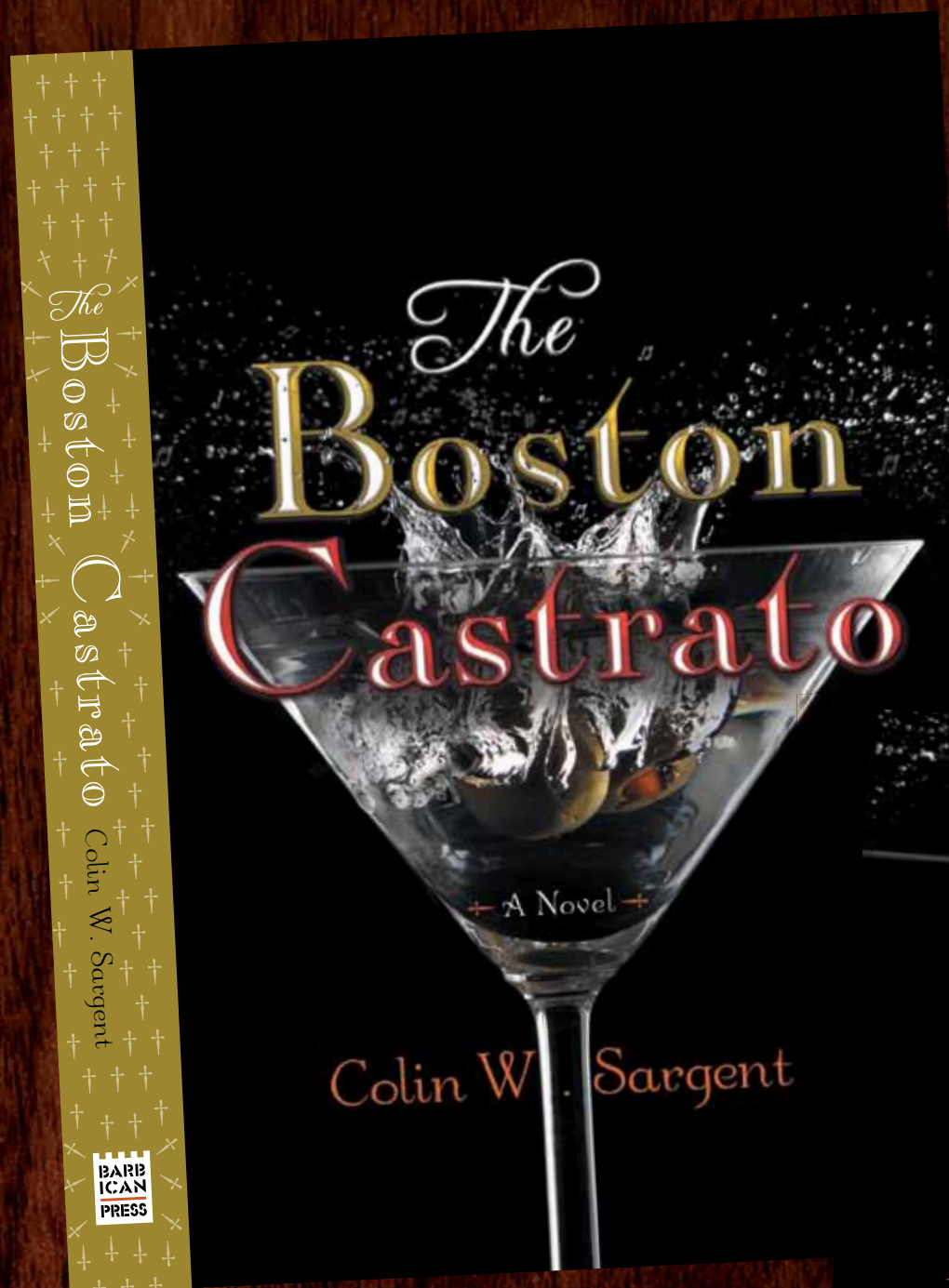


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The Humiliation of the Wood

BY GARRETT SOUCY

ROUTE 161 IS QUIET for the most part this far west of town, miles beyond that twisted stretch of road the locals call Daigle Rapids, where the teenagers like to give her some and see if they can get air off any of the hills. The little cape sits close to the road. Its woodshed is only used to house the lawnmower and a broken-down rototiller ever since his parents switched over to the oil furnace. An old clubhouse, long since outgrown, is scabbed onto the back that faces the railroad tracks and the St. John River below.

The boy stands in the driveway, his back to the river. The blue glass casserole dish hangs by a handle from the end of his arm. He crosses without looking both ways. It's quiet. The sound of a vehicle coming from either direction would hum on the horizon like someone flirting with the idea of turning the channel knob on the skyline, long before the threat of their presence would need to be considered.

The mounded rock that guards the entrance to the great north woods is covered in moss. He scrapes out the remainder of the dish on the bald spot of this ancient gatekeeper. Some of the shepherd's pie falls from the upper rim onto his hand. He's pulling his wrist back and flicking potatoes and ground meat in the direction of the trees when his lifted eyes are met by another pair, hung in the air beneath the hem of a white pine's bell.

The small red face follows the trajec-



ry of the spray of leftovers from his hand to the ground, as though deciphering the motivation of Max Ernst's brushstrokes. There is no initial pause, no moment of stillness... not at first sight. There's no tipping point of climax in which this encounter could happen or not. Their eyes meet, and the creature trots towards him, as though it had been waiting all along. The fox, picking his way over the short undergrowth, pushes down the wisps of dry timothy with his chest on his way to the boy's feet.

He has heard them at night, their hoarse voices screaming like the mourning of foreigners in the ditches between the parsonage and the church. One night, he saw a gray vixen digging in the freshly turned soil of the garden plot. His sister insisted it must have been a coyote, but the old-timer neighbor who'd lived his whole life in the county

later affirmed that a coyote wouldn't move about with foxes.

The reynard's nose twitches as though acknowledging the food scraps, but his eyes remain upturned, aiming his face at the boy's.

How long did they stare? Seconds. Long seconds. Joshua-fought-the-Ammonites-in-Gibeon kind of seconds. Long enough to burn into his formation as a man. Long enough to convince him, later in life, that Ellul was right about the maladies of technique requiring the extraction of humans from their God-given habitat-nature. He could touch the fox, but it would cost him the reality of having not touched it. The storm door creaks

and a blue puddle of music leaks from the house out into the driveway and crosses the street. Joni Mitchell sings, "A Case of You." Something behind his eyes breaks the hold.

"Mom wants her dish!"

The door creaks and slams. The music is gone, as is the fox with a mouthful of supper.

Years later, long after the LaVerdiere's had been bought out by Rite Aid and Fort Kent began to host a leg of the Iditarod, he'd go home and ask some of the neighbors about the skull.

"Ain't seen 'em in years," they'd say.

Now his parents kept a plastic barrel on a spigot that rolled compost about with some lime and ashes. He'd scrape the leftovers into the trap door, latch it, and crank the handle. The railroad tracks were pulled up and the river lay docile, like an overweight cat with all its teeth pulled. ■



CLAW DOWN AT BOOTHBAY HARBOR 1. Liz Evans, Cathy Evans, Harry Dudley 2. Chris Fritz, Allison Evans, Trisha Mason, Pete Mason 3. Jeff Dowdy, Jen Dowdy 4. Peter Williams, Jonathan Tindal, Jessica Tindal, Mary Williams 5. Patricia Inness Royall, Michael Maxim



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JEWISH COMMUNITY CENTER OPENING 1. Mayor Ethan Strimling, Ellie Miller 2. Erica Marcus, Shiloh Burger-Marcus, Micah Burger 3. Karli Evon, Deena Schoenfeld, Ethan Palm 4. Mike Lilly, Trevor Lilly, Janel Goodman

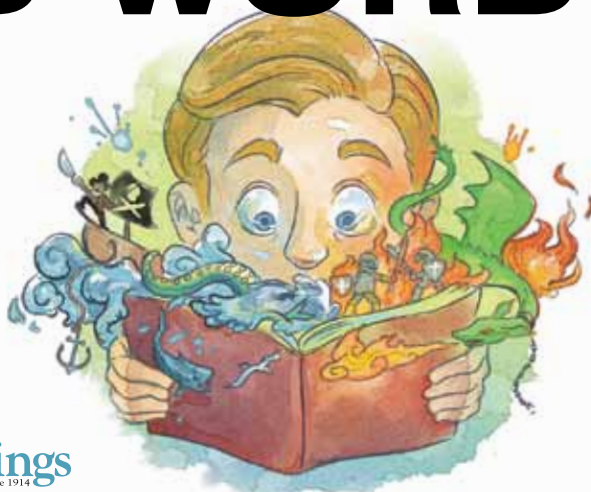


VICTORIA MANSION VICTORIAN FAIR 1. Austin Phillips, Olivia Houston 2. Sandra Riley, Stacia Hanscom 3. Cornelius Donovan, Heather Scroggins, Kathleen Scroggins, Scott Scroggins 4. Caroline Lawson, Scott Chase, Marcia Chase

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