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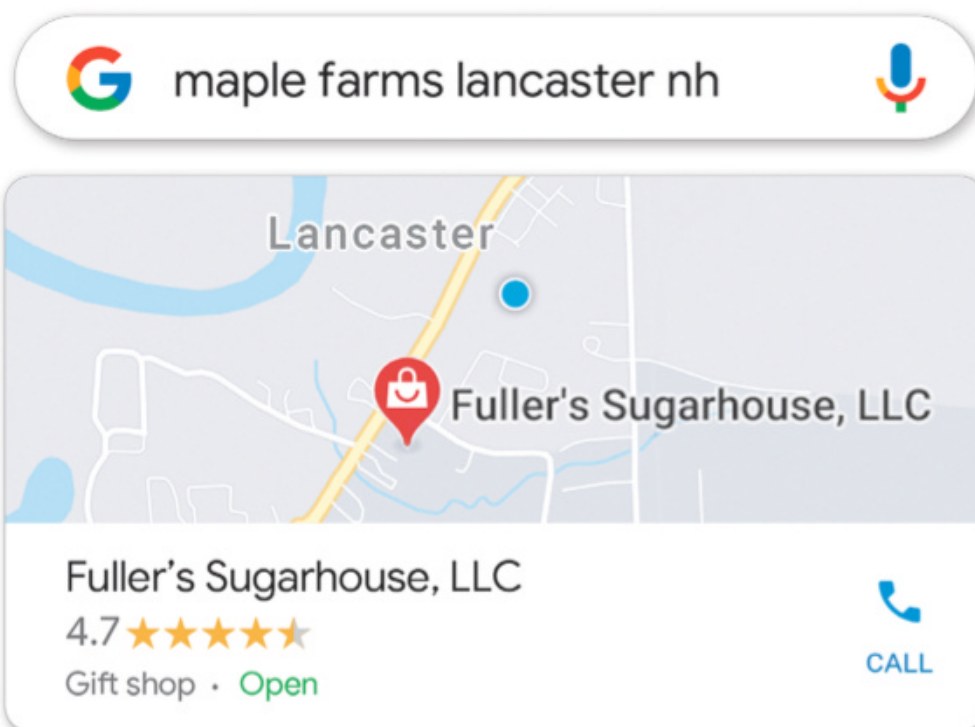


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THE NEW YORKER

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Rachel Hadas (*Poem*, p. 42) will publish her fifteenth book of poems, “Love and Dread,” next spring.

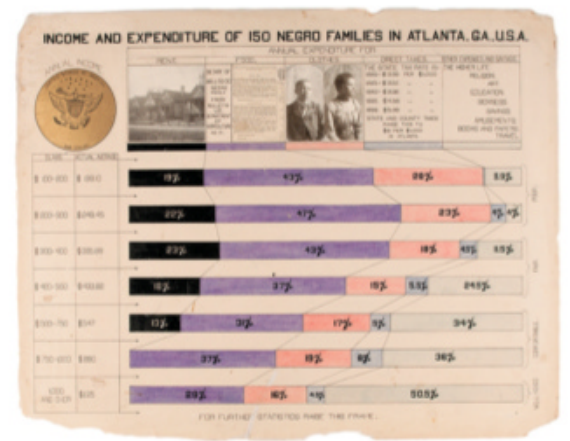
Larry David (*Shouts & Murmurs*, p. 29) is a co-creator of “Seinfeld.” The tenth season of “Curb Your Enthusiasm,” which he created and stars in, will premiere on HBO in January, 2020.

THIS WEEK ON NEWYORKER.COM



VIDEO DEPT.

“Lazarus,” the first in the New Yorker Documentary series, follows a Malawian musician with albinism.



PAGE-TURNER

Hua Hsu on W. E. B. Du Bois’s infographics illustrating black life in America after emancipation.

Download the *New Yorker Today* app for the latest news, commentary, criticism, and humor, plus this week’s magazine and all issues back to 2008.

THE MAIL

READING THE STARS

Christine Smallwood's article on astrology fails to mention a crucial fact—that astrology is nonsense (“Starstruck,” October 28th). In terms of intellectual respectability, astrology falls somewhere between flat-earth conspiracy theories and belief in intelligent design. To treat it as “a literary language whose truth can neither be validated nor invalidated by empirical science” is a mistake. Science has thoroughly documented the weaknesses in human psychology that lead people to believe in astrology, such as the Barnum effect and confirmation bias. Meanwhile, there is no empirical support for the claims of astrology. The fact that an increasing number of Americans make life decisions based on such a belief system is cause for concern. Society will improve only to the extent that we engage with reality to solve our individual and collective problems. If we choose, instead, to retreat into fantasy, we will get the world we deserve—one in which charlatans and demagogues hold sway.

Dan Robinson
Denver, Colo.

Smallwood's article leaves me, a student of astrology who is also scientifically trained, in a quandary. Astrology has been definitively disproved: astrologers do no better than chance at matching horoscopes with psychological profiles in a double-blind study. Nevertheless, I continually gain insight about myself and others through astrology, and, as I get to know people, astrological predictions about their personalities often come true. Perhaps, just as science guides the study of nature, astrology may guide our relationships with others.

Ed Weinberger
New York City

I was surprised that Smallwood, who notes that many millennials today “see no contradiction between using astrology and believing in science,” does not

mention India, where scientific progress and astrology have long coexisted. The sage Varahamihira, who lived fifteen hundred years ago, studied the sciences, such as astronomy, and also astrology. In contemporary India, it is not unusual to meet people who are scientists at work and read horoscopes at home. Though believing in both science and astrology is not new, followers of astrology would do well to remember that harboring such a serious contradiction in thought may be perilous. One doesn't need a horoscope to predict what the equation of non-science with science might bring about in India and elsewhere.

Sriram Khé
Eugene, Ore.

NEW ON THE BLOCK

I enjoyed Adam Gopnik's review of Liz Cohen's “Saving America's Cities” (Books, October 28th). I disagree, however, with the suggestion that no illustrations of a successful middle-ground approach to creating affordable housing exist. On the contrary, the history of the built environment includes promising examples. From 1972 until the late nineties, the World Bank's Sites and Services projects supported the construction of low-income urban housing across Latin America, the Caribbean, Africa, and Southeast Asia. Residents owned their own lots and designed and built their own homes, and the neighborhoods grew into largely middle-class areas, high-density but varied, that housed millions of people in dozens of countries. Such public-housing successes offer hope that a productive approach to urban planning is attainable.

David Kemper
Kansas City, Mo.

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GOINGS ON ABOUT TOWN



The flamenco dancer Soledad Barrio (above) doesn't need dry ice, multiple costume changes, or loud amplification—all staples of modern flamenco shows. What Barrio offers is more impressive: deep focus and raw power. This is flamenco as unapologetic high drama, as urgent conversation between the dancer and the guitarists and singers who feed her with their energy. Barrio's company, **Noche Flamenco**, returns to the Joyce, Nov. 19-Dec. 1, with "Entre Tú y Yo" ("Between You and Me"), an evening of solos, duets, and ensemble pieces.

PHOTOGRAPH BY PARI DUKOVIC

NIGHT LIFE

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

Roy Haynes

Blue Note

Sitting down to reminisce with the magisterial drummer Roy Haynes would be a singular experience: he's the only musician alive who can tell you what it was like to play with Lester Young in the forties; Charlie Parker in the fifties; Stan Getz and John Coltrane in the sixties; and Chick Corea and Pat Metheny in the nineties. Here, this brilliantly idiosyncratic stylist brings his matchless spirit to one of his staple venues.—*Steve Futterman (Nov. 11-13.)*

Lux Prima

Kings Theatre

Karen O and Danger Mouse, the singer and the producer known together as Lux Prima, were destined to pair up—both seem addicted to collaboration. Yet there are constitutional differences: since she first dive-bombed stages as the front woman of the Yeah Yeah Yeahs, Karen O has been a figure of tumult; Danger Mouse's tidy productions are studies in control. The duo's sweeping album honors both personalities, with the singer's swagger undiminished by the grandeur of the project. Their staging of the LP comes replete with a twelve-piece band, fancy lighting, and costume changes galore.—*Jay Ruttenberg (Nov. 14.)*

Neon Indian

Elsewhere

Alan Palomo, the front man of the psychedelic electro-pop band Neon Indian, so regretted missing a chance to drop acid with a friend that he wrote a song about it—and, as a result, helped pioneer an entire musical movement. The track, bluntly titled "Should Have Taken Acid with You," was featured on Neon Indian's 2009 debut album, "Psychic Chasms," and is considered foundational to the chillwave subgenre. The group's days of sonic experimentation aren't over: Palomo has said that a forthcoming album is "a bit of a cumbia record."—*Julyssa Lopez (Nov. 14.)*

Pivot Gang

Bowery Ballroom

When the Chicago rap collective Pivot Gang released its first project, in 2013, its members—the rappers Saba, Joseph Chilliams, MFN Melo, and Frsh Waters and the producers daedaePIVOT and SqueakPIVOT—sounded young, raw, and hungry. The group's debut album, "You Can't Sit with Us," from April, is defined by the events of the intervening six years—fame, prison, and the death of a member, John Walt—but it isn't burdened by them. The crew's familial bonds, blood and otherwise, create a natural chemistry, but their ace in the hole is how they transform resilience into refreshing fun.—*Briana Younger (Nov. 14.)*

(Sandy) Alex G

Brooklyn Steel

Though the Philadelphia-based musician (Sandy) Alex G is only twenty-six, his relentless output has yielded nearly a dozen projects that congeal the bluesy twang of Americana and fuzzy traces of nineties rock into haunting D.I.Y. inventions that are both elusive and intimate. "House of Sugar," his latest and most intricate release, sounds like he stacked his past influences and musical flirtations onto one another while also probing dark new depths of his expansive imagination.—*J.L. (Nov. 14.)*

Craig Richards

Public Records

For twenty years, Craig Richards has been a resident d.j. of the London club Fabric. Though the club's bookings range widely, Richards's style is the bellwether—simple, dirty house and techno grooves ornamented with consistently askew tones and rhythmic accents. His selections are frequently full of frippery, but at the edges of a track's arrangement rather than at its center, insuring that Richards can play long sets with little tedium.—*Michaelangelo Matos (Nov. 15.)*

Chucho Valdés / Chick Corea

Rose Theatre

The piano virtuoso Chucho Valdés first came to international attention in the early eighties, with the Cuban fusion band Irakere, and his roots in both his island's indigenous music and straight-ahead jazz remain central to his musical identity. For this engagement, after displaying his extravagant skills in a solo set, Valdés welcomes Chick Corea, an equally gifted pianist whose own infatuation with Latin music dates to the beginning of his decades-long career.—*S.F. (Nov. 15-16.)*

Taking Back Sunday

Terminal 5

In the time since Taking Back Sunday formed, in a Long Island suburb, the angsty teen-aged fans who saw themselves in the band's songs have grown into still more angsty adults; it turns out that the existential crisis of trying to function in an increasingly dysfunctional world is well served by the powerlessness encapsulated in those lyrics. Thus the mythology of the band, and of emo music itself, prevails. To mark its twentieth anniversary,

INDIE POP



The term "bedroom pop" has become shorthand to describe the aesthetic of a young generation of D.I.Y. musicians who forgo expensive studio sessions in favor of scraping songs together at home with a laptop and maybe a few instruments. For **mxmtoon**, it also meant intimacy—a secret kept between her and the strangers on the Internet who watched the videos she recorded, armed with a ukulele, under the cover of night. She sang of routine high-school problems, such as crippling self-doubt and unrequited love, with an emotional sophistication that reminded us that there are some things we never outgrow. Her audience expanded (which meant revealing her online persona to her parents) and the secret got out, but the songs on her recently released debut album, "the masquerade," maintain their profoundly personal quality. The self-crowned "prom queen of crying" plays a pair of shows in Manhattan—at Rockwood Music Hall, on Nov. 14, and at Gramercy Theatre, on Nov. 15.—*Briana Younger*



A common question about Requiem Masses concerns who they are for: are they meant to humble the living, with their evocation of holy wrath, or to mourn the dead, with harmonies that enshrine departed souls? **Verdi's Requiem**, which the conductor Teodor Currentzis and the ensemble musicAeterna perform at the Shed (Nov. 19–24), argues convincingly for the former, with a “Dies Irae” setting that sounds like the earth opening up to swallow sinners whole. The late filmmaker Jonas Mekas’s cinematic take on the piece, which accompanies the live concerts, is a bit more ambiguous. It sets an innocuous tone, with shaky closeup shots of nature—mostly flowers—and glimpses of human interventions like sidewalks, fences, and buildings, before rebuking us with images of war and famine. Toward the end, we’re reminded of our fragility as a tsunami floods the streets and carries away everything that came before.—*Oussama Zahr*

Taking Back Sunday performs its acclaimed debut album, “Tell All Your Friends,” along with one other record from its discography, on both nights of this engagement.—*B.Y.* (Nov. 15–16.)

Bicep Knockdown Center

Andrew Ferguson and Matthew McBriar—the Belfast-born, London-based duo known as Bicep—have spent a decade specializing in house records with a notably broad aural vista, from simple piano-and-vocal tunes to string-heavy, echo-laden tracks. Such dramatic pacing and meaty production also extend to their selections: their edition of BBC Radio’s “Essential Mix,” from 2017, utilizes none of their work as Bicep yet sounds precisely like them.—*M.M.* (Nov. 16.)

Magnetic Fields/Robert Forster Various locations

The recent death of David Berman left a void within the upper echelons of indie-rock songwriters; few true masters remain, and two of them happen to be playing separate New York

shows on the same night. At Symphony Space, Stephin Merritt inaugurates his far-reaching autumn residency with his preëminent band, the Magnetic Fields. (Subsequent dates will spotlight his other projects.) Meanwhile, the Bell House hosts the Brisbane, Australia, native Robert Forster, the surviving half of the Go-Betweens’ brain trust. Though the songwriters differ stylistically, they’re united by their unapologetic bookishness, musical unpretentiousness, and effortless wit.—*J.R.* (Nov. 16.)

Matana Roberts Roulette

The saxophonist, composer, and multidisciplinary artist Matana Roberts dips into U.S. history and autobiography in her ongoing cycle “Coin Coin,” a growing saga of arresting power. In “Memphis,” the newly issued fourth chapter of the series, Roberts stitches together elements of roots music, free jazz, and avant-garde assemblage to invoke an ancestor whose father was murdered by the Ku Klux Klan. Here, in what’s billed as the sole local performance of the piece, she leads a band of similarly protean artists.—*Steve Smith* (Nov. 17.)

“Buried Alive” Carnegie Hall

The young musicians of the Orchestra Now can make even Leon Botstein’s most recherché selections seem essential. In this program, they play four works from the nineteen-twenties. Two are nakedly programmatic: “Rugby,” by Honegger, and Stravinsky’s Grimm-inspired divertimento, “The Fairy’s Kiss” (his ballet of the same name was sewn together from Tchaikovsky offcuts). A concerto grosso by the influential Greek conductor Dimitri Mitropoulos embodies its creator’s nervous spirit, but Othmar Schoeck’s song cycle “Buried Alive” is the evening’s most intriguing attraction. Performed here by the baritone Michael Nagy, the songs depict the subterranean musings and agitations of a man who, waking in a coffin, finds “eternity in a single breath.”—*Fergus McIntosh* (Nov. 14 at 7.)

New York Philharmonic David Geffen Hall

Bryce Dessner came to global fame as a guitarist in the popular indie-rock band the National, but in recent years he has become an estimable presence in the concert hall. He’s featured as both composer and electric guitarist in “Wires,” a sirocco of colorful fragments and sharp edges, from 2016, with the young Finnish conductor Santtu-Matias Rouvali, who also leads works by Tchaikovsky and Sibelius. On Nov. 16, after the main event, Dessner is featured in an intimate “Nightcap” concert at the Kaplan Penthouse, where he presents his music alongside works by Luciano Berio, Kaija Saariaho, and Meredith Monk.—*Steve Smith* (Nov. 14 at 7:30, Nov. 15 at 8, and Nov. 16 at 8 and 10:30.)

Annea Lockwood Miller Theatre

Annea Lockwood, a New Zealand-born composer who eagerly absorbed lessons from the American avant-garde of the sixties, remains best known for burning and drowning pianos and for playing concerts entirely on glass vessels. Her original and expressive chamber music has received less attention, which is why this “Composer Portrait” should prove invaluable and illuminating. The program includes a newly commissioned world première, performed by the quartet Yarn/Wire, and the trumpeter Nate Wooley reprises “Becoming Air,” a piece he created with Lockwood for his 2018 For/With Festival. Also this week, in Brooklyn, Wooley presides over the third edition of For/With at Issue Project Room (Nov. 15–16). The “For” of the title refers to new pieces written for Wooley, this time by Sarah Hennies and Eva-Maria Houben; “With” focusses on collaborative creation.—*S.S.* (Nov. 14 at 8.)

Chicago Symphony Orchestra Carnegie Hall

It was a meeting of might when the conductor Riccardo Muti, known for his exactitude

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and finesse on the podium, took over the Chicago Symphony Orchestra, in 2010. The Italian music director and his Windy City players blow through New York for a two-day stint at Carnegie Hall. They conjure the Eternal City with the exuberance and drama of Bizet's "Roma" and Respighi's "Pines of Rome," and the mezzo-soprano Joyce DiDonato joins them for Berlioz's "La Mort de Cléopâtre," a powerful death scene worthy of the Egyptian queen. The second night's program returns to Italy—Verona this time—with selections from Prokofiev's stunning "Romeo and Juliet," plus the composer's Symphony No. 3.—*Oussama Zahr* (Nov. 15-16 at 8.)

"Tristan und Isolde," Act II

David Geffen Hall

The centerpiece of Wagner's "Tristan und Isolde," an opera that takes both romance and Western tonality to extremes, is the surging love scene in Act II. A clandestine rendez-

vous under the cover of night, it builds to an impassioned, almost frenzied climax and takes more than thirty minutes—and vocal cords of steel—to perform. Gianandrea Noseda conducts the National Symphony Orchestra and an excellent cast, led by Christine Goerke and Stephen Gould as the titular lovers, in a concert performance of the full act for Lincoln Center's White Light Festival.—*O.Z.* (Nov. 17 at 3.)

"Lux"

Church of the Intercession

For this week's installment of the "Crypt Sessions," the pianist Matan Porat plays from his 2018 album, "Lux," which takes light—glimmering, glaring, or absent—as its theme. It's a playlist that emphasizes devotional concept over aural cohesion, but there's plenty to enjoy in this musical book of hours. The first of Schumann's "Songs of the Dawn" beams across an awakening landscape that reappears, hazy with afternoon heat, in a transcription of Debussy's "Prélude à l'Après-Midi d'un Faune." Dusky

works by Liszt and Adès lead to the inevitable finale: the first movement of Beethoven's Sonata No. 14, "Moonlight."—*F.M.* (Nov. 19 at 8.)

DANCE

Paul Taylor

David H. Koch

In its final week at Lincoln Center, Paul Taylor American Modern Dance performs a varied selection of works drawn from Taylor's long career. The earliest pieces, "Post Meridian" (1965) and "Private Domain" (1969), haven't been seen in years. Both have designs by the American painter Alex Katz, and both reflect Taylor's time as a dancer with Martha Graham, particularly in their psychological hue. "Private Domain" is Taylor's exploration of the dark side of the human psyche, a theme he returned to regularly through the years. For a lighter side of Taylor, there is "Airs" or "Company B" (though that one, too, has its shadows), as well as the most joyous Taylor dance of them all, "Esplanade."—*Marina Harss* (Nov. 12-17.)

POSTMODERN DANCE



"Trio A," a short excerpt from a dance that **Yvonne Rainer** choreographed in 1966, has become not only Rainer's most famous work but the most prominent emblem of all the game-changing approaches of nineteen-sixties postmodern dance. It's still often performed, written about, and studied in museums and universities. Yet "Parts of Some Sextets," a work that Rainer created the previous year—and which hasn't been performed since—may have been as significant in her development. In an essay about the piece, Rainer offered her soon-to-be infamous list of the theatrical conventions she was rejecting: "No to spectacle," "No to virtuosity," and so on. The work involved ten performers, twelve mattresses, and thirty-one mostly ordinary-looking activities, arranged and timed so that something changed every thirty seconds. Now, working from photographs and five-eighths of the recently rediscovered score, Rainer and Emily Coates have reconstructed the dance for Performa 19. At the Gelsey Kirkland Arts Center, Nov. 15-17, some parts of dance history return.—*Brian Seibert*

Kate Wallich + the YC

Joyce Theatre

Outside of her base in Seattle, Kate Wallich is probably best known for Dance Church, an inclusive workout class that has spread across the country. For the Joyce Theatre debut of her company, the YC, she brings something similarly permissive but sexier, at least in a camp sense. "The Sun Still Burns Here" is a thoroughgoing collaboration with the art-pop musician Perfume Genius, who not only sings his brooding songs but co-directs and dances, too, ending up in an erotic tangle with Wallich. Amid silk and velvet drapery, all the dancers touch and writhe, doing something like Pina Bausch reimagined by Paula Abdul.—*Brian Seibert* (Nov. 13-17.)

Colin Dunne/"Concert"

Baryshnikov Arts Center

The Irish fiddler Tommy Potts, who died in 1988, is something of a cult figure—a traditionalist who broke with tradition, a virtuoso who hated performing in public. In this one-man show, the Irish step dancer Colin Dunne engages with Potts's famously undanceable music—as captured in the album "The Liffey Banks"—lacing his own rhythmic dance patterns around Potts's mercurial melodies. Both Potts and Dunne are inspired improvisers, with an open, searching approach to their instruments—in Potts's case the fiddle, and in Dunne's his exceptionally agile, rhythmically attuned feet.—*M.H.* (Nov. 14-16.)

It's Showtime NYC!

Abrons Arts Center

The name of this company of skilled street dancers is the answer to a question: "What time is it?" Usually, that question and answer come as an announcement before a performance in a subway car or a similarly contested space, but this group is committed

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Weaving has existed since the Neanderthal age, when paintings were created in caves. Yet for centuries textiles have been seen as the inferior medium. Happily, the useless old wall separating high art from craft is finally crumbling. The Bauhaus doyenne **Anni Albers** (pictured)—perhaps the most influential textile artist of the past century—took her first weaving workshop, in Weimar, Germany, in 1922, and went on to create subtly dazzling abstractions that prove that a loom’s warp and weft are the undeniable equals of a paintbrush. “Maneuver,” a six-person show curated by the perspicacious Lynne Cooke, at the Artist’s Institute at Hunter College (through Dec. 14), traces both Albers’s ongoing influence and the staying power of modernism’s pet format, the grid. Polly Apfelbaum, Sarah Charlesworth, Zoe Leonard, and Rosemarie Trockel exhibit works that incorporate (respectively) velvet, color adhesive, iPhone snapshots, and wool—all as cerebral as they are tongue in cheek. The venturesome Bay Area weaver Ed Rossbach is the closest to Albers in haptic spirit and also the most far-out in form.—*Andrea K. Scott*

to finding a place in more stable, legal venues (including, recently, the Metropolitan Museum of Art). In “What Time Is It?,” at Abrons Arts Center, the dancers share their talents and stories with the help of the actor-choreographer (and the artistic director of the company) Adesola Osakalumi and the videographer Kash Gaines.—*B.S. (Nov. 14-16.)*

Dimitris Papaioannou BAM Howard Gilman Opera House

Trained as a painter, this Greek director works smoothly and slowly, creating portentous theatrical images. The uneven floor of “The Great Tamer,” made of removable panels, is a kind of cultural graveyard, where much can be buried and exhumed. This excavation unearths dirt, naked bodies, and a skeleton, but also an inflatable globe, astronauts, some gymnastics and comical-bizarre entwinings, and multiple skewed allusions to European art, such as

the doctors of Rembrandt’s “The Anatomy Lesson” turning cannibal.—*B.S. (Nov. 14-17.)*

Martha Graham Alexander Kasser Theatre

If there were a competition for the greatest American dance score, the honors might go to Aaron Copland’s “Appalachian Spring,” with its expansive sense of space and its variations on the bracingly plain Shaker melody of “Simple Gifts.” Before becoming a staple of symphony concerts, the piece was composed, in 1944, for Martha Graham, who translated its limpid melodies into her masterly and moving depiction of a frontier couple on their wedding day. It may well be her most popular work, and is often referred to as iconic. At Peak Performances, in Montclair, New Jersey, the Martha Graham Dance Company will perform it alongside a new dance by the young choreographer Troy Schumacher—a soloist at New York City Ballet—called “The Auditions,” which is set to a commissioned score by Augusta Read Thomas.—*M.H. (Nov. 14-17.)*

“A New MOMA”

Museum of Modern Art

The Vatican, Kremlin, and Valhalla of modernism has reopened, after an expansion that adds forty-seven thousand square feet and many new galleries. Far more, though still a fraction, of MOMA’s nonpareil collection is now on display, arranged roughly chronologically but studded with such mutually provoking juxtapositions as a 1967 painting that fantasizes a race riot, by the African-American artist Faith Ringgold, with Picasso’s gospel “Les Femmes d’Alger (O. K. R. Version)” (1911). Some of the rehangs electrify, notably in the first room of the permanent collection, where a sequence of Symbolist work—by the likes of Redon, Vuillard, Ensor, Munch, Gauguin, and Henri Rousseau—leaps, after a de-rigueur pause for van Gogh, to Cézanne, who comes off more than ever as revolutionary. (The room also has six lyrical ceramics by George E. Ohr, the nineteenth-century “Mad Potter of Biloxi”—one of several invigorating nods to formerly scanted outsiders.) Piet Mondrian’s “Broadway Boogie Woogie” (1942-43) is freshly recontextualized as an outrigger to an eye-opening historical show of Latin-American art, which includes work by the ingenious Brazilians Lygia Pape and Hélio Oiticica. The best time to visit the revamped MOMA is your first, punctuated with reintroductions to old artistic companions. Masterpieces dulled by overfamiliarity in an account that had become as rote as a college textbook spring to second lives by being repositioned.—*Peter Schjeldahl (Ongoing.)*

Sarah Amos

CUE Art Foundation

CHELSEA This dense show of large prints on felt, titled “Chalk Lines,” was curated by Barbara Takenaga, a painter who shares Amos’s talent for voluptuous, galactic compositions. Amos, who splits her time between Vermont and her native Australia, achieves rich surfaces and pictorial depth by combining the printing process of collagraphy with sewing; she uses collaged and abraded cardboard to ink abstract designs on textiles, then hand-stitches thread over her shadowy patterning. This raised layer, a mix of cross-hatching and filigree, provides dynamic structure to the large works and evokes mosaics, weaving, and quilting. Amos’s abstract imagery can also conjure botanical deities, unknown sea creatures, and architecture from a lush, mythic dimension.—*Johanna Fateman (Through Dec. 11.)*

Holly Coulis

Von Nichtssagend

DOWNTOWN The ebullient still-lives in this winning show recall both the radiant geometric abstractions of Sonia Delaunay and psychedelic game boards. The Athens, Georgia-based painter renders her overlapping vases, pitchers, and bowls of fruit—as well as levitating pears, bananas, cherries, and other shapely produce—as flat forms outlined with vibrating bands of color. These are rapturous, space-bending compositions, but the unexpected showstoppers are Coulis’s jigsawed wooden constructions,

displayed on plinths, which are her sculptural début. Brightly colored grooves outline their stylized imagery, and kinetic cutouts (of lemons, mostly) disrupt their colorful planes. These curious works sometimes have a toylike, or even utilitarian, presence; the handsome “Steam and Donut Shadow” is capped by a biomorphic swoop of blue vapor that could double as a dish-towel hook.—*J.F. (Through Dec. 8.)*

Alexandra Noel

Bodega

DOWNTOWN The only unifying principle in this Los Angeles artist’s paintings is size: they’re all small, some a mere three by four inches. There is otherwise no easily discernible through line of subject matter or style. “XX” appears to depict, with sombre fairy-tale realism, a beleaguered princess, thrown to the ground; “Eep” features a cloudy sky, but Noel disrupts painterly illusion with a spiral of red finger-paint dots. Several works suggest closely cropped views of photographs (including one of a newborn, wearing a heart monitor); in others, the artist shows her surrealist side in carefully modelled alien structures and blobs. But it’s Noel’s humble assemblages, made of pastel-hued wooden blocks and dowels, that seem the oddest, if not the wildest, of the wild cards on view in this vexing, captivating show.—*J.F. (Through Dec. 15.)*

THE THEATRE

Big Apple Circus

Lincoln Center

Since the departure, two years ago, of the beloved Grandma clown (Barry Lubin, who resigned following accusations of sexual misconduct), the Big Apple Circus, which pitched its first tent in 1977, has been casting about for a replacement. This year, the star clown is Pidge (Amy Gordon), a graceful lady in a purple pigeon suit and roller skates who gets “no respect.” That’s not surprising, considering the number of poop jokes she makes, but there’s still a good amount of dazzle here, headed up by the commanding ringmaster Storm Marrero. Among the truly wonder-inducing acts—the hand-balancing duo of Dupla Mão na Roda, the daredevil Jayson Dominguez on the Wheel of Death, the Lopez Troupe of tightrope walkers (and bicycle riders), the acrobatic equestrian marvel Caleb Carinci—the clear favorites are the smallest performers: the Savitsky Cats. These Persian puffballs perform tricks never before deigned by a cat, with coolheaded panache, and the crowd goes wild.—*Shauna Lyon (Through Feb. 2.)*

Dr. Ride’s American Beach House

Greenwich House Theatre

On the surface, not much happens on the St. Louis tar beach where Liza Birkenmeier’s play takes place. Matilda (Erin Markey) and Harriet (Kristen Sieh) drink beer and shoot the breeze. It is June, 1983, and Sally Ride, who is launching into space the next day, is on their minds. Harriet and Matilda, who have been close friends since high school, so far

have not shown the decisive gumption of their namesakes from beloved children’s books. Both once aspired to be writers, and now they wait tables—they are not unhappy, but they are not happy, either. Enter Meg (Marga Gomez), an amiable butch lesbian whose gentle, catalytic bluntness forces Harriet and Matilda to face their choices. For this Ars Nova production, the director Katie Brook and her wonderful cast gently tease out the unsaid as Harriet and Matilda stumble through their lives.—*Elisabeth Vincentelli (Through Nov. 23.)*

Fear

Lucille Lortel

During a search for a missing girl in the woods of New Jersey, an overeager plumber (Enrico Colantoni) ties up and interrogates a troubled teen-ager (Alexander Garfin) in an abandoned toolshed; they’re soon joined by a Princeton literature professor (Obi Abili) who’s heard the boy’s shouts for help. The men argue over whether the teen-ager is a victim or a villain in an urgent exchange that improbably digresses into a backstory-packed moral, political, and cultural debate along formulaic lines. (The professor is a relativist liberal; the plumber is a Manichaeian conservative.) In the torrent of dialogue, they often seem to forget about the teen-ager, which is probably meant to be symbolic. Directed by Tea Alagić, Matt Williams’s play starts off contrived, becomes less convincing as it goes, and ends in a flurry of cop-out ambiguities.—*Rollo Romig (Through Dec. 8.)*

The Michaels

Public

Like Richard Nelson’s previous play cycles, “The Michaels” is set in the present—on October 27, 2019, to be exact—in a house in

Rhinebeck, New York, and if you can see it you should. Rose Michael (Brenda Wehle), a modern-dance choreographer who is dying of ovarian cancer, lives with Kate (Maryann Plunkett), a retired high-school teacher who once taught Rose’s daughter, Lucy (Charlotte Bydwell); Lucy’s sweet-natured father, David (Jay O. Sanders), is now married to the spiky Sally (Rita Wolf). Nelson builds characters who are rich in spirit and soul and sends them spinning toward and away from one another. All the actors are wonderful, particularly Wehle and the Nelson regulars Sanders and Plunkett. When Lucy, a choreographer herself, performs one of Rose’s dances, Rose, in the grand tradition of ego-maniacal, domineering artists, cuts her down. How new it still is, though, for this dynamic to be depicted with powerful mothers and their striving daughters, rather than with fathers and sons.—*Alexandra Schwartz (Reviewed in our issue of 11/11/19.) (Through Dec. 1.)*

One Discordant Violin

59E59

Anthony Black performs and co-directs, with Ann-Marie Kerr, his own adaptation of an early short story by the novelist Yann Martel, about an earnest young Canadian who, on a visit to Washington, D.C., stumbles upon the world premiere, in a condemned old theatre, of an ingenious concerto composed by a Vietnam vet who works as a janitor in a bank. The lighting, by Nick Bottomley and Anna Shepard, makes dreamy use of color and shadow, which nicely evokes the gentle, late-night surreality of Martel’s story, and the violinist Jacques Mindreau delivers a passionate performance of his effective original score (which he composed with Aaron Collier). Still, Martel’s story is a slight, sometimes wincingly callow piece of juvenilia, and Black’s version doesn’t much improve it.—*R.R. (Through Nov. 24.)*

ON BROADWAY



Few things—the “Rachel” haircut, O. J. Simpson trying on a glove—evoke the nineties as vividly as “**Jagged Little Pill,**” Alanis Morissette’s smash-hit album from 1995. In songs that burst with spurned rage (“You Oughta Know”), assured ambivalence (“Hand in My Pocket”), and the disappointment of having it rain on your wedding day (“Ironic”), Morissette gave an angsty, intelligent voice to the Gen X woman. A new Broadway musical takes its title and its songs from the album (plus others by Morissette) to tell the story of a suburban family navigating such hot-button issues as opioid addiction and gender identity. Diane Paulus directs the production (in previews, at the Broadhurst), with a book by the screenwriter Diablo Cody (“Juno”).—*Michael Schulman*

MOVIES

Honey Boy

The genesis of this intimate drama, written by Shia LaBeouf and directed by Alma Har'el, is built into the plot: as part of his therapy in court-mandated rehab, a well-known actor named Otis (Lucas Hedges) writes a script about his past, which is shown in flashbacks. The story is centered on the twelve-year-old Otis (Noah Jupe), a rising child star who is chaperoned in Hollywood by his father, James (LaBeouf). They live in a grubby motel where James, a former rodeo clown, a recovering alcoholic, an ex-convict, and a sex offender, conveys to Otis his own severe discipline and comedic craft, along with physical and emotional violence, egocentric fury, and a well of self-pity. The public misconduct that landed Otis in rehab is linked to his impacted rage—as is his artistry. LaBeouf plays James with a psychodramatic intensity that's nonetheless methodical. The strongest moments are when Otis is caught off guard: on a phone call with his mother (who remains unseen), and in scenes from movie sets where his acting and his life converge.—*Richard Brody (In limited release.)*

Marriage Story

Noah Baumbach's new film stars Adam Driver as Charlie, a successful theatre director who lives in New York with his actress wife, Nicole (Scarlett Johansson), and their eight-year-old son, Henry (Azhy Robertson). Nicole and Henry go to Los Angeles, where she is appearing in a pilot for a TV show, and never really come back; the story is as much a battle of the cities as it is a clash of characters. Nicole, while staying with her mother (Julie Hagerty), files for divorce and hires Nora Fanshaw (Laura Dern) to fight her case. Charlie fights back with lawyers of his own, though it's a conflict that neither party wanted in the first place; as a vision of good souls enmeshed in legal machinery and debased by the whole experience, the movie—fervid and funny though it is—often sinks the heart. With Ray Liotta, Alan Alda, and Merritt Wever.—*Anthony Lane (Reviewed in our issue of 11/11/19.) (In limited release.)*

Recorder: The Marion Stokes Project

Matt Wolf's documentary reveals the secret greatness of a reclusive activist. A black fe-

male librarian fired from her job, around 1960, for being a Communist, Marion Metelits considered political injustices inseparable from media misrepresentations. She became a local-TV producer and on-air personality and married a wealthy white colleague named John Stokes, Jr. In the nineteen-seventies, when VCRs were first marketed, she bought many of them, and, until her death, in 2012, she fanatically recorded broadcasts, mainly news—seventy thousand cassettes' worth—while living with her husband in deepening seclusion. (She also foresaw the importance of personal computing and collected Apple products from the start.) Wolf relies on interviews with Stokes's family and domestic staff, plus well-chosen samples of her recordings, to reconstruct her life and her ideas. (He also indulges in some misguided dramatic reënactments that muddle the film with simulations of archival footage.) An information revolutionary, Stokes, despite her decades of isolation, touched the nerve center of the times.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

Terminator: Dark Fate

The latest chapter of the "Terminator" saga, directed by Tim Miller, is by no means the least. For one thing, it sees the return of Linda Hamilton as Sarah Connor, the heroine of the first two films. She is older, wiser, tougher than ever, and still on the trail of any cyborgs who travel back from the future. The new model is Rev-9 (Gabriel Luna)—indestructibly malleable, and, for some reason, bent upon killing Dani (Natalia Reyes), a young Mexican woman. The good news is that Dani is shielded by Grace (Mackenzie Davis), an augmented human soldier who, likewise, has travelled through time for the occasion. Also on hand is a solid fellow named Carl (Arnold Schwarzenegger). Among his other skills, he makes curtains for a living. The movie drags, and much of the plot is a retreat, but the final third, loaded with shock and awe, is worth the wait.—*A.L. (11/11/19) (In wide release.)*

Waves

The gyrating and glowing images in this melodrama, written and directed by Trey Edward Shults, can't mask its flimsy storytelling or facile manipulations. The action is set in South Florida, where a popular high-school senior named Tyler (Kelvin Harrison, Jr.), a star wrestler, suffers a shoulder injury that threatens his athletic career. When his girlfriend, Alexis (Alexa Demie), gets pregnant, she considers an abortion, and the resulting conflict yields a devastating outcome that the teens' families struggle to confront. Much of the film concerns Tyler's relationship with his father, Ronald (Sterling K. Brown), a contractor; his stepmother, Catharine (Renée Elise Goldsberry), a doctor; and his younger sister, Emily (Taylor Russell). Early scenes of Ronald's stern but warmhearted coaching and the family's bruising banter suggest a depth and a complexity that little else in the film matches; the pushing of hot-button issues and the stoking of terror and anger are detached from the characters' lives and the wider world. With Lucas Hedges.—*R.B. (In limited release.)*

IN REVIVAL



Yet another masterwork made for French television and unreleased in the United States is getting a rare screening: "**Travolta and Me,**" directed by Patricia Mazuy, plays at Lincoln Center, on Nov. 15, in a retrospective of her work. The hour-long drama, from 1993, is a furious rendering of a teen-age girl's desperate passion. It's set in 1978, in a provincial French city where Nicolas (Julien Gérard), a cynical and Nietzsche-besotted adolescent, picks up, on a bet, a sixteen-year-old student named Christine (Leslie Azoulai), who's obsessed with "Saturday Night Fever." She falls for him instantly, and, when she has to break a date with him to tend the family's boulangerie, she takes extreme measures to see him again. Mazuy deftly sketches her characters and their milieu and conveys frenzied emotions swiftly and sharply; her distinctive fusion of monumental poise and reckless energy, documentary-based observation and tragic forebodings, bursts out at a skating-rink birthday party, to the songs of Aerosmith and Nina Hagen.—*Richard Brody*

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TABLES FOR TWO

Nami Nori

33 Carmine St.

On the one hand, the West Village is the kind of neighborhood where, on a Wednesday night at six-thirty, you might be quoted a ninety-minute wait for a seat at a brand-new chicly appointed hand-roll bar called Nami Nori. On the other hand, the West Village is the kind of neighborhood where you can kill time at a well-worn thirty-year-old store called Unoppressive Non-Imperialist Bargain Books.

It was during a visit to Unoppressive Non-Imperialist Bargain Books, one recent Wednesday, that I found myself having my palm read by a psychic who camps out in a nook there. After guessing my husband's initials, she said that I would travel somewhere warm next year: "I see palm trees." When she told me that I could ask her a question for free, I failed to come up with one. When she told me that I, too, could be clairvoyant, if I'd only align my chakras with some of the crystals she had for sale, I left. Back on the sidewalk, I thought of a question: When was dinner?

In sixty more minutes, said the all-knowing hostess at Nami Nori. Next stop: Luv Tea, a charming Taiwanese shop around the corner. A mug of rose goji would take ten minutes to brew, the man at the counter warned. Perfect.

If you're not in the mood for this sort of adventure, you could arrive at Nami Nori at five-thirty, when it opens, or just before eleven, when it closes. (There are also a limited number of reservations available each night.) It's a restaurant that's worth a certain amount of inconvenience. The chefs worked at Masa, the incredibly expensive sushi restaurant in the Time Warner Center. Nami Nori isn't cheap, but it's a much more accessible avenue to seafood of the highest quality.

Once you're seated, the experience becomes exceptionally efficient. Servers send orders to the kitchen via tablets, which means that plates might start arriving before you've even finished perusing the menu. Expeditors communicate like air-traffic controllers, directing items to particular seats: "Sea bass one, spicy tuna three."

A good general rule here is that the less exciting a dish sounds the more delicious it's likely to be, and vice versa. "Calamari, yuzu soy" turned out to be one of the best things I've eaten in months: pearly slices of sushi-grade squid battered in an ethereally puffy, chewy mixture of rice and tapioca flour. Nori chips were almost like savory toffee, hard crunch melting into salty stickiness, and the yogurt-chive

dip that came with them rivalled the finest ranch.

The intriguing "plum sesame salt" on the edamame, meanwhile, was overshadowed by how overcooked the pods were, and the furikake fries, coin-shaped and crimped, were surprisingly limp, though I liked the ketchup, doctored with tonkatsu sauce and Tabasco.

The hand rolls, or temaki, consist of taut yet delicate sheets of nori cupped around rice and fish like the letter "U." Fans of hot mayonnaise might enjoy the "spicy crab dynamite" temaki, which I was told is the best-seller and which is one of two rolls listed as "crunchy," meaning it's wrapped in nori that's encrusted with little barnacles of crispy rice. (The other is called "avocado 'toast.'") Fans of crab might be happier with the California temaki, which features a cool clump of sweet meat atop creamy avocado.

I preferred the mellow simplicity of fatty toro and fresh scallion to the frillier combination of sea bass, daikon, perilla (Korean mint), and chojang (Korean hot sauce), and to lobster tempura garnished with yuzu aioli and frisée. But, just as palms vary, so do tastes. One night, a woman at the bar passed a half-eaten lobster-tempura temaki to her boyfriend. "This is the best bite I've ever had in my life," she said. "Because I love you, I'm gonna share it with you, but if you eat it all you're dead." (*Temaki* \$5-\$10.)

—Hannah Goldfield

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THE TALK OF THE TOWN

COMMENT ALTER-EGO TRIPS

Donald Trump, at times when it has served his purposes, has chosen to assume different personae. There was John Barron, an alias he used in the nineteen-eighties when giving false property valuations to a reporter. Later, there was John Miller, a guise he adopted to brag to *People* about his romances. (“He’s living with Marla and he’s got three other girlfriends.”) David Dennison was his stand-in for a hush agreement with the adult-movie actress Stormy Daniels, which has now led the Manhattan District Attorney to subpoena Trump’s accountant in an effort to get access, at last, to the President’s tax returns.

More recently, Trump has shown an elastic sense of identity in ways that exemplify his Presidential overreach and arrogance. On Halloween, in a case that has major implications for both the impeachment process and the future of executive power, a Justice Department lawyer told Judge Ketanji Brown Jackson, in a district court in D.C., that Don McGahn, the former White House counsel, was “absolutely immune” from congressional subpoenas because he is “the alter ego of the President.” Apparently, he’s not the only one. The office of the current White House counsel, Pat Cipollone, has told potential witnesses in the House impeachment investigation—from Mick Mulvaney, the acting White House chief of staff, to Charles Kupperman, the former deputy national-security adviser—that they, too, are absolutely immune.

The argument is that certain asso-

ciates work so closely with the President that they are, in effect, an extension of him, and thus free to ignore subpoenas or requests to testify. Others were told that, if they testified, they risked violating additional forms of Presidential privilege. Some witnesses, including Marie Yovanovitch, the former Ambassador to Ukraine, and Fiona Hill, a former National Security Council official, showed up anyway, and their testimony is proving devastating for Trump. More than a dozen witnesses, though, have failed to appear.

A prominent absentee was John Bolton, the former national-security adviser. On Friday, his lawyer said that Bolton’s willingness to testify depends on what the courts have to say about immunity. Bolton had a difficult relationship with Trump, who fired him, and a close view of his foreign dealings. (According to Hill, Bolton called the Ukraine scheme a “drug deal.”) His lawyer added

that Bolton had new information, all of which could make him a dangerous witness for the President, particularly after this week, when public hearings begin.

But, even beyond the question of who will testify, the fights over immunity, along with a host of related legal battles, are critical, because Trump’s Presidency has been defined by his belief that he cannot be held to account. That conviction is particularly pernicious given that many of the questions at issue—What is executive privilege? Can a sitting President be indicted?—are surprisingly ill-defined in American jurisprudence. In fact, Presidents from both parties have on occasion tried to claim that close aides had absolute immunity. When President George W. Bush tested the assertion, in a case involving the former White House counsel Harriet Miers and the firing of U.S. attorneys, a federal judge ruled that no such immunity existed. But that case was settled, and never made it to even the appeals-court level. This may be the moment to establish some clarity.

The McGahn case is further along than other suits attempting to do so. (Last week, the House Intelligence Committee withdrew its subpoena for testimony from Kupperman, who had brought his own case, to keep the focus on McGahn.) The case arose from the Mueller report, which suggested that McGahn may have direct knowledge of Trump’s alleged obstructions of justice. By most accounts, Judge Jackson was taken aback by the breadth of the Administration’s claims, which included a denial that courts should be allowed to have any say in a fight between the President and Congress. “How will they



resolve it on their own, then—sending the sergeant at arms to arrest Mr. McGahn?” she asked, referring to the House’s security guard. The Justice Department’s lawyers have suggested that a better idea might be for the House committees to rely on an “accommodation process”—in other words, if they were nice to Trump he might throw a few witnesses their way.

Similarly, in a case involving the Judiciary Committee’s efforts to get access to some of the Mueller report’s underlying materials, Judge Beryl Howell, the chief judge of the D.C. district court, said that the White House’s arguments that it was going along with normal processes “smack of farce.” (On October 25th, she ruled for the committee, although her order has been stayed.) And Judge Victor Marrero, the district-court judge in the tax-return case, noted that the President’s argument would “poten-

tially immunize the misconduct of any other person, business affiliate, associate, or relative who may have collaborated with the President in committing purportedly unlawful acts.”

Marrero ruled against Trump on October 7th; an expedited appeal was heard two weeks later. In those oral arguments, Judge Denny Chin, of the Second Circuit, asked the President’s lawyer William Consovoy if he was actually arguing that, owing to Presidential immunity, Trump really could shoot somebody on Fifth Avenue and local authorities would not be able to pursue the case while he was President. “Nothing could be done?” Chin said. Consovoy replied, “That’s correct.”

The crudeness of the Administration’s arguments obscure the delicacy of the constitutional questions. Trump appears unwilling to accept the idea that weighing the President’s powers and

privileges against other parties’ rights and interests is essential to a healthy constitutional system. (The Supreme Court performed such a balancing test in ordering Richard Nixon to turn over the White House tapes.) For Trump, it’s all or nothing. But the corollary to any claim of criminal immunity is that the alternative the Constitution provides—impeachment—must not be undermined.

The House isn’t waiting for all the missing witnesses to appear, or for all the cases to reach the Supreme Court. Instead, Adam Schiff, the chair of the House Intelligence Committee, warned last week that the President’s frantic efforts to sabotage the process could, in themselves, be impeachable offenses. As the list of charges grows, more people will be called to testify before the House, and then, most likely, the Senate—and their names may even surprise Donald Trump.

—Amy Davidson Sorkin

VISITING DIGNITARIES ONE MAN GATHERS



Last month, Kip Ole Polos arrived in New York for a month of fundraising on behalf of his tribe, the Il Ngwesi Maasai, which is trying to reintroduce the black rhinoceros on its lands, in northern Kenya. Ole Polos, a safari guide and a former Maasai warrior, is the chairman of the council that governs the Il Ngwesi community and its conservancy; he is leading efforts to protect wildlife, link up with other neighboring preserves, and integrate women into Il Ngwesi political life.

On October 30th, after a quick visit to Vermont, he was a featured speaker at a gala at the Metropolitan Club, hosted by the Lewa Wildlife Conservancy, which borders the Il Ngwesi land. The m.c. was Alex Beard, an artist who lives in New Orleans and who sits on Lewa’s U.S. board. On a whim, Beard invited Ole Polos to join him the following evening, at a rock concert at Madison Square Garden. Ole Polos had never been to a rock concert, or to a place like the Garden. Beard bought him a ticket on his phone.

The next night was Halloween.

Beard and his son, fourteen, fetched Ole Polos at the Yale Club, where Lewa had put him up. Ole Polos, head shaved, arms bare, wore a red *shuka*—the traditional plaid cotton shift of the Maasai—a checked *shuka* blanket over one shoulder, and Teva sandals, with an array of *shanga* jewelry crisscrossing his torso like bandoliers. “This is me at home,” he said. He had never heard of Halloween, and he couldn’t really tell, as they struck out into the rush-hour bustle, who was in costume and who wasn’t.

Beard asked Ole Polos, “Have you ever heard of Jerry Garcia?”

“No,” he replied. “What is it?”

Beard attempted to explain what they were going to see, a band called Dead and Company, comprising several surviving members of the Grateful Dead and, as a fill-in for Jerry Garcia, who died long ago, a pop star named John Mayer. “This whole thing could really end any day, even tonight,” Beard said. “So we keep going, until that day that it does.”

“I hope it continues,” Ole Polos said.

“You might not say so, after a few hours.”

As they neared the Garden, the ratio of Deadheads to regular citizens began to increase.

“You will see a lot of *banghi* being smoked,” Beard said, using the Kenyan term for marijuana.

“Let them do their thing,” Ole Polos said. “In Kenya, it is absolutely illegal. But it is allowed in Vermont.”

Their tickets were general admission. They found a spot on the floor of the arena—mid-court. Bill Walton, the retired basketball star and Dead mascot, was nearby. Beard introduced him to Ole Polos.

“Welcome to the center of the universe,” Walton said. When the band came onstage, Walton, almost seven feet tall, held his arms high in the air. Ole Polos observed that Walton was being



Kip Ole Polos

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considerate of his fellow-enthusiasts. “He realizes that if he danced like the others he would hurt people,” he said. “So he dances with his hands.”

The tempo of the music picked up—a little bit, anyway—and Ole Polos began to dance. People offered him joints (he declined), stepped on his bare toes, and moved in for selfies, some of them assuming he was in costume. A woman asked Ole Polos what his sign was. He didn’t understand. She meant his astrological sign. “I don’t know.”

“When were you born?”

“I don’t know.” (Earlier, he’d said, “I think I’m forty-six, but I’m not sure. Every holiday, my mother tells me, ‘This is the day you were born,’ so I do know I was born on a holiday.”) When the show was over, he marvelled at the number of people pouring out through the tunnels of the Garden. He wondered, “Where do they all go?” Outside, it seemed to him that they’d vanished: “They just melted.”

A few days later, after watching his fellow-Kenyans dominate the marathon, he reflected on his night at the Garden.

“It was fabulous, man!” he said. “People take the music very seriously, and it’s clear that it means a lot to Americans. I didn’t know any of the songs. It started like a slow music, and then it got better.”

Had he found it at all silly, as many Americans do?

“In a way,” he said, with some care. “I come from a culture—for example, when someone is dancing, there is a way everyone moves. They dance the same way. Here, everybody knows every song, and yet everybody is dancing in their own way. Some old dudes seemed to take this as a golden opportunity to do some exercises. They weren’t dancing. They were doing exercises.”

He was heartened to have seen young people there: “There are things I do because my grandpa did them. The fact that the old people enjoyed it makes the young people want to do it. It also seemed that it doesn’t matter what class you are from socially. I could tell there were some very wealthy guys and also some people who probably didn’t have a home. And they were enjoying the same thing. That’s culture. At home, we do believe that the white community lost its culture long ago. Now I know it hasn’t gone away.”

—Nick Paumgarten

THE BOARDS A HUNDRED SPATS



Just before the New York premiere of “The Second Woman,” a twenty-four-hour-long play starring Alia Shawkat, of “Arrested Development,” Celine Abdallah was backstage at the Brooklyn Academy of Music, whispering into a walkie-talkie that was labelled with her job for the evening: “Man Wrangler.” In the play, Shawkat would enact the same spat a hundred times with a hundred different men. The men were amateurs. It was up to Abdallah to corral them.

The show’s creators, Nat Randall and Anna Breckon, first staged the piece in Sydney, in 2017. They reached out to Shawkat by phone, explaining that they wanted a local performer for the American production; she agreed immediately. (“I’m into these weird, masochistic projects,” she said. “This is much more of an anthropological study than an acting performance.”) The marathon experiment in intimacy would be Shawkat’s stage debut. She would be allowed a fifteen-minute break every two hours, or approximately every ten men. Her plan: “Pee. Maybe poop. Maybe have a cigarette. Drink water. Pee again. Touch up.” Meanwhile, Abdallah would be in the wings, keeping the men-in-waiting out of Shawkat’s way.

There had been a rudimentary rehearsal a few days earlier, with actors whom Shawkat called “test dummies.” But she would be meeting her scene partners for the first time during the performance. As the men arrived backstage, holding their scripts, Abdallah gave them their marching orders: each would improvise a response to Shawkat’s opening line (“How are you?”), each would carry onstage two containers of plain rice noodles, and each would choose whether his final line would be “I love you” or “I never loved you.” Abdallah refused to answer any questions about the set, and she deliberately withheld a key detail: where the men’s scripts say “Virginia throws food on the table,”

Shawkat’s reads “Virginia throws food at Marty.”

The audience was solemn when the curtain went up, at 5 P.M., but, after a few iterations of the scene (Man No. 1, an engineer, poured the contents of Shawkat’s glass into his own; Man No. 4, a sculptor, answered Shawkat’s opening question by declaring, “My therapy has been working great!”), minor distinctions began to take on significance: a slammed door or an ad-libbed toast was enough to elicit gasps. The script is laced with double meanings—depending on the man, “You’re hysterical” can be a compliment or a cruel dismissal—but Breckon and Randall had kept the text spare, wary of guys devising elaborate backstories.

By 1 A.M., Abdallah had ceded her man-wrangling responsibilities to another crew member, and the crowd seemed fully invested. Backstage, Man No. 44, a bartender, whose call time was 4:15 A.M., explained that he had volunteered out of admiration for Shawkat. “I’m the mirror for her reflected glory,” he said. When he read the script, it felt familiar. “Gender dynamics, power dynamics—this is huge for us right now.” He was unfazed by the noodle ambush.

Breckon and Randall had created the show before the #MeToo movement took off. “The male participants have shifted their game lately,” Randall said, adding that guys had been asking a lot of questions about the appropriate way to interact with their female scene partner. (Breckon speculated that New York might be more “woke” than Australia.)

At sunrise, word spread backstage that Shawkat was getting a second wind. “That actually makes me nervous,” Man No. 51, a bespectacled fellow in tweed, said. Flipping through the script, he questioned the choice of plain rice noodles. “It’s not the most romantic meal if you’re trying to fix this relationship,” he said. Pizza, he suggested, would have been a better choice.

“Pizza is more romantic?” Man No. 53 scoffed.

“He should really be cooking for her,” No. 51 replied. “Just make some pasta, come on!”

No. 53 nodded. “What’s the piece trying to say about masculinity?” he asked. “Are we really fucking it up?”

When No. 51 went on, fifteen hours

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into the show, he answered Shawkat's "How are you?" honestly: "I'm a little tired. I'm a little nervous."

"Well, I'm one of those things," she said. The audience, a portion of which had been there from the start, laughed.

With less than an hour remaining, Shawkat got punchy. She kicked off her heels, knocked over chairs, and, at around 4:45 P.M., ripped off Man No. 92's shirt. (This was Christopher Abbott, of "Girls," one of a handful of professionals to make a cameo.)

Her final scene partner turned out to be one of the test dummies who'd rehearsed with her earlier. "How are you?" she asked.

"I'm better now," he said. "How are you?"

Shawkat smiled blearily. "Better, too."
—Alex Barasch

DEPT. OF HEMLINES TEST DRIVE



As the typical man trudges deeper into the valley of adulthood, he notices that he is increasingly less likely to embrace novelty. So, when the *Wall Street Journal* reports that caftans for

men are currently having "a moment," the news can strike Mr. Typical with the force of a grand piano from the sky. He sputters and thinks, Have you mistaken me for nineteen-seventies Liz Taylor?

Nevertheless, intrigued by the prospect of wearing gender-neutral attire—caftan-curious, perhaps—one Mr. Typical recently visited the flagship Brooks Brothers store, on Madison Avenue, where a friendly older saleswoman told him that, no, dear, Brooks does not carry caftans for men. Mr. T. explained that, according to the *Journal*, Chris Pine wore one on vacation in Capri. Then he confessed to her, "I feel like, once I hit fifty, I stopped exploring." The saleswoman nodded empathetically.

His next stop was Amazon.com, where \$20.99 and one click purchased a lavender-gray cotton caftan from an outfitter called Jacansi. It looked like a buttonless Henley that was trying to colonize its wearer's ankles. Wearing it made Mr. T. feel alternately floaty and as if a large butterfly had died on him. Pairing it with black lace-up boots and a veneer of bravado, he headed in the direction of Wall Street, to Harry's steak house. Two Harry's greeters gave him a look that he would become familiar with: an indulgent smile, followed by a quick glance footward. Mid-

meal, Mr. T. pointed at the long black apron that his waiter was wearing and said, "I see that you have a low hemline, too."

The waiter replied, "Well, I'm not a doctor like you. Is that what you are, a doctor?"

"No," Mr. T. replied. "I'm just very fashionable."

"Whatever makes you happy," the waiter said.

Flushed with validation, Mr. T. wandered over to the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, where he asked an assault-rifle-wielding police officer where he could get a ticket for a tour of the Fed. The officer said that tickets were sold only online. Mr. T. asked, "This isn't about the caftan, is it?" Crushing, the officer professed not to have noticed it.

Mr. T. was met more warmly at two other tourist destinations in the financial district. Near the "Charging Bull" sculpture, a Dutch man encouraged him to pose in front of the bull and hold out the skirt of his caftan like a matador's muleta. At the Fraunces Tavern Museum, Mr. T. informed a ticket-taker that he intended to keep his caftan on in the Colonial-costume photo booth upstairs: "I'll be half Colonial, half fabulous."

The ticket-taker nodded calmly and said, "I think there are wigs up there."

The next stop was the 21 Club, where Mr. T. wrongly assumed that the addition of one of the restaurant's loaner jackets would put him in compliance with the establishment's dress code. "I'm sorry, sir," a maître d' told him. "You'd need pants."

Mr. T. muttered, "Or two X chromosomes." As he left, he wished that he had remembered to tell the maître d' that, in the Ottoman Empire, a caftan was a power look. He worried that his was reading a little too Eileen Fisher.

Waiting on the platform of the N/R train, he asked a man whose blue uniform was emblazoned with the New York Fire Department insignia if his getup was fireproof. "Nah, I'm a building inspector," the man said. "If I went into a fire, I'd probably catch."

A scruffy bystander who'd been eavesdropping looked at Mr. T. and commented, "You're kind of a firetrap, yo."



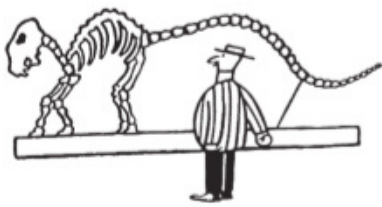
"But I won't bore you with the all too familiar story of a dictator's rise to absolute power."

Hoping to thank the Brooks Brothers saleswoman for her early encouragement, Mr. T. returned to the store. She wasn't there, so he conveyed his gratitude to a tall, white-haired salesman. "I've been a Brooks customer for more than forty years, and I never thought I'd get *here*," Mr. T. said, pointing at his caftan. He elaborated, "These are great for us guys who are anxious about the middle third of our body: I feel like I've turned the lights off down there."

The salesman said, "As long as you're comfortable, sir."

—Henry Alford

LISTENING DEPT. SLIPPERY



The actor, writer, and director Dax Shepard rounded the corner at the Hall of Ocean Life at the American Museum of Natural History, where a twenty-one-thousand-pound fiberglass model of a blue whale is permanently suspended from the ceiling. "Holy smokes!" he said, then paused and cocked his head. "I'm going to be honest: I thought it would be a little bigger." He gestured toward a walkway encircling the exhibit. "Let's go lateral with it, and see if we're more impressed."

Shepard began his television career in 2003, as the rascally sidekick to Ashton Kutcher on the MTV prank show "Punk'd." He now stars in "Bless This Mess," a sitcom about two New Yorkers attempting to sustain a family farm in Nebraska, and hosts "Spin the Wheel," a new game show co-created by Justin Timberlake. In early 2018, Shepard launched "Armchair Expert," a podcast in which he and his co-host, the actress and writer Monica Padman, affably unpack the glory and the chaos of human behavior. The pair would be working, an early press release promised, "in the great tradition of 16th-century scientists." "Armchair Expert" was the most downloaded new podcast on iTunes in 2018, and it now averages around a million downloads an episode. In conversation, Shepard

is agile, generous, and relaxed. His work on the podcast, as he sees it, is accepting that people are slippery and complex. "How are we hardwired, and what tools do we have to transcend that hardwiring?" he asked. "If it were only nature, we'd be at 7-Eleven at all times, foraging for winter."

Shepard studied anthropology at U.C.L.A., and he often invokes his education on the podcast. "The No. 1 thing that people make fun of me about is how frequently I mention I was an anthropology major," he said. "When we do live shows, someone will raise their hand to ask a question, and it'll be 'Hey, what did you major in?'"

Shepard, who is forty-four, tall, and athletic, was wearing a striped sweater over an "Armchair Expert" T-shirt. He and Padman have recorded more than a hundred and fifty episodes, interviewing a mix of celebrities (Will Ferrell, Gwyneth Paltrow), intellectuals (the developmental psychologist Todd Rose, the evolutionary biologist Bret Weinstein), and celebrity intellectuals (Esther Perel, Bill Nye). Even Shepard's real-life conversations are peppered with facts—"The ratio of a human's body-mass index compared with his penis length is astronomical," he said, while passing a diorama of early man—and each episode of "Armchair Expert" ends with a calm and thorough fact-check, led by Padman. The probing, gentle rhythm of their conversation sometimes mimics that of a therapy session. Shepard hopes that his own vulnerability—he speaks often and frankly about his sobriety, his career, and his marriage to the actress Kristen Bell, who was his first guest—will make people feel more comfortable disclosing their own fears and weaknesses.

"A lot of our guests want me to know that they feel flawed, too," Shepard said. He has come to understand that impulse—our desire to admit to imperfection—contextually: "Evolutionarily and culturally, we live in a manner that's so different from how we were designed to live. We used to live in groups of a hundred people, and the illusion of perfection couldn't possibly be maintained. You saw people shit on the side of the house; you heard your aunt and uncle having sex in the next

hut over. Now we live in very private ways, and we all think that everyone else has this figured out." It has been instructive for Shepard to see how his peers and his idols manage the difficult work of being alive. "It confirmed my suspicion that fame and money don't cure any existential ailments," he said. "That was the fairy tale that I bought into. But, if it's not that, what is it? I'm endlessly interested in what



Dax Shepard

works for people, and what I can copy or emulate. That's the A.A. model," he added. "Find somebody who has what you want, and then figure out how they got what they have."

Shepard wandered into the Hall of Human Origins. When it opened, in 1921, it was one of the first museum exhibits to explore human evolution. "Oh, my gosh, early hominids! Look how tiny and cute!" Shepard exclaimed, walking toward a pair of australopithecines, the furry, bipedal primates that lived three and a half million years ago and stood around four feet tall. Fossils of their footprints suggest that the male had had his arm curled around his female companion as they trekked together through a field of fresh volcanic ash. "They're adorable," Shepard said. "So sweet." He moved on to a diorama of a Neanderthal campsite. A male wielded a sharpened stick. "Now, look at this beastly son of a gun," Shepard said. His voice was admiring.

—Amanda Petrusich

THE FINAL FRONTIER

"Star Trek" guides a hospital vigil.

BY MICHAEL CHABON

*My father and I had already done all the talking we were ever going to do.*

Ensign Spock, a young half-Vulcan science officer fresh out of Starfleet Academy and newly posted to the Enterprise, found himself alone in a turbolift with the ship's formidable first officer, a human woman known as Number One. They were waiting for me to rescue them from the silence that reigns in all elevators, as universal as the vacuum of space.

I looked up from the screen of my iPad to my father, lying unconscious, amid tubes and wires, in his starship of a bed, in the irresolute darkness of an I.C.U. at 3 A.M. Ordinarily when my father lay on his back his abdomen rose up like the telescope dome of an observatory, but now there seemed to be nothing between the bed rails at all, just a blanket pulled as taut as a drum skin

and then, on the pillow, my father's big, silver-maned head. Scarecrow, after the flying monkeys had finished with him. His head was tilted upward and his jaw hung slack. All the darkness in the room seemed to pool in his open mouth.

Hey, Dad, I need a line, I said, breaking, if only in my head, the silence that reigned between us. I'm writing dialogue for Mr. Spock.

I'd tried talking aloud to my father a few times in the hours since he'd lost consciousness, telling him all the things that, I'd read, you were supposed to tell a dying parent. There was never any trace of a response. No twitch of an eye or a cheek, no ghost of a tender or rueful smile. I wanted to believe that he'd heard me, heard that I loved him, that I forgave him, that I was

thankful to him for having taught me to love so many of the things I loved most, "Star Trek" among them, but it felt like throwing a wish and a penny into a dry fountain. My father and I had already done all the talking we were ever going to do.

Can't help you there, said my father, a pediatrician, though long retired from practice. Now, if you were writing dialogue for *Doctor Spock* . . .

My father had slipped into unconsciousness twelve hours earlier, about an hour after we stopped the intravenous adrenaline that had been keeping his blood pressure up. Until then, he'd been responsive, aware, irritable, funny, querulous, weak, confused, furious, loopy, but recognizably himself. A studied, even militant avoider of exercise all his life, he had been seriously overweight for most of the past forty years, diabetic for a decade. His kidneys were failing. So was his liver. The latest enemy was acute hypotension, which when untreated would drop him into the scary nether regions of the mmHg scale. But the norepinephrine drip that could magically restore my father to a close approximation of the man we remembered was likely to put him into cardiac arrest. His caregivers had gently and regretfully begun to suggest that it might be time to stop treating this particular element among the complex of things that were killing him. A heart attack would be painful and frightening.

It was decided, not easily and not without reservation, to let go of him, and to let him go. It was agreed that, when he went, he ought not to be alone. My stepmother and two half brothers, who had been caring for my father without respite over the course of his decline, were exhausted and depleted. My brother and I, the sons of his first marriage, had flown up from the Bay Area to Portland, hoping not just to spend time with our dad but to give everyone else a break. So I took the first night shift. Following the logic of mercy, I was hoping that it might also be the last.

Back in the turbolift, Number One made the banal observation that people were reluctant to talk in elevators. Ensign Spock conceded her point, but I wondered if this would remain true in the twenty-third century. Once the Eugenics

Wars were over, and Zefram Cochrane had invented the warp drive, surely humanity would find a way to eliminate awkwardness, along with war, intolerance, avarice, superstition, and other pressing social ills. I tried to divert myself, with this question, from pondering what it would be like if my father died while I was sitting next to his bed, in a sleeper chair, wearing drawstring pajama bottoms and an “Illmatic” T-shirt, with my stocking feet up on the extendable footrest and my iPad, in its keyboard case, open in my lap, writing a short film about Mr. Spock’s first day on the job. I wondered if I would see or otherwise sense the instant when the hundred billion neurons in my father’s brain abandoned the eighty-year feat of electrochemical legerdemain known as Robert Chabon, and the father I had loved so imperfectly, and by whom I had been so imperfectly loved, pulled off one last vanishing act.

I can give you the exact date of the first time I ever saw Mr. Spock on TV, I said. September 15, 1967.

Hmm, I had just started my fellowship at Albert Einstein. We were living in Flushing. So you would have been . . . ?

Four. I must have sneaked out of bed, or come to ask for a glass of water. I didn’t know that it was Mr. Spock, or that you were watching “Star Trek.” There was just this scary-looking guy with the ears and the eyebrows. A pointy-eared woman, too, with enormous hair. Super-scary music, two guys fighting in a place made out of rocks. One of them got his shirt slashed open. It was just a glimpse, and I completely forgot it until, I don’t know, maybe six years later, when I saw “Amok Time” in reruns. And “Amok Time” first aired on September 15, 1967. The first episode of the second season.

I had looked up the date on Memory Alpha, an indispensable online repository of “Trek” lore, when, as a brief detour from my work on a new series, “Star Trek: Picard,” I began planning to write a short film, “Q&A,” that would feature a youthful Mr. Spock.

“Amok Time,” my father said. The second-best episode.

Of the original series.

There’s only one series, for me.

I knew my father felt this way, and

understood why, though I didn’t necessarily share the feeling. There was plenty more “Star Trek” to love. “The Inner Light,” from “Star Trek: The Next Generation,” and “Far Beyond the Stars,” from “Star Trek: Deep Space Nine,” were two of my favorite episodes of television, period. But, when I heard the words “Star Trek,” I never pictured, say, the conflicted Klingon Starfleet officer Worf, or the buttock-headed, avaricious Ferengi, or the sleek, cetacean U.S.S. Voyager, from later series. I thought of the originals: Kirk and Spock and their Enterprise, the NCC-1701.

The best episode, of course, my father continued, No. 1, is “The City on the Edge of Forever.” Then “Amok Time.” Then, No. 3 . . . Ricardo Montalban.

“Space Seed.”

Fourth, the Horta.

“Devil in the Dark.”

It was my job, always, to bother with the titles.

And five. Hmm.

Come on, I said. Spock with a goatee. Of course. “Mirror, Mirror.”

There were no surprises here. I’d heard my father’s Top Five many times before; in his view, an opinion gained authority through repetition. Every once in a while, a dark horse might slip into the ranking—“The Doomsday Machine” (he had a soft spot for William Windom) or “Balance of Terror” (ditto for submarine movies, of which this was a variation with starships).

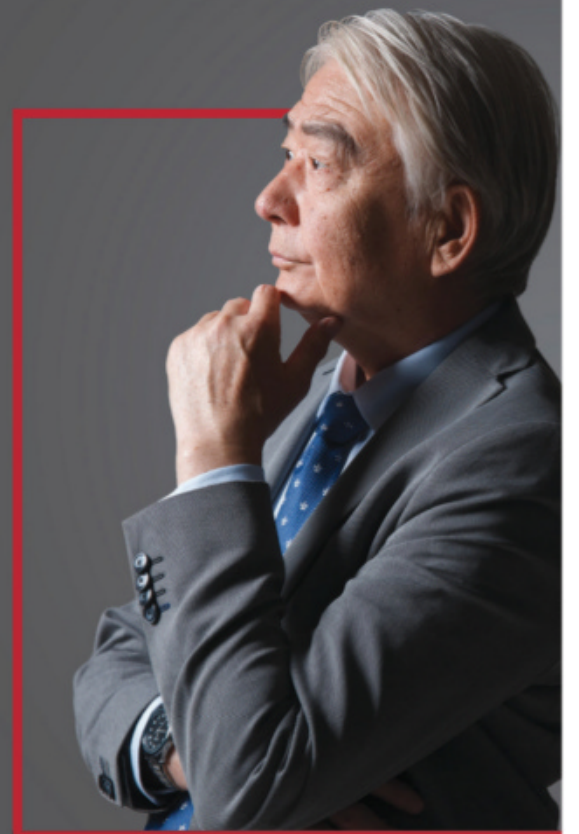
Tough to argue, I said. But, good as it is, I always have a hard time putting “City” at No. 1.

In terms of unchallenged quality, ambition fulfilled, and enfant-terrible provenance, “The City on the Edge of Forever,” originally written by the S.F. wonder boy Harlan Ellison, was kind of the “Citizen Kane” of “Star Trek.” But it was a time-travel story, set mostly in Depression-era New York, and to me it always felt wrong, though interesting, to say that the best episode of “Star Trek” was arguably its most anomalous.

“Amok Time” might not be the best, but I think it’s the most important, I said.

How so?

By addressing the question of Spock’s sexuality, and the nature of desire in a culture that eschews emotion, it makes the classic fan-fiction gesture: to find a



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"You'll have to imagine the melody for this next song, too."

hole in the quilt of canon, and patch it. Look at the earliest "Trek" fanzines, like *Spockanalia*, the first issue of which came out right around when "Amok Time" aired: they're obsessed with Spock's Vulcan heritage, his childhood, and, above all, his sexuality. "Amok Time" tried to patch those holes. It rewarded the fanfic impulse, rewarded fandom itself. That probably explains why "Trek" is still around after all these years.

My father endured my disquisition with unusual forbearance. Like all our conversations from then on, this one was doomed to take place on my terms.

So they're in a turbolift. Then what?

Then they get stuck.

And then?

I'm working on it.

I went back to my script. One of the machines connected to my father was giving off short, exasperated sighs; another beeped conventionally. From time to time, my father made sounds of mild

discomfort and agitation, but he never opened his eyes or spoke. Meanwhile, Ensign Spock and Number One began to understand that they would not be getting out of the turbolift anytime soon. Alone in that placeless place, in a niche carved out from the ordinary routines of duty, they had timeless time for conversation. Hidden things would be discovered and revealed.

I remember you writing Sherlock Holmes fan fiction when you were young. Not "Trek."

I drew my own Starfleet starships, and Enterprise crew members from alien species. But I never wrote any stories.

I'd thought about this in the weeks since I'd come on as a writer and a producer, and eventually as the showrunner, for "Star Trek: Picard." As a kid, I had tried my hand at writing fiction that mapped to Robert E. Howard's "Hyborian Age," Larry Niven's "Known Space," and Edgar Rice Burroughs's

"Barsoom" (and, as an adult, I wrote two Lovecraftian Cthulhu Mythos stories), but never to the "Trek" universe, even though it took up far more space in the atlas of my imagination.

I guess, for me, it was always about the voice on the page. That was the clue I needed to start trying to "make my own." I read all the James Blish and Alan Dean Foster adaptations, but they were never the voice of "Star Trek." And I didn't have the means, or maybe the chutzpah, to make my own fan episodes. Until now.

So, what hole are you patching?

The mystery of Spock's smile, when he encounters the singing flower on Talos IV.

"The Menagerie."

Yeah, or really "The Cage."

That was the title of the original, un-aired "Star Trek" pilot, famously rejected by NBC for being "too cerebral." "The Cage" featured a captain named Christopher Pike (Jeffrey Hunter) in command of the Enterprise, with Number One (Majel Barrett, the wife of "Star Trek"'s creator, Gene Roddenberry) as first officer and Spock (Leonard Nimoy) as science officer. Great swaths of it were later cleverly repurposed as flashback material in a first-season episode, "The Menagerie," to tell the story of how Mr. Spock—the only character from the rejected pilot to carry over into the series—following the logic of mercy, hijacked the Enterprise in order to come to the aid of a paralyzed and horribly disfigured Pike, who was thereby established, in the "Trek" canon, as Captain Kirk's immediate predecessor.

Even a casual fan watching "The Menagerie" immediately noted striking differences, beyond those of cast and characters, between the eras of Captains Pike and Kirk: differences in set design, costumes, makeup, lighting, direction, visual and sound effects. Kirk and crew never commented on or seemed to notice these discontinuities, which were all implicitly attributable to the passage of time between Pike's day and Kirk's. All but one, that is, which had long tantalized at least one non-casual fan: apart from the ears and the gull-wing eyebrows, the Spock who served under Captain Pike was nothing like the Spock who later launched a thousand zines.

In the rejected pilot, and in Rodden-

berry's original conception of the show, Number One was the expressionless, rational, cool-tempered crew member, "almost glacier-like," according to the episode's teleplay, "in her imperturbability and precision" (glaciers evidently having become more precise by the twenty-third century). Spock, by contrast, was decidedly warmer, his animated face and voice freely expressing such emotions as alarm, concern, relief, and even an almost childlike delight, when, having beamed down to the surface of the planet Talos IV, he encountered that singing flower and broke out, in a way that never got less disturbing, no matter how many times one saw it, in a toothy grin. The pretext for my script, the hole in the quilt, was the lack of any "in-universe"—or "Watsonian," as opposed to "out-of-universe," or "Doylist"—explanation for Spock's transition from expressive, even unreserved, to thoroughly glacial.

The Doylist explanation, by the way, was sexism. The NBC brass of 1965, in rejecting "The Cage," are said to have been unable to tolerate the idea of a woman as second-in-command of a starship in 2266. In reconceiving the show for the second, successful pilot ("Where No Man Has Gone Before"), Roddenberry transferred Number One's emotionless, "cerebral" cool to Spock. Codified as "logical," it became the defining characteristic of all Vulcans, creating the one-species, one-trait template—a kind of intergalactic racial profiling—that haunts the worlds of "Star Trek" to this day. When Barrett returned to the cast of the regular series, she had been demoted, and safely confined within the role of the innocuous, love-lorn Nurse Chapel, whose only distinguishing trait was her unrequited—unrequitable—desire for the character to whom Barrett's husband had fed, as it were, the soul of Number One.

Many early fans tended to despise Nurse Chapel, in particular the female fans who essentially created modern fandom—arguably the dominant cultural mode of our time—in the pages of *Spockanalia*, *The Crewman's Log*, and other pioneering zines. They saw her as unworthy of the formidable Mr. Spock, embodied by Nimoy with banked fire and clean-limbed grace. But, if Christine Chapel was a relative nullity, there

was nonetheless an insight, canny and poignant, in the Chapel-Spock dynamic, the tension between one who longed for recognition, connection, and a return of love and one who was, by training if not by nature, incapable of delivering those things. That incapacity, and the hope that it might be cured—the imperturbable perturbed, the ice thawed—was a crucial element of Spock's attractiveness, and not only to women, and not only in a sexual sense.

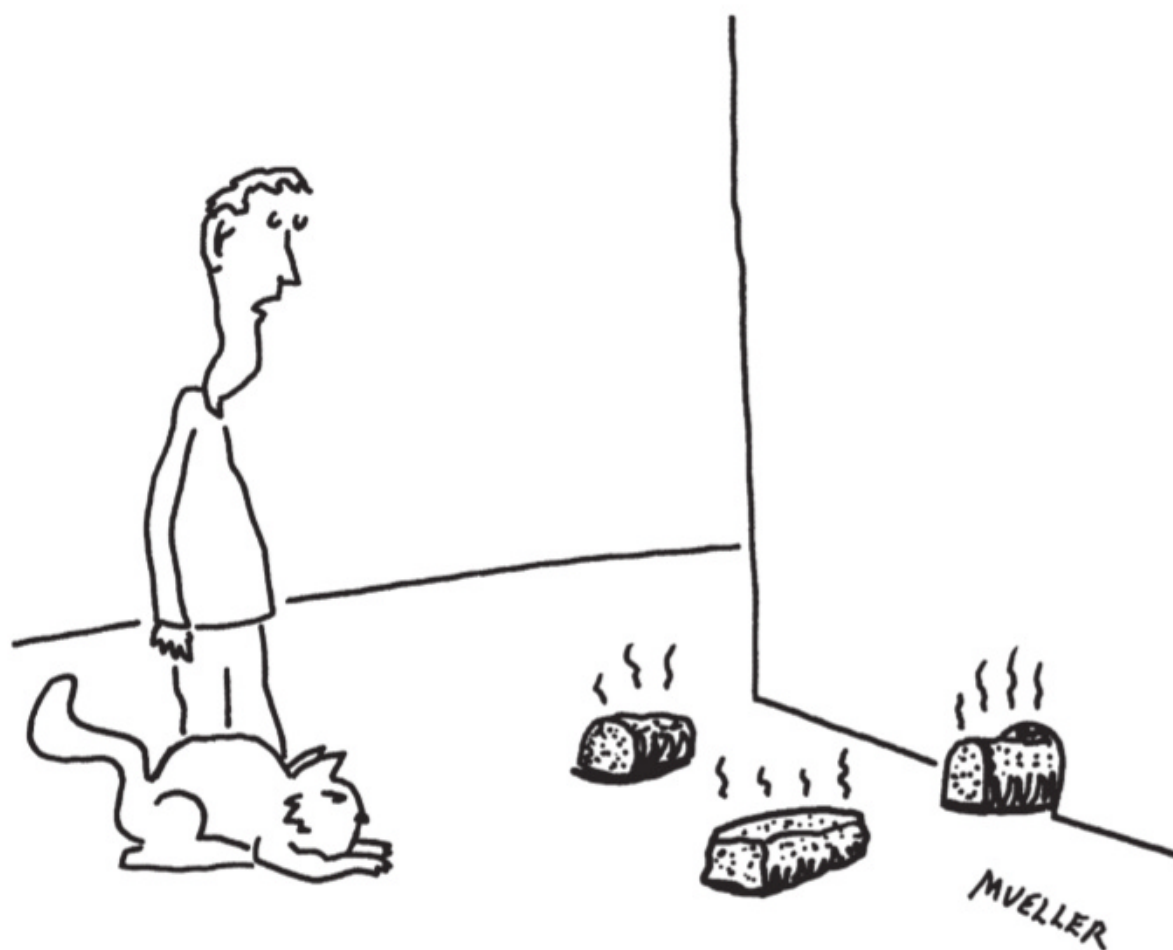
Spock was unreachable, disengaged, remote, forever caught up in his research and his work. He sought relaxation in solitary intellectual pursuits, and seemed ill at ease in a crowd. He was loyal, and steadfast in the face of trouble, but he was not available. And yet now and then, in extreme situations, often under alien influences, Spock would be seized by transports of rage, or joy, or sorrow, the emotions disinterred from their burial site inside him. The feeling was there, deep and molten—volcanic—held in check by dint of constant effort.

In "Star Trek"’s imagined future, amid the rocks and under the red alien skies of Spock's home world, Vulcans called that unflagging effort a "philosophy," enshrined its founder, Surak, and looked with cool condescension on those who did not submit to its regime. But, as I

would discover as an undergrad in the halls of the Philosophy Department at the University of Pittsburgh, a redoubt far stancher than the planet Vulcan of a logic far fiercer than Surak's, the Vulcan way had little to do with philosophy and even less to do with logic, and there was certainly nothing alien about it. It was just good old repression, of the sort practiced by human fathers, among others, for many long and illogical centuries.

I love Mr. Spock because he reminds me of you, I said.

I put aside the iPad, climbed out of the sleeper chair, and went over to the bed. It was past four o'clock in the morning. My father swallowed. He breathed. Every so often, his breathing gave way to the raw but nugatory cough that had plagued him since—and had perhaps been triggered by—the Reagan Administration. Only now each cough ended in a strange mewl that might have been pain but sounded more like frustration, like the whine that entered his voice when he was tired of your arguments, tired of your nonsense. He never opened his eyes, but now and then his features began to approximate a facial expression—surprise, annoyance, skepticism—before slackening, as if in a failed attempt to mark the meteoric passage across his



"Not while they're making artisanal bread."

brain of some thought or emotion. For the first time that night, I considered the possibility that he was going to survive it. There was a logic, an implacable, animal logic, in hanging on, in dying only when you could hang on no longer. I saw that now as clearly as yesterday afternoon—it felt like a thousand years ago—I had seen the implacable logic of our mercy.

I reached down to stroke my father's hair, something I had not done or even contemplated doing in the fifty-five years of our acquaintance. The contact felt strange. It was not that we never touched. We hugged to mark arrivals and departures, and over the past year, as his passing began to feel more imminent, I had started, when saying goodbye, to sneak in a hasty kiss that was ninety per cent sound. But I wondered how long it had been since I had touched my father's head, and if that span—half a century, say—was normal or weird.

"This is some crazy long hair you got going on here, Dad," I said aloud.

Over the past year, as the effects of lifelong improvidence had begun to impose a final reckoning, my father had been obliged to liquidate the vast collections of stamps, coins, trading cards, autographs, comic books, and historical ephemera that he had amassed with methodical recklessness since his boyhood visits to the stamps-and-coins department of Abraham & Straus. He was no longer able to boast, with a pleasure untainted by accuracy, of having been prescient in all his investments, correct in all his predictions, wise when all others were fooled. Even the sad form of entertainment that had enlivened his decline—out-doctoring his doctors, burying nurses and therapists under encyclopedic blizzards of facts (lest anyone begin to suspect that his mighty Spock brain should be added to the list of his failing organs)—was now denied to him. His magnificent hair was the last of his vanities. It was beautiful: thick, flowing, the hair of a bard or a Romantic virtuoso. One of the many things to have broken my heart during the past year was the sight of him at the bathroom mirror in the step-down facility that had been one of the steps of his long journey down, brushing his Brahmsian hair with an old-fashioned bristle brush, the kind

that his mother had used to brush mine when I was a little boy.

"Dad," I said. "O.K., I really need you to hear me."

I put my other hand to his head. I stood there, trying to find or feel my way into the darkness inside his skull.

As the world first learned in "Dagger of the Mind," Spock, like all Vulcans, possessed an ability, albeit limited, to share thoughts, memories, sensations, and, somewhat paradoxically, emotions across short distances, by means of a "mind meld." This procedure generally required that he place one or both of his hands against the face or head—as near as possible, presumably, to the brain—of the being with whom he intended to meld minds.

It's O.K., I told my father, through the contact of my fingertips to his feeble skin. *You can let go. It will be O.K. We will be O.K.*

Good for you, my father said. *I'm with the Horta on this one.*

In "Devil in the Dark," which my father had ranked among his Top Five, the Enterprise came to the rescue of a mining colony on the planet Janus VI, where a terrible monster, the Horta, was preying on pergium miners, picking them off one by one. The episode rises above the banality of a premise as old as Grendel, and some creature effects that are truly risible—even to a ten-year-old in 1973, the homicidal Horta looked like an ambulatory slice of Stouffer's French-bread pizza—by making an honest effort to imagine nonorganic life and then, in the characteristic turn that gives the "Star Trek" franchise its enduring beauty and power, by insisting that fear and prejudice were no match for curiosity and an open mind, that where there was consciousness there could be communication, and that even a rock, if sentient, had the right to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. It was, in its way, a near-perfect example of what had drawn my father, and me, and fans around the world, to "Star Trek" and its successor shows for more than fifty years.

But, as I stood by my father with my hands on his head, vainly pretending that the silence that prevailed between fathers and sons, as profound and mysterious as the silence of elevators, could thus be subverted and overcome, I sud-

denly remembered the crude three-word sentence that the acid-secreting Horta burned into the surface of a rock, after mind-melding with Mr. Spock: "NO KILL I."

Point taken, I told my father, abruptly letting go of his head, and then, aloud, "Dad, I'm so sorry."

I'm not sure what my father's last words were—possibly "I can't believe you guys had breakfast at Kenny & Zuke's without me"—but I know that, apart from one more whispered "goodbye," those were mine to him. I had never in my life been more desperately sorry about anything.

My father hung on for six more interminable days without regaining consciousness. When he died, he managed to do it during a scant five-minute interval when one of my half brothers, both of whom had kept vigil at his bedside all that week, in a round-the-clock rotation with my stepmother, happened to step out for a much needed cup of coffee. Later, someone told me that this is not uncommon, that the dying, even when completely unconscious, often seem to choose a moment when they have been left alone to set out across the final frontier.

In the days and months that followed, I tried to find ways to mourn my father. I said Kaddish. I talked about him to my own children. I posted boyhood photos of him to Instagram. But mostly I wrote episodes of "Star Trek: Picard," through and over which mortality and loss played like musical themes. The truth, I've sometimes had the nerve to tell someone who knows how much, in spite of everything, I loved my father, was that I had been grieving his loss since I was twelve years old; it was definitely easier the second time around. When I miss him, I find comfort—just as I did forty-four years ago, when he first left me behind—in his perfect, constant, undiminished presence in my imagination; his voice in my head, anytime I want it; his opinions, his jokes, his enthusiasms and vanities and lies. But sometimes, still, I wake up in the middle of the night, trapped in the broken elevator of insomnia, haunted by the cruelty of mercy and its logic, and by the pleading of the devil in the dark. ♦



ON THE FIRST-WORLD CAMPAIGN TRAIL

BY LARRY DAVID

Good evening. Thank you all for coming. These past six months, I've been to thirty-five states and done more than eighty town halls. You talked, and I listened. And the one thing I came away with, above all else, is that we have a lot of first-world problems in this country. Problems that are often overlooked and ignored. Just hearing about them has made me a better candidate—and a better person.

So many of you have opened your lives to me. There's Blair, the Silicon Valley executive who walked into her closet one morning to find that many of her cashmere sweaters were marred by moth holes. These sweaters cannot be repaired, and if you love cashmere—and, really, who doesn't?—you can appreciate how upsetting this would be, especially when you consider that every other item in Blair's closet had to be sent to the dry cleaner. Fortunately, she didn't have to go herself, but she did have to deal with not having her whole wardrobe available to her during a period of many social obligations. Blair broke down as she told me this. I put my hand on her shoulder and assured her that someday she'd get her clothes back and that, in the meantime, shopping for new cashmere sweaters could be fun. This seemed to cheer

her up, but I couldn't stop thinking about Blair's story. Let's face facts: we have a moth problem in this country, and the sooner we recognize it the better.

Then there was Rob, a hedge-fund manager from Scarsdale, who took a golf vacation in Miami Beach with his buddies and found himself on the first tee with no sunblock. He went into the pro shop to buy some, but they only had the kind that wasn't organic. Fortunately, he was wearing a hat that protected his face, but his arms and legs got so sunburned that he was unable to play the next day. Sadly, he was reduced to lying poolside under an umbrella while his buddies teed off.

Of course, the sun kept shifting, which required him to move his umbrella every ten minutes. No easy task—those umbrellas are unwieldy. He asked the pool boy to do it once and gave him a tip, but he didn't want to tip the kid every single time the sun shifted. So he moved the umbrella himself and wound up pulling a muscle in his back. Imagine: you work hard at Sullivan, Fairchild, Renfro, & Lieberman trying to help people. Sure, you're well compensated, but no one deserves *this*.

What's worse is that the injury could've been avoided if these resorts had

a no-tipping policy. Then the pool boy, who's trained to move the umbrella, would have moved it. Who can blame Rob for not wanting to give him ten dollars every ten minutes? Who brings that kind of cash on a trip? It's hard to hear Rob's story and not be moved by it. I promise that as President I will not rest until we do something about the tipping-policy fiasco that has long plagued, and continues to plague, this nation.

When Rob woke from a poolside nap, he ordered lunch, and it took more than an hour to arrive. He liked his veggie burger well enough, but they didn't have any gluten-free buns. It's time that these resorts realize that some people have gluten allergies. And that others, like myself, are just under the impression that there's something wrong with gluten and try to avoid it. When I'm President, there will be a much greater emphasis on gluten. That's a promise.

After lunch, Rob went to the spa for a facial. Another bust: the facialist didn't massage Rob's hands and feet during the mud mask. And they didn't even have a micro-needling machine—unheard of! The result? Rob left with no facial glow. That's right. You heard me. No facial glow. Later, at dinner with his buddies, Rob ordered a pricey bottle of wine, but it didn't taste right, so he sent it back. Sure enough, Rob's pal Stan made a snarky comment, and before long the two were going at it. Rob, with his sunburn and pulled muscle, could not defend himself against the smaller and wilier Stan, who punched him in the nose, causing him to bleed all over the mushroom flatbread. Rob had to sleep with toilet paper in both nostrils, which, combined with the unusually high pillows, made it impossible to get any rest.

Rob paused at this point in his story, unable to go on. This wine incident cuts to the core of who we are as a people. It took courage to send that wine back. Rob is an example to all of us, and he's here tonight. Rob, stand up!

In closing, when you hear about people like Rob or Blair—people with first-world problems—remember that they are still human beings. I'll be taking a break from my campaign next week and heading to the Four Seasons in Maui, where, rest assured, I'll be focussing on ways to improve this great first-world country. I'd appreciate your vote. ♦

LETTER FROM INDIANA

CRISES OF CHOICE

As rural health care flounders, anti-abortion centers are gaining ground.

BY ELIZA GRISWOLD



On the door of a white R.V. that serves as the Wabash Valley Crisis Pregnancy Center's mobile unit are the stencilled words "No Cash, No Narcotics." The center, in Terre Haute, Indiana, is one of more than twenty-five hundred such C.P.C.s in the U.S.—Christian organizations that provide services including free pregnancy testing, low-cost S.T.D. testing, parenting classes, and ultrasounds. Sharon Carey, the executive director of the Wabash Valley center, acquired the van in January, 2018, for a hundred and fifty thousand dollars, after finding a company that retrofits secondhand vehicles with medical equipment. That May, Carey

began to dispatch the van to rural towns whose residents often cannot afford the gas needed to drive to the C.P.C. or to a hospital. Carey has selected parking spots in areas with high foot traffic, so that prospective clients can drop in to learn about the C.P.C.'s services. In Montezuma, she chose the lot outside a Dollar General. In Rockville, she discovered an I.G.A. supermarket frequented by the local Amish community; the van parks next to the hitching post where Amish shoppers tether their buggy horses. Driving straight up to the Amish farms would have been the wrong approach, Carey felt. The community is insular, and was unlikely to welcome

outsiders offering their teen-agers free pregnancy tests or screening for chlamydia and gonorrhea.

In Brazil, which is one of the poorest cities in Indiana, Carey chose the parking lot of the Church of the Nazarene, across from a Circle K convenience store and not far from House of Hope, a Christian drug-rehabilitation center whose residents rely on the van for S.T.D. testing. On a recent Wednesday morning, Libby Butts, the manager of client services for the mobile unit, who wears her hair in a long braid, and Mary Hargis, a sonographer, came aboard. Hargis, who is fifty-six, had on a pink lab coat over a T-shirt featuring an image of a sewing machine and the words "Quilting in My Veins, Jesus in My Heart." She opened a silver wheeled bag containing a new ultrasound machine, and disappeared into the van's makeshift examining room, which contained a sink, a table with stirrups, and a large TV screen on which the ultrasounds would be shown.

Hargis began volunteering at the C.P.C. in 2005. "I think, if women are fully informed, most would choose life for their child," she told me as she assembled the machine. "Maybe I'm naïve, but from what I've read, and hopefully accurately, I'm not sure they're always informed." On the wall was a rack of pamphlets with titles such as "Before She Decides" and "Intentional Abstinence for Singles." Like much of the literature dispensed by C.P.C.s, the brochures presented carefully selected facts in order to make a case against abortion ("A small number of women have died from infection") and contraception ("You can be infected with any S.T.D. even when using condoms 100% of the time").

The C.P.C. movement took off in the late sixties, as states considered repealing laws criminalizing abortion. Robert Pearson, a Catholic carpenter, founded one of the first centers, in Honolulu, and then set up a foundation for C.P.C. owners, providing them with training sessions, pamphlets, and slide shows, many of which featured gory images of fetal remains. C.P.C.s employed various deceptive techniques to attract women, often advertising themselves as abortion providers. Centers were sometimes established next to abortion clinics and were designed to resemble them.

Crisis pregnancy centers have used deceptive techniques to attract clients.

Until the seventies, abortion had mostly been a Catholic issue, but following *Roe v. Wade*, in 1973, evangelical Christians began to join the pro-life movement. In 1978, the Southern Baptist pastor Jerry Falwell partnered with the conservative activist Paul Weyrich in an effort to register and organize religious voters, and they seized on the issue of abortion as a mobilizing cause.

In the eighties, some pro-life activism became associated with violence, when groups such as Operation Rescue staged sit-ins at abortion clinics and incited attacks against abortion providers. Several doctors were assassinated. C.P.C.s, under increasing scrutiny, were hit with a wave of lawsuits. Following a congressional investigation in 1991 that condemned C.P.C.s for committing consumer fraud and for publishing misleading advertising, the national anti-abortion organizations Heartbeat International and Care Net standardized C.P.C.s' training and materials, attempting to transform them into institutions that offered advice and support. In 1991, the Wabash Valley center was among the first C.P.C.s to hire part-time medical providers and to purchase ultrasound equipment. Like many other centers, Wabash Valley also began to run abstinence-only education programs in public schools. In 1996, President Bill Clinton's welfare-reform act allocated fifty million dollars a year to abstinence-training programs, giving C.P.C.s an infusion of federal funding. In 2003, President George W. Bush increased that funding by thirty-three million dollars. In 2009 and 2010, the Wabash Valley C.P.C. received twenty-six thousand five hundred dollars to teach abstinence to public-school students in surrounding Vigo County.

These days, as few as four per cent of the women who visit C.P.C.s are pregnant and undecided about whether to have an abortion. Most come for social services, including the pregnancy verification required to sign up for maternal and infant Medicaid. In the past decade, C.P.C.s, which are at the forefront of the grassroots anti-abortion movement, have identified a new sense of mission and authority as rural health-care providers have struggled with a lack of funding. (In the U.S., more than a hundred rural hospitals have closed in the past decade.) This dynamic was par-

ticularly evident in Indiana under the governorship of Mike Pence, who grew up as a Catholic and became an evangelical Christian as an adult, and has praised C.P.C.s for "telling the truth about the cause of life." In 2007, as a member of Congress, Pence sponsored the first federal bill to defund Planned Parenthood, which did not pass. In 2014, the year after Pence became governor, he signed a bill prohibiting private insurance plans from covering abortions in most cases. In 2015, he launched an investigation of Planned Parenthood's fetal-tissue-disposal practices. (The investigation found no wrongdoing.)

That year, Pence gave \$3.5 million to Real Alternatives, a Pennsylvania-based anti-abortion organization that supports C.P.C.s. The funding was diverted from Temporary Assistance for Needy Families, a state-run federal program intended to clothe and feed children and to create initiatives that help prevent "non-marital childbearing." Indiana has some of the lowest payouts to TANF recipients in the country. The Real Alternatives contract stipulated that the organization and its subcontractors must "actively promote childbirth" and must not refer clients to abortion providers or promote contraceptives. To date, the state has allocated \$11.25 million to Real Alternatives. In early 2016, Pence signed into law an array of bills that restrict abortion, including one measure, which was recently upheld by the Supreme Court, requiring that fetal remains be buried or cremated.

As Vice-President, Pence has attempted to reshape the country's reproductive-health-care policies according to his religious ideology. He staffed the Department of Health and Human Services with several people he knew from his time in Indiana, including Alex Azar, a pharmaceutical executive and lobbyist in Indianapolis; Jerome Adams, a former Indiana health commissioner; and Seema Verma, who worked on the redesign of Indiana's Medicaid program. In July, 2017, H.H.S. said that it would terminate the contracts of eighty-one organizations receiving pregnancy-prevention grants, and issued new rules that favored groups promoting abstinence-training programs. The National Campaign to Prevent Teen and Unplanned Pregnancy had found in 2002 that abstinence-only programs led to

"no significant changes in participants' initiation of intercourse, frequency of intercourse, or number of sexual partners." The Trump Administration also announced that it would ban organizations that provide abortion referrals from receiving funds from the Title X Family Planning Program, a federal grant that offers services including contraception counselling. As a result, Planned Parenthood withdrew from Title X funding, which it had used to provide more than 1.5 million women with services such as pregnancy testing and birth control. In March, H.H.S. designated \$5.1 million of Title X money for the Obria Group, a largely Catholic organization that subsidizes C.P.C.s in Southern California.

In response to C.P.C.s' growing influence, the national campaign #ExposeFakeClinics invited visitors to its Web site to review C.P.C.s online, to report false advertising, and to "take it to the streets." Last year, the advocacy organization NARAL Pro-Choice America conducted an undercover investigation of forty-five crisis pregnancy centers in California, finding that C.P.C. employees very often presented misleading information, claiming that "having an abortion was linked to an increased risk of breast cancer, infertility, miscarriage, and/or the made-up 'post-abortion depression' that results in suicide." Amy Bryant, a gynecologist at the University of North Carolina School of Medicine who has written about the medical ethics of C.P.C.s, told me that the centers, which are ideologically driven, violate the Hippocratic oath. "They do not have the well-being of the woman seeking care from them as their primary interest," she said.

Since the Wabash Valley C.P.C.'s founding, thirty-one years ago, its annual budget has increased from twenty-one thousand dollars to four hundred and seventy thousand dollars. Most of this has come from donations from individuals and churches, but last spring it was awarded seventy-six thousand seven hundred dollars as part of a \$4.5 million federal program called the West Central Indiana Healthy Start initiative; the program aims to combat Indiana's infant-mortality rate, which is the seventh highest in the country. The

C.P.C. has spent the funds on a five-year subscription to a curriculum designed by BrightCourse, a video-streaming service often used by such centers, and on the part-time salary of a teacher for parenting classes. It also used the grant to buy the portable ultrasound machine, for thirty-eight thousand dollars, and to pay the part-time salary of Mary Hargis, the sonographer. Whereas ultrasounds at an abortion clinic are for doctors' use, and at a medical center are studied for detailed information about the health of the fetus, the purpose of the sonograms at the C.P.C., Sharon Carey told me, is "to educate these women on what's going on in their bodies." She added, "We don't tell them, 'These are the arms, these are the legs.' We just let them see the pictures and they go from there." Hargis said that, showing ultrasounds to pregnant women, "You can see some of the change from 'abortion-minded.' You can see some of the change in their countenance."

C.P.C.'s use of sonograms is controversial. Betty Cockrum, a former C.E.O. of Planned Parenthood in Indiana and Kentucky, described the use of federal funds for ultrasounds that serve no medical purpose as "a scam." "What do they have to do with infant mortality?" she asked. (Hicham Rahmouni, who directs the Richard G. Lugar Center for Rural Health, at Union Hospital, in Terre Haute, which is distributing the federal grant, said that Healthy Start is in the process of hiring a nurse-practitioner who will travel in the Wabash Valley mobile unit so that the C.P.C. can provide diagnostic ultrasounds.) Steven Holman, the C.E.O. of Union Health, an integrated health system in Illinois that serves a rural population of two hundred and eighty-six thousand people, and the primary recipient of the grant, told me that the Wabash Valley C.P.C. was uniquely well positioned to reach women who otherwise would be unable to access prenatal care. "The C.P.C. is doing that by taking their van and going out to these moms where they're at," he told me. "Yes, they park at churches sometimes. That's where these moms may go."

Next to the highway outside the



Church of the Nazarene, the R.V.'s driver, Stan Dugger, a member of HonorBound, a Pentecostal motorcycle ministry, set up a sandwich board advertising walk-in appointments. Butts, the C.P.C. manager, drew black curtains over the R.V.'s windshield, transforming the driver's seat and the passenger seat into an improvised counselling area. Amber, a twenty-five-year-old with freckles and glasses, wearing sweats and a neon-pink tank top, stepped into the R.V. with her mother, Jackie, who had been smoking outside. Jackie plunked herself down on a narrow black bench. "I need one of these," Jackie joked, about the van. "If I get mad at my husband, I can sleep out in here."

After an earlier visit, Butts had texted Amber some prenatal videos to study. Amber, who was six months pregnant, was doing some babysitting work and lived with Jackie in a cramped house in downtown Brazil. The pregnancy was the result of "a one-night stand," Amber said. She was going to parent the child with Jackie's help. "I was up until 2 A.M. doing my homework," Amber told the women, presenting a black-and-white composition book. Butts led Amber into the back of the R.V. to take her through a series of worksheets about breast-feeding. The lesson was practical, and Butts was patient. "You're going to get real familiar with your breast during that time, so don't feel any shame," she said, noting that her daughter, who'd recently had a baby, had had trouble with latching. A breast-feeding consultant had helped immensely, she said, and if Amber signed up for the Healthy Start initiative she would be eligible for one. Participants would also be assigned a primary-care provider and a health-care "navigator," who could connect them to local organizations for help with housing, addiction treatment, and courses. Signing up required home visits. The two women returned to the front of the R.V., where Butts asked whether Amber would like to join the program.

"Remember what I said," a nurse named Carol Lucas told her. "They're not there to judge you. They're there to help you."

"I'd rather not," Amber replied. She didn't want the government snooping around in her home, she said, and was afraid that officials would find a reason to take her baby away.

"Can we pray with you before you go?" Butts asked Amber. Amber agreed, and Dugger, who was sitting in the driver's seat, swivelled around. Amber squeezed her eyes shut and lowered her head. "Lord, we first and foremost ask for a healthy baby and for your hand to be in it," Dugger said. "And to bless this baby not just physically and emotionally but spiritually. And, Father God, nurture this baby to grow up and come to know you, and to be with this family in a mighty powerful way."

Many of the C.P.C.'s clients or their partners struggle with drug abuse. According to one study, Indiana has the seventh-highest rate of drug use and drug addiction in the country. In 2015, the worst outbreak of H.I.V. in Indiana's history took place in Scott County, where the last remaining H.I.V.-testing facility, a Planned Parenthood clinic, had closed in 2013, owing to funding cuts. Pence, who was morally opposed to needle exchanges on the ground that they promoted drug use, has been criticized for waiting more than two months after the outbreak was detected before issuing an executive order allowing syringes to be distributed. According to Matt Brooks, the president and C.E.O. of the Indiana Council of Community Mental Health Centers, the state's drug problem is the result of a history of incarcerating addicts rather than treating them, and also of a lack of coverage for rehabilitation under Medicaid. Indiana is ranked forty-eighth in the nation for public-health spending. "We're getting the results we'd expect to get because of a historic lack of investment," he said.

That afternoon, a twenty-year-old woman and her eighteen-year-old boyfriend arrived for their first ultrasound. They were unemployed and lived with the man's mother, a precarious situation that the C.P.C.'s employees saw as making the woman "abortion-vulnerable." The man, whose pupils were dilated and who slurred his speech, wore a wristful of rubber bracelets stamped with names and dates—family members and friends who had died from overdoses, he said. The woman went into the ex-



“There’s food in the fridge, and clues about the state of our marriage all around the house.”

“vote pro-life,” they oppose the politicization of abortion. Sharon told me that she has never used manipulative techniques to persuade women to continue their pregnancies. “Of course we want them to carry,” she told me. “But we know the decision is theirs to make, and we want them to know, whether they choose parenting, adoption, or abortion, they’re all hard, and we’ll be there for them.” Kimberly Kelly, a sociologist at Mississippi State University, who has studied C.P.C.s for the past thirteen years, has written about a “paradox” in the C.P.C. movement: that, while garnering “impressive support among evangelicals,” it has “only limited success meeting its primary goals,” of promoting marriage and persuading women not to have abortions. She writes that “it is not uncommon for unsuccessful religious movements to reframe failure as evidence of society’s dire need for their efforts,” noting that the main function of the C.P.C. movement is the maintenance of a “collective evangelical antiabortion identity.”

One recent Tuesday afternoon in Terre Haute, I sat in on an Earn While You Learn class with four pregnant women, including a mother of six. For attending the class, the women would earn “baby bucks,” which they could

spend at the C.P.C.’s boutique on baby clothes or larger items such as home furnishings or a stroller. The teacher was Cary King, whose father pastored a local megachurch, Maryland Community Church, which is a donor to the C.P.C. King leads an abstinence program for all junior-high and high-school students in Vigo County, called Creating Positive Relationships, or C.P.R.; the Healthy Start grant was now covering part of her salary. Even though all the students in the parenting class were pregnant, and the federal grant specified that the classes were to teach them parenting skills, King seemed intent on sticking to the C.P.R. formula. “Things can get out of balance when physical touching is involved,” she said, opening the abstinence pamphlet that she uses with her high-school students. “Until marriage, it would be the healthiest choice to draw that boundary after the kissing.” (King said that she includes the C.P.R. curriculum in the parenting workshops because “part of being a good parent is that it’s important to have healthy relationships, and a lot of times they can get into unhealthy relationships which then leads to becoming a parent.”)

After the class, Audrey, a slight eighteen-year-old in jeans and blue Crocs, who was five months pregnant and had

signed up for the Healthy Start program, told me that she had taken the abstinence classes in high school, where kids who weren’t religious considered them a joke. Even the religious kids, like her, were only half listening, she said. The classes could have damaging effects. “It’s not normalized to use a condom, because of all of this abstinence training,” she said. “That’s why there are so many S.T.D.s.”

Another afternoon, a petite, visibly pregnant thirty-five-year-old woman whom I’ll call Holly, who was wearing a red headband and matching Puma slides, walked into the waiting room with her mother, her sister, and a friend. Hargis greeted her and led her back to a windowless counselling room. Holly explained that she already had three children. In the past, she had gone to Planned Parenthood to receive the pregnancy verifications she needed for Medicaid, but, in 2016, the Planned Parenthood in Terre Haute closed. After taking a pregnancy test, five months earlier, she had hoped she would have a miscarriage. “I’ve been smoking cigarettes and marijuana the whole time,” she said. Hargis explained that sonograms showed clearly that pregnant smokers had thinner placentas than non-smokers had. She told Holly about a program in which mothers who quit tobacco received free diapers each month. Holly nodded politely.

After Hargis administered the pregnancy test, she asked Holly whether she believed in God. “It didn’t feel right praying high or drunk,” Holly said. Hargis reassured her, “You don’t have to wait until you get your life together to pray. All you have to do to be forgiven is to pray and ask.”

Holly had learned that the C.P.C. offered free sonograms, and she asked if she could have one. Hargis agreed. As Hargis explains to all her patients, the sonograms at the C.P.C. are not meant to be “diagnostic,” and she stressed to Holly that she should also have an ultrasound at a doctor’s office, which could give a detailed picture of the fetus’s health. Hargis is not qualified to tell a woman much more than if the fetus has a heartbeat. Holly went to fetch her mother, her sister, and her friend, and the three women squeezed into the examining room, along with

Hargis, a nurse, and me. Hargis smeared clear gel onto Holly's belly, and began sliding a wand over it. She stopped as the baby's spine came into focus and the underwater thud of a heartbeat filled the room. "Everything look O.K.?" Holly's mother asked Hargis.

"We're not doing all the diagnostics and tests they do at the doctor's office," Hargis replied curtly. "You need to go to the doctor." Holly's mother, who had been hoping to learn the sex of the baby, glared at Hargis and left the exam room, along with Holly's sister, as Hargis printed out a picture for Holly to take with her. The nurse handed Holly a month's supply of prenatal vitamins, and Hargis offered her a basket of rubber models of twelve-week-old fetuses. "Would you like to pick out a bootie?" Hargis asked. Some elderly volunteers had crocheted booties for the rubber models to fit inside. Holly deliberated, then picked a red one.

In the course of my visits to the Wash Valley Crisis Pregnancy Center, Sharon Carey introduced me to several women whose stories she felt illustrated her staff's success. One was Jessica Harkness, who had come to the C.P.C. in 2012 to attend a parenting class in the hope of earning a crib for her baby. At the time, she was living in a tent in her stepfather's yard, at the edge of a cornfield. For six years, she had served in the U.S. Army as a Patriot-missile operator and a mechanic, but she had been discharged, she said, for consuming alcohol. At the Terre Haute employment office, a veterans'-affairs officer noted her military experience and suggested that she apply for training as a truck driver. During a routine physical for the training, Harkness learned that she was pregnant. She suspected that the father was a soldier with whom she'd had a brief relationship.

Harkness, who was not religious, expected that the services at the C.P.C. would come with a lot of talk about Scripture, but, she said, "I was willing to put up with it to get what I needed." In exchange for coupons that she could spend at the center's boutique, she signed up for whatever classes were being offered. At the end of each class, Harkness's mentor, an elderly woman named Connie Elkins, asked if she could pray

for Harkness's baby. To her surprise, Harkness found this comforting. If there was a God, she recalled thinking, she hoped that He was paying attention.

Harkness confided in Elkins about her rough childhood in the Florida Everglades. She said that her mother, a crack addict, had allowed her to be sexually abused. (Her mother could not be reached for comment.) Harkness also talked about her discharge from the Army, where she believed that she may have been drugged and assaulted. Elkins listened. "She liked me even when I thought of myself as unlikable," Harkness told me. In August, 2012, Harkness started going to church with Elkins and her husband. The women at church held a baby shower for her. Word spread that she was looking for housecleaning jobs, and she began to earn a steady income. Harkness moved between temporary housing arrangements until the next summer, when someone at the church put her in touch with a landlord who had a two-bedroom house that she could afford.

In June, I visited Harkness in the house, where she lives with her son, Mickel, who is now six. Every Wednesday, she has dinner with the Elkinses, who treat Mickel as a grandson; for a few years, she attended Maryland Community Church with them, but now she goes to a smaller church. The pastor at Maryland once preached about Harkness's story, pointing her out in the sanc-



tuary. The C.P.C., Harkness told me, had offered her a family, a community, and a way of life. "The Christian values helped me realize that I liked Trump, so I was brave and voted for him," she said, showing me a sketch of the President on the wall—she had bought it from the far-right Web site Infowars—while Mickel, sitting on the sofa, watched a nature documentary.

Sharon Carey also introduced me to another woman, who asked to be called

Ray, a twenty-one-year-old psychology major from Illinois who'd come to the C.P.C. after having an abortion, and had dropped out of school to try to pay off her student loans. Beth DaCosta, who has volunteered at the C.P.C. for more than twenty years and is one of Carey's oldest friends, said that, in March, when Ray came to the clinic after her abortion, she was suffering from "post-abortion syndrome." For a year, almost every week, Ray had attended Bible-study classes with DaCosta, making a decision to give her life to Jesus. I spoke to the two women in a conference room at the C.P.C. Ray was warm and expressed gratitude to DaCosta for listening to her while she was experiencing an overwhelming grief after her abortion. "It was eating me up inside," she said. Still, she added, she did not regret her decision, and she would not try to persuade anyone else not to terminate her pregnancy. "I would just want her to know she wasn't alone," she said. DaCosta looked surprised, explaining that she would discourage anyone from getting an abortion for any reason. "I would try to change her mind," she said.

A week later, Ray and I went to dinner at a Panda Express in a nearby strip mall. She had recently finished a shift at Staples and was wearing the store's uniform polo shirt. Afterward, she took me back to the third-floor walkup where she lived with two roommates. The C.P.C.'s illuminated sign was visible from her bedroom window. She had stopped going to the Bible-study classes at the C.P.C. and had begun ignoring some of DaCosta's text messages. "I've been kind of wanting to be left alone to figure myself out," she said.

Late this summer, she wrote to tell me that she was moving into a house with a porch swing and a yard. She had bought a husky puppy with crystalline eyes, which she'd named Blue. When I returned to Terre Haute in September, she was waitressing at Denny's three times a week, on the graveyard shift, and was about to pick up another job, at a Hilton Garden Inn. She was enrolled in college classes online and had plans to become a therapist. Taking care of a puppy had proved too much, so she'd sent Blue to live on a farm. As we talked, sitting on her bedroom floor, we played with her new thirteen-week-old kitten. ♦

THE PIVOTAL JUSTICE

How Elena Kagan became the crucial figure holding back the Supreme Court's rightward shift.

BY MARGARET TALBOT

The Supreme Court of the United States performs its duties with a theatrical formalism. Every session opens with the Marshal of the Court, in the role of town crier, calling out “Oyez! Oyez! Oyez!” and “God save the United States and this Honorable Court!” Even when the nine Justices meet privately, once or twice a week, to discuss cases “in conference,” there is a rigid protocol. In order of seniority, they reveal how they are likely to vote; nobody may speak twice until everyone has spoken once. The most junior Justice goes last. She or he takes notes, by hand, on what is discussed and decided, since clerks (and laptops) aren’t allowed in the room. If there is a rap on the door, because, say, one of the Justices has forgotten his glasses, the junior Justice has to get up and answer it. Elena Kagan occupied this role for seven years—until 2017, when President Donald Trump appointed Neil Gorsuch to the Court. During one term, she had injured her foot and was wearing a bootlike brace, but whenever someone knocked she dutifully hobbled over. Kagan, who is as amused by the everyday absurdities of institutions as she is respectful of them, likes to share that anecdote with students. In 2014, she told an audience at Princeton, “Literally, if there’s a knock on the door and I don’t hear it, there will not be a single other person who will move. They’ll just all *stare* at me.”

The writing of opinions has its own fine-grained traditions, and the slightest variation makes an impression. When a Justice authors an opinion dissenting from the majority, he or she usually closes it by saying, “I respectfully dissent.” When Antonin Scalia, who died in 2016, was especially exercised by majority rulings, such as one that struck down state sodomy laws, he omitted the respectful bit and just said, “I dissent.” That registered as a big deal. Ruth Bader Ginsburg tends to use the “respectfully dissent” sign-off,

but she has a collection of decorative collars that she wears over her black robe, and whenever she reads a dissenting opinion from the bench she dons an elaborate metallic version that glints like armor.

Last term, Kagan read from the bench a dissent in a case about partisan gerrymandering. Her dissent ended with a defiance of form and tone that was unusual both for her and for the Court. Kagan declared that the majority was “throwing up its hands” and insisting that it could do nothing about the redrawing of voting districts, even when the results were “anti-democratic in the most profound sense.” She closed by saying, “With respect, but deep sadness, I dissent.” As she read those lines, adding the names of the three Justices who joined her—Ginsburg, Sonia Sotomayor, and Stephen Breyer—her voice vibrated with emotion. Stephen Vladeck, a constitutional-law professor at the University of Texas at Austin, told me, “We’re used to acerbic attacks by Justices on one another—we’re used to sharp words. But not to ‘I feel bad,’ and not to *melancholy*.”

Kagan, who is fifty-nine and was appointed by President Barack Obama, started her tenth term this October. Since joining the Court, which is led by Chief Justice John Roberts, she has maintained a fairly low public profile. A 2018 C-SPAN poll asked respondents to name a sitting Supreme Court Justice, and only four per cent mentioned Kagan, putting her just ahead of Samuel Alito (three per cent) and Breyer (two per cent). Ginsburg, by contrast, is the Notorious R.B.G., the cynosure of an ardent fandom and the subject, recently, of both an Oscar-nominated documentary and a gauzy feature film about her early career, starring Felicity Jones. In 2013, Sotomayor published a best-selling memoir, “My Beloved World,” and this year she released a children’s book inspired by the challenges she faced as a child with diabetes. The title sounds

like a personal credo: “Just Ask!: Be Different, Be Brave, Be You.” Kagan is not a meme or an icon, and she is not a likely guest on “Good Morning America,” where Sotomayor turned up earlier this fall, promoting her book before a studio audience full of kids. I live in Washington, D.C., and last year three trick-or-treating tweens showed up on my doorstep, lace-collared and bespectacled, dressed as R.B.G.; I would’ve been shocked if anyone had come as Kagan. To many Americans, she’s something of a cipher.

Yet Kagan, who has long been admired by legal scholars for the brilliance of her opinion writing and the incisiveness of her questioning in oral arguments, is emerging as one of the most influential Justices on the Court—and, without question, the most influential of the liberals. That is partly because of her temperament (she is a bridge builder), partly because of her tactics (she has a more acute political instinct than some of her colleagues), and partly because of her age (she is the youngest of the Court’s four liberals, after Ginsburg, Breyer, and Sotomayor). Vladeck told me, “If there’s one Justice on the progressive side who might have some purchase, especially with Roberts, I have to think it’s her. I think they respect the heck out of each other’s intellectual firepower. She seems to understand institutional concerns the Chief Justice has about the Court that might lead the way to compromises that aren’t available to other conservatives. And the Chief Justice probably views her as less extreme on some issues than some of her colleagues.”

Kagan comes from a more worldly and political milieu than the other Justices. She is the only one who didn’t serve as a judge before ascending to the Court. When Obama nominated her, she was his Solicitor General. In the nineties, she had worked in the Clinton White House, as a policy adviser, and



Kagan tries harder than Ruth Bader Ginsburg and Sonia Sotomayor to find common ground with conservative Justices.

had served as a special counsel on the Senate Judiciary Committee, where she helped Joe Biden prepare for Ginsburg's Supreme Court confirmation hearings. For much of Kagan's career, though, she was a law professor—first at the University of Chicago and then at Harvard. Between 2003 and 2009, she was the dean of Harvard Law School, where she was known for having broken a deadlock between conservative and left-wing faculty that had slowed hiring, and for having earned the good will of both camps. Einer Elhauge, a Harvard Law professor who worked with her on faculty hiring, said, “She was really good at building consensus, and she did it, in part, by signalling early on that she was going to be an honest broker. If she was for an outstanding person with one methodology or ideology this time, she would be for an outstanding person with a different methodology or ideology the next time.”

In 2006, Kagan invited Scalia, a Harvard Law alumnus, to speak on campus, in honor of his twentieth term on the Court. On a recent episode of the podcast “The Remnant,” the former *National Review* writer David French, who went to Harvard Law in the nineties, said that Kagan had “actually made the school a pretty humane place for conservatives.” (She won the appreciation of students, no matter their politics, by providing free coffee.) A Harvard colleague of Kagan's, the law professor Charles Fried, who served as Solicitor General under Ronald Reagan, told me that he'd been so impressed by her savvy and management chops—“She really transformed a very large organization, with a giant budget”—that he'd worried that she might find a long tenure on the Court to be “rather too constricting or monastic.” In 2005, Fried saw Kagan speak at a Boston gathering of the conservative Federalist Society. As Fried recalled it, Kagan started by saying, “I love the Federalist Society.” He went on, “She got a rousing standing ovation. And she smiled, put up her hand, and said, ‘You are not my people.’ But she said it with a big smile, and they cheered again. That's her.”

Like Breyer, and not so much like Sotomayor and Ginsburg, Kagan seems determined to find common ground with the conservatives on the Court

when she can, often by framing the question at hand as narrowly as possible, thereby diminishing the reach—or, from the liberal point of view, the damage—of some majority decisions. There are limits to what can be accomplished by such means, and Kagan's approach can frustrate progressives. David Fontana, a law professor at George Washington University, told me, in an e-mail, that some of the compromises that Kagan has sanctioned not only fail to achieve “justice from the progressive perspective”; they “legitimate a conservative perspective, both in that case and in the law more generally.” Fontana explained that conservatives “can respond to criticisms by saying their perspectives are so persuasive” that even a liberal Justice agrees with them.

At the same time, because Kagan rarely writes stinging dissents like the one in the gerrymandering case, they can carry a potent charge. Heather Gerken, the dean of Yale Law School, told me, “One of the things that make Justice Kagan such a great dissenter is that she is careful to modulate her claims. If she thinks it's serious, she's going to tell you it's serious—and you'll believe her. But that's in part because she doesn't use that tone in most dissents. She isn't going to tell you the sky is falling unless she thinks it's actually falling.”

For many liberal voters, the sky began falling in 2016, with the election of Trump, and Kagan may feel Democrats' loss especially keenly. Had Hillary Clin-



ton won, seated Merrick Garland on the Court, and then replaced Anthony Kennedy with a liberal Justice, Kagan might have effectively become a shadow Chief Justice. In 2013, the Harvard law professor Mark Tushnet published a book, “In the Balance,” in which he predicted that, within a few years, Americans might find themselves “talking about a Court formally led by Chief Justice Roberts—a ‘Roberts Court’—but led intellectually

by Justice Kagan—a ‘Kagan Court.’” Now half the Court's liberals are literally holding on for dear life: Ginsburg is eighty-six, and the survivor of three bouts of cancer, and Breyer, though evidently hale, is eighty-one. Meanwhile, the Court's conservative wing, which has further hardened with the arrival of Gorsuch and Brett Kavanaugh, has been indicating that it might be willing to overturn long-established precedents on matters ranging from abortion to affirmative action. Kagan may have a special gift for conciliation, but, if she loses her tenuous grip on colleagues like Roberts, she may have to become as oppositional as Ginsburg and Sotomayor.

Outside the Court, Kagan generally does her public speaking at law schools, in highly structured conversations with admiring deans. She returns every fall to Harvard Law School to speak to students and to teach a short course on cases from the previous Court term. On such occasions, she adopts a studiously neutral look: dark pants; collarless jackets; scoop-necked, solid-color tops; black pumps; pearl earrings. She does not wade into the crowd, Oprah style, to answer questions, as Sotomayor did at a recent Library of Congress talk. She speaks sparingly about individual cases and cycles through a set list of anecdotes about life on the Court.

The Supreme Court is known to be a closed and nearly leakproof institution, and Kagan is an institutional loyalist. “I've gotten pretty good at knowing what, if I say it, will create headlines I don't want,” she said recently, in a conversation with Gerken at Yale Law School. “You're *not* going to hear every single thought that I have today.”

Last fall, not long after Kavanaugh's confirmation hearings, Kagan gave a speech at the University of Toronto. During the hearings, Christine Blasey Ford, a psychology professor who had known Kavanaugh in high school, accused him of assaulting her in 1982, at a party. “I believed he was going to rape me,” Ford said, adding, “It was hard for me to breathe, and I thought that Brett was accidentally going to kill me.” Kavanaugh denounced the allegations as “vicious and false,” and the Senate narrowly confirmed his nomination. For many Americans, the episode was a depressing

echo of the 1991 confirmation hearings of Justice Clarence Thomas, who had been accused of sexually harassing Anita Hill. A young woman in the Toronto audience politely asked Kagan how the Court “can be considered legitimate in its treatment of women who have experienced violence when you have not one but two Justices who have been levelled with credible accusations.” The woman noted, “I almost regret to ask this question.” Kagan’s reply was brusque: “You know, you were right—you should not have asked me that.” She went on to say how much she cherishes the institution and her fellow-Justices. Hearing Kagan speak about life on the Court, you are reminded of what a singular workplace it is—not only life-tenured but small, ritualistic, and insular, with high expectations of fidelity, like an arranged group marriage among disparate spouses. If you are a Justice, you have a job that only eight other people truly understand, and if you don’t get along with them you’re going to be pretty lonely for decades. In a recent public appearance, Kagan lamented that, when she’s faced with a tough decision at work, she “can never just, like, call a friend.”

This notion of ideological comity is increasingly out of synch with American politics. In the current Democratic Presidential primary, former Vice-President Joe Biden has been criticized for describing Mike Pence and Dick Cheney as “decent” people. (After Cynthia Nixon tweeted at Biden that Pence was America’s “most anti-LGBT elected leader,” Biden conceded, “There is nothing decent about being anti-LGBTQ rights.”) Congress has become so polarized that many of its members mock the very idea of “crossing the aisle.” The Court, however, demands interaction and concession. The legal analyst Dahlia Lithwick, in a recent essay for Slate on her enduring anger about Kavanaugh’s ascension, acknowledged that, for the Court’s three female Justices, “it is, of course, their actual job to get over it.” Lithwick noted, “They will spend the coming years doing whatever they can to pick off a vote of his, here and there, and the only way that can happen is through generosity and solicitude and the endless public performance of getting over it.”

Though Kagan has publicly committed herself to the image of the Court



as an entity that floats above politics, she told Gerken that she doesn’t want to be “completely boring and anodyne” in public, and she isn’t. She comes across as confident and chill, if circumspect. Her sense of humor has a rooted particularism, and her comic timing is sharp. Raised on the Upper West Side, she retains a little bit of New York in her speech patterns and in her light snark. At her confirmation hearings, in 2010, Senator Lindsey Graham, in the midst of a convoluted query about the Christmas Day underwear bomber, asked her where she’d been on Christmas, and she didn’t miss a beat: “Like all Jews, I was probably at a Chinese restaurant.” A few years ago, when a student in the audience at one of her law-school appearances told her that she was “the hip Justice,” Kagan cracked, “Must be a low bar.”

Kagan, who has never married and does not have children, carefully guards her privacy. (She declined to be interviewed for this article.) She lives in a nineteen-twenties red brick apartment building in downtown D.C. and leads an active but not splashy social life: din-

ner parties and meals out with friends, many of them lawyers, judges, and journalists; an occasional opera, play, or college-basketball game. (In the eighties, Kagan clerked for Justice Thurgood Marshall, who nicknamed her Shorty; she skipped the aerobics classes that Justice Sandra Day O’Connor organized, instead playing basketball with other clerks, on a nearby court that is referred to as “the highest court in the land.”) She’s a big reader and a decent poker player. She observes High Holidays at the synagogue that Ginsburg attends. When Scalia was alive, Kagan enjoyed accompanying him and his hunting buddies on trips to Virginia, Georgia, and Wyoming to shoot game—quail or pheasant, usually, but, on one occasion, antelope. At public appearances, she’s been asked about those trips, and she seems to relish reminiscing about them—it offers her an opportunity to affirm that the Justices, even those who differ dramatically in their opinions, really do like one another. A friend of Kagan’s described her to me as “fun and gossipy—but never about the Court, usually about politics and journalism.” (If Kagan has opinions on the

President, she doesn't discuss them publicly, but the friend recalled Kagan saying, in 2016, that she didn't think Trump could win the election.)

Kagan's family was civic-minded and devoted to education. Her father, Robert, was a lawyer who served on the local community board and represented tenants in disputes with landlords. Her mother, Gloria, taught at Hunter College Elementary, a highly selective public school in Manhattan. A story from Kagan's childhood seems to anticipate her penchant for stating her preferences strongly, then abiding by a compromise. When she was twelve, she asked to have the first bat mitzvah ever performed at Lincoln Square Synagogue, the Modern Orthodox congregation that her family belonged to. The rabbi at the time, Shlomo Riskin, later told the *New York Jewish Week*, "She came to me and very much wanted it; she was very strong about it. She wanted to recite a Haftorah like the boys, and she wanted her bat mitzvah on a Saturday morning." Riskin informed Kagan that she could have her pioneering bat mitzvah, but on a Friday night, and that she'd have to read from the Book of Ruth. As Kagan explained in a public appearance a few years ago, "We reached a kind of deal. It wasn't like a full bat mitzvah, but it was something."

Kagan attended Hunter College

High School and graduated in 1977. In a yearbook photograph, she is wearing a judge's robe and wielding a gavel. An accompanying quote is from the Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter—nerdy even by the cerebral standards at Hunter. Her older brother, Marc, and her younger brother, Irving, both became teachers, though Marc worked for the transit union in New York City for a time. (Irving teaches social studies at Hunter College High School.) The friend of Elena's told me that the family's apartment overflowed with books, newspapers, and magazines—"classic Upper West Side intellectual clutter."

In a 2017 appearance at the University of Wisconsin, Kagan was interviewed by a dean who had been a high-school friend of hers and delved into childhood recollections a bit more than she usually does. "The gender roles in my household were a little bit mixed up," she said. Her father "was a very gentle man." He was not a Perry Mason kind of lawyer, itching for courtroom confrontations; his focus was on solving everyday problems for ordinary people. "My mother was formidable," Kagan noted. "She was tough, and she was very demanding." Kagan went on, "But, boy, my mother's voice is in my head all the time." And writing was important to Gloria Kagan. She'd go over her children's papers with them,

sentence by sentence, pressing them to make improvements.

After high school, Elena went to Princeton, where she got caught up in the adrenalized, proto-professional atmosphere of the *Daily Princetonian*, eventually becoming the paper's opinion editor. For a brainy, ruffled, middle-class Jewish girl from an urban, public high school, the paper offered some refuge from the social scene at Princeton, which could feel Waspy and preppy, and was dominated by all-male eating clubs. Her senior-thesis adviser, the historian Sean Wilentz, thought of her as "a reporter, old school, pencil behind the ear"—a skeptical thinker with a quick, mature sense of humor. He was reminded of Kagan's temperament recently when he saw a picture of her sitting between Kavanaugh and Gorsuch. "They're smiling, and her head is reared back and laughing," Wilentz said. "One of the reasons she's gotten as far as she has is her ability to do that, even with people she might disagree with violently. It's not ingratiating—it's more like 'You're a human being and I'm a human being, and that's pretty funny. Of course, you're wrong.' There's a certain candor that undercuts suspicion and paranoia."

The thesis that Kagan wrote for Wilentz was long and ambitious, and focussed on socialism in New York City in the early twentieth century. As Wilentz put it, "She was going to write about firebrands, but she was never going to *be* one." Throughout the years, she has praised him for being her second great writing teacher, after her mother. Kagan considered going to grad school to become a historian, but hesitated. Instead, she went to law school, for the very reason that people tell you not to go: because she wasn't sure what else to do. She loved the classes, though, because she had a natural bent for logic puzzles and because she could see the impact that the law had on people's lives.

Although Kagan didn't become a historian, her opinions at the Court often read as though a historian might have written them. It's not because she stuffs them with references to the Founding Fathers—some of her colleagues do that more often, and more clumsily—but because she knows how to weave an internally coherent and sat-



"I love how fall hides the garbage."

isfying narrative, incorporating different strands of explanation and event.

Like any historian worth reading, Kagan avoids getting mired in the details. Her best opinions often begin by sounding broad political themes, as though she were gathering people around her to tell a story about democracy. In her dissenting opinion in a 2014 case, *Town of Greece v. Galloway*, she disagreed with the majority that routinely opening a town meeting with a Christian prayer was constitutional. “For centuries now, people have come to this country from every corner of the world to share in the blessing of religious freedom,” she wrote. “Our Constitution promises that they may worship in their own way, without fear of penalty or danger, and that in itself is a momentous offering. Yet our Constitution makes a commitment still more remarkable—that however those individuals worship, they will count as full and equal American citizens. A Christian, a Jew, a Muslim (and so forth)—each stands in the same relationship with her country, with her state and local communities, and with every level and body of government. So that when each person performs the duties or seeks the benefits of citizenship, she does so not as an adherent to one or another religion, but simply as an American.”

During oral arguments, Kagan maintains an attitude of unflappable engagement, rarely raising her low, pleasantly modulated voice. Breyer often speaks at length and slowly, with an undertone of exasperation, as though he were delivering a lecture for slightly thick students. Alito gazes upward forbearingly when his colleagues are speaking, as though their prattling were his cross to bear; if there are any cracks in the Court ceiling, he’ll be the first to discover them. Thomas, who almost never speaks in oral arguments—last term, he asked his first question in three years—often tips his chair so far back that you worry for his safety. Kagan, who sits between Alito and Kavanaugh, likes to bend forward, sometimes balancing her chin on tented forearms. If Kavanaugh whispers something to her, she briefly nods or smiles before turning back to the proceedings.

By the time a case is heard, the Jus-

tices have digested the arguments put forth in the appellate courts, and have often made up their minds. Their object is less to elicit new information from the advocates than to persuade the other Justices, through performative questioning. The lawyer at the lectern is the medium through whom they send one another messages. And Kagan is very good at relaying hers.

Last month, the Court heard two cases asking it to decide whether Title VII of the 1964 Civil Rights Act bans employment discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity as well as biological sex. The sexual-orientation case involved two plaintiffs: a child-welfare worker in Georgia who lost his job after joining a gay softball league, and a skydiving instructor in Long Island who claimed that he was fired after telling a female client that he was gay. (She’d balked at the standard practice of being strapped together for a tandem dive.) In the gender-identity case, a trans woman in Detroit who was a funeral director had been dismissed after she informed her boss of her gender identity.

On the cloudy day in October when the Court heard both cases, the atmosphere outside was keyed up. Spectators had been waiting in line all night to gain access to the courtroom. L.G.B.T.-rights supporters hoisted rainbow flags and posters reading “We Are the Workforce”; a smaller group of protesters waved black signs that said “Sin and Shame, Not Pride.” Cameras whirred as the trans actress Laverne Cox, looking elegant in a black suit jacket and gloves, introduced herself to Aimee Stephens, the plaintiff in the trans-rights case.

For much of the first argument in the sexual-orientation case, Kagan was quiet. Then Noel Francisco, the Solicitor General, got up. He was representing the Trump Administration, which had joined both cases on behalf of the employers accused of discrimination. Kagan began, “You talked about the history of Title VII and some of the subsequent legislative history, and I guess what strikes me—and I was struck in reading your briefs, too—is that the

arguments you’re making, I would say, are not ones we typically would accept.” As usual, Kagan sounded mild and reasonable, but when she says something like “I guess what strikes me” you know that she has found a loose thread to tug. She continued, “For many years, the lodestar of this Court’s statutory interpretation has been the text of a statute,

not the legislative history, and certainly not the subsequent legislative history.”

In this case, she noted, “the text of the statute appears to be pretty firmly” in “the corner” of the plaintiffs. The pertinent question, she told Francisco, was “Did you discriminate against somebody . . . because of sex?”

And, if you “fired the person because this was a man who loved other men,” the answer was yes.

Kagan continued to school Francisco, without allowing the flow of her speech to be interrupted:

KAGAN: This is the usual kind of way in which we interpret statutes now. We look to laws. We don’t look—

FRANCISCO: Right.

KAGAN: —to predictions. We don’t look to desires. We don’t look to wishes. We look to *laws*.

If you wanted to bolster the idea that sexual orientation and gender identity ought to be included in the protections extended by Title VII, this was a canny line of questioning. Kagan was appealing to textualism—an approach generally associated with conservative jurists. She was saying that what mattered was the *words* of the statute, not what legislators might have intended. Nor did it matter that, since 1964, Congress had not amended Title VII to specifically cover sexual orientation or gender identity. The relevant language of the 1964 law forbade employment discrimination “because of” sex, and, Kagan was suggesting, it should therefore protect a man who was fired for dating men, if a woman who dated men would not have been fired.

Kagan was not being opportunistic, or merely tactical. In the past few years, she has repeatedly declared an intellectual allegiance to textualism when it comes to interpreting statutes. “We are all textualists now,” she said in 2015, at Harvard



Law School. “The center of gravity has moved.” She attributed this shift, in part, to the influence of Scalia—who, she said, had vibrantly made the case that “Congress has written something, and your job truly is to read and interpret it, and that means staring at the words on the page.” The job of a Supreme Court Justice, then, was not to surmise intent by investigating what legislators might have said before or since about a law, or, worse, to issue rulings based on what a Justice *hoped* that legislators had meant.

Kagan’s explicit embrace of textualist methodology has resonated with conservatives, both on the Court and outside of it. Still, in the Title VII arguments, she also seemed to be signalling to the conservative Justices that she knew their language cold, and that in this instance she was speaking it better than they were. In other words, she was warning them that they risked appearing hypocritical. At times, in both arguments, Gorsuch seemed to respond to these hints, acknowledging that a textualist approach could favor the plaintiffs and thus lead the Court to conclude that Title VII applied to gay and transgender employees. It was, he said at one point, “really close, *really* close.”

When a case is being heard, Kagan generally does not ask the most questions, or the first question. Last term, according to an analysis by Adam Feldman, a political scientist who runs the blog Empirical SCOTUS, Ginsburg and Sotomayor most often jumped in first. Sotomayor asked the most questions in a single argument—fifty-eight, in a case challenging the Trump Administration’s proposed addition of a citizenship question to the U.S. census. Speaking a lot is one way that the minority bloc of Justices can try to set the tone and gain leverage; on a Court that has moved further to the right, the liberals are talking more. After Kennedy left the Court, according to Feldman, Kagan began speaking at greater length. But she still usually bides her time, letting other Justices have their say before homing in calmly, yet relentlessly, on weaknesses that she’s identified in an argument.

Ilya Shapiro, a Supreme Court analyst at the Cato Institute, a conservative think tank, said of Kagan, “She’s definitely one of the key questioners. She

and Alito. The types of questions she asks tend to be the ones on which the opinion, whether it’s 5–4 or unanimous, eventually turns.” For lawyers appearing before the Court, Kagan’s interrogations can be stressful, but they are also useful. Nicole Saharsky, a lawyer who has argued dozens of cases before the Court, said, “Justice Kagan asks the hard questions that go to the heart of a case.” Saharsky went on, “Sometimes Justices will pose questions in a way that’s not very clear, and it’s frustrating on both sides, because they feel like you’re not really answering them, and you

can’t figure out what’s bothering them.”

As a law professor, Kagan used the Socratic method; her Harvard colleague Charles Fried remembers observing her classes and finding them “brisk, tough, just terrific.” He noted, “The other classes I’d seen that really had that quality were Elizabeth Warren’s.” The first time that Kagan appeared in front of an appellate court, at the age of forty-nine, it was the Supreme Court: she was the newly appointed Solicitor General, and the case was *Citizens United*, one of the biggest of the past few decades. The Federal Election Commission was being sued

LOVE AND DREAD

A desiccated daffodil.
 A pigeon cooing on the sill.
 The old cat lives on love and water.
 Your mother’s balanced by your daughter:
 one faces death, one will give birth.
 The fulcrum is our life on earth,
 beginning, ending in a bed.
 We have to marry love and dread.
 Dark clouds are roiling in the sky.
 The daily drumbeat of the lie,
 steady—no, crescendoing.
 This premature deceptive spring,
 forsythia’s in bloom already.
 The challenge: balance. Keep it steady,
 now sniffing daffodils’ aroma,
 now Googling a rare sarcoma.
 The ghost cat’s weightless on my lap.
 My mother’s ghost floats through my nap,
 as, dearest heart, we lie in bed.
 Oh, we must marry love and dread:
 must shield our senses from the glare
 and clamor of chaos everywhere.
 Life bestows gifts past expectation.
 It’s time to plan a celebration:
 dance at the wedding, drink and sing,
 certain that summer follows spring,
 that new life blossoms from the past.
 The baby is the youngest guest.
 But just how long can we depend
 on a recurrence without end?
 Everything changes, even change.
 The tapestry of seasons strangely
 stirs in an uneasy wind
 that teases dreamlike through the mind.
 I reach for you across the bed.
 Oh, how to marry love and dread?

—Rachel Hadas

for imposing limitations on corporate political spending, on the ground that it was suppressing free speech. A lawyer who knows Kagan recalls seeing her constantly in his neighborhood Starbucks, poring over papers, the summer before the case was heard. Kagan had never been so nervous. (In general, she has said, “I have a healthy self-regard—believe me.”) As she later revealed, during an appearance at the Aspen Institute, her heart was beating so loudly that she feared she wouldn’t be able to hear anything else in the room. Scalia got her mind back on track, paradoxically, by interrupting her and challenging the veracity of one of her opening sentences. She had said, “For over a hundred years, Congress has made a judgment that corporations must be subject to special rules when they participate in elections, and this Court has never questioned that judgment.” (On the audio recording, you can hear him telling her, “Wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait, wait!”) In retrospect, she thought that Scalia had deliberately done her a favor. “I was a little bit shaky, and he was just going to put me into the game right away,” she told the Aspen audience. “If somebody challenges you, you have to stand right back.” Scalia joined a 5–4 majority that ruled against Kagan’s side. She had clearly sensed that she was fighting a losing battle, and had spoken to the Justices with striking directness about how they could vote against her position—in a limited way. She told Roberts, “Mr. Chief Justice, as to whether the government has a preference as to the way in which it loses, if it has to lose, the answer is yes.” In the end, Citizens United led to decades of campaign-finance reform being overturned, but it presaged Kagan’s later attempts to nudge ideological opponents into accepting narrower victories.

At the Supreme Court, there are few, if any, dramatic courtroom turns in which a Justice unravels an entire argument before a dazzled audience. (You’ll have to keep watching “Law & Order” reruns for that sort of thrill.) The lawyers are too good, the cases too complex. But Kagan sometimes comes close.

In 2015, during the oral arguments in *Obergefell v. Hodges*, which secured a fundamental right for gay couples to marry, Kagan pushed John Bursch, the lawyer arguing against that right, to own

some of the more preposterous implications of what he was saying. If, as he contended, the state had an interest in encouraging procreation as the main purpose of marriage, and if allowing same-sex marriage would undermine this interest, then what about heterosexual couples who did not, or could not, have children? Would it be constitutional, Kagan asked, to bar them from marrying? Ginsburg joined in: What about seventy-year-olds who wanted to marry? Bursch tried increasingly lame answers—a seventy-year-old man *could* sire children, he noted—but Kagan had set a trap. “The problem is that we hear about those kinds of restrictions, and every single one of us said, ‘That can’t be constitutional,’” she said. “And I’m suggesting that the same might be true here.”

Kate Shaw, a professor at the Cardozo School of Law, who is a co-host of the Supreme Court-focussed podcast “Strict Scrutiny,” brought to my attention another example of Kagan’s strategic questioning. In *Trump v. Hawaii*, the 2018 case involving the Trump Administration’s ban on travel to the U.S. from eight countries, most of them predominantly Muslim, Kagan managed to insert into the record the idea that prejudicial comments by a President might be relevant context. To Solicitor General Francisco, who was arguing the government’s case, she posed this scenario: “A President gets elected who is a vehement anti-Semite and says all kinds of denigrating comments about Jews and provokes a lot of resentment and hatred.” If that President, she said,



then issued a proclamation saying that “no one shall enter from Israel” but, procedurally, his staff made sure to “dot all the ‘i’s and cross all the ‘t’s,” would there be no possible legal challenge? Would the President’s prerogative to protect national security be the final answer to *any* questions about the constitutionality of his policy? Imagine, Kagan added,

dryly, that this was “an out-of-the-box kind of President.”

Francisco declared Kagan’s scenario a “tough hypothetical,” and made a kind of concession. He said that his side was “willing to even assume, for the sake of argument,” that, in evaluating the constitutionality of an order like the travel ban, the Court could consider the past statements a President had made. In the end, the Court sided with Trump and allowed the ban to go into effect, on the ground that the President has broad executive authority over national security. But Roberts, perhaps with that back-and-forth in mind, issued a majority opinion that included some statements in which Trump explicitly described the travel policy as a Muslim ban. And Roberts pointedly noted that Presidents, starting with George Washington, had often used *their* powers of communication with the citizenry to “espouse the principles of religious freedom and tolerance.”

Shaw told me that, though the travel ban survived, “it was important that the Court didn’t completely shut the door to a President’s statements being potentially relevant in a case like this.” She continued, “And it was Kagan who’d established a direct chain of causation—a connection between her questioning, the concession the Solicitor General made, Roberts’s reliance on that concession, and the ability of lower courts to perhaps consider the President’s statements in future cases.” Shaw said, of Kagan, “You really do see her, in this very canny way, looking around corners, shaping the *potential* of the law.”

People don’t tend to identify Kagan with any single judicial philosophy or area of the law—and she seems to like it that way. It gives her more freedom to maneuver. This elusiveness distinguishes her from Ginsburg, who has made sexual-discrimination law her legacy, and from Sotomayor, who has a particular concern for the rights of criminal defendants. It also separates Kagan from Thomas—who, now that Scalia is gone, is the main exponent of the view that the Constitution’s exact language should govern the Justices’ interpretations. Shaw, who once served as a clerk for Justice John Paul Stevens, said, of Kagan, “‘Pragmatic’ is maybe the best word for her. I think of Justice Kagan as a little bit like my old boss Justice

Stevens—a common-law judge who takes each case as it comes to her. She’s sort of a judge’s judge. She loves statutory interpretation. The craft of puzzling through competing arguments and sources of authority is something she genuinely really relishes, more than particular results or subject areas.” Last year, at the University of Toronto law school, Rosalie Abella, a justice on the Supreme Court of Canada, asked Kagan what she wanted her legacy to be. “I don’t want to say, ‘This is how I want to be remembered,’” Kagan replied. “For me, that would deprive me of the ability to take it a case at a time, and to really try to think in that case, at that moment, what’s the right answer. I’ll let the legacy stuff take care of itself.”

It might not be entirely Kagan’s choice that she is not associated with any particular legal doctrine. Fontana, the George Washington University law professor, told me, “If you’re playing defense, not offense, all the time, you’re not generating your own set of ideas that academics can cite, and journalists and policymakers can debate, and lawyers and judges can use.”

Since Kennedy stepped down, in 2018, and was replaced by Kavanaugh, the Court has lacked a swing Justice. This doesn’t mean that you don’t get swing *votes* on occasion—it’s just that the patchwork alliances that produce them don’t consistently depend on one person. And the cases that involve these alliances tend not to highlight the important social issues on which Kennedy joined the liberals: abortion and gay rights. Without a swing Justice (or the unexpected departure of conservative Justices), the long-term result will be an extreme rightward tilt for the Court—and that’s even if Trump doesn’t get to make a third appointment.

Because Kagan is relatively young for a Justice, she is likely to be working with colleagues on the conservative end of the ideological spectrum for a long time, and will have to think strategically about her role. Last term, the Court ruled unanimously in thirty-nine per cent of the cases it considered after oral argument, the kind of statistic that Kagan often points to as evidence that the Justices are less partisan and more harmonious than the public realizes.

Some years, it’s been more than fifty per cent, though many of the unanimous decisions are in the kinds of cases that don’t attract much public interest—pesky little tax-law cases, for instance, or beady-eyed interpretations of the word “deadline” in a regulation. Last term, in cases with a five-person majority, each of the conservative Justices voted with the four liberals at least once. Gorsuch, a conservative with a libertarian streak, sometimes sides with the liberal bloc on criminal-justice issues—last term, he voted to overturn a vaguely worded federal statute that piled on additional penalties for using firearms in “crimes of violence”—and on certain matters related to Native American tribal rights. Roberts has demonstrated a concern for the public legitimacy of the Court, and for the future of his own reputation, and this occasionally leads him to vote in unexpected ways: in 2012, he helped preserve Obamacare, and last term his vote prevented the Trump Administration from adding a citizenship question to the U.S. census on spurious grounds. The Martin-Quinn index, which two political scientists developed to place each Justice on an ideological continuum, suggests that Kavanaugh and Roberts now occupy the center of the Court, but both are, by almost any measure, conservatives.

Kagan has openly worried about the lack of a swing Justice. Last year, she appeared with Sotomayor at Princeton,



before an audience of alumnae and female students, and said, “It’s been an extremely important thing for the Court that in the last, really, thirty years, starting with Justice O’Connor and continuing with Justice Kennedy, there has been a person who found the center, where people couldn’t predict in that sort of way. And that’s enabled the Court to look . . . indeed impartial and neutral and fair. And it’s not so clear, I think, going forward, that sort of middle po-

sition—it’s not so clear we’ll have it.”

Given the current configuration of the Court, Kagan’s case-by-case approach and tactical sensibility may prove particularly helpful in preserving progressive gains—and in some instances her method may be the only hope for doing so. Last year, at the University of Toronto, Kagan described her approach to crafting compromises. It can’t always be done, she said, and sometimes it shouldn’t be—the principles at stake are too important. But, when agreement *is* possible, she noted, the way to get there is often “not to keep talking about those big questions, because you’re just going to soon run into a wall, but to see if you can reframe the question and maybe split off a smaller question.” In such cases, Kagan said, she looks to see if she can “take big divisive questions and make them smaller and less divisive, and when people really want to do that it can often happen.”

Sometimes Kagan joins the conservatives in presumably good conscience on some issue, but in a way that might also assuage and flatter them. It’s not as though she agrees with them frequently—the Justices she sided with the most last term were Breyer and Ginsburg—but she does it more than those two do. Gregory Magarian, a constitutional-law scholar at Washington University in St. Louis, and a former Supreme Court clerk, told me that Sotomayor and Ginsburg seem to have chosen “the route of ‘I’m not going to bend or compromise for what *might* be behind Door No. 2 in some uncertain future. I’m going to expend my energy at the margin trying to use this platform to tell the American people what’s wrong with what the Court is doing and what a better result would be—fifty years from now, maybe the Court will realize that.’ Whereas the Kagan way is ‘I’m going to use my leverage to achieve near- or medium-term gains at the margins of cases where I might be able to make a difference in the foreseeable future.’ You can see the appeal of either approach.”

In 2012, Kagan and Breyer played a critical role in the intricate compromise that saved Obamacare. Roberts seemed to want to uphold the Affordable Care Act, at least in part, but had been waffling for months on how to ac-

complete this, and rehearsing various combinations of votes. In the end, he joined the four liberals in a ruling that upheld the individual-insurance mandate, on the basis that it constituted a kind of tax on people who didn't have insurance, and that taxation was a legitimate congressional power. Kagan and Breyer joined *him*, though, in a 7-2 ruling that rejected the A.C.A.'s expansion of Medicaid, arguing that the Obama Administration had overstepped constitutional bounds by trying to compel states to participate in the program. It's rare to learn anything about the negotiations that occur in the Supreme Court conference room (or out in the hallway, where Justices sometimes buttonhole one another). But the veteran Court journalist Joan Biskupic recently published a biography of Roberts that reveals more than was previously known about the A.C.A. deliberations. The Justices may not have engaged in the kind of back-scratching and dealmaking that legislators do, but they did practice the art of tactical persuasion. In private conference, Kagan and Breyer had declared their intention "to uphold the new Medicaid requirement to help the poor, and their votes had been unequivocal," Biskupic writes. "But they were pragmatists. If there was a chance that Roberts would cast the critical vote to uphold the central plank of the Affordable Care Act—and negotiations in May were such that they still considered that a shaky proposition—they were willing to meet him partway."

In 2018, Kagan and Breyer joined the conservative majority in a case known as *Masterpiece Cakeshop*. The majority opinion, written by Kennedy, overturned a decision, by the Colorado Civil Rights Commission, holding that Jack Phillips, a baker who had refused to make a cake for a gay couple's wedding, had violated the state's antidiscrimination laws. Sotomayor joined Ginsburg in dissenting. But the opinion, which conservatives had hoped would establish a broad religious exemption to antidiscrimination laws, emerged from the Court as a limited ruling, governing only that particular case; members of the Colorado Civil Rights Commission had made disparaging comments about religion that invalidated their decision against the



"Wow, I can't believe it's already time for you guys to pick up on social cues that we'd like you to leave."

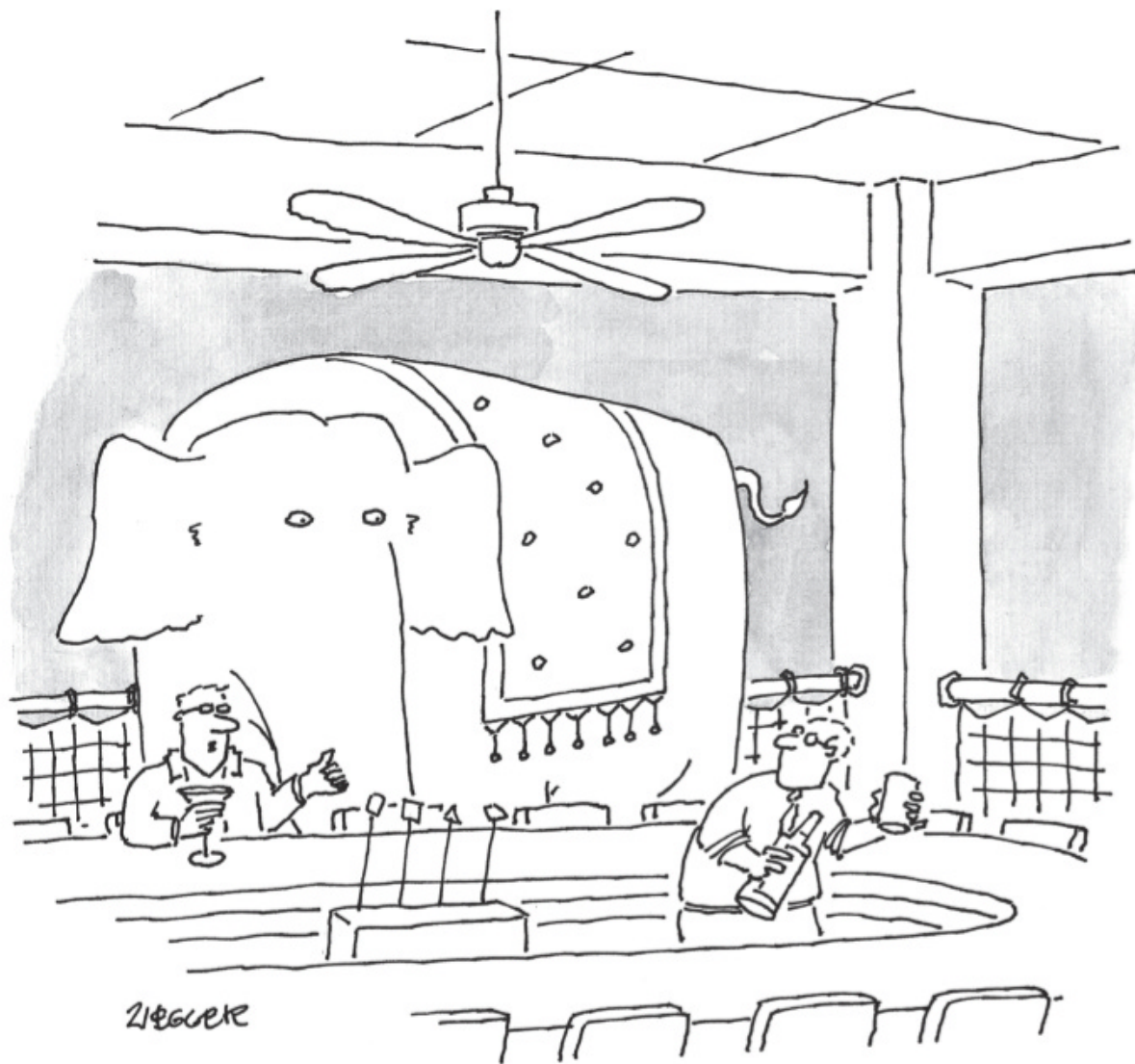
baker. Kagan wrote a nothing-to-see-here concurrence that underscored how constricted the ruling really was—if the commissioners had not made remarks dissing religion, she implied, the decision would have gone in favor of the gay couple. The Court had certainly not granted anyone a license to discriminate. (You could read the majority opinion and the concurrence together as a heads-up to other civil-rights enforcers—to protect their mission by watching what they said in public.)

It was the kind of judgment bound to please nobody. A headline in *The American Conservative* grumped, "Religious Liberty Wins Small." A lawyer who was involved in the case, on the gay-rights side, told me that he found the ruling "dismaying and intellectually suspect," but added, "Kagan has to live with these five conservative Justices forever. She's playing the long game, saying, 'Look how reasonable I am.'" By avoiding bigger questions, the majority opinion and Kagan's concurrence had the effect of forestalling any immediate, widespread damage to L.G.B.T. rights. No major precedent was set, leaving lower courts across the country that might be considering gay-rights questions free to go their own way.

Last term, Kagan joined Breyer and the five conservative Justices in allowing a forty-foot-tall concrete cross com-

memorating soldiers who died in the First World War to remain on public land in Bladensburg, Maryland. To Ginsburg, who dissented, joined by Sotomayor, the Christian symbolism of a giant cross was overwhelming—and its location, at an intersection maintained by the state, represented a clear violation of the establishment clause of the Constitution. To the majority, the cross was acceptable because it dated back to the nineteen-twenties and belonged to a venerable line of First World War memorials, whose particular religious significance had faded over time. Kagan concurred with most of the majority opinion, written by Alito. But, ever the master of positive reinforcement, she took pains in her concurrence to praise Alito's opinion for "its emphasis on whether longstanding monuments, symbols, and practices reflect 'respect and tolerance for differing views.'" She complimented her colleague for having shown "sensitivity to and respect for this Nation's pluralism, and the values of neutrality and inclusion that the First Amendment demands."

Kagan's opinion was in keeping with her past jurisprudence on such matters. Richard Garnett, a law professor at Notre Dame, who focusses on religion and constitutional law, said that Kagan "has shown that she is not a strict separationist who believes the Constitution



"Oh, and maybe some peanuts?"

forbids all religious symbolism or expression in the public square—her attitude is more that some forms of religious imagery are part of our culture, and don't threaten values that religion clauses are there to serve." What Kagan cares about in such cases is equality—that the government does not in any way favor one religion or denomination over another. She wrote a vigorous dissent last term, joined by the other liberals, when the majority declined to postpone the execution of a Muslim inmate in Alabama. Prison officials had denied his request that an imam attend his last moments. Still, when Kagan votes with the conservatives on religious questions, as she did in the cross case, she may earn some long-term good will, too, reminding them that she does not take the hard line that Ginsburg and Sotomayor do, or that past liberal Justices like William Brennan did. Outside the Court, some conservatives have noticed Kagan's positioning: on the "Remnant" podcast, David French argued that there is "nuance to her jurisprudence," and that, even though he "obviously"

disagrees with a lot of it, at least there is "more to the story with her" than with her liberal colleagues.

One of the goals held dearest by the conservative legal establishment is that of shrinking the federal government, in particular by limiting the power of regulatory agencies. Among other things, this would involve dumping something called Auer deference, under which federal courts yield to agencies the authority to decide what an ambiguous regulation means. More generally, it would mean that much of the administrative decision-making currently handled by agencies would be subject to more robust review by the courts. As a logistical matter, this goal is rather fanciful. Of necessity, Congress gives agencies broad mandates to interpret the missions it grants them: maintaining a clean environment, monitoring the safety of the nation's food and drug supplies. The Supreme Court has not ruled to overturn such a delegation of authority since 1935, amid a war over New Deal legislation, which Franklin D. Roosevelt ultimately

won. Congress is not about to get into the weeds of rule-making—how many parts per million of this or that pollutant can end up in drinking water—even if it were more functional than it currently is. But many conservative jurists, including those on the Court, think that the administrative state has run amok, and they yearn to see it dismantled.

Last term, Kagan was particularly effective at holding this effort at bay. She kept emphasizing the importance of *stare decisis*, the principle that the Court, in order to promote stability and the rule of law, generally adheres to its own past decisions, even—or especially—in cases in which it might rule differently today. And, where possible, she struck a note of soothing moderation. Writing the majority opinion in *Kisor v. Wilkie*, in which the Court upheld Auer deference, Kagan argued that judges should carefully review any disputed regulations that come before them, even when they sometimes "make the eyes glaze over," because "hard interpretative conundrums, even relating to complex rules, can often be solved." Only if such rules are genuinely ambiguous, she wrote, should agencies have the exclusive right to determine their application. "What emerges is a deference doctrine not quite so tame as some might hope," she went on. "But not nearly so menacing as they might fear." Roberts was reassured enough by Kagan's reasoning to sign on to her majority opinion. Though he has been as harsh a critic of federal bureaucracy as any of the other conservative Justices, this is an area where he may worry about the Court's reputation if it goes too far—single-handedly turning the clock back to an era before effective labor or environmental regulation, for example. The wording of Kagan's majority opinion made it easier for him to support it.

Erwin Chemerinsky, a constitutional-law scholar and the dean of the U.C. Berkeley School of Law, told me, "Kagan will try whenever she can to forge a majority either by winning a conservative Justice over to the progressive side or on as narrow as possible grounds on the conservative side. She can count to five as well as you or I can, and the conservative majority will be there for a long time. She'll play a role to achieve as much as she can, given that, and when she can't she'll write the strongest dissent she

can”—as in last term’s partisan-gerrymandering case. Kagan has written righteously angry dissents before, but she does not do so a lot. Since joining the Court, she has written two dissents a term, on average, fewer than any other Justice except Kavanaugh in his first term. Sotomayor averages six, and in some terms Thomas writes nearly twenty.

Kagan’s opinions generally avoid sentiment. Onstage with Sotomayor at Princeton last year, she said that she thought “some of the opinions that Sonia has written that are emotional are really powerful,” then added, “I tend not to try to get people to feel things. . . . But I want them to *think* they have gotten it so wrong.” She sliced the air with her hands. “And I guess maybe to *feel* that, to feel that their logic, their legal analysis, their use of precedent, and their selection of fundamental legal principles is just really”—she paused—“wrong.” The audience laughed.

“We are *very* different,” Sotomayor said.

From a Kaganologist’s point of view, the significance of her fervent gerrymandering dissent was twofold. It suggested that she does, in fact, have an area of the law that deeply animates her: cases dealing with the democratic process. And it was a reminder that she is the Court’s finest writer.

Roberts, in his 5–4 majority opinion, had concluded that the Court had no ability to intervene, even in the cases of extreme gerrymandering like the ones before it: one from North Carolina (*Rucho v. Common Cause*) that flagrantly favored Republican candidates and one from Maryland (*Lamone v. Benisek*) that did the same for Democrats. If the Court acted in these cases, Roberts argued, it would henceforth be constantly intervening in local disputes. Kagan disagreed, insisting that the Court has an obligation to guarantee that our political system remains open, so that every citizen can participate. Her dissent walked readers through the meaning of political gerrymanders, the harm they do, and the rights they infringe on, and described how the Court could have responded had it not shown “nonchalance” about the damage that such schemes cause to our democracy.

Kagan struck a commonsensical tone,

writing, “As I relate what happened in those two states, ask yourself: Is this how American democracy is supposed to work?” She defined gerrymandering as “drawing districts to maximize the power of some voters and minimize the power of others” and explained that it could keep the party controlling a state legislature entrenched “for a decade or more, no matter what the voters would prefer.” Partisan gerrymandering, she said, was an affront to the First Amendment, because it meant that some people’s votes effectively counted for less, depending on their party affiliation and their neighborhood’s political history.

“The only way to understand the majority’s opinion is as follows,” she wrote. “In the face of grievous harm to democratic governance and flagrant infringements on individuals’ rights—in the face of escalating partisan manipulation whose compatibility with this Nation’s values and law no one defends—the majority declines to provide any remedy. For the first time in this Nation’s history, the majority declares that it can do nothing about an acknowledged constitutional violation because it has searched high and low and cannot find a workable legal standard to apply.”

Yet such a standard was at hand, Kagan said—and it wouldn’t require the Court to enforce proportional representation in clumsy, seemingly partisan ways, as the majority claimed. The kind of advanced computing technology that had allowed extreme gerrymanders to be-



come so effective could be turned against them: using complex algorithms, you could generate a huge number of potential districting plans, each of them taking into account a state’s physical and political geography, and respecting its own “declared districting criteria”—omitting only the goal of partisan advantage. You could line up all those potential maps on a continuum, from the one most favorable to Republicans to the one most

favorable to Democrats. The closer any arrangement was to either end of the continuum, she said, “the more extreme the partisan distortion and the more significant the vote dilution.” In the case of North Carolina, one expert had come up with three thousand maps, and “every single one” of them would have resulted in the election of at least one more Democrat than the map that the state had been using. “How much is too much?” Kagan said. “*This* much.”

The majority had said that such a remedy could be left to others to fix—state courts or state legislatures, or even Congress. But if state courts could come up with a neutral and manageable standard, Kagan wrote, why couldn’t the Supreme Court? “What do those courts know that this Court does not?” And, though state legislatures and Congress could in theory enact something, they had little incentive to do so: “The politicians who benefit from partisan gerrymandering are unlikely to change partisan gerrymandering.”

Allison Riggs, a North Carolinian who leads the voting-rights program at the Southern Coalition for Social Justice, was one of two lawyers who argued against the gerrymander in the *Rucho* case, this past March. She was, naturally, disappointed by the outcome, but she was exhilarated by Kagan’s dissent and by the way state courts, voting-rights activists, and law students might be able to learn from it and use it. “It’s readable, it’s eminently logical, it’s understandable—it’s not a bunch of legal or technical jargon,” Riggs said. “There’s nothing intimidating about that dissent.”

Paul Smith, an attorney who has argued many times before the Supreme Court, including in a previous partisan-gerrymandering case, *Gill v. Whitford*, told me that the random-map-generating test that Kagan proposed in her dissent offers “a nice, clean way to think about the problem.” It provides a template for how state courts and others can “look at maps drawn by legislatures and critique them.”

Indeed, in the past few months, two state courts in North Carolina did what the majority of the Supreme Court had said in June that it could not do. One overturned the partisan gerrymander of the state legislature’s districts; the other issued an injunction against the state’s

congressional districts. Both opinions cited Kagan's dissent.

Kagan leavens her opinions with colloquial turns ("boatload"; "chutzpah"; "these are not your grandfather's—let alone the Framers'—gerrymanders"; a citation of Dr. Seuss) without sacrificing the requisite meticulousness of legal analysis. The results sometimes earn her comparisons to Scalia, the last truly memorable writer on the Court. But his style was different, beholden to an overarching legal philosophy, and also more flamboyant, scathing, and dependent on eccentric word choices: "argle-bargle," "jiggery-pokery."

Kagan's gifts as a writer have less to do with vivid turns of phrase than with the ability to maintain readers' attention, guiding them from argument to argument, with the implicit assurance that they will encounter a beginning, a middle, and an end. In a case from her third term on the Court, the majority held that deploying a drug-sniffing police dog on somebody's porch constituted a "search" under the Fourth Amendment and, therefore, required probable cause and a warrant. Kagan wrote a concurrence that opens with dazzlingly brisk confidence: "For me, a simple analogy clinches this case—and does so on privacy as well as property grounds. A

stranger comes to the front door of your house carrying super-high-powered binoculars. . . . He doesn't knock or say hello. Instead, he stands on the porch and uses the binoculars to peer through your windows, into your home's furthest corners." She went on, "That case is this case in every way that matters," even if "the equipment was animal, not mineral." Drug-detection dogs are "to the poodle down the street as high-powered binoculars are to a piece of plain glass. Like the binoculars, a drug-detection dog is a specialized device for discovering objects not in plain view (or plain smell)."

Kagan has written several opinions on electoral law, including one of her finest dissents, in a 2011 case in which the conservative majority overturned an Arizona law that had established public financing of campaigns. That and last term's gerrymandering opinion account for two of the three dissents that she has read from the bench—a choice that Justices make infrequently and deliberately, to emphasize how vital they consider the issue. (Kagan's third was her dissent in a case that limited the ability of public-sector unions to collect dues.) Though Kagan has not written a book or given lectures explicitly laying out a theory of jurisprudence, some of the scholars I talked to thought that she was likely informed by

the work of John Hart Ely, a Harvard law professor who wrote an influential 1980 book, "Democracy and Distrust," in which he argued that the judiciary's most urgent role is insuring that the democratic process was working fairly for all citizens. This idea became known—not particularly catchily—as "representation-reinforcing review." It generally respected judicial modesty and restraint; Ely was not an originalist, demanding that judges hew to the literal words of the Constitution, but he also wasn't an interpretivist who encouraged judges to read the document loosely, shaping it to their own liking. Paul Smith told me that Kagan seemed to respect Ely's "argument that, even if you're dubious about having unelected judges run the country, the one place where judges ought to be most aggressive is to protect the democracy itself—it doesn't make sense to hold back in favor of democratic institutions if the democratic institutions are being distorted by things that need to be fixed." Smith said that he could see Ely's influence on Kagan's opinions, especially "in the campaign-finance area," and observed, "I think she is a person who believes the Court is doing its best for the country when it keeps the democratic process working."

Gregory Magarian, the Washington University professor, said that, particularly in the electoral cases, he had a sense that Kagan was "replaying the classics." He continued, "For all of her rhetorical gifts, she's never really too far out on a limb. Reading her opinions is really invigorating, but you realize that often what she's doing is falling back on commonsense pragmatism. She's not trying to remake society so much as trying to remind us what our consensus guiding principles are, and how democracy is supposed to work."

The last Supreme Court term was relatively quiet. It seems likely that Roberts tried to keep it that way, in the aftermath of the divisive Kavanaugh confirmation hearing. Court watchers I talked to said that Roberts was "lowering the temperature" by taking as few big, controversial cases as he could. He's not the sole decider—putting a case on the docket requires four out of nine votes—but he sets the tone. Still, the thermostat can't be turned down forever. This term,



"And here are those family photos you thought you lost in the cloud."

in addition to the L.G.B.T.-discrimination cases, the Court will be weighing in on the Trump Administration's efforts to eliminate DACA, the Deferred Action for Childhood Arrivals program. For the first time in nearly a decade, the Justices will hear a significant gun-rights case: *New York State Rifle & Pistol Association, Inc. v. City of New York*. And they have agreed to take on another major test of executive power, in a case that asks them to decide whether the structure of the Consumer Financial Protection Bureau—the brainchild of Elizabeth Warren and the bugaboo of many Republicans—is constitutional. As part of Kagan's administrative duties, she had to choose the lawyer who would defend the C.F.P.B.'s structure before the Court, and she picked Paul Clement—a Scalia clerk who served as Solicitor General under President George W. Bush. Kate Shaw, the law professor at Cardozo, told me, in an e-mail, that it “was broadly received as a brilliant move by Kagan to appoint the premier conservative lawyer of his generation to mount the defense of an agency that's been in the crosshairs of the conservative legal movement for years.”

And then there's abortion. The Court has agreed to hear arguments in a case, *June Medical Services v. Gee*, involving a highly restrictive abortion law in Louisiana. The law is almost identical to a Texas law that the Court overturned in 2016, in *Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt*, because it imposed “an undue burden” on women seeking abortions. Kennedy was on the Court in 2016, and his vote secured the majority. The Court's willingness to take on the Louisiana law for oral argument does not augur well for abortion rights: there's no reason to consider it unless some of the conservative Justices are looking to toss out the *Whole Woman's Health* ruling. Thomas, for one, has openly compared abortion to eugenics; he has declared that “our abortion jurisprudence has spiraled out of control” and that the undue-burden standard is unconstitutional. And Kavanaugh has indicated that he is potentially open to validating the Louisiana law. Last term, the Court voted, 5–4, to temporarily block the law from going into effect, with Roberts joining the liberals; Kavanaugh wrote an opinion saying that it should go into effect—to see just *how* hard it would make it for a woman

to obtain an abortion in Louisiana.

Shaw noted that Kagan had asked tough questions in the Texas case, a sign that she had “zero patience for the contrived and unconvincing arguments that the law was about protecting women's health.” In the Louisiana case, Kagan could conceivably craft a compromise that hinges exclusively on the availability of abortion there, but she is unlikely to sign on to a decision overturning the Court's prior abortion jurisprudence.

One reason that the liberal Justices, especially Kagan and Breyer, have lately been banging the drum for *stare decisis* is that it might be the only principle that could make the conservative majority pause as it contemplates a wholesale reversal on abortion. Kagan, in a dissenting opinion in a fairly minor property-rights case, stressed the importance of respecting precedent, writing that the majority decision “smashes a hundred-plus years of legal rulings to smithereens.” In her public appearances, she's been underscoring the value of stable and predictable legal frameworks. At Georgetown Law, in July, she said, “Maybe the worst thing people could think about our legal system is that, you know, it's just like one person retires or dies, and another person gets on the Court, and everything is up for grabs.” That's the kind of appeal to the Court's long-term reputation and legitimacy that could continue to work on Roberts. It's not likely to persuade, say, Alito or Thomas. Samuel Bagenstos, a constitutional-law scholar at the University of Michigan, told me, “Kagan's tactical approach can be helpful in cases where Justices do not feel a very deep ideological affinity—but a tactical approach is not going to overcome a real ideological push.”

Melissa Murray, an N.Y.U. law professor, who co-hosts the “Strict Scrutiny” podcast, told me that, last term, Thomas wrote several opinions that “all have this theme—‘*stare decisis* is for suckers.’” Murray said that Thomas is “teeing up a reformulated doctrine of *stare decisis*, one in which the Court has an obligation to overrule cases that were improperly decided—and what is improperly decided is what five of

us now think is improperly decided.”

If a Democrat wins the Presidency in 2020, and the current liberal bloc stays intact, Kagan will continue to play her crucial role in persuading conservative Justices to join her side. But Trump may well be reelected. Or he may get to make more Court appointments before his term is up. (Surely, no American has more atheists and agnostics praying for her good health than Ginsburg does.)

In the current era of extreme vetting—at which the conservative legal establishment has proved particularly adept—the chances are slim that Trump would accidentally appoint an unexpected centrist, like David Souter, or even a conservative who reliably sided with liberals on very particular issues, as Kennedy did on gay-rights

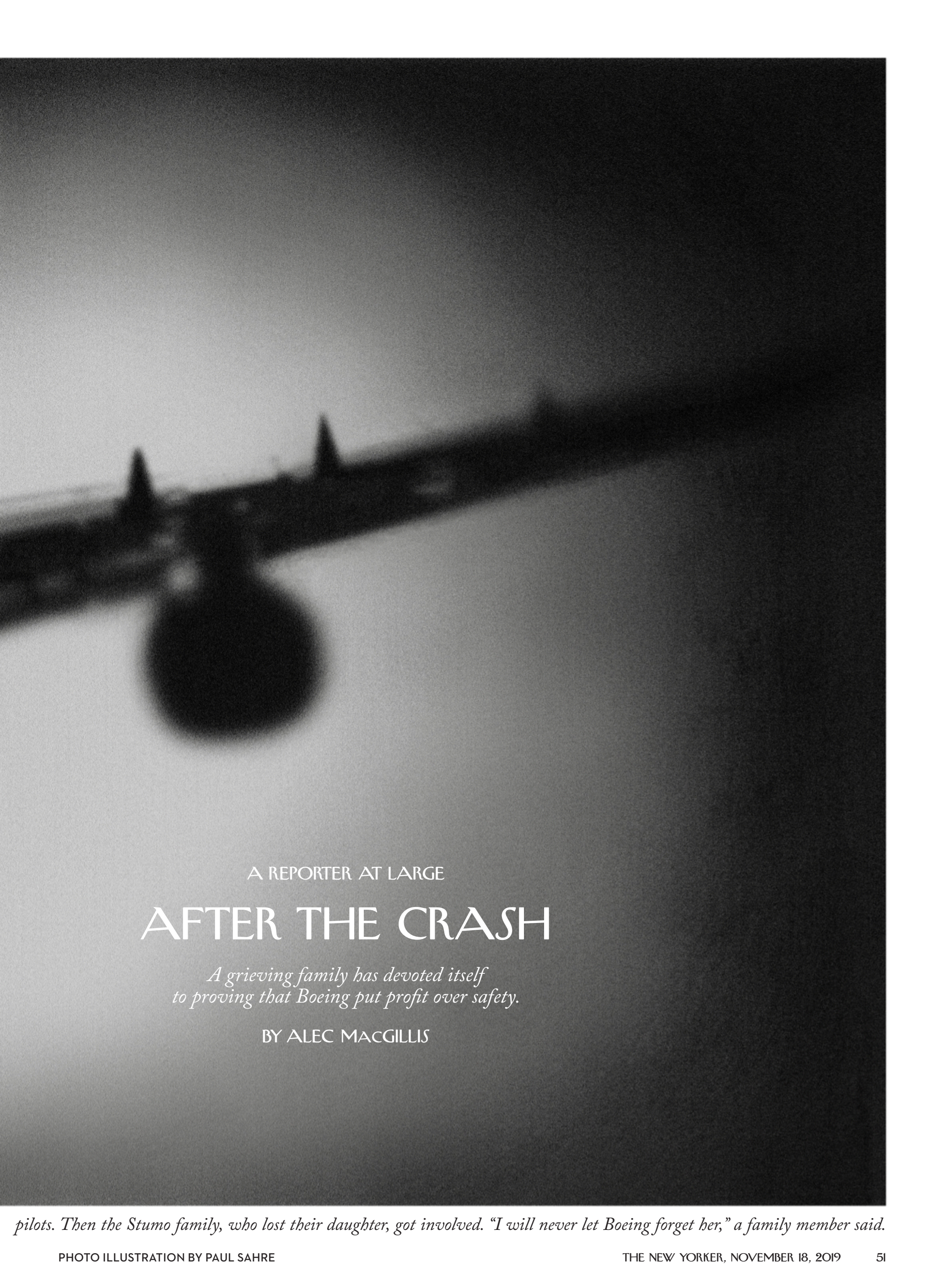
cases. If the Court were made up of six conservatives and three liberals, Kagan's approach of forming ad-hoc alliances with conservatives and limiting damage via narrow rulings might still be possible, but it would certainly be much harder.

If the Court becomes even more inhospitable to Kagan's views, she may increasingly find a powerful voice in dissent. Sometimes a Supreme Court dissenter is conscious of writing for the future—hoping that subsequent generations will come around to her point of view, and look upon her benignly as having been on the right side of history. But sometimes a Justice may be more conscious of exerting an influence, in the here and now, on political forces outside the Court. Kagan is an astute picker of battles, with as much respect for the constraints of her position as for its power. “You have to understand what it's given to you to do,” she told an audience at U.C. Berkeley's law school, in September. “And also what it's not given to you to do. And the latter is just as important in terms of doing your job well as the former.” During the summer, when she was asked at Georgetown Law what purpose she thought dissents like the one in the gerrymandering case served, her answer was more galvanizing. “You know,” she said, “for all those people out there who in some way can carry on the efforts against this kind of undermining of democracy, *go for it*.” She paused. “Because you're right.” ♦





In the wake of the 737 MAX disasters, caused by a software feature, Boeing and regulators initially placed blame on the planes'



A REPORTER AT LARGE

AFTER THE CRASH

*A grieving family has devoted itself
to proving that Boeing put profit over safety.*

BY ALEC MACGILLIS

pilots. Then the Stumo family, who lost their daughter, got involved. "I will never let Boeing forget her," a family member said.

Samya Stumo liked to ride pigs. This was on her family's farm, in Sheffield, Massachusetts. Caring for the pigs was one of her chores, so she would hop on an old, dilapidated Army jeep and drive a water tank to the sty, where she would fill the troughs and take a ride. She was nine years old.

Samya had always been precocious. She started playing cello when she was three, the year before her younger brother, Nels, became ill with cancer. When her mother, Nadia Milleron, returned from the hospital one day, Samya told her that she had learned to read.

Nels died, at the age of two, shortly after Nadia had another son. The loss played a role in Samya's eventual choice of studies: public health. So did the strain of activism in her family. Her mother's uncle is Ralph Nader, the transportation-safety crusader turned progressive advocate and third-party Presidential candidate. Her father, Michael Stumo, who grew up on a farm in Iowa, made frequent trips to Washington to lobby for small manufacturers and family farmers.

For Samya and her two surviving brothers, the family ethic was clear: seek justice for the disadvantaged, even if it means challenging authority. Samya could carry this to comic extremes. On a camping trip, she mounted a tree stump and inveighed against the family's patriarchal dynamics, while everyone else, suppressing laughter, hurried to set up before dark.

In 2015, Samya graduated from the University of Massachusetts and won a scholarship to pursue a master's degree in global public health at the University of Copenhagen. Afterward, when she was twenty-four, she got a job with ThinkWell, a nonprofit based in Washington, D.C., which works to expand health coverage in developing nations. ThinkWell sent her to East Africa to open offices there. The night before she left, earlier this year, she had dinner with Ralph Nader and his sister Claire.

During a stopover in Addis Ababa, the capital of Ethiopia, Samya texted her family to say that she would arrive in Nairobi in a few hours. Then she boarded Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302. She sat in Row 16, beside a Somali-American trucker from Minnesota.

There were a hundred and forty-nine passengers, from thirty-five countries, and eight crew members.

The plane, a Boeing 737 MAX 8, took off at 8:38 A.M., on March 10th. A minute and a half later, it began to pitch downward. A sensor on the nose had malfunctioned, triggering an automated control system. The cockpit filled with a confusing array of audio and visual warnings. The pilots tried to counter the downward movement, but the automated system overrode them. Six minutes after takeoff, the plane dived into the earth at five hundred and seventy-five miles per hour, carving out a crater thirty-two feet deep and a hundred and thirty-one feet long, and killing everyone on board.

That day, Stumo, Milleron, and their younger son, Torleif, flew to Addis Ababa. The crater had been cordoned off, but Milleron and Tor rushed past the barrier. "It was mostly dirt," Stumo said later. "Where's the plane? Where's the pieces? This plane had just buried itself right straight into the ground vertically and just disintegrated."

This was the second crash of a 737 MAX in five months, after a Lion Air jet plunged into the Java Sea, in late October, 2018. Investigators quickly focused on the automated system that had pushed down both jets, a feature new to this model of the 737. But a counter-narrative gained force, too: that the crashes were, above all, the fault of insufficiently trained foreign pilots. "Procedures were not completely followed," Boeing's C.E.O., Dennis Muilenburg, said, at a contentious news conference in April.

It has been more than a decade since a commercial-airline crash in the United States resulted in fatalities, but airplane disasters are an unwelcome reminder of the inherent risk of flying. Some 2.7 million people fly on U.S. airlines every day; we'd rather not think about the brazenness of launching ourselves thousands of miles in a fragile tube, thirty thousand feet above the earth. The appeal of blaming foreign pilots is easy to see. For the past eight months, however, the Stumo family have dedicated themselves to demonstrating a scarier reality: that Boeing, the pride of American manufacturing, prioritized financial gain over safety, with the federal government as a collaborator.

Since the crash, the family have made more than a dozen trips to Washington—a routine they expect to continue: they recently found an apartment in town. They have met separately with two dozen members of Congress, and with the heads of the Federal Aviation Administration and the National Transportation Safety Board, and testified before a House committee. They were the first American family to sue Boeing, accusing the company of gross negligence and recklessness. They have sought out whistle-blowers and filed Freedom of Information requests. They got a meeting for themselves and eleven other victims' families with Elaine Chao, the Secretary of Transportation. Afterward, they held a large vigil outside the department's headquarters. When the vigil broke up, I talked with Gregory Travis, a software engineer and pilot who has written extensively about the crashes. "Every past crash that I can think of was an accident, in that there was something that wasn't really reasonably foreseeable," Travis told me. "This was entirely different, and I don't think anyone understands that. This was a collision of deregulation and Wall Street, and the tragic thing is that it *was* tragic. It was inevitable."

I met the Stumos in 1996, in Winsted, a former mill town of eight thousand people in northwest Connecticut. After emigrating from Lebanon in the nineteen-twenties, Milleron's grandfather opened a restaurant there. Her grandmother, Ralph Nader's mother, lived in the town until her death, in 2006, at ninety-nine. Nader still visits from Washington, and his family funds two activists to monitor local affairs and bend them in a progressive direction.

Milleron and Stumo met in law school, at the University of Iowa, and afterward settled in Winsted, moving into a house on Hillside Avenue and starting a family. First Adnaan, then Samya, then Nels. They began attending an Orthodox Christian church in a nearby town. Nadia worked part time, as a court-appointed lawyer. Michael commuted twenty-five miles to a Hartford law firm, and joined the Winsted school board.

I came to Winsted for my first job, at the *Winsted Journal*, a weekly paper.

At the first school-board meeting I covered, Michael arrived late from Hartford. He was wearing a suit that hung loosely on his lanky six-foot-one-inch frame. He carried a briefcase. He was only twenty-nine, but he looked every bit the engaged citizen and responsible father.

Michael and I met a few times at a gloomy bar on Main Street, where he offered a wry perspective on Winsted politics and the plight of small-town America. He invited me over for breakfast. I remember warm sunlight, pancakes, small kids, and being impressed by Nadia, a tall woman with long dark hair and an intently appraising gaze.

I was soon gone from Winsted, to a daily paper near Hartford. In 1999, after the birth of Tor and the death of Nels, the Stumo family bought a ramshackle eighteenth-century house on a farm, over the Massachusetts line. It had been owned by sheep farmers who published a magazine called *The Shepherd*; old issues were strewn about the house, and manure was piled four feet high in the barn. Michael worked for months cleaning the house and clearing out the barn with a tractor.

A year later, Nader ran for President as a member of the Green Party. He had made his name in auto safety. In 1965, when he was thirty-one, he published "Unsafe at Any Speed," a book that focussed on the Chevrolet Corvair, which he said had prioritized "stylistic pornography over engineering integrity." The book contrasted the negligent safety standards of automobiles with the approach of airlines, in which safety was encouraged by market reality. "Plane crashes . . . jeopardize the attraction of flying for potential passengers and therefore strike at the heart of the air transport economy," he wrote. "They motivate preventative efforts."

A few months later, Nader testified before Congress. His performance made his book a best-seller and spurred consumers to abandon the Corvair. Improvements in car safety sparked by his revelations contributed to a decades-long decline in highway fatalities. In 1971, Nader founded Public Citizen, a non-profit that expanded his crusades to campaign finance, health care, and renewable energy. In the eyes of many,

he became an unimpeachable advocate for the common good.

Nader ran for President in 1996, but his impact was negligible. In 2000, he tried again, tapping into dissatisfaction with Al Gore, the Democratic candidate. "Corporations were designed to be our servants, not our masters," Nader declared at a rally, at Madison Square Garden, attended by fifteen thousand people. He got onto the ballot in forty-three states and received nearly three million votes. Many of his former admirers turned against him, however, regarding him as a spoiler. In Florida, which George W. Bush won by five hundred and thirty-seven votes, Nader received 97,488 votes.

Michael Stumo bought two hundred pigs to raise without antibiotics, but they got sick, the farm was quarantined, and he was forced to sell them at a loss. Nadia, who raised poultry, managed better, selling three hun-

dred chickens and sixty turkeys one year. But her main focus was the children, whom she homeschooled and drove to far-flung music lessons and to church. When, at fourteen, Samya felt that she needed a more challenging academic program, Nadia drove her to an early-college program at Mary Baldwin University, in Virginia.

Michael rented out part of their land and started spending more time on the issues we'd talked about in Winsted. He developed ideas for antitrust and trade policy, and in 2007 he helped found the Coalition for a Prosperous America, to fight for small farmers and manufacturers—"producers," he called them—against large foreign rivals.

With backing from farmers, unions, and manufacturers, he became a lobbyist. On one of his trips to Washington, I met him in a House cafeteria, where he was fresh from a short-lived win on trade policy. He flashed a gap-toothed smile, unself-conscious about



"So, in writing, there are six basic plots, and their sequels and derivative franchises."

wearing a dress shirt tucked into shorts.

One of the coalition's board members was Stan Sorscher, an engineer at Boeing and an official of the engineers' union. Boeing was far larger than the small companies Michael advocated for, but he viewed it as a sort of "national champion" that the country should have more of. At a time when many U.S. manufacturers were losing market share to global rivals, Boeing was the country's largest exporter.

But the company was in tremendous flux. When Sorscher first went to work there, in 1980, after earning a doctorate in physics, he marvelled at its culture, which emphasized quality improvement and communication. Managers held regular meetings for engineers to address problems; engineers worked directly with suppliers; teams shared resources, knowing that the gesture would be reciprocated. The planes that Boeing was developing—such as the 777, its first jet to use significant computer controls—were a success, with few problems after launch.

In December, 1996, Boeing announced that it was buying a struggling rival, McDonnell Douglas, for thirteen billion dollars. Sorscher is one of many Boeing employees who have identified the merger as the moment when Boeing went from being led by engineers to being led by business executives driven by stock performance.

Sorscher recalled a labor-management breakfast, shortly before the merger, at which a top Boeing executive said that the company would reduce spending on a program that employed engineers to find improvements in the process of making planes. Sorscher, a member of the union's bargaining unit at the time, pointed out how much money process improvement was saving the company.

The executive tipped his head back, as if thinking how best to explain basic economics to a clueless scientist. Finally, as Sorscher recalled, the executive said, "The decisions I make have more influence over outcomes than all the decisions you make." Sorscher told me, "It was: 'I can't help but make a billion dollars every time I pick up the phone. You people do things that save four hundred thousand dollars, that take one shift out of flow time—who gives a crap?'"

Three years later, the engineers' union went on strike over bonus pay and cuts in health coverage. James Dagnon, another Boeing executive, said that engineers had to accept that they were no longer the center of the universe. "We laughed," Sorscher recalled. "This is an engineering company—these are complex, heavily engineered products. Of course we're the center of the universe. But he wasn't kidding. We didn't get it. Who is the center of the universe? It's the executives."

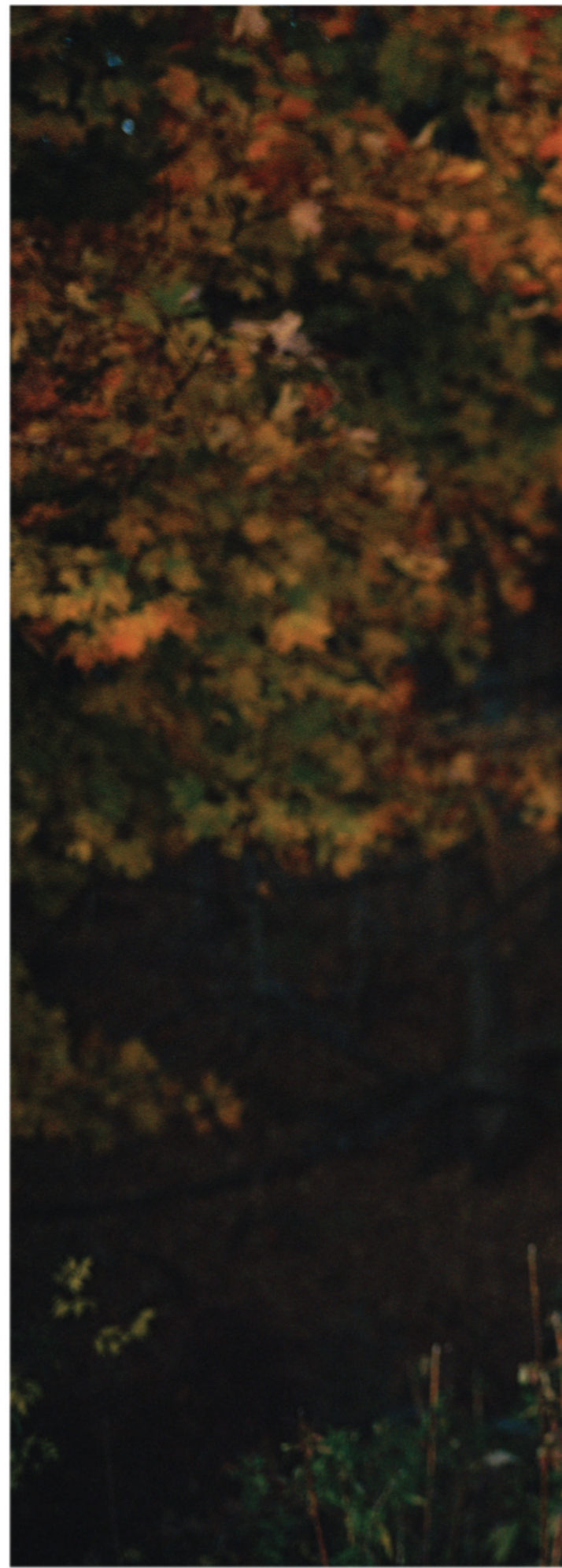
In 2002, Sorscher, who had started working for the union full time, made his case to a Wall Street analyst in Seattle, arguing that bottom-line business models did not apply to building airplanes. The analyst cut him off. "You think you're different," he said, according to Sorscher. "This business model works for everyone. It works for ladies' garments, for running shoes, for hard drives, for integrated circuits, and it will work for you."

Taken aback, Sorscher said, "Let's build an airliner with this business model. If it works, you and everyone who looks like you will be happy. And if I'm right, then we'll all be very unhappy."

In the spring of 2004, Boeing started designing the 787 Dreamliner, a three-hundred-and-thirty-passenger jet. The following year, the company named a new C.E.O., Jim McNerney, a Harvard M.B.A. who had worked at Procter & Gamble, McKinsey, General Electric, and 3M. According to Sorscher, under McNerney engineers were discouraged from voicing concerns. "What we heard five thousand times was 'Follow the plan,'" Sorscher said. "'Your job is to follow the plan, and if you can't follow the plan we'll fire you and get someone to follow the plan.'"

By the time the 787 was ready, in 2011, the program was three years late and tens of billions of dollars over budget. A year later, after the airplanes' batteries displayed a tendency to catch fire, the fleet was grounded for three months.

Nonetheless, the company's finances thrived. Between 2005 and 2015, the share price more than doubled, owing in part to Boeing's aggressive repurchasing of its own stock. "The company has developed fail-safe systems for smoothing earnings, beating expectations and jacking up demand for



Since their daughter died, Michael Stumo and

its shares with a precision that rivals any jet that rolled off the assembly line in Boeing's heyday," Maureen Tkacik wrote recently, in *The New Republic*. Between 2013 and 2019, Boeing paid out \$17.4 billion in dividends, more than forty per cent of its profits. In his last three years as C.E.O., McNerney received eighty million dollars.

Despite the stock rise, Richard Aboulafia, a prominent industry ana-



Nadia Milleron have made more than a dozen trips to Washington. They are the first Americans to sue Boeing over the crashes.

lyst, had misgivings. In his January, 2013, newsletter, after an earnings call, he fretted about Boeing's unwillingness to learn from the Dreamliner problems. "There was no contrition or soul-searching on the call about how the 787 could have gone this wrong," he wrote. "Instead, the call emphasized some impressive sales and profit numbers. It was like a farmer showing off a great crop, but not mentioning that

the tractor just broke, he fired the mechanic, and outsourced tractor maintenance to Bolivia."

The government used to provide a counterweight to corporations that compromised safety. Owing in great part to the activism of Nader and his allies, in the late sixties and early seventies agencies such as the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the

Occupational Safety and Health Administration, and the Consumer Product Safety Commission were founded to protect citizens.

As early as 1971, however, there was a backlash. That year, Lewis Powell, prior to serving on the Supreme Court, wrote a memo calling on corporations to more aggressively fight regulations. He singled Nader out as a threat, "a legend in his own time and an idol of

YOUR FRIEND'S SHOWER



millions of Americans.” Ronald Reagan, elected in 1980, mocked what he considered to be overbearing regulators: “The nine most terrifying words in the English language are ‘I’m from the government and I’m here to help.’” Corporations portrayed tort lawyers as ambulance chasers seeking to make a buck through frivolous litigation.

By the early nineties, it was plain to Nader that the government was failing to regulate air safety. In “Collision Course,” a book that he co-wrote with Wesley J. Smith, they warned, “It is an unfortunate fact that government oversight and enforcement is so underfunded and understaffed that regulators and inspectors must rely upon the integrity and good faith of those they regulate to obey the rules.” They continued, “If a company is determined to cut corners, there is every likelihood that it will succeed, at least for a while.”

The book was published in 1993. A

decade later, Boeing lobbyists began pushing for a wholesale shift in regulatory oversight. For years, the F.A.A. had deployed “designated engineering representatives,” who were based at manufacturers and certified the safety of aircraft under development. The D.E.R.s were typically employed by manufacturers, but they were selected by and reported to the F.A.A.

In 2005, embracing the deregulatory agenda promoted by the Bush Administration and the Republicans in Congress, the F.A.A. changed to a model called Organization Designation Authorization. Manufacturers would now select and supervise the safety monitors. If the monitors saw something amiss, they would raise the issue with their managers rather than with the F.A.A. By sparing manufacturers the necessity of awaiting word from the F.A.A., proponents of the change argued, the aviation industry

could save twenty-five billion dollars in the next decade.

At a meeting on the new process, Sorscher said, “This is just designed for undue influence,” he recalled. “‘No, no, no,’ they said. ‘This will work.’ ‘How will this work?’ I said. ‘We have good people,’ they said. I said, ‘Good people in a bad system is still a bad system.’”

Marc Ronell, who began working in the F.A.A.’s Boston office after the change, told me that he raised concerns with his manager, saying, “We’re paid by taxpayers to protect the public. If we’re not protecting the public, who is?” The response, he said, was: “It’s really Congress’s responsibility. Our job is to serve the customer”—the company. Ronell, who has a Ph.D. in computer science and engineering, was also disconcerted by many F.A.A. engineers’ inexperience in vetting flight-control software. To train engineers lacking a computer-science background, the F.A.A. sends them to a two-week session in Oklahoma City. “You can’t substitute a two-week course for a four-year degree,” Ronell said.

In 2009, the F.A.A. created the Boeing Aviation Safety Oversight Office, a forty-person bureau in Seattle dedicated to serving Boeing, led by an employee named Ali Bahrami. Four years later, Bahrami left the F.A.A. to take a job with the Aerospace Industries Association, which lobbies for Boeing and other manufacturers.

According to a veteran F.A.A. engineer in Seattle, there has been constant pressure from F.A.A. managers to delegate oversight of plane development to Boeing. “The F.A.A. will tell you we do risk-based resource targeting, that we put our resources where there’s the most risk,” he told me. “That’s not true. The biggest focus is Boeing’s schedule.”

On October 28, 2018, a 737 MAX 8 flown by Lion Air took off from Bali, bound for Jakarta. Less than six minutes into the flight, a cockpit alert signalled an impending stall; the plane’s software directed the flight controls to point the nose downward. This adjustment occurred three times in close succession, but, each time, the crew, which included an off-duty pilot offering assistance, managed to override it. The flight made it safely to Jakarta.

The next day, the same plane, with a hundred and eighty-one passengers and a new crew, took off from Jakarta. Almost immediately, the control column began shaking violently, a warning that the plane gives when it's at risk of stalling. About three minutes into the flight, the automated controls kicked in, and the plane dropped seven hundred feet. The pilot, Bhavye Suneja, and his co-pilot, Harvino, repeatedly tried to lift the nose by holding down the switch that adjusted the stabilizer on the tail of the plane, but after ten seconds the automated controls kicked in again, driving the nose back down. They pulled frantically on the control column, but, twelve minutes into the flight, the plane dropped five thousand feet at four hundred and fifty miles per hour, into the Java Sea.

Boeing had conceived the 737 MAX in 2011. That spring, American Airlines told Boeing that it was on the verge of abandoning the older model of the 737, which had debuted in 1967 and undergone multiple updates, for Airbus's A320neo, which was more fuel-efficient. Boeing had been considering building an entirely new jet, but it could take a decade to design a new plane and get it through the full F.A.A. certification process. Airlines would also be required to train their crews on the new planes. Desperate to retain American, Boeing chose instead to overhaul the 737.

Updating the plane introduced some engineering difficulties. The new model had larger engines, and it was hard to find room for them on the low-slung 737. Boeing decided to place the engines farther forward, just in front of the wing. The new position, and the greater thrust of the engines, produced an aerodynamic challenge during a maneuver called a windup turn—a steep, banked spiral that brings a plane to the point of stall, which is required for safety tests, though it's rarely used in typical flying. “On most airplanes, as you approach stall you can feel it,” a veteran pilot for a U.S. commercial carrier told me. Instead of the steadily increasing force on the control column that pilots were used to feeling—and that F.A.A. guidelines required—the new engines caused a loosening sensation.

To correct this, Boeing settled on a software feature called the Maneuver-

ing Characteristics Augmentation System. As the nose of the jet approached a high angle, suggesting an oncoming stall, MCAS would adjust the stabilizer on the plane's tail, pushing the nose down, to alleviate the slackness in the control column. “They were trying to make it feel the same, so the pilots wouldn't require training,” the pilot said. Boeing had gone so far as to promise to pay Southwest Airlines, which flies 737s almost exclusively, a million dollars per plane if training on a simulator was found to be necessary.

Boeing considered the MCAS feature to be so minor that it removed mention of it from the 737 MAX's pilot manual. This meant that the Lion Air pilots had no idea why their plane kept forcing itself downward: an angle-of-attack sensor on the jet's nose had malfunctioned, mistakenly signalling that the plane was nearing a stall and leading MCAS to continually push the nose down—twenty-one times in all.

Nine days after the Lion Air crash, the F.A.A. issued an “airworthiness directive,” requiring an update of the 737 MAX's flight-operations manual. Boeing instructed pilots to deal with excessive downward pitching by following the procedure for “runaway trim”—the term for when the system that controls the angle of the stabilizer malfunctions. The F.A.A. agreed that this notice would suffice while



Boeing came up with a software fix for MCAS, which it indicated would take about six weeks.

But Boeing seemed to believe that pilot error had caused the crash. In its response to an initial Indonesian government report, it highlighted the contrasting reactions of the crew on the doomed flight and the crew the day before, saying that the pilots on the second day had not followed the standard “runaway trim” procedures.

One of Boeing's senior executives

for sales in Southeast Asia at the time of the crash told me that, at the company, the word was that the crash had been caused by pilot error. Sales for the 737 MAX remained strong, and none of his customers were asking him about pilot training to address MCAS. “There was nothing I was concerned about at that point in time,” he said. “The stock was holding up O.K.”

On December 17th, less than two months after the Lion Air crash, Boeing's board of directors approved a twenty-per-cent increase in the company dividend and a twenty-billion-dollar stock-repurchase program, allowing Muilenburg, who had replaced McNerney as C.E.O. in 2015, to carry out even larger buybacks than in previous years. The board also awarded Muilenburg a thirteen-million-dollar bonus.

On March 10th, in the early hours of the morning, Nadia Milleron was at the farmhouse taking care of Tor, who had a stomach virus. She turned on BBC Radio, and heard that there had been an airplane crash in Ethiopia.

Samya's boyfriend, Mike Snavely, was on the night shift at a San Francisco hospital, where he was doing his residency. He got a news alert on his phone. Adnaan, Samya's older brother, was in New Zealand, working construction, his latest stop in a young adulthood that had included hitchhiking to Alaska and sailing across the Atlantic in a thirty-six-foot boat.

The three of them rushed to find which flight Samya was on. Only after they reached Samya's boss at Think-Well did Nadia wake Michael. “These things always happened to other people,” Michael told me. “I thought, That can't be, and found out that it was.”

Three days later, Ralph Nader appeared on “Democracy Now,” the progressive news program. Nader, who is eighty-five years old, talked about all the good that Samya would have done for the world. “It was her first trip under her new job to Africa,” he said. “Very enthusiastic. And she got to Addis Ababa and boarded this”—he paused—“killer plane, the MAX, 737 MAX 8.”

In Seattle, Stan Sorscher got a text from Michael, who was writing to let the board of the Coalition for a Prosperous America know that he would



Samya, in 2017, in Copenhagen, where she was studying global public health.

miss the annual trade conference. He was going to Ethiopia, he told them, to collect his daughter's body.

After the family got to the crash site, they settled for less. "It's a beautiful place," Michael said, at a memorial service held at the family farm. "It's on a rolling high plateau with beautiful vistas and views, hawks everywhere, local agriculture, people plowing with cattle and a single-bottom plow. And the Ethiopian people are beautiful—Nadia and Tor were really at peace at that site. Samya loved East Africa, she loved agriculture, she loved the people."

Three weeks after the crash, Michael, Nadia, and Adnaan flew to Chicago, where Boeing has its headquarters, to file a lawsuit against the company in U.S. District Court. All of the more than three hundred and fifty 737 MAX planes had been grounded, worldwide, but U.S. regulators were sending signals that they would move quickly to get them back in the air. An F.A.A. board proposed that future pilot training be done via iPads. The agency was allowing only fourteen days for comments on the proposal. Along with a half-dozen other families, the Stumos submitted a letter, complaining that this was not enough time to mount

a proper response, and the comment period was extended to thirty days.

Boeing was desperate to get the 737 MAX flying again—there were more than five thousand planes on back order, with dozens coming off the assembly line every month. Muilenburg vowed to make "safe airplanes even safer." The Stumos saw it as their mission to determine with certainty that the MAX was safe—even if it meant training pilots on simulators and putting the plane through full F.A.A. certification, a process that could last several years. But these were short-term fixes. To prevent future disasters, their goal was to strengthen the regulatory oversight that had atrophied over time.

In early June, Nadia and her brother, Tarek Milleron, flew to Washington, where Michael had secured meetings with the leadership of the F.A.A. and the National Transportation Safety Board. I accompanied them to an apartment in Northwest Washington to pick up Paul Njoroge, a thirty-five-year-old Kenyan-Canadian banker who had lost his entire family in the crash: his wife, their three young children, and her mother. The Stumos had been trying to reach victims' families around the world, and Njoroge was among the first to respond. A trim, handsome man,

he stood uncertainly in the apartment. He wore a dark suit, and looked both well put-together and utterly at a loss.

We drove downtown to a WeWork building, where we met Michael, and discussed the day ahead. They agreed that Paul, who was especially angry about efforts to blame foreign pilots for the crashes, would be the one to confront F.A.A. officials on the issue. Paul said that he preferred not to go on about the enormity of his loss, because he worried that the officials' expressions of sympathy would allow them to filibuster away the meeting.

Nadia had every intention of talking about the loss of her daughter. She said that she would tell them "what I experience over and over again during the day, where I think about her fear and terror."

Paul said that he understood, but Nadia wasn't done: "And then I want to say that this body that was perfectly healthy was broken into small bits that we don't even have in one place, and that I am overwhelmed by my grief."

Again Paul tried to agree, but she pressed on: "And I want to say, 'Why didn't you protect us? Why, with all the resources of the United States, didn't you make sure that the plane my daughter was flying in was adequate to fly?'"

The meeting at the F.A.A. left them frustrated. The agency's interim chief at the time, Daniel Elwell, refused to pledge to ground the 737 MAX until all investigations had been completed, and he equivocated on whether simulator training would be required for pilots. But, after the meeting at the N.T.S.B., they left satisfied that the agency's report on the crashes would be rigorous, and grateful for a level of empathy they felt had been lacking at the F.A.A. meeting.

Michael caught a plane to Chicago, while the rest of us headed to Ralph Nader's office, on P Street. Nader offered Njoroge one of the "AXE THE MAX" pins he had designed, urging a boycott of the plane.

"*Khali* Ralph," Milleron said, using the Arabic term for maternal uncle. "Paul is new to advocacy and trying to make things better and right in aviation safety, for sure, but he is looking for your inspiration for how to be effective."

"That is the only thing that can mo-

tivate me today,” Njoroge said. “Because, after this happens, I start asking myself, What is the essence of life? And I find myself very demotivated. What am I going to do with my life?”

“Is this your entire family?” Nader said. “Yes, my entire family.”

The man who had taken to Capitol Hill a half century earlier advised, “You have a few months of opportunity—because of your loss—that very few people have to get in the door. Door after door after door.” Nader continued, “That requires study. You have to study the committees—who they are, all that.”

“Yes, yes.”

“You’ll see who is slowing down the hearings, who wants to push the hearings, who they want to testify, who they don’t want to testify,” Nader said. “I would suggest you make this . . .” He searched for the right word. “This is the one that took your family,” he said. “You can learn all the players. All the variables.” He suggested that Njoroge get the congressional handbook, which lists the members of Congress and their committees.

There was some pathos in Nader’s insights on Congress, which dated to another era, when committees wielded more power, when staff had more expertise, when members displayed more independence. His advice was infused with an idealism bordering on nostalgia: this is how one would take one’s cause to Congress, if Congress still functioned as it should.

The Stumos returned to Washington a month later, for a hearing before the House aviation subcommittee. They had attended two previous hearings, holding a large poster with photographs of dozens of the Ethiopian Air victims. This was the first time they were allowed to testify. As the hearing was about to begin, Boeing announced that it was setting aside fifty million dollars to help victims’ families, which the Stumos felt was a transparent attempt to preempt the hearings.

At Michael’s urging, Njoroge led off the testimony, memorializing his five lost family members. Michael, who had testified at congressional hearings before, handled the committee’s questions with ease. At one point, he sketched out what future hearings on the 737 MAX should include. “Any whistle-blowers who may have been fired, and maybe

have a gag order pursuant to a settlement—who have complained about safety issues with regard to the 737 MAX—should be called to testify, with protective subpoenas, so the public can hear what they have to say,” he told the subcommittee. “The aviation-software writers—do they have the same level of engineering safety culture as regular aviation engineers?”

Michael’s restrained, lawyerly tone reminded me of something he had told me weeks earlier about the many meetings that he and Nadia had been having with members of Congress: “Nadia would pound them over the head. I’m a little more Iowa about it.”

A week later, Ali Bahrami, who in 2017 left lobbying to return to the F.A.A. as its chief of aviation safety, appeared at a Senate hearing. The *Wall Street Journal* had just reported that the F.A.A. had determined, after the Lion Air crash, that there was a high risk of another 737 MAX emergency within the next ten months, but had decided to allow Boeing to proceed with its software fix without grounding the planes. Bahrami said, “From the safety perspective, we felt strongly that what we did was adequate.”

Nadia was furious. At midnight, she and Tor started making signs—one read “FAA gambled 10 months and lost 346 lives.” At 2 A.M., they got into the car and drove to Washington. When they arrived at the F.A.A., a Homeland Security officer refused to let them enter. Eventually, they were called in to meet with Bahrami. As Tor related in a recording that he made immediately afterward, they asked Bahrami what he thought he could have done to prevent the Ethiopia crash. Bahrami said that there was nothing he could have done. (Bahrami does not recall saying this.) “I can tell you what you should’ve done,” Tor told him. “You should have grounded the plane after the Indonesian crash.” Then he and Nadia drove the seven hours back home.

In May, at the first House hearing on the 737 MAX, the top-ranking Republican on the transportation committee, Sam Graves, of Missouri, blamed the pilots. A pilot himself, he criticized Yared Getachew, the Ethiopian Airlines pilot, for going too fast, making recovery more

difficult, and for following “no operating procedure that I have heard of.” “You have to know how to fly the plane!” Graves said. “It just bothers me that we continue to tear down our system based on what has happened in another country.” Elwell, the interim F.A.A. chief, said that the Ethiopian pilots should have overcome MCAS “via a checklist they should have memorized,” and that they “never controlled their air speed.”

In September, in the *Times Magazine*, William Langewiesche, also a pilot, argued that inadequate pilot training in countries like Indonesia was “just as guilty” in the 737 MAX disasters as the planes’ malfunctions. The article suggested that Boeing was being maligned, in a “public onslaught” that included “exploitation of personal tragedy and the construction of a whole new economic sector built around perceptions of the company’s liability.”

Pilot training in Indonesia leaves a great deal to be desired. (Ethiopian Airlines has long been held in higher regard—for one thing, the U.S. paid for general training of the airline’s staff after it ordered forty 737 MAX planes, in 2015.) But to conclude that pilot error was the overriding cause of the crashes requires downplaying a string of revelations about Boeing, the 737 MAX, and the F.A.A. which began to emerge soon after the second crash.

The Seattle *Times* reported that MCAS had initially been designed to be much weaker and to kick in only at high airspeed, which is why Boeing allowed just one angle-of-attack sensor to activate it. But the company later revised MCAS to deploy at lower airspeed, and with greater force—yet left it with just a single sensor for activation. Even as MCAS grew stronger, oversight of the system was delegated to Boeing. The New York *Times* reported that F.A.A. officials were surprised to learn crucial details about MCAS only after the Lion Air crash.

The F.A.A. has said that it lacked the resources to oversee the plane’s updates, but the veteran F.A.A. engineer in Seattle told me that this was because of the way its Boeing office was set up by Ali Bahrami, with only a few people assigned to flight controls. “There are forty-four thousand people in the F.A.A.,” the engineer said. “But we don’t

have enough people to spend four hours to evaluate the MCAS safety assessment?”

The *New York Times* reported that Boeing had offered a safety feature to alert pilots to a faulty angle-of-attack sensor, but charged extra for it; neither of the doomed planes had this equipment. The *Wall Street Journal* reported that Boeing’s assumption in designing MCAS was that, in the event of a malfunction, pilots would be able to respond properly within four seconds.

Taken together, the reports suggested that Boeing had put all the risk on the pilot, who would be expected to know what to do within seconds if a system he didn’t know existed set off a welter of cockpit alerts and forced the plane downward. “An airplane shouldn’t put itself in a position where the pilots have to act heroically to save the plane,” the veteran U.S. commercial-airline pilot told me. “Pilots shouldn’t have to be superhuman. Planes are built to be flown by normal people.” Gregory Travis, the pilot and software engineer, said, “MCAS sealed their fate. Every-

thing that comes after that is noise.”

Chesley Sullenberger, the pilot who, in 2009, saved a plane by crash-landing it in the Hudson River, testified at a House hearing in June. “Boeing has said that they did not categorize a failure of MCAS as more critical because they assumed that pilot action would be the safeguard,” he said. This was a mistake. “I can tell you first hand that the startle factor is real and it’s huge—it absolutely interferes with one’s ability to quickly analyze the crisis and take effective action.” He said that he, too, had struggled in a 737 MAX simulator after the crashes. “Even knowing what was going to happen, I could see how crews could have run out of time before they could have solved the problems,” he said. MCAS, he concluded, “was fatally flawed and should never have been approved.”

A recent battery of reports has confirmed this assessment. In September, the N.T.S.B. issued its first report on the 737 MAX, declaring that Boeing underestimated the cockpit chaos that

would result from an MCAS malfunction and the effect this would have on a pilot’s ability to react quickly. A report by a task force made up of U.S. and international regulators concluded that Boeing’s engineering representatives faced “undue pressure.” The Indonesian government’s final report on the Lion Air crash cited, among other factors, Boeing’s failure to mention MCAS in the 737 MAX manual—the cockpit recorder captured the sound of the pilots riffling through pages in vain.

Currently, about seven hundred 737 MAX planes have been grounded or are awaiting delivery, and it seems likely that the plane’s return will stretch well into 2020. The F.A.A.’s European counterpart has made plain that it now has so little faith in Boeing and the F.A.A.’s ability to regulate the planes that it might take the unprecedented step of withholding approval even after the F.A.A. signs off.

The grounding has cost airlines some four billion dollars—Southwest Airlines, which has purchased more 737 MAX by far than any other airline, has cancelled thousands of flights, leading its pilots’ union to sue Boeing for lost pay. Boeing estimates the total loss to the company at nine billion dollars and rising. Its stock is down fifteen per cent since the Ethiopian crash, erasing thirty-four billion dollars in value and prompting a shareholder lawsuit.

The company has belatedly signalled that it recognizes that its corporate evolution in the past couple of decades played a role in the disaster. In September, an internal committee recommended that top engineers report to the commercial-airplane division’s chief engineer—in theory, a reassertion of expertise against the bottom-line mind-set that Stan Sorscher and others deplored. Soon afterward, Boeing replaced the head of its commercial-airplane division, and its board of directors stripped Muilenburg of his title as the company’s chairman.

In late October, Muilenburg testified before two congressional committees, where he was challenged in light of a litany of new revelations. In 2015, a Boeing employee had asked in an e-mail, “Are we vulnerable to single AOA sensor failures with the MCAS implementation?” The following year, the chief technical pilot for the 737 MAX told a



colleague in a text that MCAS was “running rampant” and “egregious” in a simulator. A June, 2018, Boeing document stated that, if a pilot took more than ten seconds to react to mistaken MCAS activation, the result could be “catastrophic.”

“If we knew then what we know now, we would have grounded right after the first accident,” Muilenburg testified. Yet he demurred repeatedly when asked if the disasters revealed a need to rein in the F.A.A.’s delegation of safety matters to Boeing.

The Stumos sat behind Muilenburg at both hearings. At the second one, they were joined by Nader, who clutched his congressional handbook. At the first hearing, Muilenburg had opened by offering an apology to the families, but had addressed it to the committee. As he was leaving the hearing, Nadia Milleron called out, “Mr. Muilenburg, when you say you’re sorry to someone, you turn to look at them.”

Muilenburg stopped, and looked at her. “I’m sorry,” he said.

In late June, Ralph Nader hosted a memorial service for victims of the Ethiopian Airlines flight at the American Museum of Tort Law, in Winsted, which he opened in 2015 in a former bank on Main Street. It is an unusual museum. At the center of the main room sits a gleaming red Chevy Corvair. Surrounding it are displays on victories for tort law over corporate negligence, told with colorful illustrations: tobacco, asbestos, the Ford Pinto. There is even a panel depicting G.M.’s attempt to entrap the young Nader by sending a prostitute to solicit him at a grocery store.

The memorial service was held in a windowless, dimly lit room at the back of the museum. Richard Blumenthal, the state’s senior senator, spoke, as did Joan Claybrook, the former president of Public Citizen, who had sold all of her Boeing stock and donated the proceeds to the museum in Samya’s memory.

But the event was dominated by Nader. In March, I had seen him at the service for Samya held at the farm. He sat by himself, with a plate of Lebanese food, wearing a heavy coat and a woolen hat. I offered my condolences. He nodded, then said, “I will never let Boeing forget her.”

At the museum, he spoke about the



“If it’s got my ass on it, it’s befitting of royalty.”

underappreciated centrality of tort law to American democracy—that the right of citizens to sue big corporations for wrongdoing was no less important than the right to vote or to face a jury of one’s peers.

There was pride and some defensiveness in his remarks. But there was also a poignant subtext—Boeing was likely to face a reckoning in court for the 737 MAX precisely because the other part of the system that Nader had championed over the years, government regulation, had failed so spectacularly. Nader and his allies had long ago shown the harm done by unchecked corporate greed, but they had been unable to stem the subsequent undermining of government’s ability to do the checking.

“This is a family that has risen to the occasion like similar families in other tragedies to make sure it doesn’t happen to someone else,” Nader said. “Their grief will never go away, but it is partially endurable by taking the lead, on behalf of all of us who fly, to make sure that the deterioration of the state of deregulation and corporate overreach will not plague the safety of hundreds of millions of future airline passengers.”

The thought occurred to me then, as it would many times in the months to come, that it was striking that this role should fall to this of all families. It would be absurd to suggest that they had been preparing for such a moment, but it was hard to imagine a family more prepared for it. To put it another way: Accountability for the 737 MAX would very likely have been more contained and more fleeting had Samya Stumo not been a passenger on Ethiopian Airlines Flight 302.

Michael was the last family member to speak. “We don’t want to be up front on this,” he said. “We want to do something else. But we have to do this.”

A few months later, I visited Michael and Nadia at the farm. It was the first cold day of fall, and Michael was loading wood into the outdoor boiler that heats the house. Nadia showed me two items of Samya’s that had been retrieved from the site: her passport and a journal, both drenched in jet fuel. Michael gave me a tour of his new barn and pointed out improvements that he wanted to make. But he’d be paying someone else to do them. “My whole life now is Boeing,” he said. ♦



THE TRIP
WEIKE WANG

In Beijing, he boiled the water. It was August, so the hottest month of the year. He put the water into a thermos and carried the thermos on a sling. He called himself a cowboy because he thought he looked dumb. Other people in the group carried a thermos, too, though his wife did not. Their tour guide was Felix. Like Felix the Cat, Felix said, and he replied, O.K. He had been to Europe before, the six-hour time change was fine, but when thirteen happened something yellow crusted around his eyes. The bus was air-conditioned. He dozed off, woke up, and by then his wife had finished his cowboy water. On the Great Wall, he had to run, since she was sprinting. She had come here long ago with a cousin. She was trying to show him a specific spot. This spot, when they got there, was where she, admiring the mountains, had learned from her cousin the word for “cool.” To not know that word, *shuang*, until she was thirteen, did he know how that felt? But you knew it in English, he wheezed, no oxygen left. She made a face. They sprinted on.

The tour would take them through the big cities. It had been a gift. Her parents, divorced, said, on separate calls, We want your first husband to see China and have good memories from there and sample its regional foods and see the warmth of its people and not hate us civilians should our two great nations ever partake in nuclear war. At least, that was what his wife said she had translated, then paraphrased.

He had not wanted to go, but her family was there, all except for the parents, who now lived in different states. She had no siblings. So, for years, it had been just the three of them under one roof that belonged, depending on the fight, to either Mom or Dad, but in truth belonged to the bank.

Do you know what that’s like? she would ask.

He did. His parents were divorced, but the divorce had been incredibly normal. They had not stuck it out, as hers did, until the day their child left for college. When his mother became a nag, his father began to drink. She nagged him about the drinking, and then he had an affair. A most American story, his wife said. She was studying how to write and had read a lot of Cheever.

In Xi’an, he bought bottled water, then shared with her a sausage on a stick that reminded her of childhood. Childhood, she said, and went to get another. Next, they drank something herbal from red tin cans, and he tried to crush his can with his grip, but couldn’t, which made her laugh. Their tour guide was Helen. Like Helen of Troy, she said, and he said, Sure. The Terracotta Army impressed him. More so than the Forbidden City—crowded—or the Great Wall. One person in their group got lost. Helen had rushed them down a long road of souvenirs and said, Please don’t buy anything, we’re already late for pickup. But a tourist called Karl stopped to buy something. The air-conditioned bus then had to drive another loop, but got stuck behind a crash and reappeared two hours later. In those two hours, Helen became silent. Only when his wife spoke to her in Chinese did she reply. All Karl bought was a magnet. At least buy the entire army. At least buy us a terra-cotta chariot. Two hours’ wait for a magnet. Fuck that magnet.

In Chengdu, he drank alcohol. She took him out for hot pot, for which the city was known. Hot pot and pandas. Their tour guide was Shirley. Like Shirley Temple, she said, and he said, All right. Pandas were lazy, he knew, but now understood. A panda’s main form of exercise was to eat. He willed one to move and it just shredded bamboo, stalk after stalk. This panda reminded him of his father, or the merged silhouette of his dad and the La-Z-Boy. Instead of bamboo, his father had eaten celery, after his mother threw out the alcohol. Childhood, he said to his wife, and she told him to respect his elders. At the hot-pot restaurant, the staff brought out a cauldron of dark-red water. This is mild spice? she asked, and they said it was. Into the red water they put chili-paste-marinated ribs and hot peppers. She told him she was going to cry. Cry or die? he asked, as he had just a taste and a flamethrower went off in his mouth. The staff brought them a bottle of alcohol. Then a plate of watermelon. Per her translation, they said, All free, please enjoy, and, remember, don’t be a pussy.

In Beijing, his mother e-mailed, but he didn’t reply.

In Xi’an, his mother texted, and he said yes, they had landed.

In Chengdu, his mother called. She wanted to know if he remembered So-and-So. His mother worked at UPS, and So-and-So’s Gam-gam had come in to mail a package. Gam-gam said that So-and-So had finally found a job in D.C. She asked his mother to relay a message from So-and-So about their time in high school when they worked at Chick-fil-A and that fun summer selling Aflac insurance. So-and-So used to be his best friend. They had once dated the same girl, who was now So-and-So’s wife and obese after three kids. So-and-So used to play football, defense—that field, green year-round, was the most expensive part of their school. Because So-and-So’s job was government, background checks were extensive—did he have a record, did he travel, who were his family and friends. When his mother paused, he said he had to go. But wait, his mother said, you haven’t told me anything about China. I want to know what you’re doing and eating. What did you do and eat today? What are you going to eat and do tomorrow? Sorry, Mom, he said, I really have to go.

In Shanghai, they met up with his wife’s cousin, who lived alone and worked in a pie shop. Here the prepaid tour ended and they said goodbye to Karl and the others. His wife had booked a room at the Langham. There were no light switches, just a control pad by the bed. The toilet lid lifted each time he passed. In Shanghai, they ate more. Hot pot, grilled fish, barbecue, fried noodles, soup noodles, soup dumplings, regular dumplings, an upscale KFC. He could no longer remember hunger.

The cousin spoke English. At one meal, he asked her about his wife’s Chinese and the cousin replied that his wife’s Chinese was like that of a toddler.

Sorry? he said.

The cousin said that it was like talking to someone between the ages of three and five.

Oh.

For instance, she and I could not discuss, in Chinese, politics or culture. If I asked her what she thought of the clash between person and state, our

preoccupation with status and wealth, our envy of the West, our pride, our tendency to self-criticize, your wife would not know how to respond.

The cousin's English was great. The pie shop was run by an American who, on his study abroad, had discovered that China did not have pie, and thus opened a store to remedy this. His wife said nothing and looked down. Then the cousin laughed and they gan bei-ed. Back at the Langham, he told his wife that she could switch to English with her cousin anytime; they weren't kids. No, his wife said, and that was that.

What do you think about the pies? he asked a little later.

Nothing, she said.

Really? he said. You have no thoughts on the pies?

She said she really didn't.

His mother baked pies and his wife had thoughts on them. Come Thanksgiving, his mother usually made four, and his wife would look at the pies, each a foot in diameter, and ask why four modestly sized people—his mother had remarried—needed four large pies.

Nothing to say at all?

No.

His mother called, but he was in the shower.

His mother called again, and he picked up. Did he remember this teacher? The teacher had come in to mail a package and mentioned that her son used to be his student. The teacher said her son was the best and possessed a natural mind for math. I wrote his letter of rec, the teacher said, and it was an honor to. In the letter, the teacher wrote about what it meant for someone like her son to have come out of their little town; he emphasized how rare that was. It had come as no surprise to him when he saw in the local paper, which was displayed at the store, that his best student had graduated summa cum laude from Duke, or, later, in the same paper, that he was doing his graduate work at Harvard, his post-graduate work at M.I.T., and then that he had been offered a place at a computational think tank, modelling how blood moves in the body, through arteries and veins, saving lives, and now, most recently, that he had just published his first *Nature* paper—congrat-

ulations—which his teacher apologized for not being able to understand, after his mother had sent him a copy. Do you remember his son? his mother asked next. He said he remembered this teacher, wonderful yet firm, but not his son. Well, his mother said, his son teaches math at the community college, where they have lots of Chinese students now. Chinese students from China. Supposedly very lucrative, but I can't imagine why Chinese students would want to come here. Maybe no one told them that there's nothing to do. Listening, he thought, I love you, Mom, but I don't like you. If he ever told her that, his mother would want to know when, at what point, exactly, he had stopped liking her. He would then have to say that it was gradual. But when did it start? Probably when he was eleven.

He did not read the local paper. His mother sent it to him, but he recycled. Only when a truly absurd headline appeared did he keep it as a reminder. One such headline was "WOMAN KICKED IN FACE BY DEER."

His wife did not get involved. The only time she did was when, one Thanksgiving, he mentioned that he was applying for a passport, as they were going to Europe for vacation. Suddenly, his stepfather got up and unmuted the television. His mother looked at his wife and then at him.

Tell me, his mother said, do the two of you have no interest in seeing the



rest of America? Yellowstone. The Grand Canyon. The amount of natural beauty in this country is endless. Then his mother began to reminisce. They used to take road trips and go camping. He used to play cowboys and Indians in the back seat.

We are not trying to say that we do not love Yellowstone, his wife answered. He told his mother that it was just a passport.

We started watching documentaries about China because of you, his mother said to his wife. We loved seeing people eat with chopsticks, and the pandas—we loved seeing them play. We even bought chopsticks. She went to the cupboard. Do you want to use them? His wife looked down, and, seeing his wife look down, he told his mother to stop talking.

Why do I have to stop?

He stared at her.

No, I don't think I want to.

Please stop talking.

What's gotten into you?

Shut up right now.

Later, his wife said that the entire meal was surreal. She found his mother interesting. Someone like her actually exists, she said, almost excited. And these places exist, and your stepdad watches ESPN, and they don't want passports, they've never been on a plane, all those pickup trucks, amazing!

But also, his wife said, somewhat serious, it must be confusing for your mom, how to stay involved without being afraid—impossible now—and fear can manifest in strange ways.

He didn't think it was fear. He told her what he thought it was. Ignorance leads to fear, she said.

That year, his mother invited them, as usual, to the family reunion and he declined. They had a call about it.

So we're not good enough for you anymore.

That's not what I said.

When are you coming back to see me?

You already asked that.

At Duke, he had won an essay contest. He wrote about low expectations. The problem with low expectations, he wrote, is that they will often seem harmless or even kind. He won a thousand dollars. In college, he worked part time. There was a scholarship for first-gen students and advisers told him to apply. He opened the form but thought, If I get this, people will know. If I never tell, who would know? So he didn't apply and accrued ninety thousand dollars in debt.

But what about high expectations? his wife asked. To be groomed for a six-figure career, do you know what that's like? I have a friend, she would start. This friend was locked in a room

by his parents until he could do something right.

We need an average, he told her.

I don't want kids, she replied.

In Hangzhou, they met the rest of her family. Both grandmothers were still alive, and many uncles and aunts. A crowd of thirteen was waiting for them, the train-station arrival lane filled with mopeds and cars. Each person wanted to help carry something. In the end, they emptied out a suitcase to give each person a thing to carry. Then they all gathered at one aunt's house, a large apartment with a terrace, to eat. I can't eat any more, he told her, face down on the bed. She said he had to. Per her translation, her family thought all Americans could eat and if he couldn't it would be disappointing. He might be the first and last American they'd ever meet and he had to deliver.

His mother called, but he was eating.

His mother called, but he was on the toilet.

His mother called, but he was out on a run.

In Hangzhou, her cousin took them to see a pagoda. The pagoda had a history, but he zoned out, as all his energy was being used to digest food. He sat down and listened to his stomach. Moments later, his wife and the cousin began to argue. He could make out parts. While admiring West Lake, his wife had said *shuang*, and her cousin had said that that word meant refreshing, not cool. Cool was *ku*, as in ruthless or strong, the Chinese word for "cruel." His wife looked down. But immediately back up. The argument worsened until they had to leave, and, on the bus, it continued. At one point, her cousin turned to him and said in English, Hey, look, I'm arguing with a toddler, after which his wife swung her hand across the cousin's mouth. Then no one spoke.

She is like a sister to me, his wife had told him. Or maybe the closest to a sister that I can imagine.

They had known each other from age zero through five, then at thirteen, twenty-one, and now.

She had also said to him, I get that you don't want to see your family, but do you know what it's like to have that choice be made for you? My parents chose to leave. I did not. I was lonely.



“Edward J. Runt yearned for the day when he would say to his siblings, ‘It is you, my gluttonous kin, who have taught me the cold comforts of solitude, philosophy, literature; you who bade me to suckle at the bittersweet teat of introspection—and I pardon you! For although my stomach is empty, my soul is nourished.’”

In their bedroom, just the two of them, he asked what the fight was about. Nothing, his wife said. Just that the cousin had called her an ABC and said that she was the most classic American-born Chinese she knew. Only ABCs went on prepaid tours, spoke bad Chinese, married out, and thought everything was cool or great, when most things were just plain.

But I was born here, she said. I had a passport from here that I gave up.

The pagoda is where the legendary White Maiden is locked. The White Maiden is beautiful, immortal, and can turn, when necessary, into the white snake from which she came. She has an immortal sidekick who comes from a green snake. His wife had said that she remembered the TV show they'd watched—which had led to arguments about who was more like the White Maiden—and her cousin had replied that it was so ABC of her to remember the show but not the Ming-dynasty legend, which she could not read.

His wife cried for ten minutes and

then stopped. I see her point now, she said, and looked at him inquisitively. You know what I thought about when she called me an ABC? He didn't. I thought about my parents. Because her parents had funny names and accents, they had to spell their names out each time, slowly and with references. Q for Queen. G for George. X for Xerox. Z for Zebra. Eventually, they changed their names altogether. Raymond like “Everybody Loves Raymond.” Lucy like “I Love Lucy.”

These were the last phrases his wife said to him in English. After that moment, something changed. She stopped translating for him, too. At meals, he could only look around or eat or laugh when everyone else did.

A phase, he decided. Something to get out of her system. But then he wondered if that made him sound like his mother, who called many things a phase. His allergy to cats, his view of the world, etc.

Her family watched television together. They went from house to

house—each family member had a house for his wife and him to see and sit in, and a television to turn on so they could watch a variety show. The shows confused him, not just the language but the thought bubbles and commentary that exploded onscreen, over the actors' faces.

Do we find any of this bizarre? he asked, but his wife just yelled ha-ha-ha alongside her aunts. Because her family sat around her, he was pushed to the other end of the room. A grandmother would sit next to her and stroke her arm. His wife didn't seem to mind. One afternoon, a white man appeared on television. The white man spoke Chinese and wore rectangular glasses. Her cousin told him that this was Dashan, or Big Mountain, the most famous Chinese-speaking Caucasian in China. He spoke like a native. The American who ran the pie shop had decent Chinese, but not as good, so she called him Small Mountain. You could become either of them, her cousin said, or you could become Average Mountain. He said that this was not his plan.

His mother called and he answered so as not to watch more TV. What did you do today? What did you eat? He told her. And the day before? He told her. And what about tomorrow? He told her. Send me pictures of where they live. He asked why. She said she wanted to see what a Chinese town looked like. Do they have big kitchens and big couches, or no kitchens and floor mats? Do they buy their own produce or grow it themselves? Are there bazaars? Do they love dogs? Send me a picture of a well-loved dog. Does she come from a village? his mother asked. She does not, he said. But have they been nice to you? Have they treated you well? Are you eating enough? Is it too hot? How's the air? Are you allergic to anything? Have you seen a hospital? A pharmacy? Are the police dangerous? Did you meet Chairman Mao? He's dead, he said. But are there pictures of him up? Do they talk about him a lot? Do they pray? Have you seen a church? When are you coming back? When are you coming to visit? We can't wait for you to visit. The next time you do, we'll all go camping. Remember when you loved that? Remember cowboys and Indians and you would put mud on your face to— Mom,

DOWNPOUR

Last night we ended up on the couch
trying to remember
all of the friends who had died so far,

and this morning I wrote them down
in alphabetical order
on the flip side of a shopping list
you had left on the kitchen table.

So many of them had been swept away
as if by a hand from the sky,
it was good to recall them,
I was thinking
under the cold lights of a supermarket
as I guided a cart with a wobbly wheel
up and down the long strident aisles.

I was on the lookout for blueberries,
English muffins, linguini, heavy cream,
light bulbs, apples, Canadian bacon,
and whatever else was on the list,
which I managed to keep grocery side up,

until I had passed through the electric doors,
where I stopped to realize,
as I turned the list over,

he said. Well, she continued, have you seen a park? Are there cars? Does her family have a car? Is it new? Send me a picture of a brand-new car. Are you getting around O.K.? Do you feel less free? Less free? he asked. Do you feel less free over there? He hung up.

When her cousin wasn't there, they used Google Translate. They would speak into the phone mike and it would, supposedly, tell them each what the other had said.

I'm going out now, she said.

Where? he asked.

Out for a walk.

Do you want me to come?

Yes, but no, thanks, have a very nice day but you are not welcomed.

Then his wife put on a canvas bucket hat—there were many in the house—and went out for a stroll.

He looked online to see if this behavior was common. Of the medical causes, she could have had heat stroke or just a regular stroke. Had she concussed herself? Had there been a moment of trauma? On a husband forum,

husbands offered theories about why their wives had stopped talking to them. There was another forum, directly linked, of husbands seeking advice on how to make their wives talk less.

She came back from the stroll with more food. Everything was in a bag, even her cup of coffee was in a bag, which she held by the handles as she drank. She sat down next to him with a huge bag of prunes and a medium bag of sunflower seeds. Did you have a nice time? he asked. She didn't respond.

Did you have a nice time?

She took out her phone and spoke into it. Can I interest you in a prune?

But did you have a nice time?

Can I interest you in a sunflower seed?

Why is this happening? he asked.

Sometimes a thing just needs to happen.

Is this about my mother? Are you angry with me?

No harm, no foul. No pain, no gain.

I think you might be suffering from heat stroke.

that I had forgotten Terry O'Shea
as well as the bananas and the bread.

It was pouring by then,
spilling, as they say in Ireland,
people splashing across the lot to their cars.
And that is when I set out,
walking slowly and precisely,
a soaking-wet man
bearing bags of groceries,
walking as if in a procession honoring the dead.

I felt I owed this to Terry,
who was such a strong painter,
for almost forgetting him
and to all the others who had formed
a circle around him on the screen in my head.

I was walking more slowly now
in the presence of the compassion
the dead were extending to a comrade,

plus I was in no hurry to return
to the kitchen, where I would have to tell you
all about Terry and the bananas and the bread.

—Billy Collins

Can I interest you in some yogurt?
Maybe we should go see a doctor.
No, I am not a doctor, but thanks for
asking. That's so kind of you. One of my
aunts is a doctor, except she is not here
right now. What is your emergency?

Did he have an emergency? He shook
his head. She handed him a prune that
was wrapped in waxed paper. He didn't
like it but ate two more. She poured
sunflower seeds into his hand, and he
ate them, too. They spat the shells into
a metal bowl. Afterward, they spent
some time looking for a canvas hat that
would fit him.

My head is too big, he said.

No, Google Translate replied, it's
just that your head is too big and shaped
like a triangle. But do not fret, we will
find a triangle hat for you and, once
we do, you shall wear it while we eat
more prunes.

They wore their hats for the rest of
the day. Her family complimented the
look and took photos. He and his wife
posed with their arms each forming a
half heart and linked at the hands. In

this country, young couples like to dress
the same, one aunt said as the cousin
translated. It is silly, and we don't un-
derstand it. Maybe they're awkward
people. Or maybe they just want to
merge. Yes, we don't understand it, but
I suppose merging can be good, or it
can be frightening. Please keep the hat,
it suits you.

He spent half of their last day in the
bathroom, the other half at the
dinner table. It seemed that his wife's
Chinese had improved. Her cousin said
that it was now at the level of a first
grader. Her cousin also had a message
for him from his wife. His wife was sit-
ting right across from him.

How would you feel if you went back
first and I stayed a little longer?

What?

Her cousin repeated the message but
now mimicked his wife's voice.

No, he said, no way.

He looked at his wife, and she tilted
her head. Only when her cousin trans-
lated did his wife go, Ah.

What would you do here? he asked.

His wife showed him her phone,
which was logged into WeChat. She
scrolled through all the people she had
been chatting with on this app.

Who are these people? he asked, tak-
ing the phone away from her.

One was her cousin, her cousin said.
Aunts, uncles, both grandmothers, her
parents in the States. And friends she'd
made here.

Here? he asked. Which friends?

Her cousin listed them. Felix the
Cat. Helen of Troy. Shirley Temple.

Our guides? You're talking with our
tour guides?

And someone named Karl.

Oh, my God.

His wife beamed. She could type
Chinese a bit, and the others humored
her. Animated emojis filled in what she
could not yet say. She was considering
becoming a tour guide herself, here in
Hangzhou. She could show Americans
the pagoda and tell them the legend.
Eventually, she hoped to read the orig-
inal, ancient text.

Although, her cousin said, that would
require college-level literacy. But, given
her rate of progress, it would take her
only a few months to achieve.

A few months? he said. No, no way.

His wife's hand covered his. She
looked sad again.

What about me? he was about to say.
I am lonely, too. Then he thought about
it more. He looked at his wife's face,
which was open and smooth. His wife
spoke and her cousin translated. I will
come back, but I need some time. I would
like to do this on my own, but also with
this family. Family is a choice, you've
said. I am proud of you just as I hope
you are of me. No fears, no tears. If you
can, please add me on WeChat as well.

He nodded. That day, he flew alone.

On WeChat, she had a blog. He fol-
lowed her posts, pictures of West
Lake and the tourists she led around it,
pictures of food, of pets, a talking par-
rot, a box of chicks, a pickup truck. She
began to use some English again and
he learned some Chinese.

Ku, she wrote.

Ku back. ♦

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Weike Wang on culture clashes and identity.

THE CRITICS



THE CURRENT CINEMA

WHEELS WITHIN WHEELS

“Ford v Ferrari” and “Doctor Sleep.”

BY ANTHONY LANE

It would be a shame if “Ford v Ferrari” were to attract an audience composed of no one but motorheads. The title doesn’t help. In some countries, the movie is being released as “Le Mans ’66,” which isn’t much better. It’s undeniable that cars, or discussions of cars, feature in almost every scene, and that one car is pushed so close to its limits that its wheels, inside their rims, glow like the heart of a forge; yet this is not, in essence, an automotive film. It’s a film about pride—about being as proud of your own flesh and blood as you are of your metal machines, and about the craziness that flares up whenever pride gets hurt.

Exhibit A: the face of Henry Ford II (Tracy Letts). It’s the mid-nineteen-sixties, and we’ve just seen Enzo Ferrari (Remo Girone), in his Italian stronghold, brusquely reject a takeover bid from Ford. The bad news is brought back to the boss. Told of Ferrari’s insults, he doesn’t flinch—not, that is, until the final jab, as reported by an underling: “You’re not Henry Ford. You’re Henry Ford II.” That does it. *That* hits home. His expression is that of every favored child, through the ages, who has inherited a shining crown and fears, deep down, that he doesn’t deserve it. He is the prince, stuck in the shadow of the king and seeking to cast his own light. Letts, who as a performer and a playwright has grown scarily wise to the embodiments of power, tightens his features and sets his jaw. His eyes, as hard as stones, are a declaration of war.

Battle is to be joined on the race-track at Le Mans. Ferrari, who has won the fabled twenty-four-hour race four times in the past five years, must and

will be dethroned. No pressure. To that end, Ford brings in Carroll Shelby (Matt Damon), who was a co-driver in the Aston Martin that won Le Mans in 1959, and who will now attend to the birth of a new vehicle, specifically designed to be a Ferrari-whipper. And Shelby, in turn, will bring in Ken Miles (Christian Bale), who is swifter than any other driver on the circuit and more stubborn than is good for him. Think of him as the world’s quickest mule.

“Ford v Ferrari” is directed by James Mangold, and it may be his strongest film. Since his debut, “Heavy” (1995), he’s been drawn toward abrasion—to the talent, or the weakness, that people have for rubbing against each other. Of late, in his Marvel offerings, “The Wolverine” (2013) and “Logan” (2017), such emotional roughness has coarsened into raw violence, and I’m glad to say that, in the new movie, balance is restored; the rub goes on, primarily between Shelby and Miles, and sparks keep flying, but there are moments of surprising quietude. When Miles is informed that he won’t be driving at Le Mans in 1965, on the ground that, as one company executive puts it, he’s “not a Ford man,” he doesn’t ignite. He nods, accepts the decision, and stays in America, tinkering with engines, and listening to the race on the radio. Inside, of course, his soul is revving up, fuelled by the humiliation. His time will come.

Bale is a cussed and calculating actor, yet he’s never been more likable than he is here—an irony to relish, since the character he plays makes so little effort to be liked. Miles is a Brit, from the fringe of Birmingham, with an accent

of impermeable glumness. Chin up, mouth down: the basic demeanor of the mutinous. The idea of his obeying corporate strategy at Ford, let alone taking on the mighty glamour of Ferrari, is itself an excellent joke. (Shelby, played by Damon at his most chipper, is more pliable. Being a Texan, though, and rarely hatless, he is anything but a pushover.) Mangold adds an unexpected grace note, for Miles has a wife, Mollie (Caitriona Balfe), and a son, Peter (Noah Jupe), both of whom he adores. Indeed, the three of them constitute what will be, for current moviegoers, a bewildering rarity: the non-sappy happy family.

Balfe, though she doesn’t have a heap of screen time, is forceful in all she does. Annoyed with Ken, Mollie guns their station wagon at such a furious clip that even he, seated beside her, begs her to slow down. And Balfe is there again, in the movie’s best scene—no cars, no crowds, simply a sunny day in suburbia. Shelby shows up at the Miles residence, and Ken, who has a beef with him, clonks him on the nose; soon the two of them are slugging it out on a patch of grass across the street. Mollie emerges, takes one look, and, instead of rushing over to stop them, fetches herself a garden chair and calmly settles down with a copy of *Better Living* to watch the bout unfold. She sees these men for what they truly are. Boys will be boys, however fast their toys.

The more dangerous fight is reserved for the track—for many tracks, from Willow Springs, an hour or so north of Los Angeles, to Daytona, and thus, climactically, to the course at Le Mans. Shelby calls it “eight and a half miles of

ABOVE: PHILIPPE PETITROULET



Matt Damon and Christian Bale star in James Mangold's film of rivalry at the Le Mans race of 1966.

PORT

FEATURING
EDWARD NORTON
AND
MAYA HAWKE

+
NICOLE FLATTERY/ ITALO LUPI
AM HOMES/ DEYAN SUDJIC
LISA MCINERNEY/ DANNY DENTON
FORMAFANTASMA

ALSO:
LITERARY SECTION GUEST
EDITED BY CILLIAN MURPHY

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SEASONAL STYLE



THE STORY CONTINUES AT
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country road,” and he’s right. The scrap between the leading teams is surreal as well as punchy, with the Ford and the Ferrari hurtling between green fields, so close to each other that the drivers can swap snarls. Even now, for all the snap of the editing, we feel that we’re watching a character study strapped into an action flick. “Drive like you mean it” is Miles’s motto, and here, in France, he means business. Not the business of the Ford Motor Company, or the cramped Oedipal dealings of its chief, but the more pressing business of being Ken Miles, to the max.

There are only two downsides to this bracing tale. One, it could use a trim; the clash between our dynamic heroes and the stiff suits in the boardroom doesn’t need to be hammered home. And, two, strangely, Mangold misses a trick. The car developed by Shelby, and piloted by Miles, is the GT40. All that concerns them, understandably, is its pace and its powers of endurance, and when, beside the grid at Le Mans, they spot the Ferraris, resplendent in their scarlet plumage, Miles remarks, “If this were a beauty pageant, we just lost.” Not so. The GT40 was the most beautiful—some would say the only beautiful—creature ever to bear the badge of Ford, and certainly the only one that could look a Ferrari in the headlights and not blink. Le Mans ’66 was never merely a matter of speed and pride; it was also, in retrospect, a contest to ravish the eye. If you can’t make that clear in a major motion picture, where can you?

A man walks into a hotel. “Wakey, wakey,” he says. The lights come on. He descends to the basement and fires up the boiler, then takes a tour of the rooms. The door to one of the bathrooms bears a jagged hole, through which the man shows his anxious face. He seems to know his way around. It’s almost as if he’s been here before.

The man is Danny Torrance (Ewan McGregor), the hotel is the Overlook, and the movie is Mike Flanagan’s “Doctor Sleep,” a sequel of sorts to Stanley Kubrick’s “The Shining.” It’s been nearly forty years since we saw Danny, then a small boy, flee from his axe-wielding father, Jack, through a snowbound maze. After such trauma, it’s no wonder that the intervening decades have been unkind to Danny, leaving him soused in

alcohol and beached in gloom. Bravely, he strives to remake himself, quitting the bottle and taking a room in a small New Hampshire town. He even gets a job in a hospice. One thing he hasn’t lost is the shine—the ability to peer into the minds of others, including frightened souls at their last gasp.

Meanwhile, a gang of predators stalk the land. “They eat screams and drink pain,” we learn, and their commander is Rose the Hat (Rebecca Ferguson): a dandy, a wit, and a practiced murderess. We observe their handiwork, and it’s all gore and gloat; one sequence, involving the torment of a child, strikes me as dramatically inexcusable. Their crimes are tracked, from afar, by a telepathic teenager named Abra (Kyliegh Curran), whose shining is of the brightest kind—“like G.P.S. but in my head,” as she puts it. She uses it to locate Danny, and to share her findings with him. Together, they go to meet the evil face to face.

Fans of the original film love to pry into its every nook, with a wild surmise as to Kubrick’s intentions. (The 2012 documentary “Room 237” offers a diverting survey of such theories.) The sequel serves up plenty for specialists to chew on, not least a Jack Nicholson look-alike—insofar as that’s possible—behind the hotel bar, yet these semi-reconstructions betray an odd sense of superfluity and strain. The movie demands that the adult Danny pay a visit to old haunts, but does he really need to?

“Doctor Sleep” reminds me of another follow-up, “Blade Runner 2049” (2017), being drawn out, dutiful toward its source, and so disconsolate, at times, that it verges on the depressing. There’s also a lack of geographic focus; whereas Kubrick homed in on the Overlook and pretty much stayed there, Flanagan’s film is all over the place, crossing restively from state to state. Rose can even travel above the clouds, in a disembodied trance. (So why does she have to arrive at the finale by car?) Luckily, Ferguson is fabulous in the role. She and Curran take possession of the tale and save it with sprightliness; their smiles arise without warning. I only wish that Rose had been around when Jack Torrance was on the rampage. What a lovely couple they’d have made. ♦

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Richard Brody blogs about movies.

A CRITIC AT LARGE

FIRES IN THE MIRROR

Behind the U.K.'s problems with Europe lies a struggle with itself.

BY ISAAC CHOTINER



The more sentimental believers in the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom focus on synchronous developments in American and British politics during the past century. The Second World War, in this telling, was won by a pair of anti-fascists whose alliance and friendship made the world safe for democracy. Even more jaundiced observers cannot help but notice commonalities. In the nineteen-fifties, two moderately conservative regimes turned their countries slightly to the right, while establishing a decades-long, bipartisan commitment to the welfare state. A generation later, the conservative revolution arrived in both countries, with Margaret Thatcher triumphing over an

enfeebled Labour government, in 1979, and Ronald Reagan routing Jimmy Carter, in 1980. In the nineteen-nineties, two slick center-left politicians, Bill Clinton and Tony Blair, transformed their parties; just as the fifties conservatives had made peace with a social safety net, Democrats and Labourites made it clear that they welcomed the role of free markets and financial capital.

And then, in the summer of 2016, the U.K. voted to leave the European Union in a referendum hastily called by David Cameron—a perfectly fine update of a nineteen-fifties Tory Prime Minister, and someone who, in his recently released memoir, notes his ideological proximity to Barack Obama.

“Populist” explosions have become the central drama of the U.K. and the U.S.

Months later, the U.S. elected Donald Trump, a man who referred to himself as Mr. Brexit. These twin “populist” explosions have been the central drama in each country ever since, feeding the news cycle on both sides of the Atlantic with the same mixture of apprehension and disbelief.

American Presidents are difficult to dislodge in the middle of their terms, but British law allows the party in power to replace a Prime Minister without a general election. Boris Johnson, the third Tory premier in as many years, has a slight physical resemblance to Trump, comparable regard for women, and a governing style that combines buffoonery and demagoguery. If you can’t see Donald Trump as the Brussels correspondent for a major print newspaper, as Johnson was in the nineties, you can probably imagine him writing up two versions of a newspaper column—or, anyway, two versions of a tweet—on an issue of national importance, and waiting until the last possible moment to decide which one to publish, as Johnson did in the run-up to the Brexit referendum.

Trump and Johnson have managed to rise to power only because of the institutional weaknesses of their respective parties, and the willingness of conservative élites to stoke and then appease each leader’s base. But there is one key distinction. The Republican establishment, in acquiescing to Trump, has been cynical rather than careless. Tariffs aside, Trump has delivered to G.O.P. power brokers most of what they wanted: deep tax cuts, gutted environmental regulations, abortion restrictions, conservative judges. No such package of partisan gains will come from the Tories’ placation of the anti-European wing, regardless of how Brexit is enacted, assuming that it is.

Brexit is despised by much of the financial sector and many small-business owners. When fifty-two per cent of the U.K. voted to leave, no one in power knew how such a decision could be carried out. Three years later, according to one poll, a majority of Conservative Party members were willing to see the Party destroyed in order to achieve Brexit; a majority also supported leaving the E.U. even if it meant doing significant damage to the British economy. The deal that Boris Johnson finally struck with Europe could eventually lead

to a united Ireland and an independent Scotland. (Its ratification will likely depend on how Johnson's party fares in an election next month.) The Brexiteers who have been celebrating the prospect of a Great Britain unshackled and ready to recapture imperial-era glory may end up with nothing but a little England. What are the roots of such madness?

This is, in effect, the question that Fintan O'Toole sets out to answer in his new book, "The Politics of Pain: Postwar England and the Rise of Nationalism" (Liveright). O'Toole might quibble with my using "United Kingdom" and "Great Britain" interchangeably, since the United Kingdom, unlike Great Britain, encompasses Northern Ireland, whose border with the Republic of Ireland (a member in good standing of the European Union) has been a major Brexit sticking point. And one of the many shocking results of Brexit is the rupture it has created between the Tory Party and its unionist allies in Northern Ireland, the defense of whom has been a defining feature of British conservatism. (The Party's full name remains the Conservative and Unionist Party.) But O'Toole's book focusses on the distinction between Great Britain, which includes Scotland and Wales, and the England of his title—the real site of the Tory uprising against Europe.

An essayist of uncommon depth and breadth, O'Toole is a Dubliner known for his work on Ireland. Describing the complicated relationship between Irishness and Englishness, he writes, "So we had these two very different ways of thinking about England: as the opposite of *Us* and as a place where *Us* could mean something much more fluid and open." His concern about a United Kingdom severed from Europe, in turn, is that the fluidity and the openness that have appealed to centuries of dissidents and cosmopolitans are going to vanish. Written after the Brexit referendum but before Johnson replaced Theresa May (who succeeded Cameron), "The Politics of Pain" argues that the causes of the Brexit vote—and the tribulations of Toryism—reach back to the previous century.

The First World War ended with a nascent American hegemony and strong hints that Britain's imperial days were numbered. But in 1919 the United King-

dom held more territory than it had in 1914. The situation looked bleaker in 1945, at least from the perspective of those who thought Britain's destiny entailed ruling over people across the world without their consent. Britain emerged from the Second World War at once victorious and shrunken, the image of plucky heroism and imperial twilight. "The power of Brexit," O'Toole writes, "is that it promised to end at last all this tantalizing uncertainty by fusing these contradictory moods into a single emotion—the pleasurable self-pity in which one can feel at once horribly hard done by and exceptionally grand. Its promise is, at heart, a liberation, not from Europe, but from the torment of an eternally unresolved conflict between superiority and inferiority."

Or, as Evelyn Waugh wrote in his California-based satire of Anglo-Americanism, "The Loved One" (1948), "You never find an Englishman among the underdogs—except in England of course." India achieved independence in 1947, Jamaica in 1962; the great majority of the Empire's "subjects" won their freedom in that fifteen-year interval. By the time the Suez crisis concluded in humiliating fashion, in 1956—when President Eisenhower forced an abrupt end to the Anglo-French-Israeli military operation to regain control of the canal—American primacy, however resented, could no longer be denied.

Dean Acheson's famous remark, in 1962, that "Great Britain has lost an empire and has not yet found a role" suggests that striving to become a social democracy within Europe would somehow have been an insufficiently glorious ambition for an erstwhile world power. Acheson wasn't alone: the debates that galvanized the British in the first twenty-five years after the war—whether to join what was then called the European Economic Community (no), whether to develop an independent nuclear deterrent (yes), whether to devalue the pound (yes, belatedly)—reflected an inability to come to terms with a reduced status. The country never entirely adjusted to being a junior partner to America or a European member state. O'Toole, who argues that ambivalence about joining the European Community was intertwined with enduring fears of German domination, describes the "vertiginous fall from 'heart of empire' to 'occupied colony,'" and ob-

serves, "In the imperial imagination, there are only two states: dominant and submissive, colonizer and colonized." (Concerns about Germany making decisions for other sovereign European countries appear somewhat less paranoid in our post-financial-crisis era.)

Hanging over all these issues was Commonwealth immigration. In a superb new study, "The Unsettling of Europe: How Migration Reshaped a Continent" (Basic), Peter Gatrell notes that, in the postwar era, Irish immigration to England "steadily began to yield in significance to migration from other parts of the world." The British Nationality Act of 1948 had allowed Commonwealth citizens to relocate to the former motherland. "Like their counterparts in Paris or Marseille," Gatrell writes, "people who arrived from the Commonwealth, and particularly from the Caribbean, spoke the language of the host country, but stood out by virtue of their skin colour." Britain eventually passed the Commonwealth Immigrants Act of 1968, which made it more difficult for Commonwealth citizens, especially non-white ones, to settle in Britain.

This was also the year that Enoch Powell, a Tory M.P. who represented Wolverhampton, delivered his notorious "Rivers of Blood" speech. Warning of the supposed dangers of Commonwealth immigration, Powell juxtaposed the "decent, ordinary fellow Englishman" with "aliens," and, alluding to Virgil, added that, "like the Roman, I seem to see 'the River Tiber foaming with much blood.'" The speech compared proponents of anti-discrimination measures to the appeasers of an earlier era. Powell quoted a constituent who wanted to send his children abroad for their safety, convinced that, "in fifteen or twenty years' time, the black man will have the whip hand over the white man." Watching Britain let in so many immigrants of color, Powell went on, "is like watching a nation busily engaged in heaping up its own funeral pyre."

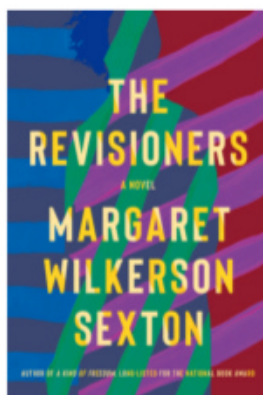
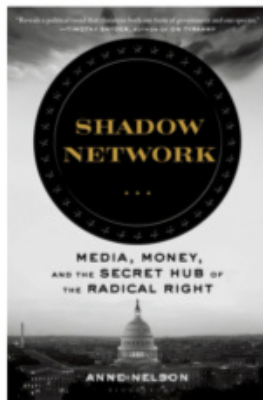
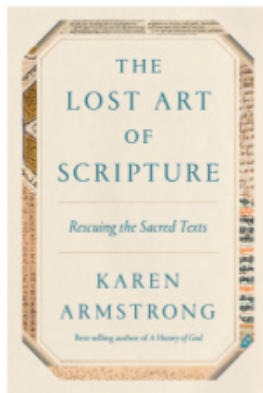
Powell's words and presence resonated with many voters, but his open expression of racial contempt also spurred outrage. (Leo Abse, a Welsh Labour M.P. who brought to government an abiding interest in psychoanalysis, claimed to spot a connection between fears of Com-

BRIEFLY NOTED

monwealth immigration and sexual insecurity, memorably stating, “If there were fewer eunuchs in the country, there would be fewer Enochs in the House.”) O’Toole suggests that Powell’s xenophobia was rechannelled, in consequential ways. “No senior figure with credible designs on power would again so explicitly blame blacks and Asians for England’s failings,” he writes. “This left a vacancy, which was filled by the European Union. A particular irony is that the scapegoating of the EU as the eternal source of England’s ills was facilitated in part by one of the more progressive developments in British culture: the gradual marginalization of open racism.”

Half a decade after the Rivers of Blood speech, Britain, over the strenuous objections of men like Powell, joined the European Community. But Powell remains a lodestar for understanding the brewing English-based rebellion against Europe. Paul Corthorn, in “Enoch Powell: Politics and Ideas in Modern Britain” (Oxford), charts his subject’s fascinating trajectory from a supporter of empire to a skeptic of Britain as a global power. Powell, of Welsh descent, was born in the West Midlands area of England, and studied classics. He served in India during the war, and initially had dreams of becoming viceroy. The granting of Indian independence—both overdue and, in execution, hasty—left him stunned and unmoored, and caused a fundamental rethinking of his views. During the next several decades, he began arguing that Britain must not live “in the past of a world-wide empire and the dominion of the seas,” and should instead “find its patriotism in England.” He was privately skeptical of the Suez conflict, which he viewed as post-imperial wishful thinking, a pathetic attempt “to get back what we had lost.” And all this consorted with his long-held disdain for America, his resentment of Britain’s “subordination” to an upstart power.

In the fall of 1974, Prime Minister Edward Heath, the Europhile Tory, was replaced by the Labour Party’s Harold Wilson, who had promised to renegotiate the British-European relationship, and won Powell’s endorsement. (In a referendum conducted eight months after the election, two-thirds of voters supported remaining in Europe.) Powell left the Conservative Party, declaring



The Lost Art of Scripture, by *Karen Armstrong (Knopf)*. This unusual, often dazzling, blend of theology, history, and neuroscience argues that our hyper-rational, left-brain-dominated society has become incapable of engaging with the “mythos” of Scripture. In a tour of religious practice spanning centuries of Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Confucianism, Armstrong writes that past cultures viewed myths as a “programme of action,” which, when enacted ritually or ethically, helped develop right-brain “habits of empathy.” To demonstrate how close the link between religion and action was, she quotes the Liji, an ancient Chinese text: “Rites obviate disorder, as dykes obviate floods.”

Shadow Network, by *Anne Nelson (Bloomsbury)*. Having grown up in Oklahoma and gone East for college, the author of this account of “the secret hub of the radical right” saw the dismay of friends back home at the gutting of environmental regulations and public education, and a marked deterioration in public health. She lays the blame with the Council for National Policy, a group that, though rooted in the oil-producing states of Texas, Louisiana, and Oklahoma, has national reach. Nelson describes the C.N.P., founded in 1981, as a “pluto-theocracy”—an alliance between evangelicals and wealthy funders, including the Koch, Mercer, and DeVos families. Alarmed at declining numbers of white Protestants, the C.N.P. has advocated privatizing public education and replacing it with schools that promote a “biblical worldview.”

The Revisioners, by *Margaret Wilkerson Sexton (Counterpoint)*. Set in New Orleans, this sweeping novel tells the stories of two women from different generations of one family. Born into slavery, Josephine is, in 1924, a widow, a “conjure woman,” and, to the chagrin of her white neighbors, a landowner. In 2017, Ava, a biracial single mother, takes a job as caretaker for her wealthy white grandmother, against the advice of her black mother, who inherited Josephine’s otherworldly powers. As various white women attempt to exploit black women, Sexton’s characters gain strength by finding one another across the generations. “Who are you?” Josephine asks a vision. The vision, ninety-three years in the future, answers, “Whoever you are, that’s who I am too.”

The Book of Daniel, by *Aaron Smith (Pittsburgh)*. Contemplating movie stars, serial killers, and masculinity, the title poem of this incisive, irreverent collection refers not to the Bible but to a scrapbook dedicated to the actor Daniel Craig. Smith’s poems expound a complicated and distinctly queer relationship to beauty. “Gayness // has always been more aesthetic for me / than sexual,” he muses. “I’d rather have the magazine // than the man in the magazine.” He levels a caustic wit at the pantheons of pop culture and modern poetry, but also strikes resounding notes of hurt and rage at homophobia, misogyny, rejection, and loss—at “how small life is and how quick, // how contained we are inside something / we can’t contain.”

that “the party system has broken in our hands,” and joined the Ulster Unionist Party, exchanging his parliamentary constituency for one in Northern Ireland. It was, as Corthorn notes, an “unusual step.” (The Scottish essayist Tom Nairn once joked that Powell thought Northern Ireland “*was* a bit of England.”) Powell represented his Ulster constituency until 1987, deep into the Thatcher era. But he was disappointed by Thatcher’s peacemaking attempts in Ireland, which he saw as being the partial result of American pressure.

Powell, along with many contemporary Brexiteers, could be called a Little Englander. In the nineteenth century, the term was applied to Liberals opposed to the expansion of the British Empire, but in the postwar era it came to refer to resentful Englishmen, frustrated with the rumblings of the outside world, and happy to resist the temptations of globalization and, naturally, immigration. Little Englandism, as the historian Linda Colley has written, was “always the other side of unparalleled imperial dominion, a cleaving to the small and the relatively known in the face of alarm or fatigue or disgust at the prospect of the very large and very strange.”

Between Powell’s time and our own, the rifts have widened: the United Kingdom’s component parts began to express their own identities more fully, and to seek greater devolution from Westminster. (Polls revealed a large uptick in English people identifying as “English” rather than as “British” after the Scottish Parliament was established, in 1999.) The Empire, which had once played a part in stitching together English, Scottish, Welsh, and Irish identities, was gone; and a united Europe offered a potential home for smaller countries. In this context, O’Toole writes, a distinctively English political community was bound to emerge. And yet English nationalism was largely relegated to the realm of skinheads, lager louts, and soccer hooligans—“until David Cameron blithely gave it a vast stage in June 2016.” The resulting ironies are everywhere. The Brexiteers, O’Toole notes, “would make much of the idea of restoring the blue-covered

‘British passport’ as an icon of independent identity. But asked in 2011 what nationality they would have on their passport if they could choose, fully 40 per cent of English respondents chose English.” Brexit, O’Toole persuasively argues, “is driven by a force—English nationalism—that its leaders still refuse to articulate. It draws on English disengagement from the Union, but wraps itself in a brashly reassured Unionism.”



Any book that delves deeply into the psyche of a country—or even presumes that countries *have* psyches—is bound to occasionally skirt the edges of absurdity. O’Toole, alas, can’t resist seeing political significance in the publishing success of “Fifty Shades of Grey,”

imagining an audience for whom Christian Grey was the E.U. and Anastasia Steele innocent England. But his summation of the paradox at the heart of Brexit is succinct and shrewd: “There is an imperial nationalism and an anti-imperial nationalism; one sets out to dominate the world, the other to throw off such dominance. The incoherence of the new English nationalism that lies behind Brexit is that it wants to be both simultaneously.”

Last month, Boris Johnson broke with the Unionist bloc in Parliament—which had only recently given Theresa May her majority—in order to reach a Brexit deal with Europe. Because of the fear that a hard border in Ireland would undermine the Good Friday Agreement, the only solution Johnson could find involved putting a de-facto border in the Irish Sea, separating the British mainland from Northern Ireland, which would essentially have remained a part of Europe. That’s why the most fervently anti-Europe Unionists voted against Johnson’s deal. If Brexit does occur, Scotland can be expected to hold another referendum on leaving Great Britain, before, presumably, applying for E.U. membership. The Scots would join other European peoples, such as the Catalans and the Flemish, who have pushed for independence at the national level while still pledging support for the European project. This brand of nationalism does

not preclude approaching the rest of the world with open arms.

But what of our Little American President? A reactionary of an earlier era would have been shocked by, say, Trump’s remarks about how America was no better than Russia, but they haven’t affected his base’s image of him as a patriot acting in the interests of the majority. Similarly, Powell would have been stunned to learn that the Little Englanders who revere him today, such as Nigel Farage, don’t much care about Northern Ireland. And yet Powell’s career is again instructive. Corthorn, noting the “inconsistencies and contradictions in his thought,” writes that Powell’s “diverse political campaigns can be understood coherently as part of a long-running and wide-ranging public debate over the ‘decline’ of the British nation.” Trump has reanimated and crystallized the sense shared by many of his supporters that America is in decline, that others are responsible, and that only he can fix it. The plan for fixing it doesn’t much matter, which is why the Republican Party is likely to follow its leader down whatever path he chooses. The nature of Powell’s plan for his country wasn’t always discernible, either, but it was always abundantly clear whom he hated.

O’Toole makes a startling comparison, late in his book, between Brexit and the Confederacy. Brexit won an initial victory in the form of the referendum, but is doomed to fail, he believes, because it was based on deception—the Europeans will never give the United Kingdom a favorable deal. And then: “The self-pity of Lost Causism will meld with the rage of betrayal. Without the EU as whipping boy and scapegoat, there will be no end of blame and no shortage of candidates to be saddled with it: anyone and everyone except the Brexiteers themselves. That most virulent of poisons, the ‘stab-in-the-back,’ is in the bloodstream now and it will work its harm for a long time.” If Powellite open racism partially gave way to anti-European sentiment, the political currents may change direction yet again, guiding anti-European sentiment toward a different target. It is not easy to decipher which country is following which in the latest transatlantic dance, but both America and the United Kingdom appear to be heading somewhere very dark indeed. ♦

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PROUD TINA

A new jukebox musical about Tina Turner comes to Broadway.

BY VINSON CUNNINGHAM



Toward the start of a 1993 recording of “Proud Mary,” Tina Turner—who, by then, had been performing the number for decades, across the globe—gives a charismatic, gently teasing forecast of the song to come.

“We’re gonna take the beginning of this song and do it easy. But then we’re gonna do the finish rough,” she says. “That’s the way we do ‘Proud Mary.’” Her voice, sharp and feline and cunning, rushes forward, tossing each syllable into a fast-moving current, until she stops to hold a choice word—*easy*; *rough*—up to the warm light of her attention. Her diction, in its variance, mirrors what she’s disclosing about the

song. Somehow the road map does nothing to dissipate the impact of the moment when the rolling thrum of guitars that dominates the first half of “Proud Mary” gives way to horns blasting out that melodic line, and the mental image of Turner spinning in tight circles, wig ablur, arms tutted out like twin cranes, tassels floating away from her body, arrives. What we lose in tonal and rhythmic suspense we gain in a more primal kind of anticipation. Yes, it will get rough, eventually—but when, and just how rough?

A similar thing happens when we hear Turner’s life story. Most of us know it in its broadest contours. Born Anna

Mae Bullock, as a child she picked cotton on her family’s sharecropping farm, in Nutbush, Tennessee, and pined for her mother, who fled Turner’s abusive father. In the first two decades of her career, her success was linked inextricably with her musical partner and husband, who physically abused her. The question, when the story is being told onscreen or onstage, is never whether these vicissitudes will be included but how brutally, and to what representational end.

Even when Turner’s music is part, or most, of the promised package—as it is in “Tina: The Tina Turner Musical,” up now at the Lunt-Fontanne, directed by Phyllida Lloyd, with a book by Katori Hall, Frank Ketelaar, and Kees Prins, and with seriously impressive choreography by Anthony Van Laast—it’s her life that delivers the dramatic shape expected from art: tension and release, fall and climb, pain and possibility. This makes Turner perhaps singular among pop artists. Usually we have to employ a kind of textualism—combing lyrics and gestures for a corollary in reality—to assign to our stars moral, cultural, and political values. Or an artist makes bold-sounding declarations, or endorses electoral candidates, or embraces high-profile causes. With Turner, even given all the innovation found in her records, the triumph is located in the life; her status as a feminist hero is stubbornly extramusical—it lives somewhere much past art, and beyond statements.

It’s a paradox, then, that it was a pop-cultural representation—the 1993 movie “What’s Love Got to Do with It,” starring Angela Bassett as Turner—that made Turner’s political importance clear to generations too young to have tracked her entire career, and made her iconography complete. For more than two decades, Bassett, whose performance as Turner is perhaps the most brilliant and haunting of her career, has dominated the collective imagination with respect to Turner, and, in many ways, has made Tina Turner’s art a mere corollary to Anna Mae Bullock’s life. Turner’s most famous songs—“Proud Mary,” “What’s Love Got to Do with It,” “Simply the Best”—now sound to my ears like autobiographical anthems, meant as a score instead of a corpus of their own.

Turner’s triumph as a feminist hero exists apart from her music, in her life.

The great benefit of this situation is clear: we learn from lives, and every saint needs a story. But, because Turner's canonization has proceeded within the limits of commercial entertainment, her life often seems at risk of being objectified in the way that can happen with a song, or a scene from a blockbuster. Whenever I hear the rapper Jay-Z, in a guest verse on a song by his wife, Beyoncé, flippantly drone, "Eat the cake, Anna Mae"—a line from "What's Love Got to Do with It" that comes during one of the movie's most humiliatingly violent moments—I recoil. I wonder if the magic of the movies—the semi-permanent stamp that some pictures make on the mind—might chip away at Turner's hard-earned gravitas, just as surely as, initially, it helped build her myth.

"Tina," a genuinely entertaining jukebox musical with some trouble at its edges, has this odd, precariously balanced mixture of life and art, politics and spectacle, as its burden. Maybe its creators were wise, then, to organize the story around Turner's religious experience—her childhood in the rural black church, her turn to a lifelong, cherished Buddhism. The show opens with a temporal swirl: the adult Tina (Adrienne Warren) sits wearing a Corvette-red leather dress, her back to the crowd, rasping out a mantra, as her very young counterpart (a charming Skye Dakota Turner, no relation to Tina) sits through a jubilant musical number at church, unable to restrain her voice, despite the chiding of her mother. Skye Dakota Turner is a wonderfully vivid performer; there's humor in every facial move and bodily gesture, and she sings with precocious, echoing focus, like a bird perched on a cathedral's upper balcony.

That opening image, whose surrealism gives way to a more or less straightforward, chronological slide down the time line of Tina Turner's life, feels like an attempt to reunify Turner and her work, and to give a hint as to their source. Some soul-deep fountain produced both. Tina grows up, and Warren, a powerful singer and song interpreter whose reputation deserves to grow after this performance, takes over. She gives little glimmers of impersonation, especially when she sings,

but mostly avoids distracting mimicry.

The trouble comes when this musical's version of Anna Mae Bullock meets this musical's version of Ike Turner (Daniel J. Watts). The real Ike Turner's very name—through a pop-cultural process not unlike the one that turned Tina's into an emblem of long-suffering resilience—is now almost synonymous with cowardly violence and petty bullying; his pioneering role in the development of rock and roll has been all but eclipsed by his notoriety as a sadist. Nobody mentions Ike and means to refer to the Fender bass named for him. But here, somehow, likely because Warren is so good, and because the songs—mostly note-for-note renderings of the well-known recordings—keep on coming, Ike comes off more as a comic buffoon than as a real menace. I don't think this is due to any odd intent on behalf of the show's producers but, rather, to the distorting imperatives of mass entertainment—tell the story, but keep it light.

Everybody knows, even before he shows up, that Ike is the villain in the Tina Turner story. On Broadway, under what looks like a thousand lights, in front of a crowd impatient to cheer, this makes him a chintzy Big Bad Wolf. Then, too, Watts, the poor actor tasked with this role, has an irremediably friendly face and funny aspect. From afar, he looks and moves a bit like Eddie Murphy, and, when I saw the show, he sometimes, at the most despicable moments, garnered what seemed to be accidental laughs.

For the most part, the show is fun. The songs sound good, and nobody's high opinion of Tina Turner will be negatively affected. Very much to the contrary, Warren's performance, which sometimes veers happily into an outright concert, is a two-and-a-half-hour-long hosanna. But I couldn't help hoping that, in the long run, Turner will be given her true due, her personal history plumbed for its deepest applications. This great theatrical rendering of her life might come only when living memory of Turner as an entertainer has faded, and her bright intensity as an archetype can shine through, unhindered by obligatory applause. The mood will be classical. Nobody will think to hope for a good time. ♦

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SORROWFUL SONGS

Julia Bullock and Christian Gerhaher bring fresh approaches to classic lieder.

BY ALEX ROSS



A decade ago, Jane Moss, the artistic director of Lincoln Center, launched the White Light Festival, intending to foster a reflective, spiritually tinged mode of spectatorship in an age of digital frenzy. The festival's name came from a remark by the composer Arvo Pärt: "I could compare my music to white light, which contains all colors." Initially, the concept inspired a few giggles around town; one heard the title pronounced in a breathy, yoga-instructor murmur. Yet Moss was prescient in how she analyzed the cultural landscape of the early twenty-first century. At a time when many people clung to naïve notions about the lib-

eratory capacities of total connectivity, she spoke about the damage that social media and mobile devices were doing to our inner lives. Now we know better how a constant flow of information can obscure, rather than sharpen, our perceptions. Conversely, a period of contemplative distance can put reality in sharp relief. The arts are never simply a refuge from worldly complexities. Even the purest, most ethereal work—an abstraction by Geneviève Asse, a string quartet by Linda Catlin Smith—can leave us in a state of vulnerable awareness.

Moss's approach to musical presentation may sound quietistic, but it has

often challenged the age-old, trance-inducing routines of classical performance. Both at White Light and at other Lincoln Center series, Moss has encouraged experiments in the theatricalization of concerts and recitals. Peter Sellars directed the Berlin Philharmonic and the Berlin Radio Chorus in a majestic staging of the "St. Matthew Passion." Jochen Sandig made use of the same chorus in a solemn fantasia on Brahms's "German Requiem." Schubert's "Winterreise" has been the focus of two productions: one by William Kentridge, with the baritone Matthias Goerne; another by Katie Mitchell, with Mark Padmore singing Schubert songs and Stephen Dillane reciting Samuel Beckett. Some of these affairs have succeeded more than others, but all have yielded images that linger in the mind.

Mitchell's latest contribution to White Light, "Zauberland," has a heady conceit. Once again, a canonical song cycle is at the heart of the undertaking: "Dichterliebe," Schumann's emotionally fractured exploration of poetry by Heinrich Heine. "Zauberland," meaning "magic land," comes from Heine's "Aus alten Märchen winkt es," about the longing for fairy-tale realms. In a program note, Mitchell proposes that one such oasis is the classical tradition itself, which is "trying to hold global change at bay." Mitchell, in collaboration with the playwright Martin Crimp, creates a framing narrative about a Syrian-born opera singer who has gone into exile in Germany. In what appears to be an extended dream sequence, the singer's memories of performing Schumann mingle with traumatic impressions of her earlier life. The Belgian composer Bernard Focroulle supplies music for Crimp's texts, which flesh out the story.

The piece was designed as a vehicle for the lavishly gifted young American soprano Julia Bullock, who has made her name mainly in new music. I have encountered Bullock in major works by John Adams—"El Niño," "Doctor Atomic," "Girls of the Golden West"—and in Tyshawn Sorey's "Perle Noire," a meditation on the life of Josephine Baker. The revelation of "Zauberland" was to hear Bullock apply her rich-hued voice and expressive intelli-

Bullock applied her expressive intelligence to Schumann's "Dichterliebe."

gence to a famous group of songs that too often fall victim to the high-minded clichés of the vocal-recital circuit. “Dichterliebe” is usually sung by men. Bullock’s fearless negotiation of this territory deepened the sense that her onstage character was an exile, an outsider. The performance was also a tour de force of stamina: Bullock sang for eighty minutes, with relatively brief breaks, and even when she was silent she was in constant motion onstage.

Unfortunately, the project suffered from a severe formal imbalance, with “Dichterliebe” dominating the first half and Foccroulle’s settings of Crimp taking over in the second half. As long as Schumann was in command, the production proved murkily compelling. The singer was shown in a quick-changing montage: giving a posh recital, being pushed around by well-dressed men, being interrogated, becoming pregnant, raising a child, and so on. As she performed “Ich grolle nicht,” Schumann’s song of forbearance (“I bear no grudge”), two men watched her from the sides: her tense grip on the piano subtly signalled the psychology of exile. Foccroulle’s music, couched in a limber atonal idiom, suggested those eerie moments in dreams when one becomes half aware that one is dreaming. Cédric Tiberghien, at the piano, handled the transitions with seamless agility.

When the Schumann stopped, though, the evening passed from the imponderable to the interminable. Mitchell’s penchant for spasmodic activity—nonspeaking actors marching on and off stage, carrying chairs, lamps, flowers, display cases, and other props—

had me writing rude things in my notebook. Foccroulle’s songs were beautifully crafted but somewhat lacking in personality. To be sure, the task of fashioning a sequel to “Dichterliebe” would have been arduous for any composer. Perhaps “Zauberland” could be reworked so that Foccroulle’s settings are more evenly distributed alongside Schumann’s stations of the emotional cross.

The previous night, at Alice Tully Hall, White Light presented a more outwardly conventional event: the baritone Christian Gerhaher and the pianist Gerold Huber performing songs by Gustav Mahler. The only innovation here was the introduction of a service called Yondr, which asks concertgoers to place their cell phones in sealed pouches. I opted out, skeptical that yet another vowel-deficient Silicon Valley company could solve problems created by other Silicon Valley companies. Indeed, a phone went off after a few minutes. When human beings gather, disturbances are inevitable. The answer lies not in trying to control the environment but in cultivating experiences that push distractions to the side.

Gerhaher is the type of performer who makes such experiences routine. In the past decade, he has assumed a preëminent position among German-speaking lieder singers and become the rightful heir to the almighty Dietrich Fischer-Dieskau. Gerhaher possesses a singular vocal style in which the veneer of classical refinement periodically gives way to the world-weary rasp of the balladeer or the arch charm of the crooner. He has a way of con-

veying raw emotion with a tinge of ironic detachment—a self-aware Romantic manner that makes him peculiarly suited to Mahler’s intricately multilayered songs.

This recital felt like a trap prepared for the kind of listener who was expecting a couple of hours of comfortable cultivation. One of Gerhaher’s signature techniques is to vary the timbre and articulation of a repeating word or phrase so that a familiar pattern becomes unsettling. In “Die zwei blauen Augen von meinem Schatz,” from “Lieder eines fahrenden Gesellen,” the singer’s insistence that “all, all was well again / Ach, all well again” undermined itself through a slurring together of “alles, alles,” until it became a repressed wail. In “Ich hab’ ein glühend Messer,” from the same cycle, cries of “O weh!” became progressively more desperate. And in the final song of “Kindertotenlieder,” reiterations of “In diesem Wetter” (“In this weather”) captured the self-castigation of a parent who has let his children out in a storm.

Gerhaher’s uncanny ability to conjure images in the mind’s eye—you could see the suicidal lover, the doomed young soldier, the missing children—made me reflect on the latter-day pressure to make concerts more relevant, more visual, more technologically adept. I found myself wishing that Bullock’s masterly rendition of “Dichterliebe” had been granted the same unadorned treatment. Yet White Light still deserves praise for its restless, exploratory spirit, its refusal to lock itself into a single approach. Neither event kept the world at bay: these places of refuge were full of wounded souls. ♦

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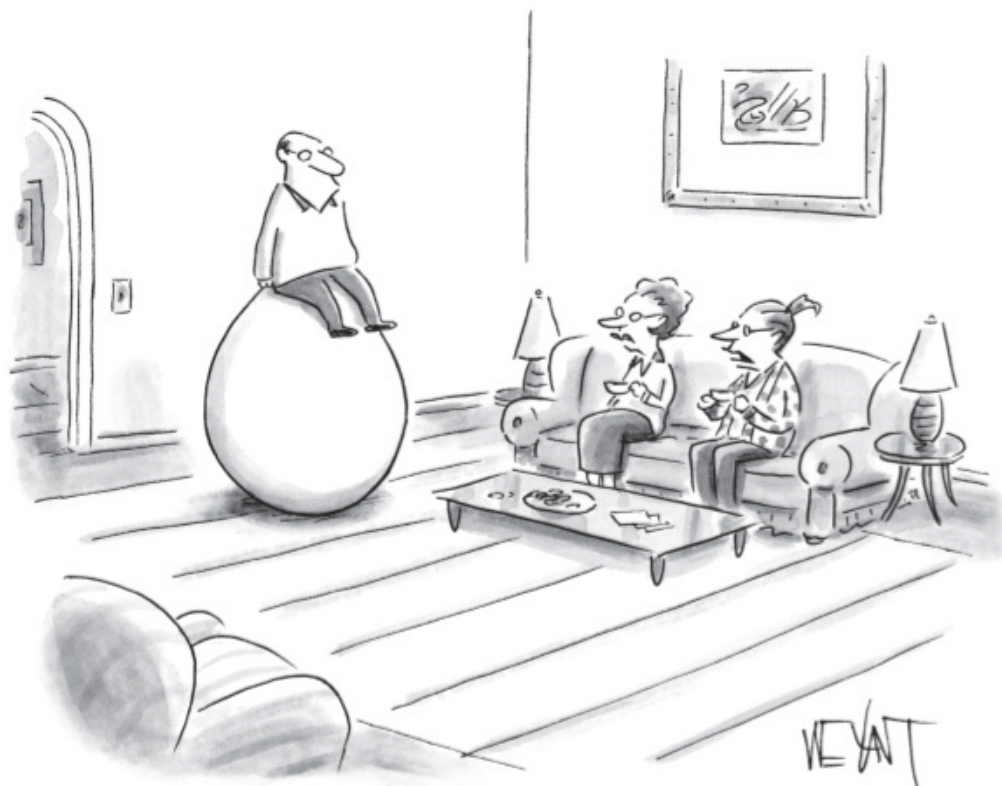
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CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each week, we provide a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Caption submissions for this week's cartoon, by Christopher Weyant, must be received by Sunday, November 17th. The finalists in the November 4th contest appear below. We will announce the winner, and the finalists in this week's contest, in the December 2nd issue. Anyone age thirteen or older can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit contest.newyorker.com.

THIS WEEK'S CONTEST



“

”

THE FINALISTS



“Publicly, we’re still saying there are no side effects.”
David A. Epstein, West Hartford, Conn.

“So the board still has no women?”
Moriah Ella Mason, Princeton, N.J.

“Good, Human Resources is here.”
George McClure, Franklin, N.C.

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“It’s not you. It’s November.”
David Sadow, Richboro, Pa.

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