

December 24, 2017

The New York Times Magazine

Jordan

Peele

sees

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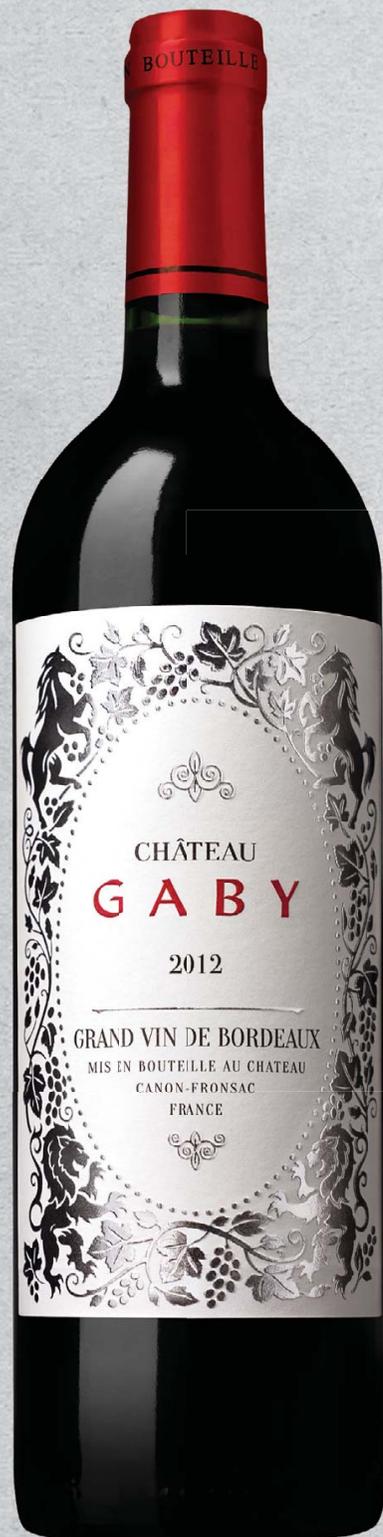
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His docu-horror-thriller-comedy about race in America was the movie of the year. What will he show us next? BY WESLEY MORRIS



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# The New York Times Magazine

December 24, 2017

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**Behind the Cover** *Jake Silverstein, editor in chief: “Amanda Demme’s portrait of the director Jordan Peele has a bright energy to it, so we tried to complicate it with a line, layered over the cover like a screen, that speaks to Peele’s multivalent perceptiveness, the way he seems to be able to see into all of society’s dark corners.” Photograph by Amanda Demme for The New York Times.*

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# The New York Times Magazine

December 24, 2017

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**'These kids are like gladiators. The dominating, the mind games, the winning. It's all strategic.'**

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Victoria Walli, 12; Angelina Velardi, 12, and Anabella St. Jacques, 14, stretching before a competition in Hackensack, N.J. Photograph by Dina Litovsky/Redux, for The New York Times.



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Photographed by Kathy Ryan at *The New York Times* on Dec. 14, 2017, at 3:31 p.m.

### Lizzie Feidelson

*"Give Me Drama!"*  
Page 40

Lizzie Feidelson is a writer and dancer living in Brooklyn. She currently dances for the choreographer Moriah Evans. This week she writes about a team of competitive young dancers in New Jersey. "I started dancing later than is typical, in my late teens, so these dancers are in the throes of rigorous early training that I never had," she says. "I relate to them as dancers, but I have a sense of awe about their situation. Being in such a competitive environment requires tremendous wherewithal, and each handles the pressure differently."

### Michelle Dean

*First Words,*  
Page 9

Michelle Dean is the author of "Sharp: The Women Who Made an Art of Having an Opinion," which will be published in April by Grove Atlantic. She last wrote for the magazine about Purell.

### Wesley Morris

*"The Seer,"*  
Page 24

Wesley Morris is a staff writer for the magazine, a critic at large for *The New York Times* and a co-host of the podcast "Still Processing." His most recent feature was about the best actors of 2017.

### Jeffrey Stern

*"Alka Pradhan v. Gitmo,"*  
Page 34

Jeffrey Stern is an investigative journalist and the author of two books, "The Last Thousand" and "The 15:17 to Paris." This is his first article for the magazine.

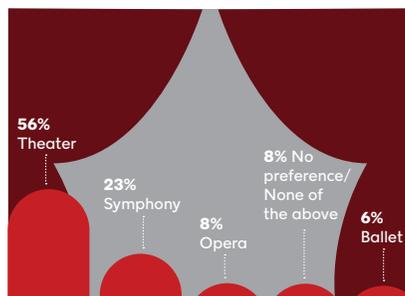
### Jason Zengerle

*"What (if Anything) Does Carter Page Know?"*  
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Jason Zengerle is a contributing writer for the magazine and the political correspondent for *GQ*. His most recent feature for the magazine was about a popular liberal political podcast.

## Dear Reader: What's Your Pick for Performance?

Every week the magazine publishes the results of a study conducted online in June by *The New York Times's* research-and-analytics department, reflecting the opinions of 2,903 subscribers who chose to participate. This week's question: *Do you prefer the symphony, the opera, the ballet or the theater?*



\* Rounded to the nearest whole percentage

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Readers respond to the 12.10.2017 issue.

**RE: FIRST WORDS**

Amanda Hess wrote about how the word “petty” was reclaimed and then quickly appropriated.

**Trump’s pettiness** was on full display during the Republican primary season when, in his lame attempts to be “humorous” at someone else’s expense, he adopted insulting names for his political opponents. “Lying Ted,” “Low Energy Jeb,” “Little Marco” come to mind. Of course, lacking any creative pettiness, “Lying Ted” morphed into “Crooked Hillary” for the general election. Then there is his favorite, go-to petty insult for Senator Elizabeth Warren, “Pocahontas,” when he has an onset of nastiness directed at her.

Now, unfortunately, his pettiness has gone dangerously international with his “Little Rocket Man” insult of North Korea’s leader. Some foreign-policy experts fear that this petty insult could even lead to war. Such a catastrophic outcome would, ironically, be a most unpetty result of Trump’s innate, pathological pettiness. Heaven help us!

John Grillo, Edgewater, Md.



**RE: TITLE IX**

Kathryn Joyce wrote about the ideological debate over Title IX and due process in campus sexual-assault cases.

**Those who argue** that schools should not be prosecuting these accused men are completely missing an important point.

An undergraduate education is an encompassing social enterprise. Participation in campus life is both voluntary and also frequently required. Many universities require students to live on campus. Every



school has a code of conduct, compliance with which is necessary for participation. The schools have every right and responsibility to enforce compliance with that code of conduct. If you cheat on a test, you are not committing a crime; your case is not referred to police, but you may be expelled from school, and rightly so.

Being dismissed from school is a form of discipline, and it has negative effects on those so disciplined; but to argue that those accused of violating their school’s code of conduct policy should have the same recourse to due process as a citizen prosecuted by the district attorney for rape is disingenuous.

When a school investigates and assigns responsibility, it does not put anyone in jail. Yes, this means schools are being held to a higher standard of behavior than that demanded by society at large. Those young men thus dismissed may still vote, get a job or a bank loan and pursue a higher education elsewhere, for instance, at the University of Phoenix. If these young men just stayed sober and kept their pants on, they would not be having these problems. Sound familiar? I jest, but I am sensitive to the importance of the issue.

Enzibzianna, Pa., on nytimes.com

**We have got** to fix the justice system before anyone can even think that it’s a reasonable option for survivors to turn to. A lot of rapes are ones that women already know aren’t going to be prosecuted: a long-term emotionally abusive boyfriend who pushes past the “no,” consensual petting that turns into nonconsensual sex that doesn’t involve bruises, drinking or drugs. Should nothing happen to those rapists?



**THE COVER, ON TWITTER**

Throwing a New Year’s Eve party with this @nytmag cover as the theme. Nicole Kidman is the only person invited. @Munzenrieder

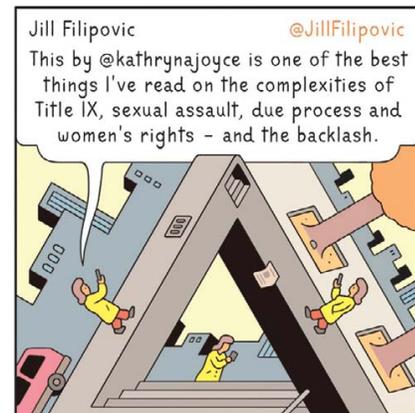
That’s the other side of the coin. Rapists going around with zero consequences because our justice system systematically fails rape survivors. The college system sucks, but it’s better than nothing, and nothing is what the justice system usually provides.

Melissa Litwin, Plano, Tex., on nytimes.com

**This story recounts** recent changes to the Office for Civil Rights of the federal Department of Education’s responses to sexual-assault complaints under Title IX from the perspective of those seeking to scale back enforcement. The debate over enforcement encompasses difficult questions about how to create meaningful opportunities for complaints while respecting due process for those accused.

Nevertheless, the article minimizes the key point that Title IX is an anti-discrimination statute. Any discussion of procedural protections under Title IX should treat those complaints like other claims of sex, race or other forms of prohibited discrimination, which interfere with students’ access to an equal education and violate their civil rights.

Julie Goldscheid, Professor, CUNY School of Law



**CORRECTION:**

An article on Dec. 10 about changes to Title IX rules on university campuses misstated the findings of a ruling issued by the United States Court of Appeals for the Sixth Circuit in a case involving the University of Cincinnati. The court found that the university violated an accused student’s rights by failing to let him submit questions to his accuser, not by failing to let him cross-examine his accuser.

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**‘The college system sucks, but it’s better than nothing, and nothing is what the justice system usually provides.’**

The New York Times

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*A ‘predator,’ we like to think, is different from everyone else: too dangerous to let near. But lately it seems there might be less vicious kinds of predators all around us, too. By Michelle Dean*

# Warning Signs

Years ago, I was out very late in Brooklyn at a restaurant whose name I was too drunk to catch. I arrived there with a clutch of people who had lingered until closing at a publishing party nearby. I wasn't particularly young, but I was still new to this world of writing and people who cared about it, and a little star-struck by most of the people in attendance. I think I was hoping their status as official literary figures — real writers, real editors — might rub off on me. ¶ One of them was someone I'll call a Powerful Literary Man. We had never spoken, and I was no one of any importance, but he sat down next to me. We ordered drinks. I don't remember what we talked about, if we really talked at all. The only memory I have crystallizes at the moment I became aware of a hand stroking the inside of my right thigh, under my dress. ¶ I turned and looked at the Powerful Literary Man, who, seated beside me, was the only one eligible to be owner of the hand. His half crouch indicated that indeed, yes, it was he stroking my inner thigh without invitation. He smiled at me. I think I remember — this is the part that shames me — smiling back. I have no explanation except to say that

ever since I was a child, it's the tic I've had in awkward situations: I smile, or even laugh, to smooth something over. I looked back around the table. No one betrayed any sign of having noticed anything. After silently reviewing my options, I excused myself and went to the bathroom, and then I left.

As we get our bearings in this new post-Weinstein age, a lot of women have spent their time returning to experiences like this one — holding them up to the light, considering what we might have missed. The difference between that night and many of the stories being reported these days is obvious, and leaps out quickly. It's the similarities that are trickier. The most arresting thing about Harvey Weinstein, for me, was how methodical he was, how consistent in *modus operandi*, when he decided to go after a woman: The call from a talent agent to arrange the meeting, the reassuring female assistant in the lobby, the hotel-room door closing, the bathrobe, the incongruous request for a massage. There was a ritual sameness to these stories, one that said to us: This was a result of consideration and planning, of practice.

This treating of the hunt like a craft, the carefulness of it, is one mark of what we often call a predator. People like that word because of its certainty, the way it rules on the case all by itself. A predator naturally lives outside the herd, and because of that, he can be very easy to ostracize. The shaming, the firing, the possible criminal prosecution: All of that seems a logical consequence for predators.

Now the word comes up everywhere, and many of the cases are easy: Weinstein; Roy Moore, reportedly chasing teenagers around an Alabama mall; Russell Simmons, accused of taking women up to penthouses and keeping them there against their will. But then there are the other instances — when the behavior is unquestionably wrong and invasive, the consequences are justified and yet the word “predator” doesn't quite comfortably apply. There are all sorts of men who do all sorts of things they should not be doing, but who believe themselves exempt from this moment because, well, they're not *that* bad. That Powerful Literary Man, it occurs to me, could read this sort of



essay and not think, not once, that the word “predator” might apply to him.

**In ecology, a predator** is an animal that kills and eats other animals, and the threat it poses is relatively clear-cut. There is very little ambiguity when the mountain lion eviscerates the rabbit, or the leopard rips apart the gazelle. A scientist, of course, might point out that from the standpoint of the whole ecosystem, a predator is necessary: It has a role to play in balancing populations, in preserving biological diversity. But when people talk about human predators, they're looking at them from the standpoint of the gazelle.

In 1981, early in his first term, Ronald Reagan stood before the International Association of Chiefs of Police and railed about “utopian presumptions about human nature” in what he characterized as the age of “the human predator.” He liked to carve the world into good and

**The treating of the hunt like a craft, the carefulness of it, is one mark of what we often call a predator.**

evil this way, conjuring the criminal as an irredeemable cancer on society, evil as a matter of his nature rather than his situation. As a former actor, he knew precisely how to manipulate human emotions, claiming that crime was “a problem of the human heart, and it is there we must look for answers.”

Democrats, chafing under the accusation that they were soft on crime, eventually picked up similar language. Hillary Clinton, in a 1996 speech supporting her husband's 1994 anticrime bill, famously referred to a certain type of young person as a “superpredator” — a word coined by the political scientist John J. DiIulio Jr., who predicted that the nation's inner cities would produce a generation of “radically impulsive, brutally remorseless youngsters.” The word is now widely acknowledged to have had racist overtones, and in the last election cycle Clinton half-apologized for using it. She caught a break too, as the predator

label drifted away and stuck to her opponent instead: Since more than a dozen women came forward to accuse President Trump of having groped them (and much worse), headlines across the media have labeled him “Predator in Chief.”

But outside the question of racial bias in identifying evil people, and policy arguments about how to deal with them, what few appear to question is the notion that there are people who are just fundamentally dangerous. We are, even in the face of our own dismay, fascinated by them. “To Catch a Predator” aired for three seasons on MSNBC; true crime has of late been a highbrow obsession, making a kind of intellectual game out of trying to detect a gleam of murder in Robert Durst’s placid expression on HBO’s “The Jinx.” The fantasy of the predator is that they are always watching us, always hunting, always about to strike. We watch them in turn because we have a fantasy of outsmarting them, of turning the tables.

The rhetoric of the predator has been wrapped up for so long with a brutal reading of human nature — a Darwinian vision of hunter and game and cold, remorseless victimization. But what about those who harm other people carelessly, thoughtlessly, drunkenly, ignorant of the consequences? In life, these people seem harder to avoid than the absolutely evil ones. They are a strange reminder that words like “predatory” were used to refer to people before they were used to classify animals. The Latin root of “predator” is not, as you might assume, the word for “hunt,” *venari*. It’s actually *praedor* — to plunder. Which is to say, to take what you have already conquered, by right, like a pirate taking a ship’s treasure.

**I don’t know**, and never will, what that Powerful Literary Man was thinking. I never spoke to him directly again. I have tried to assume that he was just drunk, or just flirting, or “just” doing any or all of the things that fall short of predation. I have joked about this, in the sardonic way that women have of joking about sexist or uncomfortable encounters, the humorous pose that helps us get through all of it.

And when I acted to stop him, it stopped: There was no chase, no lure into a more private area, no cover-up. None of what I have always thought of

as the predator’s hallmarks. Nothing worth ruining anyone’s life over. Nothing worth lumping this person in with the worst offenders.

But then, recently, as this memory asserted itself, certain bits of context floated up from my mind. There was later a situation in which he was called upon to professionally judge my work, and he turned me down for something I was competing for. So fleeting had been our acquaintance that it never occurred to me at the time to ask myself, let alone anyone else, whether the two things were connected — whether the fact that I might one day want something from him professionally helped guide the motion of his hand. I still don’t believe that was the case. But in light of everything we’ve learned, I keep wondering — why didn’t I ask that question?

**What about those who harm other people carelessly, thoughtlessly, drunkenly, ignorant of the consequences?**

Another question occurs to me. What if I told you that this party where we had all been earlier was a party that was held to honor women in publishing? That it was in part for an organization responding to the lack of women’s being commissioned to write for major publications and publishing houses? That the attendance that night was dominated by the exact sort of talented, articulate young women who flock to cultural industries in their 20s and who feel the need to cultivate the mentorship of Powerful Men?

In that sense, perhaps there was an element of a leopard in a flock of gazelles, looking around, evaluating the women as prospects. If it was predation, it wasn’t the most clear-cut, the most vicious kind. But perhaps the burden shouldn’t only be on the gazelles to see it that way. ♦

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#### New Sentences By Sam Anderson

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**‘Insupportable, soul-crushing, unfathomable — but also just silly.’**

Human emotions are, let’s say, complex. Each of us carries our own swirling atmosphere of contradictory feelings — an internal weather system in which snowstorms come pouring out of sunny skies. We adore parents who terrify us. We miss old friends we have chosen to avoid. We desperately want to finish a project but will do anything not to start it. As F. Scott Fitzgerald once wrote, “The test of a first-rate intelligence is the ability to hold two opposed ideas in the mind at the same time and still retain the ability to function.”

No event fractures us into contradiction more completely than

death. It is beyond rational response, inscrutable on every scale — from the death of a moth to the death of a pet to the death of a year to the death of a sibling. We curse and celebrate, resist and accept, look backward and forward at once.

In his new book, Richard Lloyd Parry writes about death on an inconceivable scale. In 2011, an earthquake shook the Pacific Ocean floor so powerfully, Parry writes, that “It knocked the Earth 10 inches off its axis; it moved Japan four feet closer to America.” It also unleashed a tsunami on northern Japan: a mountain of seawater that ripped over the coast, crushing whole towns and leaving around 18,500 people dead.

The disaster left behind emotions so deep and raw that they are nearly beyond language. And yet Parry’s book tries to capture them. The sentence above refers to a mother considering the impossible possibility that her entire family has died. Its final word — “silly” — contains such vibrant bravery. Death is not just sad; it is absurd. It has no business anywhere near us. Go away, death, you are ridiculous. You are nothing. No, thank you. Life does not accept your nonsense.

From Richard Lloyd Parry’s “Ghosts of the Tsunami: Death and Life in Japan’s Disaster Zone” (MCD, 2017, Page 45).

# China has a soft spot for dictators, but the end of Robert Mugabe's rule in Zimbabwe suggests its patience can run out when its economic interests are in jeopardy.



As the line of Chinese-made armored vehicles rumbled into Harare last month, Zimbabwe's 93-year-old dictator, Robert Mugabe, must have wondered what happened to the "all-weather friendship" Beijing always said they shared. For nearly four decades, Mugabe had been one of China's staunchest allies. His "Look East" policy signaled Africa's economic shift away from the West toward the rising superpower. Yet as the bloodless coup against him unfolded, Beijing offered no words of support or sympathy. Instead, there was silence — until afterward, when President Xi Jinping of China rushed to congratulate Mugabe's successor, Emmerson Mnangagwa.

The circumstances surrounding the end of Mugabe's 37-year reign are the stuff of spy novels: a high-level meeting in Beijing four days earlier, the armed showdown at Harare airport, the old dictator's last-ditch attempt to assert his authority. But the episode also tells a tale of China's evolving relationship with the world it is shaping through loans, trade and investments. In an era when the United States seems to be on the retreat — notice the absence of Americans from this story — it can be easy to shrug off China's advance as another instance of its rapid, ineluctable expansion. But the fall of Mugabe, a charismatic despot who drove his economy to ruin, shows how Beijing is learning to navigate, very carefully, through turbulent transitions in places where it has deep economic ties, sometimes decades old, and how countries bend to the arc of China's gravity.

Mugabe is among the last of a dying breed, a revolutionary hero whose relationship with China was forged in Africa's anticolonial struggle and shifted over time into an economic and diplomatic partnership. When the West issued sanctions against Mugabe's government in the early 2000s for a multitude of sins — human rights abuses, violent farm invasions, electoral fraud — China defended its ally and poured money into Zimbabwe's diamond mines and tobacco farms. It supplied weapons and fighter jets, roads and electricity plants. At a packed rally in the Chinese-built national stadium in Harare, Mugabe exulted: "We have turned East, where the sun rises, and given our backs to the West, where the sun sets."

It seemed that the sun would never set on Mugabe, even as he exploited his citizens and presided over the economy's



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destruction. In 2009, after a bout of hyperinflation so bad that the government printed \$100 trillion notes that couldn't even pay for a loaf of bread, Zimbabwe abandoned its currency and adopted the U.S. dollar as the principal means of exchange. Even so, in 2015, President Xi made a state visit to Zimbabwe, lavishing praise on Mugabe and pledging \$4 billion in energy projects. Reciprocating the good will, Mugabe made a move that would flatter Beijing's global ambition: Zimbabwe announced that it would become the first foreign country to accept the Chinese yuan as an official currency.

**Behind the scenes**, though, Beijing was growing alarmed. Mugabe's disastrous handling of the economy had gone on for years, leaving more than 60 percent of the population below the poverty line — and government debts to China unpaid. But what provoked Beijing's ire in early 2016 was a decision to enforce an "indigenization" law that required foreign ventures to

reserve at least 51 percent of their ownership for local Zimbabweans. The law was meant to promote black empowerment, as well as Mugabe's popularity. But China felt the law unfairly targeted its investments, including two diamond mines, whose assets were to be absorbed into a state-owned company. So angered were Chinese leaders that they summoned Zimbabwe's foreign minister to Beijing to hear their grievances.

For China, there loomed a bigger danger and opportunity: the long-awaited political transition. As the nonagenarian Mugabe approached the end of his term in 2018, China feared chaos. But after decades of waiting, it hoped to push a freer investment climate that would open up Zimbabwe's abundant mineral resources. As a one-party state, China has preferred to deal with ruling parties and their often-authoritarian leaders — and to hope that these old friends never pass from the scene, like the Communist Party itself. The "wake-up call," says Yun Sun, a

senior associate at the Stimson Center in Washington, came in Libya with the fall of the dictator Col. Muammar el-Qaddafi in 2011. China was heavily invested in Libya — it imported 10 percent of the country's oil supply — but blindsided by the revolt against its ally. During the turmoil, more than 30,000 Chinese workers had to be airlifted out of Libya, and China lost billions of dollars' worth of investments and loans.

Elsewhere, China's sheer size could pull wayward countries back into its orbit. In Zambia, the poor treatment of workers at Chinese-run copper mines provoked a national outcry. The populist Michael Sata ran for the presidency in 2006 on an anti-Chinese platform, vowing to prevent Zambia from becoming a "dumping ground" for Chinese workers. His defeat led to the first anti-Chinese riots in Africa. Five years later, Sata again whipped up anger at Chinese "profiteers" and won the presidency easily. Once in office, however, the old firebrand mellowed. He was soon a compliant partner with Beijing — a sign, perhaps, that China's influence on the Zambian economy had become so vital that fighting against it would be too costly.

The situation was different in Zimbabwe, where the uncertainty over succession spawned two sides vying for China's favor. Mugabe's heir apparent was Vice President Mnangagwa, a former security chief who trained as a guerrilla in China in the 1960s and earned the nickname "Crocodile." Mugabe, however, wanted to hand the reins over to his 52-year-old wife, Grace, who studied in China. Last month, when Mnangagwa threatened to stop her, Mugabe fired him. As the Crocodile went into hiding, Zimbabwe's army chief, his ally, flew to Beijing for an official visit with top military leaders. Barely four days after he returned to Zimbabwe, the coup was underway.

Suspicious about Beijing's role in the takeover were only magnified when, in his first week in office, Mnangagwa relaxed the "indigenization" law — and signed a \$153 million loan agreement with China. Beijing, citing its official policy of non-interference, vehemently denies any involvement in the coup. And indeed, such subterfuge seems more in line with past actions of the United States, which secretly helped topple governments from Iran to Chile during the 20th century. But even if Chinese officials told Zimbabwe's army chief in Beijing they merely hoped

**Brook Larmer**  
is a contributing writer  
for the magazine.

for a more stable investment environment, this could still be regarded as the first coup d'état carried out with the tacit approval of the 21st century's emerging superpower.

**China may be** new to coups, but it's one of the oldest players in the global money game. In the past few years, two separate teams of scientists have found medieval Chinese coins along Kenya's ocean coast. These tiny discs essentially rewrite the history of global trade, showing that Chinese traders reached Africa in the early 15th century, nearly a century before the first European explorers. This is not just a matter of pride. As China now moves to expand its influence in Africa, its state-owned media outlets have seized on these discoveries as proof of China's historical links to the continent — and as the perfect rationale for its return.

The coins themselves were symbols of monetary might. First introduced in the 3rd century B.C. by China's first emperor, the uniform copper coin served as an instrument for China's unification and later its expanding power. The round coins had square holes so they could be strung into belts of a thousand. The belts got so heavy that Chinese merchants in the 9th century began depositing them in one place in return for a paper receipt. They called it *fei qian*, or "flying money." When Marco Polo returned from his travels to China in the 13th century, his tales of paper money were met with disbelief. Europe would not have anything similar until the late 1600s.

When Mugabe promised to make the Chinese yuan an official currency, it was mostly a symbolic gesture. There, as in many of the world's poorest countries, the U.S. dollar reigns supreme, despite almost no American presence. But Chinese economic power is starting to challenge that status. Beijing's push to internationalize the yuan is motivated by more than vanity. A yuan that circulates more widely would spur Chinese trade, reduce its dependence on dollar holdings and enhance its geopolitical influence. The yuan is hampered by restrictions on its trade on foreign-exchange markets; Beijing fears that full convertibility would trigger capital flight. Even so, the yuan's rise is beginning ever so slightly to nudge the system of global currencies away from the U.S. dollar. Last year, the International Monetary Fund added the yuan to its basket of reserve currencies. According to the Bank of China,

## The fall of Mugabe shows how countries bend to the arc of China's gravity.

as of last year, more than two dozen countries were accepting the yuan as a reserve currency, including six in Africa.

The American economy surpassed the British economy in size in 1872, but it took the dollar another 73 years to displace the British pound, at the end of World War II. Over the past decades, there have

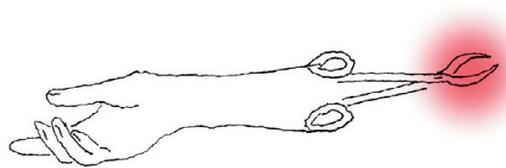
been other contenders and pretenders: the yen, the mark, the euro. But given its rapid rise — and its acceptance in distant parts of Africa — the yuan might be in the best position to catch the dollar. It may take decades, even centuries. But China, it should be clear by now, is in it for the very long haul. ♦

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Poem Selected by Terrance Hayes

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*Ever wonder about the role a sentence can play in a poem? It can be more controlled and malleable than a prose sentence. It can be a bit more subtle than a line break. The elegant sentence in this poem ties, sews and flows in a stream of chemical consciousness. The anaphoric "even," the visceral sounds stitched into the syntax, the intimacy of the ending: It requires breath to read. It prompts a gasp.*



### Ligament

By Charif Shanahan

Even after she cut into my shoulder  
Coldly, with a scalpel, resetting my clavicle,  
Tying it down with borrowed ligament and screwing it  
Into place, even after she sutured me shut,  
Sewing the two banks of skin across the thin blood river,  
Watching me sleep the chemical sleep  
Until tender and hazy I awoke — Even after all that,  
What seems the least plausible is how  
She had known, walking into that white room,  
To put her hand for just a second in my hand.

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**Terrance Hayes** is the author of five collections of poetry, most recently "How to Be Drawn," which was a finalist for the National Book Award in 2015. His fourth collection, "Lighthouse," won a 2010 National Book Award. **Charif Shanahan** is a poet whose debut collection, "Into Each Room We Enter Without Knowing," was published by Southern Illinois University Press this year. The collection was the winner of the Crab Orchard Series in Poetry First Book Award.

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# We Sponsor Refugees. What to Do About Their Patriarchal Ways?

*I am a member of a group that has sponsored a family of refugees from rural Syria. When the family arrived, group members signed up all four children — two boys and two girls — for soccer programs. Various group members also offered to drive the kids to soccer, only to find that on nights when the girls were to participate, the parents always made some excuse about why their daughters couldn't go. It didn't take long for us to realize that in their family, girls aren't allowed to participate in programs outside of the home, a decidedly nonegalitarian attitude if there ever was one. Here's the dilemma: There are those who don't want to enroll any of the children in future recreational programs because of the family's highly conservative attitudes toward females. Others feel that this would make the group guilty of imposing its value system on a refugee family and, by extension, just end up hurting the young sons. Who's right?*

Name withheld

**Neither view is right.** The objection to “imposing your value system” is confused. Unless your neighbors’ relativism includes thinking that it’s right for people to exclude girls from sport programs because their culture thinks they should be excluded, you all believe they’re making a mistake. Threatening them or harassing

them would indeed be disrespectful of them as moral persons. But provided that they understand that your sponsorship won't be withdrawn if they continue with what they're doing, it isn't an imposition to discuss with them why you think their girls should be able to participate in after-school programs. It's the way you talk respectfully to reasonable people.

So has anyone had a discussion with the family about this issue? They are presumably learning English, and they would do well to learn something about Western values as well. It's hard for them to adjust, of course, and it won't help simply to make them feel that you condemn their behavior. But neither should you avoid the issue by going along with their evasions: That's neither helpful nor respectful. Considering the situation in Syria, these refugees are going to be in your community for quite a while. And their children are attending school with local kids, so before long they're going to have to deal with these differences in attitude. Depriving the boys of recreational opportunities because the girls are kept at home does look like punishing children for something that's not their fault. It will also slow down their integration — and they may be the ones who will get the family to see your point of view.

*I am a lifelong runner, and after graduating from college this spring, I am in my first few months in a new city. While in college I ran competitively on a large cross-country and track team, and I have been transitioning to a new running routine outside of that*

*group. On my intercollegiate team, running with no shirt or, for women, a sports bra and short shorts was the norm in hot weather, and it was not uncommon to see groups of similarly attired young men and women spread out throughout the community. Since I arrived in my new community, however, I have gotten the sense that this is not a look that people regularly encounter, and I worry that I am making them uncomfortable. This morning, I passed a woman and a girl who I presumed was her school-aged daughter, and as I did, I heard the woman berate the girl, saying: “That grown man was wearing no shirt and no pants. You are not going to look at him!” I generally run in the parks near my house and avoid residential areas when possible, but it is unlikely that I will be able to completely avoid areas frequented by other people. I am not breaking any local indecent-exposure laws, but community norms also have value. It might also be worth noting that I am a white man in a predominantly Hispanic and black neighborhood, so I wonder if there are cultural norms and questions of power and privilege at play here that I am not familiar with and to which I ought to be more sensitive. Should I feel an ethical obligation to change my running clothing to something more modest in order to avoid offending the sensibilities of the people I encounter, or is it acceptable to continue to wear what is most comfortable to me based on the weather?*

Name withheld



## Bonus Advice From Judge John Hodgman

**Alec writes:** My significant other of many years drinks directly from the milk carton. This is very, very gross. Particularly disturbing, she has no issues then offering our soiled milk to unsuspecting guests. I seek an injunction plus damages in the form of back rubs for the emotional trauma that I have suffered.

**Confession time:** This court also drinks directly from the milk carton, even though I know it is, as you say, double-very gross. That said, I do not serve this milk to our guests because our guests are not children. Still, I will cease this practice forthwith and order your significant other to do same. However, I will not be party to court-ordered back rubs: That is triple-very gross.

To submit a query: Send an email to [ethicist@nytimes.com](mailto:ethicist@nytimes.com); or send mail to The Ethicist, The New York Times Magazine, 620 Eighth Avenue, New York, N.Y. 10018. (Include a daytime phone number.)

**When should you** defer to the norms of your neighbors? Suppose they objected if you put up a rainbow flag on your home or wore a T-shirt defending atheism. Concessions on such matters would require you to weigh their feelings against your own moral judgments; and you're entitled (morally as well as legally) to express your convictions in public places. But sartorial norms, within certain bounds, are another matter. Once you know your neighborhood is full of people who will be offended by your approach to exercise apparel, you certainly have a reason to dress more modestly, if it's not especially inconvenient. You would be commendably considerate of their sensibilities, without compromising any important values.

*I am in my mid-50s and self-employed, and had a heart attack last year. Fortunately, the heart-attack treatment was covered under Obamacare. I continue to pay for Obamacare, but given that it's a new year, I am concerned that my follow-up treatment won't be covered until my \$6,500 deductible is reached. I currently don't have the finances to cover the follow-up treatment: Is it unethical to get it and hope to find a way to pay for it later?*

Name Withheld

**Situations like yours** are among the great moral crises of our society. Why, in a prosperous society, should anyone have to choose between what is clearly necessary medical treatment and a debt they can't afford? Decent doctors and hospitals will allow you to set up a payment plan, but that may not be affordable, either, given your income. If it isn't, get the treatment you need and then make a plan. The wrong here is your being in this situation, not your getting medical care to which you're morally entitled.

*I grew up in a typical small town in the South that enshrined the Civil War with a statue of a Confederate soldier beside the courthouse. A childhood friend, who became a professional artist of some note, painted a picture of the courthouse, which my mother bought for me as a gift because of my connection to the artist. The picture has been hanging in my home since the 1970s. It is a lovely watercolor*

*perfectly in tune with the décor of the guest bedroom where it now hangs. The Confederate statue is not a prominent focal point in the impressionistic painting. I had never paid much attention to it until the current uproar over the actual statues caused me — a raging white liberal on issues of civil rights — to do soul-searching about whether I wish to give such a symbol any space in my home. I am torn, of course, between keeping a gift from my beloved deceased mother that few will ever see besides me and my family and taking it down. I have been polling several of my friends (all white liberals like me) about whether the picture should continue to hang or be “toppled.” Unanimously, they have urged me to “keep it up.” Hoping to get more clarity, I'm writing to get your opinion.*

Name withheld

**The wrong here is your being in this situation, not your getting medical care to which you're morally entitled.**

**I agree with** your friends. The picture's meaning for you has nothing to do with supporting white supremacy. At the same time, it does no harm to be reminded that we live in a country full of such pro-Confederate legacies — a country full of small town squares that harbor those statues. That's one reason I'm not so keen on taking down the statues (or your picture). People should know that the South went to war in order to preserve slavery and then put up Confederate memorials in order to celebrate or obfuscate that legacy a couple of generations later. For those who realize, as you and I do, why the statues were put there, they're doing us the service of preserving a past that explains too much of the present. ♦

**Kwame Anthony Appiah** teaches philosophy at N.Y.U. He is the author of “Cosmopolitanism” and “The Honor Code: How Moral Revolutions Happen.”

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# 'Passport to Your National Parks'

By Jamie Lauren Keiles



I cringe at the thought that I might be patriotic, but the next thing I know, I'm trying on a Cheesehead hat at the airport in Milwaukee and thinking about how happy I am to live in a nation so vast and idiosyncratic. This, at least, is how I like to think of America — less a set of monolithic ideals than a junk drawer full of halftime shows, regional-style pizzas, feuds over what exactly to call “soda” and snippets of marches by John Philip Sousa. But that sort of patriotism, while good enough as entertainment, offers little

comfort when I'm up late at night consuming my 25th hour of news. Lately, my America has felt too vast and fragmented, and fixating on regional curiosities like state-fair butter sculptures and St. Paul sandwiches only exacerbates this crisis of faith. I've been searching for new ways to keep liking this country, meaningful ways that don't feel like work.

Last summer, I went to St. Louis, rode a tram to the top of the Gateway Arch and rode back down to the gift shop at the bottom. There, among the

The perfect accessory for the grab-bag patriot.

magnets and commemorative spoons, I came across a kind of self-serve station, stocked with ink pads, rubber stamps and small blue books. The books were spiral-bound, with indelible-feeling vinyl covers. A title in gold foil announced: “Passport to Your National Parks.” I picked up a copy. The book divided the country into nine color-coded sections; each is introduced by a numbered list of parks, which is followed by pages for corresponding stamps. I watched as a man approached with his passport and

flipped to the orange Midwest Region. The stamp left a circle like an olde-tyme postmark: “Jefferson National Expansion Memorial JUL 19 2017 St. Louis, MO.” How random, I thought, that a space-age arch should be elected as a marker of the Louisiana Purchase. I bought the passport for \$9.95, took it to the table and made my first stamp.

The National Park Service, it turned out, offered the perfect way for me to gamify my grab-bag national pride. It was founded in 1916 as part of a Woodrow Wilson conservation effort, and it has grown in size less by coherent vision than by random acts of bureaucratic merger. The service now manages over 400 “units” — not just parks, but historic sites, battlefields, national monuments, seashores, wild rivers and scenic trails. There are National Park Service sites in all 50 states, and even in a handful of our island territories. The West Coast hosts the most postcard panoramas, but the East Coast packs more stamps per square mile. (There are nine in New York City alone.) Most points of contact with patriotism ask us to imagine what we might do for our country. If the passport has its own instructive slogan, it’s something closer to “Collect ’em all.”

I awoke the next day in the St. Louis heat, craving arbitrary merit. As with small round stones or woolen socks, an ink-pad stamp has a calming effect that makes you believe you’d be even calmer if you had more. I opened the map that was included with my passport and saw there was another N.P.S. unit nearby, the Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site, officially commemorated in 1989. The frog-green house and what’s left of its surrounding plantation sit at the heart of a tidy suburban subdivision.

My guide was a Missouri-raised milk-drinking type. (One fringe perk of using the passport is discovering new types of region-specific nerds.) He toured us around through the practically empty house, explaining to a crowd of mostly foreign tourists that Grant lived there for about five years. The site was hardly a Gateway Arch, but the quaint enthusiasm of its preservation aims offered some bite-size edification. It was the tourist equivalent of eating your broccoli. I marked a second stamp in my passport: “Ulysses S. Grant National Historic Site JUL 20 2017 St. Louis, MO.”

**If the passport has its own instructive slogan, it’s something closer to ‘Collect ’em all.’**

**Jamie Lauren Keiles**  
*is a writer in Queens.*

Six months later, I have 29 stamps inked at sites across six different states. The bulk of these were collected in September, when I drove from California to Philadelphia with my grandma. Like a giant truck-stop sweet tea or “The Grapes of Wrath” on tape, the passport pairs well with a road trip.

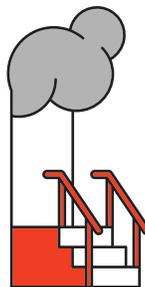
Visiting sites in rapid succession, I saw California’s purple mountains and Arizona’s 200-million-year-old petrified forest. I saw two bros vaping outside Independence Hall and a vision of America that remained inconclusive. Standing at the South Rim of the Grand Canyon, I imagined what it must have been like to ride a horse through unfamiliar land and come face to face with this immense hole in the ground. I found myself drawn, if only for a moment, to the tantalizing myth of

European “discovery.” Eleven days later, at the Liberty Bell, I read how the symbol, again and again, had been taken up in jest by women and people of color, left out of the freedom it promised.

Some sites, literal crossroads of history, bring together two contradicting stamps. At Fort Smith National Historic Site, in northwestern Arkansas, I inked one stamp for the frontier fort, a foothold on the land during westward expansion. Then I inked another for the Trail of Tears and laughed at the prospect of a patriotic vision that could ever sufficiently accommodate both. Being an American has always been incoherent. If the passport offers anything to the patriot who struggles, it finds some strange way to organize these fragments while avoiding the need to pretend they don’t exist. ♦

**Tip** By Malia Wollan

## How to Escape a Burning Building



**“Don’t wait until** you see smoke or flames,” says Margrethe Kobes, a senior researcher at the Institute for Safety in the Netherlands who studies how psychology and building design affect human behavior during fires. For one project, she offered subjects a stay in a four-star hotel. After conducting some sham experiments, everyone went to bed only to be awakened before dawn by a call from the front desk telling them the building was on fire. This, of course, was the real experiment. “In a fire, you need to evacuate quickly, but that’s not what we see,” Kobes says. Instead, people put on their shoes, got dressed, searched for their keys and repeatedly peered out their door into the hallway. Stalling before exiting is what

evacuation researchers call the “premovement phase.” Don’t prolong it.

The Netherlands has one of the lowest fire-death rates of any country in the world, five deaths per million people — the rate in the United States is about twice that. Most fatalities from fires result not from flames but from inhaling noxious gases. Avoid smoke. If you must move through it, get low, where the air is cleaner and cooler, and crawl under it. Close doors behind you as you exit, which can help slow a fire’s spread. People seek to escape buildings via a familiar route; get to know available exits ahead of time. Flee down. “Don’t go to the roof,” Kobes says.

In researching fatal fires, Kobes has found that the victims tended to hole up inside bathrooms. Perhaps they sought water or a hiding place — she isn’t sure. “If you go into the lavatory, you’ll be trapped,” Kobes says. Once outside the building, stay there. “I’ve seen cases where people go back in for their cellphone,” Kobes says. In emergencies, people tend to work together rather than act selfishly. Help one another, but if something seems off — you smell smoke or hear an alarm — don’t wait for others to react. This lack of self-reliance is especially evident when a fire starts away from home, in a theater, say, where people tend to feel like guests and will wait for instruction before evacuating. Remember that instinctual meekness: You may need to override it. “You have to trust yourself,” Kobes says. ♦

# The Gift of Excess

A rich holiday feast of seared scallops, roast duck and hollandaise sauce.



**Don't be scared of hollandaise; it's just egg yolks mixed with butter to form an airy emulsion, rich and luxurious.**



If you had told me, back in my 20s, how great it would be to spend Christmas Eve cooking for family as someone rustles wrapping paper in the living room and the dog snores at my feet, I wouldn't have believed you, would have scoffed like a Gen-X Scrooge. I was content then to hold up the bar with friends and strangers, to drain Rolling Rocks and sing "Fairytale of New York," take a swing and a miss at the midnight service, then trudge the long walk home in the cold. I'm not any longer. I cook and serve others food that is both fantastical and rich, to allow all who eat it to sleep through whatever late-night shenanigans put gifts under the tree, and to rise in the morning Christmas-excited. My children are teenagers now. But I believe they still slightly believe. The dinner helps.

Scallops are at the center of the meal. There is clarity in the water off Long Island this time of year, a crystalline purity to it that I think firms the flesh of the bivalves and makes them extra sweet. I think that's true both of the paw-shaped sea scallops that sit on the ocean floor south of the island, and of the smaller, more delicate bay scallops that live in the shallow waters between the island's forks. If I'm cooking sea scallops, I'll sear them in a pan, get a good crust going on each one, then turn them once and serve them almost right away, so that you might think they're barely done in the center. Bay scallops are smaller, more fragile. They want only warming in butter before going out on a plate: candy made of seafood.

But I don't cook just scallops. David McMillan and Frédéric Morin, the joyously immoderate chefs who run the Joe Beef restaurant in Montreal, match seared scallops with pulled pork and hollandaise sauce. I love that preparation, how excessive it is, how appropriate to holiday cheer. But over the years, I've changed it to include shredded duck instead of pork, which shaves a few hours off the cooking time and somehow elevates the fanciness of the meal as well. With Christmas Eve falling on Sunday this year, you could cook the duck well in advance of dinner. The heat of the oven renders the bird's fat and leaves the skin crisp and the meat beneath it soft and tangly. Shred the breasts and the thighs into a bowl with some diced skin and a lashing of hoisin or barbecue sauce, then heat it through in a pan right before using it on the scallops.

Finally, there is the hollandaise. A lot of people are scared of hollandaise. They eat it mostly in restaurants and consider its creation magical. But it's just egg yolks whisked with butter to form an airy emulsion, rich and luxurious. And you don't need a double boiler to make it, only a stick blender and a smallish bowl. The key is temperature, not tools. You want the melted butter warm, but not so hot so as to curdle the eggs. And you don't want to add it all at once, since that will break the sauce. Once it's thick, keep it warm on the back of the stove or in a thermos until you're ready to use it. (Still nervous? Make a trial batch for breakfast ahead of the one you'll make at night, and serve it with eggs and toasted English muffins.)

To serve, I like a plate with a spread of hollandaise on it, with a bunch of scallops on top, with shredded duck and mmore hollandaise on top of them, and a watercress salad on the side, just as if I were running a little restaurant, open once a year. But you could set the food up family-style just as easily, on a platter, or serve the components of the dish separately. You could in fact omit the duck and double the scallops. You could omit the scallops and the duck and serve the sauce with steak and smashed potatoes. You could omit the sauce and eat the scallops raw. These are gifts for you to play with, however you like.

#### **Sautéed Scallops With Shredded Duck and Hollandaise Sauce**

Time: 5 hours, mostly unattended

##### **For the duck:**

- 1 4-6-pound duck  
Kosher salt and freshly ground black pepper, to taste  
Barbecue sauce or hoisin sauce, to taste

##### **For the hollandaise sauce:**

- 7 egg yolks, at room temperature
- 1 cup unsalted butter  
Pinch cayenne, or to taste
- 1 tablespoon lemon juice, or to taste

##### **For the scallops:**

- 3 tablespoons unsalted butter
- 1 pound sea scallops, patted dry  
Kosher salt, to taste

- 1 tablespoon dry white vermouth or white wine
- 1 tablespoon finely chopped parsley, for garnish

1. Make the duck. Heat oven to 325. Remove giblets and neck from duck cavity, and discard or reserve for another use. Cut off excess fat from duck cavity. Place duck on a rack in a deep roasting pan, breast-side up, and season with salt and pepper. Then slide the pan into the oven and cook, undisturbed, for 2 hours.

2. Remove duck from oven, and use the point of a sharp knife to prick the skin of the bird, all over the breasts and thighs. Return bird to oven, and cook for 2 more hours.

3. Increase oven temperature to 450, and cook until the duck is golden and crisp, a further 30 minutes or so and an instant-read thermometer inserted into the thigh measures at least 155 degrees.

4. Carefully remove the roasting pan from the oven, and transfer the duck to a cutting board. (Let the fat in the pan cool, then store it, covered, in the refrigerator. It is an excellent medium for roasting potatoes.) Allow the duck to rest for a few minutes, then shred it, using two forks to pull the meat apart. Add your favorite barbecue sauce, to taste, or your favorite hoisin sauce, to taste. Keep warm.

5. Make the hollandaise. Put yolks into a small container into which you can fit an immersion blender, or into the jar of a blender.

6. Melt the butter in a small saucepan set over medium heat, then allow it to cool for a few minutes.

7. Process the yolks for a couple of seconds, then continue to run the blender as you add the melted butter in a slow and careful stream, until you have a thin, emulsified sauce. Add the cayenne and lemon juice to taste, blend again to combine and keep at room temperature until ready to use.

8. Make the scallops. Place a large sauté pan or skillet over medium-high heat, and add to it 3 tablespoons of the butter. When it has melted and started to foam, place the scallops in the pan in a single layer, and season with a pinch or two of salt.

9. Cook scallops without moving until the bottoms are golden brown, approximately 2-3 minutes, then turn them over, add the wine and cook an additional 1-2 minutes.

10. To serve the dish, spoon hollandaise on a plate or platter, then top with the scallops, brown-side up. Top scallops with shredded duck (you'll have some leftover for sandwiches tomorrow), and drizzle with hollandaise.

Serves 4-6. ♦

# Fit for a King — or a Queen

A *galette des rois* is as much a game as a dessert, and the winner gets to wear a crown.



**Like a birthday cake, it's an invitation to gather and celebrate.**

**Winter in Paris** always surprises me. From one January to the next, I forget how very short the days are, how damp the air is, how often it seems we're on the brink of snow but how seldom it arrives, how rare a day of sunshine is and then how weak the light can be. But January brings compensatory pleasures: hot chocolate, *vin chaud* (a mix of mulled wine, brandy and orange), roasted chestnuts bought on the street, freshly griddled crepes rolled into paper cones and the *galette des rois*, a pastry sold only during this gray month.

"Galette" is a word that can still trip me up in translation: It can be a pancake, a buckwheat crepe, a chubby cookie or a double-crust pastry, which describes the *galette des rois*. Created to celebrate Epiphany — the day the Three Kings (*les rois*) brought gifts to the infant Jesus — the galette is beloved throughout northern France (in the south, they make a brioche cake, a *gâteau des rois* that resembles a New Orleans king cake).

The galette has two components: a pair of puff-pastry circles and a frangipani-type filling. Although pastry chefs have taken to creating fillings with fruits (dried or roasted), chocolate, rose, coconut, citrus and various nuts, the form remains true to tradition. The edges of the galette are scalloped, the better to show the dramatic rise of the pastry and to seal in the velvety almond cream that is the perfect counterpoint to the flaky crusts. (If a galette doesn't shatter into hundreds of buttery shards, then a measure of its character is lost.) The top, baked to a burnished matte mahogany, is etched in a spare pattern with the tip of a knife — no icing, no frosting, no frippery or frills. In the world of prettily decorated pastries, the galette is as plain as toast.

In the years when I was a frequent tourist in Paris, I wasn't much interested in galettes. I was even miffed that for weeks these large pastries overwhelmed patisserie windows and pushed aside most other specialties, the ones that visitors could eat on the run or savor in a hotel room. It was only when I moved to Paris and had a home and friends of my own that I came to appreciate it and to understand one reason locals love it: It's as much a party game as a pastry. Like a birthday cake, it's an invitation to gather and celebrate.

Every galette comes with a crown — some from the best patisseries are intricately designed, but most are made of gold cardboard — and a charm. In earlier times, the charm was a dried bean, a *fève* — it's still the name for the trinket, even though, as with the crowns, today's *fèves*, made of porcelain, can be quite elaborate. From Epiphany past, I've saved *fèves* shaped like macarons (one was black — so chic and so unusual), sheaves of wheat, hearts and stylized beans. If the charm is hidden in your portion, you get the crown and the title of king or queen for the day. How that portion becomes yours is always a matter of luck: Many French families have the youngest person in the room get under the table and call out who should get the next slice of galette.

My friend Simon Maurel, now 40, is still the baby in his family, and so each year he folds his six-foot frame as gracefully as he can and crawls under his parents' dining-room table to proclaim the order in which all will be served the first galette of the season. If you live in France, it's almost guaranteed that a galette will be a weekly (if not more frequent) indulgence — you're bound to have one at school, in the office, at home, at a neighbor's, a friend's or even the local wine shop. (Champagne and sparkling cider are excellent accompaniments.)

I always have a galette get-together at my apartment in Paris, and when I return to America, I do it again, this time having baked my own galette. Because it uses puff pastry, which rises spectacularly almost no matter what you do, the dessert is automatically striking. And because it's more craft than art, talent or skill, it's a project of parts: The almond filling is made ahead, the pastry circles cut ahead, the galette assembled and then chilled again. The steps fit nicely between bouts with a tough crossword puzzle or getting the place ready for guests. A whole almond makes a good *fève*, but because I have the charms I've pocketed, I'll use one of them. Sometimes more — I consider it a baker's prerogative to stack the deck. I disregard tradition for the delight of seeing my friends bent over the galette, guessing which slice might hold the bean, betting on their picks, moaning theatrically when their slice is bare or brandishing the coveted *fève* in triumph.

## Galette des Rois

Active time: About 30 minutes

### For the filling:

- 6 tablespoons (85 grams) unsalted butter, at room temperature
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup (85 grams) confectioners' sugar
- $\frac{3}{4}$  cup (85 grams) almond flour
- $\frac{1}{4}$  teaspoon salt
- 2 large eggs, at room temperature
- 1 tablespoon rum (optional)
- 1 teaspoon pure vanilla extract

### To assemble:

- 2  $9\frac{1}{2}$ -inch-diameter circles puff-pastry dough (from a 14-17-ounce package; 396-482 grams), cold
- 1 whole almond or dried bean, for the charm

1. To make the filling: Working with a mixer or by hand, beat the butter and sugar together until creamy and light. Beat in the almond flour and the salt. Mix in 1 whole egg, then the white from the second egg (reserve the yolk). Mix in the rum, if using, and the extract. Cover, and refrigerate for at least 1 hour.

2. Mix the yolk with 1 teaspoon cold water; cover, and refrigerate until needed.

3. To assemble: Place one circle of dough on a baking sheet lined with parchment paper. Spread the filling evenly over the dough, leaving a 1-inch border bare. Press the charm into the filling. Moisten the border with cold water, position the second circle of dough over the filling and press around the border with your fingertips to seal well. Using the back of a table knife, scallop the edges by pushing into the dough (about  $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{2}$ -inch deep) every  $\frac{1}{2}$  inch or so. Refrigerate for at least 30 minutes.

4. Preheat the oven to 425. Brush a thin layer of the reserved yolk glaze over the top of the galette, avoiding the border (if glaze drips down the rim, the galette won't rise). With the point of a paring knife, etch a design into the top of the galette, taking care not to pierce the dough. Cut 6 small slits in the top as steam vents.

5. Turn the heat down to 400, and bake for 30-40 minutes, until the galette is puffed and deeply golden. Check after 20 minutes, and tent loosely with foil if it's browning too much or too fast. Transfer to a rack, and cool for at least 15 minutes (the galette may deflate — that's puff pastry for you). Serve warm or at room temperature.

Serves 8. ♦





**WHAT**

**(IF ANYTHING)**

**DOES**

**CARTER**

**PAGE**

**KNOW?**

He has been wiretapped by the F.B.I. and grilled by congressional investigators over his suspected Russia connections. But the Trump campaign foreign-policy adviser can't seem to stop talking.

**By Jason Zengerle**

Photograph by Ryan Pfluger

**T**

hey were closing in on Carter Page. It was the last day of November, and the onetime adviser to Donald Trump's campaign was dodging the tourists who clotted the sidewalks around Rockefeller Center and its famous Christmas tree. As Page wove his way through the holiday crowd, he talked about his troubles, raising his voice to be heard above a Salvation Army bell-ringer. "Anybody who knows me knows how ridiculous the whole thing is," he lamented to me and everyone else within earshot along Fifth Avenue. "But you're still part of the controversy."

Page was speaking of the investigation into the Trump campaign's suspected dealings with Russia during the 2016 election, which had been gathering steam of late. About a month earlier, Paul Manafort, Trump's former campaign chairman, was indicted by the Justice Department's special counsel, Robert Mueller, on charges of tax fraud and money laundering. In the next 24 hours, Michael Flynn, the former national security adviser, would plead guilty to lying to the F.B.I. Page, too, had become ensnared in the scandal, albeit more ambiguously. A foreign-policy adviser to Trump's 2016 campaign, Page had had an affinity for Russia ever since studying in Moscow as a young Navy midshipman in 1991 and had worked there for three years in the 2000s. He was suspected of meeting with Russian officials during a visit to Moscow in July 2016, and shortly thereafter the F.B.I. obtained a rare warrant to monitor his electronic communications. In recent months, he has been summoned to Washington for more than 20 hours of testimony before the Senate Intelligence Committee, the House Intelligence Committee and Mueller's grand jury.

But the fact that Page was speaking to me at all was evidence of how he differs from his castmates in the Trump-Russia soap opera. While others have lawyered up and disappeared behind a scrim of crisis-communications consultants and attorneys, Page has chosen to wage his battle almost entirely on his own, in the public spotlight. Manafort tugging on his car's sun visor to shield his face from reporters or Flynn walking stone-faced and tight-lipped into a federal courthouse might be the iconic images of the Trump-Russia scandal. But the most ubiquitous one is of Page's shorn head — his eyes bugged out and an almost blissful smile plastered across his face — bobbling above a TV news chyron on one of the numerous network and cable shows he has frequented. "I genuinely hope, Carter, that you are innocent of everything, because you are doing a lot of talking," an incredulous Chris Hayes told Page when he appeared on Hayes's MSNBC show in October.

"It's either admirably bold or reckless." As Page conceded to me: "Admittedly, I go beyond the level of transparency and cooperativeness any sane lawyer would advise."

This approach has made Page a cult figure of sorts to those who are closely tracking the ins and outs of the various Russia investigations. His TV appearances typically produce surreal sound bites, like the time he told Anderson Cooper that they once frequented the same gym. ("I remember walking by you even though we didn't know each other, and I said, 'Hi, Anderson.'") He pens verbose letters to various investigators, including one to the Justice Department claiming "hate crimes" against him during the 2016 campaign. ("The actions by the Clinton regime and their associates may be among the most extreme examples of human rights violations observed during any election in U.S. history since Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was similarly targeted for his antiwar views in the 1960s.")

Even when Page isn't seeking attention, he still somehow manages to find it. In November, he trooped up to Capitol Hill to deliver subpoenaed documents to the Senate and House Intelligence Committees, only to stumble into a throng of reporters staking out the office of Al Franken, who had just been accused of sexual harassment. Page was wearing a floppy red hat that made him resemble the titular castaway on "Gilligan's Island," prompting as many queries about his headgear as about the contents of his delivery. "I've learned a lot from the past mistakes of my fellow Annapolis grad, Senator McCain," he explained to a Business Insider reporter. "Sunny day in D.C., and skin cancer is one of them."

The more Page talks, the less clear his story has become — and people have begun to wonder about not just his competence but also his sanity. But as we walked through Manhattan that afternoon, Page assured me that he was playing a long game. "How do I say this without sounding overly confident or arrogant?" he mused. "No one is better prepared to have gone through this than me." He flashed that familiar beatific smile. "Not only am I ready for it," he said, "I savor it."

**The Madison Avenue** offices of Page's investment firm, Global Energy Capital, are just around the corner from Trump Tower — a geographic coincidence in which Page has invested much import. "For your information, I have frequently dined in Trump Grill, had lunch in Trump Cafe, had coffee meetings in the Starbucks at Trump Tower, attended events and spent many hours in campaign headquarters on the fifth floor last year," Page wrote in a letter to the Senate Intelligence Committee in March. "As a sister skyscraper in Manhattan, my office at the IBM Building (590 Madison Avenue) is literally connected to the Trump Tower building by an atrium." Page says he has been the subject of what he calls "terrorist

threats" for over a year and is generally skittish about revealing his haunts, but the office is an exception: "It's within the Trump Tower Secret Service zone, so it's one of the places where I feel secure," he explained in an email to me.

Before I visited him in November, Page told me I was the first reporter he had allowed into the office. "I'm sure if you Google 'Carter Page shadowy,' hundreds of articles come up," he boasted. "I like being a shadowy figure." But when I entered the inner sanctum, I discovered that Global Energy Capital's headquarters were actually a corporate co-working space. Page, the firm's only employee, rents a windowless room — outfitted with a small circular table, a whiteboard on wheels and a painting of an orchid — by the hour. Other tenants include the National Shingles Foundation and a wedding-band company called Star Talent Inc. Still, when he mentioned Trump, Page cocked his head toward Fifth Avenue and referred to him as "the gentleman next door here."

The office is one of many things about Page that are less than initially meets the eye. When Trump announced Page as one of his foreign-policy advisers during a meeting with The Washington Post editorial board in March 2016, he was eager to tout Page's credentials, identifying him as "Carter Page, Ph.D." Page's doctoral adviser for his degree, received in 2011 from the University of London's School of Oriental and African Studies, was Shirin Akiner, a controversial scholar who has been derided by fellow academics and human rights groups for trying to whitewash human rights abuses in Uzbekistan. But in an email, Akiner told me, "I am afraid I have no information about Carter Page — some 10 years ago, he was one of my many students."

Page tried unsuccessfully to publish his doctoral dissertation, on energy in Central Asia and Russia, as a book — a failure for which he has blamed the "anti-former Soviet Union, anti-Russia sentiment of various academic publishers." But one political scientist who reviewed Page's manuscript told me: "It was very analytically confused, just throwing a lot of stuff out there without any real kind of argument. I gave it a thumbs down — and that's kind of rare in this business for a review of a full book manuscript."

Before founding Global Energy Capital in 2008, Page spent seven years working for Merrill Lynch in London, Moscow and New York and, according to his corporate biography, was "involved in over \$25 billion of transactions in the energy-and-power sector." But his involvement appears to have been peripheral at best. In Moscow, he was nicknamed Stranichkin, from the Russian word *stranichka*, meaning "little page." "He wasn't great, and he wasn't terrible," Sergei Aleksashenko, who ran Merrill Lynch's Moscow office while Page worked there, told the journalist Julia Ioffe. "What can you say about a person who in no way [is] exceptional?"

As a midshipman at the Naval Academy, Page read and was profoundly affected by “The Wise Men,” Walter Isaacson and Evan Thomas’s book about Dean Acheson, Averell Harriman and the other mandarins who shaped Cold War-era foreign policy. He set out to play a similarly influential, “discreetly backstage” role in world affairs. People who encountered Page in his pre-Trump days recall him as someone who was forever struggling in that effort. Stephen Sestanovich, a professor at Columbia University’s School of International and Public Affairs, remembers running into Page — who is a prodigious conference-goer — on the sidelines of various Council on Foreign Relations forums and round tables related to Russia. “His view of how the world worked seemed to have an edgy Putinist resentment to it,” Sestanovich says. “I think Carter genuinely felt an affinity for Putin’s critique of the U.S. foreign-policy establishment and its unfairness to Russia, because he wasn’t doing any better with that establishment than Putin was.” In 2013, a Russian intelligence operative who was posing as a United Nations diplomat met Page at an Asia Society conference; according to the F.B.I., the Russian spy tried to recruit Page but encountered difficulties because, as he was heard telling a colleague in an F.B.I. wiretap, Page was “an idiot.”

It was the Trump campaign that finally provided Page what he had been seeking for years: a seat at the table. Ed Cox, the chairman of the New York State Republican Committee and an acquaintance, secured Page a meeting in early 2016 with Trump’s campaign manager, Corey Lewandowski, who in turn passed off Page to Sam Clovis, a talk-show host and conservative activist in Iowa who was building out Trump’s foreign-policy team. Even among Trump advisers, that team was an object of derision. “To call them D-listers would be an insult to D-listers,” one former Trump adviser says. But Page didn’t see it that way at all. “These were some of the best discussions I ever had, with some of the most impressive people,” he recalls. “It was like an oasis.”

**Page’s time** at the oasis would be brief. That July, he traveled to Moscow for five days to give a speech at the New Economic School. Not long after he returned, he received a text message from a Wall Street Journal reporter asking

**‘ADMITTEDLY, I GO BEYOND THE LEVEL OF TRANSPARENCY AND COOPERATIVENESS ANY SANE LAWYER WOULD ADVISE.’**

whether he met in Moscow with Igor Sechin, a Putin ally who is now chief executive of the Russian oil conglomerate Rosneft, and Igor Diveykin, a top Russian intelligence official. Similar questions from other reporters soon followed. Page told them — and still maintains — that he didn’t meet either man. But in late September, Yahoo News ran an article reporting that American intelligence officials suspected that Page had met with both of them in Moscow — a claim, Page later discovered, that appeared in the dossier on Trump’s suspected Russia entanglements compiled by the former British intelligence agent Christopher Steele. Three days after the Yahoo report, Page announced he was taking a “leave of absence” as a campaign adviser.

After the election, Trump’s advisers continued to distance their boss from Page. When Page, returning to Moscow in December, talked to Russian reporters about Trump’s victory and promoted his ties to the president-elect, the Trump campaign’s lawyer, Don McGahn (now the White House counsel), sent Page a “cease and desist” letter. “You never met Mr. Trump, nor did you ever ‘advise’ Mr. Trump about anything,” McGahn wrote. “You are thus not an ‘adviser’ to Mr. Trump in any sense of the word.” In January, a week before Trump’s inauguration, Stephen K. Bannon, the incoming White House chief strategist, got wind that Page was planning to appear on MSNBC and called him and told him to cancel the appearance.

“The team is only as strong as the weakest link,” Page told me. “And it’s not that I’m a weak link. It’s just that I’m the link getting smashed with an anvil.” Testifying before the House Intelligence Committee in November, he lamented, “Unfortunately, I am the biggest embarrassment surrounding the campaign.”

Page hasn’t always helped himself in his dealings with investigators. For more than a year, he repeatedly maintained that he didn’t meet with any Russian government officials on that Moscow trip. But in his November testimony to the House Intelligence Committee, Page admitted that he had in fact spoken with Deputy Prime Minister Arkady Dvorkovich. “There’s a lot that remains unexplained about Carter Page,” Representative Adam Schiff of California, the committee’s top Democrat, told me. “But one thing is apparent, and that is that his testimony under oath ended up being at great odds with what he had been representing publicly.”

Page continues to insist that there was nothing nefarious about any of his work for the Trump campaign. Besides, he told me, the foreign-policy team he served on was “a lower-level working group, of which I was on the lower end of the lower level.” And yet Page seemingly can’t quite stomach the prospect of returning to the periphery, so he has crafted an alternative scandal narrative — a scandal in which he sits at the center. Page contends that the real story of the 2016 election was not

collusion between Trump and Russia to defeat Hillary Clinton but rather collusion between the Democratic National Committee — which helped pay for the Steele dossier — and the F.B.I. to defeat Trump. And their efforts, Page insists, focused on him. “I was the most central element, the central linchpin,” he told me. Referring to his wiretapping by the F.B.I., he added: “There are two people who got hacked last year: Podesta” — John Podesta, the Clinton campaign chairman, whose emails were published by WikiLeaks — “and me.”

There may be scant evidence for this theory, but rhetorically, it has allowed Page to insist on his innocence and his significance at the same time: If circumstances have conspired to keep him from being a wise man, then at least he can be a martyr. The whole affair has wrecked his business, he says, and cost him relationships. He compares himself to the oft-imprisoned Russian opposition leader Alexei Navalny. He even likens his plight to those of women who have suffered sexual harassment or assault. “Talk to some ladies you know,” he told me, “and ask them: ‘What would you rather have? Someone putting their hand on your rear end or your breast momentarily? Or having to give up all of your personal communications, all of your thousands of emails and thousands of documents? Which would you prefer?’ It’s a powerful person putting influence on someone who’s less powerful.”

In September, Page filed a libel lawsuit against Yahoo’s corporate parent and the Broadcasting Board of Governors, which operates Radio Free Europe, for their reporting about his July Moscow trip — “perhaps the most dangerous, reckless, irresponsible and historically instrumental moments in modern-day sensational crime-story journalism,” as the suit puts it. Page is representing himself. “The real investigation, I think, is going to be the discovery process in my lawsuit,” he told me. “The information that will come out of this may be far more revealing than these other investigations.”

And in that, Page maintains, he will be able to achieve his most important goal: avoiding a cataclysmic conflict between the United States and Russia. He believes he is uniquely suited, perhaps even destined, to bring the two countries together. “It’s obviously for myself in some ways, but the bigger motivation is to prevent the legacy of ashes, the next Iraq, the next Libya, the next Vietnam, which are all minuscule compared to the level of potential conflict between our two countries,” Page told me.

It’s a lonely struggle; Page has been forsaken by former friends and colleagues. But in Donald Trump, he believes he still has an ally. “When he was in there with Kislyak and Lavrov in the Oval Office,” Page said, referring to Trump’s controversial May meeting with the Russian ambassador and foreign minister, “kind of joking around and still having the courage to try to continue a vision of actually improving relations, that’s a real profile in courage.” ♦



**HIS DOCU -  
HORROR -  
THRILLER -  
COMEDY ABOUT  
RACE  
IN AMERICA  
WAS THE MOVIE  
OF THE YEAR.  
WHAT WILL HE  
SHOW US NEXT ?**

**THE SEER  
BY  
MORRIS**

**WESLEY**

# JORDAN PEELE IS FAMOUS, IN PART, FOR

imitations — of rappers and dingbats and the 44th president of the United States. But he would be impossible to imitate. He isn't ribald. He's droll. Sometimes he's not even that. Sometimes he's quiet. Sometimes he's sitting across from you expecting you to hold up your end of a conversation. Sometimes he's listening and hearing you — like, really hearing you. This is the Peele who made "Get Out," and it takes a minute to square him with the Peele from "Key & Peele."

On Halloween, we had lunch at one of those casually cool American bistros in Los Angeles where all the food seems as if it was grown out back. He chose a spot outside, not to be seen (although a few people saw him) but mostly to see. Peele, who is 38, lives in his head, and he watches the world around him intensely. I got the duck, then so did he, and while we ate I was pretty sure I could hear him thinking. It was toward the end of the meal when he saw someone he recognized. Well, he thought he did.

"He's dressed like Chris," he said with some amusement. "Do you think he's being Chris?" He was looking past me, so it was hard to turn all the way around to confirm with any subtlety. But Peele's gaze made it perfectly obvious to the person approaching that Peele was looking at him. "Are you Chris from 'Get Out' for Halloween?" Peele asked, committing less an act of racial profiling than an uncanny identification of his own handiwork. "Get Out," of course, is the surprise hit movie that Peele wrote and directed

about a black man named Chris, who discovers that his white girlfriend's family is running a nasty racist conspiracy. Chris has big, watery eyes that seem red from weariness (or weed) and wears a collarless blue chambray shirt over a gray T-shirt and jeans.

The man Peele thought might be costumed as Chris was also black, with skin as dark and eyes as striking as those of Daniel Kaluuya, the actor who plays Chris. This impostor was indeed Chris-attired too. And the white woman he was with could also have been part of the costume. It was the sort of similarity that, once pointed out, can't be unseen. Alas, it wasn't Halloween for this guy, just Tuesday. He was thrilled, nonetheless, to be stopped by Chris's inventor, and he asked Peele for a photo. Peele, who got a kick even out of being wrong, asked him for one, too. The impostor then offered an incidental, partial explanation for why "Get Out" became the phenomenon it did: No, he wasn't Chris, "but I could be."

It has been 10 months, and we're still talking about this movie and its alarming presentation of white racism. "Get Out" opened at the top of the box office at the end of February and has grossed many, many times the \$4.5 million it cost to make. Racism is old, but Peele found a poetic new way of talking about it. He gave us language we didn't know we lacked.

For a white audience, the movie might be one of the few times they've been asked to identify with a regular, imperiled black person without

the sweetener of a white co-star — no Spencer Tracy or Sandra Bullock here, just Catherine Keener and Bradley Whitford as the Armitages, the sort of parents who'll inquire about the history of their daughter's interracial relationship by asking: "How long's this been going on? This *thang*," as daddy Armitage does. For a black audience, the movie could have ended right there. What does an affluent, middle-aged, suburban white dude know about a thang? And what's he doing saying the word with this much insinuating self-delight, this much put-on jive? "I didn't want any white saviors," Peele said over lunch. White saviors hog the history of race in American film. Instead, his movie is full of white people whom Peele reveals as insatiable predators of blackness.

In a bid to help rid Chris of the urge to smoke, Mrs. Armitage tries hypnosis. She sits him down and swirls a spoon around the rim of a teacup and commands him to "sink into the floor." Suddenly, Chris can't move. He's entered a state of paralysis that Mrs. Armitage calls the "sunken place." There's a cut to Chris falling downward into a dark space, looking up at the lighted surface where his body sits motionless while his struggling subconscious drowns. It's a strange, complicated, disturbing metaphor for the long history of white control over the black body. It's also a prelude to the rest of the movie's sinister doings, which include a racist cabal of the Armitages and their mostly white friends and culminate in an elaborate medical procedure called "coagula."

The "sunken place" is the movie's most potent metaphor. Peele says he devised it as a way of thinking about a crisis like the mass incarceration of black men. "The first moment in the writing process where I sat there and cried," he told me, "was realizing that while I was having fun writing this mischievous popcorn film, there were real black people who were being abducted and put into dark holes, and the worst part of it is we don't think about them. I hadn't been thinking about them. We put them to the back of our minds. That was kind of a trigger point for me, this idea of the back of one's mind."

As a concept, the sunken place has grown even more capacious. It has been repurposed to explain both institutional disenfranchisement and racial self-estrangement — an explanation for the behavior of black people who seem to be under white control, based on either their sustained proximity to whiteness or statements construable as anti-black, or probably both. Sunken-place entrants include Clarence Thomas, Ben Carson, Tiger Woods, O.J. Simpson, sometimes Kanye West and any black person with something nice to say about President Trump. It's more generous than "sellout" and less punitive than "Uncle Tom," a dis and a road to redemption.

Before he noticed fake Chris, Peele had been talking about the restricted ways bigotry is

discussed. “We’re never going to fix this problem of racism if the idea is you have to be in a K.K.K. hood to be part of the problem,” he said. The culture still tends to think of American racism as a disease of the Confederacy rather than as a national pastime with particular regional traditions, like barbecue. “Get Out” is set in the Northeast, where the racial attitude veers toward self-congratulatory tolerance. Mr. Armitage, for instance, gets chummy with Chris by telling him he’d have voted for Obama a third time. “Get Out” would have made one kind of sense under a post-Obama Hillary Clinton administration, slapping at the smugness of American liberals still singing: “Ding dong, race is dead.” Peele shows that other, more backhanded forms of racism exist — the presumptuous “can I touch your hair” icebreaker, Mr. Armitage’s “I voted for Obama, so I can’t be racist” sleeper hold are just two. But Clinton lost. Now the movie seems to amplify the racism that emanates from the Trump White House and smolders around the country.

A few people have remarked to me, not unreasonably, that “Get Out” isn’t terribly plausible. The cabal doesn’t make sociological sense. How does the cotton stuffing go from the armchair into Chris’s ears? What does a weekend at the Armitages look like with no black visitor? None of the terror stands up to logic! But when is terror logical? Peele developed a tone, other than hysteria, to present the black experience of discomfort in seemingly benign white worlds and the way their residents chronically deny the reality of that experience. Peele takes that reality as a given, but he is amplifying the paranoia that results from its constant denial. It’s a movie made by a person having the same bad dream I and lots of other black people have had.

Every time I’ve seen it, I’ve thought about that moment not too far into Toni Morrison’s “Song of Solomon” when somebody asks, “What difference do it make if the thing you scared of is real or not?” What befalls the black characters in “Get Out” is the thing we’re scared of.

**Before we met,** Peele presented one serious stipulation. “When you come to the office and see cards with names and details on them, I don’t want anybody knowing about that,” he warned. He is already at work on his next movie and doesn’t want to say much about what it is. He does intend to sic the “Get Out” model on other phobias and -isms. But which ones? “It’s tippy-top secret,” he told me on Halloween. “I can give you hints or something.” Peele says he wants to make “more social thrillers about different human demons, and the first human demon that I was trying to tackle with ‘Get Out’ was racism and neglect for one another. It’s going to be another piece of that project.”

On an overcast afternoon, Peele’s assistant, a chill young man named Alex Kim, drove us into the Hollywood Hills to the Spanish-style



Peele, age 9, at home in New York City, wearing part of his “Beetlejuice” Halloween costume.

Previous photograph: Peele in Central Park, near where he grew up.

colonial house that for about eight months has been the office of Peele’s production company, Monkeypaw. Like a lot of the residences up here, this one is nestled into the geological table and seems charmingly underfurnished. Most of the common space feels spare in a lonely, college-y sort of way. Some rooms have rugs, but the longer you’re there, the more rugs you want to put down. There were no visible markers of any coming projects, just walls of inspired fan art and designer posters, like the black-and-white image of a coffee mug fashioned with Kaluuya’s worried face and a spoon stirring where the top of his skull should be.

These guys might be too busy to worry about décor. Peele is producing a new “Twilight Zone” for CBS All Access and, with Misha Green and J.J. Abrams, another anthology series for HBO based on the 2016 novel by Matt Ruff, “Lovecraft Country.” Peele’s comedy “The Last O.G.” — in which an ex-con played by Tracy Morgan adjusts to, among other things, Brooklyn gentrification — is set to start on TBS in the spring. Monkeypaw is co-producing Spike Lee’s next movie, “Black Klansman,” in which an undercover detective somehow winds up running a chapter of the K.K.K. And then there’s the diversification initiative for young writers and filmmakers working in what lots of fans and critics call “genre,” which combs the country for voices — women of color, say, or gay people — that Hollywood tends to ignore. And of course there’s Peele’s own movie.

Wandering around the house makes clear that Peele’s lean into horror and thriller and science fiction and fantasy isn’t a lean at all. It’s just Peele. Anytime I’d marvel at a picture or poster in the house, he seemed delighted that I recognized it. He recited with perfect accuracy the scariness classifications from Stephen King’s 1981 horror-culture manifesto, “Danse Macabre” — terror, horror, revulsion — and convincingly applied them to “The Blair Witch Project.” He loves Alfred Hitchcock’s films (“every single possible aspect of the cinema working in unison to bring you something new”). But also Darren Aronofsky’s bonkers crypto-Old Testament flop, “Mother!”: “I think that that movie will stand the test of time in a way that more successful movies won’t.”

Peele’s space on the top floor doubles as a mini museum of his sensibility. A tall, loaded bookshelf holds everything from screenwriting manuals and six installments of the Japanese manga landmark “Akira” to Raymond Carver’s “What We Talk About When We Talk About Love” to an LP of Philip Glass’s score for the underrated 1992 urban-blight horror film “Candyman.” There are encyclopedias on “early earth” and “vampire, werewolves and other monsters,” and a slender volume titled “Trolls.” “Another one of my favorites over there,” Peele said, gesturing toward a frame hanging by the door: a poster for “The Secret of NIMH,” an animated Don Bluth special from 1982. It’s “a weird combination of

fantasy,” he said, “and kind of melancholy and some scary [expletive], but beautiful. Beautiful.”

“I’m a film geek,” he told me when we first met. And as a film geek, Peele has learned the rules for various genres — whom they include, omit and exploit and how to re-engineer it all. Earlier, Peele thought aloud about the notorious horror convention of black characters being the first to die. He believes we’ve looked at it the wrong way. The real problem, as Peele sees it, is that they don’t survive the movie at all. “Final girl” is a horror trope. “Final brother” is not. Usually, if Peele is watching a black person in a horror movie, he knows that “it’s just a matter of time until Tyrone walks away to smoke some weed or pee or something and gets macheted. It used to come right at that moment when you know everyone’s going to die. But you definitely know the final girl is not going to be the black dude.” So Kaluuya represents a correction. Now, he said, “Daniel’s the final girl.”

For a movie with this much grisliness centered around as fraught a theme as race relations in America, it’s notable that the only substantial fight about it has been one of classification: What is it? In mid-November, it was reported that “Get Out” had been submitted for Golden Globes consideration in the “musical or comedy” category, in which it’s now a nominee. Twitter — black Twitter — practically collapsed in exasperation, managing a collective SMDH. “Musical or comedy” constituted an insult, albeit an ironic one, to the historical injury the film appeared to be addressing. The dismay amounted to: What’s so funny about black pain? At the controversy’s peak, Peele tweeted simply, “It’s a documentary,” poking the beehive with characteristic waggishness. But days later, he released a statement that read, in part:

The reason for the visceral response to this movie being called a comedy is that we are still living in a time in which African-American cries for justice aren’t being taken seriously. It’s important to acknowledge that though there are funny moments, the systemic racism that the movie is about is very real. More than anything, it shows me that film can be a force for change. At the end of the day, call “Get Out” horror, comedy, drama, action or documentary, I don’t care. Whatever you call it, just know it’s our truth.

Peele told me he meant for the tweet and the statement to reflect the anguish and pride of the movie’s fans. “To me one of the greatest things about having this movie come out is we can get to this conversation that says: Who’s calling it what, and why are they calling it that?” With that “documentary” tweet, Peele was more or less saying that the movie’s genre is truth. Its other genre could be empathy. A nonwhite audience might have been Chris once, twice or all the time. But white audiences are pushed into an



Peele, 20, at the Second City comedy school and theater in Chicago.

uncomfortable new experience. “One of the reasons this movie clicked with more than just a black audience,” Peele said, “is because you get to be black while you’re watching it.”

**Blackness is the** orienting principle of Peele’s art. Its richness, its strangeness, its beauty, its complication, its ridiculousness, its divisiveness, its allure, its very realness. Many a black artist has explored blackness, but few have found it as fascinating as Peele appears to. It perplexes, amuses and excites him, the way language obsesses some novelists and food delights certain cooks. Increasingly, though, he has wanted to do more *for* blackness — building that pipeline, for instance, through which other artists’ ideas would flow.

You can see the shift from frolic to duty in his sketch work with Keegan-Michael Key. Their Comedy Central show, “Key & Peele,” was, in some ways, a lab for “Get Out,” one in which they did as much critiquing of blackness as they did of white people’s relationship to it.

One sketch from Season 1 features a fake documentary about the bar mitzvah “party motivators” Gafilta Fresh (Key) and Dr. Dreidel (Peele). They blast into a banquet hall with a dose of rappy-rap B-boy blackness. They’re Kid ‘N Play. They’re a minstrel act. And everybody digs them. The documentary cuts to a Jewish mother who says: “When you see black people at a bar mitzvah, it’s very exciting. It’s like a scary ride. And the kids just love it.” The father tells the filmmakers: “You just really can’t put a price on the look on your child’s face when they see a black person for the first time. It’s just magical.” Gafilta and Dreidel do all kinds of stereotypical black-party shtick, in the hope, they say, of exposing Jewish kids to black

people early enough so that they don’t discriminate. It’s a walk around the rim of a sunken place.

Somewhere in all this code-switching and impersonation is a stinging indictment of the cultural attraction to “niggas.” America loves a loud, crazy, funny black person as much as it needs to see him passed over for work, harshly sentenced and shot to death. “Key & Peele” was unusually creative in the way it satirized that duality, until the gravity of what we were being asked to laugh at began to darken the lunacy of the show. For the final two seasons, the bright “Cosby Show”-style a cappella number that opened each episode was replaced with ominous “True Detective”-like music, and rather than talking to a live audience, the comedians talked to each other in a car. They were on a road trip, but their enclosure whispered “fallout shelter.”

Key and Peele’s was a classical comedy combo: tall and shorter, zany and chill, wet and dry, Jerry Lewis and Dean Martin, Martin Lawrence and Will Smith. Key’s exuberant virtuosity can upstage Peele’s subtlety. Peele is quieter and seems to be doing less. Whether Key is Michael Jackson or Tim Cook, he boils over, melts down, blows up, simmers, stews and karate-kicks. He’s the rocket. Peele is the control center. He doesn’t appear to hunger for applause the way Key does. You laugh at Key because he works so hard. You laugh at Peele because, by comparison, he makes it look easy.

Key told me he believes “Get Out” is cathartic for Peele. He’s using his work to work on himself. “I’m the kind of person who would sit across from a therapist on the couch and go, ‘Then my mom. . . .’” Key told me. “Whereas Jordan doesn’t know another way to do it other than to *do*, and he has enough confidence in himself to say, ‘Well,



Peele, center, on the set of "Get Out."

I'm going to do it this way,' and I'm not sure he's necessarily conscious that he's doing it."

Peele suspects that the self-investigation he is undertaking through his work has something to do with his father, whom he didn't see after his 7th or 8th birthday. He contrasts his relationship to his blackness with that of Key, whose biological and adoptive fathers were black. "If you had a black father around, I think that role model gave him a context to understand his blackness," he says. "I would probably have been the voice in 'Key & Peele' that was pushing and pushing and pushing to expand the definition of 'African-American.' I can see how that is something I've been searching for in my art." He and Key played scores of black people of every type, and many with no type at all. For some African-Americans, for a long time, rules for what counts as black have been apparent. And they've been fixed. The joy of Peele's comedy with Key was in their violation of those rules. The show was about how lost in this stuff we all are. "Get Out" is a determination to be found.

In November, Peele was in good spirits as he sat in the greenroom before a conversation with Seth Meyers at the 92nd Street Y. He was dressed in new jeans, white sneakers and a black sweater with a taxi-cab-yellow stripe across the front. It was a variation on his usual streetwear (baseball caps, varsity jackets, hoodies, boots) but even fresher. As he was getting ready to go onstage, I asked him if he missed performing. His answer was firm. "I don't miss it. I just don't." Did he not miss it for the moment? Like, was he on a break from it? Or did he existentially not miss it?

"I existentially don't miss it," he said. "I think there will probably be a point where I get really

excited about a role and go for it because it feels fresh again and new." With comedy, "the failure on performing is brutal," he said, then laughed to himself. "We'll see how I feel when my next movie bombs."

I mentioned that the between-sketch banter in the early episodes of "Key & Peele" was often as funny and as revealing as the sketches themselves. "One of the hardest things about a sketch show is," he started to say, before taking a second to consider what the hardest thing could be. He happened to be facing the dressing-room mirror, giving himself a solemn stare. "The way we were approaching sketch was complete immersion into these characters and going for it. People like routine in television. They like ritual. They like knowing what they're going to get. This is why it's hard to break in a new sketch show — because the first season you just look like a bunch of people putting on outfits and trying too hard to make everybody laugh. And we only want to laugh at people we trust, not these new [expletive] coming in. No way." He thought some more. "I've noticed that the truth works. People can feel the truth. If you're being yourself and you're just using your own emotions, they can feel it. If you're doing fake, they can feel it. It took me a while in comedy to realize that your truth is more powerful than your mask."

**Peele grew up** on the fifth floor of a brownstone walk-up a block and a half from Central Park, a paradise that some of my black friends still don't feel is theirs. But as a teenager, Peele used it to clear his head or explore his thoughts, the rainier and gloomier the better. He wasn't a morose kid, he said, just introspective. "I don't know, there was always something about the rain that was like

I couldn't be upset," he said. "It was just always instant happiness, instant connection to something, and some sort of connection to God."

Through eighth grade, Peele went to local public schools. Then he attended the Calhoun School, about a 20-minute walk from his apartment. He was a nerd, a black nerd, before black nerds were a thing, before there were "blerds" (a word he and Key both casually use). They were nerds in the time of Lamar from "Revenge of the Nerds" movies and Steve Urkel from "Family Matters" and, in a different way, Carlton Banks from "The Fresh Prince of Bel Air." If you reminded anyone of them, you were dead. But he never got hassled in the cafeteria or between classes. In seventh grade, Peele had a bunch of Garfield shirts he liked to wear. There's nowhere to hide for a black kid in a Garfield shirt. "I never tried to wear the clothing to not get me beat up," he said. "I was into musical theater, I was into movies, I was into being free. I was a child, and I'm still that child. Part of being a child internally is not falling victim to fashion, not feeling like you have to present something that you're not." He was charming and funny and had some close friends, two of whom now work with him at Monkeypaw.

Growing up, Peele came to love "Rosemary's Baby" — he lived a few blocks from the Dakota, the mega manse in the movie. Tim Burton's "Edward Scissorhands" was another personal landmark. He has a warm memory of his mother's taking him to see it at the Ziegfeld Theater, the single-screen palace that projected its final film last year. "The movie just crushed me," he said. "I thought it was, you know, the best movie I had seen, and still, any day, it could debatably be my No. 1." Burton's persecuted misfit artisan spoke to him. So did Burton, one of Peele's favorite directors, whose approach to filmmaking revolves around the experience of belonging: "I feel like I don't quite fit in, like how I am supposed to fit in," he said, summing up one of Burton's themes.

Peele's father, Hayward Peele, wasn't around much and had other children with other women in different parts of the country. Peele has fond memories of him and of the limited time they spent together. And yet he remains curious about a major part of himself that stood out in the context of his mother's white extended family. When I spoke to Peele's mother, Lucinda Williams, on the phone, stories from her life and life with her son poured out. She tried to keep Peele's father connected to their son, first through visits, but she learned not to count on those after he stood Peele up a few times. Then she tried to keep the culture of him around — the jazz and food that he liked. But some things she wouldn't have, like the time he asked Peele why he "talked white." "I knew I couldn't allow that," she said.

Peele said he was never made to feel different. He was loved. But the void he felt was out of his mother's control. It was out of his too. He knows that in some ways he's (Continued on Page 57)

# ALKA PRADHAN





V.

# GITMO

The human rights lawyer thinks she has a good defense for her client, one of five accused Sept. 11 plotters imprisoned at Guantánamo Bay — if the government ever actually lets the case go to trial.

BY JEFFREY E. STERN

PHOTOGRAPH BY RYAN PFLUGER

# THE

Galaxy 19 is a communications satellite that orbits over North America, beaming free-to-air programming to hundreds of thousands of households. It also happens to be the way detainees at Guantánamo Bay get their television. The satellite carries a wealth of religious programming, from “Bible Explorations” to “God’s Learning Channel” to “Global Buddhist Network” — not a lineup well tailored to the particular viewing interests of the Gitmo demographic. What detainees tend to be most interested in is current events, and among the news channels that the satellite carries, RT is one of the most popular. So for lawyers who want their Guantánamo clients to see that their interests are being represented, RT is probably the best option. For that reason, in 2014, a young defense lawyer named Alka Pradhan became a frequent guest on the channel. And because Pradhan is technically an employee of the Department of Defense, her appearances constitute one of countless idiosyncrasies of Gitmo: a contractor for the United States military using a Russian propaganda channel while working for Al Qaeda terror suspects.

That was one way she wound up auditioning, unwittingly, for one of the most high-profile detainees still there: Ammar al-Baluchi, the 39-year-old Pakistani man accused of running money for the Sept. 11 attacks. In 2015, when Baluchi won approval to add a new lawyer to his team, he wanted the woman he’d seen on RT, defending his neighbors with so much vigor. He’d studied her media appearances so closely that he knew her tics, her tendency to put a hand up and partly block her mouth, and by the time they met in person, he felt as if he already knew her. Since then, Pradhan’s sole job has been to defend the suspected Qaeda moneyman. The government is trying to execute him, along with four co-defendants, all charged with organizing the worst terrorist attack in the nation’s history.

Pradhan’s title is “human rights counsel.” Aside from trying to win a trial that hasn’t yet begun, her job is to remind the tribunals, and as much of the world as she can, that her client is human, that he has rights and that those rights have been brutally violated. She believes Americans don’t like to think about the fact that their country tortured people and put them in blindfolds and flew them to an island nation with which it had no diplomatic relations. That these men were detained for 12 years, some of them 15, and even on their release were often dropped in countries that they had never been to and sometimes ones they hadn’t heard of: Syrians in Uruguay, Tunisians in Slovakia, a Yemeni in Estonia, Uighurs in El Salvador, Palau and Bermuda.

What’s more, a law passed in 2011 prevents anyone ever detained at Guantánamo Bay from coming to America, even to the supermax facility in Colorado that no one has ever escaped from, even if you’re demonstrably innocent, as if the place itself taints you. The law also blocked trials in America for any Gitmo detainee, even those against whom the United States may have had viable terrorism cases. These are the actual masterminds, the hardened jihadists — not the ones swept up by indiscriminate bounty programs and a credulous intelligence apparatus, which was the case for an overwhelming majority of them. The law means America can’t try Sept. 11 terror suspects in

America. Instead, a \$12 million ultrasecure Expeditionary Legal Complex was set up on an old airstrip on the base, and for the last five years, prosecutors and defense lawyers have been arguing about how to hold a trial there. No one can say for sure when, or even if, trials will begin. The proceedings seem stuck in an interminable pretrial phase.

When Pradhan flies down to Gitmo, which she does every month or two, her conversations with her client often have less to do with proving his innocence than with what has happened to him since his suspected crimes. One of the first things she learned about Baluchi, before they met, was that the C.I.A. had tortured him, and she has come to believe that America has waterboarded away its ability to convict him. It’s an international norm that countries don’t execute people they have tortured; the Geneva Conventions go as far as to say such prisoners must be rehabilitated. If America executes Baluchi, Pradhan believes, it will cede whatever eroding toehold it has on a moral high ground. Beyond that, what concerns her is that her client is suffering; that he has real physical and psychological injuries from his torture that have yet to be addressed. The way she sees it, by denying him adequate treatment, the government has continued to torture him.

So on a morning of brutal January weather, two days after Donald Trump’s Inauguration, Pradhan, who turned 36 this month, left her husband and young daughter at home in Washington and boarded a plane at Andrews Air Force Base to fly past tornadoes and put herself between her government and a

## ‘AMMAR HAS BEEN IN CUSTODY FOR 13 YEARS. HE HAS VERY REAL STRUGGLES STEMMING FROM HIS TORTURE.’

man accused of helping arrange the murder of 2,973 people. On board were defense lawyers, prosecutors, the judge, family members of Sept. 11 victims, interpreters, paralegals and the press corps. Virtually everyone needed to carry out what is arguably the trial of the century is airlifted to the Caribbean every month or so, which is always inconvenient, but on this trip, it was also terrifying.

Three hours after a harrowing takeoff through heavy winds and horizontal rain, the plane dropped below cloud cover toward the southeastern tip of Cuba, where the sky was clear but the wind was full. Six-foot swells rolled in the bay. High gusts whipped the plane as it moved toward the runway, and it yawed too steeply. A wing swung toward the runway; in the cabin, arms moved in unison to armrests. Pradhan got nervous. The pilot overcorrected, sending the other wing downward. Outside, a young Navy man watching the approach turned away to cross himself as the banking jet overshot the tire-stains left by previous landings, heading for the water. Pradhan was now acutely aware of the plane’s size and the speed with which it was running out of runway. She saw a wing nearly scrape the ground, and she braced for impact.

Finally, the wheels hit, torsos shifted, the smell of scorched rubber and the sound of screeching wheels arrived at the same time. The plane taxied and stopped, the forward door opened and an incongruously chipper man climbed aboard. “Welcome to sunny Guantánamo Bay!” He was the officer in charge of Military Commissions South, but he sounded more like a cruise director. “Victim families first!”

OPENING PAGES:  
ALKA PRADHAN  
IN VIRGINIA  
IN NOVEMBER

**Pradhan was an** intern at the United Nations headquarters in 2003 when, 7,000 miles away, a team of Pakistani rangers tracked down Ammar al-Baluchi in Karachi and apprehended him. Pradhan would later spend years trying to find out from the American government exactly what happened next. The government has not been forthcoming about these details, but by cross-referencing C.I.A. cables, other documents obtained by the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, comments to the press by unnamed officials with access to the Senate report's classified source material and a small number of declassified letters that Baluchi himself has written, it's possible to develop a partial picture of what Baluchi's time in custody was like.

From C.I.A. cables, we know that even in the process of being detained, Baluchi was forthcoming. The Pakistanis held him for about a week and found him cooperative. One official used the word "chatty." Even when Baluchi was in Pakistan's custody, the C.I.A. was monitoring his interrogation on a video feed, and agents sent cables back to Langley saying the interrogation was producing intelligence.

They decided to torture him anyway. The C.I.A. extracted Baluchi from Pakistan's custody and took him to the Salt Pit, a secret black site near Kabul, according to officials who spoke to *The Washington Post* in 2014. This site was also known as Cobalt, and one interrogator, during an internal review, described it as an enhanced-interrogation technique in and of itself. Another called it the closest thing he'd seen to a dungeon. Detainees there were stripped down, bound with tape and then dragged, naked, up and down the halls, while people punched them. Baluchi says his head was dunked in a tub of ice water, his face held under the surface until he thought he was drowning. His head was shaved, then driven against a wall repeatedly, so forcefully and so many times that he saw sparks of light exploding in front of his eyes, growing in size and intensity until he experienced what felt like a jolt of electricity. His vision went dark, and he passed out.

He came to in a different room, perhaps a different building, maybe even a different country: We know from media reports that several months after the Salt Pit he was taken to a black site in Romania. Impossibly loud heavy-metal music played, intermixed with grating noises that felt to Baluchi as if they were digging into his ears and pounding his brain. He didn't know how long he'd been unconscious. He was naked. The room was cold and dark. He remembers that he was too weak to stand, but that his hands were suspended above his head in cuffs attached to the ceiling, so as his body slumped, his weight pulled his wrists into the metal, which bore into his skin. When he complained, his wrists were levered higher.

He was dehydrated, and his head throbbed, and when captors came by, banging a rod against the steel door and shining lights in his face, he begged for water. Someone came with a cup, showed it to him and poured it out. This ritual was repeated.

He was kept awake. When he fell asleep, he was punched. His legs throbbed and swelled from standing. Finally, Baluchi saw a doctor approach. The doctor measured the swelling and approved Baluchi for more abuse. In Baluchi's account, his hands were kept bound for months, so long that when he was finally transferred to yet another black site, his captors couldn't remove the handcuffs because the metal had rusted shut, and someone had to find bolt cutters.



AMMAR AL-BALUCHI IN NOVEMBER.

We either don't know or can't corroborate all of the techniques that were used on Baluchi, because so much of the program remains classified, withheld even from Pradhan and her co-counsel. (The C.I.A. declined to comment specifically on Baluchi's claims of torture.) And though Baluchi has written extensively about what happened to him, only a small portion of what he thinks, writes and says makes it through classification review. But we know that he was subjected to the C.I.A.'s rendition program for nearly three years, between his arrest in Pakistan and his arrival at Gitmo. It was a period during which he had no contact with his

family but knew that they thought he was dead. In a sense, he was. He goes by Ammar al Baluchi because that name — an alias he had used — was the one the C.I.A. called him during his torture. Baluchi feels his birth name, Ali Abdul Aziz Ali, is now foreign to him, that it belongs to a different person, someone who died in custody.

We know that all of it — the movement, the music, the creative administration of pain — was part of the C.I.A.'s attempt to instill in him a sense of "learned helplessness." We know that "learned helplessness" is a theory developed in the 1960s by psychologists who gave electrical shocks to dogs. And according to the Senate investigation, the program produced no new intelligence from Baluchi or anyone else subjected to it.

**While Baluchi was** being escorted through the C.I.A.'s rendition program, Pradhan was collecting degrees from America's finest academic institutions. She was raised on stories about her great-grandfather, who taught himself law in a remote north Indian village and then spent his days defending highway bandits. Her grandfather worked for the United Nations, so she saw international relations as glamorous. She hybridized the two interests: a bachelor's degree in international relations and a master's in international law from Johns Hopkins, a law degree from Columbia and a master of laws with a focus on human rights from the London School of Economics.

After three years at the law firm White & Case in New York, angling to get on every foreign assignment she could, she quit and began working for a series of nonprofit groups, refocusing on what she figured to be the most grievous violation of international law that her country was actively carrying out — the detentions at Guantánamo Bay. In 2013, she began working for Reprieve, an organization that helped defend detainees there. One of her first clients was Emad Hassan, a genial young man with an easy sense of humor, held at Gitmo because of a translation error. He was born 115 miles from a Yemeni village with the unfortunate name of Al Qa'idah, and that's what he was thinking about when a U.S. serviceman asked whether he had "any connection to Al Qaeda." He said yes.

Even after the mistake was made known, there was no easy way to process him out. He spent 13 years in detention. When Pradhan first met him, what struck her, more than anything else, was his hair. He had long, loopy braids sprouting from his head, which reminded her of the rapper Coolio. He explained that it was for video chats with his family. "I'm trying to grow a 'fro," he said, grinning, "because it makes my brothers and sisters laugh when they see me. It makes my mother laugh. My mother never laughs anymore."

Then, within seconds, he was crying. He asked why this was happening and when it would end. He was all over the place; Pradhan found it

P 1/2

CR-133-AAA

UNCLASSIFIED

END OF MAY EARLY JUNE 2003

Head Trauma (Injury) Incident 1

At the CIA Black Site, In the very first days  
After US Gov. Agents shaved my head, then they smashed  
my head against the wall repeatedly-----

It continued until I lost count at each session.

As my head was being hit each time, I would see sparks of lights  
in my eyes, As the intensity of these sparks were increasing as  
a result of repeated hitting then all of sudden I felt a strong  
jolt of Electricity in my head then I couldn't see anything everything  
went dark and I passed out.

Next thing I found myself in a different place suspended to  
the ceiling in a dark cold cell. I don't know for how many hours  
I was unconscious. Naked while my legs were swollen as a result of  
extended standing. My legs couldn't support my body, the hand cuffs were  
cutting my wrists which were pulled over above my head. A very sharp  
throbbing pain in my head. There was an extremely loud and disturbing  
music with a mixture of grating screeching shrill sounds cutting into  
my earsounding my mind As every now and then an agent would come

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P 3/2

UNCLASSIFIED

Continued "Head Injury Incident 1"

And hit the steel door with a metal bar in his/her hands  
making verbal threats pointing to the metal bar in addition to  
flashing a sharp light into my face. And when I indicate  
that I need water to drink someone would come and stand at  
the doorstep holding a cup/container of water showing it to  
me then he or she would spill it on the floor and leave.

After this particular head injury incident I lost my  
ability to sleep ever since. I was not able to have a normal  
or deep sleep. I am still reliving the nightmares of this incident  
~~this~~ every night everytime I try to close my eyes it just  
pops up <sup>disturb</sup> and this was among many incidents.

AMMAR AL-BALUCHI

GUANTANAMO BAY

6th Aug 2015

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AN UNCLASSIFIED STATEMENT BY BALUCHI, PROVIDED BY HIS DEFENSE  
TEAM, DESCRIBING TORTURE HE SAYS HE EXPERIENCED.

heartbreaking. It was formative for her, meeting this man with the ridiculous story and the ridiculous hair, whose experience was a caricature, a symbol of a system at its absurd extreme. But at that point Pradhan had a sample size of one. For her, Gitmo was Emad Hassan.

She met six detainees and represented even more Guantánamo clients remotely, arguing with anger on behalf of hunger strikers being force-fed, trying to persuade foreign countries to take clients cleared for release and trying to educate the public, lest they forget about Gitmo. And when the team defending one of the suspected Sept. 11 plotters, by then in his 12th year of United States custody, won approval to hire a new lawyer to focus on human rights, he wanted the woman who looked as if she could be his sister. He wanted Pradhan.

She was the only woman on the team when she joined, and that helped: Baluchi thinks women are more empathetic. And it doesn't hurt that Pradhan and Baluchi have familiar backgrounds. His family is from Pakistan, though he wasn't born there; hers is from India, though she wasn't born there. He likes to speak Urdu, she likes to speak Hindi; they are

essentially the same language, written differently. They were both international, even as children, she born in Canada, living in America, spending summers with a grandfather in Geneva; he lived in Pakistan, Iran, Dubai and Kuwait and learned a half dozen languages before he turned 20. He's Westernized but rooted in the East; he's wise, quick-witted and surprisingly funny, and these happen to be precisely the qualities she values most in friends. So they treat each other like friends. When she's not with him at Gitmo, she sends him three letters a week.

Lt. Col. Sterling Thomas, another member of Baluchi's defense team, sees a different reason the detainee has bonded so strongly with Pradhan. "One of the things that strikes me most closely, as one of the few African-American officers in the JAG corps and in the military commissions," he says, is "Ammar's understanding of the differences and uniqueness of people of color." Thomas believes Baluchi and Pradhan have a genuine, profound connection, and that it derives from the fact that "they can look at their similarities of background and say: 'O.K., look I've been in situations that are similar to you, where you feel you're the only person of a certain

background in a world, where you face that additional scrutiny based on being the person who is different. You face that additional challenge being the person whose credentials might be questioned.’” The way Thomas sees the relationship, Pradhan and Baluchi connect because Baluchi is a keen observer of American culture and sees in Pradhan someone who “understands what it’s like to be otherized, dehumanized.”

Because Pradhan wears a head covering in court, you would be forgiven for assuming she’s Muslim. (Her family is, in fact, Hindu.) Once, during a hearing I watched at Fort Meade via an encrypted satellite feed, I saw her get up, begin speaking and then stop midsentence to address something that nagged at her. She told the court that everyone had been mispronouncing the name of a city in Pakistan, and because it felt to her like a way of dehumanizing her client, she commenced a history lesson about how the city got its name. It was a striking moment. It felt like the world’s most bold cultural-sensitivity training, a brown woman in Muslim dress instructing a largely white, largely male and largely U.S. government-employed courtroom about how to better respect the Sept. 11 defendants.

Pradhan stands out because she feels even more strongly, and is willing to make even greater leaps, than even most critics of Gitmo. Where many see a country wobbling between its ideals and its security, she sees a system that is deliberately and aggressively racist. “This is a legal venue that was designed for noncitizen Muslim males, right?” She often ends sentences like this — as questions, as if she’s addressing an invisible envoy of the United States government who’s always standing by and who is so stunted Pradhan needs to stop and make sure he’s following along. “If we had white guys from, you know, France being held, I remain convinced they would not have been tortured, I don’t think,” she says. “I don’t think they would have founded an entirely different legal system for them. I don’t care what you think they did.”

The volume and release with which Pradhan speaks compensate for the fact that her client’s words, his very thoughts, are classified. “Everything that comes out of his mouth,” Pradhan says, “and everything that he writes on a piece of paper, is presumptively classified. It doesn’t matter if he writes down the lyrics to a song by Miley Cyrus. It’s classified. And I have to put it through classification review before I can share his exact words with anyone.” Pradhan feels she is speaking for a man with no voice, so she does so with little reservation. If she makes the prosecution uncomfortable, good. If she makes the victims’ family members who are watching uncomfortable, which she knows she sometimes does, that’s a shame, and she wishes she didn’t; then again, her duty is not to the victims of Sept. 11, but to one of the suspected perpetrators.

**The day after** the flight, Pradhan got in the van she had been assigned for the trip, to run some errands. The van was new, which was nice, but huge, which was strange, because the only other person who would occupy any of the 15 passenger seats was me. Driving around the base, dodging iguanas and passing tent cities with all the empty bench seats behind her, Pradhan looked like the world’s loneliest camp counselor. She made a detour to take me up to Camp X-Ray, which housed the first group of detainees in 2002. Even though it was only used for a few months, it’s Camp X-Ray that most people think of when they think of Gitmo: kneeling men in orange suits, outdoors, fenced in like zoo animals. It’s now rundown and overgrown. “We thought they’d be here for like a few weeks maybe,” she said. “You know, I don’t know what we thought we were going to do with them.”

Then, she left to meet with Baluchi at Camp Echo, an arrangement of trailers set inside a security fence garlanded by razor wire and draped in green sheeting, which together speak to another Gitmo paradox: much of the infrastructure is temporary, even though the status of the accused feels fixed. They meet here because Baluchi lives in Camp Seven, and neither of them knows where that is. It’s a structure whose very existence was secret until a few years ago and whose location still is. Neither of them knows

where Baluchi goes at night; presumably, it’s somewhere on base. When they spend time together, it’s in the courtroom or at Camp Echo, in a trailer.

I was not allowed to meet Baluchi — he can’t meet anyone besides his lawyers — so what I know about Pradhan’s visits with her client comes from members of the legal team. They won’t share direct quotes from him, because other Gitmo lawyers have had their clearances suspended or revoked for sharing too much from their client. (This summer, a military judge amended the existing rule to say that no legal mail can be released to a third party. “Legal mail” is an expansive term that could include notes

## IN HIS OWN RECKONING, HE’S PRECISELY AS RESPONSIBLE FOR SEPT. 11 AS EVERYONE ELSE WHO FACILITATED IT UNWITTINGLY: RENTAL-CAR CLERKS, FLIGHT INSTRUCTORS AND UNITED STATES FINANCIAL INSTITUTIONS.

or even items committed to memory during lawyer-client meetings, so the following window into their work together would not be possible had Pradhan not shared it before the order was issued.)

On that day, Pradhan had important coming motions to discuss with Baluchi about N.S.A. surveillance, about trying to access Red Cross records that might shed light on his torture and one about improving the conditions of his detention. But when she arrived, she found Baluchi not quite ready for legal matters yet. He was thinking about mouth-feel.

At Guantánamo Bay, he is a host, and it’s important to him that Pradhan feels welcome. So he prepares her a meal. It’s a challenge, because his ingredients are limited and his guest is a particular eater; a vegetarian who likes spice and kale. Sometimes the prison meal is spaghetti, and Baluchi carefully dissects it, salvaging the part that hasn’t touched the meat sauce, and combining it later with oil and spices if the team has brought any past the guards. Then, for mouth-feel, he’ll dig around for something crunchy. He has learned to pay attention to vegetables, because even though military-issue salads aren’t necessarily the freshest, raw onions help with texture. (The place has a way of bringing out creativity; Pradhan has learned some Gitmo culinary tricks as well. She found that the hot cakes from the McDonald’s on base are the best cheat foods to bring to hunger strikers, whose atrophied jaw muscles and throats sore from feeding tubes can handle only soft foods.) Baluchi prefers prayer rugs to chairs, so when he’s done assembling the meal and they sit down to eat together, they sit on the floor.

Pradhan was preparing a long-shot motion in an effort to persuade the judge to remove Baluchi’s designation as a “high-value detainee,” a term by which the Department of Defense means a suspected terrorist put through the C.I.A.’s rendition program. The “high value” designation is cited as a reason for a variety of circumscribed freedoms, from detention in a secret location that lawyers can’t visit, to minute and seemingly meaningless restrictions like the prohibition on noncommercially sealed food items. Baluchi said he thought the language that she used was *(Continued on Page 52)*



# 'GIVE ME DRAMA!'

The high-intensity  
world of youth  
competition dance.

By Lizzie Feidelson  
Photographs  
by Dina Litovsky



T

he second time I met Angelina Velardi she had just lost a baby tooth. It left a gaping hole in her smile, but she liked how it looked: “Now if I show the judges I’m mature, they’ll be more impressed,” she said, happily. Angelina is a 12-year-old competitive dancer, and canny to the ways in which technical acuity and pre-adolescent pliability can be combined to her advantage. She started competitive dancing less than three years ago.

On a Friday afternoon last spring, Angelina and her teammates from Prestige Academy of Dance arrived at a technical high school in Sparta, N.J., for the Imagine National Dance Challenge, a children’s dance competition. Each girl wore her black uniform and sported the team hairstyle, a low bun gleaming with hair spray. Dina Crupi, Prestige Academy’s 25-year-old studio owner and competition-team director, had chosen the hairstyle for its versatility: It allowed various headpieces and hats to be put on and removed with ease. Crupi still had nightmares about last year’s style, a too-complex choice involving a pouf encircled by braids. While she stood sipping coffee, the girls warmed up around her, brushing their fingers against the athletic-gray lobby walls for balance. With their small heads, shellacked scalps and long necks, the teammates looked elegant and creaturely, like a row of lizards.

This was Prestige’s fifth competition this season, and its core team of 52 dancers would enter over 20 dance pieces over the course of the three-day competition. Angelina was a member of the preteen team, but there were also older teenagers and girls as young as 4 who were there to compete. The competition accepted dancers as old as 19, but the enterprise skewed much younger. At the dancewear booths ringing the lobby, the dance tops for sale were the size of dinner napkins.

In Prestige’s dressing room, a classroom off a back hallway, Angelina donned her first

costume of the day, a green one-piece with a choker neckline. She rubbed a deodorantlike stick (affectionately referred to as “butt glue”) on her upper thighs to make the one-piece stay in place. MaryAnn, Angelina’s mother, filled in her daughter’s eyebrows with dark pencil. An adult face emerged from Angelina’s little-girl one. She already had on fake eyelashes: She had fallen asleep in the car on the way to Sparta, so MaryAnn parked outside the competition and applied them without waking her, gluing individual lashes to her lids as she slept.

Angelina went into the hallway and did a few pirouettes. Crupi walked slowly past, appraising the girls’ makeup and watching them for mistakes. She was wearing heavy eyeliner, too, and an all-black outfit to match her students’. They grew tense under her gaze, glancing at her for approval after each trick. “You’re letting your rib cage open,” Crupi said finally to Angelina, miming a puffed-up chest. She gathered the team for a last once-over. “Is everyone ready?” she asked. “Everyone sprayed nicely?” Some of the girls had gotten together earlier in the week to get spray tans, and they were an identical tawny color, like Easter eggs dipped in the same dye. The girls nodded. Crupi wished them a curt good luck and departed for the front of the theater.

Angelina loved her teammates, but before dancing she preferred to be alone. She practiced her turns again in the dim backstage light: eight pirouettes, then five. She moved so noiselessly that it was easy not to see her at all; when she dropped to the floor and assumed a plank position, I wondered for a second where she had gone. She popped up again and grinned at me, shaking her hands and feet vigorously to help rid herself of nerves. “I just need to zone out,” she told me. “People get in my head.”

**“IT WAS NEVER LIKE THIS WHEN I WAS A KID.” JARED GRIMES,**

34, a prominent tap dancer and competition judge, told me. “These kids are like gladiators. The dominating, the mind games, the winning. It’s all strategic.” Grimes teaches at New York City Dance

Alliance, a highly regarded competition company, and he routinely judges over 500 dance numbers in a single weekend. N.Y.C.D.A. travels to 24 cities per year. Each city has its own personality, he said. “Boston kids are a little bit more reserved, very careful, very guarded — details, details. Nashville is like, ‘We’re having a good time.’”

The competition-dance format is straightforward. On weekends, for-profit traveling companies host competitions for children in convention centers and hotels. Dance schools bring their students to compete. Judges, usually dance teachers or choreographers, score each

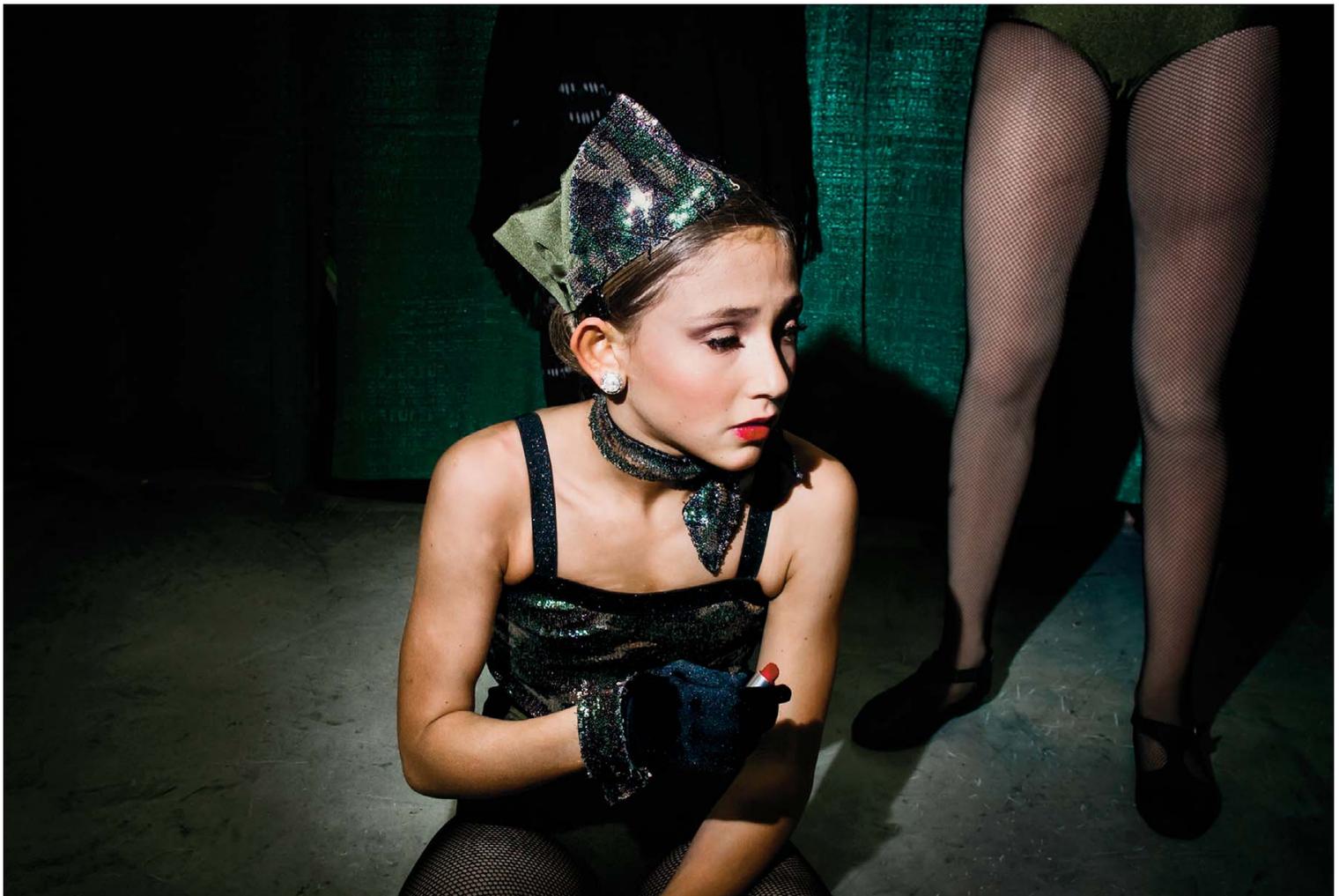
piece on the spot, often out of 100 points. At the end of the day, winners receive titles and trophies. Sometimes there are small cash awards or gift cards.

The children who enter these competitions train up to 30 hours per week, primarily on weekends and after school. Because children must compete in many styles — hip-hop, ballet, jazz and others — versatility is essential, and training can be rigorous to the point of extremity. Each competition bestows its own regional titles, and bigger events also offer national ones. Studios choose which competitions to attend based on careful consideration of cost, quality and competitiveness. Some students compete nearly every weekend during the season, which runs approximately September to July, and train at intensives and classes during the rest of the year.

There are no official figures about how many children are involved in competition dance nationwide, but the number of national competitions has ballooned into the hundreds since the 1980s. In the late 1970s, one of the first of the organizing companies, Showstopper, held competitions out of the trunk of a station wagon. Last year, 52,000 dancers participated in Showstopper, and its touring fleet included a semi truck that transported trophies alone.

A turning point came in 2011, when Lifetime aired a reality show called “Dance Moms.” A number of dance-themed reality shows premiered in the previous decade — “So You Think You Can Dance,” “Dancing With the Stars” — but “Dance Moms” focused but on relatable kids who aspired to be famous for their dancing, not adults. The show followed a Pittsburgh competition team at the Abby Lee Dance Company, reporting breathlessly on the wins and losses suffered by its team of preteens. “Dance Moms” emphasized drink-sloshing and hair-pulling by the team’s parents rather than the particulars of the students’ lives, but it made several young dancers, particularly Maddie Ziegler, now 15, into minor celebrities. The competition community almost unanimously considers the show in poor taste, but it normalized the idea of child stardom among competition-dance students, teachers and parents. When she was 11, Ziegler was cast by the musician Sia in a music video for her song “Chandelier.” The video featured Ziegler as the sole performer, doing pirouettes, splits and kicks with a series of fierce facial expressions.

When I started dancing professionally four years ago, dancers I worked with would sometimes make one another laugh in rehearsal by whipping out old competition moves: preposterously wide smiles, coquettish shoulder tilts. As adults looking for dance jobs in New York, they had hurried to leave these overblown faces behind, like a newscaster trying to scrub herself of a regional accent. They wanted to be modern dancers, and maximal facial expressions aren’t



Above: Angelina Velardi, 12, at a dance competition in Ottawa in April. Previous pages: Dancers from the Prestige Academy of Dance in Fairfield, N.J., where Velardi is a student, at the same competition.

stylish in the world of concert dance, which is still the purview of college dance programs and conservatories. When competition dancers enter college or seek jobs in the modern dance world, they tend to tone down their “fire,” as one former competition dancer put it, to fit in. She was a national-competition titleholder while in high school, but now she treated her competition past like a secret. She wanted to join a modern dance company, and competition dance is often considered better suited to music videos, concert tours or cruise ships. She felt that some of the companies she wanted to join, which performed exclusively in theaters, looked askance at her background. As mainstream as it has become, competition dance is still a distinct dance subculture, revolving around pop music, hard-hitting choreography and young female adherents. “It’s a different world,” Melinda Wandel, a mother of an 11-year-old competition dancer, told me.

Many competition dancers are drawn in by social media, where popular competition dancers and teachers have millions of followers. Others learn about it from adults. When

teachers spot promising students in their studio’s drop-in classes, they encourage talented kids to join the studio’s team. Many children start competing as young as 5 or 6. Angelina first learned about competition dance on Instagram. She was a naturally gifted athlete who played softball, but when she saw pictures of competition dancers on a dancer friend’s feed, she felt the pull of competition glow more brightly in her than it ever had for sports. “I wanted to be like that,” she told me. “Because I knew it wasn’t easy.”

Angelina loved that competition dance was not only athletic but also beautiful. She liked dressing up. “There’s definitely a pageant component to it,” Grimes says. Fake eyelashes, hair spray and crystals are de rigueur; Angelina’s first few dances required fishnets. Some parents find the pageantry bewildering — “It sucks you right in,” Wandel told me — but their daughters, and some sons, treat their jeweled headpieces and Vaseline’d teeth like armor. “We give her the choice,” Wandel said. “You can skip class and go to the birthday party. But she’d rather die. She’d live at the studio if she could.”

Dancers typically don’t win cash for competing, and they pay to enter competitions. Most participants are white; the few predominantly black studios, like DanceMakers of Atlanta, on the city’s South Side, know their students will be among the few dancers of color at most competitions they attend. Despite its cost — the families at Crupi’s studio spend up to \$25,000 per year per child on costumes, lessons and travel to out-of-town meets — competition dance isn’t solely for wealthy families. One mother told me that she ate ramen to afford as many lessons as possible.

“It’s like they’re training these girls for the Olympics,” Grimes told me. “It’s muscles on muscles.” In the 1990s, a triple pirouette was considered impressive on the competition circuit. Now 10-year-olds can do eight or nine. The official record, set in 2013, is held by a competitive dancer named Sophia Lucia, who did 55 turns in a row without stopping when she was 10.

Despite the emphasis on technical tricks, there’s something marvelously elusive about competition dance’s definition of success. Dance



Prestige dancers performing  
"To Build a Home" at the Showbiz  
competition in Hackensack, N.J.



Photograph by Dina Litovsky/Redux, for The New York Times

is an art form: It's difficult to articulate how you know that one person is better than someone else. Judges grade dancers according to commonly held professional criteria — "I look at how precise they are, how their musicality is," the choreographer, teacher and competition judge Suzi Taylor told me — but selecting winners involves assigning favorites beyond point value. "You look at how they affected you," Taylor told me. "How that piece stood out beyond all the other pieces that were shown."

The opacity of judges' criteria is part of the form's appeal. Children know that they are always being watched: Every cross word in the hallway or eyebrow quiver of effort onstage will contribute to a judge's assessment of a favorite. "It's like an audition," Grimes told me. There's a mystery to winning a dance competition, which makes winning all the more intense. Unlike in sports, when a competition dancer wins, she comes away with the intoxicating knowledge that she is not just good, but also liked.

At one competition I attended last summer at the Foxwoods Resort Casino, in Connecticut, multiple women came armed with tissues, which they held ready in their laps before the dances began. I sat beside them in the over-air-conditioned room, feeling a little smug — I would not be needing a tissue! But when the lights dimmed and the first dance started, I suddenly felt overwhelmed. Alone onstage was a single blond preteen girl surrounded by lights; farther out, it was completely dark. It was like seeing a rare animal in the wild; I wanted to grab someone's arm. Her skill was both alarming — her limbs seemed to bend bonelessly, as if she were a doll — and, to my surprise, moving. She didn't look cute. She looked vulnerable and strong, sweating hard, eyes blazing. Although she was a child striving for the performance of an adult, only unaffected determination shone through. Despite the makeup and stage lights, she looked like herself.

**WHEN THE  
ANNOUNCER  
FOR IMAGINE  
NATIONAL**

Dance Challenge called Angelina's entry number and the title of her solo, "Ideas for Strings," she walked onstage and lowered herself into a split in the middle of the floor. At her music cue, Angelina opened her arms wide and slid up into a low crouch, then spun around into a lunge. Her teammates gathered in the wings to watch. During her turn section, they counted her pirouettes. "Was that six or five?" her 13-year-old friend Tiffany Benevenga wondered.

Suddenly, the group recoiled and stiffened. I wondered if Angelina had made a mistake. "What happened?" I asked another teammate, Annalise Hofman, who was also 13 and often watched her friends dance with a stern look on her face. Annalise made a gesture of supplication, raising

her hands into the air. “Oh,” Tiffany said. “Angelina is just really good.”

Angelina finished and scampered offstage. The dance was only three minutes long, but it drained her. She put her hands on her knees and panted. The other girls reached out to brush her back and shoulders with their hands as if touching her brought good luck. “Good job,” they murmured one by one.

Angelina wasn’t sold. “If I don’t do it perfect, I get really mad,” she told me. To her, every performance presented opportunities for mistakes — errors she couldn’t feel, unnameable dips in quality. She was like a veteran rock star, who, having produced many hits, worries that her current work isn’t measuring up and that the yes-men in her circle aren’t telling her. She smiled absently at her friends, then sidled over to where I stood. “Was it good?” she asked me. I told her that it was. “What was the worst part?” she asked.

The evening crawled by in two-minute increments, long stretches of boredom punctuated by strong emotion. The girls ate ravenously at dinnertime, lifting chicken tenders gently to their mouths to avoid getting spots on their costumes. Between numbers, the girls Snapchatted one another while on opposite sides of the theater, or stood together so closely when speaking that they barely moved their lips. Every once in a while they clustered to scrutinize a dancer from another team while she performed. If she was good, they’d nod at one another contemplatively or raise an eyebrow. But none of the other local schools inspired much fear in the Prestige team, who were confident competitors. They had heard rumors, however, that at their next competition, an event called Showbiz, in Hackensack, N.J., they’d be competing alongside a team called the Larkin Dancers. Larkin’s studio was intimidatingly large, with three different locations in the state. When Angelina watched videos of Larkin performances, she was “shocked,” she told me. “They are perfect.” The entire group could do triple pirouettes in perfect unison. Even some of the Prestige dancers’ mothers were taken aback.

The awards ceremony for Imagine didn’t start until nearly 11 p.m. It was a complicated affair: Like most dance competitions, Imagine had intricate prize levels ranging from four to five stars in quarter-increments, denoting different levels of difficulty and accomplishment. The competition also gave special awards for characteristics like being photogenic or having a great personality. Angelina and her friends looked on attentively as the announcer handed out prizes for “Heart and Soul” and “Best Character.”

Angelina won in her age group. A stagehand placed a small tiara on her head, which Angelina knelt to receive. Moments later, she won another prize for her overall score. This time

she received a thick, unwieldy plaque, which she balanced in her lap after returning to her seat. In order to be sure she was perceived as humble, she remained essentially expressionless, but she was happy. “I don’t like to be too confident,” she said.

When I said goodbye to Angelina that night, it was almost 1 a.m. She was sitting on her costume suitcase with her chin on her hands. Her hair, unwound from its tight bun, still held a pulled-back shape. The next morning, she’d awaken at 5 a.m. to stretch, apply her makeup and drive back from her home in Fairfield, N.J., to the next day of competition in Sparta.

#### ON WEEKENDS WHEN THERE WERE NO COMPETITIONS,

Angelina’s team rehearsed all day. When I arrived at the Prestige Dance Academy to watch one Saturday morning, the girls were lying bleary-eyed on the carpet, warming up. That morning they’d be working on “Seven Nation Army,” their favorite small-group dance and one of Prestige’s staple numbers — it often took first place at competitions. The dance featured the seven core members of the preteen group: Angelina, Annalise, Tiffany, Nicole Kelly, Alana Pomponio, Jenna Ebbinghausen and Marin Gold. The costumes were camouflage leotards, sparkly military hats and black fishnets with seams up the back. The music was a jazzy cover of the White Stripes’ “Seven Nation Army,” from 2003.

Compared with some powerhouse studios like the Dance Company in Salt Lake City or Club Dance in Mesa, Ariz., which have hundreds of students, Prestige is small. But Crupi had a strong vision for her fledgling studio. She was uncommonly disciplined and instituted rules that emphasized teamwork and uniformity: Every week, the children broke into groups and tidied the studio, gamely scrubbing mirrors and taking out the trash. In class and rehearsal, dancers were required to wear all black.

Before she opened Prestige, Crupi was a dancer for what was then the New Jersey Nets. The choreography she favored for her students was crisp and sleek; her favorite types of pieces were jazz dances, which she liked to costume with mesh and faux pearls. Her choreography wasn’t conservative, but she coached her dancers to do saucy movements sharply and athletically, so that they looked more age-appropriate. When she arrived at the studio soon after 9 a.m. bearing coffee, she congratulated the girls for arriving earlier than she had. They had already been there alone for nearly an hour, silently practicing their pirouettes. She began the day’s rehearsal by cuing up a previous week’s judge’s critique on her laptop. At every competition, judges record live feedback while the children perform, presenting studios with the commentary at the end. Studios

rewatch the videos at home while rehearsing for the next competition.

The team huddled around; Crupi pressed play. Images of their bodies filled the screen. As difficult moments approached, the judges reacted in real time, emitting “Ohs” when the moves worked. A turn section approached; on the slightly fuzzy video, I could see that one or two spinning girls were slower than the others. “A little off there,” one judge said. “Watch those turns.”

“Look!” Crupi cut in. “Do we see that timing? That spacing? That *arm*?” The girls nodded.

They peeled themselves off the floor and spread out to run the piece. Crupi started the music. The girls began to snap their fingers slowly. One by one they whipped around and did a few solo moves. As the singer’s voice plunged into a smokier register, the girls moved with more intensity, their small shoes stamping on the floor. They ground their rib cages and hips. Tiffany did an aerial — a handless cartwheel, body hanging suspended for a moment upside down in the air. The other girls stalked around the stage, strutting on their tiptoes. They smacked the floor with their palms. They did a double *à la seconde* turn, one leg whipping out to the side in the middle of each swift revolution, followed by a triple pirouette dropping into a split.

Crupi cut the music. The turning section still wasn’t right. “When you’re at nationals, it won’t be good enough,” she reminded them. “At nationals, there will be *8-year-olds* that do these turns together.” She had them try the turns without music. To keep time, the girls counted out loud in unison. Crupi watched, her chin lowered, eyes fixed at ankle level. “It’s Angelina’s that are off,” she concluded.

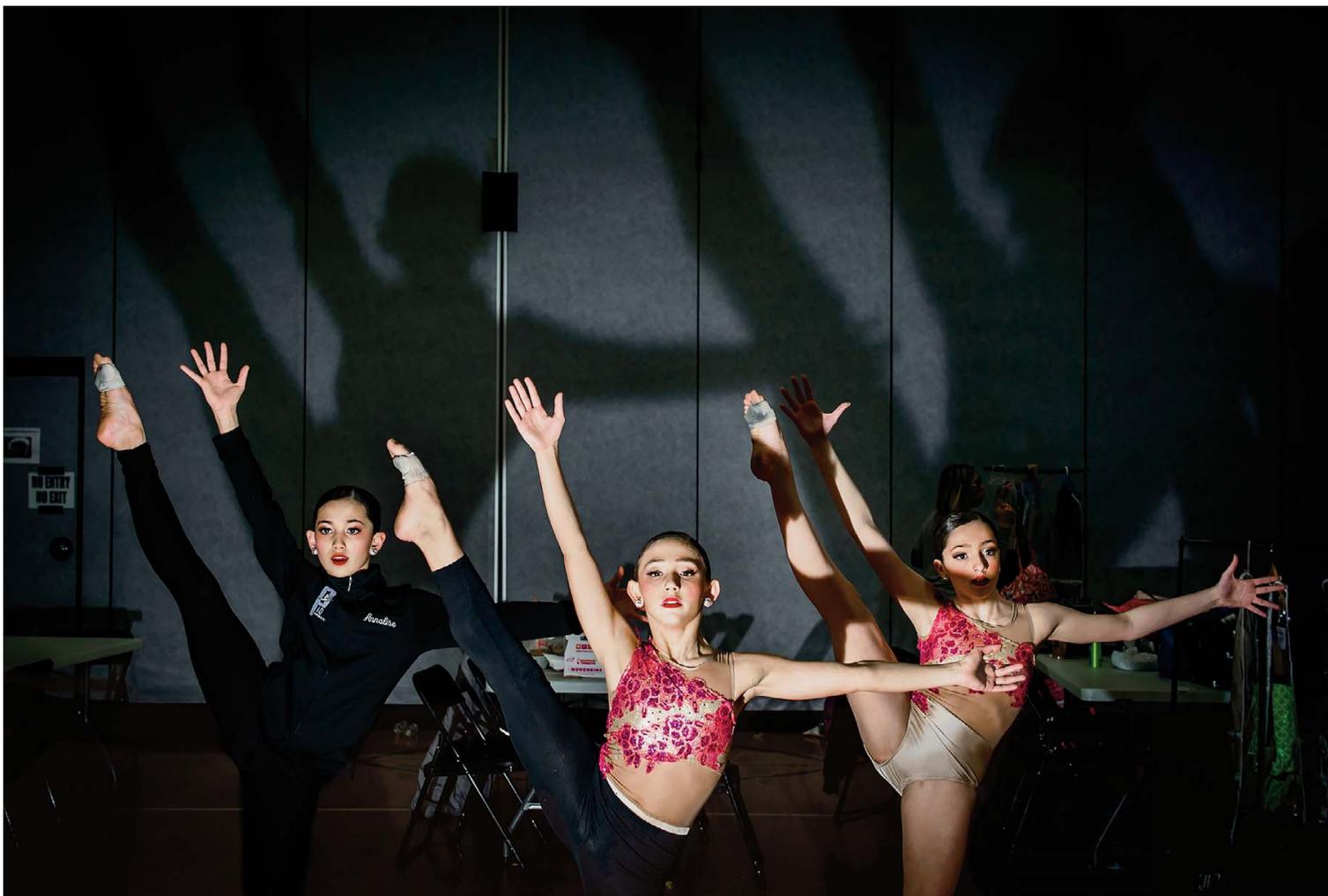
Angelina sprang into the turn again. She did it several more times while everyone watched.

“What is she doing wrong?” Crupi asked.

“She’s not opening to second position fast enough,” Nicole said. Crupi nodded. The girls learned the dance in December and would perform it until nationals in July; although Crupi had created the dance, in some ways the girls knew the steps more intimately than she did. They could feel the timing in ways she couldn’t, having sensed its elasticity together for months. When Crupi turned around for a moment, they negotiated further among themselves, behind her back. “It’s slower than we think,” Jenna mouthed.

Crupi split the girls into two groups and had them do the turns again. At one point she became so absorbed that she did a pirouette herself without remembering she was holding an open cup of coffee.

“That was bad!” she said. The girls laughed politely, but their eyes followed her warily when she walked from one side of the room to the other. After mistakes, Crupi turned



Prestige dancers rehearsing before a competition. From left: Annalise Hofman, 13; Velardi; and Tiffany Benevenga, 13.

away in genuine disgust, her nostrils flared and her mouth twisted. At first I thought she had adopted this behavior for strategic effect, but it wasn't a performance. When Crupi grew irritated with the girls, she began to act out dramatic scenes, growing unexpectedly emotional. Color shot quickly to her cheeks, and her voice grew thin and high with feeling. "Why would I cast *Cindy* if *Cindy* wasn't going to do the dance well?" she implored, wringing her hands.

Crupi was hard on Angelina. At competitions, she got angry when Angelina screwed up, becoming icy and giving her the silent treatment. "She treats me like a sister almost," Angelina told me. "Sometimes I get upset because she's really strict on me. I cry in the bathroom. I think, Why do I do this if I get upset so much?" To cope, she tried to focus on the big picture. "I'm learning from my mistakes."

Once, Crupi said of Angelina, "If I had the talent she had! . . ." She said it in irritation, letting the statement trail off and shaking her head at me in disbelief. She was unembarrassed and felt no need to hide that her dreams for Angelina

were tied to her dreams for herself. In a way, she even seemed proud.

By the time Crupi was satisfied with the turns, it was 10 a.m. She had the team run the whole piece one more time. "Don't be afraid to give me drama!" she yelled as they danced. She demonstrated, contracting her spine and shrugging her shoulders forward, conjuring an imaginary garment, something glamorous and strapless. Already huge and wet with the effort of projecting emotion, the girls' eyes grew even bigger.

**THE  
LONG-AWAITED  
SHOWBIZ MEET  
WITH LARKIN**

in Hackensack began on April 7. That weekend, there was a special guest: Du-Shaunt Stegall, a 22-year-old hip-hop dancer and competition-dance celebrity from Las Vegas who goes by the name Fik-Shun. Competition dancers with national exposure are not uncommon at regional events, whether they appear as featured teachers or — if they are young enough — competitors. Fik-Shun

won Seasons 10 and 13 of "So You Think You Can Dance" and appeared in this year's season of NBC's "World of Dance." At this competition, the president and co-owner of Showbiz had arranged for him to do a special performance and pose for selfies.

When Fik-Shun took the stage for his performance at midday, the crowd of several hundred girls erupted in piercing screams. Fik-Shun paced bashfully, waiting for them to stop. When he began to dance, his body looked slippery, like a 3-D animation. In moments of crescendo, he sent a quaking motion from his chin to his toes. Angelina clutched Tiffany's arm: "So cool."

Afterward, Fik-Shun retreated backstage, where he was quickly encircled by teenage girls. Angelina's 14-year-old teammate Nicole Kelly paced back and forth, trying to muster the courage to introduce herself. Nicole, who had dark hair, long legs and a pleasant New Jersey accent, was famous on the internet. Her follower counts were high for someone who had never been on a competition-dance TV show. She had 20,000 followers on Instagram



Waiting in the wings in Hackensack. From left: Alana Pomponio, 13; Nicole Kelly, 14; Marin Gold, 14; Velardi; Benevenga; Jenna Ebbinghousen, 12; Hofman.



and over 800,000 followers on musical.ly, an app for short videos that has 200 million users and some of whose biggest stars are 14 and 16. But she wasn't sure Fik-Shun knew her handle, @nickisport. Other children were writing their Instagram handles down on a piece of paper to give to him, slightly irritated with themselves, like businesswomen who had forgotten their business cards. When Angelina handed him hers, she explained that her Instagram was set to "private," but she'd accept his request if he asked to follow her.

Angelina didn't want to have a public account, even though her mother would have let her. She was apprehensive of the attention she might receive, although the shape that attention might take was vague — she said she was worried about "not-normal people." Angelina didn't do any sponsorships or ambassadorships for dance brands; competition dancers who do are required to keep their accounts public. For these children, who are typically paid in merchandise, self-produced leotard modeling shots are susceptible to scrutiny by anyone with access to a smartphone. "Creepy" men were a constant threat among mothers, many of whom monitored their daughters' accounts and had blocked accounts with profile pictures that suggested an adult male user. One mother told me that these accounts, distressingly, often had nothing posted but pictures of infants. These users didn't message or harass their children, but their interest was suspect. Nicole's mother forbade her to wear T-shirts with her studio or other local businesses in her musical.ly posts, lest viewers learn where she lived.

For the Prestige team, social media was where they glimpsed other dancers' routines and the prizes they had won. They used social media to analyze the details of their competitors' bodies, looping videos of their tricks again and again, memorizing their strengths so they wouldn't be bowled over when they saw them in real life. Angelina spent a lot of time online tracking the movements of the dancer she perceived to be her main competition at nationals in Florida this year, a 12-year-old named Angel DiMartino Palladino, who was part of a studio in Orlando. Angel had been Crupi's student, and Crupi vouched for her talent. On Instagram, Angelina gleaned that in the years since learning from Crupi, Angel began incorporating gymnastics tricks — or "acro," short for acrobatics — into her routine. "They do, like, standing back tucks and stuff," Angelina told me. She had resolved to work harder on her own performance skills as a result.

Angelina posted videos of her solos for her followers, as well as effusive birthday messages for her dance friends. "I post at the studio because that's where I'm happiest," she told me. But when I'd ask the Prestige dancers about Instagram directly, they would sometimes



A preperformance conference at the Ottawa competition. In one dancer's words, "It's not worth it if you aren't asking yourself why you didn't win."

become evasive; a tight-knit group would dissolve, girls trotting down the hall away from my question. It was awkward to explain social-media apps to an adult. Sometimes the teammates would giggle when they said the word "Instagram" aloud, as though it was a piece of slang that, in my presence, grew suddenly strange in their mouths.

Nicole had an easier time talking about it. "I just perform dance, and people really like it," she told me. One evening in December 2015, when she was 13, she was featured on the musical.ly home page after she used the hashtag #featureme — she had been combing popular tags for months and adding them to her posts, which included both silly videos and clips that showed off her dance technique. Overnight, she acquired 30,000 new followers. Her numbers continued to grow. Last year, she went to a special meet-and-greet in Central Park with other famous musical.ly users to pose for selfies and give out signatures. At competitions, people were scared of her, she said. "They just whisper and wave."

Nicole delivered this tale to me in a matter-of-fact voice, bouncing her body rhythmically

against the walls of the school's hallway. The other Prestige dancers gathered around to listen. I realized that they hadn't necessarily heard this story before; Nicole had only been at Prestige for a year. Her fame seemed so permanent to them that it was barely considered worth questioning.

"How did you get featured, though?" Angelina asked.

"Musical.ly saw it," Nicole said.

"What did they *say*?" Angelina pressed.

"They don't say anything," said Nicole. "They just feature you." She shrugged.

The other girls nodded contemplatively and shook their heads in wonder. Fame was everywhere.

A few hours later, as I was leaving the gym, I saw Nicole barreling toward me, followed by Tiffany and Jenna. "We got him. We got him," she said under her breath. Fik-Shun loped unhurriedly behind.

Together, they posed in front of the stage doors for Nicole's musical.ly post. "Can you give us a countdown?" Nicole asked. Tiffany opened the musical.ly app and held the iPhone

steady. "Three, two, one," she said. Fik-Shun did the robot; Nicole hiked her leg in the air, then released her torso to the side in an explosive lean, neck snapping back, one foot reaching dizzily into the air. It took about six seconds.

"You're going to be so famous," Jenna said softly.

"Can you AirDrop me this?" Fik-Shun asked. Fik-Shun didn't use musical.ly, and he peered with interest at its interface. "Wow, you have all these followers!" he said. After he walked backstage, Nicole slid to her knees and began replaying the video. Within several minutes, she'd received 814 likes.

#### THE LARKIN TEAM, LONG SCRUTINIZED ONLINE,

was even more intimidating in the flesh. The Prestige girls planned to watch their big number, set to a medley of Beyoncé songs, but it was so crowded backstage that they couldn't get to their usual spot in the wings. They retired edgily to the dressing room, noting that their mothers were in the audience and would be able to tell them how Larkin looked.

Eventually, though, the much-touted rivalry with Larkin seemed to dim. After the group number, while some of the older Larkin girls performed their solos, the Prestige teammates became consumed by a lengthy hair-braiding exercise in their dressing room and declined to watch. By contrast, Angelina stared hawkishly when Nicole, Annalise and Alana performed their trio, “Solo Dancing,” a crowd-pleasing number with a heavy backbeat. “Solo Dancing” competed in the same category as “In Roses,” Angelina’s trio with Annalise and Tiffany, and the girls were never sure which number the judges would like best. “I’m happy for them if they win,” Angelina said. “But I’m also like, O.K., I’m going to try harder next time. I still want to really get myself up there, too.” Angelina would never say this to her friends. “I hide it, kind of,” she told me. She congratulated them with genuine warmth as soon as they were finished, but she knew they were hoping to beat her, too. “They really want it,” Angelina told me. “It’s not worth it if you aren’t asking yourself why you didn’t win.”

Rivalries with other schools were a necessary performance, but the most piercing feelings of competition were animated by their friends. After one competition, I saw a Prestige teammate turn to her friend and say, “You beat —” then utter the name of another close friend in a mangled voice, her mouth frozen like a ventriloquist’s. The girl she had said this to flashed her an electric look of acknowledgment and pleasure, then turned toward her mother as though nothing had been said. And yet the teammates watched one another onstage with awe and possessiveness, like parents. Angelina’s dreams about dancing included her teammates. Once, she told me, she imagined them all in the ocean together, doing their group number while also swimming like a school of fish.

Before “Seven Nation Army,” the girls lined up backstage, the seams in their stockings plucked perfectly straight. For all of Crupi’s careful instruction, she never stood with the girls backstage in the moments before they performed, so when pressing questions about the choreography bubbled up, which they invariably did, the girls hurriedly came up with the answers themselves. They hissed questions back and forth and improvised last-minute adjustments to timing and steps, making sure each girl understood the movement and planned to do it in the exact same way.

The previous summer, Crupi taught them snatches of the “Seven Nation Army” steps in class, testing them to see who was ready for the challenging steps she had devised. The girls knew it was an audition, and the class atmosphere was tense for weeks. Crupi encouraged their anxiety, wondering aloud if she should cast understudies. Angelina was worried that she wouldn’t be picked. At 12, she was on the younger side of the preteen age group, which

was mostly 13-year-olds. She felt she had ultimately been picked for “Seven Nation Army” because of her technique, but when Angelina first tried to look slinky and sophisticated in the way Crupi wanted, it didn’t work. “You do more with your eyes and your body, like your hips and stuff,” Angelina said, trying to explain the look to me. “You don’t look mean, but like, ‘I’m committed.’ You have a little smirk.” At first, her efforts produced a strange, unsensual energy; the other girls told her she looked “crazy.” So Angelina broke down sultriness like any other move — as if it were a jump or a turn — and practiced it with her other choreography in her living room at night.

Angelina and her friends linked performances like these to haughty indifference toward males: Nicole said that performing “Seven Nation Army” made her feel as if “all the boys are coming after us, but we don’t want them.” When she performed the piece, Nicole felt “strong,” as if she and her friends were in “an actual army.”

In the middle of their performance of “Seven Nation Army,” Jenna’s shoe, which somehow hadn’t been fastened right, flew off her foot and had to be kicked into the wings. I didn’t see it happen, but the girls had a blanched look when they came offstage. Jenna sat by her expandable makeup dolly and cried, the line of her scalp showing through the middle part in her reddish hair. The other girls offered comfort, approaching one by one and placing their hands on her shoulders.

Frantically, they donned their final leotards of the day. Crupi paced among them, livid about the shoe. “You’re going to make up for all the bad dances we did today with this one, right?” she asked. The girls nodded and turned toward one another, standing shoulder to shoulder and bouncing on their toes. In this piece, called “Bloom,” the girls played a flock of birds. “Think of your character,” Annalise implored the group. “We are sad! Be the dancers we know we can be.”

“Make her happy,” one girl reminded the others, speaking of Crupi. The rest of the team groaned with recognition. Another rified: “Make her cry with happiness!” The murmur grew. “No one can give less than 100 percent,” Alana said over the sound. “Please. It won’t work if even one person gives 90.”

In “Bloom,” Annalise played a bird with a broken wing; the left sleeve of her bird costume was strapped to her side, so she could only flap with her right. At one point, the dancers came together to form two giant wings on either side of Annalise’s body, so that they looked not like a flock but like a single bird. The piece never failed to inspire emotion in the judges. During the tape of this particular competition, the judges stopped critiquing execution and started cooing “Oh!” and “Ah!”

## ONE OF THE MOST-VIEWED COMPETITION-DANCE VIDEOS

is called “My Boyfriend’s Back (7 Years Old — Original).” It has been viewed almost 38 million times. The video was uploaded in 2009; the 7-year-olds in the footage are now high-school age. At least one still dances

competitively. The dance, to a cover of the Angels’ “My Boyfriend’s Back,” opens to excited audience screams. Three girls wearing striped two-pieces, thigh-high socks and matching bobs, stand in an aggressive, wide-legged stance. When the song begins, they mouth the lyrics, pouting and stomping. All are technically advanced dancers, but the combination of racy costumes, mind-boggling flexibility and slack-jawed facial expressions makes the video feel like too much, like something you aren’t sure you should watch. The comments on the video, many of which profess to be from aspiring dancers, claim a mixture of suspicion and awe. “They look just plain innocent, but they dance like teenagers!” one reads. I asked Angelina if she’d seen the video — she had. “It is shocking,” she told me. “The piece is more mature than their age,” she admitted. “But it can be in a good way.”

Earlier that year, Angelina went to see the Rockettes, but she came away unswayed. “I want to be a dancer,” she told me. “Not just kicking my legs.” She had heard of only a few professional dance companies, but she wanted to join one someday. “Why would I work this hard just to go nowhere?” she said. “I want to go into the bigger world.” This summer, Angelina triumphed at the American Dance Awards nationals, snagging first place for the 12-and-under solo category. She posted effusively on Instagram, thanking her teachers, and later direct-messaged me to see if I’d heard she won.

At the final awards ceremony at Showbiz, the overall championship trophy stood behind the crowds of children, beside a table that sagged with the weight of smaller trophies. It was the color of Barbie’s accouterments and the size of a shop mannequin. The Prestige girls looked at it furtively, as if they didn’t want to jinx it. When it came time to announce the recipient, the announcer hesitated.

“Say it! Say it!” the Prestige dancers hissed.

Larkin won. Blue team jackets flooded the stage. It was all over.

Crupi climbed slowly toward the place where her team sat. She wore a dim smile; everyone needed to be on their best behavior, despite not having won. “Group pic!” she commanded. Since they didn’t have a huge trophy to fawn over, the girls admired a choreography award Crupi had received instead. It was pyramid-shaped with sharp-looking edges, made of glass.

Cameraphones clicked. Angelina posed and grinned before leaving the stage. I saw her give herself a searching look in a mirror placed backstage. Then she did a little move. It wasn’t something I had seen her perform before. It was something else, her own gesture. ♦

too dry. It needed color, so he asked her to include some humanizing detail. What if she reminded the court that when his father died in 2012, months passed before he could speak to his family?

Everything about Guantánamo Bay is made opaque, kept obscure to outsiders through the restriction of access, the distance from news bureaus and the tangle of logistics it takes to get there and back. It's hard to know how it all works. Baluchi understands this. But he figured people might relate, emotionally, to being cut off from family after a parent dies. Pradhan added the anecdote to the motion.

Another significant part of Pradhan's job is trying to detail Baluchi's torture and abuse. She and her colleagues expect the prosecution to say that Baluchi gave incriminating statements free of coercion. But if he made a statement on a given date, a document like a medical report from the same date could dispute the notion that he made the statement freely. There's a trove of files that would allow the team to do that kind of cross-referencing, but the defense doesn't have access to it. The prosecution does. The defense must settle for "substitution" documents: files that prosecutors create themselves, with judicial oversight, according to their own sense of what's relevant to the defense. Pradhan is certain she doesn't know everything that happened to Baluchi, which is frustrating both for planning his defense and for trying to get him treatment.

This predicament also sets the defense up for occasional surprises, like when a member of the team went to see the 2012 movie "Zero Dark Thirty," about the hunt for Osama bin Laden, and realized that one of the main characters was very obviously Baluchi. The opening segment of the film showed a man held at a black site in an undisclosed location, being tortured violently. Baluchi's first name, Ammar, had not been changed, nor had his family details, where he was arrested or what his suspected role was in Al Qaeda. While information about Baluchi's interrogations was being withheld from his own defense team, it had apparently been shared with the filmmakers Mark Boal and Kathryn Bigelow, who seemed to know more about Baluchi's treatment than his own lawyers did.

**In the case** against Baluchi and his four co-defendants, the United States has leveled charges that include conspiracy, terrorism, hijacking and 2,973 counts of murder. The government is seeking the death penalty for all of them. But more than 16 years have elapsed since the attacks, and the actual trial is probably still a long way off. There are years of pretrial motions to be argued, because, though this may be the most significant trial of our lifetimes, it is also a legal experiment. And it's a legal experiment with a few false starts already.

President George W. Bush thought the naval base at Guantánamo would be the best location for holding people and trying them without lawyers, but the Supreme Court said he couldn't do that. So he asked Congress to commission military-style tribunals. It passed the Military Commissions Act of 2006, allowing for hearings to happen at Gitmo, which they did until Obama came into office vowing to close the base and try defendants in federal court. Preparations got underway. Then that plan faltered, too, this time succumbing to public outcry about suspected terrorists on United States soil and an ongoing concern that federal courts were incapable of trying suspected terrorists.

Forced to relent, Obama reverted to Bush's fix: military tribunals at Guantánamo. President Trump has promised to keep the facility open. But the system still has to be built before it can be used, and seemingly fundamental issues are only now being addressed. For instance, military commissions are supposed to try war crimes. Are we at war with Al Qaeda and, if so, was that war already underway at the time of the Sept. 11 attacks? Only in the spring of 2016, after four and a half years of pretrial hearings, did the military commissions hear arguments about whether military commissions were even the right venue. For many experts, it's hard to imagine how the prosecution could ever secure a conviction, then a death sentence, then have it all hold up on appeal, given the taint of torture and everything else.

Karen Greenberg, who is the founder and director of Fordham University Law School's Center on National Security and who has published books about Guantánamo and the terror courts, says the commissions are essentially doomed. "It's hard to find an element of the 9/11 commissions that's not challenged by logistics," she says. "Whether it's logistics of movement and transportation or logistics of the legal process, every single point seems to be impeded in the military commissions." And she doesn't see what's happening now as a genuine inquiry into guilt but more as a kind of dramatization. What's really happening here, she says, is just "perpetual detention with the patina of a court process." One of the most likely scenarios is that the defendants just die at Guantánamo, never having been sentenced.

To convict Baluchi in particular, and to secure a death sentence against him, the prosecution has to prove not just that Baluchi was involved in the Sept. 11 plot but that he knew he was involved. Pradhan doesn't think they can.

**The prosecution's case** against Baluchi starts in early 2000, when his uncle, Khalid Sheikh Muhammad, a top Al Qaeda official, asked him to send a video called "CityBird" to Pakistan. It was an instructional film about the cockpit of a Boeing 767, the same sort of plane that would be used to take down both towers of the World Trade Center.

Mohammad then began asking his nephew to perform other odd jobs, from buying flight simulators to setting up bank accounts to purchasing plane tickets to wiring money to some of the hijackers.

Pradhan won't say whether she believes that these transactions took place; she says that she hasn't seen enough evidence to address them, and it would be imprudent for her to concede the factual claims against her client. But when asked, she returns to what she says is legally the more relevant matter: how much he knew. "One of the biggest questions is intent," she says. "For a death-penalty trial, you have to have specific intent to commit these crimes. I haven't seen anything from the government that works in their favor on that question. He didn't know. He found out about Sept. 11 on Sept. 11. That's enough."

Altogether, he wired about \$150,000 to people involved in the plot all around the world, according to the government. He was asked at an early hearing about his contact with Marwan al Shehhi, who flew American Airlines Flight 175 into the South Tower of the World Trade Center. "Did you wire transfer over \$100,000 in separate transactions to al Shehhi? Do you admit to that?"

"Yes," he answered.

"What was the purpose of that money?"

"I don't know."

At the time, Baluchi says, it was just friend of a friend asking for a favor. Gifted at languages, Baluchi was also tech-obsessed and a problem solver, so in addition to his job at a Dubai electronics company, he had a side business helping friends with logistics. Sending money for people wasn't out of the ordinary, particularly when an elder in your own family asked you to do it, even if that elder was Khalid Sheikh Mohammad. As for whether Baluchi wondered about the sheer amount of money he was moving, his response was: Why should he have? He had wealthy friends from Gulf States who often had large sums of money to move. Once, one of his friends wanted to buy a Ferrari when he arrived in the United States to study, and he asked Baluchi to handle a transfer. "So," Baluchi once said, "you can imagine Ferrari is \$300,000. This is \$100,000. So it's not that big question."

Baluchi claims that when people asked him to help move money, he had no reason to be suspicious. As he once put it, no one asked for his help sending money to "hijacker Marwan." In his own reckoning, he's precisely as responsible for Sept. 11 as everyone else who facilitated it unwittingly: rental-car clerks, flight instructors and United States financial institutions.

According to Terry McDermott, one of the authors of "The Hunt for K.S.M." and the foremost civilian authority on Khalid Sheikh Mohammad, it is plausible that Baluchi didn't know what exactly he was involved with before the attacks. His uncle was fastidious about operational security. Mohammad used dozens of SIM cards and aliases, practiced compartmentalization and used

multiple vehicles when traveling to and from meetings. It would have been out of character to jeopardize a mission by letting anyone know what the plan was. And Mohammad, for what it's worth, does not deny his own involvement in the attacks; he proclaims it. He maintains that his nephew knew nothing.

McDermott, however, believes Baluchi willingly participated, even if he didn't know specifically what he was participating in. McDermott's reporting holds that Baluchi was most likely initiated into the cause of jihad as teenager, when his cousin Ramzi Yousef, one of the terrorists behind the first World Trade Center bombing in 1993, was injured in a bomb-making accident. While recovering, Yousef came to stay in Zahedan, a town in the southeastern corner of Iran where Baluchi was attending boarding school. McDermott believes Yousef indoctrinated him during that time. Furthermore, McDermott believes Baluchi sought out Mohammad and asked to help, rather than the other way around. After all, Mohammad was first indicted in 1996, and though the indictment was initially sealed, it wasn't as if his activities were unknown. McDermott finds it hard to believe that Baluchi didn't know at least what *kinds* of things his uncle might need money for. And even if \$70,000 wasn't a lot compared to a Ferrari, it was a lot for someone like Mohammad, who had no apparent source of income.

There are other details that McDermott finds difficult to square with the idea of Baluchi as unwitting participant. Baluchi is smart and worldly; he speaks six languages. Shouldn't he have been able to figure out something untoward was going on? And, McDermott points out, he used aliases to make some of the wire transfers and purchases. Why would he have done that if he didn't think he was involved in something criminal? (McDermott also believes Baluchi was involved in the beheading of Daniel Pearl.)

The C.I.A. reported that even after Sept. 11, Baluchi was involved in plots against Western targets in Pakistan, including the United States Consulate in Karachi. And the agency says that when Mohammad was arrested in 2003, his plans for another spectacular operation fell from uncle to nephew. Baluchi is said to have pursued, among other things, a kind of British Sept. 11, in which Al Qaeda would hijack planes from Heathrow, turn them around and crash them into the airport and an office building in the Canary Wharf business district. Security was deemed too tight, however, and the plot evolved to taking planes from Eastern European airports and crashing them into Heathrow.

But the C.I.A. learned of these plots from Mohammad after its operatives began waterboarding him, which they did at least 183 times. Much of what he said during that period has since been proved false. Mohammad later retracted those statements, even as he continued to boast of his own involvement in Sept. 11.

**The day after** the meeting with Baluchi at Camp Echo was a hearing day. Security was tight. Baluchi was brought into the hearing room, a large space with one long table for each of the five defense teams, a chair at the end of each table for a defendant and a row of inward facing seats against a side wall for the guard force. Two uniformed men walked on either side of Baluchi, latex-gloved hands on his biceps, and deposited him in the chair next to his legal team. He wore sunglasses. The white light in the room is a trigger for him, worsened by a brain injury that a psychologist consulting for the defense says he received in C.I.A. custody. Pradhan says that although Baluchi didn't see natural sunlight for three years when he was in the secret prisons, the C.I.A. used bright artificial light together with beatings, dousing, extreme cold, nudity and extreme noise so that for him all these things are connected.

Baluchi sat down and slipped off the basketball sneakers he was wearing; he would follow the proceedings in socks. There weren't enough chairs at Baluchi's table, so Pradhan knelt beside him as they waited for the judge. Even if Pradhan and Baluchi had been speaking above a whisper, the few people (including me) watching from the gallery and those watching via satellite feed probably wouldn't have been able to hear what they were saying. All that observers — generally press, family members and nongovernment-organization workers — can hear is the sound loud enough to be picked up by microphones and piped out on a 45-second delay. It's an arrangement set up as a fail-safe, in case someone in the room says something classified. The judge would then have the better part of a minute to cut the feed before observers hear something they're not supposed to.

At least, that's how everyone thought it worked, until the proceedings took one of their strangest turns a few years ago. One of Mohammad's defense lawyers was explaining why evidence from the C.I.A. black sites had to be preserved, when, according to press reports, a red light in the courtroom lit up, and the feed died. The judge, Col. James Pohl, was confused. He hadn't stopped it. But he thought he was the only one who could stop it. An unseen entity — most suspect the C.I.A. — had gained access to the feed without anyone knowing. (Asked for comment, the C.I.A. referred me to the Department of Defense, which said the feed was cut "due to a concern at the time that classified information was potentially being divulged.")

Other cases of suspected monitoring by unseen entities followed. A few months after the courtroom audiovisual incident, one of Pradhan's colleagues, Cheryl Bormann, a lawyer for Walid bin Attash, Osama bin Laden's former bodyguard and a suspected Sept. 11 planner, was meeting with her client when she noticed a small electronic module on the ceiling. The guard said it was a smoke detector. Bormann was curious, so she did

an online search for the brand name she'd seen on the side of the unit, and it turned out to be an audio-surveillance device. Somebody was listening in on privileged attorney-client meetings. Or at least, someone had the ability to. But in yet another pretrial hearing, the chief of the guard force testified under oath that he thought it was a smoke detector. Which meant whoever installed the listening device did so without even the guards knowing. Army officers argued at the time, and a Department of Defense spokesman later told me, that the devices were holdovers from the rooms' previous use and furthermore that the "capability" to monitor rooms "does not establish the fact of abuse or misuse of that capability."

The defense claims even more peculiar things have happened. There was the F.B.I.'s trying to turn a security contractor working for the defense into an informant. And there was one of Baluchi's co-defendants claiming to have recognized his appointed interpreter as a man present during his torture at one of the C.I.A. black sites. Pradhan now operates under the assumption that the F.B.I. and the C.I.A. are spying on the defense. She doesn't think they do it to gather more intelligence but instead to give the prosecution a leg up and to control the dissemination of information about torture. She doesn't have any evidence; it's just the only explanation she finds plausible. "You don't try and try and try and try again to interfere with the attorney-client relationship unless you're going to get something out of it," she says. "Our theory of the case has always been that the prosecution is working closely with the F.B.I. and the C.I.A." The F.B.I. declined to comment, and the C.I.A. referred me to the prosecution. When asked, the prosecution acknowledged that it works closely with intelligence and law enforcement, but vehemently denied that its cooperation involves spying on the defense. Pradhan believes it anyway.

When the hearing finally began and Brig. Gen. Mark Martins, the lead prosecutor, got up to speak, Pradhan's body language changed. She looked coiled and alert. "Good morning, your honor," he said. "Present in the back of the courtroom, James Fitzgerald and Brianna Hearn of the Federal Bureau of Investigation." Pradhan didn't know why the F.B.I. sat there, but she says they're always there. The judge asked each legal team which of their members were present and then recounted recent developments.

"The issue before me right now is whether or not we can continue with the case for these sessions scheduled for the next eight days in the absence of Ms. Bormann," Judge Pohl said.

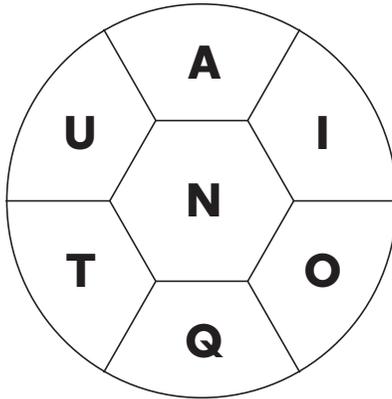
Bormann, the same lawyer whose inquiry about the "smoke detector" spurred hearings about attorney-client privilege, had fallen and broken her wrist just before the trip. She had to have emergency surgery and couldn't come to Gitmo for the hearings. Because she's the one "learned counsel," for bin Attash, meaning the one lawyer experienced (Continued on Page 55)

# SPELLING BEE

By Frank Longo

How many common words of 5 or more letters can you spell using the letters in the hive? Every answer must use the center letter at least once. Letters may be reused in a word. At least one word will use all 7 letters. Proper names and hyphenated words are not allowed. Score 1 point for each answer, and 3 points for a word that uses all 7 letters.

Rating: 10 = good; 16 = excellent; 22 = genius



Our list of words, worth 27 points, appears with last week's answers.

# CONNECT FOUR

By Patrick Berry

Each answer in this puzzle is a two-word phrase in which both words contain the same four letters in the same order, with or without some other letters in between. For instance, both halves of the phrase PARISH PRIEST contain P-R-I-S in order (PaRiSh PRleSt). The 12 sets of shared letters are shown below the clues; each will be used exactly once.

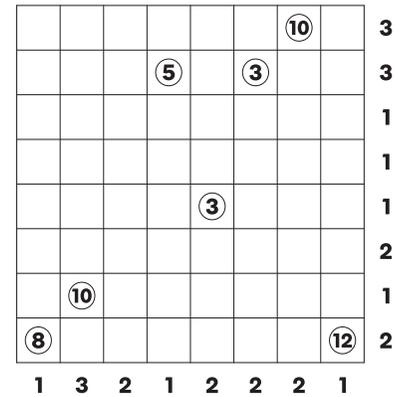
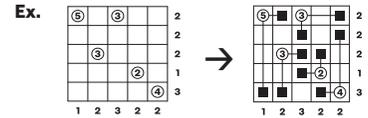
1. What Smokey Bear wants you to prevent (6,5)
2. Beloved pop song from the past (6,5)
3. Whodunit (7,5)
4. Put up a fight when the cops arrive (6,6)
5. Passes from one owner to another (7,5)
6. State of perfect bliss (7,6)
7. Engine that hooks onto the back of a boat (8,5)
8. 1960s sitcom whose pilot episode was titled "Marooned" (9,6)
9. Athletic activity that draws an audience (9,5)
10. Game whose board is shaped like a six-pointed star (7,8)
11. Nerdy accessory for an engineer (6,9)
12. Christmas carol that opens with the words "Sleigh bells ring" (6,10)

<b>CHES</b>	<b>ILAN</b>	<b>REST</b>
<b>EVEN</b>	<b>OLDE</b>	<b>SPOR</b>
<b>FRES</b>	<b>OTOR</b>	<b>STRY</b>
<b>HANS</b>	<b>POCT</b>	<b>WNER</b>

# ELBOW ROOM

By Tinh Van Duc Lai

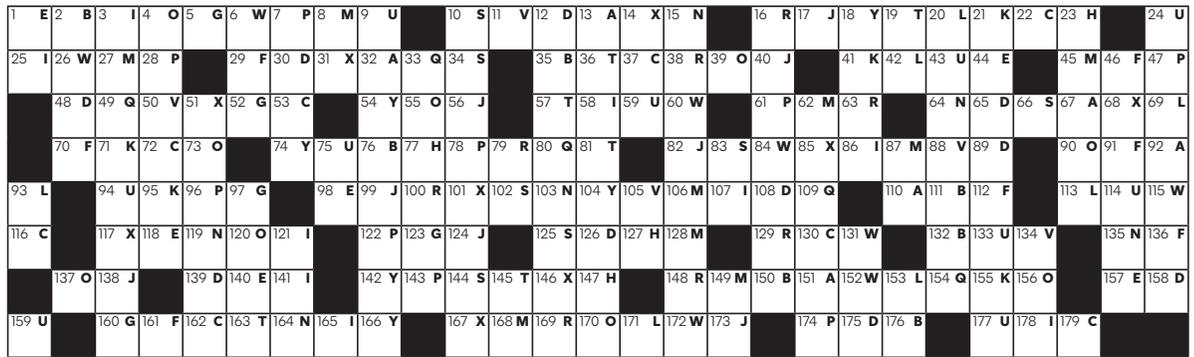
Draw two lines in an "L" shape out of each numbered circle so that the total number of squares reached by the two lines equals the number in the circle. The numbers beside the grid specify how many ends of lines (shown by black squares in the example) appear in their respective rows and columns. Lines never intersect.



# ACROSTIC

By Emily Cox & Henry Rathvon

Guess the words defined below and write them over their numbered dashes. Then transfer each letter to the correspondingly numbered square in the pattern. Black squares indicate word endings. The filled pattern will contain a quotation reading from left to right. The first letters of the guessed words will form an acrostic giving the author's name and the title of the work.



**A.** In heraldry, shown with wings extended

67 13 151 110 32 92

**B.** Largely treeless northern nation

76 2 176 150 132 111 35

**C.** Moving display featuring small models (2 wds.)

37 179 162 22 130 116 53 72

**D.** Unable to transcend the mundane

108 65 12 30 175 48 126 158 139 89

**E.** Poinsettias have small ones

157 118 98 140 44 1

**F.** Source of "glogg" and "smorgasbord"

29 70 161 112 91 136 46

**G.** Unlikely person to excel at juggling

97 160 123 5 52

**H.** Shaggy-dog story, e.g.

147 23 127 77

**I.** Ancient sort of roof construction

25 58 3 141 86 107 178 165 121

**J.** Topper for a cold bowlful (2 wds.)

173 17 124 138 99 82 40 56

**K.** Suggestive of brownies

95 21 41 71 155

**L.** Shining example of one turning a flaw into an asset

42 171 69 20 113 153 93

**M.** Dancer's jump with rapidly crossing feet

8 27 45 62 128 106 168 149 87

**N.** Labyrinth maker's ill-fated son

164 64 135 103 119 15

**O.** Costume for Ebenezer Scrooge

120 137 55 73 4 156 170 90 39

**P.** Put ornaments here and there

28 143 96 122 7 61 174 47 78

**Q.** Residue from a pillow fight, perhaps

33 154 109 80 49

**R.** Go in search of greener pastures

63 16 38 148 169 129 100 79

**S.** Beams overhead

144 10 125 102 83 66 34

**T.** Plaster used for lining chimneys

163 36 81 19 145 57

**U.** Nod's locale, in the Bible (3 wds.)

59 177 24 159 43 133 75 9 114 94

**V.** Maids a-milking, in "The 12 Days of Christmas"

50 11 134 88 105

**W.** Teachings on teaching

84 6 131 26 115 152 172 60

**X.** High rank, exalted position

146 31 117 167 85 51 68 14 101

**Y.** Posited memory imprint

104 18 166 74 54 142

**Pradhan**

(Continued from Page 53)

in capital murder cases, bin Attash now lacked proper representation.

To Pradhan, it wasn't even a question: You can't have hearings unless the defendants are properly represented. Especially in death-penalty cases and especially because the court would be hearing actual testimony that day. A family member of Sept. 11 victims, a man named Lee Hanson, was scheduled to give his deposition. He was 84 at the time, and the worry was that he might not be around to testify when the real trial begins, so he was afforded the opportunity in the name of preserving evidence. But the way Pradhan saw it, the court would be hearing testimony against an unrepresented defendant. She found the idea absurd; she found it absurd that they were even considering it.

Pohl explained why they had to come down to Gitmo at all, rather than calling it off before everyone got on the plane. "The only way to fairly litigate that issue would be to have a hearing, as we're going to do right now, and hear from both sides and then go from there." This, too, Pradhan found absurd: Pohl was asking for a hearing about how to proceed with pretrial-hearings, which, in turn, were about how to proceed with a trial. In other words, he was asking to litigate how to litigate about how to litigate.

One of Bormann's colleagues, Edwin Perry, got up to explain why they ought not proceed without his boss, who was genuinely injured and could not be there. He argued that it would be, among other things, a violation of their client's Sixth Amendment right to counsel if they were to proceed. The judge replied, to stifled laughter: "You're telling me you can't prepare these legal motions without her being present? You may be selling yourself short there, Mr. Perry. I'm just saying."

Pradhan didn't laugh. After a few hours of arguments, the judge made his decision: The deposition would go forward. The first testimony in the Sept. 11 trial would be given while one of the accused lacked a capital-qualified lawyer. Pradhan was stunned.

**From the outside** looking in, it's not obvious why Pradhan even bothers. The amount of time and work it's going to take before a jury will decide on guilt or innocence, let alone a sentence, if any of that even ever happens, is oppressive. "So damn far away," she said, when I asked when she thought the actual trial might start. And when I asked if she was confident it would happen at all, she said, "I honestly have no idea."

"The invention of a brand new legal system," she says, "means we've spent years kicking the tires of the military commissions before we can drive it. We've barely started getting useful discovery; it'll be another couple years at least before we can think about driving."

She can argue why she believes Baluchi can beat the charges if it ever gets to that, but it's still hard to see him ever walking free. It looks more and more like the prosecution and defense are all working impossibly long hours for men whose fates are, if forestalled, still inevitable. It's hard to see how it isn't, as Karen Greenberg said, just "perpetual detention." In a sense, the lawyers and their clients are all trapped together, invested in a process that may not end until the accused find another way to die.

But what became clear over the time I spent with Pradhan is that there's another reason she spends so much energy on him, and it goes beyond her belief that a favorable outcome is possible if they work hard enough. Pradhan believes the trial provides a kind of therapy. Not the kind of therapy a trial is ostensibly supposed to bring — the closure, the healing for victims — but instead healing for the accused.

Early on in our conversations, Pradhan began to articulate an idea I found surprising. "At this point," she said, "Ammar has been in custody for 13 years. He has very real struggles stemming from his torture." She has watched him participate in the case, and she has begun to see his work as an antidote for the learned helplessness taught to him by the C.I.A. It was a way to move toward something, to quiet the part of his mind where the heavy-metal music hasn't stopped, the part that nudges him awake every 45 minutes, every night to prepare for more beatings. Working with Pradhan on his trial for mass murder is what she thinks keeps him going.

It's why when she sits on the floor of the trailer at Camp Echo to prepare for a hearing, no matter how much the team has to get through, no matter how important tomorrow's motions are, it's the suspected terrorist who sets the agenda. And it's why when she kneels beside him in the courtroom, even though she thinks her job — and maybe her career, and maybe her purpose in life — is to be a loud and unreserved voice for the voiceless, she tries, in those moments, to listen as much as she speaks.

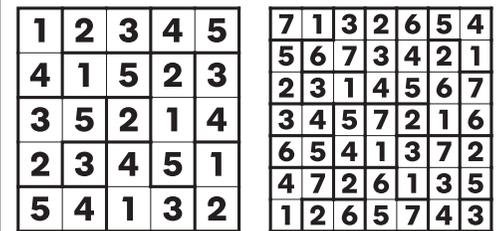
But when she does, she finds that there's always so much he wants to know about her before he's ready to talk about his defense. When they meet at Camp Echo, Baluchi, without fail, asks about her family. Mostly, he wants to know about her daughter; Pradhan once took her there, to Gitmo, "to see where Mama works." And though they couldn't see Baluchi together, they went shopping for him together. That started a tradition: Pradhan brings him berries from the Navy Exchange, saying she's delivering them on orders from the 5-year-old. Now whenever Pradhan walks in, Baluchi wants to know how the girl is doing, how her French is coming along. And it's only afterward — after Pradhan tells Baluchi the latest about this friend he'll never meet, sitting on a floor cluttered with McDonald's cups and foam clamshells — that they finally get down to the endless task of keeping him alive. ♦

**Answers to puzzles of 12.17.17**

OH, ONE LAST THING



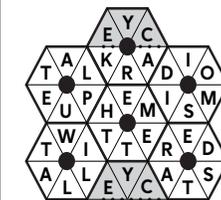
KENKEN



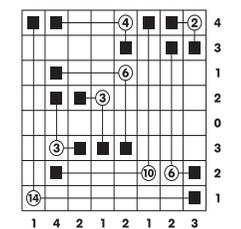
TRI-CITIES

1. Rochester
2. Allentown
3. Cleveland
4. Pocatello
5. Princeton
6. Charlotte
7. Anchorage
8. Annapolis
9. Milwaukee
10. Kalamazoo
11. Fort Worth
12. Las Cruces
13. Boca Raton
14. Palm Beach

HEX NUTS



ELBOW ROOM



**Answers to puzzle on Page 54**

SPELLING BEE

Quotation (3 points). Also: Anion, annotation, anoint, aquanaut, aquatint, attain, initiation, intonation, intuit, intuition, nation, nonunion, notation, notion, onion, quaint, quinoa, quint, taint, tannin, taunt, titan, tuition, union. If you found other legitimate dictionary words in the beehive, feel free to include them in your score.

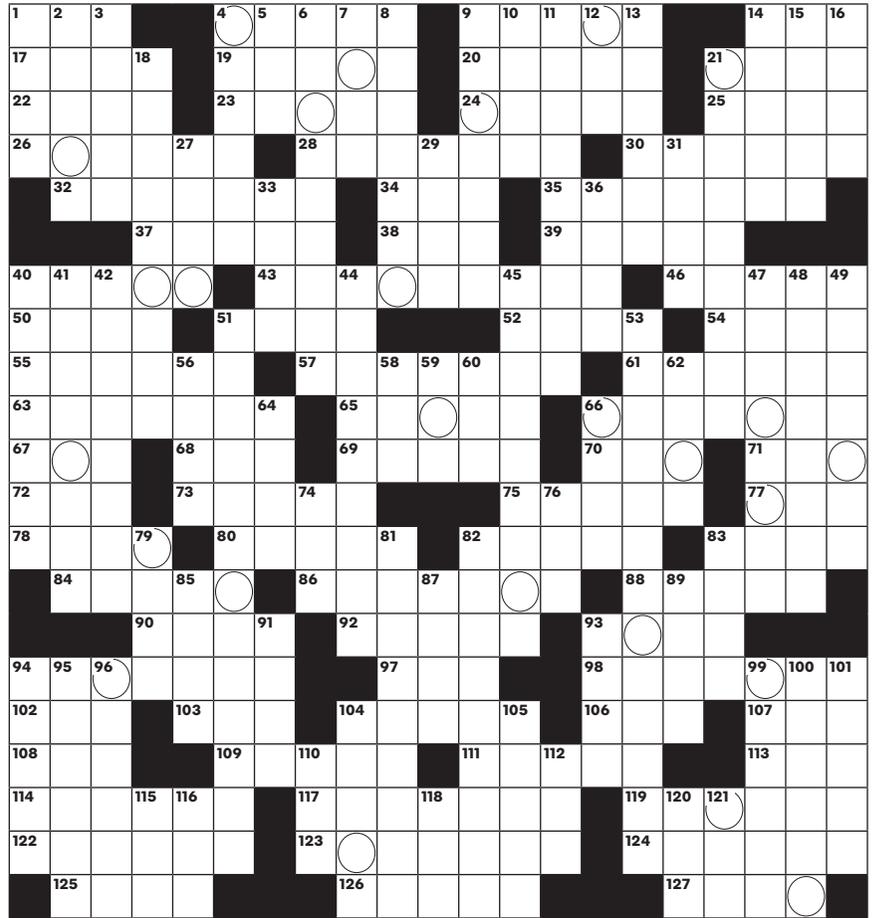
# MAKING A FAST BUCK

By Mary Lou Guizzo and Jeff Chen

**ACROSS**

- 1 Speedway brand
- 4 West Indies native
- 9 Bounds along
- 14 "Just a \_\_\_!"
- 17 Drain opening
- 19 Chip away at
- 20 Symbol of the National Audubon Society
- 21 Colorado tributary
- 22 Plot device in "The Shining" that has significance when spelled backward
- 23 Restaurant chain founded by the Raffel brothers (hence the name)
- 24 Elevator choice
- 25 Turns briefly?
- 26 Some Carnival performances
- 28 Called from the cote
- 30 Telephotos, e.g.
- 32 Ancient Greek
- 34 Male that might be in a rut?
- 35 Stymies
- 37 Relative of a birch
- 38 College in Cedar Rapids, Iowa
- 39 Country singer Crystal
- 40 Screwy
- 43 Pitch
- 46 One of the Wayans brothers
- 50 Wine: Prefix
- 51 Christmas \_\_\_
- 52 Prince, e.g.
- 54 A, in Austria
- 55 Base supporting a statue
- 57 Branded baby carriers
- 61 Symbols on 10 state flags
- 63 They might be thrown around in a rodeo
- 65 Digitally endorse
- 66 Sleigh-bell sounds
- 67 Terminate
- 68 "\_\_\_ God" (psalm words)
- 69 Chemistry exam?
- 70 Skin art, informally
- 71 Descartes's conclusion
- 72 Clear
- 73 Yule sound?
- 75 \_\_\_ guerre
- 77 Range grp.
- 78 & 80 One of TV's Property Brothers
- 82 "Really!"
- 83 Spotted
- 84 Nicholas, e.g.
- 86 Give a ring?
- 88 Hallmark.com suggestion

- 90 Divan
- 92 "\_\_\_ welcome!"
- 93 Cow poke?
- 94 Avoid a bogey, barely
- 97 Neighbor of a bishop: Abbr.
- 98 Souped-up cars
- 102 Mahershala \_\_\_, Oscar winner for "Moonlight"
- 103 One of the record industry's former Big Four
- 104 Carpenter's aid
- 106 Hypotheticals
- 107 "Just kidding!"
- 108 Airer of "Christmas in Rockefeller Center"
- 109 Sanctuary
- 111 "Hey \_\_\_" (1963 #1 hit)
- 113 Mobile home: Abbr.
- 114 Actress Audrey of "Amélie"
- 117 Animal on Scotland's coat of arms
- 119 Kind of cabinet
- 122 Written history
- 123 Who's depicted in this puzzle when the circled letters are connected from A to Z and back to A
- 124 Games of chance
- 125 Prison part
- 126 Sorts, as chicks
- 127 Downsize?



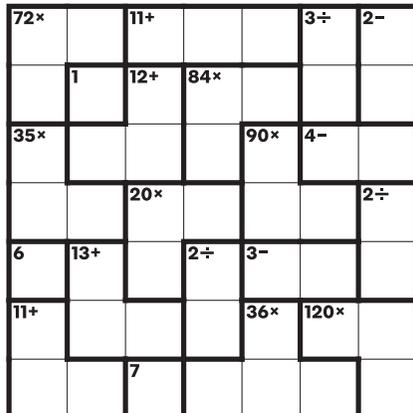
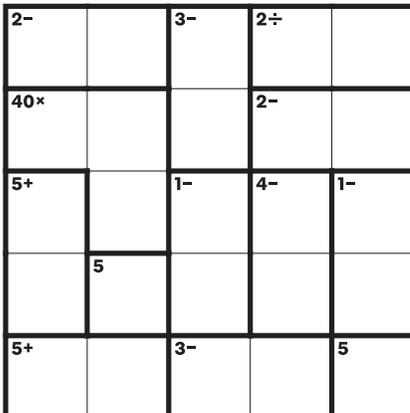
**DOWN**

- 1 Tears to smithereens
- 2 It's read from a scroll
- 3 Large column of smoke
- 4 Terminated
- 5 Opposite of dep.
- 6 Heists
- 7 Description of rustic life
- 8 Importune
- 9 It moves a cursor back
- 10 Body check?
- 11 Whiz kids
- 12 Want-ad abbr.
- 13 Having streaks
- 14 W.W. II ordeal at Leningrad
- 15 Notably nonunionized workers
- 16 Mama of song
- 18 Decorates brilliantly
- 21 One of a dozen good things?
- 27 Friend
- 29 Oodles
- 31 Vulcan mind \_\_\_
- 33 Beginning to do well?
- 36 Kind of skirt
- 40 "Fanfare for the Common Man" composer
- 41 Hair straighteners
- 42 Licorice-flavored brew
- 44 Singer with a No. 1 hit about 123-Across
- 45 Feature depicted in the upper left of this puzzle
- 47 Hatmaker
- 48 Like van Gogh, in later life
- 49 Les \_\_\_, "WKRP in Cincinnati" news director
- 51 & 53 123-Across, in song
- 56 One of many in a Swiss Army knife
- 58 Letters on some Navy carriers
- 59 Infantry members, briefly
- 60 Alternative to J.F.K.
- 62 1990s tennis great Huber
- 64 Align
- 66 First name at Woodstock
- 74 Political org. since 1854
- 76 Shout of approval
- 79 Three \_\_\_ Men
- 81 Didn't hedge one's bets
- 82 Starting point for an annual flight
- 83 \_\_\_ City (Baghdad suburb)
- 85 "In your dreams!"
- 87 Result of a sack on third and long, maybe
- 89 Bunks in barracks
- 91 "Brava!" elicitor
- 93 Punxsutawney prognosticator
- 94 Deliverer of Christmas packages
- 95 Capital whose name ends in its state's postal code
- 96 Cousin of an alpaca
- 99 Functioning robotically
- 100 Repetitive bit of computer code
- 101 A-listers
- 104 Boy in "A Charlie Brown Christmas"
- 105 Tombstone marshals
- 110 California's Big \_\_\_
- 112 Durham sch.
- 115 Roofing material
- 116 \_\_\_ Father Christmas
- 118 Crew member
- 120 Games org.
- 121 Fiscal-year part: Abbr.

**Puzzles Online:** Today's puzzle and more than 9,000 past puzzles, [nytimes.com/crosswords](http://nytimes.com/crosswords) (\$39.95 a year). For the daily puzzle commentary: [nytimes.com/wordplay](http://nytimes.com/wordplay).

# KENKEN

Fill the grid with digits so as not to repeat a digit in any row or column, and so that the digits within each heavily outlined box will produce the target number shown, by using addition, subtraction, multiplication or division, as indicated in the box. A 5x5 grid will use the digits 1-5. A 7x7 grid will use 1-7.



searching for something through his work that he may never sufficiently resolve in his life. When Peele was an adult, a half brother reached out to him through social media and shared details about his father's life after he left them, but this only compounded the questions. In July, Peele became a father himself, and he wants, as best he can, to protect his son from these nagging mysteries of the self. Perhaps his adolescent plunge into the worlds of fantasy and sci-fi and horror was a respite from the question "*Who am I?*" But in adulthood, he's using genre as an instrument of self-discovery and social X-ray: *This is who we are.*

Peele talked about his childhood over two tiny *croque-monsieurs* and a couple of mimosas at a busy French place less than a quarter mile from the apartment he grew up in. Maybe bringing all this up saddened him, but it didn't show. He even laughed through some of it. Peele curses a lot, and he's fond of using "man" as an interjection. There's an enthusiastic crack of adolescence, of nasality, in his voice that might sound nerdy but is also warm. Ascribing whiteness to it might say more about the ascriber than about Peele. It permits you to miss what the voice is saying. He sounds perfectly black to me.

Peele is married to Chelsea Peretti, the wry, sneakily blunt observational comedian. While we walked around the Upper West Side, he told me that the acidity and audacity of her humor struck him. He looked up some videos of her and watched a web series she made. "Oh! You know what?" he said, interrupting his train of thought. "The first time I fell in love with her was this 'Comedy Bang! Bang!' episode." The guests on the podcast included Peretti and some of her fellow writers on "Parks and Recreation." "They were pretending to be sort of bad, obnoxious comedians, and it was really subversive and subtle, and I said to my assistant, 'Who is that?' He was like, 'That's Chelsea Peretti,' and I said to him right there — no joke — 'There's a 10 percent chance I will marry that woman right over there, because she is cracking my [expletive] up.'" Naturally, he reached out to her on Twitter. "I slid up in them DMs," he clarified.

Peretti is white and, in certain moviegoers' analysis, the presumed subject of "Get Out." People who don't know her or Peele want to know what the deal is. They both say there isn't one. But Peretti understands the confusion. "I can't really fault anyone for wondering what it's about," Peretti told me over the phone. "I don't even know if either of us fully knows. Some of it is like poetry — it's not all fully intellectual and logical." She went on: "All of art has some stuff that's real and some stuff that's not, but I can't really distinguish for him, for his movie, what was what. I certainly don't harvest black bodies for my eternal liberty ... yet."

Peele didn't mean for Chris and his girlfriend, Rose, to function as avatars of his marriage. He was thinking more universally. "I can't point to somebody who I've felt betrayed by on a racial level," he told me one evening. "I wrote it before I met Chelsea. This is why you marry a comedian: because she gets it," he said. "I knew that something would ring true about the narrative of the white family and the white woman and the trap that that can be for a black man." He has never felt trapped by the Perettis. He wanted to challenge Hollywood's idealization of interracial relationships. They're a fact of American life and yet also still suspicious, even to enlightened people, even to people in an actual interracial relationship.

"It's still a principle that's disapproved of from both sides," Peele said. "Part of me thought: I don't know if people will want to come and see an interracial love story, even put in this sort of horror setting, because there's something about it that makes people uncomfortable. At the same time, there's a conventional way we're meant to deal with miscegenation in pop culture, which is with a certain reverence. It's Romeo and Juliet. It's Martin Luther King's dream." Peele jaundices the romance. Rose is no Juliet: She's a blood-thirsty vacuumer of black souls. But the movie isn't only about black men and the white women they date. It's entirely possible the movie is about something else. About the terror of black America accusing you of "talking white." About feeling suspicious as a black person among white people. Maybe they're guilty of, say, coveting you, and maybe the covetousness is all your fault, a result of having gotten so close in the first place.

**In an out-of-the-way** spot on the first floor of the Monkeypaw office hangs one of the only "Key & Peele" references in the house. It's an image from a Season 3 sketch called "Continental Breakfast." It stars Peele, in a black toupee and thin mustache, as a rootin'-tootin' businessman who is informed that his stay at a Comfort Inn-type hotel includes a continental breakfast. "It's ... *continental!*?" he asks, before he saunters up to the thingy that dumps Froot Loops into a plastic-foam bowl and renames the bewildered Latino busboy "*garçon.*" At first, the joke appears to be about the corporate sham of fancifying such shabbiness. Then it appears to be about the kind of black small-timer who takes "continental" at its word and permits inexperience to recast the business-travel buffet spread as the apotheosis of upper crustiness. ("Paper and everything," he says, marveling at one of those tiny, oily muffins.) But when Peele sits down and begins to sample his selection, his nin-compoopery blossoms into musicality. Each item receives a serenade of ignorant delight. ("Baked to perfection," he sings after he chomps into an unpeeled banana.) He doesn't eat so much as conduct an orchestra of gluttony (Strauss provides the musical soundtrack). His elation segues first into orgasm, then into blubbering.

I always laugh so hard at this sketch that I lose the joke. Peele is that absurdly moving. He gave dozens of tremendous, tremendously original performances. This one happens to be my favorite. The comedy comes from a place of intense passion and utter abandon. The man is a fool. But Peele insists that anyone who can love even this food this deeply deserves more than your laughter.

The image that hangs in Peele's office comes from the sketch's punch line: It's a black-and-white photograph of the businessman character beaming at a banquet-hall table, the one black face in an ocean of well-heeled, blank-looking white ones. "Continental Breakfast Buffet 1935," it reads. The dateline could also be: "Sunken Place, forever." The sketch was part of that season's Halloween episode (the last shot alludes to the last shot of Stanley Kubrick's "The Shining"). A close-up of that photo is also Peele's Twitter avatar. It's an embrace of his comedic brilliance that also feels like a reminder: *Stay woke.* Maybe that fear of alienation fostered his fascination with blackness and fueled his determination not to lose touch with or forsake it, no matter how many white best friends and girlfriends and co-writers and producers he has had. I've been there. Lots of black people have been there. "Get Out" is a hit because Jordan Peele is not alone. It's a hit because, not so secretly, it's about a profound fear of being black and isolated.

In the movie, Chris's best friend is a T.S.A. agent named Rod Williams, who is played by the stand-up Lil Rel Howery. Rod's skepticism is a surrogate for the audience's. His sarcasm is more than comic relief; it's black people talking back to the screen. Howery delivers all the easy laughs. But when the Armitage cabal snares Chris, it's Rod to the rescue. Comedy saves Chris from horror. But Rod feels far more crucial than that. It's important that Chris's best friend is a more down, average black person. It's important that Rod works for the T.S.A., a para-law-enforcement outfit that screens for safety, often staffed, depending on your city, almost entirely by black people. It's this guy who comes to save Chris from all this whiteness. They might not be friends in the real world. But in the metaphor, the relationship makes sense. Who else would have realized that two and two equals "coagula"? Who else could get Chris out of the sunken place but a man who refuses to be sunk? Rod is justice of a sort and unconditional support. He's the movie's secret weapon and moral SEAL team.

It's the big surprise of "Get Out." Peele made a nightmare about white evil that doubles as a fairy tale about black unity, black love, black rescue. More than once, Peele said he made this movie for a black audience. More than once, he mentioned how gratifying the black embrace has been for him: "No award will ever equal that to me." ♦

# Doris Burke Wants More Women in Sports Media

Interview by Molly Lambert

**In September, you were named a regular ESPN N.B.A. game analyst, making you the first woman to do so full time at the national level. How did you get into sports?** My dad was a sports fan, and college basketball was appointment viewing. I distinctly remember watching Al McGuire, Billy Packer and Dick Enberg and loving every single second of their coverage. When I was 7, we moved to Manasquan, where I picked up the game of basketball. I probably had to walk 100 yards to the basketball court from my front door. I won this purple jacket in a free-throw-shooting contest, and that would be my warm-up jacket — there was a set of hedges in front of my home, and I would take my ball and run out of those hedges like I was running out of the locker room onto the basketball floor and go emulate everything I had seen.

**You were the point guard on the Providence College basketball team. Do you still play?** The last time I played basketball it was eight weeks after I delivered my second child. You know that expression — the mind believes and the body would not follow? That was me on that particular day.

**How did you get into sports media?** My career is a happy accident. In 1990, I was an assistant coach at Providence College, but I knew I wanted to get married and have children. I did not think I could be a great basketball coach and be a great mom. There were women doing that at a high level at that time — Pat Summitt and Rene Portland — but I wasn't sure it would work out very well. The year I left coaching to get married, Providence College decided to put its women's basketball games on radio, and because I had played



**Age:** 52

**Occupation:**  
Sports reporter and analyst

**Hometown:**  
Manasquan, N.J.

Burke is a sideline reporter and analyst for the N.B.A. on ESPN and ABC.

**Her Top 5 Team Mascots or Logos:**

1. Providence Friars
2. New York Knicks
3. New York Yankees
4. Georgetown Hoyas
5. Oakland Raiders

and coached in the program, the athletic director asked if I'd like to give it a try.

**How do you approach calling a game?** Dick Vitale was adamant that the viewer is not tuning in to hear how smart you are — the viewer is tuning in because he or she wants to enjoy the game. When I was covering men's college basketball, I thought that I had to prove that I was a smart basketball person, because there weren't many female analysts. I always wore this navy blazer, because the man next to me was in a blazer and a tie, which I thought projected a certain air. But once, my son and I were watching the Olympic announcers clearly enjoying themselves, and he told me that when I'm having fun on the air, the viewer is having fun.

**Does it ever sink in that you could be someone's Dick Vitale?** It's a terrific feeling when young women tell me they're excited for me — I think it makes them aware of what is possible. We are in a seminal moment for women in sports broadcasting — Beth Mowins calling a “Monday Night Football” game may be the most important thing I've seen a woman do in this field in my time. ESPN has taken a lot of hits, but I believe the one thing you cannot be critical of is its role in revolutionizing sports broadcasting for women and its willingness to put women in roles they have been traditionally excluded from. John Skipper, our president, has changed things for women.

**What are the story lines you're most excited about for this season?** It's funny: The casual fan might say Golden State is going to win the championship in June, there's nothing really interesting going on. That's not exactly the case, right? All of a sudden, the young players for the Boston Celtics that needed to take a step forward, Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum, have done so in this incredible way. Even in the absence of Gordon Hayward, the Celtics are crushing it right now. LeBron James — we take that man for granted. He's made greatness seem ordinary. I'm guilty of it, too! I voted him third in the M.V.P. voting, so I'm criticizing myself as much as everybody else. The emergence of Giannis Antetokounmpo — this guy at his size is doing things where it's just eye-popping, and he's so young, still! The Golden State Warriors are playing at their highest level — it is truly extraordinary and beautiful basketball to watch. It all captures my imagination, to be honest with you. I can't wait for the next game. ♦



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For Giuseppe Bausilio, performing on Broadway is more than just his livelihood, it is his life. He has been singing, acting, and dancing since the age of 11. So when Giuseppe received the news that he had a spinal tumor, and it would likely keep him from the stage, he was understandably devastated.

Giuseppe's tumor was different than most. He had a vascular tumor, which is made up of tiny, interwoven blood vessels, making removal very complicated. Normally, a vascular spinal tumor is treated with a procedure known as a laminectomy, which involves removing part of one or more vertebrae. This can lead to kyphosis, a curving of the spine—obviously not something that is compatible

with an active lifestyle or career. To preserve the spinal structure, the doctors at the Mount Sinai Health System performed a very rare and challenging minimally invasive procedure that required a team of multidisciplinary specialists. The operation was successfully performed in September. Just three months later, Giuseppe was once again enjoying his lifelong passion: performing on Broadway.

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