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THE NEW YORKER

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THE NEW YORKER

AUGUST 14, 2023

DRAWINGS *Elisabeth McNair, Justin Sheen, Ellie Black, Lynn Hsu, Christopher Weyant, Stephen Raaka, Roland High, Will McPhail, Mick Stevens, Charlie Hankin, Mads Horwath, Meredith Southard, Amy Hwang, Nguyên Khôi Nguyễn, Ellis Rosen and Asher Perlman* SPOTS *Jared Nangle*

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Ian Parker (*"The Mayor Talks a Good Game," p. 26*) contributed his first piece to the magazine in 1992 and became a staff writer in 2000.

Azadeh Moaveni (*"Youth Movement," p. 20*) is an associate professor of journalism at New York University. Her latest book is "Guest House for Young Widows."

Karan Mahajan (*Fiction, p. 52*) has published two novels, including "The Association of Small Bombs," a finalist for the 2016 National Book Award. He teaches at Brown University.

Victoria Tentler-Krylov (*Cover*) is a children's-book author and illustrator. Her most recent picture book, "The High Line: A Park to Look Up To," was published earlier this year.

Jackson Arn (*Books, p. 58*) has contributed to *The Drift* and *Art in America*, among other publications.

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Charles McGrath (*Books, p. 63*) is a former deputy editor of *The New Yorker* and a former editor of the *Times Book Review*.

Victoria Amelina (*Poem, p. 32*), who died in July from injuries sustained during a Russian missile attack on Kramatorsk, was an award-winning Ukrainian writer and a war-crimes researcher.

Aparna Nancherla (*Shouts & Murmurs, p. 19*) is a comedian, an actress, and a writer. Her new book, "Unreliable Narrator: Me, Myself, and Impostor Syndrome," is forthcoming in September.

Nick Flynn (*Poem, p. 46*) is the author of, most recently, the memoir "This Is the Night Our House Will Catch Fire." His new poetry collection, "Low," will be released in November.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM

ANNALS OF CRIME
Robert Samuels on the toxic mythmaking that snarled D.C.'s effort to revise its criminal code.

THE WEEKEND ESSAY
Sunita Puri explores the hidden harms of C.P.R., a brutal procedure that has become a default treatment.

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LEFT: JORDAN GALE / GUARDIAN / EYEVINE / REDUX; RIGHT: JORDAN GALE / GUARDIAN / EYEVINE / REDUX

THE MAIL

NARCAN AND NIGHT LIFE

As an organizer for night-life harm reduction, I was delighted to read Adam Iscoe's account of his visit to a naloxone education site at a music festival in New York (The Talk of the Town, July 24th). I wish, though, that he had had room to mention two important facts about fentanyl overdoses. First, overdoses are much more common in non-festival settings, and fentanyl contamination is exceedingly rare in the club drugs MDMA and ketamine. (It is on the rise, but not yet widespread, in cocaine.) Second, it's worth mentioning that although preventing fatal overdoses is incredibly important, night-life harm-reduction efforts would have far more of an impact if they incorporated drug checking. This is a service in which a trained specialist uses an infrared spectrometer to determine the makeup of a drug, and it is helpful because drugs sold as MDMA, for example, often contain substances that can cause severe reactions. Such adulteration poses a grave threat to clubbers' safety, but event organizers risk losing their permits and liquor licenses if they offer drug checking—a fact that makes drug use much more dangerous than it needs to be.
Zoë Beery
Brooklyn, N.Y.

BEARING WITH NEIGHBORS

Having lived in bear habitat on the north shore of Lake Tahoe for forty-five years, I can confirm Jill Lepore's account that bear populations are increasing (Books, July 24th). Bear spottings were rare in the late nineteen-seventies and early eighties; it is now unusual to go a day without an encounter. And not only have bears become more numerous—they have become bolder and more clever, too. My wife and I have watched a bear work its way down our street, trying every door on every parked car until it found one unlocked. Then in it went, searching out muffin crumbs, lip balm, or that forgotten half a sandwich. Interactions between humans and bears have lately spawned many small industries in Lake Tahoe. A nonprofit called the BEAR League educates the public and helps homeowners with what some might call nuisance bears; contractors have turned to wiring windows and doors with high-voltage, low-amperage bear deterrents; and welders fabricate large, sturdy enclosures for residential garbage cans, required today at homes in many areas around Lake Tahoe. We recently moved to the Oregon desert and miss the power, beauty, and danger of wild bears.
Randall Osterhuber
Bend, Ore.

Lepore's essay brought to mind an experience I had two months ago, early in the morning, in which I encountered a large black bear walking in my driveway. I had no bear spray on hand, but I knew what to do, because, despite my home being about half a mile from the town center, this had already happened three times. I made myself big, raised my arms, yelled, and stepped toward the bear. Eventually, it turned around, found an exit through the hedge, and walked away.

There have also been reports of violent incidents nearby, such as when, last October, in a town about thirty miles west of my house, a bear bit the leg of a ten-year-old boy in a back-yard attack. These stories, along with my own increasing number of encounters, have led me to reflect on the fact that Connecticut, unlike New York, New Jersey, and most of the rest of New England, does not permit recreational bear hunting. This seems to have grown out of a belief that violent run-ins with bears result largely from victims' actions—attracting bears with bird feeders or improperly secured food waste. Perhaps it is time that our hunting prohibition be reconsidered.
Robert Byron
Simsbury, Conn.

•

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GOINGS ON

AUGUST 9 – 15, 2023

What we're watching, listening to, and doing this week.

On Aug. 11, landmark figures from across hip-hop history convene at Yankee Stadium for **"Hip Hop 50 Live,"** to celebrate the genre's fiftieth anniversary. DJ Kool Herc, whose 1973 party, in the Bronx, is widely recognized as the birth of rap, joins other classicist rap heroes such as Melle Mel and Roxanne Shanté. Gangsta rap's vanguard, Snoop Dogg and Ice Cube, stands alongside the influential Southern stars Lil Wayne and T.I., and a series of sets—"Legendary DJs," "Queens of Hip Hop," and "Bronx Bombers"—aims to showcase rap's breadth. It all builds to a walk-off reunion performance from the seminal Queens group Run-DMC, honoring the formative moments of a now global culture.—*Sheldon Pearce*

ILLUSTRATION BY JULIAN ADON ALEXANDER

ABOUT TOWN

BROADWAY | Nostalgia grinds the gears on **"Back to the Future: The Musical"**—probably because the moviemakers and Broadway conceptualizers (the original's director, Robert Zemeckis; its screenwriter, Bob Gale, who wrote the book for the musical; and the film's composer, Alan Silvestri) keep riding the clutch. Fan service gums things up—arbitrary physical details from the 1985 film persist even when their plot connections are gone—and although Silvestri's thirty-eight-year-old cinematic fanfares still thrill, a Huey Lewis oldie ("The Power of Love," heard twice) outpaces every new song by Silvestri and Glen Ballard, his collaborator. The show's director, John Rando, has most of the actors impersonate their movie forebears; only Roger Bart, playing the mad inventor Doc Brown with his own quiet mischief, refuses to look in the rearview mirror. He knows that you can't just imitate what's happened before: lightning doesn't strike the same performance twice.—*Helen Shaw (Winter Garden Theatre; open run.)*

DANCE | The **Battery Dance Festival,** with its Hudson views and golden late-summer sun, is a yearly reminder that the end of summer is nigh. It hosts more than forty companies in mixed bills, including an all-male classical Indian dance troupe, Rudrakshya Foundation, devoted to the art of Odissi (Aug. 15); both Dances by Isadora and Isadora Duncan Dance Company, two groups that preserve the works of the modern-dance pioneer (Aug. 17); a work by New York Theatre Ballet's Amanda Treiber (Aug. 18); and the contemporary-dance company Battery Dance, the festival's host (Aug. 13 and Aug. 18).—*Marina Harss (Rockefeller Park; Aug. 12-18.)*

POP MUSIC | Since releasing the EP "Rina," in 2017, the singer **Rina Sawayama** has grown increasingly ambitious, as a musician and as a performer. That EP's fascination with the digital world, embodied by a shifty alt-R. & B. sound, gave way to the fluid, futuristic pop provocations of her début album, "Sawayama," from 2020, which took inspiration from Y2K-era Top Forty radio, nu metal, J-pop, and beyond. Her 2022 follow-up, "Hold the Girl," informed by the surreal isolation of her pandemic breakthrough, found the artist taking yet another turn—into a sound influenced by the country songwriting of both Kacey Musgraves and Dolly Parton. She is joined, during her prismatic stage show, by the sleek, like-minded synth-pop duo Magdalena Bay.—*Sheldon Pearce (The Rooftop at Pier 17; Aug. 12.)*

CLASSICAL MUSIC | The **Time:Spans Festival** is often fixated on the radical present, emphasizing far-out pieces written in the past decade, but this year it makes an exception for an iconoclastic forebear, Luigi Nono, whose centennial comes in January. Using extended techniques and electronic experimentation, the late Italian avant-gardist created music that whispers and screeches into an abyss. For the festival's first two days, Experimentalstudio and Ensemble Experimental play an all-Nono program, and the JACK Quartet performs unsettled pieces by Helmut Lachenmann, a student of Nono's. Later, the violinist Marco Fusi tackles Nono's "La Lontananza Nostalgica Utopica Futura" (Aug. 18), a forbidding, hour-long work that requires the soloist to negotiate music stands strewn about the stage, as well as prerecorded tracks of harmonic overlays and ambient noise.—*Oussama Zahr (DiMenna Center for Classical Music; select dates Aug. 12-26.)*

ART | "Regeneration" honors the aching, important work of the Bronx-born artist **Darrel Ellis,** for whom longing was inseparable from the creative impulse. Photographs of loved ones are both precious and paltry things, palliating absence. Ellis printed many of his from negatives made by his father, an amateur photographer who was murdered before his son was born. Ellis transfigured family pictures—by way of paint, ink, pencil, and other material manipulations—in order to capture, in his words, "the ethereal, ghostly image life." But no phantom is more present here than Ellis, who died of AIDS in 1992, at the age of thirty-three, and in whose varied self-portraits we behold a young man searching for a lasting image of himself.—*Jennifer Krasinski (The Bronx Museum of the Arts, through Sept. 10.)*

MOVIES | Paranoid tangles of conspiracy theories about the assassination of John F. Kennedy get a hectic workout in **"Winter Kills,"** William Richert's film noir, from 1979, starring Jeff Bridges as the rich and idle Nick Kegan, whose older half brother, Tim, was gunned down, nineteen years before, while serving as President. When Nick follows up on a hot tip about the murder weapon, which was never found, he's drawn into a vortex of violence which involves such dubious characters as a libertarian rancher (Sterling Hayden) with a private tank squad, a seductive journalist (Belinda Bauer) in quest of a scoop, and the half brothers' father (John Huston), a domineering plutocrat with a vast surveillance network. Richert positions the lurid plot as absurdist comedy without losing sight of its high historical stakes.—*Richard Brody (Film Forum.)*

TABLES FOR TWO

Nasrin's Kitchen
35 W. 57th St.

At dinner recently, an Iranian American friend taught me a term in Farsi: *lebos polo khori*, which means, essentially, "finest attire" but translates literally to "rice-eating clothes." We should have been in black tie, considering how much rice was piled on the table in front of us at Nasrin's Kitchen, a new Persian restaurant in midtown. Nasrin Rejali, an Iranian refugee who moved to Queens, by way of Turkey, in 2016, earned a following with a series of pop-ups—which served traditional dishes from all over her native country—before opening her own place last month.

Several of the plates we ordered came from a section of the menu entitled Chelo Khoresh, or stew with rice. The *khoresh-e ghormeh sabzi*, a forest-green stew made with tender chunks of beef, fat kidney beans, fried herbs, fenugreek, and sun-dried limes, arrived with a separate platter of rice, the top layer of grains tinged orange with saffron, a small square of crispy *tahdig* (bottom-of-the-pot rice) as garnish. For a dish called *zereshk polo ba morgh*, the rice dominated: you could barely see the chicken legs, braised in saffron and tomato, buried beneath basmati adorned with tart barberries, glistening like rubies, shards of pistachio, slivers of almond, saffron oil, and more *tahdig*.

Rice—along with grilled peppers and tomatoes, raw red onion, and fresh basil—also accompanied the menu's kebabs: *koobideh*, made with a combination of ground lamb and beef, and juicy chunks of boneless chicken, marinated in saffron and lemon juice. Rice was wonderful mixed with Rejali's yogurt dips: the thicker, more sour *mast mosir*, made with Persian shallots and nigella seeds, and the sweeter *mast khiar*, with cucumber, raisins, sunflower seeds, dried mint, and dried rose petals. For Rejali's superlative *dolmeh barg mo*, which she makes according to her mother's recipe, rice was wrapped—with yellow split peas, barberries, tarragon, basil, cilantro, and onion—in silky grape leaves, simmered in pomegranate molasses, and served warm.

There were dishes without rice, too, including *kuku sabzi*—which is sometimes likened to a frittata but could also be described as a heap of herbs (dill, cilantro, parsley) combined with barberries, garlic, and walnut and held together by a bit of egg—and *mirza ghasemi*, a luscious eggplant-and-tomato dip topped with a fried egg and accompanied by freshly baked flatbread. Most patrons were not dressed in rice-eating clothes; more than one was wearing scrubs. But the marble-walled dining room, on the second floor of a century-old town house, is imbued with a certain formality, a faded glamour befitting the preservation of this ancient and enduring cuisine. *(Dishes $9–$30.)*

—Hannah Goldfield

PHOTOGRAPH BY COLE WILSON FOR THE NEW YORKER; ILLUSTRATIONS BY CHRISTOPH NIEMANN (TOP); ALAMY (BOTTOM)

PICK THREE

The staff writer Richard Brody shares his current obsessions.

1. The new album **"Evenings at the Village Gate: John Coltrane with Eric Dolphy"**—featuring rediscovered recordings from 1961—reveals surprising dimensions in the artistry of these short-lived heroes of modern jazz. Coltrane, who had a hit single that year with his version of "My Favorite Things," improvises on the tune here—following Dolphy's fervent and imaginative solo—with a whirlwind energy that foreshadows his mid-sixties move to the avant-garde.

2. Amid debates about Greta Gerwig's artistic freedom while making "Barbie," I thought of Irving Thalberg, the Hollywood executive who, in the nineteen-twenties, put directors under producers' supervision, jump-starting the studio system. F. Scott Fitzgerald, who worked under Thalberg as a screenwriter, modelled the protagonist of his final novel, "The Last Tycoon," on him. Fitzgerald's detailed notes about his time in the movies—which are included in Matthew J. Bruccoli's reëdited version of the novel, **"The Love of the Last Tycoon,"** from 2014—bring Thalberg and Hollywood to life even more vividly than does Fitzgerald's fiction.

3. Charlie Chaplin's boldness as a political filmmaker came to mind as I watched "Oppenheimer." In 1957, Chaplin—who'd been hounded out of the United States on political grounds—made **"A King in New York,"** in which he plays a European monarch who's overthrown for vetoing a nuclear-weapons program and then, in America, is subpoenaed as a suspected Communist. The movie, streaming on Max and on the Criterion Channel, is both indignant and uproarious.

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THE NEW YORKER

THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT
NUMBER THREE

We have long known that Donald Trump is a font of falsehoods. Embedded in the recounting of national horrors in the federal indictment that the special counsel Jack Smith brought against him last Tuesday is a stark indication of Trump's own consciousness of that fact. Three words, "You're too honest," which, according to Mike Pence, Trump uttered to him days before January 6, 2021, during a phone call in which Trump pressured Pence not to certify the election of Joe Biden, are key to the case about the former President's historic efforts to overturn the election that he lost.

Two other criminal cases have already been launched against Trump this year—the first in Manhattan, involving hush-money payments to a porn star, and the second in federal court in Florida, involving classified documents. So the impact of this third indictment, in Washington, D.C.—which almost certainly will not be his last—may feel less shocking, perhaps also because of its familiarity as a sombre and succinct narrative of events that the nation witnessed unfold and which have been replayed over and over in the two and a half years since.

But this indictment is exponentially more momentous, in that it aims to hold legally accountable a President who tried to undo a free and fair Presidential election. No case in our system of justice could more directly and fundamentally address the stakes of American democracy and the rule of law.

The indictment includes four felony counts: conspiracy to defraud the United States, by attempting to overturn the election results; conspiracy to violate civil rights, namely citizens' rights to vote and to have their votes counted; conspiracy to obstruct an official proceeding, that is, the congressional certification of the electoral vote; and the actual obstruction of that proceeding. (Last Thursday, Trump pleaded not guilty, as he has on all previous counts against him.) Six co-conspirators, who have not been named or indicted, though they soon may be, recognizably include five lawyers: Rudolph W. Giuliani, John Eastman, Sidney Powell, Jeffrey Clark, and Kenneth Chesebro. The identity of the sixth—according to the indictment, a political consultant who helped organize fraudulent slates of electors to submit to Congress—remains unknown.

All four counts depend on a basic factual allegation: that Trump understood that he had lost the election, and that his actions were undertaken with that knowledge. The indictment therefore goes to great lengths to demonstrate the many ways in which Trump was provided with that knowledge. Multitudes within his Administration—including his Vice-President, his Attorney General, his director of National Intelligence, and his White House attorneys—told him that the claims of election fraud were false, as did his campaign staff, officials in multiple federal agencies, Republican state legislators, and courts in lawsuits that he filed. The success of the case will depend on the prosecution's ability to prove exactly what Trump, in his own mind, truly knew to be false, among all the things he said and did that came so close to breaking our democracy.

Yet a paradoxical effect of reading through the grimly repetitive march of person after person who told Trump that he had lost is that it underscores his stubborn refusal to let go of the belief that he had won. Smith faces the possibility that at least one juror will accept that Trump's belief was sincere, thus producing a reasonable doubt as to his subjective intent. And the statement "You're too honest" may be the only alleged fact in the indictment that shows unequivocally that Trump understood that what he was advocating was based on falsehoods.

Trump has not been indicted for lying, but his defenders will likely push the idea that lying is not a crime; his lawyers are already invoking his First Amendment right to express to the public his concerns about the election. Constitutional free-speech protections do often enable people to lie without incurring legal liability. Nevertheless, the legal system routinely and uncontroversially permits

ILLUSTRATIONS BY JOÃO FAZENDA

punishment for lies that are used to perpetrate fraud or other crimes.

A more tricky hurdle for Smith is the fact that Trump's co-conspirators are mostly lawyers on whose advice—including in a legal memo from Eastman, laying out the possibility that Pence could refuse to certify the election—Trump was allegedly acting. Following the advice of an attorney who purports to be providing legal counsel, even if it turns out to be wrong, can insulate a defendant from liability, to some degree. But it is not the case that acting on an attorney's advice converts criminal activities into innocent ones. A trial will have to carefully parse the difference in the various interactions among Trump and his lawyer co-conspirators, between acting in good faith on their legal advice, however misguided, and agreeing with them to commit illegal acts.

What may be most notable about the indictment is what the special counsel chose not to include. None of the counts are for the crime that, to many people, most closely matches the events of January 6th—in particular, the incitement of insurrection, conduct for which Trump was impeached in the House of Representatives just days later. A federal statute makes it a crime to engage in "rebellion or insurrection against the authority of the United States," or against its laws, or to give "aid or comfort thereto." A federal conviction for "rebellion or insurrection" would disqualify Trump from holding any elected office, including the Presidency, a result that many people would consider to be not only just but imperative.

Given that the criminal process is moving in parallel with the 2024 Presidential campaign, what is absent from the indictment perhaps speaks to the legal predicament that burdens the prosecution. Pursuing a conviction that would legally require Trump's formal ineligibility for the Presidency could make it appear as if that were the very purpose of prosecuting him. But not doing so creates the possibility that someone who engaged in conduct seen as so damaging to the country that he should be precluded from holding political office could be elected President. And, even if Trump is convicted of all counts in the indictment, he could still hold the Presidency.

That quandary reflects an unavoidable crisis that looms for the country. The sitting President's Justice Department is prosecuting his leading electoral opponent, for interference with the 2020 Presidential election—a prosecution that voters who support Trump may interpret as interference with the 2024 election. The most distressing challenge, then, for Smith and for the country, is that, no matter what the outcome, there seems to be no viable path forward that all Americans will see as a win for democracy.

—Jeannie Suk Gersen

PARIS POSTCARD
VIÈRE HERE

Remember the Cronut? The Frankensteinian pastry—half croissant, half doughnut—was so popular upon its introduction, in 2013, that New Yorkers waited in line for hours to taste one. Or else they hired Cronut scalpers to wait for them, paying up to a hundred dollars for a single hunk of glazed dough. The Cronut's creator, Dominique Ansel, trademarked the name, which led to the appearance of imitation treats: fauxnuts, cronies, zonuts, frissants. Not all hybrid foods are created equal, but as brunch, Spam, turducken, pluots, Craisins, and zoodles demonstrate, you're halfway there with a catchy name.

Recently, in Paris, posters appeared all over town advertising an unfamiliar beverage: *vière*. "*Du jamais bu*," one poster punned—"Never before drunk." It came in a seven-hundred-and-fifty-millilitre glass bottle, just like a Chablis or a Marsannay. The bottle had a metal cap, the kind you might pry off the top of a Heineken. "It's not a typo," Gallia, the drink's manufacturer explained, on its Web site, of "*vière*," adding that "we wanted to switch things up by combining two malts that we love." *Vin* (wine) + *bière* (beer) = *vière*. Where did it rank on the scale of appletinis to Frappuccinos?

"The idea was to be able to present some of what's great about France—the French terroir," Rémy Maurin, Gallia's first master brewer, said the other day at the brand's headquarters, in Pantin, just north of Paris. "But we're a brewery, so we make beer, right?" He was standing at a *vière*-laden table with Amelia Franklin, Gallia's head of marketing for local products. (The brand was founded in Paris in 1890, revived in 2010, and bought by Heineken in 2021.) Nearby, a pair of employees, in bikinis, were soaking in a pair of hundred-and-sixty-gallon runoff vats that they had repurposed as a pair of hot tubs. (The water was actually cool, and compressed air made it bubble from time to time.)

Making *vière*, Maurin and Franklin explained, involves both grapes and grains. Last year, production began with some thirty tons of the former, delivered to Pantin by the truckload (eleven, by a rough count), immediately after the harvest, from organic growers in the Loire Valley, Ardèche, and Alsace. "We wanted to give a French identity to brewing," Maurin said, adding, "It's impossible for an American brewery to get Pinot Noir from the actual region to make a beer with." The grapes are de-stemmed, pressed, and left to macerate in a metal tank. When Maurin feels that the time is right, he adds soured beer wort, derived from barley and wheat. "You ferment the two together, and you get the best of both worlds," Maurin said. "The texture of beer with the flavor of wine."

Beer-wine hybrids, sometimes called oenobeers or grape ales, aren't a brand-new idea, exactly. "I mean, realistically, *vière* is inspired by a lot, right?" Franklin said. Belgian brewers started experimenting with fruit-enhanced lambics centuries ago. In America, oenobeers have caught on at craft breweries such as Dogfish Head, which makes a "vino-esque ale" called Mixed Media. If American oenobeers tend to lean toward the stalk—by law, forty-nine per cent is the highest grape content a drink can have and still call itself a beer—*vière* is closer to the vine. Maurin started his career in his apartment kitchen, using a coffee grinder and five-litre Evian bottles. He

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appreciates the spontaneity that grapes bring to the relatively predictable process of making beer. "Brewers are control freaks," he said. "But natural winemakers, they trust that nature will balance things itself." He opened a ruby-toned bottle of *vière* called Franc Jeu, swirled, and took a sip: "This is kind of our version of an Italian Lambrusco."

Vière is served in a wineglass, not a pint glass. Maurin likes to drink it very cold: reds in the fridge, whites and rosés in the freezer for half an hour before opening. "Since you have a little bit of sweetness, it's even more drinkable," he said. France, obviously, is a nation of wine drinkers, but beer is rapidly gaining favor, especially among young people, thirty-two per cent of whom cited it in a recent survey as their preferred alcoholic beverage, besting wine by five points. *Vière*, then, might be thought of as a gateway beer, as relaxed as a Kronenbourg, but more elegant; as complex as a Pic Saint Loup, but less alcoholic. "I used to work in a beer bar, and often you have people coming in with a group, and they say, 'I don't like beer,'" Maurin recalled. "This product is exactly the type of product that you can get them to drink." Surprisingly, he'd heard only a few grumbles from the vinicultural Old Guard. "We actually know that not everyone is going to like it, and that's O.K.," he said.

Back to Cronuts, for a minute. *Vière*, it turns out, was originally called "*vin sauvage*" ("wild wine"). One day, Maurin invited the consultant Julien Pham for a tasting. He came up with a novel name for the product, which *Time Out*, in Paris, eventually reprised with a headline that read "*Vive la vière!*" "It was actually a joke at the beginning," Maurin recalled. "But, after the article, people came here and started asking us for it, and then it became, like, 'No, we have to call it this.' It's really a word that explains completely what's inside the glass."

—Lauren Collins

DAY AT A TIME DEPT.

DIVE

The singer-songwriter Margo Price took a seat the other day in Hekate, a non-alcoholic dive bar, and ordered a drink. The bar, on Avenue B, was empty except for the bartender and a tarot-card reader, who was waiting for a customer to show up. (Hekate is the goddess of witchcraft in Greek mythology.)

"This is what I've been looking for!" Price declared, admiring the tiered array of festive colored bottles of alcohol-free "liquor" arranged against a wall of mirrors.

"Hell, yeah!" the young man with long hair who was tending bar exclaimed.

Price, whose most recent album, "Strays," is her strongest solo work yet, wore a black skirt and a crop top, her long coppery-blond hair covering her tanned shoulders. "Something to remind me of the good old days!" she said, taking an appreciative sip of a "whiskey sour" made with a "bourbon alternative" that had a spicy botanical taste. "But I don't have to drink seven of these and throw up the next day."

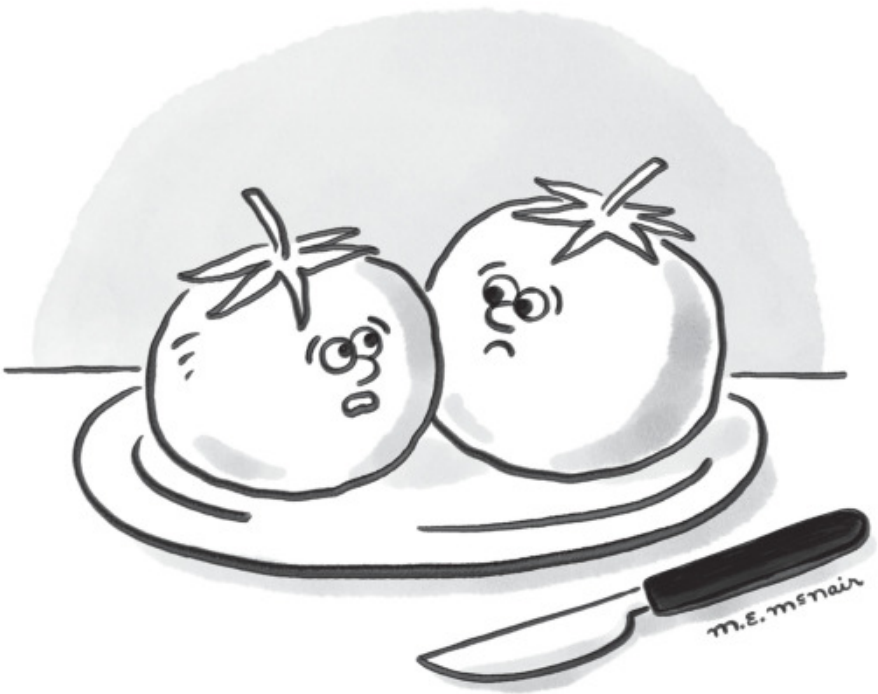
"Rock on!" the bartender cried.

Price, forty, quit drinking two and a half years ago. Before that, as a female country artist who struggled for years to make it in Nashville, she played a familiar role. "I was the fun party girl," she said. "I *was* the party. I'd be bringing the shots, so that everyone could have a great time. My identity was so wrapped up in that, and I didn't want to lose it." Whiskey soaked her work, too: one of Price's top tracks on Spotify is "Hurtin' (On the Bottle)":

> I put a hurtin' on the bottle
> Baby, now I'm blind enough to see

During the pandemic, her drinking "ramped up," she said. In the evenings, after putting her two children to bed, she'd start boozing with the band, which includes her husband, Jeremy Ivey, who plays guitar. "I'd shoot tequila and drink twelve White Claws to keep up with the guys," she said. With no shows to play, "I felt so purposeless. I felt like my career was over, and it really scared me."

One night, Price macrodosed psilocybin. She had been reading about how Bill Wilson, a co-founder of Alcoholics Anonymous, had taken belladonna, a psychedelic, which supposedly led to the creation of the program. "And I thought, Wow, that is so interesting." While tripping, she had a revelation: "No one is going to care if I



"Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious day when you're ripe and not yet mealy?"

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Margo Price

quit." She hasn't swallowed any alcohol since.

At first, "there was definitely a lot of shame," she went on. "I had this idea of people who were sober. Like, they're the damaged ones. I didn't want to admit that I'm the person who's got the disease." For months, she kept her sobriety from the band. When they drank, she was careful to covertly refill her glass with non-alcoholic beer in the kitchen. She became adept at shooting "fake shots" of soda water: "I didn't want them to feel weird and not to hang out with me."

During the recording of "Strays," most of which took place at the Topanga Canyon home studio of the producer Jonathan Wilson, Price was nearly outed. Wilson has an old cantina-like bar with Western décor—antlers and old leather—in a freestanding building on his property. During their sessions, Price appointed herself bartender. "I felt like I could control things if I was bartending," she said. "So, when everyone would do a shot, I would do soda water."

But after one session someone else poured the tequila shots, in plastic glasses. "It had been over a year at this point," Price said. "And I was very dedicated to my sobriety. But I had a moment of weakness and thought, What's one shot going to do? So I took one and looked down, and the plastic glass had a crack in the bottom. All of the tequila leaked out." When the session ended, she shared her secret.

"I feel like I've aged in reverse," she said, of the previous couple of years. "I have all this energy now, my dreams are so good, and I lose weight effortlessly. I can even eat bread!" As for her husband and bandmates, "I still get them their beers." In the mornings, when she would formerly have been nursing a hangover, she used the time to write a memoir, "Maybe We'll Make It," which was published last October, by the University of Texas Press. It details her long years of rejection in Nashville before Jack White's label, Third Man Records, put out "Midwest Farmer's Daughter," her breakthrough album, in 2016. Earlier in the day, Price had met some producers about making a documentary based on her book.

Leaving Hekate, Price passed the tarot-card reader, now seated across from a client at the window. Three cards were showing. One was the World.

—John Seabrook

DEPT. OF HONORS

INSURANCE OR CRICKET?

Around lunchtime on a recent Thursday, Michael Chambers parked his S.U.V. in front of a squat red brick building on Main Street in Hartford, Connecticut, to wait for that day's sole visitor to the Cricket Hall of Fame. Cricket: that's the one with the flat bat and the red ball and breaks for tea and cucumber sandwiches. Entry to the Hall of Fame is free but only available by appointment, Chambers had explained on the phone. Finding this monument to the world's second most popular sport can be tricky. Google Maps figures that it's next to Armageddon Auto Custom and Smith's Fire Extinguisher. In fact, it's one floor up from the Harmony Beauty Salon and Dunn's River Jamaican restaurant (tagline: "De Real Jamaican Way"). A small printed sign hangs in one of the windows on the second floor. The entrance is an unmarked maroon side door.

Of the many gifts that America has to offer the would-be immigrant—liberty, opportunity, security, the Choco Taco—it was cricket that attracted Chambers, who grew up in Jamaica. On a family vacation to Hartford when he was eighteen, he found himself roped into playing for the local team. "I played one game with them," he said. "And I never went back home. I stayed here and played my cricket." That was in 1968. Thirteen years later, by then a U.S. citizen, he had become American enough to believe that anything was possible. So he set up the Cricket Hall of Fame, which he billed as "the first in the world."

Chambers, a large man wearing a blue-and-white floral-print shirt decorated with a "Jesus Loves Me" button, has spent years amassing a collection. Crammed into the hall's two and a half rooms are framed certificates, news clippings, proclamations by Hartford's mayor declaring "Cricket Hall of Fame Day," mini cricket bats, VHS tapes of old matches, and flags from the United States, Jamaica, and the West Indian cricket team. "What you need is a place to house the stuff," he said. A plan to acquire an elegant local building to use as a museum fell through.

At least Chambers is doing better than the Dubai-based International Cricket Council, the sport's global governing body, which in 2009 launched its own hall of fame. "I.C.C. has not reached our standard yet," Chambers said. "They don't even have a building." (That has not dissuaded cricketers from accepting the honor of being inducted into either hall of fame—Shivnarine Chanderpaul, a former West Indies batsman, was inducted into both last year.) In any case,

Michael Chambers

Chambers said, "we are still the first in the world."

The Hall of Fame was, he admitted, a way for him and his teammates to secure their own legacy. "We were at the bar, drinking. We were talking about what was going to happen when we got old," he said. "Youngsters would see these old men and would say, 'Who are these guys?'"

Over the years, the hall's maroon walls have slowly filled up with the plaques that denote official induction. "You see all these plaques? One of those plaques is fifty bucks, easy," Chambers said. Two of each are made, so that honorees can take one home. Since 1981, the annual ceremony, usually held in a local hotel ballroom, has honored about two hundred players, including such cricket greats as Vivian Richards, who helped the West Indies win two consecutive World Cups. Most honorees feel compelled to make the trip to the insurance capital of the world. Besides a plaque—and sporting immortality—inductees who are willing to part with a hundred and fifty dollars also receive a maroon jacket with a patch of the hall's logo (a cricket pitch under a cloudy sky) sewn on by a tailor in Hartford. For another eleven hundred dollars, Hall of Famers can get a chunky ring, designed by a local jeweller named Audley McLean. All the money goes to fund the annual gala.

The dominance of maroon in the Cricket Hall of Fame is more than an aesthetic choice. It is the color of the West Indies team, whose players are drawn from ten independent countries and five dependencies, including the U.S. Virgin Islands. Hartford has a large Caribbean population; many islanders emigrated during the Second World War to fill labor shortages in the tobacco fields along the Connecticut River. "They brought the cricket with them," Chambers said.

Nowadays, the local cricketers tend to be Indian and Pakistani immigrants. They brought something else along with their love of the game: "I noticed that the Pakistanis don't like working with Indians," Chambers said. "So I'm saying to them, 'Come on, guys. You're in America now. Get your show together.'"

—Leo Mirani

SKETCHPAD

ONWARD AND UPWARD WITH THE ARTS

HIGH STRUNG

A violinist reinvents her instrument—and her musical persona.

BY DOREEN ST. FÉLIX

"Being an artist, you have to be a narcissist," the musician Sudan Archives says.

"Do you listen to Sudan Archives?" Most of the time, but not every time, the response to this question is one of confusion. How can one listen to the archives of a country? Sudan Archives is, in fact, a twenty-nine-year-old musician—a singer, rapper, producer, arranger, lyricist, and violinist. She creates a "fiddle-punk sound," as she describes it, that blends folk, ambient, soul, house, and whatever other tradition she feels is available for the taking. Sudan (the name that her colleagues, her fans, and, increasingly, her intimates call her) begins composing by striking a riff on one of her five violins, which she uses differently from most other American producers. A balladeer trots out the strings, like a show dog, to heighten the atmosphere of desperation in songs that are meant to be performed by destroyed women and repentant men. Sudan pursues technical, rather than emotional, manipulation. She is the violin's domme. The songs creep into existence in her basement studio, where the two of them can be alone. A D.I.Y. queen, Sudan will pump a riff into her digital-production program to deconstruct it. She can coax from the violin the sounds of an accordion, a guitar, a drum. A string orchestra. "I can perform my song live and have twenty violins," she explained. "And they're all me."

"She reminds me of Kanye West, except she's a woman and a violinist," one of Sudan's collaborators said recently. Sudan, too, wants to be a provocateur; when we spoke, she balked at the idea of performing in an orchestra, where she'd be expected to play "slavery songs." For much of her six-year public career, which has taken place in the indie/alternative music world, she has made herself the reputational custodian of her misunderstood workmate. For her real and imagined audience of overly Westernized listeners, Sudan has developed a motto: "In so many places in the world, the violin brings the party." It is the fiddle, she corrects—the preferred instrument of the underclass.

The artist, whose government name is Brittney Denise Parks, was born in Cincinnati, Ohio, not in Sudan. Her music and her performance borrow from the style of Sudanese fiddlers whom she found on YouTube, the "archives" in question. Sudan is the American who enthusiastically joins the diaspora through a kind of awed rechristening. Like those Sudanese fiddlers, who dance and sing as they play, she does not stand still when she performs. She has used choreography inspired by video games: twirling her bow as if it were a sword or a snake (she has one, named Goldie), as if she were a charmer, or a warrior. Lately, she has equipped herself with a studded quiver, drawing her bow like an archer. She uses tech that allows her to go completely wireless onstage. ("What else is prohibiting me from being wild?" she recalls thinking.) Her violin now dangles from her, and when she grasps it to play she treats it as an extension of her erotic self.

While opening for the musician Caroline Polachek, on a recent tour, Sudan occasionally came on during the headliner's set for a blink-and-you-miss-it solo. She would enter stage left, dressed in pleated leather, and gradually slide onto her knees. (Like Hendrix, she said.) She has considered using a shock-white Viper, an electric violin modelled on the guitar, which is associated with heavy-metal white guys. "It could be corny," Sudan said. "But I'm going to make it sexy."

Sudan has called herself "a visual artist who just happens to make music." Her material is her body. She has personas, who have put on and slipped out of many different types of Black drag. Early on, Sudan wore flowing cotton dresses and kente skirts, exuding an aura of Earth

PHOTOGRAPH BY DJENEBA ADUAYOM

Mother sobriety. For her first album, "Athena," from 2019, she became the picture of the arch Afropunk, who, with her black lipstick and her sculptural, green-tinged braids, emitted a different kind of seriousness. She abstracted her strings, filling the atmosphere with synths, stoking a feeling of psychedelia. For "Natural Brown Prom Queen," her second album, which she released last year, Sudan created her best persona: a character called Britt, who seems not to be a character at all but, rather, "the girl next door from Cincinnati who drives around the city with the top down and shows up to high-school prom in a pink furry bikini with a thong hanging out of her denim skirt," to quote a press release.

"Natural Brown Prom Queen" is an anthem album. You sing along to it. The music surprised Sudan's fans, in part because it felt like R. & B. The artist had expressed, in earlier interviews, that she could not bear the idea of "Oh, a Black girl, let's put her in R. & B. or soul." None of that sweaty-brow, glory-to-god belting from this singer, who hardly calls herself a singer. Like her peer experimentalists—FKA twigs, Kelsey Lu, and L'Rain come to mind—Sudan's presentation (her stylist, Michael Umesi, calls it "Nubian Pünk") sparks anxiety and excitement about her "difference." She must be new, which means alone, because Black girls don't normally present like *that*, vocalize like *that*. No other segment of the artist population is as stalked by ideas of how they should be. The notion of an "alt-Blackness" affirms the femmes and queer people, the marginalized among the marginalized, though the affirmation can have a flattening effect. "Natural Brown Prom Queen" is a key work because it does away with the binary for that millennial cohort. The artist says: I'm a trickster *because* I'm like my predecessors, not in spite of them.

Critics, Black and white, have pored over Sudan's body of work, and over her body—more precisely, the ever-evolving image she has put forth of her Blackness, as she has become less aesthetically reliant on the shock of the muscular Black girl "brandishing" a violin. The *Guardian* described "Athena" as "some of the most viscerally gorgeous music put to record" in 2019, and Pitchfork listed "Natural Brown Prom Queen" as the second-best album of 2022, right behind Beyoncé's "Renaissance." There is a sense, in all the triumphant writing about Sudan, the reviews and essays where the aforementioned praise and other self-consciously "fierce" vocabulary spill over, that the critics feel they are working in tandem with the musician on an intellectual project. One review, by a Black writer, found continuity between "The Bluest Eye"—Toni Morrison's novel about how self-loathing takes root in the fractured heart of the little Black girl—and the title track of Sudan's second album. On the one hand, noticing (or even manufacturing) resonance among works across time is what we critics have to offer. The reviewer's analysis could not have been sounder. But, when I asked Sudan about it, she bristled and said, "When people think of me as an artist, it feels so"—she raised her fingers in air quotes—"'Black historical.' I'm not doing it on purpose." Sudan, critically beloved but still in the process of being discovered, does not want her champions to eternally consist of those who are in the know.

"Sometimes I feel like a certain type of Black people don't like my music," Sudan told me, matter-of-factly. "Natural Brown Prom Queen" seems to stem from a worry that her alt presentation has turned off lovers of mainstream Black American style. The woman who had made herself haughty and celestial on "Athena" came earthbound, and was talking about Chevy S10s on soundscapes that paid homage to the innovators of Detroit and Chicago, the Black home towns of her Black parents. Sudan, who, in her stage name, sheds Americanness, told me that she wants to be seen as a "bad bitch." That idea of "badness" comes from the funk aesthetic—think of the sexual and musical authority of Betty Davis.

Sudan had resigned herself, as many touring artists have, to looking out at a white sea. But last year she performed at Hood Rave, a party for Black queer people in Los Angeles. She wondered if some Black audiences just hadn't encountered her yet, if she should maybe play more shows in the hood, and expose them to her music. "I'm going to make them like it," she said.

It was mid-spring, Coachella season. Sudan was preparing for her show in the desert, her second time performing at the music festival. During a rehearsal, in Burbank, I watched Sudan become her performance self. Sudan was initially a one-woman show. Lately, though, she has invited support musicians, including other violinists, to join her onstage. The musicians are always Black, and, more often than not, the violinists are Black women, creating a visual rejoinder to the myth that she is the only one.

That day in Burbank, Sudan was playing with a number of musicians, including another violinist and singer-songwriter, Prax Zxari, who had trained at the Berklee College of Music. Zxari wore an oversized sweatshirt, a green corset, a long denim skirt, and white boots. She stood erect as a bamboo shoot, violin tucked under her chin. Her eyes were trained on Sudan, who was dressed in exercisewear: she had wrapped her heavy locs in a blue bandanna and thrown a tennis skirt over her unitard, the waistband slung low enough to make it known that the unitard tapered off into a thong. Sudan had told her players not to worry about stage presence during the rehearsal, but as they practiced she swept the floor, extending her legs and shaking her ass, remembering to dart her almond eyes from her violin to the invisible camera, for which she vamped.

At one point, the only person who seemed to exist for Sudan was Zxari. The musicians were practicing the flourish on "Homesick (Gorgeous and Arrogant)," from "Natural Brown Prom Queen." The song is narrated by a lovesick Sudan; the echoing appellations for sex ("I just want the D-I-C-K") are softened by the violin, which Sudan plays adagio, until she quickens, punctuating the riff with two bars that feel like tripping and skidding down a hill.

Sudan drew closer to Zxari. She circled around the other violinist, lowering her own violin, at times, to her pelvis. "Too orchestra," she told Zxari, gently. Zxari played more expressively. But the players were not yet in synch.

Sudan, who has been playing the violin since she was nine or ten, is self-taught. She plays by ear. Through the years, she has sporadically worked with teachers, and has made and abandoned efforts to learn sight-reading. She played the bars for Zxari, slower. It went on like this, back and forth, until someone produced sheet music for Zxari.

With the notation learned, both players relaxed—and they moved on to the

choreography. Sudan stood back-to-back with Zxari and reached her hand above her head, like a flamenco dancer. They turned to the imaginary audience, Janus-headed. "I want it to be like we're twins," Sudan said, grinning widely.

The rehearsal continued. The music director informed everyone that he would be feeding a robotic voice into their headsets which would announce what was next on the set list. "One day, can we customize it and have it be some ghetto-ass shit, like 'Output one'?" Sudan asked, in an exaggerated voice. "I low-key wanna do it." With Sudan, "ghetto" is a word that comes up often. To her, it means "natural." Her "ghettoness," she has felt, is underrepresented. As she pushes her sound and her lyrics, she foregrounds a sense of play while under persecution, to provoke a stronger emotional identification with Black-girl listeners. Sudan is a sentimentalist, and her lyrical world is devoted to exploring the inner lives of girls like her: escapists of gender and race norms who, being free, occasionally yearn for the old expectations. The song that stands out on "Natural Brown Prom Queen" is a screamer called "OMG Britt." As a singer, Sudan sometimes embodies the parlando method: vocalizing that occupies the limbo between speech and song. On "OMG Britt," where she boasts, "I never trap alone/I always go in pairs," her delivery, crazed and funny, is beyond rapping. Her energy threatens the thudding trap bass line. The music video is a re-creation of Michael and Janet Jackson's "Scream" spectacle; Sudan smashes a violin, the first she ever owned, a dissipation of the shadow of respectability that always lurks.

In "Glorious," arguably Sudan's finest lyric achievement, from "Athena," the artist gives glimpses of her family history: "Teacher's smile on my father's face/Poppa got a new job today/Momma smiles at your door/Feels so close, yet so far away." Sudan Archives comes from "educated middle-class Black folk," according to her mother, Cheryl, who works as a compliance officer at a jewelry firm in Cincinnati. Cheryl met her first husband, Reginald Parks, at Central State, a historically Black university in Ohio. Cheryl was reserved; Reginald, a theatre major, who used to preach and now sells cars, was wilder. The two married and had three children, first a daughter named Christina and then fraternal twins, Catherine and Brittney.

It was imperative to Cheryl that her daughters know how to move easily between the Black and white worlds. ("I was not one of those Black girls trying to date all the white boys," Sudan told me.) The family, in search of the "best schools," bounced around Ohio. They landed in old-money communities, dotted with Tudor Victorian homes. The Parks family were the itinerant renters. Reginald served on and off as a preacher at Church of God in Christ, the Pentecostal community. ("Talking in tongues and stuff," Sudan said.) While living in Wyoming, Ohio, a fiddling group that played Irish jigs came to visit the kids' school. Brittney was instantly enamored. The older white proprietor of the town's violin shop agreed to rent her one, as her family couldn't afford to buy. "She was jigging around the house all day," Cheryl recalls. There was an old Casio around, which Cat and Britt often used to write songs.

Although she played in some fiddle groups in grade school, Brittney mostly honed her ability in church, which means that from the very beginning she associated the violin with the ecstatic. The family attended church three times a week. Her mother remembers her as being quiet, "a funny little girl." She was disdainful of school, but she was smart. "If you read and talk like you got some sense," Reginald said, "ain't no telling

where you can go. They won't know if you Black or white."

One night, Reginald came home high. The charismatic preacher who had struggled with an addiction to crack cocaine eighteen years earlier had relapsed. Long before this, he had also been diagnosed as having manic-depressive bipolar disorder. ("The reason I'm such a good entertainer," Sudan said, "is because of his genetics.") Reginald, with his addiction, shattered the picture of nuclear-family perfection that Cheryl had worked so hard to create. When the twins were thirteen, their parents divorced, and Cheryl met Derrick Ladd, a former scout for LaFace Records, whom she then married. Ladd came into a house full of women and was very much beloved, not least because of his determination to fill what he sensed was a patriarchal void. He wanted to mold Cat and Britt, who had always loved messing around with instruments, into a girl group, which Cat named N2, because it sounded like "intuition."

The twins got along as girls, but as they grew older differences in their personalities became entrenched. Cat was hesitant, and Britt was impulsive, though Britt said that it was her sister who first led her to think of life outside of convention—both girls chemically relaxed their hair, and it was Cat who cut off her processed hair first. Cat obeyed Ladd's expectations, while Britt grew resistant to the girl group. Ladd had put them in artist development and hired producers to craft their sound. "Derrick said, 'You need to make music, but you don't need to make *the* music,'" Sudan recalls. "I do. I need to touch it." She began blowing off rehearsal and skipping curfew and smoking weed with her boyfriend. She checked out the Cincinnati rave scene. Cheryl started calling her hippie daughter Sudan, as Brittney had never quite seemed to fit. Her mother and her stepfather gave her a gentle ultimatum: if she could not follow the rules of the home, she would have to leave. At the time, Ladd's health was declining. "Britt knew that Cat knew how to stay and how to minister, and she could not," Cheryl recalls. As Brittney prepared to leave Cincinnati for Los Angeles, with old-school dreams of "making it," Ladd blessed her. Cat also left home, for Nashville, where she began a songwriting career. Several months later, Ladd died of cancer.

Sudan settled in Los Angeles with her boyfriend at the time, a popular musician whom she refused to name. She worked waitressing jobs in order to stay afloat, sometimes three at a time. And she kept in sporadic contact with Cat. "She was struggling and didn't want us to know that," Cat said, over the phone. (Their speaking voices are so similar that, when I called her and she picked up, I

thought I had accidentally dialled Sudan.)

In Los Angeles, Sudan became Sudan. She felt a sense of divine providence, settling on her full stage name. She enrolled at Pasadena Community College, with dreams of eventually studying ethnomusicology at U.C.L.A. It wasn't long before she dropped out of school. Talking to Sudan, you realize that she metabolized her family's zeal for education into her autodidacticism. She is studious, but her learning is guided by tunnel vision, resulting in a curriculum of her own obsessions. The "Athena" album, for example, takes its concept from Martin Bernal's "Black Athena," a text about the Afro-Asiatic roots of classical civilization.

In Los Angeles, Sudan and her boyfriend were eager to throw themselves into the alt-Black scene. They often hung out at Low End Theory, a hub for producers of oracular music, in Lincoln Heights. One night at Low End, Matthewdavid, then an executive at the prestige indie label Stones Throw Records, known for representing artists like MF Doom and J Dilla, struck up a conversation with Sudan. He asked her to send him samples of her music, and she sent him a demo of "Come Meh Way," which would end up on her first EP. "Immediately, I knew it was what's up," he recalls. "I didn't have any friends, peers, or artists I was working with making music like that."

Stones Throw signed her, and Sudan soon became known for her looping technique. "I don't have the flexing personality," she told me, "but I can do some crazy-ass shit." In the mid-twenty-tens, Angelenos in the D.I.Y. community likely noticed a young woman dragging her equipment around town. "It was very stripped-down. Loop, pedal, violin set," Matthewdavid remembers. The spectacle, if there was one, was rooted in watching her trigger her gear, re-creating the act of making music live, even if it made her vulnerable to error.

Constitutionally, Sudan is a bedroom producer. She spent these years forming the basis of her production style: the merging of folk elements with electronic music. No song better exemplifies this than the light and springy "Come Meh Way." The song is a multicultural clash: she sings, in a slight Caribbean accent, over tambourines, handclaps, and an Irish jig—the precocious arranger as tourist. Nearly six years later, it remains Sudan's most popular track.

"Athena" saw the musician become darker and more compelling, as she drew on her ecclesiastical life. Here she introduced her harshness, alarming her listeners as much as she soothed them. Although she still headed most of the production, she also worked with producers such as Rodaidh McDonald, who has collaborated with King Krule and the XX. It was hard for Sudan, working with other people. As she told *Rolling Stone*, " 'Athena' was me in the studio feeling awkward, like, why am I here?" For "Natural Brown Prom Queen," which was written in quarantine, Sudan's manager devised a different system: she'd send her ideas to him, and he would then forward them to other producers. They would add their ideas, and he'd send them back to Sudan. It was a collaboration that allowed her to retain control.

At Wi Spa, a twenty-four-hour Korean spot in downtown Los Angeles, customers can soak naked on certain floors. I met Sudan there at the end of May, in the small break between her touring gigs: spring had been spent supporting Polachek, and summer would be spent up and down the other hemisphere, hitting Western and Eastern Europe, Australia, and Japan. Sudan and I went to our locker rooms, undressed, put on robes. We met at the skin-care kiosk, where we bought Advil and pimple patches. It was James McCall, her boyfriend, who thought the spa would be a good idea, as it would relax her. (McCall, one of the founders of Low End Theory, is a producer and a musician, formerly known as Nocando, who now uses the stage name All City Jimmy.) We entered the sauna and disrobed, from a distance. Either she or I made a joke about our "tramp stamp" lower-back tattoos.

We appraised each other. "We're on an even playing field," Sudan said, letting out peals of laughter. "Now that we've seen each other's titties."

We scrubbed off the day's grime and then surveyed the pools. We draped masks over our faces and struggled to hear each other above the gust in the aromatherapy room. Sudan barely lasted more than three or four minutes in each room. She moved quickly, exhibiting a low tolerance for stasis; I found myself subtly chasing

her around the spa. We ended with a vein-constricting plunge into the cold-water basin, and headed upstairs to the common area, dripping water in the elevator. Plopping herself on a mat, Sudan produced a bushel of perm rods, and began twisting her locs into curlicues. She wanted to look like "Black Medusa" in advance of a show she was doing that weekend, in Napa Valley. Onlookers gazed at her curiously. She met the stares with an aggressive smile.

She brought up Zxari admiringly: "People like that can't do what she was doing." People "like that" being people who were classically trained. Sudan is a hyperbolist. She speaks in absolutes that both entertain and confound, in order to make up for not feeling, as she has said, at home with words. So when she says, summarily, "Music theory is so white. Africans just play music," and then, minutes later, extolls players such as Asim Gorashi and Francis Bebey for their technical brilliance, she maintains the contradiction by relying on emotional meaning that I recognize. She does not actually hate the West. She has called herself the Black Stravinsky, drawn to the "punkness" of the one who had been part of Les Apaches. "The Russian composers be on some other shit," she said, approvingly. "But I'm not trying to be here in a white blouse and black pants, sitting down."

Because she has not needed to shed a period of indoctrination, Sudan is different from the Black American artists who make work in reaction to the canon. I have had the sensation, listening to her music, of being jarred by the emergence of a riff, which seems placed just because it can be. That excess is the right of the virtuoso, who regards her art as an eminently conquerable field. Lyrically, Sudan is less drawn to showmanship. She is a sentimentalist who writes in the conditional tense. "If I wear it straight, would they like me more?" she sings, on the song "Selfish Soul." Sudan is able to seem both vulnerable and cipher-like. She can recall the conservative soul queen, who struggles to navigate her self-worth and her public politicization; she can also be the modern playgirl, who fetishizes herself first.

As she finished up her hair, Sudan recalled being tagged in an Internet comment about "that Ariana Grande song, the one with the strings." It was "Positions," from 2020. The commenter, a vigilant Sudan fan, had expressed concern that "Positions" sounded like "Nont for Sale," a paean from Sudan's second EP, about not selling out romantically or artistically. "I was, like, I hope so," Sudan told me. The Ariana Grande track excited her. She imagines a future in which a Rolodex of pop stars come to her door, asking her to produce for them with her kink touch.

Sudan had been wavering on whether she would allow me to visit her home studio. In the end, she gave in. After our visit to the spa, she called a Lyft, and we piled into the car. "Brittney?" the driver asked. I turned to her. When was she Sudan, and when was she Brittney? "It's just hard to change on the app," she replied, waving the question away. And yet Sudan is clearly reluctant to kill Britt, as the name links her with her twin, who now lives part time in L.A., and with whom she sometimes writes music. The act of renaming can expand an identity every bit as much as it can narrow it. When I asked Sudan how she thought about her name, given this period of war and displacement in the country of Sudan, she said that she had considered changing her stage name. (The political "scares her," McCall told me.)

Sudan wanted a smoothie. She and the Lyft driver proceeded to have a very Los Angeles conversation about juicing and bulking. Sudan lamented turning thirty in January, and promised herself and the driver that she would have the new album—her trap phase, as she called it—nearly done by her next birthday.

We walked into her apartment. The couch was low to the floor, and the living room smelled faintly of stale sage. Junko, her puppy, bounded over, scratching my shins. Sudan led me to the basement, around back, where she and McCall had built the studio. (The two have a working romance; he writes lyrics and helps with production.) "My landlords are two wives," Sudan said, as she opened the door. "Cool as fuck. 'Cause they're queer and not racist. I feel like they know I'm poppin', which is why they never raise the rent."

The space was cluttered and slightly musty. "I told you I needed to clean it," Sudan said, by way of apology. The studio had been her haven during the pandemic; she and McCall installed Astroturf and hung artificial flowers to simulate nature. "It was super-humid, and it had a bug problem," she said of the basement. "I got this dehumidifier here and saged the place every day." On her keyboard stand, there was a music-theory book, turned upside down. On the floor, there were suitcases and boxes overflowing with leatherwear and acetate high heels. Goldie, her pet snake, was coiled in its tank. On the walls hung her various violins. "This is the six-thousand-dollar one," she said. "I know it don't even look like it."

She picked up a seashell from the floor and put it to my nose. "Stinks, doesn't it?" McCall and Sudan had just come from a trip to Tijuana. "If I could just figure out a way to make more money," she said, sighing. "Maybe I should make more pop stuff so I could move exactly where I want to go."

When she was stuck in Los Angeles, during the pandemic, Sudan found herself homesick for Cincinnati, a place that she loves but in which she cannot bear to live. There is a plainness of feeling, on "Natural Brown Prom Queen," for the pre-Sudan life, which has expanded the audience of people who can potentially feel "seen" by her sometimes heady music. "Being an artist," she said, "you have to be a narcissist. It's not about me. It's the *idea* of me."

A car pulled up at the back of the house. McCall and his eleven-year-old daughter, Violet, came in excitedly, having spent a day with family at the beach. McCall sized me up. "It's good to see a Black journalist," he said. "Usually, they send fat old white dudes."

Violet regaled us with her account of an altercation between a beach reveller and a security guard. "They was fighting!" she told Sudan. "Fighting," Sudan murmured, coming into her stepmother mode.

"One of them started talking about his Glock," Violet said, "which means gun."

Sudan shot McCall a look of concern. He assured her, "He said he had an AK in the car. He didn't have no car."

All Sudan wanted to do was stay in Los Angeles a little while longer. The sight of father and daughter made the woman who was eager to pack for a tour somewhat forlorn. She looked at the mess of clothes around her. "I feel like, if I clean this whole place up, I'll write a song." ♦

FAILURE RÉSUMÉ

BY APARNA NANCHERLA

EMPLOYMENT-ADJACENT HISTORY

Sugar Goblin, Washington, D.C., age 5

Attended first holiday potluck with parents. The dessert table had every cake imaginable. Incapable of reason, wanted a piece of every one. When parents rightfully refused, threw a full-body tantrum until hosts diplomatically stepped in, as if I were a tiny dictator with nuclear codes. The next day, I opened the box of cake they'd sent me home with and found that everything had congealed into a big cake ball. Suspecting treachery, threw another fit. First sign that I will stop at nothing to be ultimately disappointed.

Woman (You Don't Want) in STEM, Virginia, 14

Halfway through a six-week experiment, one of my lab partners accidentally killed all the microscopic specimens in our science-fair project, so we made up the rest of our data and never spoke of it again. Still ended up winning third place, because—America!

Therapy Client in Theory, N.Y.C., 31

After I'd arrived twenty minutes late to every one of our fifty-minute sessions, karma intervened, and my therapist stood me up. Her building was locked when I arrived. Texted her, got no response. Later, she called to apologize and said that she "totally forgot." She then "got too busy" to see me, and when I said that I should probably move on, well, it's hard to read tone in an e-mail, but she seemed stoked.

EMPLOYMENT HISTORY (LOWLIGHTS)

Death of a Saleswoman, Virginia, 18

Attempted to sell Cutco knife sets to friends and family after falling for an ad in a coffee shop. Sold only two knives. One of my customers—my dad's colleague—badly cut her finger using her knife. Stopped going to the sales seminars. Boss repeatedly called my house to ask why I wasn't there. Finally had to tell him that I wasn't emotionally capable of "moving product."

TV Writer—Or Is She?!, N.Y.C., 30s

Learned secondhand from a co-worker at my first late-night writing job that one of my bosses "does not get what it is you do exactly." Hard agree! Let me know if you ever figure it out! Was let go from second late-night writing job. Was generously told I could spin it as a "mutual decision." It was mutual in that I, too, thought I was going to be fired from Day One. And then I was! The truth shall set you free. Of health insurance.

Longtime Listener, First-Time Letdown, Chicago, mid-30s

Was asked to be a panelist on a popular comedic public-radio show. Thought I did O.K., but never heard from them again. When my episode aired, someone on Twitter commented that my laugh was so annoying they had to turn the program off and could the producers please never bring me back? Wish granted.

AWARDS AND FELLOWSHIPS

No major entertainment awards (that I know of), but here's something: I got my first supporting part in a movie, and they forgot to invite me to the première. Also: Went to another première for a comedy special I was in, and the doorperson said I wasn't on the guest list. Would have gone home, except my friend indignantly said, "Um, excuse me, she's in the show!" Was then waved through, like a proud boss.

EDUCATION

B.A., Psychology, Amherst College (don't know where diploma is)

Have barely used degree except during small talk (most often to polite nods), though it has led to a real weakness for online personality tests.

Thomas Jefferson High School for Science and Technology (don't know where this diploma is, either)

Guess which two subjects I have avoided studying ever since?

REFERENCES

Have missed a huge number of cultural touchstones spanning film, TV, music—you name it, I will not know what you're talking about. For example, as a thirty-seven-year-old, I asked my boyfriend if Jerry Seinfeld was Jewish.

SPECIAL SKILLS

—Leaving parties without saying goodbye to anyone, because, honestly, who even remembers? Also, frequently not showing up to parties in the first place, so not great at saying hello, either.

—Eating all the M&M's out of trail mix. I did this once while a guest at a friend's house. My host came home and, as though I were in a waking nightmare, asked if I knew what happened to all the M&M's in his trail mix. Obviously, I said I had no idea. As if either of us was mentally prepared to have an honest conversation. I barely knew him!

—Not brushing my teeth correctly (according to my dentist). It's the front back that's a real problem area.

—Habitually late in meeting: people, deadlines, expectations. Triple threat.

—Avoiding confrontation as long as possible, until I've built up enormous resentment, and then apologizing unnecessarily. Sorry, sorry, sorry. Still sorry. ♦

LUCI GUTIÉRREZ

LETTER FROM IRAN

YOUTH MOVEMENT

What happened when the country's schoolgirls took off their veils.

BY AZADEH MOAVENI

"Their rebellion is a symbol of the failure of the Islamic Republic," an expert said.

One morning this past winter, the students at a girls' high school in Tehran were told that education officials would arrive that week to inspect their classrooms and check compliance with the school's dress code: specifically, the wearing of the *maghnaeh*, a hooded veil that became a requirement for schoolgirls in the years after the Iranian Revolution. During lunch, a group of students gathered in the schoolyard. A thirteen-year-old in the seventh grade, whom I'll call Nina, pressed in to hear what was being said. At the time, mass protests against the government were raging across the country; refusing to wear the veil had become a symbol of the movement. An older girl told the others that it was time for them to join together and make a stand.

The inspectors arrived the next morning. The teachers asked six girls from each grade to assemble in the schoolyard. Nina was not among them, but she knew the plan; she sat at her desk, doodling, her heart pounding with excitement. Outside, the winter sunlight cast shadows on the school's weathered brick walls. One of the girls raised her arm, a cue arranged in a WhatsApp group the night before, and then she and the others pulled off their head scarves and tossed them on the ground. For a moment, no one said anything. Then the girls were told to go back to their classrooms. Nina's teacher looked up in surprise as her students returned, bareheaded and flushed, but said nothing. The next day, nearly every girl in school showed up without a head scarf.

From the start, women were at the center of the demonstrations that swept Iran last year, the most widespread revolt against the state since the 1979 Revolution. Iranian women have topped best-seller lists, produced acclaimed films and art work, and, in recent years, outnumbered men among college graduates in STEM fields. And yet they are also subjected to one of the strictest forms of state-imposed gender discrimination in the world. In Iran, women have fewer rights than men in marriage, divorce, child custody, and inheritance. Their legal testimony is granted half the weight of a man's, making them more vulnerable to rape, sexual harassment, and other forms of gender-based violence. For much of the past forty years, they have been subjected to strict dress codes—generally, a head scarf and a loose-fitting cloak, or *manteau*—which are enforced in public by the country's so-called morality police.

Last September, people rose up in fury at the killing of Mahsa Jina Amini, a young woman being held in police custody for allegedly flouting the dress code, and then stayed in the streets, demanding an end to clerical tyranny. Schoolgirls emerged as an unexpected source of defiant energy. In October, a video surfaced online of a throng of teen-agers on the streets of Tehran, stopping traffic, ripping up photos of Iran's first Supreme Leader, Ruhollah Khomeini, and chanting "Death to the dictator." Similar scenes erupted around the country, with crowds of girls and young women marching down boulevards and waving their veils in the air. One afternoon last fall, I was walking along Revolution Street, in downtown Tehran, when I saw students streaming out of Anushiravan Dadgar High School, one of Iran's first high schools for girls, with their heads bare. They were chatting and laughing, as if being an Iranian schoolgirl with the sun glinting off your hair were the most natural thing in the world.

Nina's school is on a wide street lined with plane trees in an affluent district of Tehran. She and most of her classmates are from liberal families, with parents who understand that aspects of an Iranian

ILLUSTRATION BY ADAMS CARVALHO

education—"Heavenly Gifts" classes enumerating the virtues of the Shia imams, field trips to shrines of minor religious figures—can inspire eye rolls. Still, Nina's complaints usually elicited a firm rejoinder from her parents. "'Maybe not everything you're learning is to your liking,'" she recalled her mother saying. "'But this is school in the society you're living in, and you can't get an education without following the rules.'"

Now girls at Nina's school were refusing to wear the veil for the annual school picture, and as a result were not allowed to participate. One girl showed up with her hair dyed the color of cotton candy; Nina had heard that another student was suspended after she got platinum extensions. The school authorities often threatened students with low disciplinary marks, and, as the protests intensified, cancelled meetings of the parent governance committee, making it difficult for parents to verify what they heard from their daughters. One day, the school convened a talk with the students to negotiate a solution. If the girls agreed to wear the veil around their necks, the school would no longer demand that they cover their hair. "This was a victory," Nina said.

But it did little to quell the unrest. The students were scrawling protest slogans—"Women, life, freedom" and "Death to the dictator"—on their desks and the bathroom walls. In the schoolyard, some students convened a "model Islamic Republic." One girl served as the Supreme Leader, another as the ineffectual President, and the rest of the class united against them. After a nine-year-old boy was shot and killed in the town of Izeh, in November (state-run media claimed that he was killed by terrorists, but security forces were widely suspected to be the culprits), one of Nina's classmates wrote on a whiteboard, "In the name of the God of the rainbows," a reference to a poetic line the boy had uttered in a video about a school project, in lieu of the orthodox preamble "In the name of God." Another assembly was convened. The students were told not to stick their noses in other people's affairs, Nina said, and that what was going on outside the school walls had no relevance to them.

One of Nina's teachers commiserated with the students, saying that she and her daughter wore the veil only because they were compelled to. She also told them that getting an education was the safest way to secure a better future. The school librarian, meanwhile, demanded that girls write out *ta'ahods*, signed disavowals of specific infractions. The students were told that three *ta'ahods* would result in expulsion. Nina was often aware of cameras installed in the classrooms and hallways. "They keep telling us that the future of the country is in our hands," she said. "But they make it illegal to talk about what is happening in the country."

That winter, a group of girls in Nina's class pulled down portraits of the country's past and present Supreme Leaders. They scribbled in pen across the faces, the pooling ink turning the Ayatollahs' frowns into black splotches. By then, the state's crackdown had largely quieted the protests. Ayatollah Ali Khamenei participated in a coming-of-age ceremony, and photos proliferated of schoolgirls swathed in floral-patterned chadors surrounding the Supreme Leader. But, even as attention in the capital turned to more mundane issues, such as choking pollution and gas shortages, Nina felt as though she and her classmates were in a direct confrontation with the state. "We want this government to go," a classmate told her. "We don't want this bad government."

The story of women's education in Iran is deeply political. The first Pahlavi monarch, Reza Shah, a military strongman who took power in 1925, put women at the center of his project to modernize Iran: he banned the wearing of the veil in public, and admitted women to universities. During the reign of his son Mohammad Reza Shah, women won suffrage, entered parliament, and gained dramatically more rights in marriage (though some restrictions remained, such as a requirement that a woman get her husband's permission to travel abroad). At the same time, the Shah imprisoned thousands of dissidents who opposed his authoritarian rule, some of whom were tortured and killed. For many, state feminism became associated with state repression and forced Westernization. Iranians from various backgrounds came together to unseat the Shah in 1979. Some women activists took up the black chador and veiling as emblems of rebellion. "There was a revolutionary fever," Haleh Esfandiari, who founded the Middle East Program at the Woodrow Wilson Center, in Washington, D.C., told me. "One way of manifesting that you were part of this movement, for women, was to wear a head scarf."

The Islamist radicals who took charge shaped their project for Iranian society around women's subordination. They rescinded the legal rights granted to women, removed restrictions on polygamy and child marriage, and eventually mandated that the veil be worn in public spaces. In May, 1980, one of the two women who had been in the Shah's cabinet, the minister of education, Farrokhroo Parsa, was executed. Many images of women were removed from elementary-school textbooks; those which remained typically depicted women as being segregated from men and performing traditional roles in conservative Islamic garb. The veiled schoolgirl, memorialized in Marjane Satrapi's graphic novel "Persepolis," became the symbol of a system designed to turn out model Islamic citizens by force.

Larger numbers of girls from traditional backgrounds and rural areas were entering the educational system. Their parents, who'd kept them out of school during the Shah's era, felt comfortable allowing them to be educated in an Islamic society. According to the World Bank, women's university enrollment jumped from three per cent in 1977 to sixty-seven per cent in 2015. Many of these women left home to study in distant cities, where they developed new values and world views, only to find that little else was changing in Iran. Educated and highly skilled women struggled to secure jobs that matched their new competencies. Much of Iran remained committed to a patriarchal system, in which men often demanded that their wives not work at all. "The Islamic Republic has unintentionally created a female population in Iran today that exists as a response and in reaction to its own policies," Narges Bajoghli, a professor of Middle East studies at the School of Advanced International Studies at Johns Hopkins, told me. "They are demanding their rights in ways they've learned within the schools and atmosphere of the Islamic Republic, and that is why the state is having such a hard time suppressing them."

The presence of unveiled women in Tehran and other large cities is the most visible sign of the state's weakening authority. In late March, in the capital,

with the snow-dusted Alborz Mountains towering over the city, women were shopping, shepherding toddlers, riding the metro, and lunching on saffron risotto with their heads uncovered. One afternoon during Ramadan, I saw a group of unveiled young women smoking cigarettes on the marble steps of a mosque. They did so nearly every day, until the mosque erected a metal barrier out front.

In Tehran, the black chador is now associated more with support for the regime's ideology than with piety. A woman I know who had always worn the chador had recently stopped wearing it. She runs sightseeing tours and chronicles her journeys around the country on Instagram. Once the protests started, she told me, her posts were littered with abusive comments calling her a "regime mercenary" and a *parastou*, or "swallow," the term for state agents who are deployed in honey-trap operations. "The women of my family have worn this since the time of Reza Shah—it's our tradition," she told me. But even in her neighborhood, near the Tehran bazaar, traditionally a more conservative part of the city, passersby would jeer at her.

In April, the Supreme Leader said that unveiling was "religiously and politically sinful." Mohammad Hadi Rahimi Sadegh, the head of the seminary of Tehran province, warned that if unveiling wasn't dealt with "nothing will remain of the Islamic system." But, like the legal structure of the Islamic Republic itself—accountable to both God and the will of the people—the mandatory wearing of the hijab is, in some sense, an invention of the late Ayatollah Khomeini. Officials have expanded digital and video surveillance, using footage of unveiled women to deny services and impose fines, but they still claim that persuasion and "cultural work" are the best ways to encourage compliance. When I arrived at a regional airport on a recent trip to Iran, an SMS pinged on my phone, informing me that "hijab is immunity, not a limitation," and asking me to respect myself and others by obeying the law.

Esfandiari said that the state was trapped in a dogma of its own making: if, in the face of the initial protests, it had simply dropped its enforcement of the hijab, it might have defused Iranians' anger. Instead, the state responded with a vicious wave of repression, arresting thousands of people, killing some five hundred protesters, and executing several others following sham trials. "Months ago, it was the hijab," Esfandiari told me. "Now people want to overthrow the regime." The students at the girls' schools posed a particular challenge. "This is the youth who were born under this regime, who were indoctrinated by its schools, who were told what to do, told to pray, told to put the hood on their heads since the age of six or seven," Esfandiari said. "Their rebellion is a symbol of the failure of the Islamic Republic."

Mahsa Jina Amini was born in Saqqez, a city in Iran's Kurdistan province, near the border with Iraq. She had finished high school and was preparing to attend university in Orumiyeh last fall. On September 13th, she was visiting family in Tehran, when she was stopped by the morality police outside a metro station. She was reportedly dressed in a black cloak and a black head scarf, a conservative ensemble by the capital's standards, but the police arrested her anyway, shuttling her off in a white van to a processing center where dozens of women were being held. In video footage from that day, which was later released by the police, a woman identified as Amini, who was twenty-two, with long, wavy hair and a lively smile, walked up to an officer at the precinct's "orientation class," gestured at her head scarf, and then collapsed. She was taken to a nearby hospital, where she was placed on a ventilator. After three days in a coma, she died.

The authorities insisted that she'd suffered a heart attack owing to underlying health conditions. The state coroner's report later attributed her death to organ failure brought on by cerebral hypoxia. According to her cousin Erfan Mortezai, eyewitnesses in the police van told Amini's family that throughout the ordeal she had been insulted and beaten, claims that the authorities have denied. At her funeral, in Saqqez, women mourners waved their head scarves in the air and chanted "Women, life, freedom," a slogan of the Kurdistan Workers' Party, the region's most prominent Kurdish militant group.

Amini's funeral was the first major demonstration in what became a nationwide uprising. Two weeks later, according to Human Rights Watch, security forces killed several dozen people at a protest following Friday prayers in Zahedan, the capital of Sistan and Baluchestan province, home to the ethnic Baluch, in the country's southeast. Police and other forces were seen stationed on rooftops near the city's main mosque and prayer hall, firing on protesters and bystanders; forces on the ground shot at cars driving injured protesters to a nearby hospital. The incident came to be known as Bloody Friday—the largest single-day death toll of the protest movement.

That fall, Mortezai gave a series of television interviews in which he said that, in the wake of Amini's death, the Iranian people wanted "human rights, a peaceful country, and regime change," adding that "the old dictator is in his last days." At times, Mortezai was seated in front of the flag of Komala, a militant group that seeks greater autonomy for Kurdish people in Iran, and which has a history of secessionist ambitions. Not long afterward, the Kurdish town of Mahabad appeared to fall under the control of protesters. Demonstrators reportedly blocked a town entrance, pelted the governor's office with rocks, and set fire to a police station. The Revolutionary Guard Corps dispatched troops to support the local police and launched a fresh round of artillery and drone attacks on Kurdish-separatist bases in Iraq. Vali Nasr, a professor at Johns Hopkins, told me the Iranian authorities were convinced that armed militiamen from Komala, not civilian protesters, had taken over the town. "They felt as though they were dealing with not just a serious law-and-order issue but a much more serious security issue," Nasr said.

For years, the regime has worried about foreign plots to break up the country, especially in Iran's restive border regions, where there are large populations of ethnic and religious minorities. "It's important to consider the mind-set of those in charge," Nasr said. "Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after

you." In 2018, Naftali Bennett, Israel's education minister, introduced the idea of an "Octopus Doctrine." No longer should Israel deal exclusively with Tehran's proxies in Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and the Gaza Strip, he said; it should take the fight to Iran itself, the head of the octopus. Later that year, the Trump Administration withdrew from the nuclear deal with Iran, and Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said that the U.S. was seeking regime change. After Amini's death, Nasr had heard that the Revolutionary Guard thought that a majority of the unrest in Kurdish towns was coming from across the Iraqi border. "You could say they believed that the outside was actually involved," Nasr said of the regime, "or that they were in a moment of weakness and moved quickly to keep the outside from taking advantage."

Iran International, a Persian-language television network, which is based in Washington, D.C., and watched avidly inside Iran, fanned the unrest. The station was set up, in 2017, by a company whose director is a Saudi businessman, and it makes little pretense of objectivity. During "Jina's revolutionary uprising," as the network's on-air personalities called the protests, Iran International featured a steady stream of commentary from militant separatists, monarchists, and anti-regime activists, including Reza Pahlavi, the son of the last Shah, who lives in the United States. News bulletins often included details of where and when demonstrators would gather. "This grand uprising of the Iranian people turned forty-one days old yesterday," a broadcast in October began. "All four corners of this ancient land, our dear Iran, scream in unison that this regime is a goner and that this generation is united to overthrow it." (The network has denied that it has any affiliations with the Saudi government, and maintains that its coverage is "independent" and "uncensored.")

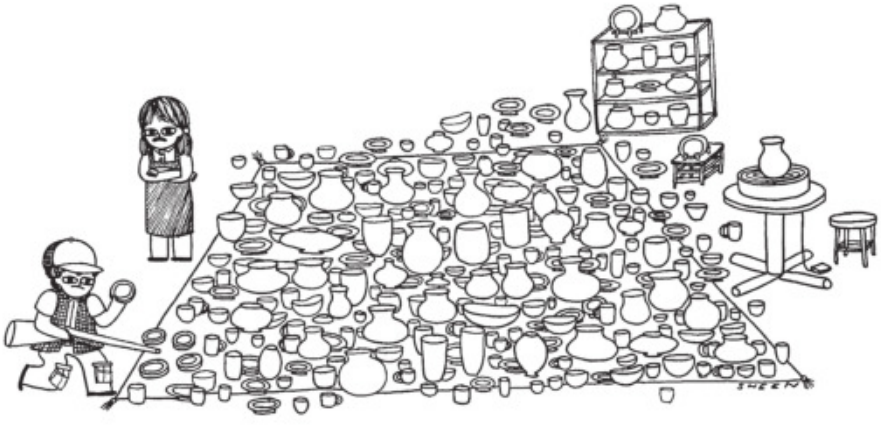
Soon, government officials were speaking openly about how the "women, life, freedom" movement was part of a coördinated campaign to destabilize Iran. Hossein Amir-Abdollahian, the foreign minister, tweeted that the "various security services, Israel and some Western politicians who have made plans for civil war, destruction and the disintegration of Iran, should know that Iran is not Libya or Sudan." According to Nasr, such warnings were largely directed at hijab-observing women who, the regime feared, felt some kinship with the protest movement. "There was an amazing amount of sympathy among more conservative and regime-affiliated women for these girls and the arguments they were making," he said. In online chat groups, he went on, conservative women "were saying things like 'We know what the morality police is, because we have one in the house. He's called father and brother.' "

One woman from a conservative family told me that her sisters had initially equivocated about the protesters' demands, parsing what they agreed with and what they thought went too far. But, eventually, each of them turned against the movement, believing that such a confrontation with the regime would do more harm than good. "They belong to WhatsApp groups where they receive ideological instructions and everything they say sounds the same," the woman told me. "They believe they must cling to the system, otherwise the whole edifice of religion will fall."

This message was reinforced with impressive propaganda. In November, a slickly produced music video called "For the Girl Next Door" surfaced online. It was set to the song "Baraye," by the Iranian musician Shervin Hajipour, which had become the anthem of the protests and won a special Grammy, presented by Jill Biden, for Best Song for Social Change. The video opened with George W. Bush touting, in 2001, the U.S.'s success in combatting the Taliban's "brutal oppression" of women in Afghanistan, and ended on Joe Biden's remarks last year, at the height of the protests, about how the U.S. might "free" Iran. In between were clips from two decades of Afghan women's suffering. The lyrics warned the girls of Iran not to let themselves be similarly victimized by the West: "For you, the girl next door / don't let your home get ruined like ours / don't let your dreams become like our stories / don't let war happen in your country."

On February 14th, an official in the holy city of Qom announced that a hundred and seventeen girls'-school students had been taken to medical centers with "suspected symptoms of poisoning." The official attempted to calm the public by noting that most of the children had recovered quickly, but panic soon spread in the city. Images circulated online of ambulances parked outside schools and of schoolgirls on ventilators in hospitals. A crowd of angry parents gathered outside a local government building, demanding an investigation. One woman screamed, "This is a war! They are doing this at a girls' high school in Qom to force us to sit at home. They want girls to stay at home."

By then, reports of mysterious poisonings had been surfacing across the country for months. Victims described smelling peculiar odors, such as citrus, rotting fish, or chlorine, before experiencing symptoms that included vomiting, dizziness, shortness of breath, and fatigue. Schools were generally told to remain open, and parents were advised to get their news from official state media. Finally, in late February, a deputy health minister, Younes Panahi, held a press conference, in which he said that the students were getting sick from non-military-grade chemicals. He said it appeared



"If you throw it in the air and shoot it and break it, you buy it."

that "some people wanted all schools, especially girls' schools, to be closed down."

Soon afterward, Panahi walked back his comments. Other state officials suggested that the girls might be inventing their symptoms, and claimed that some ninety per cent of the students were experiencing stress-related effects. Ali Pourtabatabaei, a prominent journalist in Qom who was investigating the attacks, was arrested. Independent news outlets reported that, in nearly a dozen provinces, more than a thousand girls had been poisoned in fifty-eight schools. "Has Boko Haram showed up in Iran?" Mohammad Ali Abtahi, Iran's former Vice-President, demanded on Instagram. Security officers clashed with parents and teachers outside schools, spraying them with tear gas. Protesters added a new chant to their repertoire: "Death to the child-killing government."

Nina said that security guards at her school began escorting girls to the bathroom. She and many of her friends started bringing packed lunches, fearful of eating the cafeteria food. On WhatsApp, classmates urged one another not to attend school at all. Nina ultimately stayed home for a few weeks. The intent of the attacks seemed clear. "It's revenge for the disturbances we made," Nina said. "Not a single person disagrees."

Parents asked the principal at Nina's school to shift to remote learning, on a platform that had been established during the pandemic. The school insisted that physical attendance was mandatory. Nina said that, not long afterward, her mother received a phone call from her teacher, asking why Nina wasn't showing up to class online. Remote instruction had been made available but wasn't formally acknowledged.

A teacher at a girls' high school, who asked to be called Maryam, went to work but kept her eight-year-old daughter at home. "I was too scared to send her," she said. The first day her daughter stayed home, her elementary school was targeted. A noxious smell filled the school's courtyard, and a number of girls became sick. Shortly afterward, at Maryam's school, the principal sent someone to her classroom to tell the students to put on masks—a strange odor was wafting through the corridors. "My legs went numb," Maryam said. "I thought, Dear God, what's going to happen to us?" She wore two masks with heavy filters but could still smell a scent of burning tires. She felt nauseated and dizzy. "Everyone was so paranoid," she said. "We didn't know what was real or not." In the end, Maryam isn't certain that it was a poisoning. Two of her colleagues felt ill, but none of the students collapsed or had to be taken to the hospital.

In March, the state acknowledged that the nation's schoolgirls were not victims of mass hysteria. Ayatollah Khamenei called the poisonings "an unforgivable and huge crime" and declared that authorities would track down and severely punish the perpetrators. Authorities soon announced the arrests of more than a hundred people who, according to the Interior Ministry, "out of mischief or adventurism and with the aim of shutting down classrooms," had "taken measures such as using harmless and smelly substances." Most of the suspects weren't identified; those who were included a disgruntled student and individuals who the state claimed were being investigated for possible links to extremist opposition groups. None of them seemed capable of orchestrating a nationwide infiltration of schools with toxic chemicals. Maryam told me, "If you want to pass out cookies in a high school, it's a major logistical feat."

Another explanation, which was widely floated in moderate political circles, was that hard-liners within the Revolutionary Guard, the judiciary and clerical establishments, and state media were responsible. One expert told me that the attacks corresponded with the regime's strategic use of executions to quell the protests. "It's really a way of terrorizing the parents and recruiting them as law enforcement," he said. "It creates a cost, and the message is to the parents: Is this really worth it to you? Is hijab that important?"

Maryam told me that morale in her classroom was at a new low. "School holds no appeal anymore, for neither teachers nor students," she said. "It's not just the hijab that's the issue. Everything is messed up. In whatever corner you look, there's a problem."

At Nina's school, authorities reacted harshly to the defacement of the Ayatollahs' portraits. "The atmosphere was tense," she said. "Everyone was angry and shouting." Officials reviewed the surveillance footage, which, they said, showed a student taking a pen from Nina's hand moments before the portraits were pulled down from the wall. Nina insisted that she had tried to dissuade her friends from vandalizing the portraits. She sat in the school office, trembling, reluctant to inform on her friends but also scared of what might happen if she took the blame. She couldn't afford to be expelled. Iran, she believed, was fundamentally unsafe; a high-school education was necessary to leave it.

School authorities checked the footage again and, Nina told me, determined that she was innocent. Still, the whole class was punished. All of the students wrote out disavowals and were ordered to fix the ruined portraits. They tried to wipe off the ink with wet towels, but the paper grew damp and the Ayatollahs' faces warped under the laminate.

The role of the Supreme Leader is the subject of some debate in Tehran. "Many interlocutors say he's in full control and many say he has totally lost control," Adnan Tabatabai, a policy analyst who runs a think tank in Germany, told me. "There is no middle ground left and no final conclusion." Tabatabai had heard from a former government official in Tehran that, during the winter, state authorities had instructed certain girls' schools to relax their dress codes. But, in recent weeks, the state's hard-line supporters had grown angry, and mobilized. Authorities, Tabatabai said, were "using some of this outrage to show the public there is more demand for them to be strict about unveiling."

Vigilantism was on the rise. A woman in the city of Rasht told a podcast that armed men on motorbikes roamed the streets, ordering unveiled women to cover up. At a corner market in Tehran, a customer threw yogurt on two unveiled women, both of whom were later arrested for breaking the hijab law. (The man was arrested for disturbing order.) A video circulated of a scene in Ramsar, near the Caspian Sea, of a man screaming that "all the women in this restaurant are naked!" A chador-wearing woman threatened that, if the state didn't act, "we will fire at will." She used the term *atash be-ekhtiyar*, meaning "permission to fire," which has come to refer to the extrajudicial powers that the state has given its supporters. It is

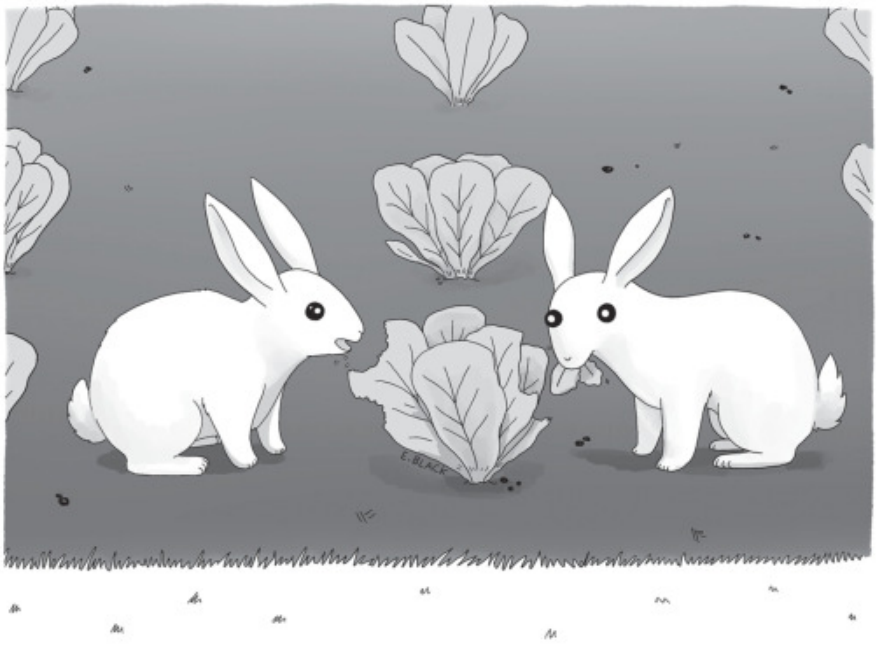
akin, a well-known academic said on his Instagram page, to state-sanctioned violence against women.

In March, the country's most prominent extremist cleric, Ahmad Alamolhoda—who is also President Ebrahim Raisi's father-in-law—suggested that an unveiled woman on the street should be prepared to "face the complaints of the people, to see that she has no place." Even according to the regime's own polling, a minority in Iran holds such views. But if they aren't catered to, Tabatabai told me, the system risks alienating its most loyal supporters, "those who turn out on the street when you need them." The Islamic Republic has a long history of playing such politics, deploying plausible deniability to distance itself, Tabatabai said. "They can do the work that the state doesn't want to do."

In practice, the "complaints of the people" are often dismissed as background noise. A few days after the Persian New Year, I visited a small town in a southern province, some five hundred miles from Tehran. The route out of the capital passed through the flat desert plain surrounding Qom. At a rest stop, where holiday travellers gathered for espresso and lunch, an employee asked unveiled women to put on their head scarves. She was either ignored or told to "get lost." As I stepped onto an elevator to go up to the food court, I heard her yell, "If you don't like it, there's the door!"

This spring, various state bodies declared that a crackdown was coming. Shortly afterward, a hundred and fifty cafés and shops were reportedly shuttered for failing to enforce the hijab law. In late April, Tehran's mayor, Alireza Zakani, announced that unveiled women attempting to use the metro would be issued warnings, and eventually prevented from entering stations. Transportation officials said that traffic-surveillance cameras would detect unveiled women drivers and impound the cars of repeat offenders.

The stepped-up enforcement may have been intended to preëmpt the annual summer flouting of dress codes, which has historically pitted the state against women in Capri pants and sandals. These days in the capital, the bared navel is common. A taxi-driver told me, with horror, that he'd picked up a young woman at Haft-e Tir Square, in central Tehran, who was wearing what sounded like a bustier under a jacket. A recently proposed law could impose a range of new penalties, including substantial fines and the "deprivation of social rights," on women who defied the dress codes or even advocated against them online. A prominent hard-line figure complained that the measure didn't go nearly far enough, calling it a bill "to support the unveiled."



"It would be better with a protein, but add-ons are so expensive."

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Meanwhile, the protest movement had hastened regional realignments that once seemed unthinkable. In March, Iran and Saudi Arabia announced that they would reëstablish diplomatic ties after years of hostility. It was reported that one of Tehran's key demands was for Riyadh to tone down Iran International. In early May, the Arab League agreed to readmit Syria, Iran's key regional ally. But the Iranian regime remains unflinchingly brutal within its own borders. By the end of spring, at least sixty people had been executed, on charges ranging from drug offenses to blasphemy, including a half-dozen men involved in the protests.

In mid-July, just before the start of the holy month of Muharram and two months before the anniversary of Mahsa Jina Amini's death, a spokesman for Iranian law enforcement formally announced that the morality police would return to the streets. I was in Tehran, and a friend called to warn me to take a head scarf when I left the house. She'd heard that one woman was recently given the option of washing corpses in a Tehran morgue as punishment for not wearing a head scarf. "I'm going to wear the hijab today," she told me. "I don't want to wash corpses."

Nina had returned to school at the end of April. The wearing of the *maghnaeh* was no longer enforced. Girls arrived bareheaded and left bareheaded, and even some of their teachers took off their head scarves in the classroom. Nina is looking forward to improving her English next year, part of a plan to attend college abroad and become an international lawyer. For a year-end outing, her class went go-karting. A class of boys was there, too. Teen-agers in Iran aren't used to inhabiting a public space without the segregating effect of head scarves. Some of the boys pulled out their phones, saying that they were going to document this *kashf-e hijab*, or unveiling. Soon all the boys were gone. The event's organizers, Nina later learned, had thrown them out. For the rest of the afternoon, the girls of her class played in peace, their hair flowing freely around the race course. ♦

PROFILES

THE MAYOR TALKS A GOOD GAME

Can Eric Adams get by on bluster alone?

BY IAN PARKER

Mayor Eric Adams's exuberant self-regard stops just short of biceps-kissing. He has talked in public about the warmth of his own smile. Describing "Healthy at Last," a book that he published in 2020 about his disciplined response to a diagnosis of Type 2 diabetes, Adams told a podcast host, "Every time I read it, I find another nugget, and say, 'Wow! This was a good point that I made.'" Adams once told an audience, "I get out of the shower sometimes and I say, 'Damn!'" He has said that he is the face of a new Democratic Party.

On a recent Sunday evening, Adams—who is sixty-two and was born in Brooklyn, although he has sometimes said that he was born elsewhere—was in a restaurant on the Upper West Side. His shirt was white and uncreased, and he wore a stud earring, an adornment that he adopted while running for mayor. He removes the stud ahead of events likely to have a more serious tenor, as if lowering a flag to half-mast. Adams ordered French fries and, unprompted, said, "This is going to be one of the most fascinating mayoralties in history." He later added, "Anyone who believes there's not a God, they need to watch my journey."

Adams is well into his second year in office, but his mayoralty still has a victory-night air. He often repeats a phrase that makes a parable of his electoral success, by linking it to stories about his troubled teen-age years which became central to his campaign: "Dyslexic, arrested, rejected—now I'm elected!" Adams likes to ask, "When does the hard part start?," although there are members of his staff who wish that he wouldn't. He has said that if God had found the Eric Adams story less compelling he "could have made me the mayor of Topeka." (Michael Padilla, Topeka's mayor, responded by saying that he, for one, values humility.)

A politician without ego is unlikely to get elected. And a politician's identity can buoy constituents, even before new policies have been enacted: Adams is the city's second Black mayor, after David Dinkins, but its first working-class Black mayor from an outer-borough family. Yet Adams still seems unusual, in a democratic setting, for the extent to which he treats his own self—both his physical presence and his biography, as relayed in a few truncated scenes—like a civic asset,

Adams happily listens to sidewalk petitions, and gives out a cell-phone number where he says

he can be reached. He believes it "means the world" to people that they can say, "I fucking text the Mayor and he texts me back!"

PHOTOGRAPH BY MARK PETERSON

and a form of government. In the late eighties, when Adams was in the New York City transit police, he could bring a little order to a beery Coney Island subway car just by stepping onto it. His mayoralty attempts to reënact this stance. To borrow from the Jadakiss song that played as Adams approached a hotel-ballroom stage on Election Night, he runs a "The Champ Is Here" administration. The Mayor doesn't paint a picture of a brighter future; he invites us to be inspired by him. When Hillary Clinton interviewed Adams, at the start of his term, she began with the softest softball: What were his priorities for the city? He replied not with his agenda but with his story, in which he overcame youthful "dark moments" to pursue "justice and safety." (Becoming mayor, he assured Clinton, was "a natural transition for me.")

Mayor Adams attends all his budget and land-use meetings, which are largely held on Zoom, and at which he is likely to be seen bobbing on an exercise machine. He'll ask sensible questions and then thank colleagues for "delivering good product." He monitors municipal data, most often by reviewing spreadsheets on an iPad in the back of his mayoral Suburban. And he regularly confers with the half-dozen deputy mayors who have offices in the northwest corner of City Hall, near his, and who oversee the commissioners running the departments that employ some three hundred thousand people.

But his overriding instinct is to find ways to be visible. Adams's diary of official events seems far fuller than those of his predecessors Bill de Blasio and Michael Bloomberg. They might have been glad to skip, say, a Croatian flag-raising, or a mayoral forum on drones. New York is now led by someone who takes deep pleasure in the pleasure people take in seeing him. Adams recently told an audience, of his visits to an outreach center for unhoused people, "If you can see their faces when they walk down the line and they're given food—and they see their mayor!" (Adams has dismissed less responsive constituents as "naysayers," "haters," and "little people.")

Adams also has a personal schedule, which includes cigar-bar time with his son, Jordan Coleman, and late nights at Zero Bond, a members' club in NoHo. One spring evening, I saw Adams at a boxing event, in midtown, that pitted members of the Police Department against members of the Fire Department. He was drinking cocktails with Johnny Petrosyants, a friend who is a restaurateur and a convicted felon. When we'd met for dinner a few weeks earlier, Adams had agreed that he could be thought of as someone trying to embody New York. As one of his advisers told me, "To him, he *is* the city, because he's running the city."

To sustain this ambition, Adams follows a self-care regimen that includes meditation, a diet rich in plants, naps in the car—and the kind of breathing exercises that he has ordered city schools to teach, and that he encourages his staffers to emulate. Rachel Atcheson, a close adviser, told me, without complaint, that under Adams's influence she now sleeps with her mouth taped shut, "in order to force myself to breathe through my nose." (Her dreams, she said, have become more vivid.) Adams defends his life-style enthusiasms but isn't always earnest about them. When I sounded skeptical of Wim Hof, a Dutch ice-bath evangelist whose program Adams has started to follow, he laughed, saying, "You're going to call my idol a lunatic?"

Adams's schedule keeps him in contact with voters and donors, and shows him to be comfortable in any room, ready to hear people out. But his daily zigzagging across the city doesn't create confidence about his administration's likely impact on sustained municipal problems. His old friend Norman Siegel, a civil-rights lawyer and the former executive director of the New York Civil Liberties Union, recently said, "Sometimes I look at those events in the evenings and think, Why the fuck is he going to this thing?" Siegel recalled dryly suggesting to a mayoral-communications staffer that the staffer arrange a photo op of Adams sitting at his desk.

At the eighteen-month point in de Blasio's administration, tens of thousands of four- and five-year-olds had finished a year in a new program of free pre-K education. The Adams administration—working in admittedly more straitened times—has no equivalent achievement. Mayor Adams can point to any number of smaller initiatives—composting, free Internet in public housing—and can note a plan to create fourteen hundred new shelter beds for people who are unhoused, even as the city contends with an unprecedented influx of tens of thousands of asylum seekers. But if Adams stepped down tomorrow he might be remembered largely for a baffling redesign of the "I ♥ NY" logo, and for his willingness to recognize—or, in the eyes of critics, to recklessly amplify—the fear of crime felt by some residents. Last year, Adams proposed, with wild inaccuracy, that the city was more crime-ridden than he'd ever known it. (Recent crime increases haven't brought city crime anywhere close to the peak of the late eighties and early nineties.)

At the restaurant, the Mayor picked at his fries, and talked, as he has many times, about his shock on learning, in his mid-fifties, that he was diabetic. "Everything broke at one time," he said. "It was frightening." He couldn't see in one eye; his fingers tingled. Adams has claimed that six doctors he consulted said nothing about diet, and could promise only medication and future amputations. In his telling, he switched overnight to a plant-based diet, and within weeks he'd lost considerable weight and seen a "reversal" of his disease. "It's empowering to know that you could not be imprisoned by medicine," he told me.

His remarks on this theme went in some odd directions, as his remarks often do. He talked up a company that sells at-home gut-microbiome tests. But he could also point me to policy—to changes that his administration has made to the menus of schools and hospitals. Food is a favored topic. It allows Adams to connect political action to personal anecdote, a rhetorical move that's harder to pull off for most issues pressing on City Hall—say, the huge annual cost of police overtime (eight hundred million dollars) or inmate deaths in the dysfunctional jails on Rikers Island. An argument for eating more beans is where municipal politics looks most like the online inspirational vid-

REDUX

eos that Adams enjoys. With food, he has a story about taking control and, against élite expectations, turning things around. He often sounds frustrated that people don't characterize his mayoralty in exactly these terms.

"Remember, our minds are hardwired to hear stories," Adams told me. He got ready to leave, having eaten perhaps four fries. He explained that he had two more dinners scheduled. That night, then, he was giving a number of New Yorkers the opportunity to tell a story about sitting down to dinner with the Mayor, which is almost the same thing as eating dinner with the Mayor. Adams eventually headed out to Brooklyn, where, among other things, he shopped for sweatshirts and visited a pop-up art gallery. At a party celebrating the fiftieth anniversary of hip-hop, he appeared onstage with Ice-T.

Evan Thies, a key political adviser to Adams, recently described the months leading up to his client's election as mayor, in 2021: "Within a year, we went from 'Everybody hates the police—got to defund them,' to the guy who wins is an ex-cop who is saying the opposite." Thies's sense of achievement is understandable. Of New York's fifty-one City Council members, all but six are Democrats, and twenty-one are in the progressive caucus that considers police reform an urgent priority. The Mayor is a former Republican whose political character has been shaped largely by a police career. One can fairly think of his election as the N.Y.P.D.'s arrival in City Hall. If that points to potential virtues in an Adams mayoralty—indefatigability, perhaps; an alertness to working-class and outer-borough interests; trains running on time—it's also easy to detect, in his administration, the N.Y.P.D.'s historical weaknesses. These include an immense appetite for deference, and a readiness to think of external scrutiny as an affront. Adams shares some rhetorical habits with Patrick Lynch, the combative, Trump-endorsing former head of the Police Benevolent Association, the biggest police union in the city. For Adams, criticism is "demonization"; investigation is "disrespect."

When I asked Thies about the mayoral campaign, he described a turning point, in 2018, when he heard Adams address a church congregation. Adams was then in his second term as Brooklyn borough president—largely a ribbon-cutting and mayoral-prep role. As Thies recalls it, Adams talked about how his diabetes scare, two years earlier, had led him to "a bigger-picture way of thinking about the world, and his place in it," and how, as a police officer, he'd often scarfed down "a bunch of cheeseburgers from McDonald's" without realizing "that this was a bad idea." Thies was taken aback: "I thought, That might be the first vulnerable thing I've ever heard him say."

Adams, who joined the transit police in 1984, eleven years before it merged with the N.Y.P.D., has said that he felt the first stirrings of mayoral ambition in the early nineties. His former N.Y.P.D. colleague Corey Pegues, a drug dealer turned cop who, like Adams, grew up in South Jamaica, Queens, remembers hearing Adams talk about having "a twelve-year plan" to become mayor. Pegues told me, "Took a little more than twelve years. But, damn it, he did it." In one of my conversations with Adams this spring, he said, "I never thought for one moment I was *not* going to be mayor. Never."

Adams retired from the N.Y.P.D. as a captain, in 2006. He went on to secure four two-year terms in the New York State Senate, representing a district in central Brooklyn. He was elected borough president in 2013 and 2017. But in six elections Adams had never faced a serious challenger, not even in a primary. Frank Carone, a lawyer and a Brooklyn Democratic power broker who became Mayor Adams's first chief of staff, in 2022, recently explained how Adams had come to run unopposed in the 2013 primary. "We knocked some folks off the ballot," he told me, in a businesslike way. "Some other folks, we spoke to."

Adams could be a powerful public speaker, but he had the unsmiling manner of a police officer who's had about enough of your bullshit. As a first-term state senator, he made his mark by pressing for higher pay for state senators. (On the Senate floor, in Albany, he demanded, "Show me the money!") A decade ago, he gave an address to graduating students

"Please fill out these medical forms, which are identical to the ones you filled out earlier online, and have the exact same questions your doctor will ask you later in the exam room."

at Medgar Evers College, in Brooklyn, in which, dispensing with celebration, he told them to smarten up. There was an echo of a billboard campaign that he'd launched in 2010, "Stop the Sag!," which was ostensibly pitched at under-belted young men—"RAISE YOUR PANTS, RAISE YOUR IMAGE!"—but could also be described as a ploy for media attention. Adams, who around this time drove a BMW convertible and wore a thin strip of mustache, informed his audience that, as a public official, he met some of "the most intelligent, attractive ladies" in the city. He added, "And I'm not going to take you anywhere if you've got a tattoo on your neck with two cherries saying 'Lick Me.' It ain't happening."

In 2018, Adams no longer had a mustache. He had recently bought an apartment with his partner, Tracey Collins, a New York City schools administrator. The long balcony of their home—toward the top of a thirty-one-story building in Fort Lee, New Jersey—offered a panorama of Manhattan's skyline. It was minutes from one of the properties owned by Johnny Petrosyants and his twin, Robert, who in 2014 were convicted in a medical-billing-fraud case. Adams's son had been brought up in Hackensack, New Jersey, where his mother, a former *Daily News* reporter, lived with her partner. Adams also owned two properties in Brooklyn: a co-op in Prospect Heights and a house in Bedford-Stuyvesant, whose basement apartment he kept as his own.

By 2018, Adams and Thies were years into discussions about a mayoral run in 2021, when de Blasio's second term would end. But they had barely discussed policy. "The message conversation really starts once you're about to declare," Thies told me, describing a path to City Hall that would have sounded familiar to a candidate running a hundred years ago. The first objective was viability: "It's about building support politically, and knowing you're going to be able to pay for a campaign—you know, the logistics, the machinery." Adams, who had been registered as a Republican for several years at the turn of the millennium, and whose career had not been defined by sustained ideological commitments, was building an unusual coalition that came to include Black homeowners, Orthodox Jewish communities, and some key unions and real-estate interests. He'd set up an organization, One Brooklyn Fund, that accepted donations to finance events that promoted the borough—and promoted the borough president, too. Between columns of Brooklyn Borough Hall, he'd hung a banner showing his face.

Adams had always presented himself as "a very in-control, powerful person," Thies said. "Because he is! But that doesn't always work in politics. You need to show you're human—you're like everyone else. You need to say, 'I can lead you because *I am you*.'"

Adams's account of burger-scarfing was a useful "crack in the façade," Thies continued. "That was the beginning of this process of unlocking his story in a way that we could then use." Thies and Nathan Smith, a strategist who later became Adams's campaign director, extracted more biographical material. "He wasn't used to digging in his past like that," Thies said. "It was 'Eric, I know your family struggled when you were growing up. Tell me stories.'"

In one conversation with Thies and Smith, Adams talked, laughing, about how his mother had always told him and his five siblings to be ready with a Plan B. Thies explained to me, "Eric said, 'Sometimes she would send us to school with a garbage bag full of clothes, because she didn't know if the marshals were going to come.' Nathan and I were, like, 'Oh, my God. That's a striking visual.' And it went into the stump speech." So, eventually, did the phrase "I am you." Thies also recalled Smith telling Adams, "Eric, you're very attractive. Please smile more. Your base loves it."

Thies said that, in recent years, Adams has become "much more open—and, I think, happier and more centered." He added, "There's a little bit of therapy in running for office. It can make you reveal things to yourself about yourself." Adams has thanked Thies for having "captured my voice."

Between 2018 and 2021, Adams appeared on dozens of podcasts with names such as "Plantstrong" and "Spiritual Shit," and talked primarily about his response to diabetes. He sometimes recorded three or four episodes in a day. He attested to the power of turmeric, the importance of doing one's own medical research, and the grim contents of his fridge at the start of 2016. "It was all processed," he once said. "It was all heavy with sugar, heavy with fat, heavy with processed oil. And I just threw it all out." He frequently allowed himself to be introduced as a vegan, and once or twice said that he was one. Adams proposed that, as mayor, he'd bring food issues into every classroom. "How many apples does it take to make a salad? That is math," he said. Or, for geography: "Where does a banana come from?"

When the pandemic began, Adams sometimes tied his food journey to that crisis. Before a vaccine was developed, he argued, rashly, that a diet like his enhances a person's immunity, and that natural immunity is the "best defense against viruses." (Unusually for an elected official, Adams had announced, at a public event in 2018, that he didn't need a flu shot that year; he'd also said, falsely, that the "jury is still out" on whether the M.M.R. vaccine causes autism. Later, he didn't hesitate to support the COVID vaccines.) In pandemic-era interviews, Adams correctly noted that by mitigating preëxisting conditions he'd reduced his risk of severe illness from COVID. But this led him to refer pitilessly to those less fortunate: an ambulance will be "taking your butt to the hospital, where you are going to die," he said.

The wellness conversations prepared Adams for the storytelling campaign to come. But a self-approving account of a personal transformation doesn't exactly signal "I am you." Adams's clearer message was, as he once put it, "You could be the you you've always wanted to be." When on the campaign trail Adams began describing himself as "perfectly imperfect," it was with the implication that his imperfections were obstacles, such as dyslexia, that he'd already overcome. Later, in 2022, he had to deploy "perfectly imperfect" to stave off criticism, after Politico reported that Adams wasn't a strict vegan: he ate fish. He initially denied this; he denied to me, untruthfully, that he'd ever claimed to be a vegan. His statements about diet continue to surprise. Adams told me, "If I see a piece of chicken, I'm going to nibble on it."

On the health podcasts, Adams was

never coy about his political ambitions. But he also seemed to be claiming a place among inspirational speakers—to be a guru-in-training. In one conversation, Adams enthused about the way that, thanks to TED talks, YouTube, and podcasts, "an accumulation of believers are now at a centralized spot, out there in this place we call cyber." He went on, "We're going to start to see believers start to come together, and build these communities and these colonies. . . . That excites me—that I can go out and find other believers, and I believe our energy, our vibration, will start to deal with some of the major issues that have held us back." If Adams was talking primarily about dietary views not embraced by the medical mainstream, he was also open to a broader agenda of woo-woo thinking. He once declared a "firm" belief in reincarnation, and described a previous life as an ancient Sumerian.

Adams often brought up Joe Dispenza, the author of such books as "You Are the Placebo" (2014). Adams told me that Dispenza is still one of his favorite writers. Dispenza, a chiropractor by training, writes self-help books that draw on his scientific reading. "Breaking the Habit of Being Yourself" (2012) proposes an interconnectedness among people, across time and space, akin to quantum entanglement in particle physics. (Adams has publicly referred to quantum entanglement.) The book cites a paper that Leonard Leibovici, an Israeli medical researcher, published in the *British Medical Journal* in 2001. Leibovici had directed prayers, from afar, toward a randomized sample of hospital patients with infections. The results appeared to show that prayed-for patients had done better: shorter infections, fewer deaths. Dispenza doesn't note that Leibovici's paper was published in an annual holiday issue featuring experiments on absurd topics: unicycles, lost teaspoons. The absurdity in Leibovici's paper, which was plainly satirical, was that he'd studied *retroactive* prayer: the measured infections had all run their course, fatal or not, years before Leibovici offered prayers. Dispenza tells readers the experiment shows that "our intentions, our thoughts and feelings, and our prayers not only affect our present or future, but they can actually affect our past." Extending the self-help truism of creating a better future, Dispenza dangles the possibility of creating a better past.

"I miss helicopter parenting."

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A few weeks ago, I heard Adams speak at the Bethel Gospel Assembly, in Harlem. Adams, who has claimed a history of fighting in boxing matches, told the congregation, "I was so good in the gym—but I'd get knocked out in the ring." In the spring of 2021, Adams made a campaign stop at Gleason's, the Brooklyn boxing gym. As Adams's hands were being wrapped ahead of a photo op, he was asked, "Have you ever boxed before?" "No," Adams replied, adding that he'd sometimes punched a bag at his gym.

The Mayor apparently reserves the right to mix incidents from his own life with material from his quantum lives: things that could have happened, or almost happened, or happened to someone he once met. All potentials exist simultaneously. An Adams untruth will not be outrageously grandiose and grifty, like those told by Representative George Santos. But Adams doesn't just polish anecdotes. He is unusually ready to repeat things that are confirmably untrue, or that—in their internal contradictions, or avoidance of specifics, or mutability from one telling to the next—seem very likely to be untrue. There's an echo of Donald Trump, whose messaging style Adams praised after the 2016 election. "All of those one-liners, it was nothing complicated," Adams said. "Everybody else wanted to be so sophisticated and talk about their major plans of doing X, Y, and Z, and Donald was just A, B, C."

It's a rare day when Adams doesn't reference Desmond Tutu talking about the importance of fixing problems "upstream," rather than "pulling people out of the river," half-drowned. Tutu never said this. (The Mayor's office noted that a Google search yields many attributions to Tutu.) Online, Adams has posted uplifting quotes falsely or dubiously attributed to E. M. Forster, Winston Churchill, George Eliot, Rosa Parks, and many others.

Some people in New York politics seem to regard Adams's untruthfulness as a quirk deserving little more than an eye roll—like de Blasio's rooting for the Red Sox. "Cops sit in their patrol cars and they love to bullshit," a veteran public official who has informally advised the Adams administration told me. But

some of the Mayor's autobiographical claims have a strange air of recklessness. Last year, after the murder of two police officers in Harlem, Adams made a speech in which he described having long carried, in his wallet, a small photograph of a police-officer friend who was murdered in 1987. A week later, Adams showed this crumpled keepsake to journalists. The *Times* recently reported that, in the days following the speech, City Hall aides had manufactured the wallet photograph by downloading an image from the Internet, then staining a print with coffee, to make it look old. Adams did not admit to the deception and attacked the paper for checking, before publication, whether he'd truly been the officer's friend.

Last summer, during a speech at a Dominican flag-raising ceremony in Bowling Green park, Adams ebulliently noted, "I may have been born in Alabama, but I'm Dominican, baby!" I heard Adams repeat the line six months later, at an event hosted by the New York congressman Adriano Espaillat. Adams's mother was born in Alabama, but Adams was not—he was born in a Park Slope hospital.

In 1968, when he was seven, the family moved to Queens. Adams's mother, along with Adams and his siblings, began attending a local church. Adams has often said that they called it "the 'Cheers' church—everybody knew your name." The sitcom "Cheers" débuted in 1982.

Adams has said that, when he was six or seven, his father took him to Harlem on Saturdays, to hear a man giving fiery speeches. Only years later did he realize that the speaker was Malcolm X. In the first few years of Adams's life, Malcolm X did make occasional high-profile speeches in Harlem, but he was not making regular Saturday appearances. When he was assassinated, in February, 1965, Adams was four.

As Adams tells it, his adolescent years were marked by extreme highs and lows. He has often said that by the age of twelve he had an important role in New York's networks of illegal gambling. Earlier this year, he declared, "I was one of the top illegal numbers runners in the city." He has also said that when he was a teen he worked for tips as a squeegee guy—washing windshields at intersections—but couldn't afford a squeegee. Adams once said to an interviewer, "When I played football for Bayside High School, we used to win championships all the time." He told me that he never played football for Bayside.

Adams has sometimes talked of the death of Clifford Glover, a ten-year-old shot by a police officer in South Jamaica, in 1973. Adams once said that, after the killing, he "was marching and leading the protests." (The Mayor has also referred to the police killings of Randolph Evans, in 1976, or Arthur Miller, in 1978, as the start of his involvement in protests.) When Glover was killed, Adams was twelve; there's no evidence that he led protests.

In a speech given at Columbia University earlier this year, Adams repeated the frequently cited but famously untrue notion that if you put a frog in cold water and then heat the water slowly, the frog will allow itself to be boiled to death. Adams added this gloss: he'd done the experiment himself, in school. "If you think about it, it was a terrible experiment," he said.

In October, 2020, Adams published "Healthy at Last," as a prelude to his more formal mayoral-campaign launch, a month later. He shared recipes for soups and salads, and prefaced these with the story he'd now told a hundred times. It starts with an addiction to junk food, formed in part by the stresses of a police career, including his experience of 9/11. In the book, Adams writes that, at the time of his diagnosis, his breakfast was eggs and pastries; his kitchen had "a small mountain of Big Mac cartons in the recycling bin."

On a Zoom call not long ago, which

TESTIMONIES

only women testify in this strange town
one speaks of a missing child
two speak of the tortured in the basement
three repeat what rapes and avert their eyes
four speak of the screams from the military headquarters
five speak of the executed in their own yards
six speak but are incomprehensible
seven check food supplies counting out loud
eight call me a liar because there is no justice
nine talk on their way to the cemetery
I'm also on my way because I know them all
in this town

its dead are my dead

its survivors are my sisters

ten speak of a survivor, a man
he's returned from captivity
he could testify

I knock on his door, a neighbor
opens.

"It seems like he has survived, all right,"
she says.
"Go talk to the women."

—Victoria Amelina (1986–2023)

(Translated, from the Ukrainian, by Valzhyna Mort.)

began while Adams was sitting on the ferry that runs between Governor's Island and Manhattan and ended with him in a halo of light in the back of his Suburban, I asked him about this foundational story. He has said that he avoided medical checkups for so long that when he finally saw a doctor, after a February, 2016, trip to Israel, his A1C blood-sugar test produced a reading of seventeen per cent—an extraordinarily high number. (David Dunaief, a physician who has since treated Adams, appeared with him in a video promoting plant-based diets, and rattled off that number. But in a recent interview Dunaief couldn't confirm its accuracy.)

I asked Adams if there was perhaps a longer period, starting before 2016, where he was aware of his disease, and not eating Big Macs. As Adams writes in "Healthy at Last," his mother was diabetic, and Tracey Collins, his partner, was prediabetic. As borough president, Adams had promoted National Diabetes Month. And, as I mentioned to Adams, I'd seen videos from well before 2016 in which he'd spoken very highly of kale.

Adams had me repeat the question, then said, firmly, "No." Until 2016, he considered pastrami a health food. "I never ate kale until I was diagnosed with diabetes," he said. "I didn't even know what kale was."

"Meet the Regulars," a book of interviews done in Brooklyn bars and restaurants, included a 2015 lunch with Adams, at a Petrosyants restaurant. Adams compared Brooklyn's recent cultural flowering to an "overweight but gorgeous" woman he dated in college. For lunch, he ordered lamb and a salad of his own invention, which included kale and had no dressing.

That year, Adams said at a public event that he started his mornings with a smoothie made of green vegetables, including kale. In 2014, Adams had hosted a "Cut the Salt!" event outside Brooklyn Borough Hall, at which he described using a NutriBullet to make smoothies. "This is how I start my morning! I put kale in the NutriBullet," he said. He added, "Health is better than wealth!"

Recently, Adams told me that it's fair to detect some "mumbo jumbo" in his storytelling—"Hey, your data is mixed up, Eric!"—but that he used "the stories of my life to say that, no matter where you are, you can overcome."

Inspirational embroidery can get in the way of a genuinely inspiring story. I recently had lunch with Bernie Adams, who is the youngest of Eric's siblings and, like Eric, a former N.Y.P.D. officer. At the start of his brother's administration, Bernie, who is fifty-eight, accepted Eric's offer to oversee City Hall's security. After the administration made a belated referral to New York City's Conflicts of Interest Board, Bernie's role was downgraded to senior security adviser, and his salary was reduced from two hundred and ten thousand dollars to one dollar. He left after fifteen months—earlier than planned. The brothers hadn't fallen out, though Bernie told me that it was nice to no longer have Eric teasing him that he was a wimp for sometimes going home at ten.

Bernie resembles Eric to the extent that crowds sometimes applauded him when he exited a mayoral car. On these occasions, he would give a thumbs-up. He's easy company—it's as if someone had dialled down his brother's alpha weirdness, leaving only self-possession and sociability. It's unsurprising to learn that Bernie has weighed a political career of his own.

He was three when their parents, Dorothy Mae and Leroy, left Brooklyn and took out a mortgage to buy an eight-

hundred-square-foot house in South Jamaica. In an upstairs room, under the eaves, the four boys initially shared two beds. The elder of their two sisters had her own little room; the other slept in a hallway.

"We grew up in a poor household," Bernie said. It could be hard to pay the mortgage. "But our household was fun. Friday night used to be games night. And we had a devotional night, too—sit around talking about the Bible." On Sundays, they attended the Church of Christ on Rockaway Boulevard: "Dad took us. He didn't go himself. Load us in the car, get us there, pick us up."

Dorothy Mae worked as a house cleaner, and later as a cook in a child-care center; Leroy had worked as a butcher. "Mom ran a strict household," Bernie said. "And when my mom wasn't there my sister was her eyes and ears. So there was no hanky-panky. You didn't come and go as you wanted to. You went to school, you got your homework done." Bernie detects in Eric's spreadsheet orderliness the impact of dyslexia, but also of their upbringing. "He's a systems guy," he said. "Everything has to have a system."

Bernie's details are helpful, given that Eric's childhood memories sometimes have the shadings of amateur devotional art. When the Mayor spoke to the press on International Women's Day, earlier this year, in front of a new art work at City Hall—three flags resembling dirty dishcloths—he recalled his mother using a single rag "not only to wipe her hands after cooking the meal" but also "to wipe her eyes, to hide her tears of the uncertainty of the next day . . . to hide the tears of trying to figure out why her son couldn't learn in school." Adams proposed that the day recognized not only women of individual achievement but also the mothers of such "great men" as David Dinkins, Thurgood Marshall, and himself. In one of my conversations with Adams, he said of his mother, "She adored me. I gave her hell growing up. But, it turned out, she was very, very proud. She just enjoyed being Eric Adams's mom."

Until the older children began earning money, the family relied largely on Dorothy Mae's modest income; Leroy was an increasingly irregular part of the family. "He would be there today, go for a pack of cigarettes, and come back a week later," Bernie recalled, laughing. "If it wasn't so sad, it would be comical. I remember writing him letters. Like, 'I want to hang out with you.'" His mother's instructions, Bernie told me, were "Love Dad. He's your father. Respect him. He sucks as a husband, sucks as a father, but he's your dad." Eric described his father to me as "one of the nicest human beings, but he wasn't a father."

Eric and his siblings later learned that, during their childhood, their father had

started a second family, and that they had a half brother and two half sisters in Brooklyn. "That was devastating," Bernie told me. "One sister was, like, five months younger than me. I thought I was the youngest, I thought I was the baby!" (Leroy died in 2016; Dorothy Mae died two years ago.)

Eric was "naturally smart," Bernie said. "If he wasn't dyslexic, he'd be an Einstein." Eric, like his three older siblings, attended Bayside High School, in the north of the borough; it was then a majority-white school. (Jordan Belfort, the Wolf of Wall Street, was two years behind him.) Bernie said of his brother, "He was a leader—a guy that people will follow. He wasn't going to school to become a scientist, but 'This is where my fans are.'" He added, "You're a rock star, you play to your crowd. He loves being right in the center. So it was fun going to school. Even now, as mayor, he thrives off that energy. Getting people—not so much bowing down to him, but just really excited to see him. He's excited to see *them*."

As a high-school student, Adams was never told that he had dyslexia—he later made the diagnosis himself. He has said, "From K through 12, I used to walk in the school building—they used to put 'Dumb Student' on the chair." Adams, speaking of his "horrific experience in high school," recalled "being embarrassed to be called on to read, laughed at, just about bullied." I mentioned Bernie's point about it being fun to see his fans, and he laughed: "Let me tell you where the fans were. They were in the park playing Cee-Lo, playing craps with me. They were not in the classroom."

Adams has said that in the mid-seventies, when he was a teen-ager, he was on the periphery of a Queens gang called the Seven Crowns. "We were not bad kids," he told me. "We were mischievous." This description was backed up by Corey Pegues, the former drug dealer. Pegues, who is about a decade younger than Adams, sold crack for the Supreme Team, a violent South Jamaica-based gang, in the eighties. The Seven Crowns, he said, was primarily about "hanging out with your boys," adding, "It wasn't a stickup crew. They weren't selling drugs and doing all this crazy stuff." An association with the Seven Crowns would have given Adams—who wasn't from a housing project, and was bused eight miles north to school—some local standing. "The kid that's going to school every day and church on Sundays is cornball," Pegues said. "To get the street cred, you've got to get some street knowledge." Adams, interviewed for a recent documentary about the Supreme Team, which was linked to at least twenty homicides, was almost admiring of the gang's brutal entrepreneurship: such "street-corner C.E.O.s" shouldn't be judged from an "intellectual, born-on-third-base mind-set," he said. Adams can sometimes sound more forgiving of criminals with felonious ambition—go-getters—than of those guilty of misdemeanors. Last year, Adams criticized the incoming Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg for indicating that his office wouldn't prosecute turnstile jumpers.

I asked Bernie if one could think of the high-school-age Eric as an essentially good kid. "No!" he said. "He was a bad kid!" But he wasn't "robbing old ladies," and it was a momentous event when, at some point in the mid-seventies, Eric and one of his older brothers, Conrad, were arrested for criminal trespassing and held overnight. "I had this pit in my stomach all day—my brothers are in jail!" Bernie said. "And that was a foreign concept. You know, we didn't get arrested."

Eric has told the story of his arrest in different ways, but he consistently describes a crime of restitution—almost of righteousness. A woman who danced at a local strip club owed Eric and Conrad money for some errands they'd run for her; the brothers maybe took a money order and a TV from her apartment. (Bernie supposes that this was Eric's plan, not Conrad's.) The brothers were apprehended and taken to the 103rd Precinct, in Jamaica.

Decades later, Bernie learned that, when Eric and Conrad were in custody, officers kicked them both repeatedly in the groin. Bernie told me, "He was a smart-mouth. I can see him saying something smart—and then, 'O.K., take him downstairs.'" In 1999, Adams talked about this incident in an unpublished interview with the journalist Juan Williams. Adams recalled that a Black officer had interrupted the abuse by his white colleagues: "This Black guy was able to go among those white guys and stop this. He got juice—J-U-I-C-E, as the kids would say." Williams, recounting this conversation in a 2021 article for *The Atlantic*, wrote, "Eric was drawn to power. He thought the cops had a great hustle."

In recent years, Eric Adams has described the violence of that day as traumatic. In November, 2020, six months after the murder of George Floyd, Adams

"I think I see Camille—no, wait, it's just a swarm of bees."

released his first campaign video, in which he said, "Some people talk about police brutality. I want to tell you how it is to live through it." Yet he also seems protective of the officers involved. "Sometimes we expect perfection from those who put on the uniform," Adams told me. But "if you're met with ill-conceived hatred, it's going to play out in how you police." That is, South Jamaica was a place of "great, hardworking, middle-class and low-income New Yorkers. But the police were encountering the *worst* of people—they weren't encountering the average person." The policemen who kicked him, he said, were surely telling themselves, "Here's some more badass kids. We're going to teach them a lesson."

Adams's empathy for his past self can, of course, coexist with empathy for the men who assaulted him. But that combination creates odd political messaging. Even as Adams declares his solidarity with the abused—"I am you"—he puts himself in a category of people whose abuse by police was *meant for others*. He was victimized because lesser people had been disrespectful to the police.

Bernie Adams said of his brother, "He loves cops. The guy *loves cops*. And he's going to give the cop the benefit of the doubt until we can prove otherwise." (Bernie added that Conrad Adams, now a farmer in South Carolina, never welcomed his brothers' police careers. Conrad could not be reached for comment.) It puzzles Bernie that Eric has apparently never sought out the details of his arrest. Eric made his assault a cornerstone of his campaign, and held a press conference outside the 103rd on the first day of his mayoralty. But he told me that he'd never even tried to identify the officers involved. Bernie said that, had he been in Eric's place, he would have wanted to know more: "I would have asked those cops, 'What were you *thinking* when you did that? And how many times did you do it?'"

On an evening in February, after midnight, Adams was at the World Trade Center subway stop, where the E train terminates. He was with a TV news crew, and some city social workers who had the job of nudging people to use shelters rather than sleep on the trains. Such persuasion relies largely on patient talk, but the workers also handed out flyers showing photographs of available accommodation, and they could make an icebreaking offer of a new pair of sneakers.

A young man was standing on the platform, underdressed for the weather, marching in place. Adams, always the joyful center of attention, and always ready with a "Good to see you, brother!" or a "Hey, ladies!," had the peculiar experience of being ignored.

"You want another pair of shoes?" Adams asked, pleasantly, from about ten feet away. "Want a pair of shoes?"

He asked a few more times, until the man said, "Am I answering your question?"

"I'm sorry, I didn't hear you," Adams said.

The man, now talking as if to a child: "Am I *answering your question*?" His commitment to ignoring the Mayor's sneakers was impressive, but so was Adams's equanimity in the face of this scorn.

The man then said, "No, I don't want a pair of shoes."

"O.K., fair enough," Adams said. "O.K. if I give you a card?"

"No."

On a later occasion, Adams told me, "I was a good cop. And all of my superiors would say, 'When Eric was on the desk, I could sleep good at night. Because Eric is not going to let any bullshit happen.' They won't be getting that call: 'Hey, Volpe just stuffed a plunger up someone's rear.'" (He was referring to the 1997 assault on Abner Louima by Justin Volpe, an N.Y.P.D. officer.) Adams went on, "I was always a fun guy to be around. We all bullshit, we all joke. I was a cop's cop."

Adams has described his decision to join the police as an act of radical politics. Despite his unhappiness at Bayside, he'd had the good sense after graduating—it still surprises him today—to start taking courses at Queensborough Community College. He later attended City Tech, in Brooklyn, and graduated with a computing associate's degree.

As Adams has sometimes told the story, he joined the transit police after a mentor—the Reverend Herbert Daughtry, of Brooklyn's House of the Lord Pentecostal Church—called upon him to "fight for change." As Adams put it to me, Daughtry gave him the "assignment" of a police career.

In the late seventies, Daughtry had begun hosting a weekly political-study meeting, the Timbuktu Learning Center, in the basement of the church. Adams frequently attended, and then he became involved in a civil-rights group, the National Black United Front, that Daughtry co-founded in 1980. In a recent conversation, Daughtry, now ninety-two, told me that he had indeed raised the idea of a law-enforcement career with Adams, and with some others. Daughtry recalled, "My best friends were looking at me kind of strange—here I am, emerging as the leader of the most radical Afrocentric part of the movement, telling some kids that we need you to join the police department!" He told me that his instincts were as much pastoral as political. Acknowledging his debt to the philosophy of William James, he explained, "For people to be happy, they've got to find something to which they can give themselves. And that's contrary to the way the world views life: *Get what you can get*. Policing is a noble career to which a person should aspire, because it's an opportunity to save lives, to protect lives."

In fact, when Daughtry brought up his becoming an officer, Adams had already taken the preliminary exam to join the police. Speaking recently, he didn't challenge Daughtry's memory. "I was an angry little boy," he said. Daughtry could see that this path "was going to ground me." Adams noted that, despite "all the bad things people think about law enforcement," the "discipline is unbelievable."

Adams has said that, for much of his police career, he was following a program to make himself electable. After a few years on patrol, he transferred to the transit police's Data Processing Unit, in Brooklyn, becoming what some cops call a "house mouse." (Bill Bratton, the former N.Y.P.D. commissioner, recently used that term, in a friendly enough way, when talking about this part of Adams's career. He went on to praise Adams, whose administration he has sometimes advised, for resisting "woke" orthodoxy in the city and state legislatures, saying, "He's really swimming upstream against Niagara Falls.")

By 1994, Adams had been promoted to sergeant, and he'd become the president of the Grand Council of Guardians, the officially recognized organization representing Black law-enforcement

officials. That year, he failed to collect enough signatures to run for the New York congressional seat held by a long-time incumbent, Major Owens. He publicly criticized Owens for having denounced the Nation of Islam; Adams said that he was ready to look past that group's antisemitism, in the interest of taking advantage of its crime-fighting ambitions.

In 1995, Adams co-founded 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care, a group that at first focussed on community outreach. Adams and others in the group provided security for Mike Tyson when he was paroled after serving three years of a prison sentence for rape. (This was despite an N.Y.P.D. prohibition on officers fraternizing with convicted felons.)

Adams recalls being advised that his political future would be improved by a bachelor's degree. He began taking courses in criminal justice at John Jay College, in Manhattan. Among his professors was Eugene O'Donnell, a former N.Y.P.D. officer and a former prosecutor. In an interview, O'Donnell praised Adams as a fine student who was sanguine about sitting alongside others half his age. "He essentially co-taught the class," O'Donnell told me.

But O'Donnell, an unrelenting pro-police pundit, was otherwise scornful of what he viewed as Adams's disloyalty to law enforcement. There is a strand of N.Y.P.D. opinion in which Adams is *not* a cop's cop. (The union that represents N.Y.P.D. captains backed Andrew Yang, not Adams, for mayor.) In 1999, the year after Adams graduated from John Jay, Amadou Diallo was killed by plainclothes officers in the N.Y.P.D.'s Street Crimes Unit. As Marq Claxton, a co-founder of 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement, recently noted, public attention on that case was so intense that the group's reactions to it were widely noticed. This was "our coming-out party," Claxton said. Adams told the media that the S.C.U. had been given "carte blanche to do as it will to the people of the City of New York, especially the African American community." He organized an event at which a former S.C.U. member described the unit's stop-and-frisk practice as racial profiling.

Adams told me, "If you go to the Giuliani years, and do an analysis of who was fighting against all the heavy-handed policing—that was very few voices. It was Reverend Sharpton. It was Reverend Daughtry. It was 100 Blacks in Law Enforcement Who Care." This leaves out a lot of other critics. Moreover, the year that Diallo was killed, Adams was quoted saying, "Giuliani deserves tremendous credit for the falling crime rate. What Giuliani has done was done despite serious critics who said it couldn't be done. But he had the will to do it, so it was done."

Adams's record as an activist seems at times to undermine equally the observations of defenders and detractors. Norman Siegel, the civil-rights lawyer, described him to me as fearless and principled in what became an increasingly contentious role. O'Donnell, meanwhile, came to regard Adams as intolerably self-interested: "Eric's brand is built on trashing people who were in the street. They were out doing raids, taking murderers into custody at three o'clock in the morning—a guy might have a gun under his bed." Meanwhile, Adams "was ready to get up for his computer job, or whatever."

That's not a fair description of Adams's broader police career. But neither, perhaps, is Adams's own description. In 2021, in a disagreement with progressive City Council members about solitary confinement, Adams said, "I wore a bullet-proof vest for twenty-two years and protected the people of this city. When you do that, *then* you have the right to question me."

O'Donnell, remembering the mayoral campaign, said, "He was able to present himself as a police person *and* as an anti-police person, and was able to benefit in both directions." He added, "It's leveraging, it's positioning, it's advantage. Eric has an eye for Eric."

Evan Thies, the political consultant, recently described a call he received, in the spring of 2021, from Nathan Smith, Adams's campaign director. The Democratic mayoral primary was several months away. In a field of a dozen, Adams was a serious contender, but Yang led in the polls.

Smith asked Thies if he'd seen that week's N.Y.P.D. CompStat numbers—its crime data. "And I looked, and *holy cow*," Thies said. Seen today, a graph of murders in New York City shows a spike in March and April, 2021; the numbers then drop—briefly, to a level lower than that of 2020. (Other crimes, including grand larceny, also increased that spring compared with 2020, when COVID had caused those numbers to fall.) The topic of crime "was good for us, we knew it," Thies told me. Adams challenged more progressive candidates, such as Maya Wiley, on policies designed to reform or shrink the N.Y.P.D. He also used crime to change the subject.

That April, for example, Yang held an event announcing that, if elected, he would crack down on the corrupt use of parking placards by city employees, including cops. This topic could be thought of as an Adams vulnerability: his support for "broken windows" policing had carved out an exception for the everyday corruption of government officials. When an anonymous Twitter user had objected to police vehicles blocking Brooklyn turning lanes, Adams had compared this person to a Klan member. He'd protected the right of his own staff to leave their cars, illegally, in the park next to Borough Hall, on the basis that previous borough presidents had allowed it. "I fought my entire life to make sure men that look like me don't have different rules than anyone else," Adams said. (As if in solidarity with Adams's position, the Petrosyants twins, when they opened Osteria La Baia—a midtown restaurant that became an Adams favorite—parked a car filled with flowers on the sidewalk, permanently.) In response to Yang's remarks, the Adams campaign released a statement: "Violent crime is skyrocketing in New York. People are dying. Five-year-old and 12-year-old children are being shot in our streets—and Andrew Yang is focused on double parking."

In May, Adams was endorsed by the *Post*. Not long afterward, Yang claimed in a debate that Adams had been investigated for corruption "everywhere you've gone." Yang was referring to several internal N.Y.P.D. investigations that involved Adams; a 2010 report by New York's inspector general into the dubious awarding of a casino license in Queens, which declared that the testimony of Adams, then a state senator, was not believable; and two New York Department of Investigation examina-

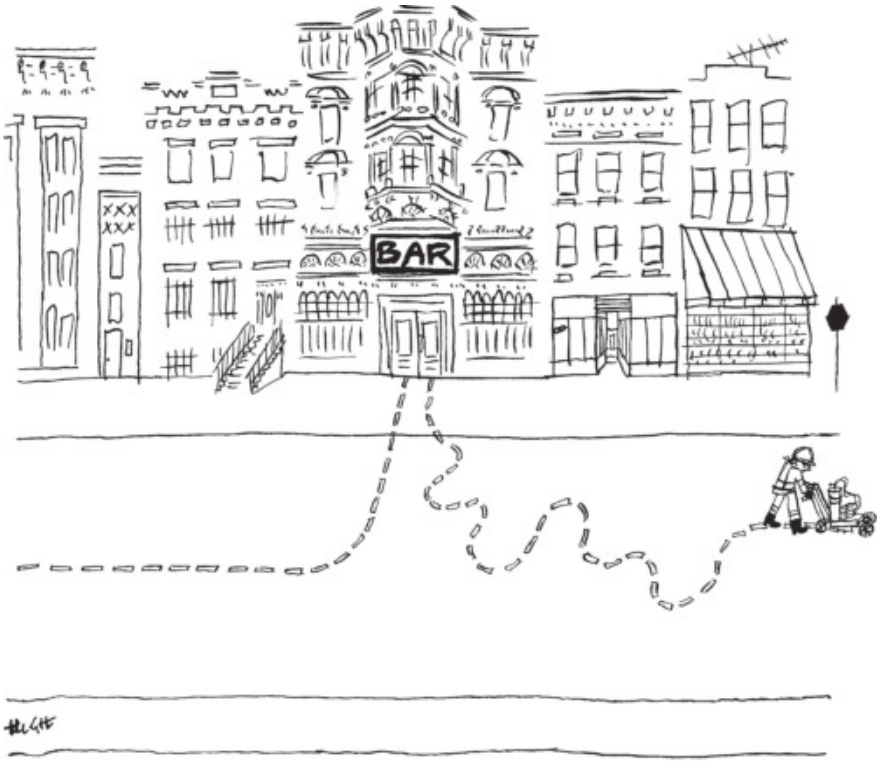
tions of One Brooklyn Fund. (The Mayor's office recently noted that no wrongdoing has ever been established.) Reporting during the campaign had also revealed that Adams hadn't paid tax on rental income derived from his house in Bed-Stuy. (Adams later explained that his property paperwork was in a muddle because his accountant was homeless.) Although the media didn't ignore the fact that Adams had repeatedly been under suspicion of ethical lapses, the question of corruption hardly dominated his media coverage.

Then, two weeks before the primary, Politico ran a story about the mystery of Adams's home address. As a voter and as a candidate, Adams had declared that the basement in Bed-Stuy was his legal residence. Politico had staked it out: Adams was never there.

The campaign couldn't ignore the story, because a candidate whose primary home is in New Jersey—in a building whose amenities include an indoor and an outdoor pool—can't legally become New York City's mayor. In fact, it seemed likely that Adams more often spent the night in Brooklyn Borough Hall than in Fort Lee. A year earlier, at the height of the pandemic, his decision to sometimes sleep at work, on a mattress on the floor, could be presented as a gung-ho sacrifice. But to make Borough Hall his home was an ethical and legal complication. Later reporting established that between 2017 and 2019 Adams had told the I.R.S. that he wasn't living in his Bed-Stuy apartment.

The campaign considered holding a press event in the basement on the following day. Thies told me, "My theory was: If you make a spectacle, and it all seems silly, then maybe the accusations are silly." Adams, he said, initially resisted the idea. "This is his house. His son lived there"—Thies checked himself—"you know, *with* him. It was really, at that moment, more his son's apartment, because Eric was gone so much."

Adams was persuaded, and at about 1:30 A.M. he reached the apartment and video-called Thies, who was a new parent. Thies recalled, "I'm trying to quiet my screaming infant son, with the future mayor of New York taking me around his apartment, saying, 'Do you think I should leave this Buddha statue here? What about what's in the fridge?



Like, my son's got all his video-game equipment out.'"

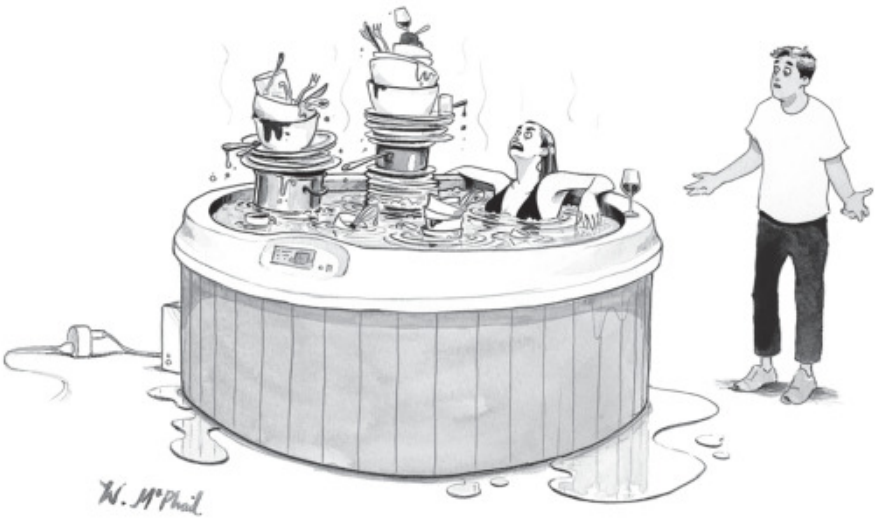
In the morning, reporters arrived at the basement door. Adams spoke to them outside, with Jordan Coleman by his side. Wiping away tears, Adams said that he'd always been secretive about his personal life, to protect his family; he regretted that public service had kept him away from so many of his son's birthdays and football games. (Adams certainly puts in long hours. But in the years when Coleman played high-school football Adams was in the New York Senate—a body that, every June, goes into recess for six months. Coleman recently told me that, even when his father's absence had saddened him, he'd valued Adams as a "metaphorical father.")

Journalists trooped through the apartment in groups. The campaign had framed the event as a rebuttal, but the low-ceilinged apartment, with one bed, looked exactly like what it was: the place where Coleman lived, surrounded by his sneakers, and with some of his dad's stuff on the shelves. The event was like watching a politician deny an affair while holding the hand of his mistress.

But, as Chris Coffey, one of Yang's campaign managers, put it to me, "nobody cared." Coffey recalled that the next morning's *Daily News* "had him with a picture of his son, in the home that he *did not live in*, and the headline was 'ADAMS FAMILY VALUES.'" A defeated laugh. "I just threw in the towel." Adams won the primary; that fall, he defeated Curtis Sliwa in the general election.

I recently noticed a photograph that Adams posted to Twitter in 2017. It shows the inside of a big white French-door fridge, and the caption reads, "This is my #plantbased fridge at home in #BedStuy. These are the foods waiting to refuel and heal me. This is my absolute best #medicine." It's easy to identify the fridge: it's the same Whirlpool model that was in the listing for the Fort Lee apartment when Adams bought it, in 2016. Adams did not have a white French-door Whirlpool "at home in #BedStuy." (The Mayor confirmed that the photograph is of his Fort Lee fridge, but said that a staffer wrote the tweet for him.)

According to Bernie Adams, Eric now sometimes sleeps at City Hall, in "a little war room that's turned into a place to hang out." Tracey Collins still lives in Fort Lee. The Mayor



"I'm letting them soak!"

• •

has disputed a report in Politico saying that, according to five sources, he sometimes stays overnight at an apartment, owned by the Petrosyants, in the Trump World Tower.

Adams also has a bedroom at Gracie Mansion. One morning earlier this year, at six o'clock, he met me at the nearby Mansion Diner, which is decorated with mayoral memorabilia. Adams hadn't eaten there before. One of the owners told him that Robert Wagner, who was the mayor when Adams was born, used to come in every day. Adams ordered oatmeal with "just a little banana—like, a quarter, not a half." His phone rang. "Tracey! How are you doing?"

During the campaign, Adams announced that, if elected, he'd dispense with a security detail and carry his own gun. He does have a detail; he doesn't carry a gun. After breakfast, four officers walked with us toward the Q train. On Eighty-sixth Street, Adams noticed a pile of bedding on the sidewalk, and asked someone in his entourage to inform the Sanitation Department. On the subway, he acknowledged admiring remarks, and chatted with some N.Y.U. drama students. "You're lucky," he said. "Your parents must be rich." There was applause when he got off the train at City Hall.

In Adams's model of city government, the mayor is, in part, a kind of secret shopper. He makes what he calls "spot checks" around town, and monitors a dozen spreadsheets that carry live data about issues that particularly matter to him. One documents homeless encampments, whose removal he championed last year—a process that he compared to the work of Jesus. "Prior mayors didn't keep their eyes on things," he told me that morning. "They basically hired people and said, 'Go ahead.'"

Brendan McGuire, whom the Mayor appointed his first chief counsel, told me, "It's very important for him not to get stuck in the ivory tower of City Hall, of government." It's important for Adams to have access to people inside and outside the building. He added, "A lot of this can be traced back to his time as a police officer. It's pragmatic. It's understanding the sensitivities of various stakeholders. And there's also this sense of being not only willing but wanting to get your hands dirty." Camille Joseph Varlack, Adams's chief of staff, who previously held a senior role in Governor Andrew Cuomo's administration, told me that access to Cuomo "was very tightly controlled." In the Adams administration, she said, with what could be called contained enthusiasm, "*everybody* has access—you just never know where the question is going to come from, why the question is being asked."

Adams is happy to listen to sidewalk petitions. He'll give out a cell-phone number where he says he can be reached. He told me of a time when a woman texted the number to report problems enrolling her daughter in a summer-school program. He introduced her to the schools chancellor by text, saying, "Get this woman's daughter a school!" Adams told me that it surely "means the world" to this woman that she can tell people, "I fucking text the Mayor and he texts me back!" He mentioned another occasion, at a Bronx mosque, when someone asked him about delayed building permits. "Two hours later, we resolved the problem!" Adams said.

Adams isn't suggesting that a city of eight and a half million people should be run on mayoral whim. But a government that refers to government as an "ivory tower" inspires only limited confidence in its ability to govern. Adams's stories of intervention tend to stop at the point where he's thanked; they don't lead into discussions of agency reform. (And it's of course easy to find examples of people who texted the Mayor and never heard back—including those who accepted his invitation to send him photographs of cops on the subway who appeared to be idling on their phones.) Adams has often talked of enhancing city-government transparency by publishing CompStat-style figures from agencies other than the police. This hasn't happened. During the Adams mayoralty, the Department of Corrections quietly ended its practice of automatically informing the media after each inmate death at Rikers. (According to the Mayor's office, this move was to avoid "bombarding everyone's in-boxes.")

When people close to Adams cite his availability, they're talking about more than his responsiveness to constituents' messages. Adams is up for a pitch. As Brooklyn borough president, Adams hosted a demonstration of an expensive contraption that drowned rats; he promoted a lasso-like law-enforcement device—in which Frank Carone, his future chief of staff, had a financial stake—and pasted the manufacturer's advertising copy into an Instagram post. After Adams began spending time with Brock Pierce, a wealthy crypto investor—sometimes in the company of William Benson, a night-life friend who runs a champagne business—Adams announced that he'd make New York a cryptocurrency hub, and he converted his first three paychecks into Bitcoin and Ether. That year, those currencies would lose more than sixty per cent of

their value. (In January, the *Post* ran a story alleging that Benson had misrepresented himself to investors and to romantic partners, and had talked up his connection to Adams. Benson showed me the text that Adams had sent him after the report was published. "Part of the process," he wrote. "People will always shit on a black man.")

As mayor, Adams has proposed installing subway metal detectors; he has approved N.Y.P.D. robot dogs. He has announced that drones will be used for building inspections. Adams spends time with people who call themselves influencers, and he has something of an influencer spirit himself: government by inspiring example. But he could also be thought of as an influencee—less generously, a mark.

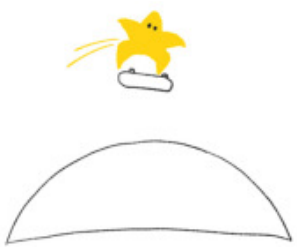
I used the word "mark" when talking with Siegel. In reply, he said, "Eric is the kind of person who wants to keep an open mind, which is good. He wants to be generous to people, especially people who have never had access to power." He then added, "You've got to have a couple of people around you who say, 'Listen, this is not what you should be doing.' "

Even after the departures of Bernie Adams and Frank Carone, who left after a year, the administration remains dominated by old Adams allies. Among them is Philip Banks, the deputy mayor for public safety, a role that gives him considerable influence over the N.Y.P.D. Banks is a former N.Y.P.D. chief of department, the most senior officer in uniform. In 2018, he was named as an unindicted co-conspirator in a federal police-corruption case; he had reportedly accepted free vacations, foot massages, and other gifts from businessmen seeking political favor. (Banks has denied any wrongdoing.) Banks's brother, David, is the schools chancellor. David Banks's partner, Sheena Wright, is the first deputy mayor. Timothy Pearson, an old N.Y.P.D. friend of Adams's, is a senior adviser for public safety and COVID recovery. Ingrid Lewis-Martin, who has worked alongside Adams since he was in the New York Senate, and whose husband was an N.Y.P.D. friend of Adams's, is the Mayor's chief adviser.

Kathryn Wylde, who runs the Partnership for New York City, a powerful business-lobby group, has been friendly with Adams for years. But—without mentioning any names—she observed that "it's a big leap from the small-bore politics of Brooklyn to City Hall. It takes time."

Adams's "perfectly imperfect" mantra sometimes sounds like insurance paid against future embarrassment. Between 2008 and 2015, seven members of the New York State Legislature were expelled on felony convictions, including Adams's friend and onetime travel companion John Sampson. That list doesn't include Hiram Monserrate, a former N.Y.P.D. officer and a once close friend of Adams's, who was expelled from the State Senate in 2010, after being convicted of a misdemeanor assault of his girlfriend. (Adams voted against the expulsion.) Adams's old friend Lamor Whitehead, sometimes called the Bling Bishop, currently faces charges of financial fraud, which he denies. A recent indictment charged six people, including Dwayne Montgomery—an associate of Adams's and a former N.Y.P.D. inspector—in a scheme to circumvent campaign-finance law in support of Adams's election. (All six have pleaded not guilty.)

Brendan McGuire, who used to run the Southern District of New York's anti-corruption unit, told me that when he was approached about becoming the Adams administration's chief counsel he'd been wary of serving as preëmptive ethical cover. "I was very clear from the



get-go that I was not prepared to be used as the white hat who would be rolled out when there was a problem," he said. He acknowledged that people have raised questions about Adams's hiring decisions. But, he went on, "I have never felt uncomfortable with a decision he's made in that regard." He added, "Corruption is not one hire, it's not one act. It is a series of choices. And it's a degradation of standards over a period of time. And so the goal here is to teach this team that muscle memory. And we have done a real good job of that."

Not long after we spoke, McGuire announced that he would be leaving the administration. Several other senior officials who, like McGuire, weren't already members of Adams's inner circle have also recently left: these include Jessica Katz, the Mayor's chief housing officer; Maxwell Young, his communications director; and the N.Y.P.D. commissioner Keechant Sewell. It's been reported that Adams sought to influence Sewell's decision about whether to discipline Jeffrey Maddrey, the N.Y.P.D.'s chief of department and a friend of Adams's, for having improperly voided the arrest of a former N.Y.P.D. officer. The Mayor denies having done this. (Sewell reportedly proposed a punishment of docked vacation days for Maddrey; the case hasn't been resolved.)

I was told a few times that Adams never raises his voice in anger. Meetings start almost on time. He attends to the municipal problems that engage him. People like him. Historically, bluster and attention-seeking have always been part of the job. Ed Koch famously never stopped asking, "How'm I doing?" (The "Saturday Night Live" iteration of Adams's bombast, performed by Chris Redd, sexualizes it in a way that doesn't seem to represent him accurately.) But the personal regard in which Adams is held by colleagues is clearly colored by an underlying uncertainty, if not trepidation, about his thinking and his possible future actions. Siegel recalled a time when he was asked by one of Adams's deputy mayors, "What does he think of me?" Siegel was surprised. "The idea that a deputy mayor was concerned about what her boss thinks about her, because she didn't really know him—that opened my eyes to the power dynamic. That particular deputy mayor probably wasn't confident enough, at that point, to go in and say to Eric, 'Don't do that.' "

One of Adams's verbal tics is to take possession of things that aren't really his: "my police officers," "my religious leaders," "my D.A.s," "my hotels," "my shoe-shine people," "my cooks," "my rap industry," "my boroughs." So it was telling to hear the distance in his answer to a reporter's question last year

about the Democratic Party: "They have a good product."

There was a moment, just before Adams took office, when Siegel first heard him use the phrase "Public safety is the prerequisite for prosperity." Siegel called Adams to object, and to propose an alternative: "Public safety *and social justice* are the prerequisites to prosperity." Subsequently, Adams sometimes added "social justice," or just "justice," but he often stuck with the original.

In the Mayor's first year in office, Siegel was excited enough by various health and homelessness initiatives to maintain hope that Adams could become a transformational figure. But he was discouraged by the raids on homeless encampments, and by aspects of Adams's criminal-justice message. Before last year's congressional midterms, when many pundits predicted a Republican landslide, Adams positioned himself as a populist savior who could later rescue Democrats from their progressive foolishness—perhaps while running for President. Echoing Republican talking points, he repeatedly suggested that reforms to the state's bail laws, enacted in 2019, had helped push up city crime rates—a causation that seemed plausible to many people, including editors at the *Post*, but wasn't well supported by available data.

Then the Democrats overperformed nationally, and Adams's preferred candidates for office in Albany underperformed. A centrist path to higher office was now less clearly marked—and a 2025 mayoral-primary challenge from the left seemed inevitable. When I began talking to Adams, near the start of this year, his self-assurance and animation—welcomed by many, after the billionaire iciness of Bloomberg and the dourness of de Blasio—had become laced with peevishness about being underappreciated. People were feeling safer on the subways, and the city's bond rating had been upgraded, but who was giving him credit? He'd announced the launch of an e-mail newsletter and a podcast, saying, "I need to speak directly to my consumer, in my voice." He said that his administration had "allowed others to hijack what our successes were." He complained about "little people" on social media. When I asked Adams to point to a particularly frustrating moment, he recalled that, in November, he had directed the city's first responders to be ready to impose involuntary hospitalization on mentally ill people who were unable to "meet their basic needs," even if they posed no threat to others. That directive had critics, including Siegel, but also significant support. One could imagine another elected official working carefully to build consensus—to *lead*, in part by sharing data. But Adams seemed focussed on online antagonists. "They just distorted the whole thing!" he told me.

On February 26th, I went to an afternoon event at Gracie Mansion, where, in a ballroom with no other reporters present, Adams spoke to sixty teen-agers enrolled in Jack and Jill of America, the African American leadership organization. He was asked about the good and the bad of being mayor. The best, he said, was holding an event like this one. The worst, he explained, to laughter, was "so many haters, man. Unbelievable level of hatred, because I don't fit the model. Bald-headed, earring-wearing Black man." He added, "Don't get mad at me because I became the mayor! *You* go raise that twenty-two million, *you* go knock on thirty-five thousand doors, *you* deal with all of the haters yelling at you and calling you names. But no one wants to do that. I always say, 'Let your haters be your waiters.'"

Two days later, he appeared at an "interfaith breakfast" at the main branch of the New York Public Library. Ingrid Lewis-Martin, the Mayor's chief adviser, who is also a Christian chaplain, introduced him as "one of the chosen," adding, "One hears about the importance of separating church from state. But we have an administration that doesn't believe in that."

"Ingrid was so right," Adams said, moments later. "Don't tell me about no separation of church and state. State is the body. Church is the heart. You take the heart out of the body, the body dies. I can't separate my belief because I'm an elected official. When I walk, I walk with God. When I talk, I talk with God. When I put policies in place, I put them in with a godlike approach to them. That's who I am."

This material wasn't in his prepared remarks. Camille Joseph Varlack, Adams's chief of staff, who was in the room, recalls telling herself, "Oh, well, this has taken a direction I didn't expect." Varlack had experience with Adams improvisations. "Nine times out of ten, he nails it," she said. "And sometimes there's . . . a sound bite. And I'm, like, 'Jesus Christ, now we have to deal with *this* in the news cycle.'"

Adams's remarks were indeed controversial. In subsequent interviews, he leaned into the subject: "Some people, they see me go to Mass and they get upset. . . . All I can say is 'Get over it.'"

"That settles it. We're getting a cat door."

He said that it was "time to pray." He claimed that he'd been criticized in the past for expressing a "strong belief in faith." In fact, in previous years, he'd missed countless opportunities to discuss faith. Indeed, when the hosts of the podcast "Faith Grind Inspire" had asked him their usual question—"Out of 'faith,' 'grind,' 'inspire,' which word resonates with you?"—he'd replied, "Grind, man, grind."

Adams now used "faith" as an instrument of political dominance—a way to make haters waiters. He'd hinted at the strategy the previous spring, at an event with religious leaders, where he'd welcomed collaborations with them. "There will be those who will critique us," Adams told the room, smiling. "Let's be clear—lions don't lose sleep over the opinion of the sheep." There was laughter and applause. It was a remarkable moment. At a meeting of religious shepherds, the Mayor had rallied the room to a fuck-the-sheep message. His comments weren't just un-Christian—they were Nietzschean. As Adams once said, giving advice about self-presentation, "Everything about you must say power."

Adams has sometimes said that the achievements of his administration will eventually be memorialized in the Museum of the City of New York. I asked him what this exhibition would contain, and he first mentioned his enhancement of an existing program to help young people in foster care. (The cost of this is ten million dollars, in a city budget that exceeds a hundred billion dollars.) He then cited a pilot program, widely praised, to screen for dyslexia in city schools.

A New York mayor can do only so much. Michael Bloomberg published a congestion-pricing proposal in 2007; a similar scheme may finally be executed next year. But Adams often gives the impression of finding the political present less compelling than the myths of his past and the glories of his future recognition. He told me, "I think that the museum is going to show the uniqueness of a mayor who was not make-believe. He was authentic. He was a blue-collar mayor."

I last spoke to Adams at the Roosevelt Hotel, on Forty-fifth Street, which has become a welcome center for recently arrived asylum seekers. On a Sunday morning in May, he was joined there by several colleagues, including Anne Williams-Isom, his deputy mayor for health and human services, and Manuel Castro, who runs the Office of Immigrant Affairs. Adams inspected a ballroom crowded with a hundred military-green cots. "Good stuff," he said. One of the support staff there recognized Adams from an earlier life, and greeted

him as Eazy-E. Williams-Isom deadpanned, "Sounds like a Brooklyn thing."

A few weeks earlier, Adams had hosted a press conference to discuss the pressures put on the city by asylum seekers, who were arriving at a rate of about two hundred a day. Camille Joseph Varlack told me that before the event she'd alerted the White House that the Mayor would be "calling for the national government to help us"; Adams, who'd requested such help before, would be using "standard and consistent" talking points.

Then protesters interrupted the event, asking, "Mayor Adams, why are you cutting schools?" They were referring to proposals for the 2024 budget, which included a cut to education spending of more than six hundred million dollars.

Varlack told me, "I think it just enraged him." His annoyance, as she read it, derived from the failure of New Yorkers to acknowledge the administration's efforts on behalf of asylum seekers, and the cost of those efforts. "People don't seem to really think it's an issue, because we've done such a good job of taking care of it," she said. It was in this mood, Varlack proposed, that Adams declared that, on this issue, "the President and the White House have *failed New York City*."

Not long before, Adams had been pleased to be included in a story that listed Democratic advisers who would likely be central to President Joe Biden's reëlection efforts. "I think the President sees something in what I'm doing in New York," Adams had said. But when a list was published, just before I joined the Mayor in the Roosevelt Hotel, Senator Elizabeth Warren, of Massachusetts, and Gavin Newsom, the governor of California, were on it, but Adams was not. He told me that the "failed New York City" press conference perhaps wasn't responsible, but said, "People want to say, 'If he ever talks about crime, he's hurting the Party. If he ever talks about asylum seekers, he's hurting the Party.'" He added that, though he considered Biden a friend, others in the White House had "their own agenda."

In our previous meetings, it had become clear that Adams preferred to talk while surrounded by other people. We'd met that day in Times Square, and Adams had opted to forgo the Suburban and instead walk along Forty-second Street toward the Roosevelt, wearing an "NYC MAYOR" windbreaker. This had led to selfie requests and, at one point, a solicitous exchange with a distraught woman who told Adams that a stranger had just spit in her face.

Now Adams and I were talking in a cafeteria at the Roosevelt, at the same little table as a half-dozen senior administration officials. It was a group interview in which I felt for a moment like the unacknowledged object of an intervention. "From Day One, I was surprised by his authenticity," Williams-Isom told me. "He loves New York. And so it's a joy to watch him be happy, and to do this job."

"There was never a day that I did not feel as though 'We've got this,'" Adams said. Any annoyance he'd felt, he added, was in response to reporting about his work, and never the work itself.

Such criticism, Williams-Isom added, was disrespectful.

"You saw people who were *not lifting a finger* being disrespectful to my team!" Adams said. He went on to say that people who fact-check him seem to doubt whether he could have gone through what he's gone through in life and still "become mayor of the most important city on the globe."

"It's like they're questioning your integrity!" Williams-Isom said. "And I don't appreciate it."

Adams tells his staff that they should keep journals. "This is an amazing moment for them," he said. "This is going to be one of those great moments in American history." ♦

ANNALS OF MONEY

THE GIFT

What should you do with an oil fortune?

BY ANDREW MARANTZ

Let's say you were born into a legacy that is, you have come to believe, ruining the world. What can you do? You could be paralyzed with guilt. You could run away from your legacy, turn inward, cultivate your garden. If you have a lot of money, you could give it away a bit at a time—enough to assuage your conscience, and your annual tax burden, but not enough to hamper your life style—and only to causes (libraries, museums, one or both political parties) that would not make anyone close to you too uncomfortable. Or you could just give it all away—to a blind trust, to the first person you pass on the sidewalk—which would be admirable: a grand gesture of renunciation in exchange for moral purity. But, if you believe that the world is being ruined by structural causes, you will have done little to challenge those structures.

When Leah Hunt-Hendrix was an undergraduate at Duke, in the early two-thousands, she wasn't sure what to do with her privilege. She had grown up in an apartment on Fifth Avenue, and spent most summers in Dallas with her wealthy churchgoing grandmother. One afternoon, she wandered into a lecture by Stanley Hauerwas, a divinity-school professor whom *Time* had just named America's "best" theologian. Hauerwas, as it happened, was also from Dallas; the son of a bricklayer, he could speak in the academic argot of a virtue ethicist or the salty style of a fire-and-brimstone preacher. He rejected the "ahistorical approach of liberal theory," the assumption that each individual is an autonomous economic unit with a view from nowhere. Instead, as Hunt-Hendrix later put it, "we are born into traditions, and it becomes our task to keep making sense of the world through those traditions, improving them as we go." Inequality was arguably the defining fact of contemporary American life, which struck Hunt-Hendrix as urgently, intolerably wrong. Hauerwas encouraged his students to reckon with the forces that had shaped their lives, even ones that were set in motion long before they were born.

One summer, Hunt-Hendrix studied with Hauerwas one-on-one, reading Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics. The following summer, she went back to Dallas. On campus that fall, Hauerwas saw her sitting on a bench and stopped to ask about her break. "She sort of sheepishly mumbled something about interning at the family business," he recalled. "At that moment, it hit me, and I blurted it out, 'Well, shit, you're a *Hunt!*'"

At a place like Duke, where about twenty per cent of the students come from the one per cent, it's not remarkable to encounter a rich kid. Only in extraordinary cases (Rockefeller, Murdoch) is a surname, on its own, an instant giveaway. Hunt is a common name, but to a Dallasite of Hauerwas's generation it was unmistakable. "I can't believe it took me this long to put it together," he told her that day on campus. "My daddy must have laid bricks for your granddaddy."

H. L. Hunt, Leah's maternal grandfather, was a Dallas oilman. In the nineteen-thirties, he built wells all over the East Texas oil field, which turned out to be one of the most prodigious reservoirs of oil in the United States. In 1948, *Fortune* estimated that he was the wealthiest person in America; in 1967, *Esquire* quoted a source saying, "There's absolutely no question about the Hunts being the richest family in the country." Hunt backed Barry Goldwater, the archconservative senator from Arizona, and George Wallace, the segregationist governor of Alabama. (When term limits prohibited Wallace from seeking reëlection, Hunt encouraged him to run his wife, Lurleen, in his place.) He supported the power-mad senator Joseph McCarthy, the rabidly anti-Communist John Birch Society, and reportedly even the Nation of Islam, which promoted racial separatism. William F. Buckley, Jr., once wrote that Hunt's "yahoo bigotry" had almost managed to "give capitalism a bad name."

If Leah Hunt-Hendrix had accepted the notion that she was merely an atomized individual, unencumbered by history, then all of this might have seemed like little more than a coincidence. Her grandfather had died before she was born. Why should she do penance for his sins? And yet, no matter how many times she repeated this argument to herself, she remained unconvinced. She even looked a bit like her grandfather: fair skin, apple cheeks, round face. When Hunt began amassing his fortune, it was not widely understood that the overuse of fossil fuels could ruin the planet. But this was known by 1987, when Hunt Oil finished building a pipeline through the desert of North Yemen; and in 2007, when Hunt Oil signed a prospecting deal with the regional government of Kurdistan (a deal that the Bush Administration disavowed in public but blessed in private); and in 2017, when Rex Tillerson, who had worked closely with Hunt Oil in the Middle East, became Donald Trump's Secretary of State. Hunt Oil is still family-owned, and still among the largest private oil-and-gas companies in the U.S. It's now one of several family companies that are part of Hunt Consolidated, including Hunt Energy, Hunt Refining, Hunt Realty, and Hunt Power. The Hunt Consolidated headquarters, in downtown Dallas, is a fourteen-story tower made of steel and glass; the air-conditioning bills must be enormous, yet, somehow, the building is LEED-certified.

Behind every great fortune is a great crime, according to an adage attributed to Balzac—but, unlike the money, the

"Leah was clearly preoccupied with how a person of extreme privilege can live responsibly," her Ph.D. adviser said.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PLATON

crimes are not fungible. Some took place many generations ago, whereas others are ongoing; some afflict a marginal few, others the whole world. Hunt-Hendrix joined a Christian-fellowship group on campus and volunteered as a community organizer in downtown Durham. She wanted to devote her life to rectifying society's imbalance of wealth and power, but none of the familiar options—endow a professorship? work at a soup kitchen?—seemed to get to the root of the problem. "Most of us spend our lives only embracing or only renouncing where we come from," Hauerwas told me. "Leah wanted to do the grownup thing, the exceedingly difficult thing—to look all of it square in the face, and then to find a way to make herself actually useful."

After graduating, Hunt-Hendrix entered an interdisciplinary doctorate program at Princeton called Religion, Ethics, and Politics. ("In my mind, those are three ways of saying the same thing," she said.) Two of her main advisers were Cornel West—one of the best-known public intellectuals in the country, always ready to support a labor strike or a socialist candidate—and Jeffrey Stout, who was about to publish "Blessed Are the Organized: Grassroots Democracy in America." (The book posited that the U.S. seemed to function "as a plutocracy," and that the way out was to help organizers build power "from the bottom up.") She took a leave from grad school in 2009 and spent a year teaching English in a small Egyptian city, then another year studying Arabic in Damascus. In Tunisia, she later wrote, she met organizers who "talked about the role of oil companies"—the major public ones, in this case—executing land grabs and "violence against activists who were part of the resistance to fossil fuel extraction." On a trip to the West Bank, she heard residents' stories of abject suffering and, moved by compassion and guilt, asked what she could do to help. But many people told her: We don't want your help, we want your solidarity.

When she came back to Princeton, she proposed a dissertation on the intellectual history of solidarity. ("Vast, interdisciplinary topic," West told me. "We knew she'd pull it off, but she exceeded our expectations.") She could spend her life giving money to those in need, she concluded, but charity would only change things at the margins; to help uproot structural inequality, she would have to invest in social movements.

Hunt-Hendrix is now forty and splits her time between New York and Washington, D.C., where she has become a nexus of the New New Left, in frequent contact with street organizers and also several members of Congress. A few times, I saw someone recognize Hunt-Hendrix in passing—Representative Ro Khanna, leaving a progressive centimillionaire's holiday party in Greenwich Village; a Teamsters organizer at a rally of UPS workers in Canarsie—and ask her, "What is it you do again?" Each time, she struggled to give a concise answer. Basically, she is a philanthropist, though she is reluctant to use the word, given her skepticism toward much of what passes for philanthropy. She donates money to leftist social movements, and she leverages her connections to persuade other rich people to do the same. She gave early funding to Black Lives Matter activists, and to the long-shot primary campaigns of members of the Squad. Since 2017, through her organization Way to Win, she has helped raise hundreds of millions of dollars for left-populist politicians—not quite Bloomberg or Koch money, but significantly more than is usually associated with the far left.

"She has better politics than anyone else who's that rich, and she's better at fund-raising than anyone else with her politics," Max Berger, who worked on Elizabeth Warren's Presidential campaign in 2020, told me. "Whatever you want to call my faction—the Bernie wing, the Warren wing, democratic-socialist, social democrat—we would have way less power if Leah didn't exist." If the faction had enough power to enact its full agenda, many of the richest people in the country would likely lose money and influence; a centerpiece of the agenda is the Green New Deal, which, if implemented in maximalist form, could help put fossil-fuel companies, including Hunt Oil, out of business. "Leah was clearly preoccupied with how a person of extreme privilege can live responsibly in the world," Stout told me. "That seemed to be, for her, an existential question."

"I guess mostly I'm grumpy because I have six goddam roommates."

Legend has it that H. L. Hunt won the lease to his first oil field in a poker game. According to the book "Texas Rich," the legend is just that: Hunt actually got some of his most prized properties by keeping the wildcatter Dad Joiner in a hotel room for days and wearing him down until he signed away the land, a deal that Joiner apparently regretted for the rest of his life. "In terms of extraordinary, independent wealth," J. Paul Getty said in 1957, "there is only one man—H. L. Hunt."

In the press, Hunt cultivated a reputation as a respectable conservative who wore rumpled gabardine suits and carried a sack lunch to work. With the

benefit of a fuller historical record, it's clear that, even by the standards of his time, Hunt was unusually racist and reactionary. He sometimes implied that to give up a significant portion of one's income, through taxation or philanthropy, was to let the Communists win. He funded a nationally syndicated conservative radio show, "Life Line," and an endless series of far-right-propaganda pamphlets and books, many of which he wrote himself. "Alpaca," a self-published novel in the vein of Ayn Rand, sketched his vision of a political utopia; it included a system called "graduated suffrage," in which rich people would get more votes. Once, after a "Life Line" anchor spoke out against "hate groups" on the air, Hunt privately admonished him never to espouse "opposition to a white-supremacy group."

Hunt's life was so soap-operatic that J. R. Ewing, of the TV show "Dallas," is assumed to be based on him. According to posthumous reporting, he was both a grandstanding moralist and a semi-secret polygamist who fathered fifteen children, some of whom he acknowledged only when he was forced to. Leah and her branch of the Hunts refer to themselves as the Second Family, which is slightly misleading given that, while living with his First Family and before starting his Second, Hunt married another woman on the sly and had four children with her. (The woman later testified in court that he'd tried to coax her into converting to Mormonism, so that his multiple marriages could be legal; when this didn't work, she alleged, he offered her nearly a million dollars to sign a statement swearing that they'd never been married.) Near the end of his life, he sold what he marketed as health food—whole-grain bread, peanut butter, canned chicken—and extolled an exercise technique that he called "creeping," otherwise known as crawling around on the floor.

By 2020, according to *Forbes*, the Hunts had slipped from the richest American family to the eighteenth-richest, worth more than fifteen billion dollars. Leah's uncle Ray Hunt, the only Second Family son, started running Hunt Oil after his father died, in 1974, and today he is worth between five and six billion dollars. (H.L. also left several oil companies to his First Family heirs, whose descendants now run Petro-Hunt, which is based in Dallas as well.) "My brother was groomed to take over the family oil business," Leah's mother, Helen LaKelly Hunt, once wrote. "My sisters and I were taught to be precious Southern belles."

Helen has an older sister, June, who hosts a popular evangelical radio show, and a younger sister, Swanee, who was Ambassador to Austria under President Bill Clinton. For years, the sisters lived on monthly allowances, but eventually they negotiated to get dividends from Hunt Oil. Since then, they and their descendants have been invited to annual meetings at the corporate headquarters; they are allowed to ask questions, but they have no formal power within the company. Helen rebelled against expectations when she was a young adult, in the late sixties, by moving to New York; she later grew close to Abigail Disney and Gloria Steinem, and funnelled much of her share of the family fortune into the second-wave feminist movement. Most of the Dallas Hunts remain George W. Bush-style Republicans, yet they are proud to think of their family as the kind that can hash things out over Thanksgiving dinner, without raised voices.

In April, I went with Leah to visit her parents. They now live in Dallas full time, in a not particularly lavish condo decorated with Pueblo pottery, mementos of their children's accomplishments, and a KFC bucket repurposed as a flowerpot. (Leah has four half siblings and one full sibling—Haela Ravenna Hunt-Hendrix, the lead singer of the critically lauded metal band Liturgy, who lives in Brooklyn.) Her parents are well-known marriage counselors with several best-selling books ("Getting the Love You Want," "Keeping the Love You Find"); her father, Harville Hendrix, has made more than a dozen appearances on "Oprah."

"A few years ago, we asked our staff for a list of the ten American cities with the highest divorce rates," Harville said. "We went down the list, going, 'We don't know anyone in Las Vegas, don't know anyone in Jacksonville—'"

Helen gently interrupted him: "Well, we do have family in Kansas City." Clark Hunt, of the First Family, is chairman and part-owner of the Kansas City Chiefs. "But in the end we decided on Dallas," Helen said, smiling.

"Yes, we thought Dallas would be best," Harville said, smiling.

They are constantly doing this sort of thing—surfacing some minor disagreement and then settling it, amicably and a bit ritualistically. When things get tense, they resort to what they call "mirroring": one partner talks and the other listens, speaking up only to ask clarifying questions. ("So it sounds like you're frustrated that I ran that yellow light. Am I getting that right?") One of their core tenets has been that almost no married couple should ever get divorced. "We believe that relationships are the cornerstone of society, and a lot of people's relationships are not doing so well these days," Helen said, wincing empathically. In Dallas, they hoped to start a proof-of-concept revival, restoring one city's civic health from the cornerstone up. "We thought, If we can lower the divorce rate in just one place, then maybe that will lower the rates of alcoholism and crime and all sorts of things," Harville said. "Sounds a bit grandiose, maybe."

"Everyone in this family, in one way or another, wants to change the world," Helen said.

We spent several hours in Helen and Harville's car, a dinged-up silver Lexus, on a driving tour of the city. "That's one of Caroline's hotels," Helen said. (Caroline Rose Hunt, of the First Family, founded the Rosewood hotel chain.) And later: "That's the Margaret Hunt Hill Bridge." (Margaret, Caroline's sister, founded the Dallas Cotillion; three of their brothers tried to corner the global silver market in the seventies, resulting in a commodities crash.) We parked next to the colonnaded white mansion where Helen grew up; in front of it, written in wrought iron, were the words "Mount Vernon." (The house is a replica of George Washington's plantation home, in Virginia, and is about the same size.) "Popsie used to

take us around town and make us sing these little anti-Communist ditties he wrote," Helen said. She started to sing one from memory—"Take Me Out to the Ballgame," but with lyrics warning about what would happen "if the Reds take over."

One day of the visit was Palm Sunday, and Leah and her parents went to church. "My parents used to be very close with the pastor," Helen said. "I believe they had a building named after my mother." The pastor her parents had known was W. A. Criswell, who for years was a virulent anti-Communist and segregationist. His church, First Baptist Dallas, is now a megachurch, and its head pastor is Robert Jeffress, a Fox News contributor who has been called Trump's Apostle. Leah, looking a bit ashen, read his Wikipedia bio on her phone.

Inside, there were three thousand seats, and nearly all of them were filled; the pulpit featured a three-hundred-person choir and a baptismal tank full of bright-blue water. "They're doing an amazing job of marketing," Harville said. "Notice how they keep mentioning his book?" Leah was more attuned to the hallmarks of movement-building: an upcoming singles' night, a pancake breakfast, infant care—amenities that were increasingly rare in the public commons. (Leah agrees with the sociologist Émile Durkheim, who believed, as she noted in her dissertation, that "the importance of a religion is not its proximity to an absolute truth, but its ability to hold a community together.") "Why can't the left pull off anything like this?" she whispered. "Maybe that's what we should have been building all along."

In the fall of 2011, activists took over Zuccotti Park, in lower Manhattan, forming an encampment that came to be known as Occupy Wall Street. Hunt-Hendrix, who was renting a two-bedroom apartment in Brooklyn and working on her dissertation, started spending a lot of time there. "New solidarities were formed," she wrote in her dissertation. "People of vastly different backgrounds found themselves in meetings, ate meals together, debated politics."

She tried to listen more than she talked. This was meant to convey humility, but it was also a way to avoid having to divulge too much about herself. "If a table needed to be wiped down, she was wiping down the table," Nelini Stamp, an Occupy Wall Street participant, told me. Still, word got around. "Someone pulled me aside and pointed and went, 'You know that's oil money right there,'" Stamp recalled. "I went, '*Leah*? No way, that's the homie.'" Another Occupier told me, "I remember hanging out with Leah when she was coming back from a party, and she mentioned, 'Oh, Chelsea Clinton was there.' I thought, Huh, O.K. Not the kind of parties I get invited to!" Hunt-Hendrix also became friends with Brooke Lehman, another Occupy participant who was born rich. ("Lehman, as in the brothers?" fellow-activists would ask her, and the answer was yes—one of hundreds of descendants, but still.) As more organizers realized that some of their comrades had ties to dynastic fortunes, they mused about what the movement could achieve with access to that money and power.

Hunt-Hendrix, Lehman, and a half-dozen other participants, most of them wealthy, started to meet up informally, over home-cooked meals at Leah's apartment. Some referred to themselves as "one-per-centers for the ninety-nine per cent," or, semi-ironically, as "class traitors." Most of them, including Hunt-Hendrix, were members of Resource Generation, which was a group for young progressives who had money but felt ambivalent about it. Lehman used family money to buy a dairy farm in upstate New York and turn it into a retreat center for organizers. Farhad Ebrahimi, whose father is a software billionaire, had a sixty-five-million-dollar bank account that he controlled outright; he committed to donating all of it to leftist activists, within the next decade. Most of Hunt-Hendrix's family money, by contrast, came at the discretion of her parents.

She was "outed," as she put it, in March of 2012, when Salon ran an article about her under the headline "Occupy's Heiress." She corresponded with her uncle Ray—a former chairman of the Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas's

UNBROKEN

As if the past were riding up to meet you
as if the past could ride a horse

as if the past were a horse wandering riderless
along a dusty road

as if the horse had never been ridden

/

They say a horse is broken when the rider
can stay on

they say the past is broken when you can
let go of it

I have broken with the past, she says

I have erased it from my phone
I have blindered my eyes from her eyes

/

I didn't know the past was made of horses
I didn't even call it a horse until now

I didn't even call it strange
until I looked back on it

the past was a horse crossing a desert
a body draped over it

this is how we get the beloved home

/

Strange now to never hear a horse upon waking
or when out in the field

I didn't know the past would come for me
I didn't even call it the past until now

sometimes one gallops past
but no one else ever sees it

—Nick Flynn

board of directors—who wrote her a letter asking about her participation in the movement. There were bad apples in every profession, including finance, but why tear it all down? She wrote several long, earnest responses ("It's not about bad people, but about a system that has gone awry"), each time beginning and ending on a note of familial conciliation ("Thank you for holding our differences with such gentleness").

Occupy was criticized for not having a central demand, but after a few months it splintered into several local campaigns around the country seeking specific policy concessions: end fracking, raise the minimum wage. Most of these nascent groups were in no position to apply for seed funding from philanthropic foundations like MacArthur or Ford—many didn't even have official names, much less 501(c)(3) status, and some employed civil-disobedience tactics that big foundations might not condone. Instead, the organizers could call Hunt-Hendrix to ask for what they needed. In 2013, this ad-hoc funding method became a community of donors, helmed by Hunt-Hendrix, called Solidaire Network. It began as a rapid-response e-mail list that went out to a few dozen donors, then to a few hundred. One e-mail raised six thousand dollars for a bail fund for Black Lives Matter activists in Minneapolis; another e-mail requested twenty-five thousand dollars for "land acquisition in an oil pipeline fight." Even when the actions hit close to home, Hunt-Hendrix didn't intervene. In 2014, a protest called Flood Wall Street targeted "oil, gas and coal companies that pursue increasingly extreme projects for bringing fossil fuels out of the ground"; Hunt-Hendrix was one of the organizers.

When her friends and their friends couldn't keep up with the demand for donations, she set out to recruit more wealthy progressives who could. Liz Simons and Caitlin Heising, the daughter and granddaughter of the hedge-fund billionaire Jim Simons, became Solidaire members; so did Regan Pritzker, an heir to the Hyatt hotel fortune, who also got her mother, Susan, to join. At a conference at the Mandarin Oriental hotel in D.C.—held by the Democracy Alliance, a network of V.I.P. progressive donors, including George Soros and Tom Steyer—Hunt-Hendrix worked the room, trying to persuade people to support more grassroots activism. While courting a finance person, she compared scrappy nonprofits to undervalued stocks; with a venture capitalist, she talked about early adoption and hockey-stick growth. "There is a part of me that deeply detests élite spaces, but there is another part that feels quite at home among powerful people," she said.

Her parents were then living on Riverside Drive, in a Beaux-Arts town house with nine bedrooms, eight fireplaces, and a Tiffany-glass skylight. They hosted a series of invitation-only "salons," where grassroots organizers mingled with Solidaire members while caterers served wine. It was hard to miss the resemblance to the scene that Tom Wolfe captured in his essay "Radical Chic," in which uniformed maids at Leonard Bernstein's Upper East Side apartment offered Roquefort-cheese balls to members of the Black Panther Party. One Solidaire salon featured Occupy activists, Arab Spring organizers from Egypt and Tunisia, and a special performance by Peter Buffett (New Age recording artist, son of Warren); it also promised "a discussion of how we can dip into history as it swirls around us," followed by "generous helpings of Ben & Jerry's ice cream scooped by Jerry himself!" For a few months, Black Lives Matter organizers stayed in some of the upstairs bedrooms, covering the walls with butcher paper as they brainstormed future protests.

Historically, a lot of radical-chic activism hasn't amounted to much more than virtue signalling. Some post-Occupy initiatives that Solidaire funded led nowhere, but others kept gaining momentum. A campaign to increase the minimum wage became the Fight for $15, which was ultimately successful in New York City, Los Angeles, and multiple states. The Black Lives Matter movement culminated, in the summer of 2020, in the largest civil-rights uprising in American history. A youth climate-justice campaign spurred a congressional bloc calling for a Green New Deal. Solidaire now distributes tens of

millions of dollars a year to activist groups. (Hunt-Hendrix has stepped down as executive director, but she's still a member.)

In 2015, Hunt-Hendrix pledged ten thousand dollars to the Debt Collective, a group co-founded by a socialist writer, filmmaker, and organizer named Astra Taylor. The group demanded, among other things, the abolition of all student debt in the U.S., an idea that was then considered ludicrous. But when Bernie Sanders ran for President in 2020 he included the idea in his campaign platform; Joe Biden then promised to cancel some student debt, a position he had previously opposed. (Since that year, Way to Win has given the Debt Collective an annual grant of a quarter-million dollars.) Last year, President Biden signed an executive order cancelling tens of billions of dollars in student debt, only for the Supreme Court to strike it down this June; the Administration recently announced a narrower debt-forgiveness plan. This fell short of Taylor's aspirations, but it showed how far a movement's demand could get within a decade. "People think this shit just happens on its own," she said. "Anyone close to it knows it takes years of work, and money."

Rich people have always given alms to the poor, but the tax-exempt institution we now know as philanthropy is only about a century old. In a 2018 book called "Just Giving," the Stanford political scientist Rob Reich argues that many corporations and wealthy individuals use contemporary philanthropy as "a plutocratic exercise of power"—a soft-power equivalent of graduated suffrage. No wonder many left-wing activists have little patience for distinctions between bad plutocrats and less bad ones. "If someone approaches me and says, 'I have ties to the fossil-fuel industry, which has been destroying the planet and lying about it for fifty years, but now I feel bad and I want to help,' I think it's rational for me to go, 'Nah, go fuck yourself,'" a prominent Green New Deal organizer told me. "I don't feel that way about Leah, but only because she spent years putting in the work to convince people like me that she's legit."

After grad school, Hunt-Hendrix spent a few years in San Francisco, trying to make inroads among the new-money entrepreneurs of Silicon Valley. She had some success—she grew close to the founder of a well-known tech company, and his wife became an active member of Solidaire—but less than she'd hoped. Many people in the Bay Area were influenced by effective altruism, an ethos that purports to reinvent philanthropy from first principles, but which struck Hunt-Hendrix as glib and ahistorical. "I'm glad any time a rich person redistributes money to a poor person—it's better than nothing," she told me. "But ultimately, in the absence of a larger strategy, it's just palliative."

She elaborates on her theory of change in a book she wrote with Taylor called "Solidarity: The Past, Present, and Future of a World-Changing Idea," due out next year from Pantheon Books. (It was going to be published this year, by Verso Books, but then, following a dispute between the Verso union and management, Taylor and Hunt-Hendrix pulled it, in solidarity with the workers.) The book traces the concept of solidarity from Aristotle to nineteenth-century French "solidarists" to Rosa Luxemburg to the American welfare state. One chapter, "The Problem with Charity," contends that most current philanthropy amounts to doling out Band-Aids without addressing what's causing the injuries in the first place. "If Amazon warehouse workers can't afford housing," Hunt-Hendrix told me, "the response can't just be 'Let's build more shelters.'" The chapter's moral foils include noblesse-oblige patrons such as John D. Rockefeller and Andrew Carnegie, who are described as "grandstanding" and "Janus-faced," and Bill Gates, who "wields a disconcerting amount of power." Among its heroes are the Secret Six, a network of abolitionists who clandestinely funded John Brown, risking jail time.

The book has plenty of kind things to say about Marx and Engels, but it levels one major critique: they assumed that solidarity among "all of the laborers of all countries" would arise automatically, sparking a revolution, with or without the help of wealthy patrons—an odd oversight given that Engels, the son of rich industrialists, was a proud class traitor himself. On this point, Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor are sympathetic to Durkheim, who maintained in later writing that solidarity must be cultivated through difficult work—in essence, the work of organizing. Given the current distribution of power, working-class movements need upper-class patrons. But how much can activists really trust them?

Hunt-Hendrix is quick to acknowledge these tensions, even if she doesn't know how to resolve them. "Ideally, social movements would not depend on philanthropy," she said. "But, because the labor movement has been so undermined, this is the situation we're in." The standard funder-grantee relationship can feel transactional: the foundation sets a goal and subcontracts with a nonprofit to meet it, and to provide quantifiable proof of effectiveness along the way. By contrast, Hunt-Hendrix aspires to what she calls "philanthropy-in-solidarity," a more cozy-feeling arrangement that allows donors to see themselves as collaborators in activists' struggles. In a way, it's an attempt to re-create the prelapsarian days in Zuccotti Park, before she was outed. Many times, I saw her hesitate while describing her relationship to an organizer or a political strategist, vacillating about whether to refer to the person as a grantee, a "thought partner," a "co-conspirator," or simply a friend. In practice, many of her grantees do seem to be her friends, and yet most friendships are not marked by the tacit understanding that, if you and your friend drift apart, you might lose your operating budget. "The vulgar Marxist take, which I guess I can't refute, would be that we're all in the tank for Leah because we've all taken her money," Max Berger told me. "I would absolutely still fuck with her, on a movement-strategy level and on a personal level, if she were as broke as my other friends. But the tragic irony of our friendship is that there's no way for me to prove it."

When libertarian or right-wing plutocrats buy influence—fossil-fuel executives pushing for deregulation, hedge-funders who want lower taxes—it's easy enough to understand what they're up to. But leftist class traitors are harder to pin down. They can always be suspected of performative reputation-laundering, or dilettantism, or dual loyalty. The left is wary of them

for having been born into an obscene level of privilege; the right resents them for not having the common sense to shut up and enjoy it. It's one thing to be a rich liberal—acknowledging your unearned privilege, endeavoring to leave the world a little better than you found it—and another to be a rich anti-capitalist radical, galvanized by the conviction that you are complicit in a historic injustice. Nonetheless, the list of inheritors organizing against extractive capitalism continues to grow: Aileen Getty, of the Getty oil fortune, co-founded the Climate Emergency Fund, which supports disruptive protests around the world; the Rockefeller Brothers Fund now donates to groups that coördinate anti-pipeline encampments and other acts of civil disobedience. Farhad Ebrahimi has given most of his money to grassroots activists in places like Alaska and Eastern Kentucky, and plans to donate the last of it this year.

One afternoon, Hunt-Hendrix and Taylor met me at a coffee shop to discuss their book. Afterward, Hunt-Hendrix invited us back to a luxury penthouse on Houston Street, which she shares with her partner, Marvin Ammori. As an elevator opened directly onto the apartment—window walls, potted orchids—she admitted that she had scheduled the interview at a coffee shop because she found her place "embarrassing, or at least more bougie than I feel great about." (The apartment is Ammori's; Hunt-Hendrix owns a two-million-dollar town house in D.C.) Ammori is a lawyer who works for a cryptocurrency trading platform. "His parents immigrated to America, he's self-made, and he is just less conflicted about spending money than I am," she said. Taylor and Hunt-Hendrix were preparing to host a fund-raiser for *Lux*, a left-feminist magazine named for Rosa Luxemburg. (The name is also, according to an editor's note, "a nod to the fact that in our vision of socialism, there is abundance for all.") An onyx necklace lay on a coffee table; Hunt-Hendrix picked it up gingerly and explained that it had been a gift from Gloria Steinem to her mother. Her dog, a high-strung Maltipoo named Malcolm, growled at a passing garbage truck. By the way she told me his name—quickly, with a barely perceptible flinch—I could guess what turned out to be true: yes, she'd named the dog after Malcolm X, and this, too, seemed to embarrass her.

"A bouquet that leaves me with the task of trimming the stems, cutting off the leaves, finding a vase, and cleaning up? You shouldn't have!"

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Hunt-Hendrix has center-left critics who consider her too deferential to movements whose slogans (e.g., Defund the Police) might alienate swing voters. She also has leftist critics who worry that even well-meaning wealthy donors can constrain activists' ambitions in subtle ways, a process that the political scientist Megan Ming Francis calls "movement capture." Still, most of the leftists I interviewed, even when speaking off the record, did not take the opportunity to bad-mouth her as inept or fundamentally unserious, even though bad-mouthing other leftists is the American left's most venerable pastime. Most of her "co-conspirators," especially the left-of-liberal ones, tend to view liberal guilt as a distraction. "There is no right life in the wrong one," one organizer told me, quoting Theodor Adorno: we live in the fallen world of late capitalism, and we should try to change this fact, but why make a show of lamenting it? The organizer, whose work has been funded by Hunt-Hendrix, said, "It's never even occurred to me to feel bad about taking that money. All money is dirty money." Some climate-activist groups refuse to endorse any politician who takes campaign contributions from fossil-fuel companies, yet the same groups accept Hunt-Hendrix's donations. It's possible to see this as hypocrisy, or as hubris: the activists don't trust politicians to be immune to industry capture or soft corruption, but they do trust themselves. They prefer to see it as consistent with a materialist analysis of power. "You don't take donations with strings attached," the organizer went on. "Short of that, you take all the owning-class money you can get, and you use it to put the owning class out of existence."

Last year, when I was in Washington to report on climate activists staging a hunger strike outside the White House, I texted Hunt-Hendrix, who had funded their organization. She told me that she was hoping to make it, but for the moment she was stuck at the Ritz-Carlton, having a glass of wine with her cousin Hunter Hunt, the C.E.O. of Hunt Energy, who also oversees Hunt Oil and Hunt Power. Whenever she

"When I grow up, I want to be friends with a nurse, a barber, a therapist, and a plumber."

• •

found herself doing something conspicuously bougie in my presence—ordering a fresh-squeezed orange juice with a double-digit price tag, booking an impromptu Mediterranean vacation—she would sigh knowingly, or make a self-deprecating joke. She aspired to a life of Aristotelian virtue, defined as "a mean between two extremes." "Luxury will not bring you happiness," she continued. "But do you need to give away everything?"

At Occupy, there had been an anarchist-leaning cohort that was skeptical of political power: you could pursue authentically populist goals, or you could sell out and support a major-party candidate, but you couldn't do both. After Bernie Sanders's unexpectedly popular Presidential campaign in 2016, and the shock victories of Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez and other democratic socialists, this came to seem like a false choice. In 2017, Hunt-Hendrix co-founded the nonprofit Way to Win with the goal of forging a new electoral map for progressives, one that relied less on the (older, whiter) swing voters in the Rust Belt than on the more diverse purple states in the South and Southwest. In 2020, most of Way to Win's candidates lost, but there were enough come-from-behind victories—Cori Bush, in St. Louis; Jamaal Bowman, in New York—to prove that the Squad's success two years earlier hadn't been a fluke.

While we were in Dallas, Hunt-Hendrix met her cousin Hunter for an after-work drink. She'd suggested meeting at the Petroleum Club, on the top two floors of Hunt Consolidated headquarters, but it was closed that afternoon, so they picked a nearby restaurant instead. Leah and I ordered guacamole and virgin margaritas; Hunter, who had a physical exam the next day, said, "I'm gonna be good and stick to sparkling water." On the whole, he said, "our family just respects the heck out of Leah, and there's no question that the world is a better place with her in it." The sentiment seemed sincere, even if the details were slightly hazy: he didn't appear to know exactly which causes she supported ("You don't do PETA, do you?"), except that they occupied a space somewhere to his left. "Leah and I don't agree on everything—I'm sure our votes cancel each other out," he added. "But that doesn't mean you can't listen."

"I can be a bit too conflict-averse," Leah said, almost under her breath.

"Respectfully, you have a funny way of showing it," Hunter said.

In 1999, he worked for George W. Bush's Presidential campaign, helping to craft its energy policy. Hunter's not a climate-change denier, but he is a climate moderate. "If the world is going to use fossil fuels for as far as we can see, let's make sure we're doing it as cleanly and responsibly as possible," he said.

"Do you know the Sunrise Movement?" Leah asked. "They're the young people pushing for a Green New Deal, going, 'We're running out of time!' How would you respond to that?" She didn't mention that she'd funded Sunrise, or that it maintained a Dallas "movement house" a few miles up the road.

"Well," Hunter began, diplomatically, "most of humanity wants the world to be a better place. That's true of every activist and every oil-company C.E.O. How you define 'better' is a different deal." He reverted to this formulation several times: why can't everything be a win-win? When you get down to specifics, though, some political questions really are zero-sum—for example, the question of whether the federal government should continue to subsidize fossil fuels or outlaw them.

"Just so you know," Leah said, "I love the idea of a Green New Deal."

"So, here we're gonna agree to disagree," Hunter said, civilly. "I do not believe in a Green New Deal. I believe in the I.R.A. That's a very balanced deal." The Inflation Reduction Act, so far the capstone legislative achievement of the Biden Administration, is the largest climate investment in American history, though many on the left feel that it doesn't do nearly enough.

In my time with Hunt-Hendrix, I asked her more than once why she didn't focus her activism on her own family company. Why not stage a die-in at a corporate meeting, or try to mount an internal coup, or otherwise push Hunt Oil to get out of the oil business? "I

don't believe that you make systemic change by asking corporations to do the right thing," she said. Even if she could persuade her cousin to stop mining fossil fuels, she argued, he might simply be replaced with a C.E.O. who would. She further pointed out that, if Hunt Oil shut down tomorrow, global emissions would decline by only a small fraction—which was true, mathematically speaking, but also seemed like a convenient dodge.

I sometimes found myself wishing that Hunt-Hendrix would be less conflict-averse—that she would cause a scene, grabbing her cousin by the collar and screaming wildly about the climate emergency. Then again, if she made him uncomfortable often enough, wouldn't he just stop returning her calls? We left the restaurant, and I drove my gas-powered rental car to my air-conditioned hotel. I checked my e-mail: Passover was coming up, and I was corresponding with one of my cousins about whether we should insert a line in the Haggadah, just before "next year in Jerusalem," noting that the nonmetaphorical Jerusalem seemed to be descending into an authoritarian crisis. I'd suggested a confrontational statement, with references to illegal settlements and occupation; my cousin countered with something more euphemistic. Now we were considering dropping it altogether: it would only make our older relatives upset, and what was the point of that? I couldn't tell if this was Aristotelian discernment or simple cowardice.

As far as I know, Hunt-Hendrix's relatives have taken no concrete steps to block her activism. Maybe, given the family's financial arrangements (which are private), there isn't much they can do about it. Maybe they don't pay close enough attention to realize that the social movements she supports could someday directly imperil the family business. Or maybe they understand all of this but still don't feel threatened, because they think that the activists have so little chance of winning.

In the 2022 midterm, the Democrats narrowly lost the House, but enough of Way to Win's candidates got elected—Delia Ramirez, from Chicago; Summer Lee, from Pittsburgh; Greg Casar, from Austin; Maxwell Frost, from Orlando—to constitute a kind of Squad 3.0. "Leah let me stay here for a few weeks, in her basement, while I was campaigning," Casar, an eager thirty-four-year-old, told me, standing in the foyer of Hunt-Hendrix's town house in D.C.

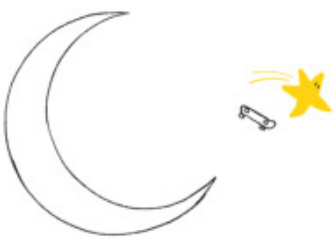
"Me too," Frost, the youngest member of Congress, said.

"I used to call the basement my congressional crash pad," Hunt-Hendrix explained. (She later clarified that it was a "congressional candidate" crash pad; once candidates were elected, they had to be more careful about accepting her hospitality, owing to ethics rules.)

"This is what happens when you bring actual working-class folks to the Hill," Wasi Mohamed, Summer Lee's chief of staff, said.

"I moved to Washington with no savings," Frost said. "I had to max out two different credit cards."

It was early February, less than a month into the new Congress, and about two dozen people—House and Senate aides, staffers from regulatory agencies, a Teamsters organizer, and six members of Congress—were meeting at Hunt-Hendrix's house to discuss strategy. She had spent the afternoon uncorking wine bottles, chopping and roasting asparagus, and getting a fire going in the fireplace. Now she guided everyone toward the living room, where they sat in mismatched armchairs. The



first-term congresspeople swapped new-kid anecdotes about getting lost in the underground tunnels, or passing Marjorie Taylor Greene in the hallway. Then talk turned to the faction's less heralded accomplishments, such as the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau's recent initiative to crack down on junk fees. "Not the sexiest thing in the world," Helen Brosnan, the executive director of Fight Corporate Monopolies, said. "But it will probably put more money in more working people's pockets than anything else that'll happen in D.C. this month." As UPS workers prepared for a potential strike this summer, Hunt-Hendrix coördinated with members of Congress and organizers from the Teamsters to support more labor mobilization around the country; she is backing several congressional candidates for 2024, including Ruben Gallego, who will challenge Kyrsten Sinema from the left.

When the weather in D.C. is warmer, Hunt-Hendrix likes to host parties on her rooftop. I dropped by one around sunset, just as Jamie Raskin, then the senior whip of the House Democratic Caucus, was leaving, and Pramila Jayapal, the co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, was arriving. There were about eighty people on the roof: Ilhan Omar raised a glass of sparkling water for a toast; a half-dozen Squad staffers drank whiskey around a fire pit. People kept ducking inside, down a small ladder, to find a bathroom or do a quick TV hit in one of the empty bedrooms. Each time, in the upstairs hallway, they passed a small, sepia-toned photograph of H. L. Hunt.

It may be true that behind every great fortune is a great crime, but it's more comfortable to think of yourself as fortunate than to think of your loved ones as criminals. You can try to resolve the discomfort, or you can find a way to live with it. When I talked to Stanley Hauerwas, the theologian, he told me a story from his life. "I was a young guy, a student at Yale Divinity School, and I went home to Dallas over the summer," he said. "My father, who was caring in his way but not very expressive, hands me a hunting rifle. He'd been crafting it by hand, for months. For me. I told him, 'Dad, you can keep it—those things ought to be banned.'" Hauerwas still looked pained by the memory, though the incident had happened decades earlier. "What an ignorant little shit I was," he went on. He could have done whatever he wanted with the gun—locked it in a safe, made a sculpture advocating for gun-control laws, melted it down. "But when your ancestor hands you a gift, however deadly it is, the first thing you do is you accept it," he said. "You have to accept the gift." ♦

The True Margaret

Karan Mahajan

PHOTOGRAPH BY ELIZA BOURNER

Meera was recalling the tragedy of her first marriage. Married off to an Indian doctor in 1959, she had moved to London only to discover that her new husband, Ravi, already had a wife in the city.

Ravi didn't wait long to tell her. It was the night that Meera and he arrived in London, haggard from their two-day honeymoon in Jaipur, where an overenthusiastic bearer woke them every morning at six with bed-tea. Then, on a connecting flight from Cairo, they had dozed, their heads forming a tent against the propeller roar, and now, in Earl's Court, the street below empty save for murmuring students and a chestnut seller with a scratchy voice, they stayed awake into the night. Ravi showed her around the sparse, drafty top-floor flat and plugged in the three-bar fire. Then he began speaking to her in a businesslike way, a tone she'd never detected before in his arsenal of charm.

"I suppose, dear, we might as well discuss the issue at hand," he said. Casually he brought up the fact that he was already married to a woman in England, Margaret, a nurse. "I can only be half a husband," he declared. "I owe a responsibility to this woman. You see, when I was lonely and sad in this new country, she was of great . . . assistance . . . to me, and I am like a father to her two children. No, let me finish. You see, there was no circumstance in which I could inform my family in Amritsar about her. People there don't understand these distances—the new world you and I inhabit." Ravi was a tall man with aristocratically weather-beaten skin. He stooped more and more as he spoke, clutching the daggers of hair at the back of his neck, one eye twitching a little, the whites embroidered with rivulets of red, even as his voice remained deliberate. "You must realize, Meera, it was a very difficult circumstance for me. When a man is cast away from home, he needs an anchor to keep his ship in port."

Meera stood on her toes. Swaddled in several hand-knit pullovers, she reached up and touched his face.

Ravi looked as if he were going to sneeze but then relaxed.

He grew sleepy, like a boy. Drowsily, in bed, he kept speaking and she shushed him and stroked his hair.

In the morning he woke full of energy and said, "I won't see her. I don't know why I told you. It's long over. It was a marriage of convenience. You know Count Leo Tolstoy? On the night he and his wife were married, he told her everything about his past. Everything."

But what about the children? Meera wondered. Then she extinguished the thought.

Three days passed. Nothing more was said of this subject and, because it had been spoken of so late in the night, it acquired the quality of a memory from transit, experienced nowhere. Ravi once again became the gallant man who had patiently showed her how to make love on their wedding night while relatives giggled outside and parroted raucous sex noises. He laughed heartily now at her Indian-isms and on Sunday took her by the hand into the streets to name the flowers growing in boxes on the windowsills, damp and fresh and pouring downward, their tendrils caught in the teeth of the sooty brick.

Then, one windy and dry day—the pavements heaving up dead leaves and blowing grit into the eyes—Ravi came home from the hospital where he worked looking tense and withdrawn.

"Would you like a shoulder massage, maikyaji?" she asked. She had been hoping good behavior could make the nightmarish conversation evaporate.

"You judge me, don't you?" he snapped. "You think I'm a coward. Why couldn't I simply tell them, isn't it? Well, you don't know my family. My father is a very traditional person. If your dear Papaji had taken the time to investigate, if he didn't have ten other children to marry off, he would have seen it instantly."

"Don't say anything about Papaji," she growled. She loved her father, was proud of his role in the freedom struggle, the fact that he had retired as a cabinet minister (without portfolio) in Nehru's first interim government.

Ravi hadn't even heard her. "My father brought a great deal of pressure to bear on me to get married," he said. "My mother, frail in the best of times, perversely worried about *his* health and made it seem *he* might have died if I didn't go ahead with the proposal. So, you see, one's hands were tied. And then I met you and I thought, *Ah, this is a modern woman, educated, well spoken, from a great family, she is likely to understand.* Don't cry."

She cried some more. She was thinking about how disappointed her father would be. He had gently warned her against marrying a man who lived abroad, but she had been adamant. She was a great lover of her family, of her boisterous brothers—no one had expected her to leave India. But the converse of this love of family was a need to discover herself.

Ravi started skulking around the flat, his black shoes gleaming brilliantly—he wore a scuffed pair at the hospital, he'd told her, and changed out of them when he left. "I knew it," he said. "No one understands." That night, he drove off in his Morris to his other family.

It was Meera's first night in England alone. Ravi had left the three-bar fire going in the kitchen and a pile of shillings on the table for the meter, otherwise she would have frozen. She lit a candle and by the familiar wavering light at the waxy kitchen table wrote a letter home. The letterhead said "The London Hospital."

She composed the letter in her cramped but polite slanting cursive. The letter was as deliberate in its form as Ravi was in his tone of voice. "I believe I have had a relapse of my bronchial infection in Jaipur," she wrote to her father. Ravi, being a doctor, had suggested she go home immediately and get fresh air in South India, before it became too damp and cold in London. "Ravi says he can purchase a ticket on the Cunard Line. Better for me to make the arduous journey before I am with child, he says."

It took three weeks for the letter to reach India; another month for the reply to come back. But Meera's father, traditional himself, wrote to Ravi instead of to Meera. And when Ravi returned one night to the flat—he now spent only the first half of the week with Meera—he waved the reply, written on the cheapest, lightest onionskin, to save postage, at her. "Bronchial infection, is it? Come here. Come here!"

He lowered himself onto the green, woolly, pilled reading chair. She came close. Ravi peered up at her through the circle of lamplight. His voluminous eyes, with their English rationalism, seemed

to press into all parts of her, like they were the cold ovals of stethoscopes. His eyelids were ash gray; his dense eyebrow hairs were quilled upward. "Any phlegm? Cough for me." Then, before she could do so, he abruptly waved her away. "Cowardice! You couldn't say to my bloody face you were unhappy?"

Meera, marvelling at his hypocrisy, drew back. "I . . ."

He went on, "And here I was mistaking you for a modern woman! Don't you see, I'm not just living half the week elsewhere but am also giving *you* freedom to do what *you* want for that time. And see it from Margie's perspective. She's agreed to share me with you out of *deference* to my culture. When she could have easily said no and thrown a fit, as you have. But you see, these English women, they're practical, not entitled like you upper-class Indian behnjis." A sneer distorted his face. Meera thought, *He's going to kill me. This is how husband-wife murders happen, it is this kind of hate that does it—two people alone in a place where they know no one and are free.*

But, before Ravi left for the hospital the next morning, he kissed her on the head. Then he led her to the bedroom and they made love methodically in the sunlight, as they often did on the days he was home. Meera, greedy for affection, accepted it as a mark of his dedication to her. At the end, he said, "I'll write your daddy today, O.K., I'll tell him everything's well, your sickness is homesickness and that's that." He smiled, and kissed her on the head again, as if he were already living in that solved future.

Yet, as soon as he left the flat, with its rippled floors and grimy lace curtains and unpainted window shutters—a flat she occupied in fear for much of the week, too frightened even to go out and greet the milkman—she started packing her suitcase. She was crying. With each object she put in it, she understood that her life as she had known it was ending, that what she was doing now was even more irreversible than the vows of marriage. She was throwing herself across a line, the line of being a woman without a husband—a nobody, unprotected—and, just as Ravi had smiled at the vision of their contented future, she wept for her future self. She knew what the future held for her. It was exactly out of a desire for a future that she had pressed for a match with this doctor living abroad. She had thought of marriage as a way to move through space at a speed India would not allow—oh, how much she had looked forward to vilayat, Big Ben, Stratford-upon-Avon, the Tower of London, the Peacock Throne, "heather" and "gorse" and "marsh" and "moors," the chance to leave her teeming family behind for a while, and on top of that there was Ravi's collected, reserved, British style and charm, such an antidote to her uncouth siblings. . . . Yes, it was an arranged match, but she had felt truly seen, had felt that he was picking her for their life together because she was special, not just because she was the daughter of a famous man; and they had made each other laugh with a reference to Gandhi's obsession with bodily functions and she had loved that boyish gap in his front teeth, had dreamed about it. But of course it was this very charm that allowed Ravi to imagine he could maintain two wives, two selves; what he had seen in her was not her intelligence, she thought now, but her pliability—why else would he have been reckless with someone from a famous family, when he could have found a nobody who might have been grateful for even half or a quarter or a fifth of an Indian doctor? But perhaps, Meera thought, this was another aspect of his greed and charm and acquisitiveness, perhaps he had forgotten when he saw her that he had an English wife. He was a divided person, *he really was two people*, and sometimes, when he was home with her in their hot-water flat (small,

as befitting a half marriage), Ravi would appreciate her cooking, would laugh and joke with her in Punjabi; he was a great mimic of distant relatives of hers, people he knew he could mock without hurting her, the voices bursting through his gray reserve (no, he wasn't two people, he was many, the acting and balancing had destroyed his center, he could be invaded by anyone or anything), the Punjabi that of an exile, inflected with villagey phrases that made her laugh. "What's so bloody funny?" he would say with affectionate cocked eyebrows before launching, almost as a response, into the squawking Punjabi voice of a family friend. It was as if a switch were being thrown—the serious doting doctor and the crazed mimic—and it was the same at the midpoint of the week, when, the night before heading to Margaret's, he was seized by a coldness, his body flung about by chills as he lay next to her. It was as if he were remembering Margaret and the kids and his awesome pileup of responsibilities, aspects of life he had forgotten with Meera. *Perhaps this is why he married me*, Meera thought, still packing, *because in fact he wanted to start anew, he saw me as a chance to be young again, to continue the life he had always wanted, one that got sidetracked by this English virago.* She was now very angry at Margaret. *How dare she never show her face here, that bitch! She and I have more in common than most women, and she knows I am new here, whereas she has lived here her entire life and she probably spends the days with him at the hospital. Doesn't she owe me a visit?*

But Margaret remained an enigma. And it occurred now to Meera that Margaret could very well have directed Ravi into this sham marriage, that Margaret might have even explained to him the type of Indian lady who'd be most accommodating—Meera could see them having a measured conversation over flower-patterned teacups. "Well, you see, darling, there's nothing to be done, is there?" Margaret would have said. "Quite right," Ravi would have replied, sipping the weak tea. And then Meera thought, *No, no, this is wrong, these images are false, how can I be sure Margaret even knew about my marriage before Ravi returned from India, handcuffed to me?* And now Meera felt that she could guess why Ravi became so cold toward her during certain weeks. These must have been the weeks when Margaret was raging at him, belittling him for his cowardice, overturning the imaginary teacups in fury, asking how he could be so spineless—didn't he live five thousand miles from home, and, given the distance, and the fact that he had money, power, status, and the awesome validation of British citizenship, what could his supposedly traditional family in Amritsar have done

to him? "You surely can't think your grand old father would stoop to suicide, now, do you?" Margaret would have said, and suddenly Meera was fully in Margaret's head, speaking her voice, feeling her curvy white pale body from the inside, the body sagging at the center but with blue eyes burning at the world, a woman all the way around, not boyish and wiry like Meera, a carrier of children, yes, Meera was inside this other woman and crying and packing and she thought, *I'm losing my mind, I am doubled now, too. I now have the gift or the curse of being inside everyone, like my husband does, and it is because I can't bear to be inside my own self—I'll be anyone but me. I'll even be my enemy, Margaret, because in fact we are one.*

She left the flat and somehow, using an A-to-Z map, walked to her uncle Harish's place, a mile away, in Wembley. But, when she showed up at the iron gate of his decaying semidetached Victorian, dressed in a red sari and a camel-hair coat, carrying a neat little suitcase with an ivory handle, she was no longer the weeping bride who had fled her sanctuary. The journey had forced her into composure. Even as Harish Uncle opened the door, she couldn't project despair or fear, and when she told him what had happened his expression locked into place. "You mustn't bring this to me, no, no, no," he said. "How can I help you, beta? I myself, I was never married, you must sort this out between the two of you." He was one of those doting third-cousin-ish father figures, a bachelor with wispy hair growing out of his ears, white and curly like pubic strands, his glasses hanging from a cord around his neck. He was shrinking with every year. He sat at the edge of his cigar-scented sofa with its dirty white lace cover. "Beti, what would your papa think?"

And Meera thought, *He's not heard me*. Now Harish Uncle began droning on about how good Indian boys got entrapped in such relationships, these maims really knew how to blackmail them, there was a reason the Britishers ruled us for so long, you think enslaving one Indian is so difficult? "Our chaps," he said, "they're so innocent, earnest, dutiful, and the maims can never find men like that in their own country. Moreover, these chaps are emotional and not buttoned up, no, these maims throw themselves at our boys, what chance do the poor chaps even have? And your papa, think of what he'll say if you leave—he'll scold me, he'll say, You bloody fellow, you're supposed to be her guardian, and you allowed her to just run away . . ."

The disadvantage of being the child of a famous man: all of her Papaji's henchmen feared him. Topmost in their minds was the desire to please him. *This man*, Meera thought, *has a false idea of my father in his head. My father is more liberal and loving than twenty fathers combined. Doesn't everyone say the Kukreja girls are like boys, tough and individualistic and educated, and didn't he agree to send me five thousand miles away*? She became angry on behalf of her father. *How dare you speak for him*, she wanted to shout, *I am his daughter, not you*, and now she was angry not just at this soggy hairy specimen but at all men. *Go to hell, all of you*, she thought, but a layer of tiredness slipped over her again and she started to cry.

Harish was off the sofa, coming toward her with his awkward hands and hunched back, saying, "Beti, what will crying solve?" She thought, *He hates all of us, hates our tears, this is why he's a bachelor*, and suddenly she was lit up with warmth toward Ravi, toward his neat way of expressing himself, of taking his tie off every evening and folding it just so and placing it on the dressing table, his hands open at his sides as he talked about his day at the hospital—she was in love with Ravi.

I'm going mad, she thought. She wiped her tears and said, "Thank you, Uncle."

"I understand," he said. "It's hard to be in a new place. It takes time to adjust." He went on, "It's a big shock, how free people are here. Do you mind if I light a cigar? And you can imagine when I came here, it was a different time, I mean these chaps were still our rulers, but of course they treat you differently once you're here—especially in London they're very liberal and courteous and curious, they want to know all about you. But it's all very well to treat a few of us well when you're enslaving a nation, isn't it?"

"But we're independent now," Meera said.

"Quite right, quite right," he said, puffing on his cigar.

Meera returned to her flat and made Ravi a nice meal.

She lasted a year. But, when she thought later of what one year meant against an entire life, it was nothing. She

"We scheduled all our vacations so that it will be impossible to hold any meetings next month."

• •

had almost accepted half a life *as* her life.

Every day with Ravi was new. Every day was unpredictable. And yet every day, when it reached its conclusion, could be recalled only as an accumulation of signs: grayness, clouds, rain, milkman, flower seller, greengrocer, baker, the tramp at the bus stop who yelled about the deaths at the Somme.

India had been the opposite: a daily external extreme churning, a chaos of relatives and servants—but a place, too, of inner peace, a kind of boredom and security, the kind that had made her eager for an adventure with a man living abroad.

Meera missed home. She put her head against the crosshatched windowpane, absorbing the cold through her temple.

One warm morning, when she opened the tiny window in the bedroom, it simply fell out, along with its wooden frame, into the dirty alley between the backs of the houses.

She read in the papers about Sophia Loren's husband, accused of bigamy, but could not connect the story with her own condition, did not feel that English laws applied to her. Nor had she been able to bring herself to investigate Margaret. This was because all white women of a certain age in London *were* Margaret. Suspicion made her peer at each one of them, noticing their teeth, noses, lips, their low-cut blouses, their fashionably belt-cinched waists. How could she compete with them?

At home, she sometimes touched herself while imagining Ravi with one of them—only to pull her hand away.

She didn't want the revelation of the true Margaret to take away a city full of her playthings.

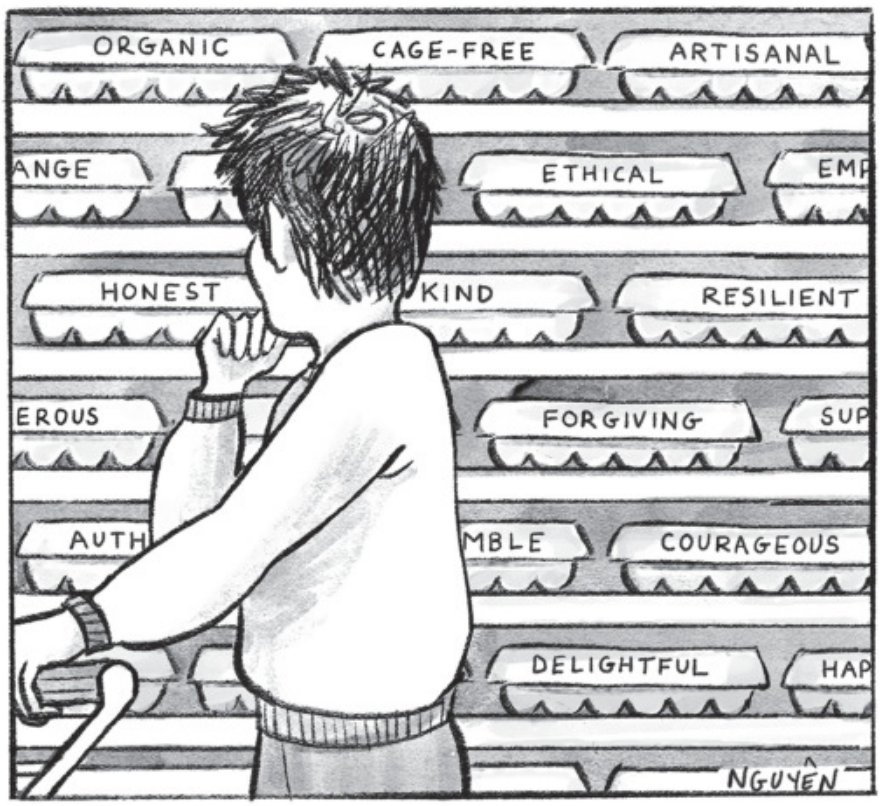
These thoughts came and went in flashes. She told herself that her perversions were brought on by loneliness—the desire for friendship, the kind of bond she had formed with only one person in London, the landlady's daughter, Abby, who, like Meera, had been a competitive badminton player in school.

"And how alike we really are!" Abby had said, pressing Meera's hands as they chatted by the staircase.

Abby seemed to know about Ravi's other wife, because she never mentioned his prolonged absences. This knowledge sat heavily between them, preventing them from progressing further; they were always stuck on the ground floor of friendship, expressing admiration for each other's existence without making the slightest attempt to penetrate to the truth, their friendship little more than a series of chirps of affirmation.

The flat was not without clues about where Margaret might live—receipts, faded prescriptions for the kids (two boys, she had learned). But, every time Meera took the Tube and got within a few blocks of Margaret's possible address, in Islington, she turned around.

In this way, Margaret helped her discover the city, develop confidence, learn to be alone.



"I don't deserve these eggs."

"When you came, you were like a mouse," Ravi was saying. "A small freezing mouse. Do you want to go to the theatre?"

She nodded.

In the dark of the matinée, he held her hand. She let it lie limp but did not pull it away.

At home, he was distracted. He took off his tie. Then, for the first time in months, he bent down and passionately kissed her. She resisted, but then her mouth sagged open and they lay in the bed together, close to the repaired window with its fresh harsh eye on the back alley.

"I want us to have a child," he whispered into her neck, his hooked nose nestled there. She was silent.

"Hullo?" Ravi said. "Anyone home?"

"I don't want to," Meera finally said, her eyes scanning the pressed-tin ceiling.

"But why, darling?"

"I don't want to bring more sadness into the world."

Ravi got up on his elbows. "Meera. It's not what you think it is. Margaret's a good person. She was widowed and I used to comfort her. Then . . . love . . . developed." He paused. "The love has been dead for years. When I met you, I was trying to escape her. But how can I? I'm incapable of leaving anyone or anything, of moving on."

You left India behind, she almost said. But what was the point?

"It's the children. That's why I've stayed." He stroked her sides. "That's why I want us to have one of our own. Half of you, half of me. Think of how sweet he'll be. How much we'll adore

him. It's a different kind of love one has for kids."

He kissed her deeply.

"I don't want to," she said again, covering her eyes with an arm.

Night after night now, the building would come alive with the sound of Ravi's trotting footsteps approaching the fourth floor.

Then the good doctor, placing his black valise on the carpet, would crouch down beside his intransigent wife—usually knitting in a chair—and say to her, "Will the Duchess of York consent to make love to her humble servant tonight?"

"No."

"May I serve the Queen of Sheba the crêpes Suzette I brought home especially from Veeraswamy?"

"Give it to your other wife."

But, to her surprise, he was starting to make her laugh again. Northern summer light swamped the flat in the evenings.

He was spending more and more time with her. *A man who likes a project*, she thought. He brought home a suitcase of clothes. She anticipated his arrival with dread. She had carefully calibrated a routine—cooking, shopping, walking, playing cards and badminton with Abby—and now it was crumbling.

Nevertheless, she could feel her resistance giving, too, and she was frightened. Then, one night, Ravi was crouching on the floor next to her and stroking her thigh as she read in the green chair, when she said, "Will you take me to meet Margaret?" How many months it had taken her to ask this question!

Ravi startled. He was still in his gray work suit; his brown hat lay on the carpet. "Of course, that can be arranged," he said. "Of course, that can, yes . . ." He seemed to be speaking to himself.

"I propose we meet halfway between India House and the House of Commoners," Meera said, purposely misstating the latter.

"It's a joke to you?" Ravi asked.

Her mouth tightened.

"You have to understand, Meera, once I open that door—that's the issue," Ravi was saying.

For three days, she didn't hear from him and was in suspense. She mopped the floors, dusted the fronts of the cabinets, beat the sofa with her palm.

The door groaned. It was Ravi. He stood in the frame, hunched and weary, his black doctor's bag under one arm. "She is amenable to it. She says you can come to our—to her—place, but not to expect any grand cooking." He seemed older, broken, a man caught between two lives, two wives. And what she felt for him, even as she said "Very good," was not pity but contempt.

Am I, too, just a creature of power? she thought, with a horrified smile.

The next morning, Ravi was unwell. He had evidently caught a bad cold and began coughing into the kitchen sink. "Not there!" Meera found herself shouting. "I just cleaned all those dishes!"

He glanced sideways at her from over the crack-spidered sink, eyes bulging as he coughed some more.

"Just do it on the side!"

"I'm sick, Meera—"

"Move!"

She felt, again, that unbearable contempt for him. How had she let this man waste her life?

For the next two days, they fought. He called her fat and uptight, she taunted him for not having got her pregnant the first months they'd made love in England. "Is that why you brought me here, because you couldn't get your English screw pregnant?"

"Listen to the words coming out of your mouth," he said.

She did, and she was dismayed.

Suddenly, she was on the landing. She had run out of the flat, slamming the door behind her.

As she came down the stairs, the door to Abby's flat opened.

"It's not all right, what's happening with you," Abby whispered. "I'll help you."

A week later—the day before she was to meet Margaret—Meera flew to Delhi, smuggled out in the night by Abby. She had sold her gold wedding bangles to purchase the ticket.

In Delhi, her father, broad-shouldered and upright in his tight study, was shocked to see her.

But, when Meera started crying and told him the whole story, he said, "Oh, my bitiya, this is my mistake, you've run all this way—"

"No, Papaji, it's my fault," Meera said, crying. "I should have known." How had her life come to this?

"How could you have known, bitiya?" he said. And then, "You know, when my first wife passed, I was only twenty, and I didn't want to remarry, I didn't think life could start again, and I was angry that my father had pressurized me, but then I went ahead—and look at things now. I have you and all of my children. So, at your age, there's no reason to be despairing."

Men always take the occasion of a woman's sadness to launch into reveries. She didn't mind. She got so little time alone with him. It was only tragedy that had brought them closer. She was, for a second, almost grateful for it: she had lost a husband but gained a father.

After a discreet back-and-forth with Ravi's family in Amritsar, the marriage was annulled under the pretext that it hadn't been consummated.

A few months later, she was married off again—to an older, widowed, mid-level railway official with a weak heart. She had no idea how much diligence was done. It was understood that she had to go back into the world, even if it was as damaged goods. And so the shambles of London gave way to the shambles of India—a more lower-middle-class existence than she'd ever imagined, a union with a man she had nothing in common with, and who, strangely, had no interest in her famous family and instead asked her questions about England, as if she had been there for her studies rather than for a wreck of a marriage.

Was that really me in England? she sometimes wondered, remembering the first night Ravi had spoken to her about Margaret, and how that conversation itself had seemed like a dream. A dream upon a dream upon a dream: her life. There was, however, one sobering, bracing dose of reality: Ravi.

Ravi never vanished. Ravi kept writing to her for years. He said he loved her deeply. In the letters, he was apologetic and morose, he wanted her to see his position, asked how she was, how her son, Anand, was growing, and so on. He wanted Meera to forgive him from afar. He wanted India to forgive him for marrying a British woman.

She never replied. ♦

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Karan Mahajan on immigration and the self.

BOOKS

YOU HAD TO BE THERE

How a ramshackle street shaped a generation of artists.

BY JACKSON ARN

Has anyone bothered to thank Pepsi for its crucial little role in American culture? The year was 1947, and a young Mississippi artist named Fred Mitchell was trying to expand his horizons. He entered one of his paintings in a contest and won a cash prize of fifteen hundred dollars—close to twenty grand today—courtesy of the sponsor, the Pepsi-Cola Company. Mitchell used his winnings to sail to Europe, where he spent the next three years meeting artists and inhaling modernism. When he returned to the States, he settled in a half-empty building on a street near the southern tip of Manhattan and invited one of his new buddies, the painter Ellsworth Kelly, to join him.

The street was Coenties Slip (pronounced "co-*en*-tees"), and during the next decade or so it became a bright, teeming hothouse of the New York avant-garde. The fibre artist Lenore Tawney moved into 27 Coenties Slip in 1957, the same year that Kelly persuaded the actress Delphine Seyrig and her husband, the painter Jack Youngerman, to live in the same building. Kelly also helped recruit Agnes Martin, James Rosenquist, and Robert Clark, who hadn't yet changed his surname to Indiana, let alone scattered "LOVE" sculptures across the planet. By the mid-sixties, you could have filled a first-rate museum with the work of Slip artists alone: abstract paintings by Kelly, Martin, and Youngerman, weavings by Tawney, assemblages by Indiana. Hanging in the lobby, one of Rosenquist's Pop canvases, starring a mound of spaghetti or (did he know?) a Pepsi logo.

There were times when life on the Slip must have felt like the kind of cornball bio-pic in which someone famous pops up every thirty seconds. Robert Rauschenberg and Jasper Johns were minutes away. Frank O'Hara would drop by. In 1964, Andy Warhol shot a film in one of the buildings. In spite of attention from glossies such as *Esquire*, the area was never overrun by hangers-on—there was always a community but never really a scene. It helped, probably, that many of the buildings lacked reliable lighting, plumbing, or heating. (Harder to hang on when it's freezing inside.) Artists loved the enormous rooms as much as the cheap rents, but by the late sixties most of the buildings had been demolished for high-rises—a bang in lieu of the usual gentrified whimper. Go there today and your reward is a grassless park, and an Insomnia Cookies around the corner.

Things that burn bright and vanish are easily idealized, but in "The Slip: The New York City Street That Changed American Art Forever" (Harper), the critic Prudence Peiffer opts for a tricky blend of mythmaking and myth-busting. Like many recent chroniclers of mid-century New York, she snubs the household names, so that we hear barely a peep from Warhol, Rauschenberg, or Johns, and even less from Jackson Pollock, Mark Rothko, or Philip Guston. One reason the Slip's residents were overlooked, Peiffer suggests, was that they shared no obvious brand or style; their identity was having no identity. None of them plays the lead in her book, but neither does the crew as a whole. The true hero is an environment, an atmosphere—in the parlance of our times, a vibe.

Like Wall Street and Santa Claus, Coenties Slip owes its long history to seventeenth-century Dutch settlers. For hundreds of years, it was an economic hub where fishmongers sold cod, sailors chugged grog, and ships loaded and unloaded cargo. (The roomy lofts that proved so useful to artists were designed for sail-making.) Walt Whitman knew the area, and Herman Melville gives it a shout-out in the first chapter of "Moby-Dick": "Go from Corlears Hook to Coenties Slip, and from thence, by Whitehall, northward. What do you see?—Posted like silent sentinels all around the town, stand thousands upon thousands of mortal men fixed in ocean reveries." Peiffer cites passages like this to argue that young, wayward artists thrived on the Slip because it was "a liminal place," "at once center and edge"—close to the action but removed enough to breathe.

I'm not sure this is so special—New York is full of center-edge neighborhoods, and the history of its art scene is largely a matter of the edges becoming more (and ultimately too) central. Peiffer's main point, though, is right: Coenties Slip had seedy glamour to spare, but for most of the fifties and sixties it didn't feel like Manhattan. The buildings were stubby and decrepit, and in some of them feral cats outnumbered humans; one real-estate developer complained that the area turned into a ghost town after 5 P.M. Because its lofts were commercially zoned, anyone who slept

HANS NAMUTH / © 1991 HANS NAMUTH ESTATE / CENTER FOR CREATIVE PHOTOGRAPHY, UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA; OPPOSITE: ANTONIO GIOVANNI PINNA

Agnes Martin, Jack Youngerman, and Ellsworth Kelly on the roof of 3-5 Coenties Slip, New York (detail), 1958.

there at night was breaking the law, though landlords were happy to look the other way. If a building inspector came knocking, Seyrig and Youngerman could grab a set of slatted doors that they had found on the street, hide their bed behind them, and pretend to be decent, law-abiding business owners.

For Slip artists, the street was a rec room, a grocery store, and, above all, a supply shop. Most of the people in this book are scavengers—besides doors, things they find in the neighborhood include barrels, quilts, chairs, chains, gas heaters, newspaper plates, brass stencils, wheels, and old slabs of wood, which both Indiana and Martin turned into sculptures. (Martin used them for furniture, too.) Peiffer's book is free of the weightless isms that one usually sees in art histories. Every page is lousy with stuff, as if Coenties Slip were an islet to which mounds of debris drifted from the mainland of New York. When its residents talk about "leaving Manhattan" to go home, you see what they mean.

They lived below Fourteenth Street, but they were never pillars of the downtown art scene. Tenth Street, where Pollock and the leading Abstract Expressionist painters of the era drank and gabbed, might as well have been Canada. "One of the things we were very conscious of," Youngerman later said, "was the fact that we all knew that we weren't part of the de Kooning/Pollock legacy in art." He was talking about something both broader and narrower than Abstract Expressionism: art as gruff male ego, epitomized by the famous Hans Namuth photographs of Pollock bobbing like a middleweight and hurling paint like a pitcher. Slip artists, many of them gay, and many of them women, were proud to scorn this model. The irony, as Peiffer and others have noted, is that Abstract Expressionism was never the brawny sport that Pollock made it seem. No matter. If artists didn't have rivals to renounce, they'd have one less reason to make art.

In fact, "The Slip" leaves you with the suspicion that renunciation is the jet pack of art history. It's not enough to have talent and vision; if you want to be great, you need grudges, fallings-out—the pettier the better. Ellsworth Kelly was in his early thirties and a minor hit with New York gallerists when he began an affair with his neighbor Robert Indiana. Kelly had spent time in Europe, soaking up Matisse, and his abstract canvases from the fifties have some of the Frenchman's bright, taut simplicity. Indiana was younger, less established, and insecure about his style. What could possibly go wrong?

For much of their time together, the two artists swapped ideas without caring too much about credit. Kelly, Indiana later recalled, was prone to "long discourses" on color and encouraged him to explore vivid, hard-edged abstraction. You can see this influence in "The Sweet Mystery" (1959-62), a tribute to the yellow leaves of nearby ginkgo trees. It could almost be a Kelly painting, save for the blue stencilled letters that spell out the title; ripped from a love song, they mark one of Indiana's first works bearing words. Kelly, for his part, began to fool around with letters. In "New York, NY," one of his most arrestingly offbeat paintings, a big white "N" melts into a big white "Y" to make something halfway between abstraction and representation, Pop and Minimalism—a fine example of the promiscuous mixture that was the Slip's house style.

After the breakup came the usual revisionist histories and awkward division of assets. Indiana's immediate reaction was to make a word painting called "FUCK"—a warmup, in a way, for his "LOVE" sculptures. (The "U" in the painting, like the "O" in the sculptures, is tilted.) Kelly despised it, and it's not hard to imagine Indiana burrowing deeper into word art as a way of twisting the knife. He revisited some of his abstract paintings and added letters; other canvases he painted over completely. Kelly returned to pure abstraction and never dabbled in words again. Falling in love has inspired its fair share of art, but next to falling out of love it's a blip.

Even when the antagonisms aren't so obvious, "The Slip" is defined as much by sticks as it is by carrots: its characters may not be able to explain what they do, but they're clear on what they're trying to avoid. Agnes Martin was nearing fifty when she moved to Coenties Slip, having spent most of the previous decade painting rich, dreamy abstractions in the Southwest. With her new address came a great emptying out of her imagery—unlike most of her neighbors, she wasn't ashamed to call herself an Abstract Expressionist, but her paintings resemble Pollock's as much as a murmur resembles a squawk. "The Dark River" (1961) is a quietly overwhelming work, precisely because it doesn't spill its guts straight away. What at first looks like a lifeless brown grid begins to vibrate; thin lines stammer their way from one side of the canvas to the other. Soon you have the sense of talking with someone who is trying very hard not to burst into tears.

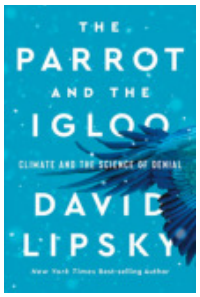
"You did have a college fund, but then we decided to have one picture professionally framed."

Every ensemble drama has a few standouts, and Martin is one of "The Slip"'s. Peiffer calls her the "den mother" of the neighborhood, renowned for her blueberry muffins, but mental illness held her back: she was diagnosed with schizophrenia and spent much of 1962 in Bellevue. As though taking cues from "The Dark River," Peiffer doesn't strain for pathos in these chapters, so you can't help but feel some. Lenore Tawney paid Martin's medical bills and bought her art, both to support a worthy cause and to stop Martin from destroying it. Why Tawney felt compelled to do this—whether the two women were lovers, friends, friendly rivals, or some combination—is never explained and, at this point, probably inexplicable. (Martin died in 2004, Tawney in 2007.) There are times when the uncertainty works to "The Slip"'s advantage. In 1963, Martin wrote Tawney a letter that began, "I am not going to be able to tell you anything really. You have made this day the turning point in my life." Knowing what she was thanking Tawney *for* would spoil things: unspecified, the words wash over their whole tense relationship with something like what Philip Larkin called "an enormous yes."

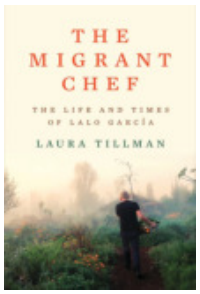
The turning point in Tawney's life, or at least in her career, came shortly before she moved to Coenties Slip. She began experimenting with a looser kind of weaving, in which the usual layer of vertical threads (the warp) stretched from top to bottom, while some of the horizontal threads (the weft) curved, stopped halfway, or never began in the first place. The main downside of open-warp weaving, as it's known, is its delicacy—without the extra material, it's liable to sag—but in Tawney's hands weakness became virtue. "Seaweed" (1961), one of her most striking creations, is mostly empty space, yet there's something weirdly resilient about it. Yellowish squiggles of linen and silk veer one way, then another, not with a grand "Because I say so" but with a serene "Why not this?" If Martin clung movingly to the grid, Tawney did doughnuts all over it.

What did any of this have to do with the Slip itself? "Place," Peiffer declares in her introduction, "is an undervalued determinant in creative output." That's a funny claim for an art

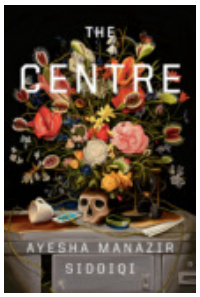
BRIEFLY NOTED



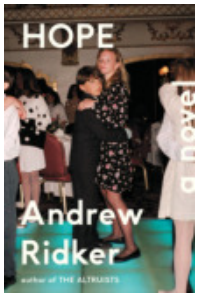
The Parrot and the Igloo, *by David Lipsky (Norton)*. This history of the idea that human actions are warming the world to cataclysmic effect opens with brief biographies of the inventors who ushered electricity, and its most troubling descendant, fossil-fuel dependency, into the world. The awareness of human-induced warming dawns in 1896 and resurfaces periodically throughout the twentieth century—in 1956, the *Times* imagined an Arctic so hot that it was home to tropical birds, a landscape that gives Lipsky's book its title—before battles with skeptics and deniers begin in earnest, in the two-thousands. A consensus finally arrives with the release of the fourth I.P.C.C. assessment, in 2007, but this triumph becomes an anticlimax when governments prove unwilling to regulate fossil fuels.



The Migrant Chef, *by Laura Tillman (Norton)*. The Mexican chef Eduardo (Lalo) García Guzmán, the subject of this wide-ranging biography, spent his youth as a migrant worker in the United States, where he learned that "the health of the oranges was more important than his own." Tillman traces Guzmán's trajectory from deportee to celebrated chef dedicated to local ingredients, terroir, and transparent supply chains. She evokes how even as Guzmán aims "to hint, via an ingredient" or "a geographic term," at the history embedded in his menus, he is haunted by the inequities of haute cuisine, and by the circumstances that render locally sourced foods a luxury.



The Centre, *by Ayesha Manazir Siddiqi (Gillian Flynn)*. The protagonist of this mystery is a young Pakistani Londoner who earns money writing English subtitles for Bollywood films and longs to translate literary classics. When she receives an invitation to the Centre, a secretive language school that produces native-level fluency in ten days, she enrolls, mastering German and Russian before strange dreams and a hushed-up death alert her to something amiss. The novel explores friendship, purpose, and power; it also frames language as intimate and embodied, casting translation as an opportunity for "a repurposing of things once thoughtlessly imbibed."



Hope, *by Andrew Ridker (Viking)*. This comic novel, about a year of crisis for an affluent Jewish family, opens with a dinner party at which each guest is served a meal representing a different socioeconomic background. According to the hostess, Deborah, the matriarch, the purpose of this exercise is "to replicate, in a controlled environment, the lottery of birth." Yet, the control of the family's own environment becomes a problem after Deborah's husband, Scott, is caught falsifying data in a clinical trial. Deborah pursues an affair, their daughter becomes reëntangled with a teacher who groomed her in high school, and their son, a premed student who idolized his father, feels increasingly lost. Ridker's tone remains light even as his characters struggle to correct course. Writing about psychiatry's new interest in the "transgenerational transmission of trauma" in his medical-school application, the son wonders, "Who knows what else our parents have unwittingly passed on?"

critic to make—it would be hard to discuss postwar American painting without mentioning the Cedar Tavern or Tenth Street, and this book is only the latest entry in the neglected-creative-community subgenre of biography. (Aficionados might try Maggie Doherty's "The Equivalents" or Mary Gabriel's "Ninth Street Women.") "The Slip," though, goes all in on the conceit. Coenties Slip didn't merely put artists in touch with artists; it offered cavernous rooms and interesting plants and sea breezes, and they're all presented so winsomely that you may wonder how any non-Slip resident managed to do anything at all.

I read these pages with delight and foreboding: delight because Peiffer is a lively storyteller armed with oodles of great material; foreboding because whenever a writer starts making solemn generalizations about place I start rubbing my temples. Peiffer's favorite generalization is a concept that she dubs "collective solitude." Most labels simplify; this one is so broad that it's impossible to argue with. Artists benefit from living near other artists, since they can share ideas, materials, studio space, gallery connections, and so on. Artists also benefit from being alone when they feel like being alone. That's about it. Peiffer appears to think that collective solitude was particularly useful for the young, ambitious artists of Coenties Slip, when it seems fairer to say that it's useful to anyone who wants to paint without dying of loneliness.

The vagueness of this theory allows her to take a Panglossian view of things. What happened in the Slip's buildings happened *because* of the Slip's buildings, though you could build a reasonable case for "despite," unless you pretend that it's easy to make great art in a home without hot water. This is a tactile book, but its sensations skew smooth and gentle. In James Rosenquist's memoirs, he recalls visiting Indiana's building and encountering a mind-altering stink, which turned out to belong to a dead body. The episode is nowhere to be found in "The Slip"'s perfumed pages. In what may be its most telling passage, however, Peiffer notes that Youngerman did much of his painting at night, since he and Seyrig couldn't afford a babysitter, and adds, "There's something comforting about being the only one awake creating as your family sleeps below." Something exhausting, too, I would bet. All for the best, though, in the best of all neighborhoods.

The surprise survivor of "The Slip"'s place-centric approach is Rosenquist. He's as vulgar as Kelly is tasteful, as various as Martin is consistent, as chunky-jangly as Tawney is delicate. Like Warhol, he got his start in commercial art; unlike Warhol, or, for that matter, Roy Lichtenstein or Claes Oldenburg, he had no patience for the shortcut of the ironic-iconic, which partly explains why his Pop art isn't as recognizable as theirs. He would never have silk-screened Marilyn Monroe's photograph and called it a day; instead, he would have cracked her face into fragments, shuffled them around, and interspersed the results with jagged bits of text. (In 1962, he actually did.) Many Slip artists painted their rooms white, the better to inspire pure, beautiful art. Rosenquist never bothered. Filth was his friend.

It's hard to explain his stuff in the context of the Slip, and the harder the book tries the more singular it seems. Peiffer suggests that neighborhood strolls inspired Rosenquist, but when she quotes the man himself he cites midtown Manhattan. He was a midtown guy through and through—there's nothing cozy about his dense, dirty paintings, in which faces and logos and objects melt into one another. The meaning of these images is nearly beside the point, though the best ones have an almost sublime tawdriness. "Rosenquist," Peiffer writes, "presaged digital art and postmodernism's mash-up of high and low imagery." This is damning him with faint praise: every Pop artist presaged digital art and postmodernism. More than any of his contemporaries, though, Rosenquist understood that the basic unit of mass culture isn't the long, worshipful stare—it's the twitchy glance. Next to him, Warhol seems prehistoric.

More than sixty years on, so does New York City. Something close to a miracle appears to have happened here after the Second World War: suddenly, superb artists could be found infesting every apartment. For a long time, the miracle was explained in terms of misty essences like genius or nationhood, though lately art history seems to have grown more modest in its claims. In lieu of the solitary virtuoso or the triumphant country, books like "The Slip" give us the plucky community, halfway between one and the other. This isn't a bad trade, by any means; what doesn't quite wash is the assurance that we now have a clearer idea of where great art comes from. The giveaway, to return to Peiffer's introduction, is the word "determinant." Talking about liminal places and collective solitude strikes me as a way of sneaking some scientific-sounding rigor into a subject that is fundamentally unscientific—of exchanging an old, stodgy fairy tale for a fancy-sounding new one.

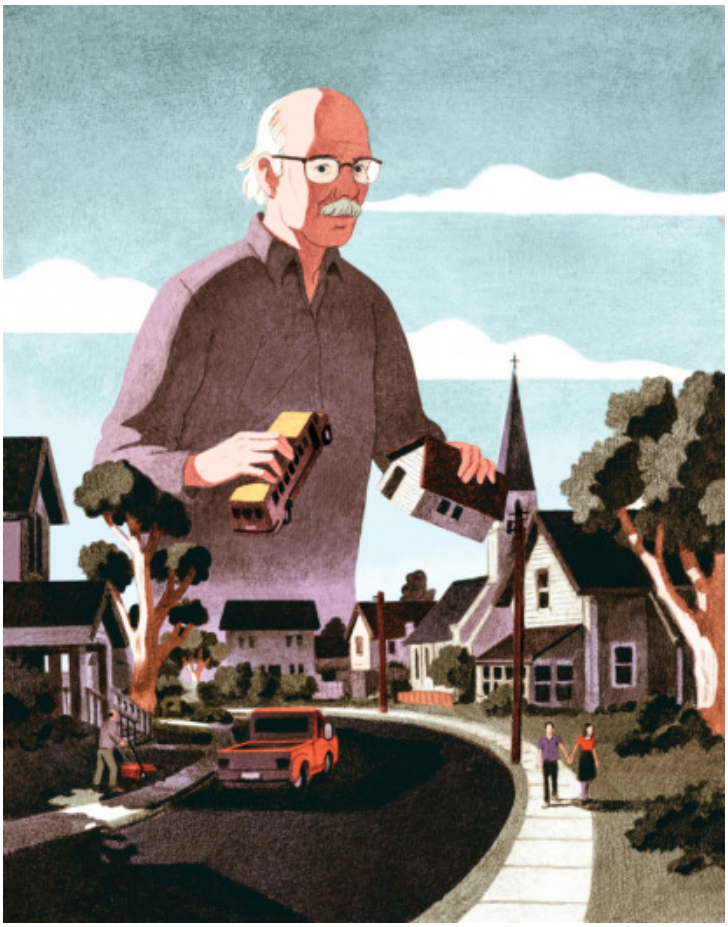
Even if you think of cultural history in terms of determinants, there are better ones. "I went on unemployment," Rosenquist wrote; this was in 1960, when "you could go to Chinatown and six people, six *hungry* people, could go to Hong Fat and have a big meal with rice and tea. The bill would be $5.75!" Read almost any memoir by a mid-century New York painter or writer and you'll find some version of this story. In 1960, a New York apartment could cost seventy-eight dollars a month—roughly eight hundred dollars today. Tuition at Columbia University was less than two grand. Creativity can't be predicted, but it can be encouraged, and the best form of encouragement has little to do with charmingly ramshackle streets. "The Slip" inspires plenty of respect for its artists, but it left me with a suspicion both heartening and chilling: talent is as common as dirt. It's taken a bleak state of affairs to stunt it now, and it took remarkably little for it to flourish then.

So it helps not to romanticize a Zip Code too much. Agnes Martin was fifty-five when she found out that her loft was doomed to demolition. Instead of moving somewhere nearby, she cut her hair, bought a camper, and left town. "I must give independence a trial," she told Tawney. She wouldn't finish another painting until 1974, but she didn't quit again until she was dead. Vibe isn't everything, and today's refuge is tomorrow's renunciation. The Slip was a pleasant enough place to live, but its biggest contribution to art history may have been that a great painter left it behind. ♦

CRAZY TOWN

The singular stories of Steven Millhauser.

BY CHARLES MCGRATH



The small-town settings enfold a meticulous blend of realism and surrealism.

ILLUSTRATION BY ANTOINE MAILLARD

Steven Millhauser, whose new collection, "Disruptions" (Knopf), is out just in time for his eightieth birthday, is the great eccentric of American fiction: a sleight-of-hand artist who from time to time seems to vanish into his own work. His first novel, "Edwin Mullhouse: The Life and Death of an American Writer 1943-1954, by Jeffrey Cartwright"—ostensibly a biography of an eleven-year-old novelist by his fifth-grade classmate—was a minor sensation when it first appeared, in 1972, and it became a cult classic. There has never been anything like it, both a parody of literary biography and a mesmerizing evocation of a small-town nineteen-fifties childhood.

Millhauser had another brush with fame in 1997, when his fourth novel, "Martin Dressler: The Tale of an American Dreamer," won the Pulitzer Prize. But his second and third novels—one a portrait of a teen-age romantic and the other a fantasy set in the kingdom of Morpheus, the god of dreams—are not as memorable, and he is best known for his short stories and novellas, like the ones gathered in the new book, in which compression somehow allows his talent its fullest expression. (Millhauser has said that he likes the "fraudulent modesty" of the story, the way that, pretending not to strive for much, it actually aspires to embody the whole world.)

Occasionally, his stories turn up in large-circulation publications such as this one, but mostly they appear in literary magazines and specialized quarterlies, and they're almost impossible to categorize. Millhauser reminds you of Borges sometimes, of Calvino and Angela Carter at other times, even of Nabokov once in a while. What sets him apart from other writers these days is that he's a fabulist of a particular sort: his stories take place, for the most part, neither in the real world nor in one that's wholly fantastical but someplace in between. Millhauser has a Nicholson Baker-like gift for meticulous, closeup description of the ordinary, but his world is also one that may be inhabited by ghosts, a realm where paintings and postcards come to life, where people can vanish or fly on carpets, and where it's possible for someone to cohabitate with a frog.

For a reader coming to Millhauser for the first time, "Disruptions" may not be the ideal place to start. (That would be "We Others," his 2011 collection of new and selected stories.) From his latest book, you wouldn't learn just how much Millhauser loves illusion and all the gimmickry of illusion: puppets, peepshows, waxworks, automatons, flip books, magic lanterns, and, perhaps most of all, animated cartoons. One of his best stories, "Cat 'n' Mouse," is itself a kind of cartoon, cheerfully deploying the stock imagery of those old "Tom and Jerry" episodes—shiny round bombs with burning fuses and the like—in what's both a sendup and a fond homage. You don't so much read as watch inside your head when the cat, for example, after losing the top of his skull to a guillotine, crams it back on like a hat. Then he discovers that he's holding a package with a stick of dynamite inside. It explodes, naturally, and, when the smoke clears away, the cat's face has turned black and in each of his eyes there's a ship, which slowly cracks in half and sinks.

Millhauser is also fascinated by miniaturization—models, replicas, doll houses, the smaller the better—and by its opposite, gigantism. In "Martin Dressler," the title character, a nineteenth-century cigar-maker turned entrepreneur and hotelier, gets carried

away and builds a hotel, the Grand Cosmo, so vast that, not unlike a Millhauser story, it becomes a world unto itself, with a haunted grotto, a Moorish bazaar, and a temple of poetry in which young women, clad in Grecian tunics, recite Wordsworth and Longfellow twenty-four hours a day. Another one of Millhauser's stories imagines a department store so sprawling that customers get lost in it, amid brooks and streams, and areas made to look like a Victorian parlor or a foggy London street. In addition to snowblowers and mulching tractors, you can buy waterfalls, Viking ruins, a full-sized Venetian palazzo, a Scottish castle, or miles and miles of steaming Amazon jungle.

In the new collection, Millhauser has it both ways. One of the longer stories takes place in a Connecticut town where the inhabitants of a certain neighborhood are just two inches tall. Some of them have jobs in—what else?—nanotechnology, and others work in the homes of their (relatively giant-size) fellow-townspeople, removing lint from clothes, polishing eyeglasses, scouring attics and cellars for ants and mouse droppings. The little people and their counterparts mainly get along, and sometimes even have dinner together. Millhauser, with his eye for detail, is very precise about the logistics of these encounters—the miniature tables and chairs set out on the regular-height tabletop, the motorized platforms that raise the smaller people up from the floor. He's quite explicit, too, about what happens when a small person and a large one fall in love and attempt to have sex. The story is funny and affecting (it's reminiscent at times of "Stuart Little"), but disturbing as well. It's about difference, of course—not just difference of scale but difference of perception. There are people in both groups who believe that this mingling has gone too far, because it makes people of both sizes feel inadequate, awkward, ashamed. Among the larger people, there's a segregationist faction called Think Big. At the high school, though, there is a Shortness Club, whose members wish that they could be more delicate and petite. One boy, a sophomore, even tries to cut off his feet with a hacksaw.

The new collection includes a couple of excellent stories about dreamy, moony, self-conscious adolescents, another of Millhauser's preoccupations. He's written about them so often you can't help guessing he must have been one himself. At the core of "Disruptions," though, is a group of stories in a mode that Millhauser keeps returning to in book after book: a disorienting version of the small-town tale. These stories are set in the archetypal old Connecticut town where so much of his fiction is situated, a place with a green, a steepled church, a historical society, a museum. At one end of town is Long Island Sound, with a beach that teenagers go to at night. At the other end, you can hear the traffic on the throughway. In between are leafy neighborhoods of houses with wide lawns and big porches set back from the street. The residents are diligent about mowing and watering, cleaning out the garage, touching up the paint on their shutters.

As if to underscore the generic quality of the setting, Millhauser's small-town stories are mostly written in the first-person plural, using "we" instead of "I," because the narrator is reporting on something unsettling that is happening to the whole town. Invariably, the residents are seized by a kind of collective restlessness, a yearning for something else, something different, only with nobody quite knowing what that should be. In an earlier work, for example, the town is overcome by a mania for mermaids; in a darker version, the townspeople fall in love with death and begin killing themselves. In the new book, the first such disruption takes place in a story called "Theater of Shadows," in which the residents are captivated by a puppet master who puts on little skits and dramas from behind a curtain, and then become obsessed with the idea of darkness itself. They take to painting their houses black, filling their sandboxes with black sand. Then there is a run on something called Shadow Glass, which drains color from objects, and on another product, Shadow Shellac, which, when painted on houses and garages, gives them the look of a "grainy movie filmed in black and white." Babies begin to wear black diapers, grownups blow their noses in black tissues. In the end, the whole town seems in danger of fading away. "Some say that our passion for shadows has gone too far," the narrator says, going on to defend it in words that echo the old hymn: "For then our eyes were unopened, but now we see."

In "Green," a fad for grassless back yards sweeps the town. People rip up their lawns and replace them with bricks and cobblestones. Next, the trees start to go, and by Labor Day the town is stripped of green. Then, in the spring, the pattern is reversed. First one family and then another starts planting bushes and reseeding the yards, and then, of course, this being a Millhauser town, everyone goes too far. Houses start disappearing behind hedges, the Department of Public Works begins ripping up the streets and planting trees there. People cover their porches with sod, grow vines in the living room. "I could feel it myself," the narrator says, "this restlessness, this desire to push beyond carefully defined limits toward unknown lands." He adds, "Some say that if we don't change direction, our town is destined to disappear entirely. . . . Others feel that just as we once turned from green to stone and back again to green, so another change is imminent, though what that change might be, no one can say."

There's also a pair of stories about elevation. In one, "The Summer of Ladders," neighbors begin competing to see who can climb higher. The hardware store sells extension ladders that come in three or four sections and stretch to seventy or eighty feet. It is as if, the narrator says, no height could ever be enough. Inevitably, people begin to fall. One man breaks his neck; a sixteen-year-old boy ascends his father's ladder, bends back to look at the moon, and plummets to his death. Still, people keep climbing, until one man goes up into the clouds and is never seen again.

In the other story, "The Column Dwellers of Our Town," the town is home to forty-one columns, some made of stone and mortar and other, newer ones of reinforced concrete, ranging in

height from sixty to a hundred and forty feet. When the story begins, thirty-seven of them are occupied. People go up there to live—for reasons they can't really explain—and almost never come down. What they do there is a matter of town-wide debate and speculation. Not everyone approves of the column-top dwellers, and yet there is a civic association devoted to the maintenance of the columns and the provisioning of those who live on them. Most of the townspeople can't imagine life without them.

All these stories are about transcendence—about a wish to get away from the worlds we inhabit and the limitations they impose on us. Sometimes this urge has an explicitly religious dimension. A minister in "Ladders," for example, denounces the ladders as dangerous metaphors, "materialistic perversions of spiritual striving." In the story about the columns, they are said to have originated with a fiery seventeenth-century preacher, but the whole notion obviously owes something to the stylites, those early Christian ascetics who lived on top of pillars in the desert. With their pristine New England setting, their sense of collective restiveness—of a community caught up in a spiritual yearning that nobody, including the narrator, can quite put a finger on—these small-town stories verge on allegory, that no longer fashionable form, in a way that may remind the reader of America's first great fabulist and allegorist, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Millhauser was raised as a secular Jew and perhaps for that reason is less guilt- and sin-obsessed than Hawthorne, but the two writers nevertheless share some preoccupations. Hawthorne, for example, was also fascinated by clockwork and automatons (see his strange story "The Artist of the Beautiful"), and in one of his tales there is, just for the oddness of it, a sort of peepshow diorama. Millhauser's story "Tales of Darkness and the Unknown, Vol. XIV: The White Glove," though the title presents it as something appearing in a cheesy-sounding periodical, is actually a very clever modern-day retelling of Hawthorne's "The Birth-Mark," and his various macrocosms, those worlds within worlds, must owe at least something to Hawthorne's Hall of Fantasy.

But Millhauser seems to be made even more uneasy about the imagination, or maybe about art itself, than Hawthorne was. On the one hand, mere reality always leaves his characters, like Millhauser himself, wanting something more. On the other hand, as in "Martin Dressler" and "An Adventure of Don Juan," a novella about an eighteenth-century English landowner building an epic theme park on his estate, you get a sense of a dangerous imagination running amok. It's as if Millhauser were warning us against the seductions of his own storytelling. He depicts his characters' follies in sometimes extravagant detail—this is a writer who really, really likes making things up—and the reader is swept up in his pleasure. And yet in Millhauser's work the artistic vocation is often a fatal one. His novella "The Little Kingdom of J. Franklin Payne" is about an early-twentieth-century newspaper cartoonist who throws himself into the world of animation but loses his grasp on reality and ruins his health and his marriage in the process. Edwin Mullhouse, the precocious eleven-year-old novelist of Millhauser's first book, winds up killing himself.

Much as Millhauser relishes the magical, he also has a soft spot for the humdrum: the sound of a lawn sprinkler, the sight of a basketball left on a driveway. His genius is to be able to evoke both so urgently. It's telling that, in most of the Connecticut stories, the townspeople, after their flings with shadows or ladders or whatever, eventually come back down to earth. One such story in "Disruptions," told in the first-person singular rather than plural, is about what happens when the town is gripped by a kind of collective exhaustion, a weariness that spreads like an infection until everyone falls asleep for three whole days. When the narrator comes to, he listens to the sounds of his neighborhood awakening—a power mower, a pair of chainsaws, a bicycle tire crunching on gravel—and, reflecting back on his strange tiredness, he says, "I seemed on the verge of understanding something that would change my life forever, but it all felt vague and far away, as if I had imagined it long ago, on a summer afternoon in childhood, and with a new burst of attention I listened to the clatter of a skateboard, a nearby shout, a shut door." ♦

ON TELEVISION

WHY SO SERIOUS?

The delights of "Harley Quinn," on Max.

BY INKOO KANG

The Joker's ex-girlfriend sets out to earn her own fame.

Batman doesn't get much crime-fighting done in the Max animated series "Harley Quinn," a bright-hued, pointedly buoyant riff on a comics franchise that's come to be defined by its shadows. For most of the show's run, Gotham's best-known millionaire orphan has been in a coma, in convalescence, in a swoon over an ambivalent Catwoman, or in prison (for tax evasion, because Batman is nothing if not a problematic fave). The city is up for grabs, and every baddie is eager to make his name. Supervillainy is a kind of stardom, after all; you have to be camera-ready, create a memorable spectacle, and know your competition. Reputation is everything. That's why, when the Joker (voiced by Alan Tudyk) is dumped by his girlfriend, Harley Quinn (Kaley Cuoco), he's quick to spread the narrative that she's a "crazy bitch," and that *he* broke up with *her*. Tired of being seen as a mere sidekick—a cutesy accessory to some guy—Harley sets out to earn her own fame as one of Gotham's premier scoundrels.

Like "The Boys"—a live-action melodrama on Amazon, and the only other series I've found that's capable of overcoming my chronic superhero fatigue—"Harley Quinn" is a wry show-biz satire with a distinctly anti-corporate streak. (This is the kind of Batman story that implicitly argues Bruce Wayne would do more good by funding public education than by playing dress-up as a flying rat.) Referential and potty-mouthed, the cartoon is no less blood-spattered than "The Boys," but Harley's fantastical exploits are anchored in more earthbound struggles, even when her rivals are attending a business conference on the moon. In the first season—the show is currently in its fourth—Harley has to be dragged kicking and screaming by her new friend Poison Ivy (Lake Bell) to the realization that she lost her sense of self in her entanglement with the Joker. (Before meeting him, in Arkham Asylum, Harley was Harleen, a promising young psychiatrist who had clawed her way out of a dysfunctional childhood through academic achievement. The Joker, her patient turned lover, persuaded her to quit and become his mallet-swinging muscle.) Harley spent much of the rest of that season dealing with the shame of having stayed so long in an unequal, arguably abusive relationship. The series' willingness to traverse such difficult emotional terrain distinguishes it from more straightforward female-empowerment tales, including the 2020 movie "Birds of Prey," in which Margot Robbie, playing a flesh-and-blood Harley, underwent a similar but less developed journey of self-rediscovery.

The genius stroke that gives this iteration its chaotic ebullience is its core characters' uncertainty about where they want to settle on the good-evil spectrum. After her breakup, Harley tries to join the Legion of Doom, the corporate-slick supervillain "big leagues" with "all the heavy hitters: Sinestro, Lex Luthor, Roger Goodell." But Poison Ivy, here a green-skinned, part-plant environmentalist, gradually convinces Harley that she's "broadcast bad," not "cable bad"—a fiend with an ultimately good heart. (When a less scrupulous member of Harley's new crew offers to call up his old buddy "Hank" Kissinger for some dastardly ideas, even she has to concede that, sure, they're criminals, but not *war* criminals.)

Heists and schemes stack up, but

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA DEGNBOL

the series' strength lies in its lavish reimaginings of Harley and Ivy, whose friendship takes a romantic turn in the second season. Harley is bounciness personified: her two-toned cropped tank and booty shorts are both sexy and sporty, and a backstory as an Olympic-hopeful gymnast explains her acrobatic force and grace. Cuoco—a casting coup—plays her as perkily manic and sweetly shrill, a tornado afraid to stop whirling. The most ambitious episodes draw from Harley's background in psychiatry. A visit home to Bensonhurst, Brooklyn, reveals how she was primed to fall in love with controlling, narcissistic men, and multiple episodes find Harley and her crew, with the help of a telepath named Dr. Psycho (Tony Hale), wandering through the fractured psyches of various characters. After discovering that Batman's is a labyrinth where every corner replays the memory of his parents' murders—and connecting with his inner child—a newly empathetic Harley becomes his de-facto therapist. By the end of Season 3, when Batman enters prison, she's moved so far past her former black-hat aspirations that she decides to give Gotham-saving a try. After a lifetime of reacting against authority figures, maybe cracking some skulls for the good guys could be her calling.

The series' creators—Justin Halpern, Patrick Schumacker, and Dean Lorey—make Ivy an even richer character. Other than her mermaid-red hair, there's little trace of the hokey seductress of yore; this Ivy is a nerdy, misanthropic loner with a dry monotone and a penchant for preaching about injustice—Plant Daria, complete with the green jacket. She grouses that some light ecoterrorism gets her slapped with the villain label, when it's the status quo that's evil. Ivy's the one who breaks it to Harley that there's a glass ceiling for female malefactors: it's hard to get serious consideration from the press, and sometimes even from Batman, when you're just a girl. But, unlike Harley, Ivy is courted by the Legion of Doom from the outset—and her tree-hugging is so fanatical that it leaves her indifferent to the fate of humanity. By the start of the fourth season, she's been coaxed by Lex Luthor (Giancarlo Esposito) into becoming the Legion's first "She.E.O.," a position that frustrates and flatters her in equal measure. Her newfound sense of purpose takes the form of a plan for "socially conscious evil," a self-imposed ethical conundrum that leads to a smart exploration of how easily feminist righteousness, especially at the uppermost rungs of society, overlaps with self-aggrandizement.

The intricate plotting extends to the playfully dirty but heartfelt romance between Harley and Ivy. Like all love stories, it inevitably dipped in excitement once the characters finally committed to each other. But their relationship—increasingly strained by their diverging moral codes—is all the more affecting for how it builds on their individual arcs. A lonesome Harley grapples with codependency. The confrontation-averse Ivy would rather lie than make Harley uncomfortable. Fighting the world is a welcome challenge; fighting at home is a minefield.

The show's thick joke density helps fill in a Gotham where the madcap melts into the mundane: heroes and villains live-stream on Waynestagram, shop at Mor-4-Lex, staff up via a henchman agency, and grumble that installing a trapdoor in a lair requires a permit. Harley gets several seasons to achieve closure with the Joker, and the evolution of their relationship proves surprisingly moving. Side characters proliferate, too: a shape-shifter named Clayface, who dreams of becoming an actor; the vengeance-obsessed giant Bane, whose 'roid rage focusses on a pasta-maker; the carb-phobic, fun-shunning Nightwing, who got his start as Robin and is desperate to surpass his mentor in gravel-voiced brood-a-thons. Some of the ensemble sticks around longer than necessary, but it's hard to fault the writers for their affection toward their characters, especially when their love language is mockery. For a franchise whose most toxic fans have spent decades fussing over how serious "Batman" should be, "Harley Quinn" is a reminder that Gotham has always been a playground, and that its streets aren't just for facing off against thugs—they're for cartwheels, too. ♦

THE CURRENT CINEMA

MOST WANTED

"Passages" and "Lady Killer."

BY ANTHONY LANE

There have always been strange fish floating around on the big screen. Darting to and fro, and obeying behavioral patterns of their own devising, they represent a species unknown to science. The leader of the shoal is Peter Lorre. Other examples include Harpo Marx, his soundless mouth opening and closing like a grouper's, and Klaus Kinski, as if someone were stoking a fire inside his head. As Tomas, the protagonist of "Passages," he rubs his hands over his scalp at moments of distress, trying to put out the flames.

Tomas is a film director, and the opening scene shows him at work, shooting a sequence in a bar. He doesn't berate his actors, and yet, during multiple takes, as he issues instructions ("Put your hands in the pockets") we feel the whetted edge of his impatience. That can't make life easy for his husband, Martin (Ben Whishaw)—a printer by trade, and a peaceable spirit in comparison with Tomas. They have an apartment in Paris and a rural retreat: a comfortable existence, designed to raise the hackles of a natural discomforter like Tomas. Barely has the tale begun when he meets a teacher named Agathe (Adèle Exarchopoulos) in a bar, dances with her, and then sleeps with her. The next morning, he goes home and says to Martin, "I had sex with a woman. Can I tell you about it, please?"

Ben Whishaw, Adèle Exarchopoulos, and Franz Rogowski in Ira Sachs's film.

a danger to everything else in the tank. Now we have Franz Rogowski, who stars in Ira Sachs's "Passages."

You may have noticed Rogowski in Michael Haneke's "Happy End" (2017) and Terrence Malick's "A Hidden Life" (2019), or as the leading man in Christian Petzold's "Transit" (2018) and "Undine" (2021). Last year, in Sebastian Meise's "Great Freedom," he played someone imprisoned for homosexuality in postwar Germany. All in all, Rogowski is not a performer to be ignored. Note the pause and lunge of his movements; the chewy lisp of his voice, which gives the impression that, even in mid-rant, he is not so much addressing other people as letting them into his thoughts; and the dark, unsleeping fervor of his stare. It is

It is the starkness of the line that shocks. We sense the brunt of pure selfishness, and behind it an unspoken but immovable credo: "I will do as I wish. I make no concessions, let alone apologies, to you or anyone else." Tomas is not petty enough to be a mere jerk. He is an id savant, as it were, with appetites exposed—a descendant of the angelic demon in Pasolini's "Theorem" (1968), who wormed himself into a bourgeois family and ate it from within. Just when we think Tomas has done his worst, he doubles it. Wait for the conversation in which he makes so bold as to suggest that Martin, whom he has cuckolded with abandon, should be *happy* for him.

After the initial betrayal, everything speeds up. Before we know it, Tomas has moved out of the marital bed and in with Agathe. "Are you going to stay for a long time?" she asks, more in trepidation than in hope. "I can be terribly self-involved," he says, though you can't be sure whether he's warning her or bragging. She introduces him to her parents—an all but unwatchable clash of opposites, with Tomas rolling up late in a sheer black crop top, covered in dragons, that leaves his midriff bare. (Elsewhere, he sports a coat as thick as a bearskin and a loosely woven sweater of poisonous green. Talk about a statement wardrobe.) Not that Martin, for all his mildness, hangs back. He soon gets involved with an imposing writer, Amad (Erwan Kepoa Falé), and we realize that "Passages," far from being an elegant love triangle, is more like a quadrilateral of desire. And the shape of it shifts, right up to the bitter end.

In narrative terms, this is familiar territory for Sachs. His 2014 movie, "Love Is Strange," was about a gay couple, played by John Lithgow and Alfred Molina, who had their own pressures to endure. The result, however, bore a comic gentleness, even a gentility, that is utterly expunged from "Passages." The emotional weather has changed. The new film is relentlessly interior, unfolding in bedrooms, classrooms, and cafés, with no interest in broader landscapes; all we see of Tomas's country place on the outside is a corner of the house and a parked car. Time, too, seems to be squeezed. Tomas leaves Martin, returns in fitful ways, then departs again, but how many days or weeks elapse between these decisions I couldn't say. The dia-

ILLUSTRATION BY MALIKA FAVRE

logue is abrupt and angular: "You can't tell me what to do"; "I don't want to talk with you any more"; "I want my life back, and I don't want you in it." Hearing this jab of monosyllables is like being poked in the eye.

Here and there, "Passages" has been described as "sexy," but that's the last thing it is. To be sure, there are writhings on view, gay and straight, but the sex has the animus of violence: a desperate grapple, with one person's legs wrapped around another's back. Agathe keeps her heavy boots on, and almost bangs her head on the edge of a desk. Nothing here is solved or softened by the making of love. Rather, the effect of all the lusting is to hammer people further into unwisdom and despair. It's the unhappiest film I've watched in a long while, steeped in Freudian pessimism—that is to say, you *can* meet the demands of the libido, in full, but don't expect your world not to fall apart. Once satisfaction is guaranteed, so is chaos.

Why put yourself through "Passages," then, if it's so painful a trip? Largely because of Rogowski. Tomas is a beast, and were he played by an actor of less vehemence he'd be a pain in the neck and nothing more. As it is, he pulls us into the jungle. At the movie's climax, we find him on all fours, in a school corridor, in a fury of supplication, and then on a bicycle, haring through Paris and paying no heed to the traffic. The camera draws closer to his face as he rides, and we hear—but do not see—what sounds like a street band, raucous and cracked. A similar music rang out sixty years ago, at the end of Fellini's "8 1/2," to serenade another film director. But he was a wistful and regretful soul, whereas Tomas is unappeased and mad. He's on the road to nowhere, and getting there fast.

There is an odd stretch of common ground between "Passages" and "Lady Killer," which opens at Metrograph on August 4th. In both films, one of the characters is employed at a printing press. In both, too, a guy lies in a bath and soaks, like a tea bag, while chatting to his lover. Each movie explores, with terrible candor, the ease with which people can enter the gravitational pull of a seducer. For my money, the erotic atmosphere of "Lady Killer" is the denser of the two—surprising, perhaps, given that it was made before the Second World War.

The director of "Lady Killer" is Jean Grémillon, a substantial yet elusive presence in French cinema, who died in 1959. Although he was honored with a retrospective at the Museum of the Moving Image, in 2014, "Lady Killer," which dates from 1937, has never before been granted a theatrical release in America. The French title is "Gueule d'Amour," which means "good-looking" or, literally, "love mug." The mug in question is that of Jean Gabin, who plays a cavalryman named Lucien Bourrache. His regiment is garrisoned in Orange, in the South of France, and heads turn whenever he enters a room. Needless to say, comeuppance awaits. Lucien, encountering the stylish and untethered Madeleine (Mireille Balin), loses his swaggering heart and his cool head. He quits the Army, follows her to Paris, and discovers, having fooled with the affections of so many women, what it's like to be the toy.

"Lady Killer" reveals Gabin in the early summer of his fame. (In the same year, he appeared in Renoir's "Grand Illusion.") What a captivating figure he still cuts: as squarely grounded as Spencer Tracy, though touched with the murmuring modesty that we associate with Gary Cooper. As Lucien, Gabin has to be plausible not only in uniform, sporting pants so wide that they deserve their own palazzo, but also when misfortune blunts his dashing manners of old. "Your talk, your advice, I've heard it all, now go!" he barks at Madeleine's interfering mother. Again, we catch an uncanny echo of "Passages"—"We don't need your advice," Tomas says, berating the mother of the mortified Agathe.

Not every rarity is a revelation, but "Lady Killer" strikes me as the real deal. The romantic fatalism of its plot might seem to portend Gabin's work in Marcel Carné's "Le Quai des Brumes" (1938) and "Le Jour Se Lève" (1939), yet Carné's baleful mists hold little appeal for Grémillon. His movie breathes a sharper air. Observe the crisp diagonal shadows that slice across the sunlit squares and sidewalks of Orange. Late in the proceedings, the gaze of the camera slips sideways from the *patronne* of a café, polishing glasses, to two customers (straight out of Cézanne) at a table, one of them playing a mouth organ, and comes to rest on the inky silhouette of Madeleine, who braces herself for the arrival of Lucien, and thus for the settling of scores: an entire domain of sentiment and custom, at once earthy and mysterious, traversed in a single shot. The chance to savor such grace doesn't descend too often. Grab it now. ♦

NEWYORKER.COM
Richard Brody blogs about movies.

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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Tom Toro, must be received by Sunday, August 13th. The finalists in the July 31st contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the August 28th 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

“ ”

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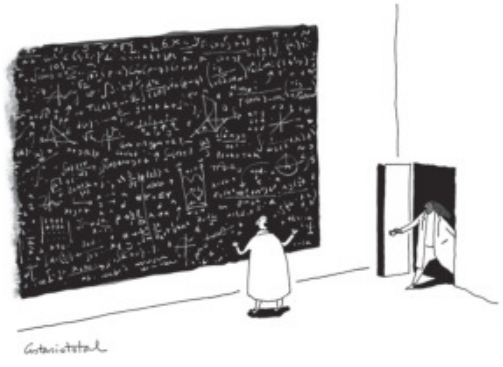
THE FINALISTS



"I have nothing left to prove."
Colin Mills, Boston, Mass.

"I do this to scare the students. I actually have no idea what it means."
Kyle Sasloe, Norwalk, Conn.

"I always leave a little room for doubt."
Carol Lasky, Boston, Mass.

THE WINNING CAPTION

"I hate going home. I have a million relatives."
Jessica Misener, Ann Arbor, Mich.

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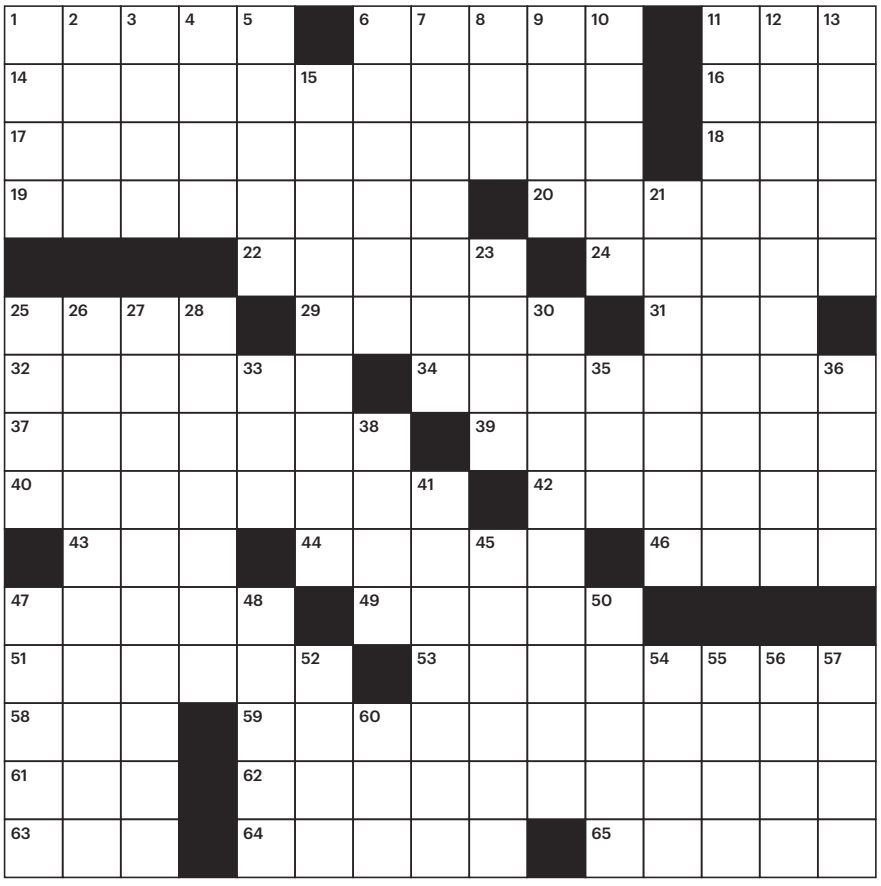
PUZZLES & GAMES DEPT.

THE CROSSWORD

A lightly challenging puzzle.

BY WYNA LIU



ACROSS

1 Quick kisses
6 Org. that operates Philadelphia's rail system
11 "Yo! ___ Raps" (classic hip-hop program)
14 "What five-letter word becomes shorter when you add two letters to it?," e.g.
16 "So that's it!"
17 Artist known for his surreal cartoons featuring the anthropomorphic character Frank
18 D.C. V.I.P.
19 "Run—don't walk—to the theatre!"
20 Observe
22 Assembly of bishops
24 iPods that replaced Minis
25 Long features of a sloth
29 "Rodeo" composer Copland
31 Brooks who wrote, "If *I* cut my finger, that's tragedy. Comedy is if *you* walk into an open sewer and die"
32 Black-and-white farm animal, to a toddler
34 Volcano whose name means "long mountain" in Hawaiian
37 Person who might walk a fine line at work?
39 Accessorizing, say
40 Like satay and kebabs
42 Doobie
43 Country on one side of Lake Titicaca: Abbr.
44 "Is it worth the risk?"
46 Ward of "CSI: NY"
47 Jean-Paul ___ (French revolutionary whose death was painted by Jacques-Louis David)
49 Some trending posts
51 "No promises . . ."
53 Fizzled
58 Brewery selection
59 "Quite the opposite!"
61 "*¡No* ___*!*" ("Enough!," in Spanish)
62 Virtual component of some computing networks
63 They may show one's age
64 Messages that, to some, sound angrier when punctuated with a period
65 Primp

DOWN

1 Two-spread sammies
2 Port city on a Great Lake of the same name
3 Showed up
4 Fruit named for a bird
5 Little brats
6 Arizona city famed for its red rock formations
7 Annoyingly catchy tune
8 Trident-shaped Greek letter
9 Dollywood's state: Abbr.
10 Noble gas that glows violet in an electric field
11 What a biologist might care about deep down?
12 Goateed fast-food spokesperson, familiarly
13 Disobeys a "No Smoking" sign, in a way
15 Prize named for a co-founder of the American Theatre Wing
21 Dishes wrapped in corn husks
23 "___ I say!"
25 Reddit Q. & A.s
26 Something sentimental from Boston or Chicago?
27 "Close enough"
28 Give a death stare to
30 What superfoods are said to be packed with
33 Honor bestowed by King Charles III: Abbr.
35 Science educator Bill
36 Site of the Taj Mahal
38 Football club, e.g.
41 Lengthened
45 Corrects, as a document
47 "Moonlight" setting
48 "The Communist Manifesto," for one
50 Throat malady, for short
52 Pagan celebration of the winter solstice
54 Catherine who's a character in the musical "Six"
55 ___-second rule
56 Word before spirit or sample
57 Relative of a gull
60 Co-star of Aniston, Kudrow, LeBlanc, Perry, and Schwimmer

Solution to the previous puzzle:

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

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