

# THE FEATHERTALE REVIEW



LISTENER  
ADVISORY  
ABSURD CONTENT

## SIDE A

### 1 • From the Monkey’s Desk

*Performed by* Scott Simmie

Welcome, listener, to my latest creation.

This is the twenty-ninth instalment of *The Feathertale Review*. If you can hear me, then you have figured out how to play this record and have thus managed to transform my voice into electrical energy that is now being amplified and transmitted through some sort of speaker and filtered toward the holes on either side of your head.

Now that I have control of the vibrations inside your ears, allow me to introduce you to this issue, or “album,” if I may. What you are about to hear is a curation of imaginatively unimaginable storytelling that has been magically converted into microscopic grooves and pressed onto a circular disk of polyvinyl chloride.

The sounds you are hearing were recorded in a studio in the Centre of the Universe (known to humans as the city of Toronto) over four days that had no other significance to history.

If you are wondering why you should listen to any of this, I get it. Your life is short. And by the time this record is over, it will be several minutes shorter.

Regardless, sit back in your favourite chesterfield or settee, lather your body in hot honey or sriracha sauce, and let us entertain you. No need to thank me for any of this. You’re already welcome. — *Written by* D’Artagnan

### 2 • Cormac McCarthy Orders a Pizza

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan (*Operator*) and Jordan Moffatt (*Cormac McCarthy*)

**Operator:** Thank you for calling Papa Jerry’s. What can I get for you today?

**McCarthy:** A pie of average size with blood-red medalions atop a lava-like layer of bubblings that reaches in vain for the stony burnt crust.

**Operator:** Beg your pardon?

**McCarthy:** Medium pepperoni.

**Operator:** Will this be delivery or pickup?

**McCarthy:** Depends on the position of the godless sun by which men have come to tell time and therefore by which time has come to tell men of that which has come to pass and may yet come to pass since time is a smoke-darkened nexus of chimes and ticks that only reveals its full allotment after the fall of the final stroke.

**Operator:** Uh ...

**McCarthy:** What time is it?

**Operator:** 10:32.

**McCarthy:** Delivery, then. I dare not venture forth into the nameless night from which nothing save wolves emerge as emissaries of a void beyond reckoning.

**Operator:** OK, great. Can I get your address?

**McCarthy:** I live at the intersection of nihilistic despair and aesthetic idealism.

**Operator:** Is that a house or an apartment?

**McCarthy:** House.

**Operator:** Can I get a name for the order?

**McCarthy:** Cormac.

**Operator:** Kermit?

**McCarthy:** Cormac.

**Operator:** Like the frog?

**McCarthy:** Sure. Like the frog.

**Operator:** Would you like to try our Spicy Garlic Fun Sticks for \$3.99?

**McCarthy:** Negative. Eternally negative.

**Operator:** And how would you like to pay?

**McCarthy:** With my soul and with the souls of all who face the icy blackness of the world in its final turning with the stubborn-stoic hope of a deaf-mute monk who hears God’s silence and responds in kind.

**Operator:** OK, so, we take cash and credit.

**McCarthy:** Credit.

**Operator:** Okay, Kermit. The time is now 10:33. Your order is guaranteed in thirty minutes or it will be free. Thank you for calling Papa Jerry’s.

**McCarthy:** Thank you for being Papa Jerry’s. I salute your courage. — *Written by* Chris Gilmore

### 3 • A Fish Tale

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan

The steelhead said to the rainbow trout, “Let’s you and I go to sea.”

And the rainbow trout agreed. They made their plans, mapped their route and said their goodbyes. The day came.

And the rainbow trout said to the steelhead, “I can’t go. The time isn’t right. I’m not well-fed. I won’t survive. I like it here. I have to clean my house. I have to do my dishes. I shouldn’t have agreed. I’m not going. I’m not going. I’m not going.”

The steelhead went to the sea alone.

The following year, the steelhead returned. He was healthy and strong and swollen with pride, but humbled by experience and hardship. The steelhead was welcomed back heartily. He had long tales, short tales, silly tales and strange tales.

Fish from ponds and streams and rivers and creeks from miles around gathered to hear of his adventures. All but the rainbow trout, who already knew that the steelhead’s stories of the sea would be stupid and boring.

— *Written by* Sarah Mintz

### 4 • The Patron of the Arts

*Performed by* Jordan Moffatt (*Lackey*) and Gavin Williams (*Patron*)

**Patron:** What is this?

**Lackey:** What do you mean?

**Patron:** I mean, I paid you good money to bring me the most important authors of our time, and you brought me ... nineteen monkeys?

**Lackey:** I bought twenty, but there was a fight and ...

**Patron:** Hence the empty work station.

**Lackey:** I’ve got feelers out to a couple of preserves. I’ll find a replacement.

**Patron:** That’s still only twenty. The proverb says “an infinite number of monkeys.”

**Lackey:** Okay, but the number of monkeys in the world is finite and shrinking due to habitat loss.

**Patron:** How many monkeys are there in the world?

**Lackey:** Well, that depends on whether or not you count the humans.

**Patron:** Humans count?

**Lackey:** Scientifically.

**Patron:** Oh. Are you a scientist?

**Lackey:** No, not really.

**Patron:** So how many monkeys?

**Lackey:** Well, there are seven billion humans, give or take. They represent the lion’s share.

**Patron:** And if we exclude the humans?

**Lackey:** A couple of million.

**Patron:** Jesus. Okay. Buy the two million and start a breeding program.

**Lackey:** With respect, the universe is finite. It is physically impossible to accommodate an infinite number of monkeys.

**Patron:** I thought you weren’t a scientist.

**Lackey:** I’m not.

**Patron:** Good, then you can find me an infinite work-space somewhere outside the universe where we can put the monkeys with the typewriters? Typewriters! What are those things the monkeys are using?

**Lackey:** Computers?

**Patron:** Does the proverb mention computers?

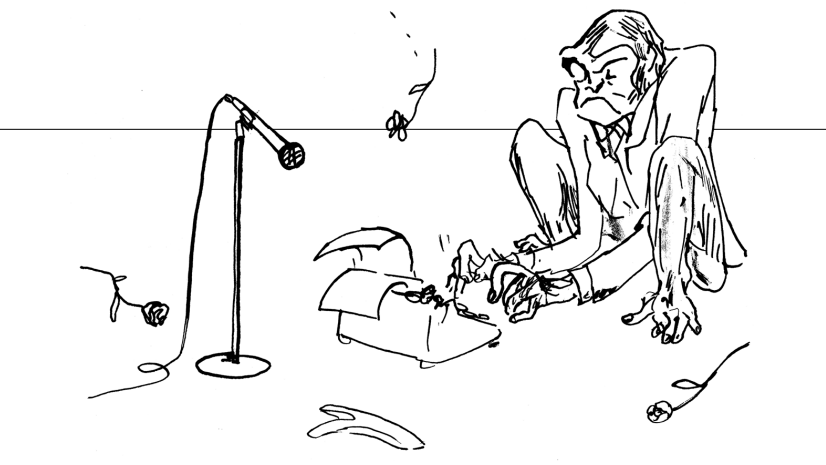
**Lackey:** I don’t think there were computers ... Anyway, the computers are equipped with ChatGPT, which I think is important. Keep in mind the monkeys can’t read.

**Patron:** Any idiot can write with ChatGPT.

**Lackey:** Exactly.

**Patron:** No, it has to be low-tech. Technology saps the life from everything and leaves us with pointless drivel. If I wanted pointless drivel, I’d hire a writer. The monkeys represent our hope for an authentic story that will touch us all, but only if you give them typewriters.

**Lackey:** But look at that one ...



**Patron:** Is he playing *Minecraft*?

**Lackey:** That one there has figured out how to apply for government documents. Oh, and that one there is siphoning funds from you and is transferring them to the one with the passport.

**Patron:** Typewriters. I said *typewriters*. Why is that so fucking hard?

**Lackey:** Well, they’re not exactly making a lot of typewriters these days.

**Patron:** Fix it. Fire these nineteen monkeys that you’ve polluted with your technology, replace them, and put them in front of typewriters.

**Lackey:** I would, but I’m afraid you’re ruined. I work for the monkeys now. They’ve engaged me to find humans to type the next blockbuster. Here’s your computer.

— *Written by* Andrew J. Simpson

### 5 • Jill Val the Science Gal

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan (*Jill Val*) and Jordan Moffatt (*Frank*)

Hi, I’m Jill Val the Science Gal, and today I’m making a human. No, not like that. Do you know what humans are made of? Not sugar and spice and everything nice, nor snips and snails and puppy-dog tails! We’re made of CHNOPS! That’s carbon, hydrogen, nitrogen, oxygen, phosphorus and sulphur. They make up practically 99% of us. We are literally made of stardust. The only difference is the recipe. Whereas we’re 65% oxygen, the universe has only 1% oxygen in it. We need to get the right balance to make a human.

So I’ve got my cookbook, *Jill Val’s Building Blocks of Life, DNA and Winter Stews*, because Frank said it would sell better if I went all domestic ... didn’t you, Frank? That’s Frank back there, my producer ... yep, my producer. Right, so where was I? Okay, I’m just going to mix a little bit of this and a little bit of that and a wee dab of something and a sprinkling of another thing, and voila, *human extraordinaire!*

Let’s try and make the perfect human, shall we? First, I’m going to start with a smidgen of chimpanzee. They share 99.6% of our DNA. Kids, do you know what DNA stands for? DNA actually stands for deoxyribonucleic acid. That’s a molecule made up of two chains of nucleotides that wrap around each other and form a double helix. You can think about it this way: DNA is like a super smart-phone that holds all the genetic instructions that are used in the growth, development, function and reproduction of all known living organisms.

No! ... No! I did not say *orgasms*. Yes, Frank, I did not say *orgasms*. What a joker, what a joker, you! Isn’t he, isn’t he a joker, kids? Let’s, let’s keep going! Team go! Okay, all right. There’s no *i* in *team*. Isn’t that what you said, Frank? Unless you’re spelling *team*. Right? Okay.

Now, there’s more to a human than just DNA and the building blocks of life. There’s sociological and cultural ingredients that we need to add. You can’t raise a baby in a box! What’s the perfect person? Frank, you seem to have a lot to say about the perfect woman, don’t you? You’ve got a lot to say about a lot of things.

So this morning, right before coming on stage, Frank was like, “Oh hey, Val, do you know the story about the woman who jerked off the dolphin? The dolphin was in love with her, so when they were separated the dolphin took its own life. I’m the dolphin and you’re the scientist ... How does a dolphin do that, you ask? That is, if you don’t already know? How does a dolphin stop breathing? Well, a dolphin has to decide to breathe. Now, I’m not sure if a dolphin doesn’t panic like a human would. I guess they don’t. But there’s a lot I don’t know. I do know that we share 99.9% DNA with that woman who jerked off that dolphin.”

Did you know there’s a lot *you* don’t know? Socrates said the only thing you know for sure is that you know nothing. And I bet that you’re thinking, “A woman scientist, whoo-ee, don’t see many of you. Bloody unicorns, you lot are.” According to the history books, there has only ever been one woman worth a nickel for every two hundred, maybe even two thousand genius men. Everyone knows that in primate societies the alpha male is the most important member, so let me just throw a bonobo into the mix; a certain level of aggression never hurt anybody. Everyone knows because everyone has been told that about the alpha male for an eternity. Strength and domination are the most important qualities in all species, right, Frank? What we humans hate is when the female of the species has more of the power. No Hillary Clintons for this recipe.

We weren’t evolved from praying mantises, Val. Let me ask you this, though, what is power? I’m just gonna throw a puppy and a kitten into the mix, so, you know, the perfect human will be cute. And just a dash of lavender so the perfect person smells good. Is it power if I can make you think a thing? How about we don’t talk about it, right, right, Frank? Ignorance is bliss. Keep your politics at home, Val. Just do your science stuff and look good. That’s what people want. I was talking about dolphins, wasn’t I? Suicidal dolphins? Hey, Val, what’s the sexiest animal? Oh Val, you know you could wear a lab coat, but why don’t you try wearing something a little more revealing, or make it a bit shorter? A little lace underneath. Oh hey, Val, *I* can show you how to make the perfect human.

You know what I really want to make? I want to make a spaceship and put you in it, Frank, and send you to the outer rings of hell! Just shoot you out into the universe and watch your head explode. Your eyeballs bulging out of your head. Actually, I’d like to build a tank so I could put you inside. A tank where you would be continuously frozen in that moment, the moment just before your head explodes, because that’s how you make me feel. You make me feel like my head is about to explode and I feel absolutely powerless because I want to do this job. I want to foster a love of science in children. But no. Instead, every day, every fucking day, I come in here and you tell me about animals having sex, and which animal has the biggest dick, and you lean in too close to me so your hand can touch my ass. And my head hurts, and I want to cry, and then I want to hurt you and make you suffer. That’s what I want. That’s really what I want: to make you suffer.

Hey, kids! Um ... thanks for listening. Thanks for listening, have a good day ... and remember, science is fun! — *Written by* Ambika Thompson

### 6 • The Second Amendment, as Originally Written

*Performed by* Scott Simmie

I. Hello and welcome to Second Amendment of Constitution for United States. Is very important you don’t read this in Russian accent. As this is definitely not being written by Russians from future who realized best way to destroy evil United States was go back in time and insert this amendment into your laws forever. I did not mean to write “evil” there. Was accident. Why would I, Benjemin Franclen, call my own country that I love very much “evil”? United States is great place, and only slightly inferior to Russia, the country I am not from and whose crisp spring breeze has never sweetly caressed my cheek. Now, time to list details of this, the amendment that will surely not ravage your country, I mean “our country,” for rest of time.

II. To make U of SA safe, is necessary all citizens have right to own gun. And not just one gun, but as many as person

can fit in closet or hole they dug in yard of trailer park. This right for everyone! Would be ridiculous to take a man’s guns away just because he was batshit crazy, or involved in series of escalating domestic incidents that seemed destined to come to violent end. Furthermore, if too many shootings ever becomes issue, the answer will never be to remove guns from populace. When has a problem ever been solved by eliminating the thing that caused it? Sure, guy in bank line might pull 9mm out of Jockeys and shoot place up. But guy behind him might pull .45 out of Hanes and shoot first guy. Is recipe for healthy democracy! We, Framers of Constitution, anticipate day when there are 300 million people in America and 300 million guns! Imagine how safe from guns we will be on that day when we all have guns! May sound crazy, but trust me, is good idea and not part of rival country’s plot to destroy your nation from within.

III. We have touched on quantity, now is time to talk technology — which is word I believe exists in this time period but am not totally for certain. In future, people may say we Founding Fathers couldn’t envision advances in gun capability. Is nonsense!!! Right now, me and Tommas Jeferssinin are sitting next to each other making discussion of gun ideas. Here is list of possible possibilities off top of our heads: Laser scope. Silencer. Body armor. Bushmaster AR-15 with fiber-optic red-bar front sight. Will any of these things be invented? Who knows? But point is, this amendment should serve as blanket recognition that we foresaw all of them. So go to gun show and buy as much artillery as kiddie-porn enthusiast in BluBlockers will sell you, then keep it with you at ALL times. You’ll want it ready when having bad day — which we all have! Note: I capitalized “ALL” not out of unfamiliarity with English language but to emphasize importance!

IV. Now, is possible many citizens of Mother America will be killed in mass shootings. When these happen, we will all feel unbridled delight — but the occasion. Massacres may occur anywhere. Schools. Churches. DAVE & Buster’s arcade/restaurant hybrids (which I foresee being Ultimate Destination for those who enjoy four-way air hockey and loaded tots). But I implore you, when gunmen use military-grade weapons to slaughter civilians with maximum efficiency, Americans must do sensible thing: blame rap music. Gun is not problem! Gun is good, with many non-violent uses! You could stir noodles with it. Use it to perforate paper to fit in binder. Spin it on dinner table and person it points to gets biggest piece of chicken (or more caviar). So many possibilities! Still, after tragedies people will say law is stupid and not changing it would be literal definition of insanity. Ridiculous!!! This is price of freedom!!! Take it from me, intelligent Patriot who is not vindictive adversary hoping Americans will butcher each other in endless cycle of violence. Besides, if killer didn’t use gun he would have used knife or slingshot or sock full of dominoes and been just as effective.

V. This section is dedicated all to gun safety. Be safe out there.

VI. Now is time for conclusion. Americans are like weeds (in a good way) and part of living in Greatest Country on Earth is knowing anywhere you go someone could be waiting to shoot you in face. Accept it! Life isn’t all rainbows and four-way air hockey. Important thing is you strictly adhere to most radical interpretation of this amendment no matter what. Dig those heels so far in you’re up to your nipples in shit! And when in doubt, take opinion of politicians you deem most likely to use N-word in private. Is good rule of thumbs! Back in Moscow, which I have never been to, we have saying: “Above all, seek truth.” In this case, truth is staring you right in face: anyone who wants to remove this amendment ... is not real American.

— *Written by* Ryan Wolin

### 7 • Eight Words About Nature

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan

If trees could talk they’d probably just scream.

— *Written by* D’Artagnan

## SIDE B

### 8 • The Hunter

*Performed by* Scott Simmie (*Narrator* and *Doctor*), Jordan Moffatt (*Hunter* and *Sam*), Richard den Hengst (*Rabbit* and *Pig*), Gavin Williams (*Meeting Attendee*) and Lindsay Mullan (*Meeting Attendee*)

He crept through the autumnal shadows of ponderosa pine trees spiking a sky clear and blue. Raw, gloveless hands gripped a double-barrelled shotgun. Whiskey be-fuzzed his tongue. Frozen dew enswathing blades of grass cracked without shattering as he slunk past snowberry and chokeberry bushes and beneath the rufous flash of a sparrow hawk.

In the distance a mallard yowled. The world suddenly smelled grassy. At the base of a bedraggled blackjack oak, he removed his cap and wiped a hand across his brow and squatted low to a cluster of golden scat. The droppings glistened wet and new in the dawn light. Rabbit tracks in a crazed line led to a ground hole rimmed with heaps of dirt like an infection around a wound.

The Hunter guzzled from his whiskey flask. He set the cap back on his bald head and sidled downwind of the hole and genuflected on the cold, beating heart of the earth. As his old friend Sam had taught him, the Hunter breathed through his nose and aimed in readiness over the lunar edge of the barrels and waited. He waited.

A brittle wind skirled through the blackjack branches. The whiskey slowed his heartbeat. When the rabbit deigned to surface from its hole, the hunter unloaded both shotgun barrels. His shoulder absorbed the kickback, the forest the boom. The rabbit’s long ears flattened one to each side as the bullets passed overhead — a miss! — but close enough to raise eight separate wisps of smoke from the grey-white fur as if from an extinguished candelabra.

The Hunter bounded across the space between them. Sure not to miss this time, he shoved the shotgun barrels past the rabbit’s jutting teeth with a ferocity that caused the rabbit’s whiskers to stiffen and twang like fiddle strings. Yet after that brief moment of panic, an absolute nonchalance slackened the rabbit’s face. Cruel boredom deadened the rabbit’s eyes. The rabbit eased its mouth away from the end of the shotgun and draped its arm over the barrels and proceeded to munch on a carrot produced from some elliptical dream-world pocket lost to all reason.

The rabbit said, Correct me if I’m wrong, Mac, but you ain’t reloaded yet, has you?

Why? the Hunter asked.

The rabbit said, Well, correct me if I’m doubly wrong, pal, but ain’t you out of bullets then?

The Hunter said, Really?

He turned the shotgun around and peered down the barrels and tested its forked triggers. Like the first boom, the second was absorbed into the forest. When the smoke ebbed, the Hunter’s face was charred black and his eye-brows immolated, and chittering bluebirds encircled his head. His trembling lips sputtered nervous, uncontrollable laughter. His last thought before oblivion was, Oh, that wascally wabbit.

\* \* \*

The Hunter made a big poop poop in his bedpan! The pretty nurse with the golden ringlets of hair clapped her hands together, and so he clapped his hands together too.

Hooray! she said. Woo-hoo! You got it all in there!

Huh huh huh huh huh huh huh, he said.

This was his thirteenth day in the hospital since coming out of the coma. He knew because the pretty nurse would give him a black cherry Jell-O every morning. Plus oatmeal with brown sugar and raisins and a cup of apple juice with a lid on top. He liked the oatmeal with the brown sugar and raisins, and he liked the juice and the sound it made through the straw when he got to the bottom.

He did not like the Jell-O. He placed them on the window sill and when he couldn’t reach high enough, the pretty nurse helped him stack them one on top of the oth-er so that they made a Jell-O wall, slowly blotting out the window, and she said that when the sunlight couldn’t get through anymore, he’d have to up and walk out of there, no questions asked, because there was no sense staying in a room without sunshine. So far there were twelve cups of black cherry Jell-O on the sill, and that’s how he knew he’d been out of the coma for thirteen days, because on the first day he tried the Jell-O and went, Blech.

On that first day a doctor with grey caterpillar eyebrows and half-moon glasses told him he was an absolute miracle of modern medicine. The doctor said, You’ve suffered an

acute intracranial subdural hematoma, an acute intracrani-al epidural hematoma, considerable contusions along the frontal and parietal lobes, all the attendant intracerebral hemorrhaging one would expect, along with an untold number of diffuse axonal injuries, causing your current state of hydrocephalus as well as what I imagine will be considerable impairment of your motor skills and cognitive functioning, but like I said, that you’re even able to blink right now is an absolute miracle of modern medicine.

Am I going to have to wiv wike a wegetable for the west of my wife? the Hunter said.

The doctor peered over the top of his clipboard. Have you always had a lisp? he asked.

What wisp? the Hunter said.

The doctor unclipped his pen and made a note. Behind him, the pretty nurse with the golden ringlets of hair had her hands clasped together beneath her quivering chin, and her eyes shimmered in the light that in those days still came full-bore through the window.

Oh, don’t you worry, she told the Hunter. We’re going to get you as right as rain.

As wight as wain, he said softly.

No one came to visit him, not even his friend Sam, who’d taught him how to hunt, but the nurse was always there. Every three days she washed him with a soft yellow sponge that tickled the insides of his elbows and the backs of his knees. The first person he saw every morning, the last person he saw every night, she rolled him over onto his side so he wouldn’t get bedsores, wiped away the colourless glop he sometimes vomited down the front of his checkered hospital gown.

In the early days, whenever his body palsied with brain-bleed convulsions or whiskey withdrawal or both, she held his hand and hummed snatches of light opera into his ear. The first time he spooned oatmeal into his mouth without spilling any, she kissed the top of his head, and his face turned crimson and his eyes dilated to stars. She had the longest eyelashes he had ever seen. She was the love of his life. She taught him how to play Go Fish again and then checkers again and then chess. He graduated from the bedpan to the toilet, from a walker to a cane. Eventually he could string together enough words to speak in full sen-tences, not at the same high level of diction as before, but that was okay. It had always been an affectation anyway. He couldn’t lose that stupid lisp, though, but apparently that too was okay because the nurse had told him she thought it was cute. His heart thumped visibly in his chest.

On his ninety-seventh day out of the coma, he set a cup of black cherry Jell-O in the highest row, in the last spot available, darkening the window in its entirety, and then he turned and walked out of the room on his own, down the hallway past the beeping machines and applauding hospital staff, to the nurse who was waiting all alone by the elevator, out of her blue garbs now and wearing a pink sundress, too shy to even look at him. He cinched his arms around her waist and dipped her low to the ground. Too low, apparently. Her blond wig fell off. A pair of floppy ears unfurled from her head.

Eh ... What’s up, doc? Oh, you dubbuh-crossing wabbit! he said. You tweachevous misceweant!

When the rabbit lifted her head to kiss him, the Hunter pushed her away with such force that she dropped through the ground, leaving behind only an outline of her body in the floor, and then she dropped through the next floor, the surgical department, and then the next floor, gastroenter-ology, and then the next floor and all the floors after that, obstetrics and oncology and pediatrics (to great cheers) and dialysis, the outline of her splayed body in the floor looking smaller and smaller from the Hunter’s vantage point until finally she dropped through the emergency room into the underground parking lot, whereupon she disappeared in a billowing cloud of dust and debris.

Oh, he thought. What have I done?

\* \* \*

He moved back home to his cabin in the woods. In his absence, a freeloading family of brown mice with yellow sombreros had moved behind his walls and into his cabinets. They were outrageously fast. To hasten their exit from his home, he drove six hours to a gun show and upgraded his double-barrelled shotgun to a top-of-the-line Ruger AR-556 semi-automatic sportsman’s rifle, capable of firing forty-five rounds per minute out of the box, four hundred rounds per minute after he took it home and modified it with a bump stock, following the instructions in a video tutorial he’d found on YouTube.

The mice squeaked as they took off into the woods. Worried they might return, he made plans to build a perimeter wall, not out of Jell-O this time, but with

heavy bricks. But the project turned out to be way more expensive than he’d originally thought, and also he got distracted by other videos he’d found on YouTube: videos on the deep state, stolen elections, the 9/11 hoax, the global warming hoax, the COVID-19 pandemic hoax, cancerous wind turbines, a shadowy cabal of Democratic pedophiles, and a Jewish laser from outer space causing all the California wildfires.

He considered himself fiscally conservative but socially liberal, a libertarian, really, somebody who just wanted the government to mind its own business and leave him alone, and every one of those YouTube videos struck him as patently preposterous. But he had seen things. He knew things. The world was more preposterous, more cartoon-ish than most people dared to imagine.

For instance, a little less than a year after coming home from the hospital, he was driving — at five dollars a gallon! — to the nearest liquor store to pick up another couple of cases of Coors Light when a yellow pencil as big as a telephone pole materialized out of nowhere. Guided by an invisible hand, the pencil erased his truck, the pickup bed, the tires, the mud flaps, the steering column, everything but the seat he was sitting in, which continued to fly down the road at seventy-plus miles per hour. He looked down. There was a sign in his hand. It said UH-OH.

Gravity reasserted itself and he crashed to the asphalt. He tumbled end over end to the mysterious accompani-ment of off-key piano chords until he at last collided with a rock face that flattened him into two-dimensional putty. He knew that giant eraser would be coming after him next. Not just him, but everyone like him. When he could move again, when his body had somehow inflated itself back to full dimensionality, he took off running through the woods back to his cabin.

He didn’t go out much after that. He got a notice in the mail saying it was Rabbit Season, but then right after that another notice flew through the slot saying it was actually Duck Season, then another notice that said Rabbit Season!

Duck Season!

Rabbit Season!

Rabbit Season!

Duck Season!

After throwing the notices in the trash, the Hunter put his head in his hands. How to keep up? How to know what was right, what was wrong?

One night a skunk went racing through his yard, followed by another skunk holding a folded handkerchief and a bottle of chloroform, but then that colossal pencil appeared out of the sky to erase them both. He knew it would come to cancel him next if he took even a single step out of the cabin.

He got his groceries delivered on Sunday, his beer and whiskey on Monday, then his beer and whiskey on Mondays and Fridays both. Worried he was drinking too much, he tried cutting back, delaying his first of the day until sunset, capping his total daily number at four, his weekly number at twenty-five. He kept careful charts. He switched to beer only. Then whiskey only. He took days off and made solemn vows in front of the bathroom mirror. Because he couldn’t stop, he felt weak and pathetic, the shame leading to more drinking which led to more shame which led to more drinking. The liquor store’s delivery boys started dropping off boxes in front of the cabin on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays.

His cheeks sprouted a patchy beard. He woke up with vomit on his chest, as he had in those first few days out of the coma, but with no one to clean it up for him. After months of blackout sleep, he dreamt of the rabbit sitting cross-legged in some desert, wearing a turban and playing a snake charmer’s flute, the melody of which seemed to entice an electric razor on a long cord to go chasing after ...

He sat up gasping in bed. He tried turning on the night-stand lamp, but its bulb had burned out. With the sheets twisted around his sweaty legs, he reached over the edge of the mattress for the bottle on the floor.

Before untwisting the cap, he turned to look over his right shoulder at me and said, Stop. Pwease. No more.

I’d forgotten about that, Listener. How many shorts had I seen? How many times had he turned to look at me through the television screen as I sat cross-legged on the brown-and-red carpet? He’d hold a finger in front of his lips and tell me to shush, to be quiet because he was hunt-ing wabbits. But somehow I’d forgotten that he could do that, break the fourth wall, until he did it to me again, all these years later. Not to tell me to shush this time, but to plead with me to stop torturing him. He had the bottle in his hand. He was bald, as I am bald, and patchily bearded, as I am as well, and he had an expression on his face I’m

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Scott Simmie, Gavin Williams

## ART

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## PRODUCTION

RECORDED AT • Met Radio, Toronto

MANUFACTURED BY • Microforum Vinyl

Record Pressing, Toronto



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The Feathertale Review (ISSN 1911-2734) is produced by *Feathertale*, PO Box 291, Ottawa, Ontario, K4M 1A3, Canada.

*Publisher’s mail agreement:* 4236539

*The text on these record sleeves is set in Laurentian. Designed in 2001 by Canada’s foremost typographer, Rod McDonald, it was the first typeface ever commissioned by a Canadian magazine. Created for Maclean’s, it is inspired by the work of France’s Claude Garamond (ca. 1490–1561) and England’s William Caslon (1693–1766).*

*Feathertale acknowledges the financial support of the Ontario Arts Council and the Canada Council for the Arts for helping to make this issue possible.*



reluctant to describe because it is too familiar to me.

The phone rang. In the middle of the night, but so what? I wish I had thought of making it ring sooner.

The Hunter set the bottle down and picked up the phone, and on the other line it was his old friend Sam from Yosemite. The cantankerous gunslinger who’d first taught him how to shoot! The roughest, toughest, he-man-stuffest *hombre* that’s ever crossed the Rio Gran-day — and he ain’t no namby-pamby!

Or at least the voice on the other line *sounded* like Sam’s. The Hunter couldn’t be sure, not after all he’d been through. The alleged Sam claimed he was in the vicinity and asked if he could swing by.

The Hunter waited for him inside the cabin, peeking through the window blinds, until a fella who really did look like Sam came trotting up to the front door with his spurs clanking. He had the same cowboy hat the Hunter remembered him wearing, his moustache as long and bushy as ever, though speckled now with grey. A pair of six-shooters dangled from belt holsters. He banged his fist against the door.

From the other side of the blinds, the Hunter told him to remove his cowboy hat.

Cut it out and open this darn door, you lily-livered galoot!

In a voice cracking with neglect, the Hunter cried, Wemove that ten-gawwon hat or welse!

Puffs of steam whistled out of Sam’s ears. He ripped off his cowboy hat, revealing a bald head fringed with red, but no rabbit ears, and so the Hunter opened the door.

Great horny-toadies! Sam said as he strode into the cabin. This dump smells like a doggone distillery!

The Hunter levitated a couple of inches off the floor, his feet kicking out beneath him with joy. It was really him! After all this time! His oldest and dearest friend! Some rumour or another had it that Sam had been committed to a psych ward for alcoholic hallucinations or incarcerated in a Yosemite workhouse following his fifth DUI or possibly both or worse, but he must’ve escaped or convinced the powers that be to let him out or something else entirely, not that it really mattered — he was here!

The Hunter raced into the kitchen to fetch a couple of glasses. He’d been so lonely, hadn’t even realized how lonely he’d been. It was as if some sort of invisible layer, some sort of transparent celluloid sheet had him separated from the rest of the world and everyone in it, but no longer. He and Sam would have a couple drinks, reminisce about old times and recapture the spirit of other days. Everything would be great again. They’d take their guns out onto God’s green earth and shoot down into every rabbit hole they found, though probably not tonight. Probably tomorrow.

The Hunter came out of the kitchen with two relatively clean glasses and a plastic bottle of Black Velvet Canadian whisky. Good old Sam was already sitting at the wooden table, his hands folded in front of him.

Huh huh huh huh huh huh, the Hunter giggled. Would you wike to do the honour of untwisting the bottle cap?

It turned out, however, that Sam did not want to do the honour of untwisting the bottle cap. It turned out he was on the wagon. The roughest, toughest, he-man-stuffest *hombre* that’s ever crossed the Rio Gran-day was sober.

Huh, the Hunter said.

\* \* \*

At the meeting Sam drove him to, the Hunter sat in a surprisingly comfortable leather chair next to a loudly thrumming air conditioner.

The room was filled with people, or at least they seemed like people — he couldn’t be sure they weren’t sitting on cottony tails or hiding rabbit ears under their hats. But one after the other they told stories that somehow were also his story, about anxiety and heartbreak and isolation and shame, about tongues befuzzed with whiskey, hospital visits, car accidents, and even the feeling that there was some sort of transparent celluloid sheet separating them from the rest of the world, not in so many words exactly, but in spirit. There was plenty of hope in their stories too. And jokes! So many things that shouldn’t have been funny, but weirdly were!

When it was his turn to speak, he opened his mouth and told them all who he was. They said hello. He was nervous, he was confused, he didn’t quite know how to feel or what to say. When he finished his story, which somehow was also their story, they all thanked him.

At the end of the hour, a sweet-tempered, pink-faced stutterer sitting at the front of the room said, That’s all, folks. Somebody else said, Keep coming back.

— *Written by* Matt Burgess

## SIDE C

### 9 • There Was a Knock

*Performed by* Gavin Williams

There was a knock at the door. I opened it. I saw a person. I still heard the knocking. It came from inside the person. I opened the person. There was a heart. I pressed my ear against it and heard knocking within. I opened the heart. I saw a door. Another door. And another. It was like a village of tiny doors living inside the heart. Please don't tell anyone we're here, one of the doors said. We have nowhere else to go.

— *Written by* Jason Heroux

### 10 • An Observation on a French Dessert

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan

Crème brûlée wouldn't be so expensive if they just called it burnt cream. — *Written by* D'Artagnan

### 11 • The Enlightened Man Podcast

*Performed by* Gavin Williams (*Dr. Tiberius Testosterone [MD, PhD, OB/GYN, neuroscientist to the stars]*),Jordan Moffatt (*Jax Muskol [Tiberius's personal trainer, life coach, stylist and vitamin dealer]*) and Lindsay Mullan (*Dr. Stacey Gilbert [psychologist]*)

**Dr. Tiberius Testosterone:** Welcome to *The Enlightened Man Podcast*, the show where we help men navigate a chaotic world of feelings and optimize those feelings into muscle mass and productivity. I'm your host, Dr. Tiberius Testestone. We're here to help you get jacked in your mind, body and soul.

If you're listening, you're a man, like me. But you're a better man than other men. I'm not Andrew Tate — I'm a doctor and I care. You're not a mansplainer — you're a *facts*plainer. Instead of toxic masculinity, you have *nutritious* masculinity, like a juice cleanse. You don't snort coke at the club — you crush green smoothies made of the organically farmed leaves of the *coca* plant, which, as long-time listeners know, is *cocaina*'s all-natural cousin.

In other words, you use the latest facts and science to activate your XY chromosomes' potential for epigenetically hacking your wellness, BMI, IQ and romantic success — in a peer-reviewed way.

**Jax Muskol:** Hey, everyone. I'm Jax and I'm co-hosting here with the man himself, Dr. Tiberius “Testy” Testestone, MD, PhD, OB/GYN and neuroscientist to the stars.

**Testestone:** Thanks, Jax — folks, my co-host, Jax Muskol, my own personal trainer, stylist, life coach and completely legal, uh, vitamin supplier — but never call me Testy on air again. We do *not* joke on *The Enlightened Man*, Jax. Joking burns a mere five calories per minute, while explaining burns eighty and wild speculation burns ninety-eight. More importantly, there is *nothing* funny about science-adjacent human optimization and excellence.

**Muskol:** Sorry, bro. You're right, it's not funny. I'm so pumped for today's episode I could barely finish my keto vegan protein shake. Prepare to *optimize*.

**Testestone:** We've got a special show for you today. But first, I'm gonna take a big gulp of HydroJacked — aaaaah! — the most scientifically based male hydration vehicle known to history. It doesn't just have electrolytes — it has vitamins, minerals, ginseng, caffeine, adaptogens, faptogens, maca, chaga, GABA, guarana, Aruba, Jamaica, ooh I wanna take ya. Now in new goji berry cherry flavour! I always start my day with a smoothie made with HydroJacked, Soylent protein powder and one-third of a banana, and it makes me feel whatever the opposite of existential despair is.

This episode we're going to make history by addressing every single topic that's important to Enlightened Bros everywhere — in just five minutes. So, if this is your first time listening to the show, prepare to be *enlightened* to the *extreme*.

Let's begin by jumping right into the topic that's on all our minds right now: yes, I'm talking about *low sperm quality*. Yes, I said it. I'm not afraid to tackle the difficult issues that threaten manliness around the world.

**Muskol:** Sub-fertile humans, listen up!  
**Testestone:** This is truly an epidemic. The mainstream media needs to catch up. Sperm quality is nosediving. Impregnation rates are falling. And it gets worse. Here's a shocking graph correlating America's falling sperm count with IQ. Here's another one showing the link between sperm motility, obesity and credit card debt. I'm concerned.

Now, it's common knowledge that when it comes to testicles, heat is your worst enemy. Regular listeners know I'm a regular sauna user every morning, after my HIIT workout but before I enter my hyperbaric chamber. You may not know that I never sauna without a discreet pocket into my boxers for this ice pack. It keeps my genetic material cool while I sweat out the toxins and bad dreams. And now I've created a gonad cooler ready to go on the market. Our next fifty Patreon donors will receive a brand-new Dr. Testestone's Chilly Sperm Saver — with my face on it — to tuck into their shorts during their next sauna session or at the beach.

**Muskol:** I can't wait to bust mine out at the gym. Okay, the next logical topic is beard grooming.

**Testestone:** Love my beard!

**Muskol:** I fucking love your beard. My beard is dope too.

**Testestone:** My beard is so full and lush.

**Muskol:** I condition my beard every day with mink gland excretions, coconut oil and Himalayan pink salt.

**Testestone:** Next: feelings. As you know, we're living in a time when there are more feelings happening to us, aren't there, Jax?

**Muskol:** My clients tell me they're having feelings sometimes every day.

**Testestone:** This is serious. As a neuroscientist, I know that feelings come from a specific lobe in the brain. This is also where bad thoughts and carb cravings come from. I've experimented at Carnegie Mellon with laser treatments on that part of my brain, which usually helps me go right to sleep.

**Muskol:** Dude, lasers! Okay, moving on. Mindfulness: it's a must. I do it every morning, burn palo santo, say my affirmations.

**Testestone:** I sit in meditation in full lotus position for an hour every morning after lifting weights, followed by an hour of yoga nidra. I aggressively calm my thoughts without mercy. I only move to breathe. Then I'm calm enough to apply my skin-care products.

**Muskol:** I have insane focus when I play *Call of Duty*.

**Testestone:** Now, on to a fresh topic called ... here, let me read this ... it says *sexual consent*. Oh yeah. Consent! Consent is great. So important. Thank you, ladies, for teaching us this word. Stacey — this is our special guest, Dr. Stacey Gilbert, a woman psychologist — she knows me. I always get consent in all my situationships. Always. Men — you gotta get consent. And let me say, I don't just get consent in a limited way, right? My time is valuable, so I get macro-consent. It's like meal prepping. I ask all the women in my DMs for pre-consent at the beginning of the calendar month and get it until the next month rolls around. Well, of course I mean my AI assistant gets their consent and puts it into my Google calendar — and hopefully doesn't let any of the other ladies know about each other like last time, right?

**Dr. Stacey Gilbert:** Can I just break in here —

**Testestone:** I respect women. I myself have a mother, as you know, and I feel something of a connection to women. And I'm a gynecologist, so I talk to women at work. Jax, you have a mother, right?

**Muskol:** Jax was not of woman born.

**Testestone:** Uh ... okay. Well, anyway, yeah, consent is sexy.

**Gilbert:** It *is* sexy! But it's important to stress that you have to get consent every time you —

**Muskol:** Shit, we're running out of time. We only have time for one more thing. Boosting T? Ketamine therapy? Adaptogenic mushrooms for longevity? Microdosing psilocybin? Ethical polyamory?

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Sarah Barmak** is a Toronto-based author working

on a book about consent and sexual culture tentatively titled *Hard Yes*. She lives with her partner and two children. **Greg Boose** is a novelist living in Santa Monica, California, with his two daughters.

**Matt Burgess** is the author of the novels *Dogfight*, *A Love Story* and *Uncle Janice*. He teaches at Macalester College with Canadian poet Michael Prior. **Matt Cardinal** is a poet and professional golfer in Vancouver. He has a creative writing BFA from the University of British Columbia. **Katie Daubs** lives in Toronto and works at the *Toronto Star*. **André de Biasi** is a conservatory-traumatized pianist in Toronto. **Richard den Hengst** is a globe-trotting Dutchman currently settled between Georgian Bay and the Blue Mountains. **Chris Gilmore** is the author of *Nobodies*. **Kevin Hartford** is a writer, filmmaker and ginger from Halifax. **Jason Heroux** was the poet laureate for Kingston, Ontario, from 2019 to 2022. He is the author of *Like a Trophy from the Sun*. **Mia Johnson** is a first-time audio engineer who aced it. **Richard Kelly Kemick** is the tallest person in Vancouver. **Jenn Lawrence** is *Feathertale*'s long-time design director.

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**Gilbert:** Wait, wait, stop. Just, just stop. Please. Please stop. You don't have to do this, guys. You don't have to *do* all this. You're *fine*. You're fine the way you are — mostly. You're all okay, okay? It's fine. Just be kind. Eat vegetables, sure. Exercise. Yes, great. But it doesn't really matter. When you talk to women, ask them questions and then just listen. Volunteer for something, maybe, or take care of yourself, sure. Great. Just not too much. You're all going to die anyway.

**Muskol:** That was a joke.

**Testestone:** Ha. Yes. I sometimes enjoy jokes.

**Gilbert:** Uh —

**Testestone:** *Thank* you, Stacey!

**Muskol:** That's why we love having Stacey on the show.

She's funny.

**Gilbert:** *I am?*

**Muskol:** So funny!

**Testestone:** We're done here.

**Gilbert:** I'll show myself out.

— *Written by* Sarah Barmak

### 12 • A Momentary Ponderance on One's Mortality

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan

When I die, I wish to go out as I've lived: smeared in peanut butter. — *Written by* Katie Daubs

### 13 • Things I Saw from My Window on a Tuesday in Late Autumn

*Performed by* Richard den Hengst

A fox
A rabbit
The remains of a rabbit
A crow
A fox
The remains of a crow
A plastic bag drifting on the breeze
A plastic bag caught on a fence post
The moon
The sun
The moon and the sun at the same time
A raccoon
A fox
An urban turf war
A fox hiding under a shrub
A raccoon biding its time atop a shed
Darkness
A man eating yogurt out of a plastic tub
My reflection
— <span> </span> <i>Written by</i> Brett Popplewell

### 14 • A Partial Taxonomy of Google Slides Animals, Narrated by Sir David Attenborough

*Performed by* Gavin Williams

**Anonymous Leopard:** Similar to the domestic house cat, the Anonymous Leopard uses its feces to mark territory it “owns,” covering its area of the Google Slides ecosystem in shit. By the time the other animals are alerted to its presence by the stench of the excrement spread across multiple pages, the silent and speedy Anonymous Leopard is long gone.

**Anonymous Bat:** A nocturnal animal, the Anonymous Bat misses out on the action during the daytime. While other anonymous animals work hard during the daylight hours, the Anonymous Bat is nowhere to be found. When the sun finally sets and the other anonymous animals ready themselves for sleep, the Anonymous Bat goes to work, feeding on the ripe fruits of its labour. With the sun now rising, the other anonymous animals wake to see much of what they had accomplished during the previous day has been chewed up and spoiled.

**Anonymous Elephant:** Known for having a great memory, the Anonymous Elephant remembers all. While this

is sometimes a welcome addition to the anonymous animal kingdom, its flawless memory is a testament to the evolutionary need of the ability to forget as a precursor for sanity. The Anonymous Elephant remembers every bit of minutiae from every meeting of the anonymous animal kingdom, and stomps around the deck trumpeting it back, driving other animals mad.

**Anonymous Hyena:** A natural pack animal, a lone Anonymous Hyena is a shy animal, rarely being so bold as to make any changes or leave comments, instead sticking to scavenging small tweaks and other leftover bits of work. But when joined by other Anonymous Hyenas, it grows emboldened to attack other animals higher up on the food chain, setting off a feeding frenzy of edits and comments.

**Anonymous Cormorant:** A small, fussy little bird, the Anonymous Cormorant is a mostly harmless presence in the Google Slides ecosystem, lacking the size needed to make any real impact. Known for its tendency to nest year-round, it makes the slide deck its home, constantly making small additions and endlessly moving little bits around, none of which have any real impact other than to make itself more comfortable.

**Anonymous Crow:** Despite being one of the more intelligent birds, the Anonymous Crow cannot help but be obsessed with shiny objects and other flashy things. Often appearing with the intent of providing a high-level bird's-eye view, the Anonymous Crow instead rarely makes it past the first view pages, fixating exclusively on the animated GIFs and bright colours of the title slide, squawking its opinions for all to hear.

**Anonymous Python:** A silent predator feared by many, the Anonymous Python lurks silently, searching for an animal grazing where it shouldn't be. Known for biting off more than it can chew, the Anonymous Python often expends all of its energy devouring a single large animal, leaving it dormant on a random page while it slowly digests.

**Anonymous Grizzly:** The top of the food chain and an apex predator, the Anonymous Grizzly is at the same time fat, slow, tired and looking for food more than a fight. For the most part, it is content to take a slow walk through the deck, eating snacks and taking a few rest breaks along the way, until eventually finding a quiet corner to hibernate for the next few months.

**Anonymous Skunk:** While relatively low on the food chain, the Anonymous Skunk is a vain rodent with a high opinion of itself, requiring other animals to afford it a wide berth to strut through the deck at its own pace. When unbothered, its impact is minimal, but in the event it is backed into a corner or thrown under a bus, it will cause a stink that will linger for weeks.

**Anonymous Beaver:** One of Mother Nature's most industrious creatures, the Anonymous Beaver is nothing if not hard-working. Unfortunately, its effort is often misplaced. The Anonymous Beaver sees every breezy, easy-flowing stream of words as a threat, and as a result works diligently through the night to clog things up with walls of nearly incomprehensible wooden text. When every sentence ceases to flow, the beaver rests. — *Written by* Jacob Pacey

### 15 • A Subtle Comment About Relationships

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan (*Narrator*) and Richard den Hengst (*Parrot*)

Tricking a parrot into saying “I love you” won't make you any less lonely. — *Written by* D'Artagnan

### SOUND EFFECTS

ALL SOUND EFFECTS ARE RIGHTS-FREE OR LICENSED FROM THE NOTED SOURCES: **TRACK 1:** “RADIO TUNING” SOUND EFFECT COURTESY OF NBEATSOFFICIAL; “MET 30 THEME” COURTESY OF CJTM MET RADIO; ALL OTHER SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACKS 2, 3, 4, 7, 9, 10, 13, 16, 18, 19, 21, 23:** ALL SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACK 5:** “SCIENCE THEME” COURTESY OF DELPHINE WINTON; ALL OTHER SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACK 6:** “RUSSIAN NATIONAL ANTHEM” COURTESY OF WIKIMEDIA COMMONS; ALL OTHER SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACK 8:** “CARTOON RUNNING” SOUND EFFECT COURTESY OF KYDA NO COPYRIGHT SOUND EFFECTS; “DUN-DUN-DUUN” SOUND EFFECT COURTESY OF DIVENORTH (FREESOUND); “SNAKE CHARMER FLUTE MUSIC” COURTESY OF MUSIC AND SOUND ZONE; “THAT’S ALL, FOLKS” PIANO JINGLE COURTESY OF ANDRÉ DE BIASI; ALL OTHER SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACK 11:** “AIRHORN” COURTESY OF CMUDD14 (FREESOUND); “DJ AIRHORN” COURTESY OF PFRANZEN (FREESOUND); “MIC DROP” COURTESY OF ECHOCINEMATICS.COM; ALL OTHER SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACK 14:** “SKUNK” SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF BBC SOUND EFFECTS ARCHIVE; ALL OTHER SOUND EFFECTS COURTESY OF AUDIOHERO • **TRACK 22:** “THE ANGEL” BACKGROUND MUSIC COURTESY OF DELPHINE WINTON

## SIDE D

### 16 • An Unkindness

*Performed by* Scott Simmie

Scott Simmie

Off to hear the poet’s reading, at some bookstore slowly bleeding, far beyond the suburbs of geography and honest want. Have to take a train, two buses; I oft wonder what the fuss is, if we actually really like this, like this night of word and flaunt. Train was late, the buses early, so I flagged a taxi flaunt; meter ticking like a taunt.

From the rear-view, silhouetting, was the pine tree, cliché scenting. Rain had made the pleather seat more wetter than baptismal font. “Where you going?” he asked with deference. “To hell,” quoth i; he knew the reference.

Thus, he drove with temperance, temperance like the ferryman, nonchalant — while he floats the damned, despite their pleas, he doesn’t get chalang. Roadkill’s freedom seemed a taunt.

Scott Simmie

Highway signs soon sped past blurry: Port Coquitlam, New West, Surrey. Past the outer burbs, where Moxies be the solo restaurant. By its aura, I did know it, this bookstore still sold Farley Mowat. Clumped outside there stood some poets, poeting all grandiante, Ostantious as when Lady Byng (who was my great-grandaunt), brainstormed World War One’s détente.

Like a horse who yearns to be clip-clopping to the gluey factory, Death seemed painless, yes? Not cold but cool as autumn in Vermont. But unlike the maples of Colchester, my heart did dim and fester. Not like in Montpelier and Manchester and small Piedmont. Yes, I may concede perhaps I Googled “cities in Vermont.” Genius becomes tired when taut.

Scott Simmie

Soon, I knew, I would be hating, all this literary masturbating. Metaphors quick-mixed like frogs, with themes as empty as bouffants. Took a seat in chair unfolded. The impotent and the cuckolded closed me in with eyes that bolded, told of fearsome, winsome fonts, spoke nightmarish tales of Comic Sans and Baskerville Old font. Times New Roman was a taunt.

Scott Simmie

First: Acknowledgement of land (pronounced with names not learned beforehand). Second comes the host’s announcement, said with visage drawn with gaunt, hunger in the eyes’ wet pleading, trembling hand, hairline receding. Voice as cracked as sidewalk weeding: “We have books for sale if you want. Or you know of someone who — someday, somehow, somehaps — may want.” No one never, ever wants.

Scott Simmie

Now the poet doth approacheth, scurries forth like cockroacheth through the aisle, the live-long way from down the seat where he’d sat dormant, where we’d prayed that he had died, departed like a meal now sharted; ’Twas a shameful prayer that smarted, smarter than Lou St. Laurent, tiny twelfth prime minister, whom separatists did call “Le Runt” (“Federalist” once was a taunt).

Scott Simmie

At the front, his book now open; for more COVID, we are hoping. Hark, his greeting speaks as sweetly vile as Axe deodorant. “I hope,” I sigh, “a stroke shall find you — not of t’ genius kind now, mind you.” But, I was confined to, was resigned to, was resigned to a fate so full of want: want of deafness, want of blindness, too, just like a cursed *enfant*, whom his mother does not want.

Scott Simmie

’Cause within that state of being, the state would take o’er my foreseeing. I would live off grants and other monies of the public vault! Ottawa would send e-transfers, which I’d spend on mid-range liquors, Writing poems ’bout nature, ’bout nocturnal birds that spook and haunt. And, when that gets old, I’d change the verbs to “hoot and saunt”; Maybe also, “toot and taunt.”

Scott Simmie

I was once a babe, a changeling, daydreams of Nobels all dangling like a mobile up above, with hopes to be a commandant of Canadian literati, trophies and awards aplenty. On Jian’s Q, oh, I’d get haughty, hot under the ruff, so vaunt, like ol’ Billy Bobby Thornton, cinema and film savant, fifty-year-old debutante.

Scott Simmie

Swing a dick on air, on radio, gallivant around Toronto; Lunch beneath the SkyDome, and Sephora on Spadina’s but a jaunt. “Good as New York!” you hear while chattin’ to those who’ve never seen Manhattan. Then, a train to Paris, rattling, rattling through the outer monts, (note: by “Paris” I do mean to Montreal, to Outremont) feign we’re places that we’re not.

Scott Simmie

But, no, no: this life’s my burden. Now, the poet starts his wordin’. First line’s fine; the second, too. The language strikes, it’s garde-avant. He’s — my God, I’m such a sucker — better than me ... *motherfucker*. Effortless with form and structure; stanzas tasty as croissants. Similes as fresh and sexy, sultry-shaped as a croissant, One that’s really, really hot.

Scott Simmie

I don’t think I’ve been so angry, worse than when I’s stuck in Langley. He’s as stately and as smug as all the staff at Banff’s Fairmont who flat-out refused me entrance. “Sir,” they said, “no shirt, no service.” Hear him now, I am enhanced, as hanced as large as an elefant (which is an archaic spelling, as to mean: an elephant), but I’m smaller than an ant.

Scott Simmie

Art is better when done honest, when what’s given is what’s promised; when the bard comes clean, confesses true to you, their confidant. So, I’m now admitting: I clap louder when the poet’s shitty. When the writing is unwitting, writers welcome spurns and taunts. Awful authors let their enemies collude in cruel ententes.

’Tis the best : I want, I want.

— *Written by* Richard Kelly Kemick

### 17 • About the Rest of the Pot Roast

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan

Lindsay Mullan

I thought you didn’t want It so I ate It. — *Written by* Kevin O’Cuinn

### 18 • The Interview

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan (*Betsy* and *Jennifer*) and Jordan Moffatt (*Seth*)

Lindsay Mullan

**Betsy:** Okay, so first of all, thank you so, so, so, so, so much for agreeing to do this interview with me. I’m pretty nervous, so please be gentle. And I know you have a really busy schedule because you’re such a huge celebrity and everything, so thanks again for meeting me today.

**Seth:** Hey, no problem at all. Let’s just have a quick bite and a casual little chat. Nothing too scary.

**Betsy:** Nothing too scary, thank you. That’s a relief. But I have to say that ... honestly? You’re one of my favourite actors of all time.

**Seth:** Aw, thank you. Thank you very much. That’s very kind of you.

**Betsy:** But I’m saying like of *alllll* time.

**Seth:** Right, thank you. Okay.

**Betsy:** I just can’t believe I’m sitting here across the table from you right now. It’s just absolutely surreal. It’s like my vision board just ... came to life! After all that time staring at it taped to the back of my closet and praying and praying and praying, it finally came to life. I mean, here we are! Together. Finally together.

**Seth:** Oh shit. So, okay then. Let’s make this quick because I just realized I have to be back on set really soon. Like, I have to leave in about five minutes. You have a couple of questions for your website about the new movie?

**Betsy:** I do! Okay, first of all, how did you know you wanted to be an actor in this movie? I mean, did you always want to star in a shark-attack movie, one where the shark is so smart that it can actually talk to humans?

**Seth:** Oh, I guess I just thought it would be a fun thing to do, you know? I knew some of the people who were putting it together, the writer and a couple of the producers, and sometimes you just want to hang out with your friends for a couple months and take a break from all the serious stuff and do something like a shark-attack movie.

**Betsy:** If you were bitten by a real shark, I think I would just die. Like, for real.

**Seth:** (*He laughs uncomfortably.*)

**Betsy:** No I would, I would, I would —

**Seth:** We don’t want that, we don’t want that.

**Betsy:** I would kill myself.

**Seth:** We don’t want that.

**Betsy:** Okay, so if you were a shark who could actually talk, what do you think you would say to humans? And what would you say to me, specifically? What would you say to me if I was coming down the stairs for our date wearing a really amazing ball gown? And remember that my dad is standing there.

**Seth:** I’m confused. Are we ... going to prom?

**Betsy:** Sure. Why not?

**Seth:** Um, I don’t really get where you’re going with this —

**Betsy:** And remember, you’re a shark. Either a great white or a hammerhead, your pick. And this is, let’s say, our fifth date total. So, we’ve done some below-the-belt stuff, you know.

**Seth:** Um ...

**Betsy:** What would you say to me? As a shark?

**Seth:** Look, this is getting a bit ... ah, shit, look at the time. I’m about to be late for my thing, so I really need to get going. But thank you for your time and good luck on your story.

**Betsy:** Wait, wait, wait, wait.

**Seth:** It was very nice to meet you. Take care.

**Betsy:** Please, just take five more minutes, please — oh, shoot. My bag.

**Seth:** Here, let me help you with that. Is that ... oh my God. And here I thought I was the only one who read *Winter Sandals Magazine*.

**Betsy:** Oh, yeah. I mean, I —

**Seth:** Did you read the July issue this year? Oh my God, it was so good. The article on the flip-flops lined with rabbit fur was genius. I mean, my whole yearly subscription was worth it just for that piece alone. I went out and bought six pairs that very night. Did you read it?

**Betsy:** Actually, I wrote that article.

**Seth:** Wait. What?

**Betsy:** Yeah, I wrote that article about the rabbit-fur-lined flip-flops. I actually had to travel all the way to —

**Seth:** Are you telling me that you’re Betsy ... Lincoln? You’re *the* Betsy Lincoln, senior editor of *Winter Sandals Magazine*?

**Betsy:** Yeah. ... Oh my gosh, I didn’t think you, of all people, would know what *Winter* — okay, maybe you could just stop screaming a bit. ... Oof, ouch, that’s a really tight hug. I have had a bad back for a while, so if you could just —

**Seth:** I can’t believe this is happening. I can’t believe I’m hugging Betsy freakin’ Lincoln. I can’t believe I’m touching you right now.

**Betsy:** Uh, yeah. My back hurts, though, so could you just —

**Seth:** Oh, oh, oh! And you wrote that other story a couple months ago, in the October issue, about the Birkenstock Arizona shearling slides

and how disappointed you were in them. They gave you “Birken-shock.” That’s what you wrote — “Birken-shock” — which I thought was the funniest, wittiest, *best* thing I have ever read in my life. It actually made me a little ... horny.

**Betsy:** That’s ... nice to hear ... I think?

**Seth:** Do you live around here? Do you want to have a drink back at your place?

**Betsy:** Don’t you have to get to your movie shoot? Aren’t you going to be late?

**Seth:** “Hello, gorgeous. Are those rabbit-fur-lined flip-flops you’re wearing? You look *amazing* up there in them.”

**Betsy:** What?

**Seth:** That’s what I would say to you if you were coming down the stairs for our prom date with your dad standing there. I would say, “Are those rabbit-fur-lined flip-flops you’re wearing? You look *amazing* up there in them.” And then I’d bare my gums at you like I was a great white shark. That’s what kind of shark I’d be, a great white. Chomp-chomp-chomp. And you’d still be Betsy Lincoln, the best winter sandal journalist in the world, the hands-down sexiest woman alive.

**Betsy:** Whoa. Okay, look, this is getting a bit weird. I should probably get going.

**Jennifer:** Hello, y’all, my name is Jennifer and I’ll be your server today. Can I get either of you something to drink? Maybe an appetizer?

**Betsy:** No, thanks. I’ve got to get going. We both do, actually. Uh, sorry.

**Seth:** Really? No. Are you sure?

**Betsy:** Yeah.

**Jennifer:** You sure you don’t have time for something small like the jalapeno poppers? They’re *sooo* good here.

**Seth:** You know, I’ve actually heard that. Where did I read that?

**Betsy:** Yeah, I feel like I read that too. The jalapeno poppers “pop in your mouth —”

**Seth:** “— not in your hands.”

**Betsy:** Yeah! That was so good!

**Jennifer:** Oh, you liked that? I wrote that myself on the sidewalk sandwich board. Some of the other servers thought it was stupid but I actually thought it was — oh my gosh, okay. You’re both hugging me for some reason.

**Seth:** You are literally one of the best writers I’ve ever met.

**Jennifer:** Wow, oh, we’re hugging. Oh my. A bit tight.

**Betsy:** Would you take me to prom? You don’t even have to be a shark.

**Jennifer:** Be a what? You’re both ...

**Seth:** What kind of magazines do you read?

**Betsy:** Would you wear a pair of furry flip-flops if I gave you some? And nothing else?

**Jennifer:** Oh, okay. Do you guys want ... all right.

**Seth:** Do you want to be in my talking-shark movie?

**Jennifer:** I can’t breathe ...

**Seth:** We’ll take three orders of your finest jalapeno poppers, please.

And we expect you to join us, *Ms. Tolstoy*.

**Jennifer:** I’ll be right back with those. Or someone will be. Like my manager. Or the police.

**Betsy:** It’s like my vision board just came to life all over again. What a day.

**Seth:** Chomp-chomp-chomp. — *Written by* Greg Boose

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She’s so smart, she could be a lawyer.

I read somewhere that Shania means “on my way”

so where are you going? Can I go with you?

I’d never ask you to choose between country and pop

because I hate them both, but don’t stop.

You make genres bearable like ketchup

does with potato products. I’m sorry about your ex and your best friend and how they ruined your life.

I would never do that to you unless your best friend was the 1999 version of you but even then I’d feel bad about it.

“Come On Over” is my favourite song

to ride my bike up hills to.

“Any Man of Mine”

is a close second.

When I was a little kid I’d dance to your songs

with underwear on my head.

I do that less often lately

but with no less passion

just bigger underwear.

— *Written by* Matt Cardinal

Matt Cardinal

Matt Cardinal

### 21 • A Brief Moment of Self-Reflection

*Performed by* Lindsay Mullan

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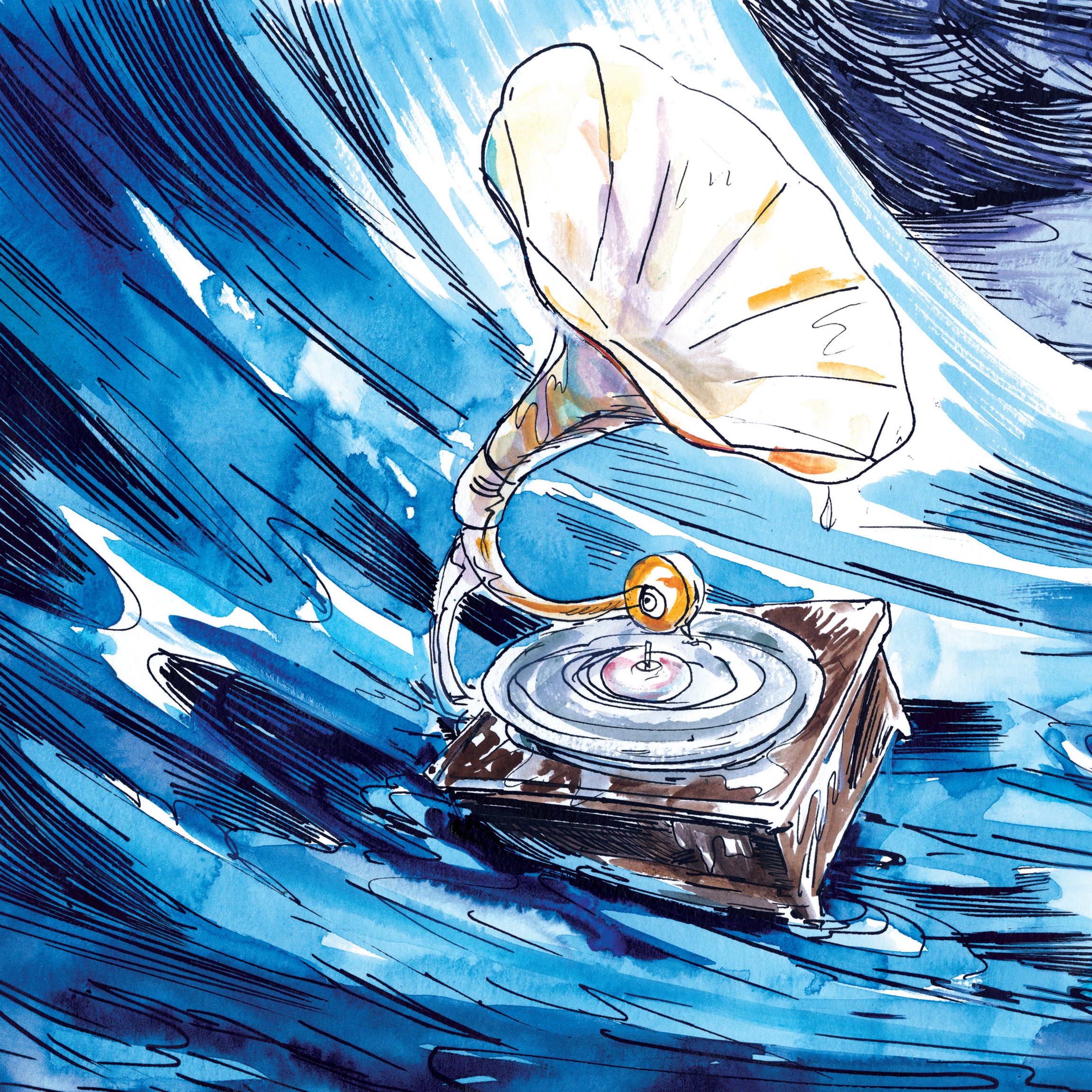
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No record player?  
That's fine — you can  
listen to this album  
digitally (*if you insist*).





**FROM THE CREATORS OF GRANDIOSE STATEMENTS THAT CANNOT EASILY BE FACT-CHECKED COMES THE WORLD'S FIRST FULLY AUDIBLE ISSUE OF AN AWARD-WINNING MAGAZINE.**

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**INSIDE:**

**A DAVID ATTENBOROUGH IMITATOR MUSES ON ANONYMOUS ANIMALS**

**THE SECRET HISTORY OF THE SECOND AMENDMENT**

**MODERN-DAY NEANDERTHALS FEIGNING ENLIGHTENMENT**

**NINETEEN SIMIANS TOILING ON A PROVERB**

**AN EXASPERATED SCIENTIST LASHES OUT**

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ISSN: 1911-2734  
CANADA/USA \$30

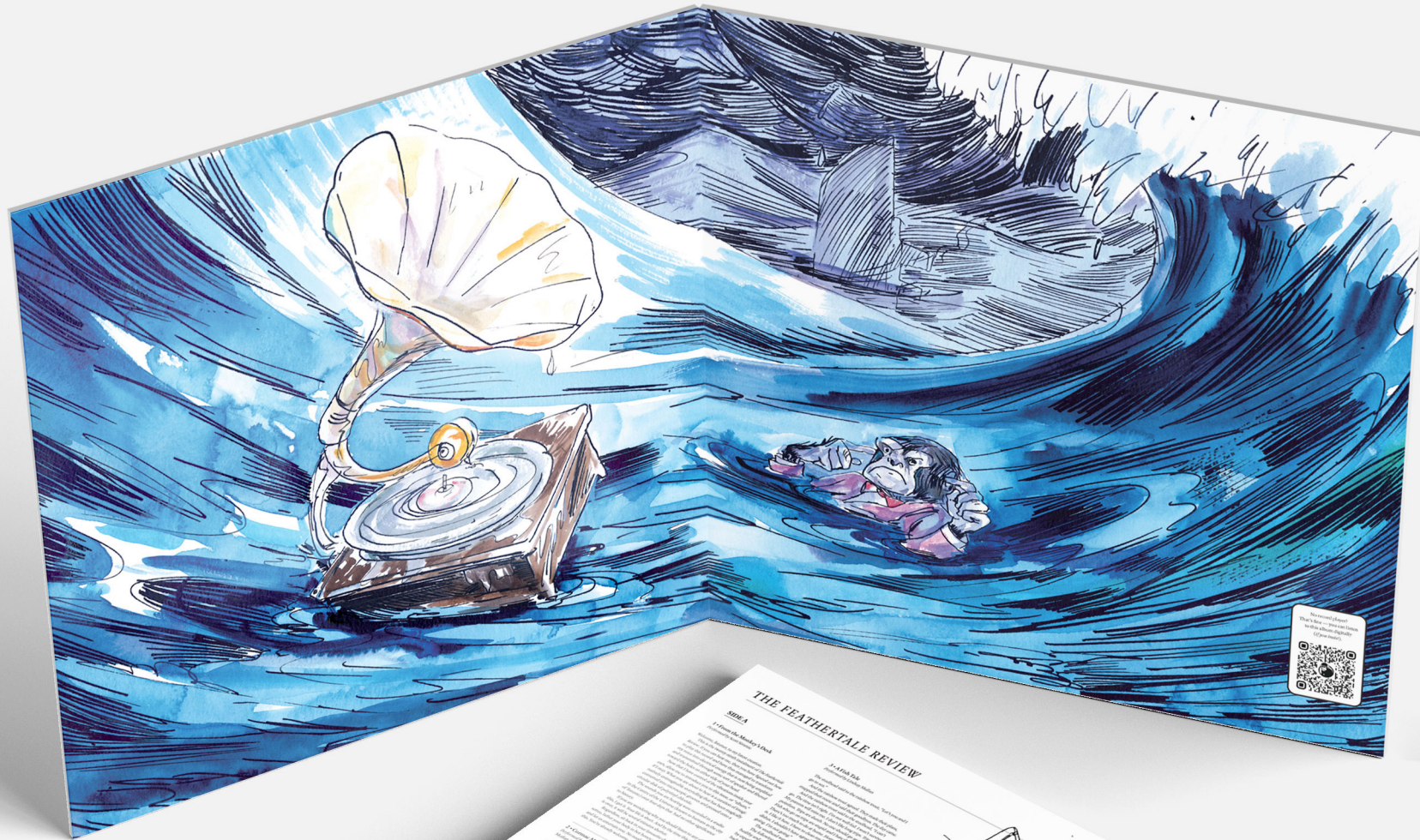


THE FEATHERTALE REVIEW • ISSUE 29



FRONT COVER

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GATEFOLD & INNER SLEEVE

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DISC 1: SIDES A&B

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DISC 2: SIDES C&D





SIDE D

16 • An Unkindness  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

Of the best the poet's made of a mere backbone...  
I thought you didn't want  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman

17 • About the Best of the Post-Rock  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

I thought you didn't want  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman

18 • The Interview  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

Berry: Okay, so first of all, thank you so much for agreeing to  
do this interview with me. I'm really nervous, so please be gentle.  
Justin: Sure, I'll be gentle. I'll be gentle. I'll be gentle.

19 • Candle in the Breeze  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

A moment's peace with a candle in the breeze  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman

20 • Things I'll Tell Shania Twain If I Can Manage  
To Get Past Security  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

If I was thirty years older  
or you were thirty years younger  
I would have had you in high school  
My grandma thinks I would have had her for you  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman

21 • A Brief Moment of Self-Reflection  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

A moment's peace with a candle in the breeze  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman

22 • Black Hole, They Call Me  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

A moment's peace with a candle in the breeze  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman

23 • Final Crocus  
Performed by Justin Hoffman

My dear Shania,  
I hope to believe that you have reached the last few poems of this  
book to the end of the world.  
— Writer by Justin Hoffman





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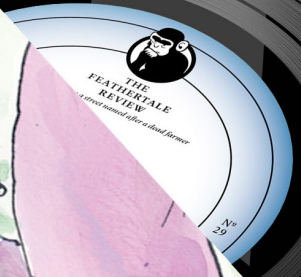
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BACK COVER

