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An illustration of a person with dark hair tied back, wearing a blue and yellow striped shirt, sitting on a beach and reading a book. The background features a vibrant sunset with a large yellow sun and colorful waves in shades of blue, orange, and yellow. The person's hands are visible, holding the open book.

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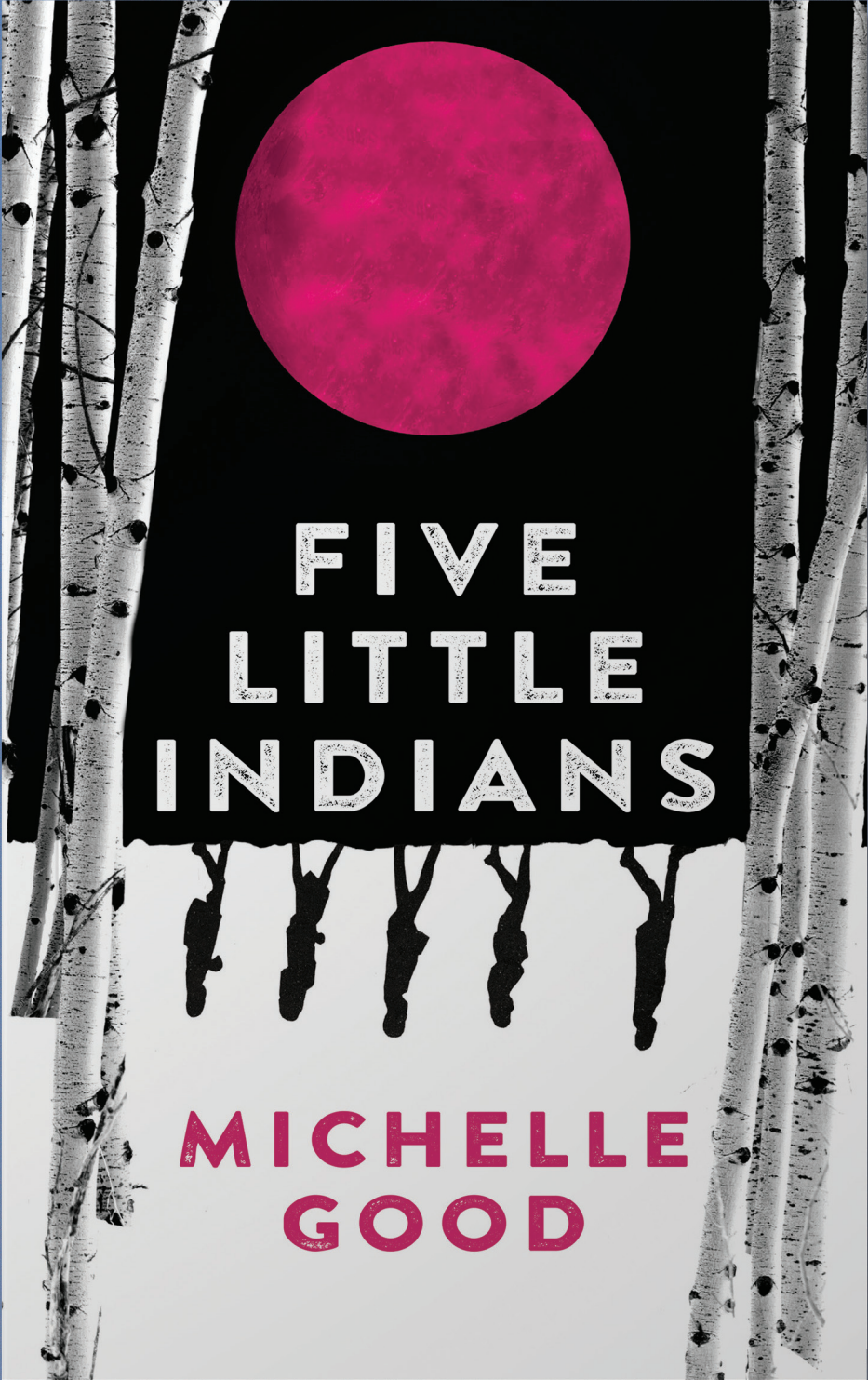
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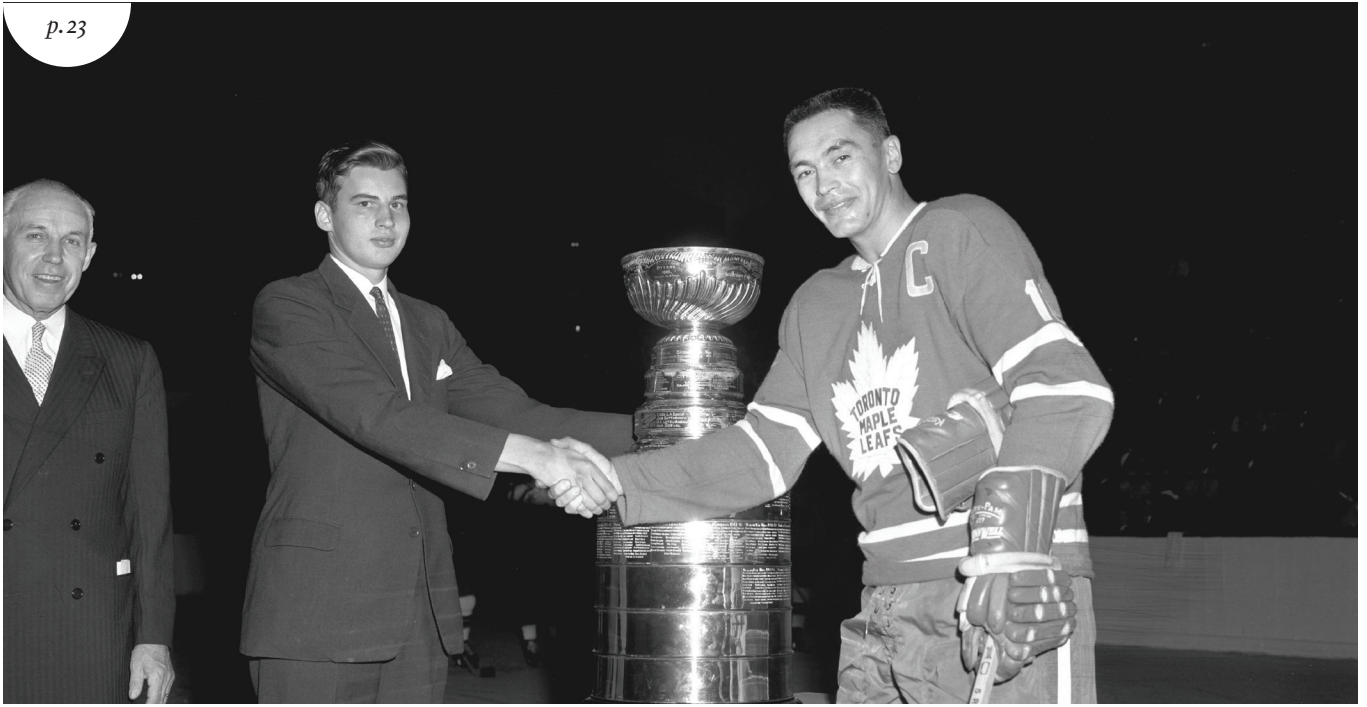
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THE WALRUS

VOLUME 18 • NUMBER 5
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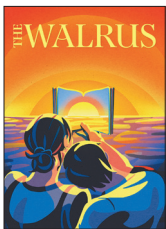
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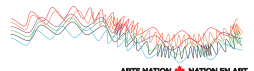
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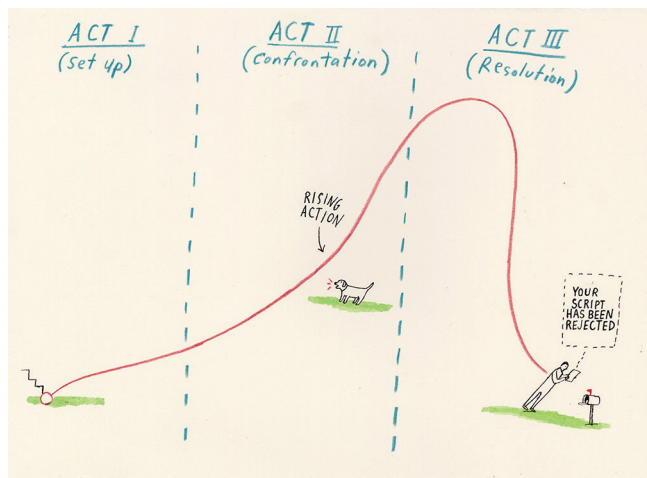
Editor's Letter

THE MOST useful advice I've retained from my undergraduate program in creative writing is a lesson about structure from producer and screenwriter Peggy Thompson. She trained us to watch movies with a stopwatch, clocking the timing of different plot points, such as the call to action, the midpoint, and the climax—her rationale being that viewers' commitment to mainstream films is tied to their expectations.

If the plot twists don't make sense or the story is taking too long to unfold, we're more likely to walk out.

I called Thompson to discuss what struck me as similarities between the COVID-19 pandemic and the story-structure pitfalls she had taught us. The first part of the pandemic was rife with dramatic calls to action—the introduction of physical distancing, nightly cheers for health care workers. Then came progress in curbing infection rates, then (as in any epic struggle) setbacks. But, instead of resolving, as the plot of even the most basic Hollywood movie manages to do, things kept getting worse: ineffective lockdowns, quickly spreading variants, confusing vaccine rollouts. As many critics of the institutional response to the pandemic have observed, you could hardly tell the second act from the third, let alone a potential fourth—especially in regions that have been in and out of states of emergency for months. Now, more than a year since the pandemic started, we seem to have “lost the plot,” Thompson concurred.

Some psychologists say that the narratives we create around our experiences affect the way we feel about them; the



same is true of narrative writ large. “On some level, we’re all little kids who look to narrative for answers,” said Thompson. “And we don’t have a lot of answers right now. We just have a lot of questions.” In this part of the world, trained as we are to expect a clear beginning, middle, and end, the same guidelines hold true for writing an epic like *Star Wars* and for responding to a pandemic. As an editor, I can tell you that, when fiction or nonfiction lacks an awareness of plot and structure, it leaves readers unsettled. Their attentions drift. Perhaps they start thinking about what to make for dinner. In the worst cases, the tension caused by a lack of structure can feel existential: Will the problem never be resolved? That’s a bit what the pandemic feels like right now.

The July/August edition is our annual Summer Reading issue and, traditionally, a tribute to the most creative work we publish. This year, it’s striking to see how much writers have incorporated the themes of the day into their inventive stories, poems, and essays. In “Little Sanctuary,” Randy Boyagoda envisages life for a family in a country devastated by twin calamities: a plague and political collapse.

Charlotte Gill’s unexpectedly sexy short story “Giganto” is a work of satire (I think!), but it’s also about what a larger-than-life being can teach us about our own relationships to mortality and the environment. Sharon Butala is one of the country’s most frank, unflinching chroniclers of the experience of aging, and her essay, “Years of Solitude,” looks at the ache of isolation—a topic we’ve all thought about lately. And, in her debut visual essay for *The Walrus*,

“The Way We Were,” photographer Jorian Charlton uses the medium of the family photo as a form of storytelling—weaving a personal and cultural connection between past, present, and future.

Looking around at the faces of my colleagues on a recent Zoom call, I noticed that the adrenaline of covering the pandemic’s first wave had been replaced by a grim determination to get the job done: we are experiencing narrative fatigue. Some of us have been sick, and all of us miss loved ones. Yet not one person has given up on the job—on bringing in ambitious features, developing relationships with new writers, or working to get our stories in their best possible shape. That commitment reflects our love of the craft and of our readers. It’s also an act of protest against the moment we’re in.

It helps us to know that this is a two-way street. We were moved to learn that a doctor recently requested hundreds of copies of *The Walrus* for COVID-19 patients at half a dozen Toronto-area hospitals. Perhaps in life, unlike in art, the biggest victories don’t have tidy endings—but that doesn’t make our progress any less meaningful or compelling. ■

—Jessica Johnson

Contributors' Notes



FRANCO ÉGALITÉ

Illustrations for the cover and Summer Reading, p. 41

“My teachers always told me, ‘Don’t draw from your imagination.’ As an artist, I take things from reality and then bring them into my own little

world. The starting point is always very technical: anatomically correct and accurate in perspective. Once everything is set, I break it and sculpt it into something more abstract. It’s a weird back and forth, but it helps me rediscover the small details in life that we usually pass over.”

Franco Égalité (“Francorama”) is an illustrator and artist from Montreal. He has worked with Facebook, Stella Artois, and Hachette Livre.



WAUBGESHIG RICE

“Home Ice,” p. 23

“As somebody who grew up on a reserve and is visibly Indigenous, I’ve always understood my status as an outsider in this country. I wanted to write this piece, about my complicated love for

the Toronto Maple Leafs, because I’ve seen first-hand how prejudice thrives in the hockey world. In recent years, the NHL has faced a reckoning with racism, homophobia, and misogyny. The league is taking small steps to be more inclusive, which is something it has to do—not just to stay relevant but to be a good entity. Hockey can’t exist as a white-dominated realm anymore.”

Waubgeshig Rice is an author and journalist from Wasauksing First Nation. His most recent novel, Moon of the Crusted Snow, was published in 2018 and became a national bestseller. He lives in Sudbury, Ontario, with his wife and two sons.



SHARON BUTALA

“Years of Solitude,” p. 32

“My loneliness was hugely magnified when I became a widow and moved to the city. I realized that I was becoming an old person, and the transition to old age can be hell. It’s harder than,

for example, becoming a mother, when you still have this new love in a wonderful baby. But, at the same time, old age can be—intellectually, creatively, and spiritually—the best and most fascinating time of your life.”

Sharon Butala’s next book, This Strange Visible Air: Essays on Aging and the Writing Life, is out in September from Freehand Books. She is based in Calgary.



IRA WELLS

“The Making of Moonstruck,” p. 70

“While touring Victoria University Library’s special collections, at the University of Toronto, I noticed around eighty boxes belonging to filmmaker Norman Jewison. The chief librarian

told me that people had accessed them but not in any comprehensive way. I decided to work through the material and shape a biography from those fragments of letters, memos, and contracts. In the early 1950s, Jewison was driving a cab, on the night shift, for Diamond taxis in Toronto. About a decade later, he was directing some of the world’s biggest film stars. How does that happen?”

Ira Wells teaches literature and cultural criticism at the University of Toronto. His latest book, Norman Jewison: A Director’s Life, was published by Sutherland House in May.



CHARLOTTE GILL

“Giganto,” p. 49

“I live in Powell River, BC, where there are quite a few armchair enthusiasts who like the idea of pursuing a bigfoot-type creature, as the characters in this short story do. I think what draws many people to this quest is a subliminal wish

for a wilderness that we haven’t penetrated completely—that there might be little corners of planet Earth where things could be alive and we wouldn’t find them and be able to study them down to their last cell.”

Charlotte Gill is the author of Ladykiller and Eating Dirt. Her next book, Almost Brown, about growing up mixed-race, is forthcoming from Penguin Random House Canada.

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Letters



KICKED TO THE CERB

The Canada Revenue Agency bureaucracy highlighted in Ken Babstock's "I Fought the CRA, and I Won" (May) doesn't affect only writers and creatives. As sex workers, my peers and I have encountered endless CRA wrinkles since the start of the pandemic. Shifting qualifications, along with the Canada Recovery Benefit's requirement that applicants provide proof of past employment, have left us in the lurch. For Babstock, the CRA's failures seem to entail improper administration of policy—for sex workers, these failures are more holistic. Due to a dearth of "legitimate" employment, a primarily cash-based income, and the reticence of many tax professionals to offer us services, my colleagues and I have experienced a lack of support from these programs. There are fundamental inequities in how different forms of labour are legislated, and they come with grave economic implications.

*Sloane Saeed
Montreal, QC*

By chronicling one man's struggle to settle the record on his monthly assistance payments, Babstock points to broader problems with the Canada Emergency Response Benefit (CERB) and the CRA. In the months following CERB's rollout, myriad problems were reported, including unclear official communications and subsequent edits to the wording of eligibility guidelines. It is perfectly understandable for an initiative that paid out over \$74 billion to encounter some hiccups, but punitive responses from the CRA risk eroding the goodwill established by CERB in the first place. As we continue to recover from this pandemic and its economic fallout, policy makers would do well to give Canadians the benefit of the doubt and think twice before demanding repayment.

*Duncan Cooper
Toronto, ON*

CLEAN BREAK

I agree with Angela V. Carter and Imre Szeman's explanations, in "Ask an Oil Expert" (May), of why continued oil production is energy inefficient, financially risky, and ecologically disastrous. However, I found that they oversimplified how easy a transition to clean energy would be. TD recently estimated that up to 450,000 jobs—or three-quarters of oil-and-gas workers—are at risk from the energy transition. While much of this can be offset by work in clean-energy industries, these new jobs will be expected to offer stable employment, similar local tax revenue, and comparable benefits and union representation, none of which can be assumed. Of course, for Canada to continue producing emissions at such high rates is unacceptable. But being cognizant of the challenges an energy transition entails will only help accelerate cohesive action.

*Calvin Trottier-Chi
Montreal, QC*

TALK ISN'T CHEAP

Reading Hannah Seo's article "Blah Blah Blah: The Lack of Small Talk Is Breaking Our Brains" (thewalrus.ca), I felt lucky to live in a multiple-unit dwelling where I can see people in the halls and lobby. One of my neighbours has no internet access and therefore does not receive regular updates on vaccine distribution. Luckily, while making small talk, I happened to mention to him that I had just been vaccinated. He asked how he could find out more, so I copied out the toll-free number he could call to get more information. My partner now tells me that this man has an appointment for a vaccine. Small talk isn't always so small after all.

*Stephen Rees
Vancouver, BC*

TUSK, TUSK

In the November/December 2020 issue, the article "The Wrong Side of the New Age" stated that Nova Scotia had the highest unemployment rate in the country in 1977. In fact, it had one of the highest unemployment rates. And, in the May 2021 issue, the article "How Immigration Really Works" stated that CanadaVisa is the only up-to-date list of Canada's many immigration programs. In fact, it is one of a few such public lists. The Walrus regrets the errors.

"The time has come," The Walrus said, "to talk of many things." Send us a letter, email (letters@thewalrus.ca), or tweet, or post on our Facebook page. Comments may be published in any medium and edited for length, clarity, and accuracy.

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NANA ABA DUNCAN

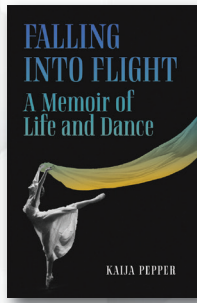
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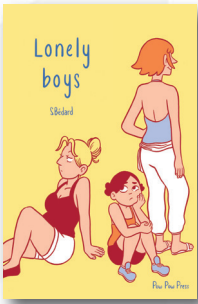
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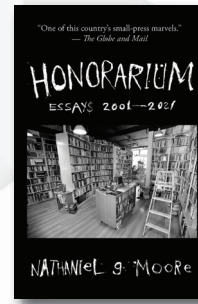
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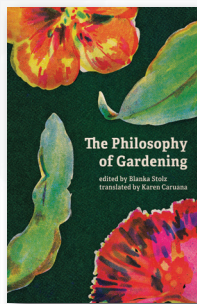
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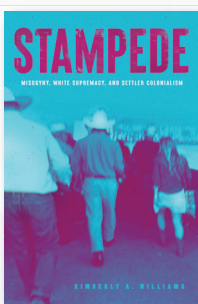
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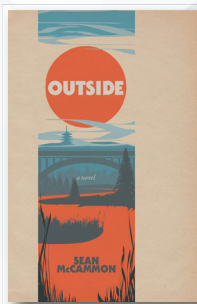
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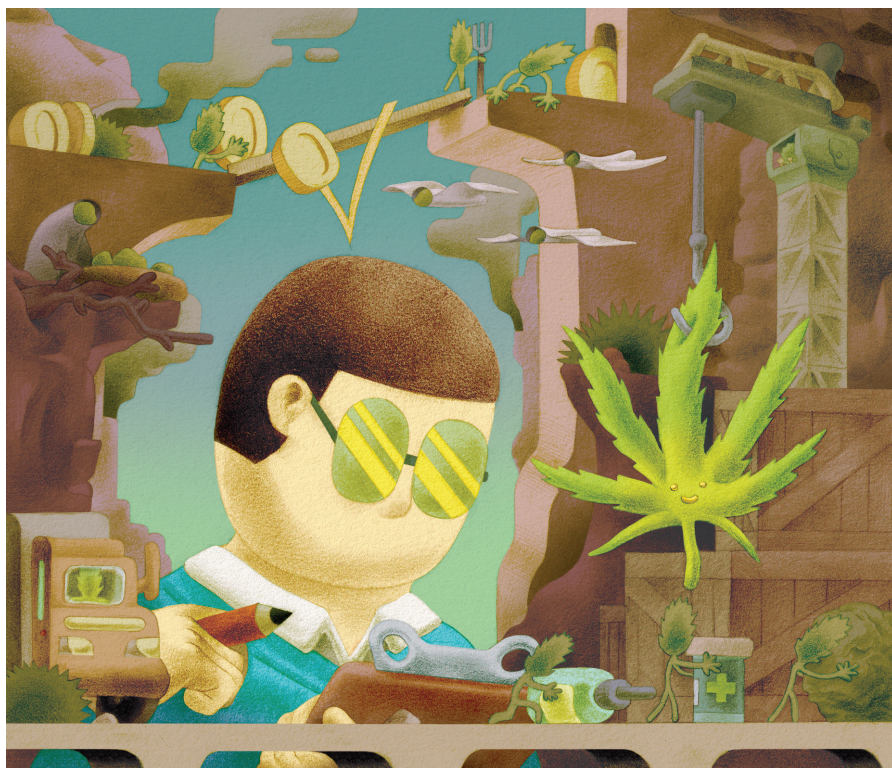
ECONOMICS

The Great Cannabis Count

Inside statisticians' quest to quantify the hazy economy of weed

BY ALANNA MITCHELL

ILLUSTRATION BY JEFFREY KAM



IN 2008, after decades advising national statistical agencies to count only legal market activity in their annual reports, international accountancy mavens at the United Nations Statistics Division—the global trendsetters who tell countries how to do their books—decided that the wages of sin ought to be included too.

That spawned a frenzy of number-crunching. By 2014, novel line items appeared in the accounts of most European Union countries, estimating the economic value of prostitution and illegal drugs. (It's a work in progress. For example, in 2016, the UK clarified its books

to reflect the fact that sex workers tend to conduct business forty weeks a year rather than fifty-two.) The United States, famously prim when it comes to certain kinds of sinning, does not count illegal activity in its national books. Nor does it count cannabis despite the fact that the substance is now legal in a raft of states.

Canada, too, excludes sex work and illegal drug activity from its spreadsheets. But, when Ottawa announced that it would be legalizing recreational cannabis in 2018 (the medicinal stuff had been legit since 2001), the country found itself needing to figure out just how much our basement toking was contributing to

the national economy. So Statistics Canada, our most staid government agency, embarked on a nimble-footed, years-long quest to do the math of pot, complete with its own original taxonomy and an astonishingly tender amount of detail—a fervour that has gained plaudits from some of the UN's select club of national accountants.

Our groundbreaking methodology—which includes sifting through wastewater and poking through memories of pot prices paid sixty years ago—was the subject of a packed session at the international accountancy community's bi-annual meeting in Copenhagen in 2018 and is seen as a potential model for other countries.

Anthony Peluso, until recently an assistant director at Statistics Canada, was charged in 2017 with overseeing the intricate process of figuring out the current and historical value of the weed economy in Canada. That extends to labour statistics, manufacturing, imports, exports, policing, health care, and so on. Peluso, though silver-haired, could be mistaken for actor Stanley Tucci. It's the magnificent black eyebrows and the roguish glint that I can see in his eye even over Zoom. But it's also the comedic impulse. For example, even months after he retired (he's now a private consultant in Ottawa), Peluso's Facebook profile page descriptor was "Professional cannabis connoisseur." And, because he no longer has to comply with what he grinningly calls the "communications hygiene" of a government agency that has no obvious sense of humour, he can give us a peek behind StatCan's cannabis curtain.

IT'S ANCIENT, this urge to count things. About 10,000 years ago, even before they developed written language, as best as we can tell, early Sumerians in the fertile valley between the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers used "count stones," tiny symbols of the quantities of things, to monitor inventory. How many sheep were in storage? How many sheafs of wheat? Then, about 5,000 years ago, they made the logical leap to the first writing systems. Again, the invention seems to have been aimed originally at



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administrative tallying, which is to say, keeping track of stuff. It had political ends. Sumerians counted food, money, and trade, the underpinnings of the cities and governments they were inventing.

Those early records evolved into the complex financial statements we keep today. Since the Second World War, a key figure has been the measure of gross domestic product (GDP), the monetized value of all the goods and services produced in a particular jurisdiction in a given time period. It is widely interpreted as a proxy for wealth.

What you count matters. In her book *GDP: A Brief but Affectionate History*, Diane Coyle, Bennett Professor of Public Policy at the University of Cambridge, describes just how emotional it is for countries to change their approach. In 1987, Italy, whose citizens are famous scofflaws when it comes to reporting income and paying taxes, announced that it was adjusting GDP upward by about a fifth to reflect the underground—but not necessarily illegal—economy. Overnight, Italy became the fifth-largest economy in the world, surpassing the United Kingdom. National euphoria ensued. Italians dubbed it “il sorpasso,” the overtaking.

Adding cannabis into national accounts may not be quite that consequential, but it’s still tricky. Coyle told me that governments like to pretend that calculating production value is a very technical subject, “but it overlaps with ethics all over

the place.” And cannabis statistics, she points out, are one of the places where the technical plainly overlaps with the ethical. Using pot was once so stigmatized that it bore criminal consequences, and now, all of a sudden, it’s part of the formal assessment of our national well-being. The situation lends itself to tiptoeing.

In the back halls of StatCan, this spilled over into how the statisticians were allowed to refer to the project, for fear of access to information requests from journalists looking for unseemly jollity, Peluso says. Cannabis wasn’t the same minefield as prostitution would have been—he calls cannabis “illicit activity-lite”—but it carried cultural baggage all the same.

“You know, the whole Cheech and Chong thing,” Peluso says. “They didn’t want it to be seen to be treated frivolously. They wanted it to be seen as a serious policy that we were measuring seriously. Even in internal communications, they didn’t like it if you made some cannabis-related joke.”

Like what? A “joint” communication was frowned upon, he recalls. Or a lift of the eyebrow with the greeting: “High, how are you?” No banter, however mild, was acceptable.

Yet Peluso knows that the project had an intrinsic comedic arc, he tells me, hands alternating between waving for emphasis and pressing against his lips to suppress mirth. It was clipboard-toting civil servant meets spliff-smoking hippie.

In order to count everything correctly, statisticians, including those who had never touched a rolling paper, had to grapple with the minutiae of how the plants were grown, prepared for market, and consumed. Was it seeds or flowers? Fresh flowers or dried? Oil or extract or infused beverage?

The teams had to invent codes to capture classifications for new line items. Among them: 71.0105, in the classification of instructional programs for cannabis culinary arts and cannabis-chef training, and 71.0110, for cannabis-selling skills and sales operations.

It was obvious that there had to be new categories for cannabis taxes, but what about economic assessments of cannabis-related uses of police, courts, hospitals, and preventive health care? That led to a whole slew of new classifications under “functions of government.” And then there were changes to business investment, imports, exports, and household spending. The effort tangoed across dozens of divisions and other federal departments, consolidating data from both the social and the economic sides of the agency.

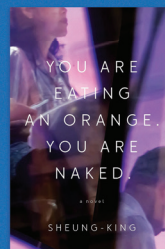
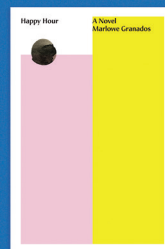
Apart from hammering out semantic protocols, StatCan faced two central hurdles in determining how to count cannabis: How much do Canadians use? And what does it cost? But the economists at StatCan wanted to calculate those numbers not just for the final quarter of 2018, when cannabis became legal, but

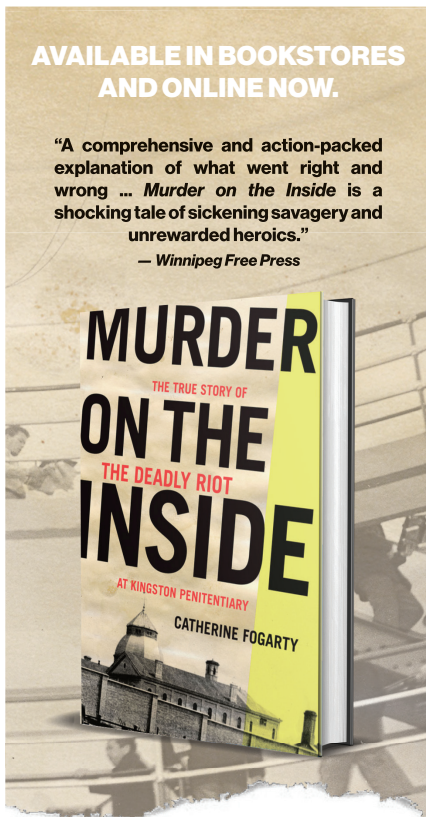


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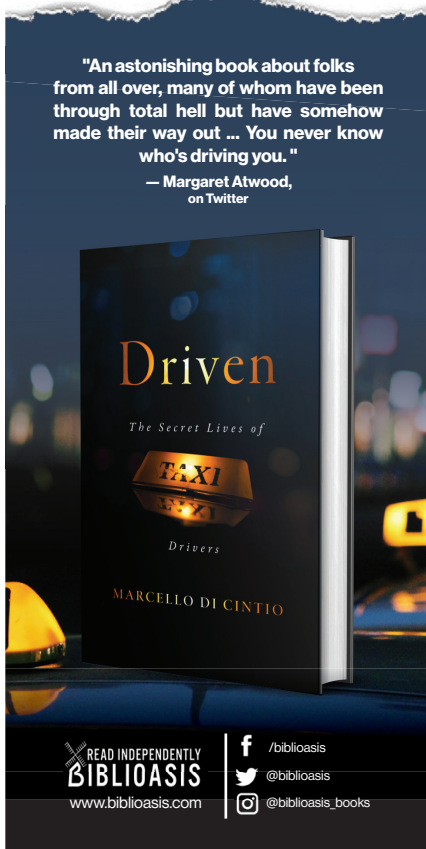
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OUR UNTOLD STORIES



for every year back to 1961, which is as far back as the national accounts go, at least in their current form. The reasoning was that cannabis amounts to an uptick of about \$6 billion a year in economic activity. Without adjusting backward, it would seem as if Canada had had an unusually great 2018, an accounting offence StatCan's economists couldn't countenance.

Other countries didn't have such qualms. In 2014, after European Union countries added illegal drugs and sex work into their accounts, as well as incorporating some other shifts mandated by the new international guidelines, their GDPs rose, Diane Coyle writes. The United Kingdom's jumped by about 4 percent, Spain's by 2.5 percent. Those of Finland and Sweden likely gained even more, she says.

But, in Canada, that wouldn't do.

"It would look like GDP was just taking off in that quarter when that wasn't happening," says Conrad Barber-Dueck, an economist in the national economic accounts division. "All that was happening was that production was moving from an illegal basis to a legal basis."

So the cannabis team dug back through decades of surveys on drug use, addiction rates, law enforcement, and health data to figure out how much cannabis Canadians were consuming back in the day. It started small, with as little as twenty-four tonnes a year in the early 1960s. By 2015, it was close to 700 tonnes. Until the 1990s, when the US war on drugs ramped up, a lot of that came from abroad. Now, we're a major exporter.

Still, StatCan craved more detail. So, in 2018, analysts hooked up with researchers at McGill University's department of chemical engineering for a year-long scrutiny of wastewater in Halifax, Montreal, Toronto, Edmonton, and Vancouver. (Halifax clocked in with the highest cannabis load per capita and roughly triple the usage of Vancouverites. Go figure.) That pilot project has now been suspended for lack of money, says Barber-Dueck.

The latest figures show that more than 2 million Canadians use cannabis at least once a week, and more than a third of those use it every day. But what have they been paying? Barber-Dueck says that the

team ploughed into historical databases of weed prices, talked to law enforcement officers, and canvassed longtime illegal growers, mining their memories. British Columbians were especially forthcoming. "People are pretty open about it and have been for years," Barber-Dueck says.

As the legalization date approached, the team created the crowd-sourcing app StatsCannabis, complete with a cannabis logo. "Statistics Canada needs your help collecting cannabis prices," the app pleads, adding, "Your data is protected!"

The technique had its drawbacks, Peluso notes. Heavy users of cannabis are the most frequent participants in the surveys by default. But they're also filling out the survey right after they've made a purchase.

"When you survey heavy users of a psychotropic substance, the error band is always a little bit bigger. You're picking up people whose—How shall I put it?—whose awareness might be slightly compromised." Again, the grin.

DRUG DECRIMINALIZATION continues to pick up steam around the world, and other countries are taking note of what Canada has done. "We may not dominate in a whole bunch of stuff," Peluso says, "but sometimes we get into these little things and we do them well."

There was the international session in Copenhagen. And, before he retired, Peluso gave a presentation to Mexican economists. (This March, lawmakers in Mexico's lower house passed a bill to legalize recreational cannabis.)

In the US, president Joe Biden has gone on record in favour of decriminalization. Rachel Soloveichik, the research economist at the Bureau of Economic Analysis who is exploring methods of inserting illegal activity into the national accounts, is in the throes of writing a working paper on cannabis. "Some of the stuff Canada did is very innovative," she says. "As you can probably imagine, surveying this type of topic is not always easy." ✉

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ALANNA MITCHELL is a journalist, author, and playwright who often writes about science.



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ON SATURDAY nights, as 7 p.m. nears, I pour popcorn into a bowl and a cold beverage into a glass, and I seat myself in my preferred spot on the couch, closest to the television. I change the channel to watch the Toronto Maple Leafs play hockey. Streak or slump, I tune in as I've done since I was a child growing up on the reserve. This expression of fandom is more than just a ritual and more complex than just supporting a professional hockey team that is both beloved and reviled. Like those of so many other sports fans, the roots of my devotion are intergenerational.

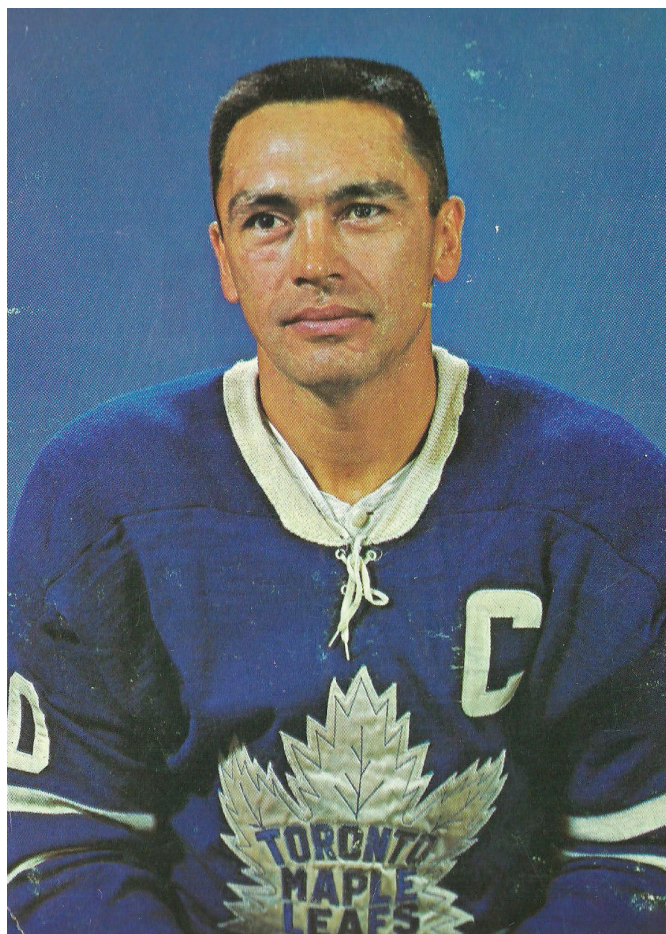
I grew up in Wasauksing First Nation, an island community on Georgian Bay near Parry Sound, Ontario. I'm of mixed Anishinaabe and Canadian heritage: my dad is from the rez, and my mom is from town. I don't remember when and how, exactly, I became a Leafs fan as a kid in the 1980s; the team has always been a part of my life and a part of my father's. We didn't have hydro in our home until I was about eight years old, so I was introduced to my favourite sports team off the grid. My earliest memories include my dad connecting a small black-and-white TV to a car battery in order to tune in to CBC on the rabbit ears and watch *Hockey Night in Canada*. We eventually got electricity and a colour TV, and antenna reception improved enough to watch games more regularly. The late '80s were hardly a glorious era for the Buds, but the period was defined by Wendel Clark, a mustachioed forward whose physicality, grit, and scoring prowess still made the game fun to watch.

SPORTS

Home Ice

On the paradox of being a diehard Indigenous fan of the Toronto Maple Leafs — or any hockey team

BY WAUBGESHIG RICE



Everything changed in the early '90s. The Leafs became a Stanley Cup contender thanks largely to the addition of Doug Gilmour, a small but speedy centre forward. The team made the conference finals two years in a row—the first time to lose due, arguably, to a non-call on a high stick committed by the most famous hockey player in the

world, Wayne Gretzky, on our beloved Gilmour. It's a moment that will forever live in infamy, but it solidified my love for an immensely skilled team that just couldn't quite make it to the pinnacle. As the years went on, so did the championship drought, one that dated back to a year burned into our collective psyche: 1967. That was the last time the Leafs hoisted the Stanley Cup, over their rival Montreal Canadiens.

My devotion only grew stronger as I grew older, especially once I moved to Toronto, in the fall of 1998, to study journalism at Ryerson University. As a student, I couldn't afford tickets to games, but living just a few blocks from Maple Leaf Gardens was thrilling. Mats Sundin, our captain from Sweden, quickly became my favourite player, and the tough, blunt head coach, Pat Quinn, produced results. Toronto became a perennial playoff team, reaching the conference finals twice in a four-year span. After suffering through futility during my childhood years as a fan, enjoying expected annual success as an adult felt like redemption. A Stanley Cup championship continued to elude the Leafs, though, and they regressed into a dark era of disarray and failure as the 2000s went on. I've seen and heard all the jokes about the team at this point in my

life. They always make me laugh, especially the image of a horse-drawn wagon captioned something like "Photo of the last Leafs Stanley Cup parade." A glimmer of hope has returned

LEFT George Armstrong, of Algonquin and Irish roots, captained the Leafs to their last Stanley Cup, in 1967.

in recent years thanks to the arrival of forwards Auston Matthews and Mitch Marner. I was in the stands at their first game—in Ottawa, against the Senators, in October 2016—when Matthews scored four goals. No other player in the modern era has scored four in their debut. It was impossible not to see a brighter future. The Leafs have since developed, once again, into a team that makes annual playoff appearances, even though a Stanley Cup still feels so far out of reach. I patiently await ultimate success, as I have for my entire life. That hope is rooted in something. It's a result of a proud, strong, global network of fans: Leafs Nation. I always have my phone handy on game nights to check in on Leafs Twitter, join group chats with friends, and occasionally text with my dad, John.

In the middle of this pandemic-shortened season, I texted my dad during a game against the Edmonton Oilers to ask about the origin of his allegiance. "The blueberry stains on my butt at birth is proof I am genetically a Leafs fan," he jokingly texted back. He told me he'd been a fan for as long as he could

remember. He started watching games with his cousin at their grandmother's house, but he remembers it being a visit to Wasauksing by one particular Leafs superstar, sometime back in the 1960s, that affirmed his fandom for life. "My first experience with hero worship was the winter George Armstrong came to visit our little community hall," he wrote. "It was awesome seeing a Nish that played professionally on TV. To see him in real life was legendary." Armstrong, the captain with Algonquin and Irish roots who had led the team to Stanley Cup glory in '67, was an iconic Indigenous player. He provided representation on a mainstream stage in a country that oppressed and neglected people like him and those he inspired.

I posted on Facebook asking Indigenous fans how they came to be passionate about the team from Toronto, the big city far from many of their small communities. Most respondents who appeared my age and younger said it was because their parents were fans, which explains the unwavering devotion despite recent failures. They recalled watching games

at home, on the rez, with their parents, or listening on the radio while at hunt camp. It seemed like every older fan mentioned one name: George Armstrong.

Armstrong died, at the age of ninety, earlier this year. I've seen how massive his legacy is, especially in First Nations throughout Ontario. I wanted to ask someone close to him about that, so I messaged Ghislaine Goudreau, an Anishinaabe educator in Sudbury whose grandmother was Armstrong's cousin. "I personally think he inspired anyone who saw him play and who knew him," she responded. "In many ways he was a born leader. He had lots of respect for his Indigenous mother. The leaders traditionally in our communities were the women." Goudreau described the racist taunts Armstrong endured as a child and the horrors his relatives survived at residential school, which he fortunately was able to avoid. She believes his experiences fostered a strong sense of empathy and compassion, which she saw him extend to anyone who came into his circle.

"As Nish we always fight for the underdog because sadly, we've been put into

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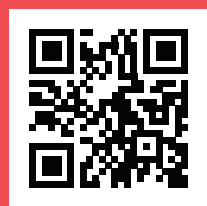
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that position,” Goudreau added. “That is why so many of us are not giving up on the Leafs even though George is the last captain to win in 1967.”

It is this hope, which thrives in our communities despite the Leafs’ decades-long championship drought, that connects us to the team and its fan base. It is choosing to be part of something unifying even though Indigenous nations and cultures in this country have long been violently pushed to the periphery. While this hope is pinned on something entirely out of our control, it is by no means trivial. Hope for a healthy future is what pulled many Indigenous people through the heaviest traumas of colonialism, which still reverberate today. When settler authorities outlawed ceremonies, stole children, and brutalized them for speaking their language, communities held on to hope that, one day, the old ways would be able to return and would be celebrated. That process is underway across the land.

In this sense, being a diehard Indigenous fan of the Leafs—or of any hockey team, for that matter—is a paradox.

Hockey is widely considered Canada’s game, a sacred pastime that purportedly brings people together to celebrate the virtues of this country. But anyone who inhabits the margins knows that’s a fallacy. Canada’s history is horrendous, particularly its treatment of Indigenous people. So, as an Indigenous person, to latch on to something so intrinsically Canadian can feel contradictory.

The sport itself has long embodied and perpetuated bigotry and inequality. In recent years, a reckoning has come, with players of all backgrounds speaking out about the racism and discrimination they’ve endured from other players, coaches, management, and leadership at all levels. Racist, homophobic, misogynistic, and other discriminatory language has long been part of the game’s parlance, both on and off the ice. The first time I was ever called the R-word was while playing in a novice house-league game at Parry Sound’s Bobby Orr Community Centre.

Considering all this, I have a conflicted relationship with my favourite sport. I admit to engaging in a level of

cognitive dissonance when celebrating the moments that make me happy. And, as a Leafs fan, I know first-hand that those big events, bursting with joy, are few and far between. Still, it’s a choice I make, and I recognize all the contradictions that arise when I wear those colours, that maple leaf, and inhabit that realm.

Perhaps it’s the choice itself, to become part of a wider community that’s steeped in tradition and carried by hope, that appeals to Indigenous Leafs fans like me. The devotion unites us with fans from other cultures and communities, and we’re bound by the stories, the dreams, the heartbreaks, and the triumphs. We’re all holding out hope for the ultimate payoff of that lifelong dedication. “We know one day [the Leafs] will be victorious,” Goudreau wrote at the end of her message to me. “We’ve had small victories along the way, and we are never giving up.” \

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WAUBGESHIG RICE is a journalist and author of several books, including *Moon of the Crusted Snow*.

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IT TOOK OVER three centuries and a Canadian to make it happen, but when Mark Carney was hired as governor of the Bank of England, in 2013, he became the first foreigner to run the institution since it was founded, in 1694. The response to his appointment was rapturous, bordering on parody. The British press alternately called him a banker from “central casting” and a “rock star.” Carney, stepping away from the same position at the Bank of Canada, was just forty-eight years old. He was brought on to modernize the UK’s ossified banking system, and kudos poured in from the left, the right, and the centre. “Mark Carney is the outstanding central banker of his generation,” former chancellor of the exchequer George Osborne told the House of Commons.

Then, Brexit.

From the moment then prime minister David Cameron floated a referendum to leave the European Union, in the early months of 2013, until the day the exit was made law, Carney was increasingly in the spotlight. He was asked, repeatedly, what impact leaving the EU might have on the economy. Tradition dictated that the bank governor remain above the political fray. Carney, however, was blunt in his assessment that the decision could lead to economic disaster—he even worried publicly about the possibility of a “cliff-edge Brexit.” He did not venture this as offhand opinion: he was, after all, governor of the central bank. Nevertheless, this was seen as taking sides. Suddenly, in certain parts of the country and some segments of its media landscape, he went from being Hugh Grant to Hannibal Lecter.

The fact that Carney’s original assessment would be proven right wasn’t politically relevant. Nor did it stem the criticism, even after he was asked by the Conservative government, not once but twice, to extend his original five-year contract so as to maintain stability and continuity in the Brexit rollout. The drama—which ended for Carney last year, his tenure finally complete—may have been theatrical, but it also highlighted the many ways that electoral

politics can be a dirty, unpredictable business in which intellectual analysis and raw emotion do not always share the same cab. For Carney, it’s an experience that may yet come in handy.

In the months since Carney arrived back in Ottawa, where he now lives with his wife, British economist Diana Fox, and their four daughters, he’s landed a few plum positions: he’s taken a seat on the board of digital-payment unicorn Stripe, and he’s now heading up asset-management firm Brookfield’s expansion into social and environmental investing. He has also continued his role as United Nations special envoy on climate action and finance. Still, there have been whispers about what, exactly, he plans to do next. With the release of his

PROFILE

Mark Carney’s Next Move

The economist led two central banks through two era-defining upheavals. Is politics his future?

BY CURTIS GILLESPIE

ILLUSTRATION BY CHLOE CUSHMAN

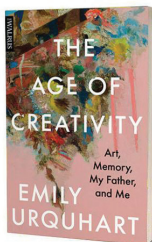
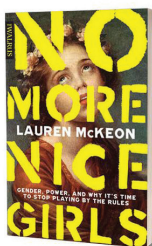
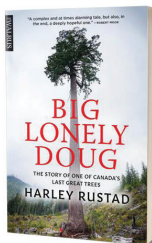
first book this spring, *Value(s): Building a Better World for All*, they only got louder.

In early April, Carney was a keynote speaker at the Liberal party’s federal convention. During his speech, he committed himself to the cause, stating, “I’ll do whatever I can to support the Liberal party in our efforts to build a better future for Canadians.” It’s a line that has drawn many close readings in the media. The Canadian Press reported that his appearance was a “political coming out party of sorts” that marked “the first public dipping of his toe into partisan waters.” Pundits, and their unnamed inside sources, speculated that Carney could be on the next ballot, with some venturing that he could soon be minister of finance. Others have even gone



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further, naming him a potential successor to Justin Trudeau as Liberal leader and, if voters say so, prime minister. Still, Carney isn't committing either way. At a recent virtual event held by the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management, he was asked whether politics was in his future. Carney played it coy: "I never say never." He is certainly primed for a leap into a leadership position, but is that a job he actually wants?

ON FEBRUARY 1, 2008, Carney, then forty-two, got a promotion: he was to become governor of the Bank of Canada. Even with his impressive CV, it represented a rapid ascent for the relatively young man who grew up in Edmonton: undergrad at Harvard, doctorate at Oxford, and success as an investment banker with Goldman Sachs in London, Tokyo, New York, and Toronto. He switched from Goldman to the public sector in 2003, landing roles at the Bank of Canada and the Department of Finance before being named governor—the youngest central banker in all of the G20.

Almost immediately, a calamity hit. Carney was still familiar with the world of Wall and Bay Streets, and he perhaps sensed, ahead of other central bankers, that the financial realm, faltering since 2007, was in jeopardy. Just a month into his tenure, while EU member states were raising interest rates to reflect a healthy economy, he cut Canada's overnight rate by fifty basis points—a kind of fiscal booster shot that anticipated and, for Canada at least, moderated the trouble to come: the disastrously overleveraged state of credit default swaps and obligations that would ultimately overwhelm global markets and bring about the Great Recession.

There's a chasm between the day-to-day job of being a bank governor and what the public might imagine they actually do—at least to the extent that anyone thinks about bank governors at all. Craig Wright, chief economist at RBC for over two decades, explains that the main job is to hit the inflation target the bank and the government deem advisable, which, in Canada since the late

eighties, has been somewhere between 1 and 3 percent. On average, says Wright, Carney always found that 2 percent sweet spot. "That's what you aim for in normal times," Wright says. "Mark has been through a couple of abnormal times."

In some ways, a bank governor is a bit like the captain of a giant steamship crossing the Atlantic—let's call it the *SS Stability*. Know your charts, set a judicious course, keep a close eye on things, and it should be smooth sailing. Unless, of course, there's a hurricane (credit crunch) or rogue wave (recession), at which point all hell breaks loose, your crew starts to panic, and every decision, big or small, is monumental. If you choose wrong, you're going down.

Angelo Melino has been on faculty at the University of Toronto's department of economics since 1981 and briefly worked for Carney as a special adviser to the Bank of Canada in 2008/09. "He was a very good crisis leader. I mean, he's not a large man, but you would not know that if you were in a room with him," Melino says. "He was very good at inspiring people to work hard. Everyone saw that this was a crisis, and he showed that he was a good leader and a very good decision maker."

This became even clearer a few years later, when Carney was poached by the Bank of England. It was an institution that, by most accounts, needed to have the boardroom doors thrown open to the sunlight. Carney was hired to do the door-flinging. He was to oversee changes in communications policy at the famously tight-lipped bank as well as bring about reforms in technology, diversity, digital currency, briefing frequency, and even the printing of plastic versus paper money. It was a bigger role that came with more attention. A lot more attention. Intelligence, charm, and diligence could parry some, but not all, of the daggers. "I think it's safe to say that the level of scrutiny in public roles in the UK is intense and unrelenting," he says with a laugh during our call.

But, though he initiated an era of modernity at the bank, there remains debate in the financial community as to his overall effectiveness. Phillip Inman is the

economics editor of the *Observer*. “If you talk about a crisis, then Mark Carney is your man,” he says. “He didn’t have to deal with the worst of the Euro crisis that happened just before he arrived, but it was still being felt when he arrived in 2013. Then, of course, we had the Brexit vote, in 2016, and he was a model of calm while everyone else was losing their heads.”

The story of Carney’s time in the UK is, in many ways, wrapped up with the story of Brexit. According to the *Times*, before taking up his post as governor, he sought assurance that there were no plans to hold a referendum on leaving the European Union (something that the Bank of England later denied). It did not take clairvoyance to predict the chaos and fractiousness such a process would bring about, regardless of the outcome.

According to Inman, it is important to remember the milieu in which Carney was operating: the financial sector considered Brexit earth shattering. “Not just an economic disaster,” he says. “A cultural disaster. A step backward in almost every way you can think of. And Carney had to stay calm and act quickly.” This was particularly crucial, says Inman, due to the Bank of England’s slow response to the 2008 recession—something that led to a lagged recovery and an awful lot of criticism.

Though Carney impressed early on, Inman says, his response to the latter stages of Brexit proved subpar. Like most other central bankers, he says, Carney’s technical tool kit was quickly found wanting. This, Inman argues, was where Carney’s naïveté about Britain was exposed. “Events never panned out as he predicted: wage growth never got high enough. He was a poor forecaster,” Inman says. “He had interest rates at rock bottom, he was doing all he could to facilitate growth and wages growth, but the mistake he made was that it takes more than that to jump-start recovery.” He adds that Carney’s policy of “forward guidance”—offering long-range direction on interest rate movement to promote economic stability—also proved contentious. Carney would announce that rates would

soon go up to reflect increases to inflation and a healthier economy. But time would pass and nothing would change. “Month after month, year after year,” says Inman, “we would get Carney’s forecast of inflation rising and interest rates coming in to calm it down. And [the increases] never happened. Even when you start to get a sustained recovery, which didn’t happen until 2017, this is four years after he’s joined the bank. We had four years of ‘It’s coming.’” Carney was, in Inman’s opinion, misreading the situation before him.

Of course, some have always claimed there’s a whiff of smoke and mirrors to

Prosperity, Carney argues, is most likely going to be greatest when we can balance economic growth with social values.

the work of economists. I remember, from earlier reporting days, Ralph Klein’s chief of staff, Rod Love, joking about economists: their ways, their mysteries, their arcane lexicon. It came with the punchline, *Don’t get me wrong, I love economists. They’ve predicted seven of the last two recessions.*

UK Labour MP Pat McFadden may have been feeling similarly inspired in 2014, when he likened the Bank of England under Carney to an “unreliable boyfriend” for the mixed signals it was sending over the timing of future rate hikes: “One day hot, one day cold.” It was a characterization that stuck even after Carney ditched forward guidance as a policy. “He was quite thin-skinned about it,” says Inman. “I would attend press conferences and ask him direct questions, and he was very prickly when you asked questions that appeared to impugn his forecasting or his social

conscience or any of the things that he felt he should be praised for. As in, ‘Who are you to question my authority?’ Very sharp and dismissive. When everything’s going well, he seems very confident and it’s all lovely. But, when things are not going so well, in a one-to-one personal situation, he’s quite prickly. And his reputation inside the bank was quite authoritarian.” Carney was reported to have earned some infamy among bank staff. According to BNN Bloomberg, “Being on the receiving end of sudden flashes of fury became known as ‘getting tasered.’”

With the honeymoon period over, Carney’s manner and performance were regularly questioned by the media, with the caveat that a public figure receiving a mauling by the British press is like winter in Edmonton: the question is not *if* or *when* but *how bad* and *for how long*. Philip Aldrick, economics editor and columnist for the *Times*, was one such critic. After Carney’s tenure ended, Aldrick wrote that “the quantitative easing he oversaw at the Bank widened inequality and provided [chancellor of the exchequer] George Osborne with a cover for austerity.”

The bottom line, says Inman, is that Carney’s legacy at the Bank of England is simply more conventional and conservative than Carney and his advocates may believe it to be. “I just think he was more of the same,” says Inman, “rather than somebody who was a bit of a new broom.”

Carney insists that he enjoyed his experience in the UK but admits it was a fishbowl existence he was unaccustomed to. Everything from his marathon times to his expense claims received public airing. “In Canada, I was recognized, but I basically had a normal life,” he tells me. “In the UK, I did not. It was exceptionally difficult to do anything that was not in the public eye, so there was a level of scrutiny that was remarkable. As it turned out, with the Brexit cliffhanger, I ended up doing seven years, so I was there longer than I originally intended. If there’s an unasked question, by that point I’d been a G7 central bank governor for thirteen years, and you only get one life. I enjoyed it. It was a privilege. It was very intense. But it was enough.”

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THIRTEEN YEARS, two banks, two crises. How do you follow that kind of record? So far, one of Carney's primary areas of focus has been his new book, *Value(s): Building a Better World for All*. At nearly 600 pages, it is learned, passionate, well researched, reasonably well written, and surprisingly accessible for a text encompassing politics, economics, history, and philosophy. All orbit around the ideas of value and values: how we find them in the market and how we promote them among ourselves. Yet it also presents something of a mystery: Whom, exactly, is this book for? It feels too colloquial to serve as an academic text, too academic to appeal to a general readership. Suffice it to say, at the literary or emotional level, the book is no Obama memoir. "I'm not hanging by the phone for the call from Oprah," he jokes. In a way, the book seems to represent the duality of Carney's public persona: part policy wonk happiest at Davos, part hometown hero keen to introduce himself and his ideology to the wider world.

It's difficult to reduce *Value(s)* to a bite-size summary, but one thing it expresses consistently and in various ways is that Carney is not a free-market fundamentalist. In this, he falls into the traditional liberal camp: markets are run by humans and humans have emotions, biases, failings. The book is undergirded by an almost plaintive appeal to the decency in each of us as individuals and all of us as a collective. Prosperity, he argues, is likely going to be greatest for most when we can balance economic growth with a broader set of social values. That means limits; that means regulations. "When left alone, ultimately the market will consume the social capital that is needed to support the market," he tells me. "You've got to be careful to balance things so you don't lose the dynamism and innovation that only the market can provide. But some things aren't trade-offs, right? We're in a COVID crisis. With the people in the old-age home across the street, it's not their lives versus the economy."

It's not just that the free market is too volatile when unregulated, Carney argues in his writing, but that it is also

prone to systemic and episodic failures, which, combined with human frailty, means we must keep both a collar and a leash on this powerful beast. His call for a regulated and equitable financial system doesn't appear to be a self-conscious bit of politicking: after all, if he didn't hold these beliefs, Carney could have remained in the private sector, earned his millions, and we'd have never heard his name in the first place. Which raises the question that, if this is all part of the bigger picture he's painting, what's the next brush stroke? "In retrospect, everything might look quite logical and well planned out," Carney says of his career. "But I've just gone to things where I felt it was a challenge and it interested me." One potential challenge that has been simmering for some time, however, may be coming to boil.

John Ibbitson has been a political writer and columnist for the *Globe and Mail* since 1999. Mark Carney has been on his radar, to one degree or another, since he first appeared as a young governor at the Bank of Canada. Even then, Carney was rumoured to have political aspirations.

"He's a fascinating character," says Ibbitson. "If he were to run as a Liberal, he could bring increased credibility on economic issues in an area where that party is deemed by some to be weak." Ibbitson did reiterate that the job of prime minister is currently filled and will be for the foreseeable future. But Trudeau won't be leader forever.

Even if that tumbler did unlock, there are questions about whether Carney should open the door. The Liberals, notes Ibbitson, have been known to choose leaders who look great on paper and then struggle on the ground, Michael Ignatieff and John Turner being perhaps the two best examples of intellectual heft that turned into political dead weight, mostly due to an absence of the common touch. Voters, after all, don't necessarily want the smartest person for the top job—they want someone they trust. And getting to that position is always a fight. "Does Carney take relentless, vindictive personal attacks, both from opposition politicians and

from a portion of the press?” Ibbitson wonders. And, even if he can take it, can he dish it out? “On paper, he looks great as a candidate. He is formidably qualified for a senior role in public life,” Ibbitson says. “But politics is a blood sport.”

Naturally, there are skeptics about whether Carney will commit to running. “I would have thought him being rather thin-skinned would be his Achilles heel in politics,” says Inman at the *Observer*. “In terms of understanding the tectonic plates of international capitalism, how everything fits together and how it works, and knowing all the top people across the world, he does. I could see that being a great appeal, but the campaign trail can be brutal. Another thing that will stand in his way as a politician is that he talks in a way that is technocratic, which is loved by people when referring to their central banker but not much good in a politician.”

Philip Aldrick, in a recent *Times* book review, referred to the rumours surrounding Carney’s aspirations. “If *Value(s)* is a political manifesto, it is that of Davos man. The benevolent belief that, with a few tweaks, the ‘citizens of nowhere’ can reorganise capitalism for the collective good to save the world. You believe Carney has the sheer will to make it happen, but not the self-awareness.... If he wants to be PM, he will need to speak human first.”

Still, signs have been accumulating. One potential clue can be found in his book’s acknowledgements section: “Gerry Butts kindly reviewed the draft manuscript and provided essential insights.” Yes, that Gerry Butts—longtime chief adviser and former principal secretary to Justin Trudeau. I ask Carney if anyone ought to read anything significant into that detail. There is a pause, then a laugh. “No,” he says, “except that he’s a smart person, and if you want somebody to read your manuscript, you get someone like that to take a look.”

We probably won’t have to wait too long to find out Carney’s intentions given the Liberals’ minority rule—an election can’t be too far off. But, for now, the only thing known for certain is that he has

been engaging in his own version of forward guidance, signalling to both party and public that he is worth long-term investment.

In one chapter of *Value(s)*, “How Canada Can Build Value for All,” Carney pays homage to his homeland in all the conventional ways: Canada gave him his chance in life, educated him, taught him his values; it is a magnet for talent, has a wonderful cultural mosaic, turns challenges into opportunities; there is nothing we can’t accomplish if we work together. “I believe Canada is not just the present but very much the future if democracies are going to thrive,” he writes. “That’s why I want to help us reach our full potential and shape the future, right here at home.” He then lays out a ten-point plan that governments can follow to achieve value-based prosperity, which ranges from the boilerplate (building a new economy in which all can thrive) to the expected (greening the economy) to the genuinely interesting (developing intergenerational accounting practices to track sustainability). In the end, he says, Canadians need to support one another from “coast to coast to coast.” Although *Value(s)* does not, in sum, read like an electioneering document, there are sections that cannot be read as anything other than political semaphore.

In his book’s final chapter, “Humility,” he returns to an earlier anecdote about Pope Francis, who once suggested to an intimate gathering of influential people, of which Carney was part, that just as grappa is wine distilled—nothing but pure alcohol—the market is “self-interest, humanity distilled.” The job of those assembled before him, the pope solemnly said, was to turn grappa back into wine.

The pope may have been onto something. The trouble is, the only way to know what you’ve got is to uncork the bottle, let it breathe, and give it a try. Only then can you really see what’s inside. ♪

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MEMOIR

Years of Solitude

In old age, I had to come to terms with the loneliness I'd felt all my life

BY SHARON BUTALA

PHOTOGRAPHY BY LUCY LU

ALTHOUGH my memory of the details is vague, I think the following happened when I was eight years old, living in a village in central Saskatchewan and attending a one-room school with grades one through eight. Probably it was a hot day in June, we girls were wearing summer dresses, and because it was most likely a Friday afternoon, when everybody tends to slack off (or did in those days), our young teacher had sent us outside, around to the back of the school, to our baseball diamond. There, we were all—somehow, despite our being different ages, sizes, and genders—organized to play softball. I didn't enjoy sports, wasn't athletic, was a tiny child, and was bored. I remember standing in the batting lineup forever, as there was double the required number to a side, until finally it would be my turn and I would be berated by my teammates when I would inevitably strike out. Because of all this, after a while, I wandered away from the game, around to the front of the empty school, and sat

down, alone, on the wooden steps leading inside. Eventually, a sweating older girl came panting around the side of the building, looking for a drink of water. Seeing me, she hesitated and asked why I was sitting there by myself. I probably said that I didn't want to play ball—our mother didn't allow us to shrug our shoulders or say "I dunno" when she spoke to us, so I would have said something. She went on inside and at once came rushing back out, swiping water from her chin, and ran back to the game.

She must have told the teacher where I was. "Oh," the teacher must have said, and knowing I wouldn't be getting into mischief, seeing no other reason to insist I come back, the teacher left me there. This was just after the Second World War, when experienced teachers were in short supply. Ours was a teenager herself, with zero knowledge of child psychology, and she probably just couldn't be bothered. So I sat alone, listening to the crack of the bat on the ball and the cries of my classmates floating to me through the warm spring air over the roof of the school.



My Parents' Vase (2019)

But, mostly, I remember sitting there, elbows on my knees, chin resting on my palms, and feeling... what? Peaceful and quiet, I think, aware of myself as alone in a wide noisy world yet enjoying my distance from it, if also feeling the creeping approach of loneliness. The boundary between solitude and loneliness is permeable and unstable, after all. I remember that, after a while, I got up off the steps and went back to the game. I remember that I found the teacher playing in the infield, sweat trickling down her temple, and when she glanced at me, her expression was somewhere between annoyed and indifferent. I already knew that look from my too-busy mother, who had five children under eleven to worry about, and I was by this time—at eight—girded against it.

Seventy years later, I still recall this moment, although without the shame I once associated with it—my peculiarities, my sullenness—as being when my status as a loner and a pursuer of solitude was cemented. Yet I and those friends my age who admit to suffering from loneliness do everything that remains within our power (not being able to bring the dead back to life or get rid of Parkinson's, arthritis, congestive heart failure) to relieve or dispel loneliness. I tell myself that everybody feels this emotion. It is some help but not much, and my inability to find the right or true source or cause of my loneliness is as painful as the loneliness itself.

WHEN I WAS thirty-six, I left my lowly university-lecturer job in a small city to marry a cattle rancher whose land was in a sparsely populated and remote part of southwest Saskatchewan where, in time, I came to understand that I would never be fully accepted. Thirty-three years later, a widow dreaming of a new life (or to recreate my original one), I moved to Calgary to be near my grandchildren. Otherwise, I knew virtually no one there, and years later, my family gone to Ontario, I still don't have extensive or deep social connections. Ever since I left that remote Prairie home and chose the city, I have had the sense that my "real life," the

place where I belong and where there is no loneliness, is somewhere else out there in the world, although I can't name or find it.

I'm eighty now and I live alone, a situation so common that you might even say loneliness goes hand in hand with being old, that the old are experts in loneliness. There is, however, a stigma attached to being lonely—being lonely must be your own fault because you're an inferior person—while, if you claim to enjoy solitude, you are seen as not of the typical run of humanity and are admired, even while being looked at skeptically, because in our society, preferring to be alone isn't seen as "normal" or well adjusted. Also, there is the tired disclaimer that you can be lonely while among people—and even in marriage—a cliché that, while true, only irritates those who are truly, physically alone in the world, such as orphans or the old whose family and friends are all too debilitated to connect with others or are dead.

We also all know, or at some juncture in our lives discover, that loneliness in North America is pervasive and thought to be caused by the cult of the individual, the nuclear family, the rise of narcissism, globalization, and late-stage capitalism. As an old person, I live in the midst of a community of loneliness—admittedly a contradiction in terms: How do the lonely make a community and remain lonely? But, somehow, we manage it. The COVID-19 requirements of physical distancing and isolation have resulted in the sad, even alarming fact that loneliness is now more widespread through our society than it's ever been.

It is only when, having some long, heightened personal experience with loneliness, you decide to write an essay on this newly (again) trendy subject that you discover what a voluminous literature there is about it, from modern studies done by government departments to personal essays, from sixteenth-century Michel de Montaigne's "On Solitude" to psychiatrist Anthony Storr's 1988 *Solitude: A Return to the Self*. Both conclude that solitude is good while loneliness is bad and that loneliness is a complex emotion, state, condition. Put

the topic in the hands of philosophers and you will soon find it is almost beyond your ability to understand their deep probing of the subject, examining related concepts of grief, sorrow, depression—even homesickness, although in old people, homesickness is usually for the no longer extant home or for a home that, even if one went back and stood in the middle of it, wouldn't be the right, longed-for home anymore. And that would be loneliness.

I am surprised to find that friends my own age who, before COVID-19, took part in the activities of a number of organizations and so were out of their homes and with congenial people often—friends who never spent three to five days completely alone, the phone not even ringing unless it was the cursed telephone marketers—people who never used to go three to five days with no one knocking on the door and who didn't have to go to the grocery store or post office or even to the doctor just to have a human conversation, claim *still* to be lonely. How can this be?

WE LOOK BACK through our lives, thinking that loneliness didn't strike us at all when we were young, except—oh, yes—in certain rare, specific situations: mom in the hospital, siblings gone somewhere without you, being sent off to the relatives while your parents holidayed, starting a new school, that kind of thing. Or, later, in adulthood: betrayal, divorce, living alone, changing cities, children leaving home, without the money to do whatever it is you want to do, dreaming of some life you can never have. Now, in old age, though, we are baffled by our loneliness no matter what we do to alleviate it; we resent it and start searching through the past to try to discover how we have come to this.

In a 2013 essay for *The New Republic* called "The Lethality of Loneliness," Judith Shulevitz writes, "Loneliness is made as well as given, and at a very early age. Deprive us of the attention of a loving, reliable parent, and, if nothing happens to make up for that lack, we'll tend toward loneliness for the rest of our lives. Not only that, but our loneliness

will probably make us moody, self-doubting, angry, pessimistic, shy, and hypersensitive to criticism. Recently, it has become clear that some of these problems reflect how our brains are shaped from our first moments of life.”

When I read this, I froze, so accurate a description it was of the tendencies that I fight in order to live a more “normal” life, of how I have gradually, over the many years of my adulthood, come to see myself as having been. That is, in order to not die of self-imposed loneliness. And, still, before COVID-19, I would catch myself dodging out of an event as soon as it ended, right when everybody else was gathering to network, bond, cement alliances, gossip, chat, and just have a little fun for half an hour before, satisfied, they would turn toward home. Or else I would refuse a social invitation because it intimidated me too much, even though everybody else would have a good time, and I probably would have too, if I could have just mustered the courage to initiate conversations or if I hadn’t thought that the slightest, most fleeting expression meant the person I was talking to was bored by me or had taken a dislike to me. That I had, once again, said something immeasurably stupid or offensive or had made an enemy when I was trying to make a friend. Rather than suffer through that again, I would tell myself, *I would rather be alone*. Even though COVID-19 has greatly exacerbated loneliness, I doubt, when it’s over and I get used to going out again, I’ll feel any different.

Not all the roots of loneliness grow from childhood. When I first became aware of myself as old, and when both of my parents, two of my four sisters, and my husband had died (the other two sisters, as well as my son and his family, live in other provinces, too far from me to visit casually even without COVID-19), leaving me pretty much permanently alone—in the physical sense, at the very least—I began to feel like the last member of my tribe left on earth. For the first time, I understood, in the deepest part of my being, what the true loneliness of orphans and of those who define themselves or are defined by society as

“other,” as not belonging, really is. I began to understand why the elderly are too often lonely people. But this is a kind of loneliness that is attached to being in the flesh, to once having been firmly related to others, to once having been a member of a large family or community. The soul remains connected to the dead, as if they were all still alive, but the body is bereft, and the mind rests in a kind of melancholy, awed confusion, and dismay. More than once, I have heard old people say, in a puzzled, sad way, something like, “I have outlived my life.” I have said it myself. How can it be

*Wisdom suggests
that we learn to
focus on the now,
forget the past,
and stop worrying
about the future.
Only then do we
erase loneliness.*

that I remain alive and on earth when the significant people of the life I have lived are now only ghosts? I have overstayed my life; my still being alive is a mistake; surely, I was meant to go when they did.

When I consider my own loneliness, now, in my old age, as I have done both on purpose and inadvertently, I count my blessings: a nice home; enough money to pay my bills; pretty good health for my age; a few good old friends in other provinces I can talk to on the phone; a few new friends with whom, before the virus and its isolation, I used to visit and with whom I went to movies and plays; a brain that, though not as good as it once was, is still working well enough. This cures me for the moment, COVID-19 or not, but let my guard down and there it is again, like a mangy grey coyote that shadows me everywhere and that lay, forgotten by me, at my feet under the table when

I was lunching with a friend, my loneliness problem solved until the moment the door latch clicked behind her and that coyote crawled out and rubbed against my leg once more. And I am baffled by this too, and thoroughly annoyed with myself because I knew—I know—better, if only I could remember what I know.

I was lonely after my husband died, in 2007, because I had no “significant other” reading the newspaper in the other room. But, as I adjusted to my single state, stifling that yearning, I turned to philosophers for instruction on the good life, the happy life, and in reading them, I suddenly remembered a teaching from many years ago, when I was wandering alone on the prairie one day, immensely sad, full of self-pity, and trying to understand where my dismal feelings came from.

There really was no one thing that I could pinpoint: I was sad because I was alive and did not have every single thing I had ever wanted, did not even know all the things I wanted, and I believe now that it was the latter that made me saddest. I was alive and I was a human being and wanting is the condition of the human. Words appeared in my head, or perhaps it was what I have called the “voiceless voice” that spoke to me. *This too is illusion*, it said, and at once, it straightened my head right around. Wisdom may sometimes come in such a flash, but I have learned you must stick with it or it will leave you as clueless as you were before it lit.

LONELINESS isn’t a social construct in itself, although social conditions can certainly create it: the loneliness of the prisoner, the loneliness of those doomed to live a life they think is not the one they would have chosen for themselves, the loneliness of the elderly caused by ageism. To suffer from loneliness is part of the human condition and must always have existed.

But it hasn’t always been named as such. William Shakespeare, our greatest expert on everything human, left behind no indelible quotes about loneliness, as he did for just about every other human experience, despite being credited with

coining the term “lonely.” We, as readers, have never looked to him as someone who wrote about the subject. Was this because, for him, loneliness was fully tied to the condition of being unhappily in love? Or was it about the supposed loneliness of the dead? Nonetheless, Shakespeare’s tragic heroes certainly suffered from what we would today simply call loneliness. King Lear, Hamlet, Timon of Athens, Coriolanus, and Titus Andronicus, in their extremities of rage, grief, and humiliation, were also lonely people.

Thomas Dumm, in *Loneliness as a Way of Life*, writes that “the very texture of modern life is inflected by loneliness.” Thinking of the West, at least, who could disagree? Dumm, a professor of political science, goes on to write that loneliness permeates our entire experience of living and that it is also political because of the way it helps us understand and shape not just the meaning of our individuality but also how we use power and justice in the world. It is so ubiquitous an experience that, in January 2018, in response to a UK report finding that about 9 million people (out of 67 million surveyed) reported themselves as lonely and the fact that loneliness can be responsible for a decline in health, the British government appointed a so-called minister of loneliness. In late 2018, the government began serious work on a loneliness strategy, with the overarching department introducing a number of programs it believed would help alleviate the condition. (Currently, the “minister of loneliness” position no longer exists, though loneliness is the purview of the same department.) This February, alarmed by the increase in suicides it linked to the increased isolation of COVID-19, the Japanese government also appointed a minister to oversee loneliness.

In Canada, governments are starting to pay attention to the problem and devise ways of alleviating it where they find it: chiefly, but not exclusively, among senior citizens. A good thing, because two Angus Reid Institute studies show that, in 2019, 55 percent of the population identified as having a good social life, but in 2020, the figure had dropped to

33 percent. The percentage of those reporting as not suffering from either loneliness or social isolation had dropped from 22 percent to 12 percent. But those suffering from both social isolation and loneliness (separated by the researchers, with sufferers of both referred to as “The Desolate”) had increased from 23 percent to 33 percent. In 2020, one-third of our population was “desolate” from isolation and loneliness.

As if the simple continual longing for company isn’t devastating enough, researchers have demonstrated that social isolation results in a weaker immune system, making the lonely more vulnerable to disease. A 2010 review of 148 studies on the health effects of social isolation found that they exceeded the health risks associated with obesity, inactivity, heavy drinking, air pollution, and smoking.

I have to question what agencies and programs designed to alleviate loneliness and instill a sense of community can do for the suffering. Besides offering transportation for people with disabilities and elderly people and language classes for non-English speakers, they can provide funding and leadership to create clubs and organizations designed especially for those groups defined as lonely. In some cases, all this may help quite a few people. But, in most of us, the fundamental condition will remain, even if at a diminished level, and for most of us, it ebbs and flows throughout our lives.

“We are all lonely, even when amid crowds and in committed relationships,” writes psychoanalyst James Hollis in *Finding Meaning in the Second Half of Life: How to Finally, Really Grow Up*. “When we are alone, we are still with someone; we are with ourselves. The question is how are we with ourselves?” Loneliness opens us up to self-questioning, sometimes to the obsessive mental repetition of past experiences and accompanying emotions, often to overpowering, helplessness contrition for past deeds and words, to heightened mourning over our many losses, and to hopelessness. When you’re alone, there is little to distract you from your thoughts, and if you have no one to talk to, your ideas about who you are and who you have been can ramp

themselves up until rational perspective departs. Such suffering over your life can lead to despair. But Hollis writes that, if you have respect for yourself and if you pay attention to your dreams and “other such phenomena,” you may find help with your loneliness from a deeper place within yourself. This is a psychoanalytic solution, deeply learned and intensely felt, and one that most people would be grateful for (and it will probably be as far as most of us get), but I think that, as helpful as such communing with the deeper self undeniably is, this response is still not quite the full answer to the problem of loneliness. It shouldn’t be forgotten that we are all afraid, even the greatest heroes and heroines among us. My own feeling is that perhaps the empty spot that pains us so deeply is, as I have written, yearning for what we have lost—our mother, spouse, child, original home, the way of life we left behind. “Our loneliness is always deepest in those moments when we face the terror of nothing,” writes Dumm in *Loneliness as a Way of Life*. “But nothing rarely appears as itself; instead, it takes on many guises, most of which connect back to the ultimate nothing, death, or non-existence, that blank page.”

And how do we deal with that? I think of myself as a person with a long history of being stifled by my own fears, and now, in old age, I think of the foolish ones: to drive in heavy traffic, to visit places where I know no one, to go out at night. I have wondered about them, berated myself over them, tried to overcome them, but I think I see now that, although there is much out there for old people to be afraid of, I suspect my fears are, in the end, related to my approaching nothingness—“that blank page.”

One of the things that most puzzled me during the more than thirty years I spent with my husband in what was for me rural solitude—partly because I didn’t fit into rural society and partly because I chose the work of learning to be a writer, which further isolated me—was that, even as I was often brought to an absolute physical halt by the natural beauty I was seeing, I was at the same time stricken painfully in the heart by

the sight. Looking closer, I identified it as yearning, and then, in the end, I gave it the name of loneliness.

If I were more religious than I am, I might say that the feeling was yearning for the place we came from before we were born. But I don't quite believe that, although I would like to. Perhaps, instead, it is about the human search for perfection, the perfection we find only in great works of art and out in the landscape. I think that we yearn for perfect peace, which doesn't mean being in perfect solitude, or comatose, or brain dead, but for peace in the heart—a peaceful heart in the midst of the multitudes, tumult, chaos, violence, sorrow, and beauty of everyday life. We can never have that peace, except in the work of art or the sunset, but instead, we have intimations of it, and that is why we feel sadness.

I have at times forgotten all about loneliness and, if asked, would have offered denial. My goodness, it's hard to be lonely in the middle of sex: the act occupies you rather fully, at least for a few minutes. And I wasn't lonely giving birth, although I was frightened, in pain, and

perhaps indignant that this was bloody well asking too much of me. Or when I held my dearest preschooler tightly in my arms. Moments, flashes, the occasional long afternoon in the countryside, when dreaming, when lost in my work, in the "zone" athletes talk about, when struggling to understand an idea, whenever I am focused on something. Nor was I lonely when I was walking on the prairie alone and my consciousness moved out beyond its normal limits and allowed me a larger sense of the world.

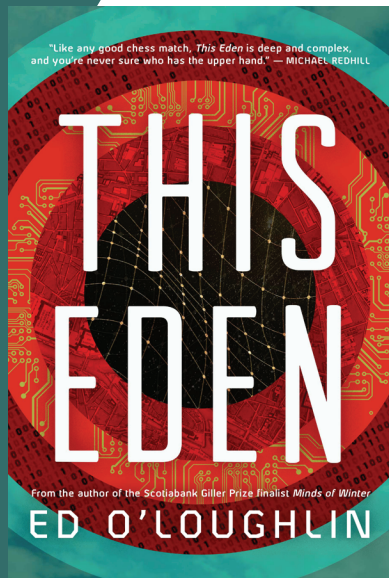
It took nearly eighty years of living through happy things and sad things and torments of every kind that beset the human before I began to see how right the philosophers were: we are creatures of desire, creatures of the imagination, and to subdue these natural and vital processes takes a lifetime of repeated experience and the work that follows. No wonder wisdom suggests that we learn to focus on the now, forget the past, and stop worrying about the future. Only then does the sorrow vanish, only then do we erase loneliness. But, I think, at what great cost to the exploration of the

richness of life and to individual human possibilities.

Still, sometimes I wonder how my life would have changed if, that day beside the school, my young teacher had come looking for me and, speaking to me encouragingly, had brought me to the others and ensured that I found a place in the game. Maybe I was waiting for her to do that, although I remember soon realizing that nobody would, one of the first revelations of my life. I was all alone, by my own not-exactly-choosing, since I wanted to be with the other kids but also wanted something else. Perhaps my need for solitude, despite its sometime companion loneliness, had been instilled in my soul long before I entered school, maybe at conception, and it would be up to me, as I grew, to find a balance where I could. 🍷

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A version of this essay appears in *This Strange Visible Air: Essays on Aging and the Writing Life (Freehand Books)*, which is out in September.

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SHARON BUTALA has published twenty books of fiction and nonfiction.



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Why executives need to take the leap on ESG and corporate purpose

In a post-pandemic world, consumers won't just accept brands at face value. To succeed, companies must demonstrate their commitment to positive ESG practices that support corporate purpose—or risk failing

The COVID-19 pandemic has been more than a health crisis. This black swan event has brought the consequences of climate change, growing income inequality, societal inequity, labour issues, and related social injustices to the forefront, and they are poised to dramatically change business and consumer relations.

While discussions around environmental, social, and governance (ESG) issues and corporate purpose have been trendy speaking points in the last few years, many companies have been slow to follow through. But stakeholders may no longer have the patience to wait for companies to shift their values and take concrete action.

For businesses looking to remain competitive and thrive post-COVID-19, employing good ESG practices and

demonstrating a strong corporate purpose has become the new business essential, says Faith Goodman, CEO of Goodman Sustainability Group and founder of VeriStell Institute—a not-for-profit think tank that was one of the first to link the two concepts and is working to mainstream them globally. Committing to both ESG practices and corporate purpose simultaneously is vital for a company's internal strategy and its outward communications.

According to Goodman, a company's corporate purpose should tangibly contribute to at least one of the United Nation's seventeen Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As firms focus on creating value for both shareholders and society at large, they need to find ways to use their organization's inherent capabilities to help solve pressing

social concerns related to injustice and inequity (such as poverty and hunger), human-rights issues (such as child welfare, racial inequality, and gender-based discrimination), and climate change.

“A shift toward purpose is underway—inspired, instigated, and amplified by socially conscious consumers, responsible investors, and newly empowered employees who are seizing this moment to drive fundamental change,” says Lamia Kamal-Chaoui, director of the OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities.

Kamal-Chaoui also highlights the important role that small businesses play in this shift: “In Canada, small businesses make up 98 percent of all businesses and employ 8.4 million workers. They can have a huge impact

in driving the adoption of more responsible business practices—not just because of their collective scale, but also because of their roots and relationships in local communities.”

Large, publicly-traded firms like Fortis Inc., a leading North American electricity and gas distributor, have already leaned into this shifting sustainability model and created value for both shareholders and society.

“Our focus on sustainability and ESG in particular is many decades in the making. Gender diversity, both at the board level and within our executive teams, has been a priority, and we are proud of the progress we have made,” says Nora Duke, executive vice-president of sustainability and chief human resource officer at Fortis. “We engage with our stakeholders on ESG priorities and focus on our purpose: delivering a cleaner energy future, as demonstrated by our partnership with twenty-four First Nations in Ontario on the largest majority-owned First Nations construction project in Canada’s history, which provides reliable electricity, socio-economic benefits, and lower carbon emissions.”

Society and governments are now moving in unison, urging—and, in some cases, regulating—firms to do better. Consumers, employees, and investors are demanding that companies take demonstrable action on incorporating ESG and corporate purpose into their operations and conduct. Trust in businesses has

How ESG creates value for your business

E

REDUCE YOUR ENVIRONMENTAL FOOTPRINT.

Taking climate change seriously, limiting pollution and waste, and finding renewable energy sources helps build consumer trust.

S

SHARE YOUR SOCIAL PRINCIPLES.

Customers and employees have faith in brands that publicly champion—and take action on—diversity and inclusion, tackling injustice, and building equitable conditions across the business and its supply chain.

G

COMMUNICATE YOUR GOVERNANCE STRUCTURE.

Help build investor and stakeholder confidence by showing transparency around board diversity, executive compensation, and how your business operates.

now surpassed trust in governments, according to this year’s Edelman Trust Barometer report, and when it comes to fixing social problems, more than two-thirds of people (68 percent) say they want companies to step up and “fill the void” left by governments.

Historically, companies have adopted a profit-first model to serve shareholders, while creating real societal value has come a distant second, if at all. But, says Goodman, “a global shift is redefining the contract between businesses and their communities, from simply ‘being responsible’ to creating real social value. Defining and owning your corporate social purpose is the most critical competitive advantage of our time.” In the new sustainability frontier, she adds, “companies need to define why their brand exists beyond a profit-only model.”

Brands that don’t articulate and deliver on a clear, meaningful purpose or take tangible action on ESG issues are primed to face increasing public pressure and risk losing out to competitors, especially as consumers take back brand power by boycotting products and services from companies with values opposing their own. What the pandemic has made clear is that social issues no longer exist solely outside of the boardroom. Instead, leaders need to ask themselves: What courageous actions can I take to embrace ESG issues and corporate purpose imperatives? ■

What is the difference between the S in ESG and corporate purpose?

The “S” (for social) in ESG often plays second fiddle to environmental (E) and governance (G) issues. But now is the time for boards and executives to take a stand on equity, diversity, and inclusion, the future of work, supply chain accountability, employee compensation, and other social justice and

humanitarian concerns.

Corporate purpose or corporate social purpose, on the other hand, refers to the clear articulation of why a brand exists and how its particular expertise can help solve societal challenges. Taking this strategic, long-term view gives a brand the best chance of success

by keeping it competitive, attracting consumers, and retaining loyal employees and suppliers.

If a company hopes to survive and thrive post-pandemic, social goals—such as paid sick leave, diversity in senior leadership, and fair and equal pay—must inform and guide its ESG efforts.



ADVENTURE
CANADA



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Explore Newfoundland with The Walrus



The Walrus has a long partnership with Adventure Canada, an award-winning, family-run adventure travel company. As the new executive director, I'll be joining their **small-ship expedition Newfoundland Circumnavigation**, July 4-15, 2022.

My family has roots in Newfoundland, and I'm excited to return. This trip will start in St. John's and cover the island's northeast coast, L'Anse aux Meadows, Red Bay, Gros Morne National Park, Miawpukek First Nation (Conne River), as well as other beautiful spots. I'm looking forward to the colourful homes, whale watching, and breathing in the fresh, coastal air!

During this trip, I'll join you on our daily excursions and host a special dinner for supporters of The Walrus, where I'll share some insights from our work in 2022 to spark a conversation on the country Canada could be.

One of the things I've missed the most over the last year is exploring. Travel gives us a unique opportunity to **learn more about our country and ourselves**. I would love for you to join us!

Jennifer Hollett, Executive Director, The Walrus



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FICTION

LITTLE SANCTUARY

BY RANDY BOYAGODA

◎ **HOW DO YOU FIND SWEET SYRUP** at the end of the world?

For Amma: a thimbleful to pour over her bowl of sour yoghurt. There were six other dishes on the table, their last meal before they left home. The children were dressed as if for school, in white shirts, navy shorts, navy socks, and black shoes.

A plate of melon slices for Sabel.

A towel of warm bread for Reya.

A foiled bit of chocolate for Theri.

A bowl of plain cold rice for Verlane.

A cup of black olives for Appa.

A cup of pitted cherries for S'Jin.

A bowl of sour yoghurt for Amma.

A thimble of sweet syrup.

They held hands.

◎ **NO ONE SAID ANYTHING AFTER THAT.**

Someone had to say something.

Otherwise, it would be just another day, albeit with each of their favourite foods, a few of them miraculously found, and the children wearing their school uniforms for the first time in a long while. But still, just another meal. They would eat, as usual, while listening for the sounds of planes, of trucks, of when it was time to go back down into the cellar and wait in the dark with candles until the sounds stopped. Then see if there was still an upstairs.

But, this time, this meal, they were listening for a new sound too. This sound was terrible too.

No, not terrible.

Hopeful.

Remember, children, what we are doing, where we are going, is because we are hopeful. Amma and Appa kept saying this, as if to believe it themselves. They ate in the big cold kitchen where they also slept these days, the one room of their house that still felt like a room of their house. Along the western side were smashed-in walls, a caved-in section of roof, and debris from the bomb that had dropped nearest to them. So far.

The night the bomb dropped, Amma and Appa had emerged from the cellar and felt a strange cold wind come down the stairs. They argued about whether the house was a target. They lived so far from the city. There were no other houses near them. Be hopeful, but be careful whom you trust. *Touch only those you are committed to for the rest of your lives.*

“Maybe it was meant for the capital,” said Appa. “Maybe it was an accident.”

“How could this be an accident?” said Amma.

“It was an accident. It had to be an accident.”

“Why *had to be*?”

“They already got the president. Why kill his doctors now?”

“Can someone bigger than me go close the door upstairs?” asked Theri. “The wind makes me...”



“Scared!” teased Verlane.

“No!”

“Verlane, go upstairs and close the door,” said Sabel.

“No. I’m scared.”

“Ha!”

○ **SOMEONE, SAY SOMETHING.**

No one spoke after the prayer. No one was eating either. If they started, they would finish, and after clearing the table, it would be time to leave. Instead, they looked at one another. Everyone’s hands kept going up to scratch behind their ears, to rub the backs of their necks.

Late afternoon the day before, Amma and Appa had called each child behind the house, below the ash-covered trellis wrapped in dead vines. Birds were still singing in the far field. Beyond that, on a clear day, you could see the capital. Buildings like white, silver, and black streaks against the sky. Mostly black, by now. But, from here, the city looked peaceful.

How could the last safety in your life deceive you like that?

As easily as this:

Amma turned the metal garden chair in the other direction, toward the sloped side of the gully where the river still ran. She made each of them sit in the chair, wrapped a towel around their shoulders, and gave them identical haircuts, very short, sporting-day short. They were four girls—fourteen, twelve, ten, eight—and a little

boy, nearly four. After cutting everyone else’s hair—*Why, Amma?—Sit still!*—Amma sat down and called Appa over. Everyone watched and stifled their giggles while Appa cut Amma’s hair. Then Amma went to the mirror in the kitchen and cut it again.

“I thought you had the hands of a surgeon?” she teased.

“I used to,” Appa replied.

“We all look like soldier boys now,” said Sabel.

“Send him your hair in the mail,” said Reya.

“Amma!”

“What mail?” asked Appa. “Who?”

“You haven’t sent mail, have you?” Amma turned from the mirror. “From here?”

“She likes him! She likes him!” Reya sang.

“Did you give someone our address?” Appa demanded.

“Sabel,” said Amma.

“*Amma!*” Sabel cried.

○ **AMMA PICKED UP** the thimble. She marvelled at it. She looked at Appa, as if to say: melons and fresh bread, fine—even the chocolate was probably hiding somewhere close—but how on earth did you find sweet syrup at the end of the world?

He looked back: I found it for you.

She smiled, he smiled back, then she poured it slowly into the bowl of yoghurt. She licked her thumb—what daring!—and wagged a finger at the children. *Do as I say, not as I do.*

With both hands, she picked up the bowl and tilted it toward them. The dark syrup made circle after circle in the yellow-white yoghurt. The circles began to fall into one another and onto her fingers. They began eating like never before, offering and accepting and laughing and talking about what next.

What next?

They finished and got up to take away the dishes.

“Leave them. Never mind the cleanup,” said Appa.

“Never mind? Never mind the cleanup? Appa?”

“Sit down. All of you, sit down. There is something we have to say. You will understand when you understand. From now on, your brother is your sister,” said Amma.

“I don’t have a brother. Or is Amma having a baby?” asked S’Jin.

“No, S’Jin, you have sisters,” said Appa.

“I want a brother. I don’t even get to play with Tric anymore.”

“Listen, S’Jin. From now until I tell you otherwise, you are their sister.”

“Appa?” said Sabel. “Amma?”

“Sabel, you are the oldest,” said Amma. “You have to help them understand.”

“I can help too, Amma,” said Reya.

“Yes, you too, Reya. Both of you.”

“Amma—”

“Sabel! You have to!”

“No, Amma, listen,” said Sabel. “Everyone, listen. Listen!”

They were here.

⊙ **A BLACK SCHOOL BUS** pulled up in front of the house, red dust sprayed along its sides. Two men stepped out, dressed all in black, black-strapped visors, red dust on their boots, mirrored sunglasses, and thick short beards like smudges of paint. One had a white scar that ran from cheek to cheek and stood out against his beard like tracer fire. They didn’t have guns, at least not showing.

“Time to go,” the scarred one said.

The scarless man took their bags—little sacks each had promised they would be able to carry by themselves.

“Children, you go first,” said Appa.

No one moved.

“Girls, get on the bus!” said Amma. “Sabel! Reya! Take your sisters and get on.”

No one moved.

“Okay, Amma. I’ll go first.”

S’Jin went in. He had to use his hands to climb the stairs. He stood at the front, beside the driver, who looked the same as the other men. The driver stared ahead, tapping the steering wheel. S’Jin clapped the dust from his hands, waved to someone at the back, and walked the length of the bus.

Then Appa let something out. It was the worst noise. It was a screaming, raging, crying, sobbing sound, all of it choked, bubbling up in his throat, seeping through clenched teeth. He turned away from them.

Not Amma. She had the steady hands. She took each of her children by the shoulders and guided them onto the bus. Her hands, they noticed, were sticky. The syrup. Then the two men climbed in, the door closed, and they drove away, Amma and Appa disappearing in the dust.

Do as I say, not as I do.

⊙ **SABEL DIDN’T CRY.** She didn’t ask any questions, at least not aloud. Surrounded by sobbing and pleading, she looked out the window, combing over their final days at home, what Amma and Appa had done and planned. What they had really been doing and planning.

Amma and Appa, figures in the back window, getting smaller and smaller in the red dust of the world.

S’Jin didn’t cry either. His friend Tric had been on the bus when it came for them. They hadn’t seen each other in months. Two rows back from the sisters, they talked and talked: recently seen animals, dead and alive; the best and worst places they’d slept; and the remains of their marble collections. The bus sped past abandoned houses, burned-out cars, skinny cows, masked and bandaged people running to the road at the sight of a vehicle, any vehicle, and others running away. All the old blockades and checkpoints were twisted metal on the side of the road, and gone were the men who used to stand in front of them and ask questions.

“Why are your sisters crying?” asked Tric.

“My haircut makes me cold,” said S’Jin.

They took the main road to the capital until it came to an end in a T. They turned right. This was also new. When they used to go back and forth from the city to their house in the countryside, they had always turned left. Where were they going?

“There’s a man on the bridge,” said the driver.

Up ahead, an old man stood in the middle of the lane, facing the bus.

“That’s the judge,” whispered Verlane.

“Ask him! Ask him when they’re coming!” said Theri.

Amma and Appa knew the judge. When they had all lived in the city, before the store windows were smashed and pictures of the president torn down, the judge would come over some nights, take a small strong drink on the veranda, and talk about what was happening, what was next. His daughter had married a colonel stationed in a far province. The colonel had sent her and their children, twins, a boy and a girl, to stay with the judge when things had started to go bad against even people like them.

Now the twins were standing on the side of the bridge with their bags.

“What do I do?” asked the driver.

Their old lives had come to an end, then their new lives had come to an end, but they were still just children.

“Drive,” said the scarred man.

He drove. The judge didn’t move. The bus reached the bridge, its tires rumbling on the steel. The old man stood his ground. The children were screaming.

Sabel lurched out of her seat, ran to the back of the bus, and pulled S’Jin and Tric into her, covering their eyes. Reya did the same for Verlane and Theri.

“Okay, okay, stop. Stop!” shouted the unscarred man.

The bus shuddered and stopped a few metres from the judge. The two men got out. One stayed by the door and the other went to speak with the judge. He kept his distance. The judge pointed to his grandchildren and brought his hands together. A prayer. The twins looked tired and embarrassed.

“How did he know we were coming? That’s not supposed to happen,” said the driver to the unscarred man.

“He must have applied but didn’t qualify.”

“We need to move. We can’t be stopped like this, on a bridge,” said the driver, leaning over to look up at the sky.

“Okay,” said the unscarred man.

He pulled a pair of blue rubber gloves over his black gloves, walked over to the scarred man, and spoke into his ear. The scarred man didn’t bother with extra gloves. They grabbed the judge, taking an arm each, and dragged him to the side of the road. The judge took a step forward, still begging and gesturing at the children. The unscarred man shoved him in the chest with an open hand and the judge fell backward. He looked about to get up when the unscarred man took a step forward. The judge stayed down. The twins cried out and ran over to him. The children watched from the windows of the bus. The unscarred man peeled off his blue gloves and dropped them on the bridge. They drove on.

◎ **THE CHILDREN** had never been to this place before. The city they had known, the capital, was clean and new and wide open, all gleaming fountains and bright, clipped greens. Until it was all of that but charred and empty. Until it was none of that.

But this was the old city—it had always been as it was now. There were no walkways or roads, just winding

narrow lanes of worn-out brick. The buildings were small and made of painted stone. It had been a long time since the colours were vivid and bright. In front of the buildings were barrels and vendors’ stands and carts blocked on both sides of each dusty wheel. The barrels, stands, and carts were mostly empty. The market men and women still stood and sat beside their few faded wares. They wore chains and charms from unknown times and places. At their feet stretched dogs and cats, idle and taut as fallen bows and arrows. The people were very old, all of them, their faces shrivelled like found grapes. They watched the bus drive by.

There were dwellings everywhere. People lived on top of the buildings and beside them and behind them. These were made of old wood and scrap metal, their roofs waterproofed by the orange-and-blue tarps that had covered the shipments back when the shipments were still coming: they had stopped long before the boulevard trees burned, when the north had been emptied and smashed in, when the first cities fell. The tarps rolled like waves in a storm.

Here, few followed what were considered rich-people rules. People were everywhere, close together, many barefaced. But they were all moving in the same direction as the bus: to the harbour, to boats waiting in the harbour.

Sabel walked to the front. The two men were sitting in the first seats after the driver. They were looking straight ahead, not at all the people looking at them.

“Can you tell me where we are going?” Sabel asked.

“You will find out on the boat,” said one of the men.

“What boat?”

“Go sit down,” said the other man.

“Sabel!” said Theri, coming up behind her. “Sabel, give them this.”

Sabel turned. “Go sit down. Go stay with Reya until I come back.”

“Give them this,” Theri insisted, holding out her hand. The foiled bit of chocolate, which she had saved. “Give them this to tell us when Amma and Appa are coming.”

“Both of you, go sit down,” said the scarred man. “We are almost there.”

Sabel turned and put her hands on Theri’s shoulders, but Theri slipped down and squeezed past her. “Here! You can have this, all of it. Tell us when our amma and appa are coming.”

The men didn’t look at her. The chocolate fell under a seat. Sabel picked it up, grabbed Theri, and led her to the back of the bus.

“What did they say?” Reya asked.

“That we’ll find out on the boat.”

“We’re going on a boat?” S’Jin asked.

“We had a boat,” said Tric. “My appa once caught a shark, and I helped reel it in.”

“For Reya’s birthday, we swam with dolphins,” said S’Jin.

“Shark,” countered Tric.

S’Jin slumped down, defeated, in his seat.

“You should eat your chocolate before it falls in the water,” said Verlane.

Instead, Theri put the chocolate back in the little pocket sewn into her bag. She looked to the back window, again, to see if Amma and Appa were following the bus. That must be it, she thought. A second bus for the ammas and appas. Theri had been looking back the whole time. There wasn’t anyone behind them.

“What are you going to tell them when Amma and Appa are not on the boat?” Reya whispered to Sabel.

“I don’t know.”

“Why did they keep saying we had to be hopeful? How is this hopeful?”

“I don’t know.”

○ **THE BUS STOPPED.** Ahead were the harbour docks and, off to the side, the shallows. At both, people were climbing onto vessels of all sizes. People making their way to the departing ships were in front of the bus and all around it. Everyone seemed to be moving, but no one was gaining ground. They were the only ones in a vehicle.

The driver honked. No one paid any attention. He honked many times, then opened the door so one of the men sitting behind him could lean out and shout at the people to move out of the way. No one paid any attention. The driver honked, the man yelled. Then the crowd gave way, and four young men with big grey rifles walked up to the bus. They were dressed in jeans and sneakers and jackets over white T-shirts. Apart from the guns, they looked like they could be going to watch a game at the presidential stadium. Before it became the overflow prison. Before it became a big stone bowl of rocks and chairs.

“Checkpoint checkpoint checkpoint,” S’Jin sang. Tric joined in for a verse before Sabel shot them both a look and they quieted and shrank down. The other children had already ducked into their seats and were peeking out the windows. They watched the two men on the bus speak with the other men through the open door. There was a lot of pointing, by both sides, at the docks.

To the children, the men on the bus were no longer the mysterious and terrible men who had taken them away from their parents a few hours earlier. Now, they were the mysterious and less terrible men who would protect them from these mysterious and more terrible men wearing big long guns. Did the men from the bus have guns? Where were they? Shouldn’t they get them out?

One of the men took something out of a bag under his seat. It wasn’t a gun. It was a bundle of coloured papers that he counted out, putting most of it back into the bag. He went back outside and gave the papers to one of the militia men.

“Ghee,” said Verlane. She took great pride in knowing poor-people slang for money.

After Amma and Appa’s papers with the presidential seal had become things to burn, not show, they had had to give money, many times, to the armed young men setting up blockades. Should one not have ghee to give, the men would begin shouting, fingers on triggers, and then others would come, guns and knives ready—maybe even the same group that had dragged the president from his bedroom.

Or so Amma and Appa had heard from fellow survivors of the president’s staff—cooks, lawyers, the presidential zookeeper—who had visited them in their country house after they moved there for good. While the adults had whispered in the kitchen, the children had played under the trellis and made up stories about why no one was allowed to go down to the gully. When they ran out of games and stories and finally accepted that the zookeeper’s children weren’t going to tell them what had happened to the animals, they had nothing better to do than to sing their newest song.

Checkpoint checkpoint checkpoint.

○ **THEY BEGAN TO MOVE,** slowly, with two militia men out in front, clearing the way to the harbour.

“Which one is our boat?” Theri asked. “I don’t like the big ones. They look like shark heads.”

“No they don’t,” shot Verlane.

“She’s right,” said Tric.

“Which one of us is right?”

Tric just nodded wisely.

“Then what do they look like, Verlane?” asked Theri.

“They look like floating morgues.”

“Verlane!” Reya hissed. “How do you know that word?”

“Everyone, stop!” Sabel cried.

The bus stopped. For a moment, all of the children, Sabel included, were amazed and reassured that she suddenly had such command over the situation. But the men weren’t looking at her. They were watching their militia escorts turn and walk away.

“Where are they going?” asked the scarred man.

“No idea, but we’re not going anywhere until they come back,” said the driver.

The crowd filled in the space around the bus. The people looked the same as those the children had seen in the old city. Tattered, bundled, tired, limping to the harbour wearing and carrying and pushing and pulling everything they had left. Children sat on shoulders and babies were wrapped and strapped to chests and backs.

It was an inky, cloudy day, but everyone looked like they were squinting against the sun.

"Someone else needs their help," said Reya. "Look over there."

The children followed her pointing finger. Outside, the militia men were walking toward a tighter crowd that had formed within the crowd. Someone was being held in the middle.

"Children, go to the other side of the bus," said the driver.

The militia members reached the person being jostled and beaten at the centre of the throng. A young man. They handed out a few coins and dispersed the crowd. The young man stood up and faced them. He would either accept their recruitment offer and be taken or refuse, be made to accept their recruitment offer, and then be taken. He coughed and spat at them. Visors were lowered. Truncheons were out.

"Children, go to the other side. Now!" shouted the driver.

They went.

"Is that why S'jin is now our sister?" Reya asked Sabel. "Would they make little boys fight too?"

"I don't know. Maybe. Eventually. It depends how long it goes on."

"What goes on? The war or the sickness?"

Sabel just nodded. Reya crept back a few rows to speak with Tric and S'jin. To make sure they understood. The driver started honking again. A new set of militia men walked up to the bus, insisting they knew nothing of the earlier arrangement. More money came out of the black bag.

"Gee," said Theri.

"It's *ghee*," shot Verlane.

Theri rolled her eyes.

Sabel didn't know if she should be grateful for her siblings' bickering. Their old lives had come to an end, months ago, and then their new lives had come to an end, hours ago, but they were still just children. How much longer could they stay the same?

Why wouldn't Amma and Appa have told her? Just her, at least. She would have understood. She would have kept the secret. She had kept other secrets for them, about them, about what they had learned about the sickness. About what the president had allowed the country to know, after he cut off communication to the outside world, and what he hadn't.

What could be better and more hopeful than being together?

Being alive. Being alive and well.

If they were being sent to live, what about those left behind?

Sabel shuddered, shutting the thought away in her head like an upstairs room. She didn't want to know. She would ignore the wind.

DREAM FRAGMENT

BY STEVEN HEIGHTON

In those days the weather was jealous
and would turn up at her house just to see
what its cold winds could make of her face.

At her door she would be seen often
speaking to each of the seasons in turn,
though with a marked preference
(as many observed, and reported)
for winter,

which always stayed longest
and left behind fading signs
of its tenure aboveground.

Who among us up here
wouldn't want his love, her love
to carry a trace that clear, that
cold, stoic and austere, withdrawing
to regain itself, then resurging?

What I wouldn't do
or undo (winter whispered
in a voice akin to mine) to see
one more time what my touch
might make of your face.

○ **WHEN THEY WERE** close enough to see the foaming, dark-blue water, their second set of escorts waved at the driver and walked away. The crowd was parting here on its own, moving toward either the big ships by the docks or the yellow rafts floating in the shallows along the shore. The bus drove ahead slowly, as if it were going straight into the water. A man on the dock ahead motioned them forward. He was standing beside a control panel. The vehicle dipped and rocked side to side. They were on a floating platform.

"We're here," said the driver, turning off the engine.

"Where?" asked Theri. No one answered.

The man from the dock walked around the bus, bending down here and there. The children watched his progress from their windows.

"He's probably checking for bombs," said Tric.

"We're not a bomb," said S'Jin.

"How does he know?" asked Tric. "How do you?"

"Is he going to give us the fever test?" asked Theri.

"We're not sick!" said S'Jin. "We have haircuts!"

The children were quiet for a moment. Then Sabel stood up and marched to the front. "Where are we going?" she asked.

"Go sit with your sisters. Masks!" said the scarred man.

"No," Sabel said. "You know where you're taking us. Our parents have given you money to take us somewhere, and you are going to tell me, now, where we're going." She pressed her hands into the back of the seat so the men wouldn't see them shaking. They stared at her. The scarred one had a funny smile. The unscarred one looked irritated.

"Answer me, now," said Sabel. "Answer me, please."

Then came a roaring sound, and the bus shook and began to shift on the bucking platform. The children screamed and took cover. From down in her crouch, Sabel saw that the two men hadn't flinched. She stood up and looked outside. The crowd was still moving toward the ships. A few were watching them, in their bus on its platform, now motoring out over the breaking waves. A couple of boys threw rocks at them, which fell short and disappeared into the sea.

☉ **THE FLOATING PLATFORM** was moored against the side of a very big ship. The children lined up in the aisle of the bus, fiddling with the loops around their ears. This could have been a field trip to an ancient ruin or a patriotic museum. The men motioned for everyone to come forward. They stepped down from the vehicle onto the platform, steadying themselves against the roll of the waves. The man at the control stand smoked and watched.

A bright-orange rescue boat was lowered from the ship to hang just above the floor of the platform, knocking against the hull. S'Jin took Sabel's hand. Without a word, the scarred man picked up each of the other children and put them and their bags into the boat.

"Sabel, one of us should go up with them," said Reya.

"Go," said Sabel. "I'll wait with S'Jin for the next one."

The unscarred man pounded twice on the hull and the rescue boat went up. S'Jin waved to the rising children. From where they were standing, he and Sabel couldn't see what happened next, but they didn't hear any commotion or cries for help.

Sabel looked at S'Jin, who was still looking up at the now empty rescue boat knocking against the side of the ship. She suddenly noticed how windy and loud it was on the open water. She wiped the spray from her

neck and stopped. It felt like someone else's neck, the short hair. S'Jin was also covered in spray, his school shirt dotted and damp. He squeezed her hand tightly, staring at her. She was staring at the men.

The unscarred man said something into the ear of the scarred man, who nodded, threw away his cigarette, and moved across the platform toward them.

Why was the rescue boat not coming back down?

Couldn't they all have fit?

And where were they going, anyway?

The scarred man's hands were out in front of him, spread wide like a dog catcher's. Sabel took a step back.

"Stay where you are!" he shouted.

She kept moving back, pulling S'Jin.

"Stop!"

Sabel saw the other two men look up from their work and rush toward them. The driver carried a coil of rope. She turned to call for help and was knocked over by the rescue boat on its way down. S'Jin stumbled back, let go of her hand, and fell into the water. Sabel screamed. The scarred man dove in. The unscarred man lay flat at the edge of the platform while the driver stood beside him, ready to throw the rope.

For the longest, longest time, nothing happened.

Then the driver threw the rope, the unscarred man grabbed hold, and both pulled. Sabel went to the edge and saw the scarred man holding the rope and kicking water and holding S'Jin, who was kicking water and kicking him.

The unscarred man pulled S'Jin out of the water and dumped him into the rescue boat. Giving a wide margin, Sabel climbed into the boat and sat down. She took S'Jin close to her, jumping at how cold he was, and held his shivering body closer.

The back of her neck tingled.

She felt someone come near, close behind her. It was the scarred man, also soaking and shivering and breathing hard. He was very close by now. She didn't turn.

"Do you think someone saves *my* children? Turn around, you goddamn sugar diamond, you—"

"Come on!" called the unscarred man from the bus. "We're late for the next pickup."

The scarred man didn't move.

"Now!"

Sabel held S'Jin, cupping her hand on his jaw and squeezing so that he couldn't turn. The scarred man spat and banged his hand against the hull and was still vowing terrible things when the boat went up and blue-gloved hands reached out and took the children away. ☉

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FICTION

GIGANTO

BY CHARLOTTE GILL

NIGEL LEANED OVER from the driver's side and poked at the stereo. "Sorry, Doc," he said. "It's not that I don't appreciate a little Nana Mouskouri first thing in the morning."

Dr. Krentz squinted over at Nigel but then appeared to let this go. He hoisted his Thermos to his lips and returned his laser eyes to the road. Then silence, the rumble of tires, the ping of rocks inside the wheel wells.

We were four in the truck, an ATV in the back, our dry sacks and Pelican cases wedged into the leftover crannies. Camryn had brought her own music—I could see her iPhone glowing through the pocket of her cargo pants. She was Dr. Krentz's intern.

"What are you listening to?" I asked. She took out one AirPods. I expected her to name some folk-emo band with a name like a nineteenth-century hardware store.

"Podcast about horse breeding," she said.

Blonde ponytail, Patagonia rainwear, strawberry lip balm addiction. She was a human burro, even if she didn't know it yet, paid just enough to keep the Equity Enhancement Office at bay.

"What brings you to this hot mess?" I asked.

"Needed a summer job." She pinched out a smile and stuffed the AirPods back into her head.

Three days, I predicted. Then she'd fold up like a wet tent.

I wiped the fog off the window with my sleeve. Our route was a moribund logging mainline used by locals

for recreational pursuits—rod-and-gun stuff, snowmobiling in winter. I jokingly referred to this place as Area 51, a backwater ransacked by forestry from highway to headwaters. It was mostly old clear-cuts grown over with weedy tangles, the odd strip of survivor trees towering above it all. We came every year to make a pilgrimage of sorts. Our Camino de Santiago, our El Capitan. Everything striving, greedy for the light, everything reaching hard.

AFTER THE SPRING SEMESTER ended at our little university, the anthropology department looked like a clearance sale at Staples. Even the admin was on vacation, and the overflow from the paper recycling bins whispered down our hallway. It was unbearably muggy.

I stood up, crossed the hall, and nudged into Dr. Krentz's office without knocking. I saw that he was looking at a paper published by his nemesis, Dr. Neeti Kapoor. I could tell that from the header font—I'd read the paper myself but lacked the heart to tell him of its findings. As I entered, Dr. Krentz convulsed and closed the document, revealing his desktop wallpaper—an author photo from the glory days, in which he wore a turtleneck beneath a poncho, leading a pack horse up a terribly eroded trail.

I called him Dr. Krentz, never wavered from the dusty reverence, the protocols of the tower. He was my mentor. We were freaks, according to our university, but we



survived on the endowment of an eccentric whose money funded our little budget. All I had to do was follow in Dr. Krentz's footsteps and I might achieve my own little slice of stability—and, I hoped, a shot at his job once he finally retired.

Dr. Krentz insisted on hard copies of all his emails—for his archive, he explained. I watched his eyes creep back and forth across the page I'd brought. It was a message from some rando named Nigel. This person had great admiration for Dr. Krentz's work. It was "underappreciated." He wrote that he was hoping to plumb the depths of Dr. Krentz's knowledge for a book he was writing on the undiscovered megafauna of North America. Was there the possibility of a ride-along?

The fan oscillated, levitating the wispy hairs on the top of Dr. Krentz's head. "Thank you, Melinda," he said, folding the page in two.

Dr. Krentz would arrange to meet Nigel at the commissary in the basement of engineering. Several times, behind my back. Supposedly, Nigel was experienced at backcountry orienteering due to a book he'd written on the ambergris hunters of New Zealand. According to Dr. Krentz, he'd make an excellent addition to the party.

I did not like this idea, not at all.

every sample vial and AAA battery, every data point on every spreadsheet. I was our chief logistician, yet here I was in the back seat, three hours into our field trip, with Nigel at the wheel. We paused at a fork to consider the map near a dark, glittering lake where a fisherman in a dinghy waved slowly, as if mystified by our intent. From here, we took the road less travelled, the one with significantly more potholes.

Our first order of business in Area 51 was to attend to a test plot Dr. Krentz had set up last summer, laying a road-killed deer inside a ring of barbed wire. He'd hoped to find a snagged bit of hair, some dried blood. He sent Camryn and me into a thicket of serrated leaves and giant steroidal ferns, where we bashed around with the GPS for what felt like hours. We found the deer carcass totally gone and the barbed wire rusty but otherwise intact. When we returned to the truck, Dr. Krentz and Nigel were chawing Clif Bars and trading banter about the trips they'd made to the world's exotic shitholes.

We climbed back into the truck and continued deeper into the jungle-like forest until the road grew terribly corrugated. We spun rubber, even with the four-wheel drive engaged. Nigel slung his arm over the front seat and looked me in the eye. "I think it's time to free the beast."

The truck had two gas tanks (I had filled them myself at the Gas 'n' Go), and I could see from the gauge that we'd pretty much sucked the first one dry. If we

I KNEW HOW TO READ A MAP perfectly well and could drive a truck through a raging creek somewhat competently if pressed. In fact, I knew the precise location of

wanted to make the return trip without walking for days with jerry cans banging our thighs, it seemed prudent to leave the truck by the wayside sooner than planned.

We spent a bit of time getting the ATV down from the truck on its ramps. Finally, Nigel climbed aboard it and turned the ignition, but nothing happened. He bucked forward and back in the saddle, trying to spur it. Camryn observed with her chin tucked inside her jacket flaps. Nigel dismounted and began kicking the tires.

“May I?” Camryn asked, gesturing to the seat. She mounted the ATV as if climbing astride her childhood pony. A couple of clicks and our machine was up and roaring.

“Well, well,” I said. “Just look at you go.”

Camryn shrugged. “My dad’s a hunting guide.”

GIGANTOPITHECUS, as it is scientifically known, is an ancient organism constructed from prehistoric DNA. It’s a painfully reclusive creature, favouring remote subalpine environments, much like the grizzly bear, although some researchers suggest it once occupied valley bottoms before being outcompeted or perhaps bludgeoned into obscurity. I’ve read anecdotal reports of specimens up to 800 pounds and ten feet tall. But size is subject to inflation. Based on my inferences about their diet, which would be pretty lean in their typical habitats, I suspected males would top out at 500 pounds, females slightly less.

The prevailing hypothesis suggests *Gigantopithecus* crossed into North America via the Bering land bridge in the wake of *Homo sapiens*. You can see this reflected in the myths and lore of Asia, where *Giganto* is known by various names: almasty, migyhur, meh-teh, dzu-teh, etc. Around here, the common term is a result of colonial mangling, a bastardization of a word from a Coast Salish language, Sásq’ets, or “wild man.” I believe the species originated in Europe as a Neanderthal offshoot before migrating into the Himalaya. That’s where Dr. Neeti Kapoor dug her famed mandible fragment from the receding foot of the Bara Shigri glacier, back in 2005. After that, Dr. Kapoor became the public face of our trade. She appeared on the cover of *Squatchin’ Monthly* and got a cameo on a reality TV show about big-game hunters.

Now, every *Giganto* researcher this side of the Pacific was out on the hunt, it seemed. Dr. Kapoor, with her drone scans and thermal imagers, was kicking Dr. Krentz’s ass, and he knew it. No tree-branch arrays, petroglyphs, plaster footprint casts, or even hair samples would make him happy now. Science dwells in the physical and rewards the brave. He wanted to go out with a bang. More than anything, he wanted a wet specimen, an idea that had me grinding my teeth at night.

WE MADE CAMP on an old landing, a log dump from the bygone forestry days. We found it webbed with a weird, strangulating vine that reinforced my belief in nature’s ability to reclaim any decimation. Probably a good thing in the age of climate change (climate *crisis*, as our friends in environmental sciences liked to say).

We pitched our geodesic domes. It was raining at dusk, so we huddled in Dr. Krentz’s tent, the most spacious real estate due to all his bulky, old-school equipment—the telephoto lenses, the shotgun mic, the army surplus night-vision goggles. We sat cross-legged as Dr. Krentz distributed our freeze-dried dinners. The men chose the Turkey Tetrizzini and the Chicken à la King. I went for the Chili Mac ’n’ Beef, leaving Camryn with the Sweet and Sour Pork, which I knew from prior expeditions was a disturbing vermilion gloop.

“How is it?” I asked in my private glee.

“Not bad.” She chewed carefully.

Dr. Krentz spread the map across the tent floor and traced his finger along our path ahead. We’d waste little time in the valley bottom and head upslope as far as the road system would allow. We needed old snow, the keeper of all the scat and tracks. Over the winter, Krentz had procured the questionably antique map that lay spread before us. It showed routes penetrating even deeper into the backcountry, and it was here he set his sights.

“Permission to speak freely?” I asked.

Dr. Krentz frowned. “I know you have your doubts, Melinda, but this is virgin territory, unknown to Dr. Kapoor or any of her ilk.”

“Probably for good reason,” I argued. Back here, the bush was relentless. You could fall into a gulch and no one but future archaeologists would find you. Upon discovering your mossy remains, they might assume you’d gone on some kind of hallucinogenic wander or been cast out by your clan. I continued to express my reservations while Camryn studied me as if deciding something.

Dr. Krentz scowled at me and turned to Nigel.

“A sound plan, sir,” said Nigel, digging in his food pouch with a spork. I wasn’t sure he had the faintest clue what we were talking about.

“Good,” Dr. Krentz replied. “We leave at 0700.”

Camryn raised her eyebrows. Possibly she was wondering why I hadn’t put up a bigger fight. The fact was, I was short on alternative employment options.

After dinner, I stomped off to my tent to finish my daily reporting. *Sunset: 20:45. Elevation gain: 450 metres. Light rain. Temperatures seasonal normal. No specimens collected.* It was technically spring, yet I watched a cloud of my own breath puff up to the ceiling. Beyond my tent walls, I could hear Nigel and Dr. Krentz murmuring. I lay swaddled inside my mummy bag, unsettled, and popped a Zolof, closing my eyes with my hand wrapped around my trusty canister of bear mace.

NIGEL SHOOK MY TENT. “Does the princess require her waking potion?” he asked. Then, without invitation, he unzipped the door and shoved his arm through to offer me a mug of coffee. Black. The way he liked it, presumably. But it was hot, and I had to admit I appreciated the gesture. When I emerged, Camryn and Nigel were ferrying gear to the ATV while Krentz puzzled over his clipboard. The sun struggled to punch through a gruel of high clouds.

While Camryn bungeed Krentz’s tripods together, Nigel seized the moment. “Better watch out,” he whispered, nodding at Camryn with his chin. “She’s coming for your job.” In truth, I’d been slightly worried about this very thing. My job paid barely enough to keep my lights on, but it served the purpose while I awaited the next batch of tenure-track postings.

“Why would she want it?” I asked.

“Same as you,” he replied. “Something to step on whilst climbing.”

From the moment of his arrival, Nigel had been watching for conflict, triangulating, presumably to find the “narrative” for his project. So I waited for my moment and hit back. “How’s it coming with the book?”

He’d confided to Dr. Krentz over sherries in the faculty club that he was a year behind his deadline. He’d talked to his share of bigfoot enthusiasts and had spent months trying to interview Dr. Kapoor, to no avail, but he still needed a climax, a culminating event.

Then our conversation took a surprising turn. Nigel confessed to me that he desperately needed this book to work out. He was broke. He’d already blown through his advance, and his agent had stopped returning his calls. Then he blushed and changed the subject. I wondered why he was telling me all this. Perhaps he doubted, as I sometimes did, the wisdom of chasing a mystical quarry.

Anyway, that shut him up for a while.

But he insisted on driving the ATV again. Krentz wedged onto the seat behind him. The ATV’s front and rear racks were piled so high with our stuff that Camryn and I were forced to trudge behind the beast, shouldering our backpacks. We continued along a series of upward-trending spurs, each narrower than the last. Eventually, the road transformed into a creek bed of jumbled stones.

As we trailed along in a wake of exhaust fumes, Camryn recited the names of all the plants and trees. She’d applied for Dr. Krentz’s internship not because of departmental ambition but because she was on her way to veterinary college—so not interested in replacing me at all. I wanted to ask if she believed in *Giganto*, but then she said, “I took anthropology as a blow-off course, but actually it’s sort of interesting.”

Eventually, we reached a split in the road that was not indicated on the map. I wondered if Nigel had led us astray. Camryn, who was almost perversely fit, volunteered to

explore the lower road on foot while Nigel ascended the steeper one in the ATV. That left Dr. Krentz and me at the fork to triage gear in case the route became impassable. Dr. Krentz was convinced of his “undiscovered” route, but the landscape felt lonely and oppressive.

I expressed more doubt about the plan.

“Teamwork, Melinda,” Krentz said. “Preparation is key.” He took the occasion to reveal a new piece of equipment to me. It was a dart gun he’d bought online, a CO₂ tranquilizer pistol designed for extracting bears from backyard trees and vaccinating big cats in zoos. This might have alarmed me, but in truth, it looked like a plastic squirt gun with a clownishly long barrel. I also knew from our occasional pool games in the faculty club that we both had terrible aim. And, besides, *Giganto* had eluded us so far.

The professor had stowed the gun back in its bubble wrap by the time Camryn came back. The road she’d followed descended for a kilometre and then dead-ended in a patch of brambles.

We waited for Nigel to return, which he did after a lengthy absence, looking windblown and slightly unhinged. He claimed that his path continued indefinitely, but he’d parked the ATV to take a leak, and in the stillness, he’d just gotten *this feeling*.

“What kind of feeling?” asked Dr. Krentz.

Nigel scrubbed at his head. He wasn’t cold, he explained, yet every filament of body hair had stood up in its follicle, the most terrifying case of goosebumps he’d ever experienced. “I felt,” he said, “*not alone*.”

“I knew it,” said Krentz bitterly. “She’s already here.” He began ranting about Dr. Kapoor and her posse of sycophantic nerdlings, which was often where his mind went when faced with small adversities.

Camryn turned to Nigel. “I thought you didn’t believe in any of this *tosh*,” she said, air-quoting the final word.

I wondered when they’d found the time to discuss *Giganto*—or anything in private. Dr. Krentz looked between the three of us, as if doubting his choice of companions.

WE MADE CAMP TWO where the road ended—rather, where it just dissolved into the bush. We had to hack away just to make a place to set up our tents.

Dinner with Dr. Krentz again. Swedish Meatballs or Chicken Kiev. I chose the former as the lesser of two evils. We were all a little tired and dejected—the fog was unrelenting. Nigel tried to redeem himself by building a sad fire. The air, damp and heavy, seemed to want to extinguish it. We crouched around its phantom heat pretending to warm our hands.

I retreated into my tent to finish the day’s reporting, then flipped and rolled inside my mummy bag, trying to get warm if not comfortable. I didn’t exactly fall asleep,

Human nature was to fight, to oppose things we didn't understand, and to obliterate, the way an avalanche knocks all the trees flat.

but my mind left my body for a time. I walked in the forest at dusk, and the air was thick with mist. I found myself reaching through it, as if to pull a curtain aside.

I arrived at the mouth of a cave. It was a dank, mold-prone place, yet I proceeded, drawn in by an irresistible curiosity. A figure was waiting for me inside, sitting by a small crackling fire. I approached with my whole body tensed, fearful of making a sound. But then he swept the earth with a hairy hand, brushing away the spiders so I might sit.

The creature, if I could call him that, regarded me apologetically. He had nothing to offer but a couple of skunk cabbage stamens, which he was roasting atop some dying embers. They were probably not to my taste. And, just like that, I came to understand that he was conveying meaning to me, precisely and fully, only not in linguistic form. He had no interest in doing me harm. He was a vegetarian.

I found him incredibly ugly, much less like Chewbacca than conventional imagination would have it and more like an extremely hirsute giant man. He smelled like a cross between a wet dog and a locker room, yet he possessed an intense physical charisma: I couldn't look away from his huge forearms, his enormous fleshy earlobes, his monstrous genitals hidden away in a thicket of dark pubic hair. I felt, I'm not embarrassed to admit, completely drawn to him.

I knew he could crush me with one swipe of his massive arm. But there was a noble regret to his demeanor, as if he'd read my mind about his musky aroma. He was sorry for the state of his dwelling. Evolution had blessed him with opposable thumbs but none of humanity's adaptations.

I felt a wavelet of guilt. Wasn't I the one intruding in his moss-strewn bachelor cave?

It's all right, he indicated with a gentle grunt. *I invited you.*

He slid a twig into the matrix of the fire, and we watched it catch and flicker. He'd observed our party since we arrived in his forest, selecting one of us in the hope of averting conflict. He'd chosen me, he clarified, because

my thoughts were direct and unambiguous. Somehow, he communicated this preverbally, in the metaphor of consciousness. He painted for me an image on the canvas behind my eyes: a clear brook running straight downhill.

So you communicate... telepathically? I wondered.

All at once, I felt strangely naked and undone, just sitting next to him. It astonished me that two minds could cleave to each other so immediately, without any resistance. There was no way to hide, to deceive, no escape from being *known*. It was beautiful, but also utterly terrifying, to be thusly invaded. I found myself trying to slam the doors of memory to prevent his access, but it was too late, he'd already arrived.

He showed me a lone tree, bereft of leaves, no longer alive but still standing in a dappled, verdant forest. I knew he was showing me the space left by my mother's death.

What is your name?

He didn't have one, just an olfactory signature—unique, pungent—that told all his fellow creatures who he was, where he'd been, and how long ago he'd passed by.

Remarkable.

He turned his roasting dinner and illuminated for me the ways of *Giganto*, confirming many of my theories. He'd spent most of his earthly existence alone. He did not have a "wife" per se, but there was a female companion—here I sensed the heavy weight of responsibility. His consort lived, one valley over, with their offspring. When these younglings matured, they'd set off to find their own stomping grounds, remote valleys where others of their kind had died out. He met his mate every summer, for conjugal purposes, up in the alpine meadows. I sensed no shame. It was a matter of bodily function and instinct, a duty to one's own genetic material, like drinking or eating.

He had three children, but one had died of a fever: *fire burning underground*. He thought this to me without pain or emotion. In his eyes, love contained the possibility—no, the certainty—of loss. This concept had no name, just a smell. The bright green fragrance of vegetation in the spring. I detected reverence—a crude form of spirituality, even.

Wasn't he lonely?

It was his nature to be alone. Nature, nature, nature. As we communicated, he kept repeating this concept, the ruling principle of *Giganto* life. Human nature was to fight, to oppose what we didn't understand, and to obliterate, the way an avalanche *knocks all the trees flat*. That's why we needed language, to explain our benighted existence to one another. Again, he related this without judgment.

He'd come close to humans many times, had watched them from the bluffs or concealed in the greenery. He found our thinking, even from afar, tricky, muddy, *a swollen river in back-eddy*. He wondered if I found it difficult to live in such confusion. He was sorry that my

kind was so incapable of restraint. We could not see the inevitable coming. The time of *Giganto*, living as they did among the glaciers and alpine tundra, would soon end. Extinct. Gone. A hot lump rose in my throat, and I tried to swallow it down even though my attempts at hidden feelings were pointless.

How many of you are left?

He showed me a night sky dotted with stars. Not many, scattered wide, separated by unfathomable distances.

Go home, he said. Don't return.

I apologized. I acknowledged that he might be right about humanity. But I didn't want to leave. I still had so many questions and no recording equipment of any kind.

*Goodbye, female human, he said. I saw a lovely field of purple fireweed, the blossoms half-turned to cot-
tony seed. I think he was referring to my place in the
life cycle. Live well.*

Inside my dream, my eyes fogged. I knew I'd glimpsed the wonder of a lifetime but come away without a whiff of evidence. I scratched around for my notebook and pen so I could capture a small fragment of what had been revealed to me, and in an instant, I was back in my tent, pawing the nylon floor. I was alone, returned to my familiar world.

THAT'S WHEN NIGEL STARTED SCREAMING. I jolted upright in my sleeping bag, my heart banging away like a piston. I always slept with my clothes on, in the field, but it still took me what felt like an agonizing amount of time to scramble from my mummy bag and shove my feet into my boots. I'd gotten halfway through my zippered screen when the sky cracked with a deafening boom. The echo rumbled around the valley.

Nigel appeared in the beam of my headlamp. He wore a T-shirt and pants and appeared to be glistening with sweat. Camryn and Dr. Krentz had also emerged in slow-moving bafflement.

"You brought a gun?" I asked.

The weapon dangled from his right hand. Nigel must not have had a clue how to use it. Camryn plucked it from his trembling fingers and reengaged the safety.

"What did you do?" Camryn asked.

"I don't know," Nigel said.

He told the story in a jumble of words: It was dark. He was roused from sleep by the snap of a branch outside his tent. He emerged without a flashlight and came upon a large shadow, only he couldn't tell what it was. There was fur and a bad smell. It stood up on two legs and huffed at him.

"So, a bear?" said Camryn.

Nigel had fired into the air to scare it off, or so he claimed.

"You've frightened the daylight out of every specimen from here to Alaska," said Dr. Krentz, who was now

"Christ—the size of that thing!"

"It's not a thing," I said, my voice gluey with emotion.

terrifically vexed, an effect undone by the fact that he was wearing flannel pajamas.

"Yes!" Nigel said. "That was the point."

My adrenaline had fuzzed a little by then, but my eye was drawn to the gun in Camryn's hands. Krentz was right: every sentient organism in Area 51 was now alerted to our presence. But still I felt an almost biological urge to run into the night, after *Giganto*, who had come so close, just within my reach.

"I thought you said you weren't afraid of a little wildlife?" Dr. Krentz asked.

"Little?" said Nigel, pressing his palms to his thighs. "Christ—the size of that thing."

"It's not a thing," I said, my voice gluey with emotion.

Everyone turned to me, blinding me with their headlamps, but I decided that I wouldn't say another word.

IN THE MORNING, I discovered a trail of black drops in the grass. I crouched to swab them and the cotton came back smeared an oxidized crimson.

At the campsite, Nigel was sheepishly contemplating our extinguished fire, looking like he'd slept in his crinkled anorak. "You did this," I said, brandishing my latex gloves. I struggled to keep my voice away from the cliff edge of hysteria.

"I couldn't see!" he said.

"Optimal time for gunplay," I replied.

"You're acting like I shot your dog."

He'd wounded our subject specimen. But the crime felt worse than that, as if he'd wounded some wild and rare thing of my imagination, and now it had escaped from my grasp. I scanned around camp: there was the ATV spattered with mud, our food barrel hung up in a tree.

"Happy now?" I asked. "Got your culminating event? You just *shot our specimen.*"

Camryn materialized at my side in a gesture of camaraderie that surprised me. She was wearing a little backpack and carrying what looked like a disassembled fishing rod. I admit I'd been a little bit wrong about her. Maybe a lot wrong. My compass needle was spinning.

"Where the hell is Krentz?" I shouted.

Camryn snapped her rod at the air and it assembled into a hiking pole. She pointed its tip at the granite head-wall that loomed above us, the bluffs peeking out from the trees. “Up there,” she said.

Of course, I thought. He’d probably set off before dawn, with his outsize dreams of emeritus glory, hot on the trail of his limping beast.

We turned to Nigel, who folded his arms across his chest. “No way,” he said. “Not a chance.” The longer we gawked, the tighter the constriction of his limbs. I envied his ability to detach himself so totally from the expedition. I worried what we might find up there too.

WE PACKED WATER, spare clothes, the expired cashew-coconut energy bars that nobody wanted, plus Nigel’s sidearm, which Camryn still had in her possession. “Just in case,” she said. A first-aid kit, that’s what I brought.

We followed the dark drops through the trampled foliage. Camryn explained that animals typically sought to bed down when they’d been wounded. They took the path of least resistance. But this creature had taken routes that confronted every obstacle. We bushwhacked under branches, over fallen logs, across creeks whose icy flow overran my boots. Inevitably, we hit the snow, where the trail continued in a Morse code of pink dots accompanied by Krentz’s footprints.

“Looks like a flesh wound,” said Camryn.

This was a huge relief to me. As was our silent agreement about the sort of beast we were tracking. We examined the prints in the snow, which looked as if they’d been made by a very large, shuffling human in thick socks. The tracks were indistinct. Whoever made them was dragging something behind, a log or a branch, perhaps.

“It’s left-handed,” said Camryn.

We post-holed through the snow and came out above the trees. At Camryn’s pace, I felt like an Everest climber who refuses to be left behind in the death zone. Then the clouds broke apart and we experienced a sudden blast of sunshine so intense I regretted my lack of sunglasses. I stripped off my jacket and tied it around my waist.

The blue square of Krentz’s coat appeared in the distance. He’d left it unzipped, and against the white slope before us, it resembled a lazily waving flag. We caught up to him easily; except at times like these, it was easy to forget that he was a senior citizen. He turned to me, his brow furrowed in determination. “Did you bring the binoculars?”

“No,” I replied.

He regarded me testily and resumed his fervent trudge. I fell in line behind him—it was my habit.

We made it as far as the ridge, but then the trail just disappeared, as if the maker of the dots of blood and the footprints had been raptured on the mountainside.

Our little group gathered closer to make sense of it, but the tracks were confused, overlapped.

“Not as dumb as I thought,” said Camryn.

He’d been dragging a big branch to obscure the direction of his travel. It seemed my *Giganto* had climbed up, turned around, then retraced his steps downslope only to vanish again. I might have laughed at the cleverness of this strategy, but something in me, oiled by my former ambition, locked up solid. I caught a vertiginous glimpse of the watershed below, like a little diorama of our recent adventures. Perhaps he’d led us up here to make some kind of point.

“An animal this big doesn’t just vanish,” said Dr. Krentz. Then he zipped up his coat, his old eyes watering, and shrugged himself deeply into his sleeves. He peered up at the surrounding peaks as if looking for somewhere else to go.

I slid the dart gun from my mentor’s hands. Then I touched his shoulder, the one and only time. “Dr. Krentz,” I said, “I’m so sorry.”

He’d never find his *Giganto*, not the way I’d found mine.

AFTER MY MOTHER DIED, all those years ago, I took myself to the remake of *King Kong* starring Naomi Watts and that rubber-faced dipshit Adrien Brody. The love story was not between the two leads, Ann and Jack, but between Ann and Kong. I sat in the back row of the mostly empty theatre and wept into my sleeve. I understood that she loved the big beast, whose hideous form concealed an intelligence only she could discover. They were soul mates, doomed to oblivion by the fact of their mismatched bodies.

When it was over, I squinted out from the theatre. There was a strong, melancholic tug in my chest, as if some residue of sadness had lodged there. In a way, it was the beginning of my affection for *Gigantopithecus*, a similarly fascinating and misunderstood creature.

I never intended to become a hunter of gentle monsters. *Live well*, he’d said. Now, I felt pinned to the mountainside, sweaty, clobbered by deep fatigue. I wanted to lie down in the snow and wait to be swallowed by time, roaring forward through decades, through my own molecular disintegration into dust and peat. Just as *Giganto* would dissolve into the unknowable beyond. The valley would mourn and then resume its ancient genuflections. Birds and wind. Running water. Snow in the winter, melt in the spring, then the birth of violent, radical green. Stumps would become fodder for new trees. Everything would morph and revolutionize, but not to the naked eye. ♣

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FICTION

PRIVATE HANDS

BY MICHAEL LAPOINTE

✱ **HE WAS COMING FOR ROCK AND DISNEY.** My instructions were to prepare the Mickey room, and because Harvey sensed a chance to dump the Hendrix Strat, polish and tune it and prime the amp. The millionaire's strums should sound just like Jimi's.

On the day of the visit, the four of us—Harvey and I, Paul and his own assistant—toured the Upper Haight house. About fifty, Paul wore faded blue jeans and had his head shaved, cheeks inflamed with rosacea. He'd made his money in pesticides, Harvey told me, and was worth about \$200 million.

Disney stuff always sold itself, and Paul swiftly chose two Mickey Mouse signs, engine oil ads from the '30s—incredibly rare, \$1,000 apiece. Once Harvey and Paul finished doing business, they'd retire to the front room to play pinball while I finalized the transactions with Paul's assistant.

"Nineteen-sixty-three Fender Stratocaster," Harvey said, opening the case on the rosewood table. "Hendrix played it in '65 at the Juggy Sound Studio after leaving Little Richard. You can see the tremolo arm's been modified so he could play left handed."

"All right, very cool."

Paul hefted the guitar, studied its face, and slung it on. I felt Harvey's eyes on me as I ducked to plug it into the amp. When Paul struck a chord, it sounded full, finishing with a fuzzy edge that evoked the Hendrix splendour.

"Isn't that something," Harvey suggested.

"What are you thinking?" Paul asked.

"I could let it go for 500 thou."

By the glance Paul exchanged with his assistant, I could tell he wouldn't bite. The price was a problem. Harvey could normally negotiate down, but he'd overpaid for the Strat, a rare miscalculation, leaving no room to manoeuvre.

"Let's put this aside for now," Paul said, and I was there to take the guitar. "What else are you sitting on?"

To accentuate the Strat, I'd arranged a display of rock memorabilia—original Grateful Dead poster art, unused Beatles tickets, a test pressing of *Led Zeppelin III*—nothing over \$5,000. Paul looked the table over approvingly.

"This is the thing with Harvey," he told his assistant. "You know you're getting only the very best stuff."

"We take pride in ownership," Harvey said.

"But guitars. I'm really after guitars."

"The Strat is the piece we're looking to part with right now."

It wasn't my place to speak, but I could see Paul's interest wavering, and I knew Harvey would be depressed and furious if he didn't parlay this visit into more. I quickly cupped Harvey's ear and said, "The Jasper."

My mistake was clear at once. He waved me off.

"What is it?" Paul said.

I stood in the corner, regretting my initiative.



Harvey sighed. “I’ve had another guitar for a little while now. Abel Jasper played—”

“Abel Jasper?” asked Paul. “The folk singer, the dandelion guy?”

“Yeah.”

There was a flash of excitement. “You have one of his guitars?”

Harvey buried his reluctance and signalled for me to retrieve it. I rushed to storage and gave the guitar a quick once-over. Its tune had held. I was back in a minute.

“Well goddamn,” Paul said when Harvey opened the case to reveal the modest acoustic instrument with a dirty rope for a strap. Tiny flecks of red paint were sprayed across its face.

“I didn’t know you were a fan,” Harvey said. “He’s not exactly Hendrix.”

“My dad came up in the Depression,” Paul said, a little quieter now, running a finger along the neck. “He loved this music.”

“Well, if you’re a Jasper collector, this is the piece to have. He played this guitar from about ’33 to ’40, which covers the most prolific period of his songwriting and virtually all the recordings.”

Paul touched the high string, and it sang. “Dare I ask how much?”

“I could let it go for a hundred thou.”

The number surprised me. I knew what he’d paid for it. But Harvey could see Paul was falling in love.

“That doesn’t sound crazy,” Paul said. “I assume you can show provenance?”

“That’s why I didn’t mention the guitar right away. The provenance is still a work in progress.”

“But you have something, right?”

Harvey gave me a nod. It was a gamble. I opened the case’s compartment, removed the slip of paper, and handed it to Paul.

He read: “This is to verify that Abel Jasper played this May-Bell acoustic guitar for many years, before giving it away in 1940. Certification made by the Museum of the Dandelion, 1979.”

When he folded the paper, Paul laughed. “Harvey, what is this?”

“Like I said, we’re still working on it. But I’m confident that you’re looking at Jasper’s guitar. I wouldn’t show it to you if there was a shadow of a doubt.”

“I trust you, of course,” Paul said, “just not to the tune of \$100,000.”

“I understand.”

Paul couldn’t take his eyes off the guitar. Then his reverie snapped. He gently closed the case and passed a smile around the room.

“Authenticate the guitar, Harvey, and I’ll buy it.”

★ **THE JOB WITH HARVEY SISKIND** wasn’t meant to last forever. Out of college in ’95, grades undistinguished, I’d taken a one-year unpaid internship at an

accounting-software company in Seattle. I'd hoped to make myself indispensable, but as the end of the year approached, the company had no place for me, the next intern was incoming, and I was grasping for some way to shake my student loans. That's when my boss mentioned that a client in San Francisco needed a personal assistant. The details were hazy, but the client was indisputably rich, so maybe I'd kill my debt in a few effortful years.

I moved to San Francisco in '96, but four years later, there was no end in sight. Harvey kept me on a wage low enough that, despite the occasional twenty-five-cent raise, there was nothing left over at the end of the month. At Christmas, or when we closed a big sale, his idea of a bonus was to buy me a suit. He believed himself a generous employer but didn't seem to notice that the cost of living had changed since the '70s, when he paid off his house in the Upper Haight and devoted himself to the collection.

My job title was personal assistant, but all my duties pertained to Harvey's collection. Having made a fortune in nutritional supplements, he'd indulged his love of pop culture by amassing, in addition to all the Hollywood and rock memorabilia, a profusion of midcentury collectibles and rare Americana. I had to keep everything in pristine working order. You never knew when a middle-aged filmmaker, in a fit of nostalgia, would pay thirty grand for a Wurlitzer jukebox full of doo-wop 45s.

Harvey's collection was a self-sustaining, self-replicating organism. He never put money in; he just sold a piece and reinvested. That's why an item like the Hendrix Strat could become such an albatross: it limited his ability to acquire. If, on the other hand, he could flip something like the Abel Jasper guitar, which he'd bought for next to nothing, then all would be well in the spreadsheet that monitored the collection's fiscal health.

Provenance was everything. A purchase had to be like a royal marriage, the lineage assured. That wasn't usually a problem. Most of Harvey's items had already been collected and came with certificates of authenticity from reputable sources, and when Harvey discovered something for himself, he could send it away to a trusted expert who'd authenticate it for us. Occasionally it fell to me to research an item, and then I'd spend days, sometimes weeks, compiling a dossier on, say, a spotlight from the Paramount studios, to show just which stars it had shone on.

Right away, however, we knew establishing provenance on the Jasper guitar would prove difficult. Photographs are the most persuasive evidence, but there weren't many pictures of the nomadic folk singer who'd ridden the rails through the '30s. Those that existed were often blurry or had sunlight striking the face of the guitar, obscuring distinguishing features like those red

I thought about how I'd never see the old man again, there was no record of this conversation, I could promise anything.

paint specks. It was well documented that Jasper had played a May-Bell with a rope for a strap, but that detail was easy to forge, and nothing in the official record mentioned paint. With \$100,000 in the offing, however, Harvey told me to drop everything and work on the Jasper guitar.

One hundred thousand dollars—when I tried to contemplate that amount of money, I actually failed, and I felt a rage that seemed, sometimes, disconcertingly near the surface. But just when I thought I'd summoned the courage to let it out—tell Harvey I'm poor, he had no idea what it cost to live, give me a fair cut for my labour—the fear of the bottom overcame me. *You'll end up on the bottom*: that's how my parents had put it whenever I'd complained about school or said my boss was an asshole or just expressed a desire for more, a desire that, to them, rang as entitlement or an intention to steal. *Go ahead, they'd say, get angry. You'll be expelled or fired or imprisoned, and then what? Where will you end up?*

✱ **HARVEY SUPPLIED THE FIRST LEAD.** Last year, a friend in New York real estate had tipped him off that a small folk music museum in Greenwich Village was closing and some of its collection might be acquired for a song. Harvey flew out for the liquidation and returned with the Jasper guitar. It had been a fire sale, frantic and disorganized, and the curator didn't have his papers in order. Still, for \$12,000, the guitar was worth the risk—just look at how it might pay off. Harvey provided me with the curator's information, and I booked a red eye to New York. Take no chances, he said, and get the documents in your hands.

The trip came at an awkward time, straddling the first of the month. When I'd moved to San Francisco, I'd answered an ad from a couple seeking a roommate in the south Mission, not far from Cesar Chavez. Cat's parents had given her and Steven the down payment on a two-bedroom live/work space as a wedding present. Needing help with the mortgage, the couple rented out their other bedroom. They were simultaneously my roommates and my landlords and, to a certain extent,

my friends. Cat in particular tried looking out for me, especially once she understood the situation with my debt, showing me all the inexpensive grocery stores so I'd make rent on time. Even so, when I boarded the plane to New York, I knew I'd need an extension for December 1.

The curator of the Museum of the Dandelion, a man named Martin Maggio, agreed to meet at his apartment in the Village. When he answered the door, I found a small man with bloodshot eyes and a brittle white beard, wearing a leather vest over a paisley shirt. We settled in the living room with cups of sour Chardonnay, Martin on the threadbare couch while I perched on a stool. The place smelled like rat shit, and where the floor wasn't covered by rugs, the hardwood had splintered. He'd been renting there since 1962, he said. The couple upstairs paid eight times more.

"I named the museum after Jasper's song," Martin told me. "We opened in '71 to preserve the history of the folk music movement. Thirty years later, what thanks we get. They condemned the building. Urban blight, they called it. We couldn't survive. We'd never charged admission. I had to sell off the collection just to claw back to zero."

He asked if I knew Jasper's great song, "Dandelion Blues," and I said no, I'm sorry, I didn't really know a lot about the music.

"Oh my," Martin said, and crouched beside a row of vinyl records on the floor. He pulled one out, placed it on the turntable, and I watched the wobbling black edge as it played. The music sounded kind of primitive, just a standard bluesy melody for acoustic guitar.

"He played that May-Bell like a banjo," Martin said, eyes closed. "Rhythmic action on both hands. Thunderous harmonica."

Jasper started singing, but his Texas accent was so thick, and the quality of the recording so poor, it all seemed dusty, obscure, and I couldn't make it out.

"The dandelion is the people's flower," Martin explained. "Common. Unwanted on the tycoon's lawn. Riding the rails one day, Jasper saw the sun rise over a whole field of dandelions, and he beheld that yellow fire he's singing about, you hear?"

I thought maybe I heard something about a yellow fire.

"The song is a call for the common man to unite and take what's rightfully his. This line right here—listen."

I leaned closer to the wooden speaker but shook my head.

"Your ears are ravaged," Martin said.

"I'm sorry."

"He's singing about dandelions on the White House lawn. Listen. They're overgrowing Capitol Hill."

"I see," I said as the song ended. "I think I get it."

"When the dandelion flowers," Martin said, "its seed becomes a drifter, and you never know where it might

land and spark a whole new conflagration. Do you see the significance of what he's saying? Do you understand the courage it can give a man?"

I nodded with a serious expression, though the ideas meant nothing to me. Finally, I came around to why I was there.

Martin refilled his cup. "When I bought the guitar," he said, "it became the soul of the museum. If you've held it in your hands, then you know the righteous anger that blazes right through it."

I thought of the millionaire, almost afraid to pluck a string.

"I won't lie to you," Martin said, "selling it to your boss was a low, low day. I didn't have the money to advertise the sale, otherwise I never would've sold it to him. I don't believe in collecting."

I said I understood, but he'd sold it anyway.

"Yeah," Martin muttered. "I sold it anyway."

"Do you remember where you acquired it?"

"I bought it off Lonesome Lonni Nolan's wife, after he died. That was '79, and I paid \$7,000. I had to borrow from everyone to get the money, but the community came together. They knew how important it was to keep the guitar here in the Village, because this is where the soul of Jasper—I mean the movement he planted in the '30s and '40s—where it really flowered. Not that anyone seems to know a goddamn thing about it anymore."

"Do you have documentation to this effect? Can you prove, somehow, that you bought it from—what's his name?"

"Lonni Nolan," he said, irritated. "Lonesome Lonni, 'The Ballad of the Pony Express,' 'Cherokee Blues.'"

"I'm really sorry."

"Sweet lord. Well, we didn't keep receipts, if that's what you mean. But I might've mentioned it in a journal somewhere."

"If it isn't too much trouble."

Martin had sunk into the couch, swirling his wine, but I just held my eyes on him until he sighed and went into the bedroom. I followed. There was an unmade pullout bed covered in paperbacks. The walls were veined with cracks. Martin opened a filing cabinet in the corner of the room and began digging through it. What had once been his museum was now contained in this cabinet. After a few minutes, he produced some notebooks bound in leather and brushed through them, eventually finding an entry from '79.

"Here," he said. "That what you're looking for?"

The entry described Martin's purchase of Abel Jasper's guitar from Melissa Nolan, wife of Lonesome Lonni Nolan. The price had actually been \$5,000. But, even better, the entry also said, *Lonni was given the guitar by Christian Royce of Dallas, TX.*

"Who's Christian Royce?" I asked.

Martin took the journal back and stared at the entry for a minute. Royce was a farmer from Texas, he said, the one who originally got the guitar from Jasper. “He lived in the Village for a while in the ’60s. Used to sing a little but never caught on. Why he gave the guitar to Lonni is anybody’s guess.”

“Would Nolan’s wife remember?”

Martin said she’d died years ago.

I was thinking about the provenance. The Nolan ownership was a regrettable gap, but if this Christian Royce were still alive and could testify to having given the guitar to Nolan, it was covered.

“It’s a shame you won’t be here tomorrow,” Martin said. “Some of the old faces are coming by. You could learn a thing or two about the man you’re after.”

“Royce?”

“No,” he said. “Jasper. You could learn about the music—what it really means, what we’ve been singing about all these years.”

I apologized but said I was on a tight schedule. Then I asked if I could photocopy the journal. I’d noticed a copy place nearby. Martin seemed hesitant.

“You’re planning to sell that guitar, aren’t you?” he said.

“We establish provenance on—”

“I know what this is about.”

“All right.”

“If I let you copy the journal,” he said, “will you promise me something? Promise the guitar goes somewhere people can see it. It doesn’t belong in private hands.”

The old man had grown encouraged by the wine, a fresh intensity in his eyes. I thought about how I’d never see him again, there was no record of this conversation, I could promise anything I liked to get the documents for Harvey.

But all I said was, “I can offer you a hundred dollars for the journal.”

Martin scoffed and handed it over. “It’s just a ratty old book. What goddamn difference does it make?”

✱ **HARVEY HAD TOLD ME** to keep receipts but had given me the freedom to decide how much I’d spend. He trusted that I wouldn’t treat it like a vacation. But the real reason I chose coffee-window bagels and corner-store sandwiches was that I had to float the trip on my Visa. He’d reimburse me later, but there wasn’t much clearance on the card.

At a cybercafé, I crammed an English muffin, researching the next link in the provenance. Using a few different search engines, I found mention of a Christian Royce who’d played in Greenwich Village in the ’60s. The article appeared in the internet newsletter of a college radio station in Montreal, where Royce still lived and performed. But, if he were the farmer who’d received the Jasper guitar, as Martin said, then there

were issues with the timeline. The article said Royce arrived in the Village, at age twenty-one, in 1963, which meant he wasn’t even alive in 1940, when Jasper gave the guitar away.

I dashed over to the library, found the phone book for Montreal, recorded the number of every Christian Royce or Chris Royce or C. Royce, returned to my hotel, and tried them all. When I reached the right one, he seemed happy to arrange a visit. No, he said, Jasper hadn’t given him the guitar, but I wasn’t far off and he’d make everything clear.

After a hasty falafel, I headed into Tower Records. Martin Maggio had left me feeling pretty dumb about the history I was after, so I perused the folk section. An Abel Jasper CD was part of a display of inexpensive best-of compilations. It cost \$8.99, and in a rebellious thrill, I decided to charge it to Harvey as a business expense. Then I went back to the hotel and packed my bag, a little guilty about the extravagance. Today was the first of the month, and I hadn’t paid rent. I summoned the courage to call the apartment.

“I’m glad you called,” Cat said. “I was getting confused. You didn’t leave your cheque.”

“Sorry, I didn’t get a chance to talk to you about it.”

“Is something wrong?”

“No, not really, nothing drastic. It’s just that I need an extension.”

“How long?”

“Well, I’ll be back in—I don’t know—a few days, maybe, and then I get paid on the tenth, so if you could just float me until then?”

Cat had always shrugged off money. She had a way of making me feel like it wasn’t so shameful to bring up. But now her voice went stiff. “I really wish you’d told me sooner.”

“I know, I’m sorry.”

“I feel like you’re taking advantage of me.”

“What? No, I didn’t—”

“Did you consider the position you’re putting me in? I’m basically broke right now. I just got Steven his Christmas present, and now I’m really stretched. I was counting on you.”

I wanted to tell her I didn’t even have the ability to stretch. I could extend to a very definite point and no further. Then I was broke—broke broke, not basically broke. But I just apologized again.

“It’s fine, I guess,” she said. “But I’m not doing this anymore. What would you do if you were living somewhere else? You think landlords just give extensions out of the kindness of their hearts? You should think about the pressure you put on others when you aren’t forthcoming.”

“You’re right. I know it was wrong.”

“And either ask your boss for a raise or get another job.”

✱ **“EVERYBODY ELSE WORSHIPPED** Bob and Joan,” Christian Royce told me in Montreal. “Those two played into the pretensions of the Village—the epicentre of pretension. But I was drawn to Lonesome Lonni Nolan. He spoke more to the world I knew back in Texas. Folk wasn’t just an idea to guys like us.”

“You mean like dandelions?” I asked.

Cat had loaned me her Discman for the trip, and I’d listened to the Abel Jasper CD on my flight to Montreal. But the lyrics were still indistinct, the recordings garbled by imperfections, like they’d been unearthed.

“Exactly,” Christian said. “I was a real dandelion. I didn’t just dress up like one.”

We were seated in a café near the college campus, art nouveau reproductions on the walls, the faint bacterial smell of unclean beer lines in the air. Christian’s grey hair hung in strings from a flat-brimmed cap with a tiny red star, like Chairman Mao’s. Every so often, the door opened and he’d check to see who’d entered. He lived above the café and was performing there that night.

“I rejected the Village scene,” Christian said. “Everybody talked a big game about the people, but when it came to the genuine article, they cut me out. I got so fed up with all the fakes and pretenders, this was maybe ’66, I decided to hell with it. I walked away from music. The last thing I did in New York was give Lonni the guitar.”

Some young men came in. Christian checked his watch.

“My pops left me a bit of money,” he said after I prompted him to go on. I was hoping to get out of there before his show. “I tooled around for a while in the ’70s—LA, mostly, and I went to London for a bit, picked up guitar again. I cut a record with a group called Brake!—brake as in brake pedal, with an exclamation mark—sort of a German-influenced deal. Then I moved up here in ’84. The government gives you all sorts of grants and things.”

I told him about my meeting with Martin Maggio.

“Sure, I know Marty,” he said. “One of Dylan’s chief bootlickers. Kept Bobby’s boots real clean.”

I said he’d told me Christian received the guitar from Jasper. But, as I spoke, a pair of college-age women came in laughing, their high boots caked with slush, and Christian said he’d better get up there.

He employed a synthesizer, a contact mic, and a host of effects pedals. It was pretty simple: he’d strike a key on the synth or hum into the mic, then loop the sound and begin manipulating it with the pedals. Soon the various strands would merge, and he’d let this throbbing wave of noise sustain. The limitation of the technique was that he apparently couldn’t remove any element once it had been introduced, so the pattern of the songs was identical: a small sound snowballing toward crescendo, at which point he’d abruptly cut everything off. The show lasted almost an hour. I think I fell asleep for a minute,

OBSERVED AND OBSERVING, THAT’S HIM

BY ARMAND GARNET RUFFO

On a ladder balancing
off a roof. If you were
to look up, you would see
a shamble of a man
holes in his work pants
holes in his jacket
holes in his sneakers. Holes.
To those below, he is a man barely hanging on.
You can tell this by the glances
from the backyard across the street
where a couple is getting married COVID style.
From his vantage, he has a bird’s eye view
and he can see they are doing their best
to ignore the dark sky, to manage
their masks in the unforgiving wind.
A few minutes earlier, the groom’s mother
waltzed over in wedding attire fitted
for the cold weather and called up to him
to stop working. Rain coming, he said, looking up
and over, pressing the trigger of his drill
zoom zoom zoom.
But she was polite, and he acquiesced
tossing his belt of tools to the ground. Besides,
a thought had suddenly run through his brain
like a busy squirrel trying to gnaw into an attic.
Special occasions are rare at a time like this
and it was even more special
to be twenty-five feet in the air
looking down
on all that
hope.

but maybe not. When Christian came offstage, I told him I didn't have a lot of time.

"Don't get uptight," he said.

"I'm sorry, I didn't mean to be uptight."

"You're not being uptight, you're getting uptight."

I hung around the bar while he tried talking to the women. Eventually they left, the owner started spritzing ammonia on the tables, and Christian gruffly invited me upstairs. I expected some bohemian pad like Martin's, but in fact, the apartment was modern, with a home entertainment system, black leather furniture, and grey carpeted floors. He dropped one of his own CDs in the stereo's tray and that aimless music started playing again.

"I don't want to sound uptight," I said as we took seats across the glass coffee table, "but I really have to ask about the guitar."

"Just ask your questions, man. Nobody's stopping you."

I brought out photos of the guitar.

"Yeah, that's it all right."

"How do you know?"

"Those red dots." He indicated the specks of paint on the face of the guitar. "Some fascist heckler threw paint at Jasper, but he just stayed in the groove. He wasn't a pretender."

So, if Jasper hadn't given him the guitar, I asked, who had?

Christian started grinding up some pot. "My old man."

"That makes more sense. Your father was a farmer?"

He licked the paper, sealed the joint, and sparked it. But he hadn't rolled it tight enough and half went up in flames. When he'd gotten it under control, he crossed his legs and said, "He was a doctor. He serviced all the farms in the region. There wasn't another man with a medical degree for miles around. That's how he got the guitar. Those farmers, you know, they didn't have a lot of cash on hand, this was the time of the drought, so my pops would take what he could get. They'd trade you a couple hundred pounds of beef if you could set a broken bone. Every so often, you know, the really poor ones, they'd pay with some heirloom or another, then he'd drive into Dallas and exchange it for money. That's how it had to be, back then. Anyway, I was—I don't know—ten, eleven, and showed some interest in playing the guitar, so my dad wrangled one for me. It just happened to be the most famous guitar in Texas."

I asked if he had a map and whether he'd show me the region in question, but he said, "What's in it for me, anyway? Why am I spending all night talking to you?"

I told him I was authorized to offer a hundred dollars for his help.

Christian peered at me. "How about one-fifty?"

"Fine."

"Then you'll do 200, won't you?"

I found myself singing of dandelions, of a yellow fire that would burn up Washington. Jasper's accent entered mine, all our voices joined in the original rage.

I nodded. He laughed and went to fetch a map. I'd been hoping for something more specific, but he was able to indicate the general area his father had worked in.

"It used to be out in the country," he said. "Now it's practically downtown Dallas, the way the city's grown."

"I know it's a long shot, but do you remember the name of the farmer?"

He gulped the smoke. "Sure—Dearlove. That's what people always said, when they asked about the guitar. My old man didn't know Jasper, he wasn't a musical person, but he knew he'd gotten something valuable because all the farmers would ask about the guitar he'd got off Dearlove."

"First name?"

"Dearlove's all I know."

I took notes as he said, "I guess you'll probably sell that guitar for a whole lot of money, huh? How much?"

I said I couldn't disclose that.

"Well, even so, I never regretted getting rid of it. Guys like Marty Maggio, down in the Village, they're just followers, lemmings. But you have to follow yourself. You have to be your own lemming. Nobody down there ever figured that out. They were too busy strumming their little guitars, thinking they were something they weren't."

The CD ended, and it was like a fridge or an air conditioner switching off, the sudden absence reminding me that there had been a noise.

✱ **SOMEWHERE OVER INDIANA** or Missouri, I really heard Abel Jasper for the first time. I was in the middle seat of a Delta flight to Dallas, listening to Cat's Discman and gazing vacantly at the TV lowered for the movie, when suddenly the lyrics, which had all been muddied to me, became words, simple and direct.

I never thought much about the Depression. I'd seen *The Grapes of Wrath* and the Walker Evans photographs. Answers on multiple-choice exams included Okies, the

New Deal, and the Dust Bowl. But that was all locked on the distant side of the century, a time that seemed insane and discredited, when everyday Americans were actual communists, actual anarchists. Now, everybody pulled in the same direction. We all wanted the same things, basically.

If Dallas went well, I might finally get my hands on some of them. Before leaving Montreal, I'd called Harvey to tell him about the Dearlove lead.

"That's terrific," he'd said. "You come back with the provenance, it'll show up on Christmas morning."

I pictured another useless tailored suit, but he added, "You deserve a cut of this sale."

I couldn't wait for that plane to take off, wondering what he meant by a cut. I gave myself permission to imagine 10 percent—\$10,000—but, not wanting to get my hopes up, I dimmed the fantasy to \$5,000. Still, with \$5,000, I could take a healthy bite out of my debt and stay ahead of rent for a couple of months.

But then, at cruising altitude, Abel Jasper spoke, and even that amount of money seemed small and somehow futile. He was singing about people who'd been forced to sell ancestral homes and undertake the journey west, and what had sounded, before, quaint and almost gentle, now seemed charged with a changeless anger. Dust driven, locust eaten—I closed my eyes and saw them all.

Now he sang "Dandelion Blues." As the song neared the end, just before Jasper's harmonica gusts it away, scattering seeds across the country, I looked out the window. The image rippled with burned jet fuel, but the sun struck the bank of clouds below, setting everything off, and surely this was the very thing he'd seen, drifting on the rails years ago, a field of yellow fire.

★ **WIND SWOOPED OFF** the high-rise, thirty storeys of stained concrete. In a long list of tenants behind a scratched plastic sheet, it was there—J. DEARLOVE.

It took a few days at the library to reach this tower, wedged between highways on the city's outer ring. I'd sifted through deeds of property for the farms in the region Christian Royce had indicated, eventually turning up a John Dearlove. From what I could discover, he'd acquired his land in the '20s. Ownership passed to his son, John Dearlove Jr., in 1977, and Jr. sold the farm in '89. The Dearlove name then dropped out of the agricultural records, but I managed to root out mention of John Dearlove Jr.'s purchase of a unit in this tower in 1990. The timeline held together.

I buzzed the number and a woman answered, but the intercom wouldn't let us talk more than a moment, so I had to buzz a few times, trying to convey that I was there about Abel Jasper. She kept asking me to repeat myself, and I was shouting into the speaker when the intercom harshly beeped and the front door clicked

open. I got into an elevator, cables gnashing as it wobbled up twenty-two floors, then hurried along the hall, televisions blaring behind doors, until I found the Dearlove apartment.

Standing at the door was a woman, maybe sixty, with a spray of freckles, faint brown eyes, and a loose bun of rose-coloured hair. Her black sweater had a big felt candy cane sewn on. She introduced herself as Jessie Dearlove. "I'm sorry," I said, "I think I've made a mistake."

"But you want to know about Abel Jasper? Is it about the farm?"

She invited me into a small, tidy apartment with plain wooden furniture, a portable TV set, and a beaded curtain to the kitchen. Decorated with red and silver bells, her miniature plastic Christmas tree sat atop a chest of drawers, and she'd hung some dresses to dry, their folds gently swaying in the radiator's heat.

After serving coffee, Jessie sat across from me and said, "What do you want to know?"

I explained that I was the assistant of a collector who'd acquired a guitar that might have once belonged to Jasper. I'd been trying to authenticate the item, and the chain of ownership had brought me to John Dearlove.

"You have the guitar?" she said.

"Well, maybe. We think so. That's what I want to find out."

"You got a picture I could look at?"

I spread some photos on the table. I watched her lips move as she muttered.

"What's that?" I said.

She looked up in surprise. "Oh, it's just—I never thought I'd see it again."

"That's the guitar?"

She nodded.

"How can you tell?"

"Those little red specks. My brother, Johnny, took the guitar out on a painting job, got it all messed up. I wouldn't mistake it for the world. Last I heard, Dr. Royce's boy took it to New York. Fool's errand. He couldn't play a lick."

I felt the last link materializing. I made a note that we should clean off the paint.

"Do you remember how your family acquired the guitar?"

"This all happened before I was born," Jessie told me. "Dad was struggling to keep the farm, but he never refused somebody in need. He had old ways, like that. He didn't have much to offer but the land itself, which was getting meaner all the time, but as the years went by, and you started having all these folks on the move, the farm became a kind of waystation for drifters and migrants and such. Dad would let them come together and share what they had, then move on to wherever they were going, or thought they were going."

Soon enough, she said, word got around about the farm, and new sorts of people started showing up—artists, politicians, activists. They'd stage shows and make speeches and try organizing people.

"One time, we even had a man running for president. I figure Daddy's face would be on a stamp if that man had won the White House, but I don't think he sniffed it."

Those were good years on the farm, she said. People got by, together. When the troubles came later, there wasn't anybody there.

"As for Abel Jasper," she said, "I was only a little girl when he came to the farm."

"This was 1940?"

"You know your stuff. Jasper ducked in with some drifters, slept out with them, sizing up the place. Nobody knew it was him until one night he brought out his guitar. Daddy took my brother along to where everybody'd gathered. Plenty of folks with guitars had passed through the farm before, but they'd never played music like that. It came right out of that place, out of what people were feeling, like everybody's—I don't know—pain or soul was talking. His voice cut right to it. Still does.

"Jasper and Daddy formed a bond. They'd walk together, out all night, talking over the situation on the farm. Jasper saw it for the special place it was. When the time came for him to go, he gave Daddy his guitar. Me personally, I'd have turned him down. He'd played that thing for years, criss-crossed the country with it, wrote all his songs on it. But Daddy told me he just accepted, simple. He understood what Jasper was saying by giving it away."

I jotted some notes and asked how Dr. Royce had acquired it.

Jessie looked into the cup in her lap. "That was all my fault."

"How so?"

She went out playing where she shouldn't have and cut her hand on some old metal thing. Nobody thought much of it at the time, but then she started feeling sick and the cut went brown and smelled bad. Her father called Dr. Royce. By that time, it felt like it hadn't rained in years, the days of the drifters were over, and they were all alone out there. When Dr. Royce presented the bill, there was nothing but the guitar.

Jessie picked out one of the photos.

"Johnny used to play it," she said. "So did I, a little. Johnny could really pick it, though. I don't know, I guess Daddy didn't have a choice. We had a few good years anyway, here and there, but all through the last twenty or so, we were fighting with the pipelines. There were all sorts of takings on our land so they could lay them down. Those should've been prosperous years on the farm, but the construction made it so you couldn't work. They'd build roads for their equipment that went diagonal

across the land, then dig out trenches and never put the topsoil back on, all these big dead scars. I was taking care of Daddy by then, so things fell to Johnny to negotiate, and I don't know—somehow he never got his footing."

Her brother finally got so fed up, she told me, he signed the farm away, signed the papers right on the hood of the company's pickup. With the money, he bought this place in the city for the three of them. It's a good place, Jessie said.

"Yeah," I said, "it's really nice."

But she was relieved her father died before moving in. He wasn't made to live up in the sky. The farm had rolled for miles in every direction.

"You're done with that?" she said, motioning to my cup.

"Thanks, yeah."

She gathered it up and whisked through the beaded curtain. I worked furiously, writing everything down. When she returned, I asked if she had any documents that might corroborate her story.

"Why? You don't believe me?"

"I believe you. It's just—is there any sort of proof that Jasper gave it to your father?"

Jessie bit her lower lip, then went to the chest and withdrew a photograph. The edges were frayed, and the whole thing had a crease down the middle, but I clearly distinguished Abel Jasper with a boy who was holding the guitar. It looked huge on his body.

"That's Johnny right there," she said, standing over my shoulder. "This was taken the day Jasper left."

"Where's your brother now?"

"Johnny died."

I glanced up. She was peering past me, into the photo. "I'm sorry."

"It's okay." She sat down again. "It isn't every day someone asks about the farm."

On the back of the photo was written: *Johnny and Jasper, August 1940*. I was holding the provenance in my hands.

"This is sort of awkward," I said, "but would you let me copy this?"

"What for?"

"We're trying to authenticate the guitar."

"You said that. But why?"

It has very little market value without proof of provenance, I explained.

"You mean you can't sell it."

"That's right."

She asked for the photo. I handed it over. She studied it a moment and said, "I'm afraid that's how it's got to be."

I said I could offer \$200 for a copy.

"No, that's all right."

"I could go as high as three. Or why don't you name a price?"

Jessie laughed and said, “That old guitar must be worth a lot to you. How much it going for, anyhow? Maybe I can buy it back.”

I said I couldn’t disclose that.

“Well,” she said, and I thought for a moment she might relent. “No, this is private. There’s no price on it.”

As if to hide the picture from my sight, she placed it between the pages of a book on the table. I saw its frayed edge protruding.

“Hey,” she said. “Don’t look so glum.”

I brightened my face. I could still convince her somehow.

“You like to sing?” she said.

“Sorry?”

“I was just about to get out my guitar before you buzzed. You care to sing with me a little? It’ll be fun.”

I gave a nervous laugh and said all right, maybe it would, and Jessie went to get her guitar. I looked at the edge sticking out of the book.

She returned with what could’ve passed for a Jasper forgery, a simple acoustic instrument that she wore with a rope for a strap.

“Can you play?” she asked.

“I can only tune it.”

She strummed a chord. “Doesn’t need it. Anyway, Johnny could really go. This guitar was his. I can only mess around a little. You know any Jasper songs?”

I said I’d listened to “Dandelion Blues” so many times over the past few days, I could probably remember the words.

“Then let’s go.”

Jessie’s right hand picked the strings, thumping low notes with the thumb, while her left hand hammered and slid. I was so transfixed by the action of her fingers that I missed my cue. But Jessie only smiled as I found myself singing of dandelions, of a yellow fire that would burn up Washington. At first, I felt embarrassed by the sound of my voice, but Jessie gave me courage. Soon it was like Jasper’s accent had entered mine, all our voices joined in the original rage.

I closed my eyes, gave in to it completely. Let it out. There’s nothing to fear.

The song ended. Jessie slapped her knee.

“Right on,” she said. “We don’t sound half-bad.”

“Yeah, it’s good,” I said, a little scattered.

She picked up the guitar and looked at its face. “I don’t suppose this one’s worth anything to you, is it?”

I blinked, confused.

“No, I don’t suppose,” she said. “Well, it’s about time I got dinner on the stove.”

I collected myself and said I understood. Jessie went to put the guitar away. I looked at the book on the table. Her footsteps faded in the hall.

I hated Harvey for putting me here, but the song had given me courage. I could march back to San Francisco

SPIRIT AT SUMMER’S END

BY ROO BORSON

Rivulets of scent, dust,
wind-borne debris,
bent straw and bee music,
the shrunken honeysuckle
evaporating from the year,
a few flies passing nearby
swept a fraction sideways
by the air —
at any given moment
something rare and exact
will have happened here,
where the spirit lies down,
gone dormant,
whose life this was,
whose life was (all of it,
from end to end)
one summer.

empty handed. I could tell him there’s no provenance, the guitar is worthless, he should give it away.

Then the wind howled on the high-rise. Go ahead, do that, sure. And what about the first of the month? Where will you end up? There isn’t any Dearlove farm. There isn’t an escape anymore. The bottom is deeper than the song.

I pulled the photo from the book and slipped it into my pocket.

Jessie came back. I was standing. I thanked her for sharing her story.

“You’re welcome to it,” she said. “It’s good to keep old things going.”

I should’ve hurried off, but for some reason I lingered, as if she’d only glance at the book and show me how to let it out. ✱

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MICHAEL LAPOINTE is the author of *The Creep*, published by Random House Canada in June.

TOP, BOTTOM RIGHT
Untitled (Shai & Lex)
 by Jorian Charlton
 (2020)

BOTTOM LEFT
 Vintage 35mm slide
 by Clayton Charlton
 (c. 1979–85)



VISUAL ESSAY

The Way We Were

How family photo albums can make history

BY JORIAN CHARLTON, AS TOLD TO CONNOR GAREL

LIKE SO MANY Caribbean fathers, my dad tends to be reticent about his past and doesn't like to reminisce. When I was growing up, he'd often deflect when I asked him questions about his life, and so most of what I know about him are details I've learned from his sisters. In 2017, when he gave me these 35mm photographs that he took in Jamaica (where he was born), New York (where he has family), and Toronto (where he eventually moved) throughout the 1970s and '80s, he handed them to me in this ragged, decomposing camera bag, like they didn't matter at all. "They're just pictures," he said.

They're more than that to me. And I'm sure they mean something to him too, since he kept them for all this time and even thought to give them to me for safekeeping. These pictures are like a gateway into his world, his history, and whom he cares about. As Black people, we have had a lot of our history destroyed and erased. We don't often see proof of our existence at museums. Many of us don't even know our full family trees because it's harder to trace our ancestry. My mother doesn't have a family album. She tells me stories about my grandmother, but I wish I had a picture. I wish I knew what she looked like.

I think that's why the family photo album is so important to Black communities. It's why I wanted

to make my own: photographs of my family, new friends, old friends, and sometimes their kids, also taken between Jamaica, New York, and Toronto. Most of my subjects are Caribbean or of African descent. I remember looking at my dad's photos and seeing similarities in how we compose our images, even though his are all candid and I'm a professional photographer who always planned to show my work publicly. We both focus on women and kids. We both favour natural light. I think there's a tender and warm quality to the pictures we take. That's all mostly accidental, but I consciously decided to use his pictures as a source of inspiration for this project juxtaposing his shots with my own, which is called *Out of Many*.

When I had my own daughter, two years ago, I started thinking more about what I want to leave behind for my children. I'm a second-generation Canadian, so my kids are going to have a similar experience to mine, growing up here, which is a sense of disconnection from their roots. So, in a way, these images are part of an archive I've created for them. I'm preserving my own world so I can give them back a piece of our culture. 📷

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JORIAN CHARLTON is a portrait photographer based in Toronto. Her work focuses on Jamaican Canadian culture, contemporary modes of Black representation, and concepts of beauty.



TOP LEFT
Untitled (Georgia & Kuku) by Jorian Charlton (2020)

TOP RIGHT
Vintage 35mm slides by Clayton Charlton (c. 1979–85)

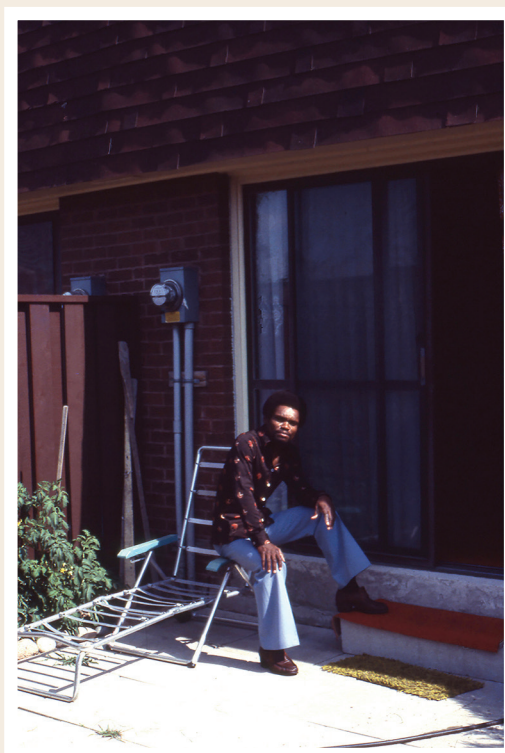
BOTTOM LEFT
Vintage 35mm slide by Clayton Charlton (c. 1979–85)

BOTTOM RIGHT
Untitled (Georgia) by Jorian Charlton (2020)



TOP, BOTTOM RIGHT
Untitled (Whak & Mo)
by Jorian Charlton
(2020)

BOTTOM LEFT
Vintage 35mm slide
by Clayton Charlton
(c. 1979–85)



FILM

The Making of *Moonstruck*

The 1987 romantic comedy starring Cher and Nicolas Cage seemed doomed to fail.

Director Norman Jewison turned it into a modern classic

BY IRA WELLS

PHOTO ILLUSTRATION BY NIKKI ERNST

THE OVERLAPPING coffee rings staining the cover of *The Bride and the Wolf* told Norman Jewison that the screenplay had been making the rounds. Still, something in the material, written by playwright John Patrick Shanley, spoke to him. It was theatrical, snappy, and, like almost all of the director's strongest work, situated within a specific ethnic and cultural milieu (Italian American, in this case).

He was also slightly desperate.

By 1985, Jewison was already an almost mythic veteran of the film industry. The Toronto native had been in the CBC's just-completed Jarvis Street studios in 1952 when the first televised image was broadcast in Canada. He shot up the ranks of live television in Toronto and New York before making the leap to Hollywood. In 1968, his *In the Heat of the Night* beat out three epochal films—*The Graduate*, *Bonnie and Clyde*, and *Guess Who's Coming to Dinner*—to win Best Picture. In the 1970s, while Hollywood was leaning in to gritty, auteur-driven fare like *Mean Streets*, Jewison made *Jesus Christ Superstar*, the first rock opera to be turned into a feature film. As the industry grew increasingly besotted with effects-driven franchises like *Star Wars*, in the late 1970s, Jewison reinvented himself as a mid-budget prestige filmmaker, the “actor's director” to whom stars like Sylvester Stallone, Al Pacino, and Goldie Hawn would turn when they wanted to play against type.

At certain moments of his career, Jewison seemed like the consummate Hollywood insider. Yet the director was keenly

aware of the limits of his power. He could never initiate his own projects without green lights from studio heads, with whom he often clashed. In 1985, Jewison was heavily invested in remaking *The Man Who Could Work Miracles*, an H.G. Wells parable about an ordinary shopkeeper granted godlike powers, which he'd loved since seeing it at Toronto's Beach Theatre in 1937. He'd worked intensively on developing a new script, and Richard Pryor signed on to star. Then came the rejection—first from Columbia Pictures, then from every other studio in town.

Jewison once believed that, after reaching some arbitrary threshold of success, he would be able to call his own shots. Yet here he was at sixty, still hustling, still facing rejection. Those rejections were “very destructive for me at times,” he confided in an unpublished archival interview. “When I become depressed and disillusioned and forsaken and nobody believes in you anymore...you take it personally.”

Such was Jewison's headspace when Shanley's coffee-stained script appeared at the director's office. Executives hadn't seen anything lucrative or prestigious in this talky, low-key romantic comedy. When Jewison read it, however, he saw something they didn't: he saw *Moonstruck*.

MOOONSTRUCK, released in 1987, has been having a moment, with some calling it the movie of the quarantine. For *Vulture*, it was the “Morbid Spaghetti Rom-Com We

All Need Right Now,” and *The New York Times Magazine* concurred: “Under lockdown,” editors wrote, the film became “a salve to many.” But *Moonstruck*'s troubled origin story appears to have been glossed over in these appreciations, culminating with Cher claiming, “We really, really got along. We just loved each other.” But that's not quite what happened. In fact, *Moonstruck*'s success was a triumph over circumstance, which might make it even more of a pandemic touchstone than fans realize.

The conflict-ridden production was, in some ways, rooted in the plot itself. *Moonstruck* is the story of Loretta Castorini, a thirtysomething Italian American widow who agrees to marry Johnny Cammareri, an overgrown mama's boy who appeals to her common sense. Then she meets his brother, Ronny, a wolfish, sensitive brute who appeals to her hotter regions. The script makes room for a colourful ensemble of supporting characters: Loretta's mother, Rose; her philandering father, Cosmo; her dog-obsessed grandfather; and an old goat of a New York University professor who is continually having drinks thrown in his face at the local Italian eatery. But the film belongs to Loretta and her inner conflict between heart and mind.

The studio had plenty of ideas about who should star, including Liza Minnelli, Rosanna Arquette, Demi Moore, and Barbra Streisand. Jewison hadn't seriously considered anyone but Cher for the role. She had a gritty, streetwise quality that Jewison associated with his nonsense protagonist.



Cher's career had foundered in the late '70s until a turn in Robert Altman's *Come Back to the Five and Dime, Jimmy Dean, Jimmy Dean*, in 1982, earned her a Golden Globe nomination and revived her fortunes as an actor. Even in 1986, while Cher was getting choice roles in Hollywood films, questions lingered about her star power in the medium, partly because nobody knew what "star power" really was.

For some industry executives, there were three bankable female movie stars: Jane Fonda, Sally Field, and Meryl Streep. "There is no clear evidence that Cher has pull," a 1987 story in *The New York Times Magazine* noted, and "some evidence that she doesn't." Surveys conducted by the private firm Marketing Evaluations had found that Cher was well known but not well liked. Her "Q score," a supposedly objective measure of brand appeal, was lower than the mean for actresses. "She's never been as popular as she was when she was on television in 1974," Steven Levitt, the company's president, said of Cher. "My prediction, based on the data

we have, is that people are not going to go out of their way to see a movie she's in." Had Jewison known about this research, it's unlikely that he would have cared. In his mind, Cher was Loretta Castorini.

Jewison was less committed when it came to the part of Ronny Cammareri. It seemed that almost every A-list actor in Hollywood, from Tom Cruise to Bill Murray, was considered for the role of Loretta's mercurial, one-handed love interest. Jewison scribbled "needs style" and "too young" next to Ray Liotta's name after his audition—the actor was ten years older than Nicolas Cage, who eventually won the role. Ultimately, it was Cher who pushed for the unlikely choice of "Nicky." Cage was just twenty-three years old (seventeen years younger than his co-star) and missing two front teeth, which the method actor had removed for his role in *Birdy* (1984). "He's not all that great looking," a *Cosmopolitan* writer claimed at the time. "Rather, it's his pouty, hangdog eyes, a look of vulnerability that's mindful of a lazy morning in bed... a brooding

look that says, 'Baby, I can be very dangerous.'"

"Nicolas did have a darker interpretation of Ronny than I did," Jewison told a reporter in 1988, "but we both agreed that a poetic quality was central to the character. When Ronny is first introduced in the film, he's in a basement slaving over hot ovens, and he almost has the quality of a young Lord Byron."

By all accounts, Cage, who was almost entirely nocturnal, brought a punk edge to the ensemble. He patterned his character's melodramatic gestures on German Expressionist cinema and cited Fritz Lang's 1927 sci-fi classic *Metropolis* as a specific inspiration. Cage also owned two sharks, an exotic insect collection, and a jewel-encrusted tortoise. "I've always been fascinated by marine biology. I don't know why. It's sort of like my bible," Cage told *Playgirl*. "I have a picture of a fish in my wallet that is just going to knock your socks off."

Cage was not the only colourful member of the cast. Feodor Chaliapin Jr.,

who played Cher's grandfather (he ad-libbed interactions with his five dogs throughout the film), had great difficulty hearing the other actors. Jewison recalls in the *Moonstruck* DVD that he got his cues by watching the lips of the actor with the lines ahead of his: when they stopped talking, he'd start. Before casting Chaliapin, Jewison phoned his old friend Sean Connery, who had worked with Chaliapin in *The Name of the Rose*. "Norman," Connery told him, "he canna see, he canna hear, and he'll steal every bloody scene in the film."

For many viewers, however, *Moonstruck*'s real star was the screenplay. It was at once ethnically specific and universal—a cornball fairy tale that was also knowing and worldly and wise. Consider the crucial forty-five-second sequence filmed in the cloakroom of the Metropolitan Opera House. Ronny has convinced Loretta to accompany him to Puccini's *La Bohème*, an occasion for her Pygmalion-like transformation into what one critic at the time described as an "elegantly tall woman" with "ebony hair corkscrewed into a cascade of curls, her lips the colour of sin on a Saturday night." But Loretta—still engaged to Ronny's brother Johnny, played by Danny Aiello—spies her father with his mistress. She confronts him.

LORETTA: Pop? Pop, what are you doing here?

COSMO: What'd you do to your hair?

LORETTA: I had it done.

COSMO: What are you doing here?

LORETTA: What are you doing here?

COSMO: Who's that guy? You're engaged!

LORETTA: And you're married!

COSMO: You're my daughter, I won't have you act like a puttana.

LORETTA: And you're my father.

COSMO: All right. I didn't see you here.

LORETTA: I don't know if I saw you here or what.

The dialogue crackles with the rapid-fire, thrust-and-parry wordplay we associate with classic screwball comedies. The language also feels authentic to the characters. Trying to pry Loretta away

from his brother, Ronny accosts her: "You waited for the right man the first time, why didn't you wait for the right man again?" "He didn't come!" she fires back. "I'm here!" "You're late!" The presiding mood is simultaneously whacked-out and operatic—"rose-tinted black comedy," in film critic Pauline Kael's words, a "giddy homage to our desire for grand passion."

Where the typical three-act Hollywood screenplay scaffolds scenes according to a carefully controlled schema of narrative beats, *Moonstruck* luxuriated in long, character-building scenes that seemed superfluous from a plot perspective. Take

Norman Jewison's own desires infuse *Moonstruck*, a film that embraces the mess and entanglements of love, sex, death, wine, music, and food.

the five-minute restaurant scene in which Loretta's mother, Rose, played by Olympia Dukakis (who died in May), spontaneously has dinner with John Mahoney's skirt-chasing professor. Mahoney confesses feeling like a "washed-up old gasbag" while Dukakis offers her theory that men pursue women "because they're afraid of death." In an unpublished interview he gave after the film's release, the late screenwriter William Goldman said, "It's a glorious scene with two superb actors, but you could cut the whole scene, and nobody would say, 'What about the restaurant scene?'" For Goldman, *Moonstruck* was the rare example of a successful screenplay that flaunted the rules of narrative efficiency.

"If it hadn't worked," he added, "it would have been so awful, you would have been writhing in your seat, saying, 'What is this shit?' But the fact is, it does work, and that's very audacious—a wonderful piece of work."

AT THE TIME, that success was hard to anticipate. Nothing on set came easy. It started with a frantic schedule that had been compressed to accommodate Cher. After two and a half weeks in New York, *Moonstruck* moved north—to a converted IBM factory in Scarborough. Further locations

included Markham Theatre, Toronto's Keg Mansion, and Little Trinity Church Park. Then, in a case of life mirroring art, the cast of *Moonstruck* ended up replicating much of the love-hate dynamic between their characters. "We are all together in a very intense, close relationship," Jewison said. The sexual frisson between Cage's and Cher's characters stemmed at least partly from an ambivalence in their off-screen relationship. "I don't know if Nicky will ever be a huge mainstream actor," Cher told *Newsweek* in 1987. "He takes unbelievable chances, and personally, I think he's

crazy—sometimes he's a blast on set, other days I'd get real peeved at him." If anything, Cage was even less effusive about working with the singer he'd loved as a ten-year-old. "I do think she needs a good director," Cage said of Cher in the same issue of *Newsweek*. "Otherwise, she's in trouble."

Cher sometimes resisted direction, insisting that she knew the character best. "There were certain things that Norman had a lot of trouble getting from her," recalled co-star Julie Bovasso in an unpublished interview she recorded alongside Dukakis. Cher could be stubborn. One day, after an early-morning call and a number of lacklustre takes, Jewison kept the cast and crew working until past noon. "It was about 1:30," Jewison told a reporter in 1987, "and I told her something authoritative like, 'We'll break when we get it right.' And Cher turned to everyone else and said, loud, so that they all heard, 'Did I just hear that? You're not going to let us have lunch?'" She threatened to report him to the actors guild.

Dukakis felt that Cher's difficulty had to be understood within the context of her long career. Cher had been toughened by a decades-long stint in show business that had begun with singing backup vocals for Phil Spector on "Be My Baby" and serving as Sonny Bono's housekeeper at the age of sixteen. "I think she's been through

so much, and she's been very aware of people controlling her, so that she's really on guard," Dukakis said. "I think that's what working in this business taught her." Dukakis thought that those close to Cher had told her not to do the film at all.

Moonstruck didn't feel like a triumph to those who were acting in it. "We were all stupid and didn't understand what Norman Jewison was really doing," remembered Dukakis in a 2015 interview. "One day, we were sitting around talking," she said, "and somebody asked Cher what she thought was going to happen, and she gave the thumbs-down. Nobody really expected too much out of it."

According to multiple accounts, pent-up tension among the cast finally erupted when filming the climactic scene, in which each character congregates around the Castorini kitchen table for a final reckoning. Everything is wrapped up in the span of a few minutes: Rose confronts Cosmo over his infidelity, Johnny arrives back from Italy, and Loretta confesses her love for Ronny. It was a complicated sequence, and flubbed cues resulted in many failed takes. Actors started telling one another off; at one point, Danny Aiello, Loretta's fiancé, clutched his testicles and bellowed at Cage, "You gotta give it to me from here!"

Jewison cleared the set to speak only with the actors. He vented his frank exasperation: normally, when he asks actors to try the scene a certain way, they listen. But this pigheaded group had stopped taking direction. He urged them to pull it together and get the film across the finish line, but they launched right into another volley of failed takes. Cage became so consumed with rage, Jewison told a reporter in 2011, that he hurled a chair at another actor.

Finally, Feodor Chaliapin Jr. rose to be heard. "Calma, calma, calma," he implored. He explained that they were working in the tradition of Feydeau farce, "and in a Feydeau farce, we pull everything together in the last scene." Chaliapin's castmates may have been baffled by his reference to nineteenth-century French playwright Georges Feydeau, but the elderly actor's intervention somehow deescalated the situation.

"We did it again," Jewison remembers, "and everything fell into place."

MOOONSTRUCK was about the deranging quality of romantic love and one family's ultimate capacity to contain that wild energy. Feminist critics like Marcia Pally decried what they perceived as the film's conservative sexual politics: a traditional (puritanical, for some) attitude toward sex also prevailed behind the scenes. In interviews, Cher often displayed an old-fashioned attitude toward romance. "I am monogamous," she said at the time. "I have relationships, not lovers." Cher even insisted on wearing a bodysuit during the film's (decorous) sex scene. Still, much of the film's manic force comes from submission to the whims of unbridled, irrepressible passion. Jewison revels in Cage's soaring monologue on the street outside his apartment: "We are not here to make things perfect," he yells at Loretta. "We are here to ruin ourselves and break our hearts and love the wrong people and die!... Now *get in my bed!*"

Some directors (Martin Scorsese, Quentin Tarantino, Wes Anderson) never let you forget that you are in the presence of an auteur. Jewison was certainly capable of flashy directorial moves that drew attention to his own creative prowess: the sweeping, magisterial shots of Jesus wailing atop an Israeli cliffside in *Jesus Christ Superstar*, for instance. *The Thomas Crown Affair* was so full of directorial flourishes that one critic described the film as "essentially the story of a director directing." In *Moonstruck*, by contrast, Jewison largely avoids drawing the viewer's attention to the hands behind the camera. Here, the maestro devotes his own immense gifts to showcasing the talents of others.

This was borne out during the 1988 Academy Awards, when *Moonstruck* was up for six Oscars, including Best Picture and Best Director. From his lower-bowl seat in the Shrine Auditorium, Jewison saw Dukakis win Best Supporting Actress. He saw John Patrick Shanley collect his original screenwriting Oscar. (Shanley thanked "everybody who ever punched or

kissed me" and "the multimedia princess Cher.") He saw Cher, dressed in a sheer Bob Mackie negligee bodice, trip on her way up the stairs (blurting "Shit!") after winning Best Actress. Cher thanked "my hairdresser" and "the lady who taught me how to speak in this Brooklyn accent," but not Jewison. He saw Robin Williams present the award for Best Director—he'd removed his glasses, just in case, only to hear the rousing ovation Bernardo Bertolucci received for his achievement in *The Last Emperor*.

The Best Director loss was no doubt lacerating. But, for Jewison, after so many years struggling to balance commercial and artistic imperatives, *Moonstruck* was an immense personal validation. The wins for Cher and Dukakis further solidified Jewison's reputation as the preeminent actor's director; just as importantly, the film was a box-office smash, taking in over \$80 million against a budget of \$15 million. *Moonstruck* had stunned the industry to become one of the highest-earning films of the year, outgrossing blockbuster fare like *Lethal Weapon* and *The Untouchables*.

Jewison's presence, especially his cinematic deep yearning, was everywhere in *Moonstruck*. He wanted to do everything. He directed twenty-four feature films and not one sequel. He frustrated critics who couldn't find a through line connecting his pictures. The director's own boundless desires infuse every frame of *Moonstruck*, a film that embraces the mess and entanglements of love, sex, death, wine, music, and food. It was Jewison's most sensuous film: eggs and Italian peppers sizzling in the frying pan, strains of Puccini swelling over the soundtrack, the fizz of a sugar cube dropped into a flute of champagne. It was Cher in a black coat against the Manhattan skyline, kicking a tin can down the middle of the street in high heels, a dreamy look on her face. *Moonstruck* was drunk with life. ☺

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THE FACTS

Ask a Tourism Expert

How will Canadians travel in a postpandemic world?

BY CHRIS CHOI, AS TOLD TO ARIELLA GARMAISE

TRAVEL IS among the industries hit hardest by COVID-19. According to Statistics Canada, the country's tourism sector shrank by almost half in 2020, and it may take five years or longer to recover. We asked Chris Choi, an expert in tourism and strategic marketing, what the future of Canadian travel may look like.

How much of an economic toll has COVID-19 taken on Canada's tourism industry?

Pre-COVID-19, domestic tourism accounted for nearly 80 percent of tourism spending in Canada.¹ In 2020, the Atlantic provinces alone—which typically bring in about 7 million visitors each year, generating \$5 billion—saw a 66 percent decrease in their revenue despite having the bubble that allowed for regional travel. And it's not just about tourism. The industry is interconnected, affecting things like sports, restaurants, entertainment, and events. Combined, we're looking at a total loss of up to \$29 billion.

This isn't the first time Canada's tourism industry has taken a hit. In the past two decades, it has had to recover from major events like 9/11, SARS, and the 2008 economic downturn. The SARS epidemic was the most destructive. At the time, Canada was thought to be a very dangerous place for tourists to travel, and it took fifteen years to bring our visitor rates back to what they were in 2002.

1 Tourism makes up 2 percent of Canada's GDP.

2 The investment includes a proposal to establish a \$500 million Tourism Relief Fund to help local tourism businesses.

3 According to a March 2021 report from Destination Canada, Canadians spent \$28.2 billion on international travel (excluding airfare) in 2019.

4 In April, the federal government announced a \$1 million investment to, in part, increase tourism in Thunder Bay.

Will the federal government's recent \$1 billion investment in the tourism sector² reverse the damage?

Destination Canada, a national tourism marketing organization, has always focused on promoting Canada internationally, but now it is shifting that focus toward regional travel and staycations—for instance, national and provincial parks, lakes and beaches a few hours away from home. Canadians typically will spend billions annually on international travel,³ but more than half of that money could be redirected to local spending.

This is a great opportunity to develop travel hubs in more remote parts of Canada, like Indigenous cultural sites and places in Saskatchewan, Manitoba, and Northern Ontario.⁴ Over the past few decades, there have been efforts to promote tourism in the North, but they were unsuccessful. COVID-19 could change that.

What travel trends can we anticipate in the coming months?

Postpandemic travel, at least this summer, will be in great demand. It's called the "revenge travel" phenomenon. The problem is that it's going to be expensive. Those who were making money over the past year but stuck at home with no places to spend it are willing to pay more once travel is allowed again. Service providers have seen this as an opportunity to raise their prices. We're already starting to see the effects: I've found that many campsites and small hotels close to Toronto are fully booked for the summer, and their rates are much higher than they were last year. This is going to be the reality for the next two years. But, for those who can, regional travel may be one of the best ways to keep people safe and save our economy. 🚗

This interview has been edited for length and clarity.

CHRIS CHOI is a professor at the University of Guelph's school of hospitality, food, and tourism management. He has worked as a strategic marketing specialist in tourism for more than twenty-five years.

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