children's stickers; the tonal mismatch, amusing for the first ten seconds, is then repeated ad infinitum.

Compare, if you can bear to, another pairing: Charters and Caldicott, the English chums inserted by Hitchcock into the train-bound drollery of "The Lady Vanishes," in 1938. (Two years later, they were summoned back, by popular demand, for Carol Reed's "Night Train to Munich.") A chorus of two fools, like Tangerine and Lemon, they were as mad about cricket as Lemon is about Thomas the Tank Engine. How lightly that madness was worn, though, and with what quick grace they saw the moral error of their ways; remember the superb scene in which the peaceable Charters was shot in the hand, barely flinched, and grasped at once who the real enemy was and why battle had to be joined. Dramatically speaking, Hitch achieved more, with that one

ILLUSTRATION BY SIMON BAILLY

small spillage of blood, than Leitch can deliver in two hours of carnage. In truth, the only soul to emerge with any credit from "Bullet Train" is Brad Pitt, who drifts through the tumult in a haze of unbothered charm. To say that the whole thing concludes with a total train wreck is both accurate and misleading. The wreckage was there all along.

If your thirst for mayhem has not been slaked by "Bullet Train," more is on tap in "Bodies Bodies Bodies." The film is written by Sarah DeLappe, from a story by Kristen Roupenian, and directed by Halina Reijn. The first sounds we hear are birdsong, a breeze, and soft kisses, followed by a declaration of love, but those are a diversionary joke. The movie is a beastly thing, and proud of it—a gaily sadistic kerfuffle, from which all traces of tenderness have been expunged. At best, the characters are randy with self-adulation. As one of them says, "I look like I fuck. And that's the vibe I like to put out there."

The smoochers at the beginning are Sophie (Amandla Stenberg) and her girlfriend, Bee (Maria Bakalova). They have been together for ages—like, I don't know, *weeks*. Don't waste any effort trying to work out who is, or was, seeing whom; just accept that relationships, in the world of this film, last about as long as an open carton of milk. The souring starts at once. Also, being in a couple doesn't mean that you are well informed about your other half. Sophie, for instance, believes that Bee attended Utah State University, and there is talk of her being Russian, but that's it. Anyway, they are on their way to a fancy house in the countryside, where Bee will be introduced to a gang of Sophie's friends. Lucky Bee.

The houseparty comprises Emma (Chase Sui Wonders), Jordan (Myha'la Herrold), Alice (Rachel Sennott), Greg (Lee Pace), and David (Pete Davidson). We soon realize that the place belongs to David's folks, who are away. In what dire lapse of sanity, you want to ask, did they leave it in his care? Apart from Jordan, the daughter of mere college professors, everyone here is couched in privilege and wealth. And, apart from Greg, who is older and semi-detached, everyone hails from Gen Z, and has the tics—linguistic, emotional, and technological—to prove it. The dialogue, cunningly stacked by Roupenian and DeLappe, is a bonfire of inanities and vanities, incandescent with blame and sudden spite: "Don't call her a psychopath. That's so ableist." "You are so toxic." "Feelings are facts." "I have body dysmorphia!" "You hate-listen to her podcast." (That was a new one to me. I should spend less time love-reading Jane Austen.) We also get the wistful shrug of "You're coked out. We're all coked out," which is a direct descendant of James Thurber's cartoon caption, first printed in these pages in 1935, "Well, I'm disenchanted, too. We're *all* disenchanted." Every age is proud of its pains.

Sociologically, in other words, the film has quite a nerve, setting out both to woo and to aggravate the very demographic that it represents onscreen. It wants to have its cake, slice it, blitz it, roll it out in little lines, and snort it. The irony is that such blatant hankering to catch the moment cannot help but remind you of moments past. When Reijn overlays a sylvan landscape with music of brutal aggression, she is pinching a trick that Michael Haneke pulled in the opening of "Funny Games" (1997) and again in the 2007 remake. And the plot of the new movie? Brace yourself for a ludicrous hurricane, which blows in after Sophie and Bee arrive, battening down the dramatis personae for the next hour or more, and keeping them a) wet, b) unable to call for help, and c) in harm's way. All of the above would have brought a slow smile to the long face of Boris Karloff, the star of "The Old Dark House" (1932), which came with a handy tempest of its own.

As for the title, "Bodies Bodies Bodies" is the name of a game, played by David and his guests as the storm kicks in. After the drawing of lots, one person gets to be the assassin, pretending to "kill" another player with a tap on the back. The others then gather round to solve the crime. Except, in this case, you'll never guess what: someone *actually dies*. Then someone else. And so on. The suspense, to be honest, is pretty half-cocked, and made to seem more intense than it is by outbursts of dimly choreographed panic, yet there is a genuine twist: in traditional murder mysteries, you don't much care who croaks, but this was the first occasion on which I found myself actively willing the extinction of every single character, if possible in conspicuous agony. Not one deserves to survive. I did briefly wonder: if Bee is indeed Russian, could she be part of a secret Putinist plan, sent to destroy this hotbed of rich Western decadents from within? Nah. They can do it all by themselves. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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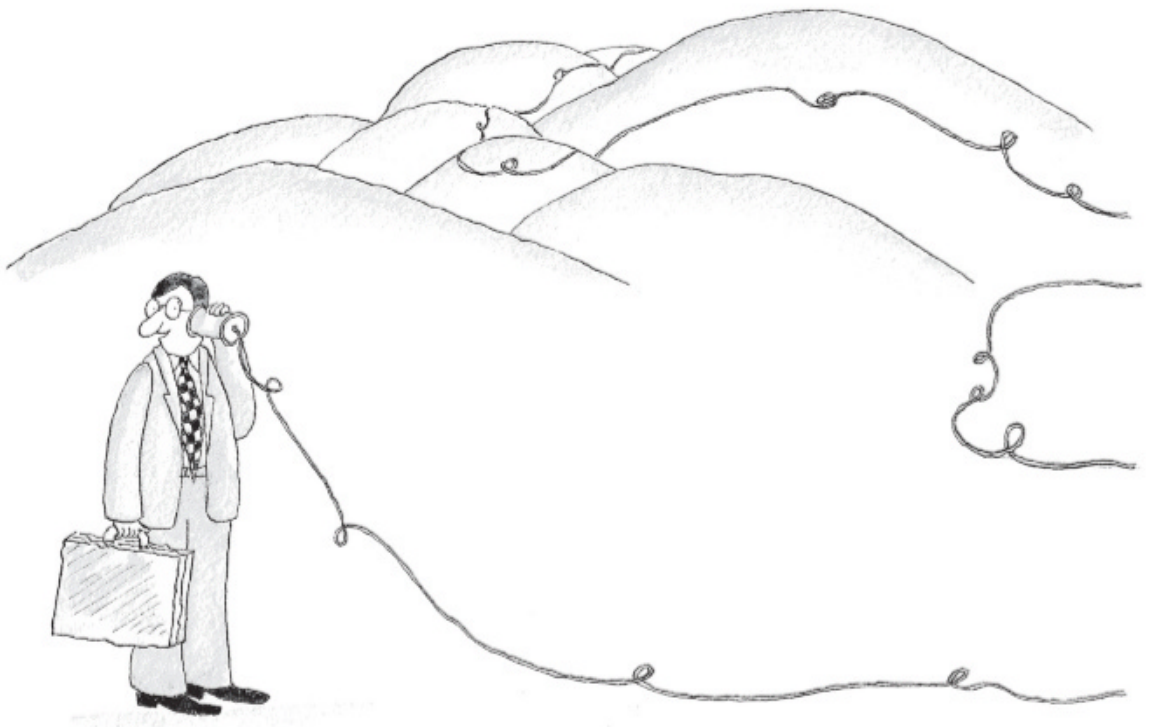
CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

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 Victoria Roberts, must be received by Sunday, August 14th. The finalists in the August 1st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 29th issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

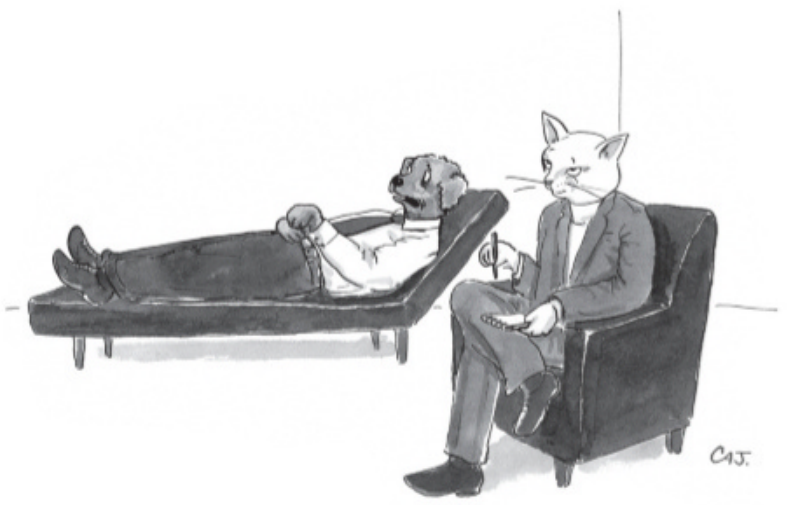
THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



Victoria Roberts

" "

THE FINALISTS



"What happened to the mouse that came in before me?"
Tyler Bradley, Stratford, Ont.

"You wouldn't understand. I need people to like me."
Lawrence Wood, Chicago, Ill.

"This is the only place I'm allowed on the couch."
Beth Lawler, Montclair, N.J.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"Actually, everybody wants to talk about it."
Ken Carlson, New Haven, Conn.

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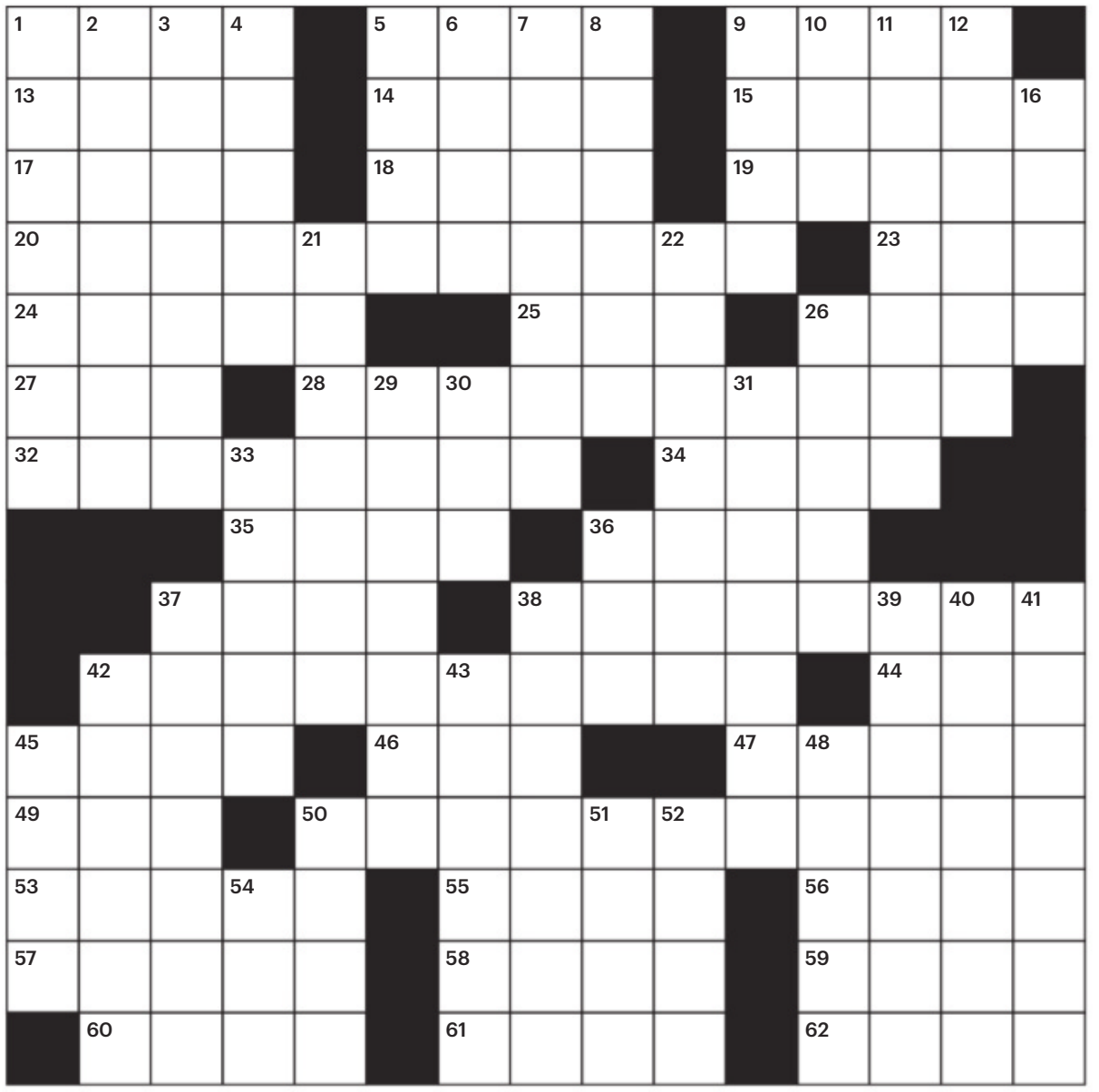
PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A beginner-friendly puzzle.

BY CAITLIN REID



ACROSS

1 ___ judgment (hasty decision)
5 Impolite
9 Places to conduct science experiments
13 Thing that every instrumentalist can play
14 Prestigious British boarding school
15 Actor's representative
17 Birds associated with wisdom
18 Named names, as it were
19 "___ me impressed!"
20 "Why even bother?"
23 One who's decidedly not a friend
24 "My Year in ___" (Jamie Loftus's podcast about infiltrating a high-I.Q. society)
25 ___ shot
26 Puzzle that's wall-to-wall fun?
27 Subject of some "appreciation" classes
28 Not even remotely accurate
32 Rhyming term for a low-alcohol brew
34 Move like a butterfly
35 New Age energy field
36 Bit in a burrito
37 Puerto ___
38 Traded one thing for another
42 Boasts before a big game, say
44 Former Giants quarterback Manning
45 Feet in a pound?
46 "Let You Love Me" singer Rita
47 Fencing swords
49 Pot topper
50 Figurative peace offering
53 Roughly seventy-one per cent of Earth's surface
55 Prickly ___
56 International alliance headquartered in Brussels
57 Moby-Dick, e.g.
58 "Ish"
59 Shade of beige
60 Troubles
61 Lightens up at the salon, say
62 "On the double!"

DOWN

1 Result of a winter character-building activity?
2 Middle of ___
3 State capital with the world's busiest airport
4 Annoying people
5 Take it easy
6 Western neighbor of Colorado
7 Doomed
8 Completely surround
9 Frilly fabric for some wedding dresses
10 Many moons ___
11 2021 Oscar-winning film set in Northern Ireland
12 Grab forty winks
16 Elm, oak, or ash
21 Ten-dollar bill, slangily
22 Endures
26 Home to Acadia National Park
29 Kind of can for some sunscreen and dry shampoo
30 Apt anagram of "aye"
31 Prattle on and on
33 Features of some skate parks
36 Sheepish remark?
37 Short end of the stick
38 Courage
39 Dramatize, as a historic battle
40 "Baywatch" actress Carmen
41 Dispense, as advice
42 Chinese martial art with slow movements
43 Three-legged prop for a camera
45 Tractor attachment
48 Sheets of glass
50 Smallest bills in the till
51 Opposite of difficulty
52 Stereotypical frat guys
54 The whole enchilada

Solution to the previous puzzle:

S	A	L	T	S	C	R	U	B	■	■	■	N	A	M
E	L	A	B	O	R	A	T	E	■	■	B	O	R	E
G	E	T	S	T	O	N	E	D	■	D	A	W	E	S
A	X	E	■	H	O	G	S	■	P	O	B	O	Y	S
■	■	■	Z	A	N	E	■	V	I	C	E	R	O	Y
■	■	J	O	T	S	■	L	A	X	■	S	N	U	B
■	L	A	O	S	■	B	A	L	E	S	■	E	M	U
J	A	Z	M	I	N	E	S	U	L	L	I	V	A	N
A	Z	Z	■	T	E	A	S	E	■	A	W	E	D	■
L	Y	E	S	■	U	N	I	■	S	P	A	R	■	■
A	R	R	E	A	R	S	■	F	U	S	S	■	■	■
P	I	C	A	D	O	■	V	E	N	T	■	C	B	D
E	V	I	L	S	■	M	A	N	T	I	C	O	R	E
N	E	S	S	■	■	R	I	C	E	C	A	K	E	S
O	R	E	■	■	■	S	N	E	A	K	P	E	E	K

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

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