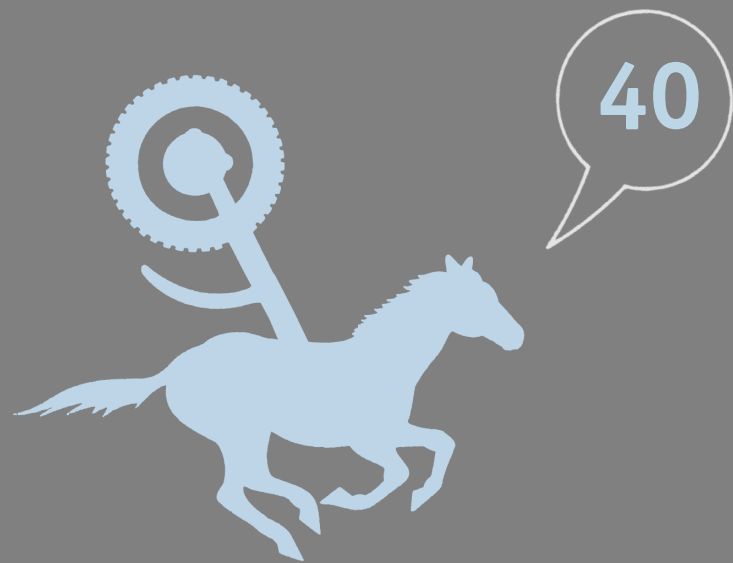


PDF Excerpt:
Julie Mannell



CAROUSEL 40

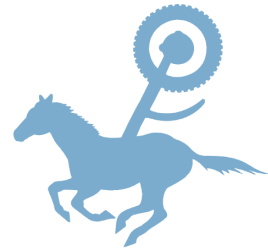
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Erratum Notice:

It's been brought to our attention that a printer's imposition error has occurred in the print version of **CAROUSEL 40**; please note that pages 53 and 54 have been inverted in Julie Mannell's story *July 19, 2015: Three Years After the Strike* (appearing on pages 51 to 58 of the journal).

As a way of correcting this unfortunate error, we are releasing this downloadable PDF, which publishes the story in its correct form.

JULIE MANNELL

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July 19, 2015: Three Years After the Strike

*The following is an excerpt from the novel **Weekending in India** that tells three separate stories of the same two people falling in love in Montreal at different points in their life. **Georgia**, the narrator, is a mildly-famous Anglophone installation artist who lives in the English-Hipster area of Mile End. **Théo-Simon** is a Francophone anarchist who lives in the very French neighbourhood of Hochelaga. They met during the 2012 student strikes when Georgia, an undergraduate student, took Théo's virginity before finding out that he was actually a seventeen-year-old high school dropout who had just hitchhiked from Chicoutimi. This section takes place in 2015, three years after their first romance.*

When you are in fresh love everything feels like a metaphor. For example: the way the hot water in the shower pelted my skin and trickled down my curves and into every hot dent on my torso, the cracks behind my knees, the dips in my armpits and the hole at the centre of my neck — that was his tongue and how it had twisted and how it would maybe dig into me again. I pictured myself as a sandbox and every spot that spiraled inward was a vortex to another continent. The heat of the steam in my nose could represent the sweat-heat of his exhales evaporating into my inhales. The novel cold of shutting off the tap and shivering naked beneath a penetrative light dangling from the maggoty ceiling conveyed how I felt in the single night we'd spent separate — vanished for a moon life. Detoxing cold-turkey from that burning temperature makes you believe that you might never be warm again.

I'll admit it — I kept my phone on the toilet seat, threateningly close to the tub water, just in case he messaged me. Maybe I was a little addicted to the enthralling weather of us loving each other — the comfortable intimacy in the repetition of the dangerous word to name the feeling. Maybe somewhere in the periphery existed the awareness that I had hurt him and he had cried. Revenge is, for me, a futility that precedes regret.

That's logical. Logic doesn't govern situations between people. The more I let warm thoughts of him sit in my stomach the more painfully aware I was of the kind of power he had, even stupidly, to fuck me up in a way that would last.

Earlier I'd laid on my bed with one hand on my thusly mute phone thinking *I define everything as a set of feelings that define other feelings and swirl into me as vague notions that are constantly in flux and shock me with their pain and intensity. How I love and why I love only makes sense chronologically in relation to the way I've loved before.*

At about three in the afternoon he messaged me that his friends were having a party in Hochelaga and it was beach themed. I journeyed to a vintage store at the corner of Parc and Viateur to find something suitable. I fingered through a dusty menagerie of brown corduroys, bushy fur coats, and dated patterns on puffy cocktail dresses and eventually landed on a skirt-bra combo that had a blue surfing pattern. After paying five dollars for the costume I took it home and was relieved it fit — a little tight around the hips — but it fit. I felt self-conscious about the way my belly bubbled out a bit from beneath the bra so I tied a see-through white blouse around my middle. I chose bright pink lipstick and Princess Leia buns so that I'd look like a seasoned party girl. I hadn't worn Leia buns in years and was ridiculously cognizant of the fact that I was probably channeling some younger version of myself, the hard drinking and hardly sleeping Montreal-Georgia I was trying to escape by way of Toronto.

The journey still seemed so long. I hadn't grown accustomed to the forty-five minute voyage on multiple transit lines and navigating the unknown streets of his neighbourhood. It was worth it to be with him though. Exhausting but worth it.

In the dimly lit living room that was on the second floor of a café on Pie-IX, young francophone voices reverberated off the crowd and bounced against the walls and the ceiling and into my ears as sounds. Not words but sounds that arose from some unfamiliar back-of-the-tongue place. Théo held my hand at the entrance. "Are you okay? How do you feel?"

I was a little nervous about navigating the anomalous linguistic environment and the many large dogs that seemed to always come with it. *French Canadians love large dogs.* However, I still felt kind of desperate after even a night apart. I had an idea I had to prove

something to him about my coolness. I mean I already had him with my hipster-anglo crew but I was still insecure around this group that knew him and not me.

I sort of parsed through the people in the room and counted faces as signifiers and watched the way the bodies seemed to jump and spin with ecstatic youngness. Little girls with belly tops who looked fresh out of high school, they had shimmery eye shadow maybe three shades too cheerful. A group of boys with skater toques and skater shirts and skateboards tied to their hip. Fresh moustaches and poorly groomed beards that young men twirled between the notches in their knuckles like they were new toys they'd only just learned to play with. *I am uncool in this context.*

I told Théo that I'd be fine.

"Are you sure? You can come meet my friends if you want."

"No no no, I'm sure I'll be okay. Have fun with your friends. I don't want you to think you have to babysit me."

He kissed my temple and rubbed my back. He ventured to a pack of young people. A burly guy greeted him by picking him up and throwing him over his shoulder and spinning him around like the spoke of a helicopter.

Sensing that I appeared a bit gawky just standing there with my wine bottle and my two feet solidly planted on the linoleum floor, I roamed over to a velveteen chair and took a seat and watched. I gulped my wine and watched. I watched so long that I saw five cell phone conversations through to the end. I saw a girl with flowers in her braids pass a joint to a boy with flowers in his man-bun. I saw a fat kid in a baseball cap roll around with a dog on the floor — barking as if he were a dog himself. I saw a tall person dance with a small person. I saw Théo-Simon chatting with a pixie-like chick and I saw her push out her pelvis as she put her hands at the back of her hips. I saw shadows collect in one light spot and then migrate around the room into other light spots. I saw a pair of jeans back into a beer causing many other empty beer cans in a pyramid to crash like metal snowflakes. I saw a guitar. I saw a silly little sing-a-long. I saw Théo-Simon and the pixie make white lines of drugs and put a dainty straw into each of their noses and giggle while they wiped away the residue from their upper-lips. I saw a filthy glass. I saw a smirk. I saw a twinkle on the surface of an expression. I saw him kiss her and I

watched his thin middle bend to do so and I watched her face tilt upwards and I watched the way his hand cupped her chin. I looked at my knees. I watched my knees like I was watching war. *We didn't talk about monogamy. I'm leaving. Did I want that? If I don't even want it then why does this hurt so bad?*

I heard a soft cluster of French and looked up into the gentle face of a woman I didn't know.

“Désolé. Est-que vous parlez français?”

“Non. Sorry.” She grinned with a separatist air of judgment before she stepped into another conversation.

I felt bad about myself. For someone who'd made a career of communicating feeling and meaning, it was fairly dehumanizing to feel like I was failing to represent myself. Awkward and a little lonely in a room full of people I couldn't talk to, I watched the pixie skitter from clique to clique with the buoyancy of a rubber ball. I watched the tightness of her skin against her bones and counted all the moments her adorable little face illuminated with youthful newness. I was exhausted by the way her sweet chuckles pandered to the innocent fever such parties always seem to elicit. I was grossed out by all the fuss she made of her own innocence.

Later in the kitchen, when the party began to fade out and there were only a few pockets of patrons left, Théo-Simon told me that his friend was getting a cab back to the Mile End and he thought that I should probably take the free cab ride and go home.

“What? So you can fuck that girl you were making out with?”

“She has been my friend for like, a really long time. I always kiss her. It is fun. You kiss your friends too. I know that you do.”

“I haven't since I've been with you.”

“Well if you are angry then maybe you should go home then.”

I was furious.

“You are so obvious! You are so fucking obvious and stupid! You think that I don't know what you're doing? You're an idiot. You're a little shit.”

“You always thought bad things of me. I knew it.” He began to furiously pace around the marble island, stopping to smash his hands against its surface, gaze into me after

masquerading a put-on laugh, “You always think I am stupid. You think my politics are stupid. You think my striking is stupid when it really means a lot to me.”

“Fuck you! The strike? The 2012 fucking strike? That's what you think this is about? It's about you inviting me all the way out to Hochelaga, getting me to wear this stupid outfit, ignoring me while you make out with your ugly concubine — ” *he won't understand the word concubine* “ — that fucking girl, while I sit alone in a chair and have nobody to talk to and then you want me to go home and give you permission to fuck her. Are you serious? The strike? Oh fuck you, you power-happy, self-indulgent, disturbingly delusional poser!”

He clapped his hands dramatically and smiled at me the way some people sometimes do when they are angry and your anger amuses their anger.

“You didn't really want me. I could be anyone. You just wanted someone to worship you.”

“Says you, says the selfless martyr of a cause that doesn't apply to you.”

“You use people so that you can feel better about yourself. You only cared about the strike as a tool to gain sympathies. You come to a province and don't bother to learn the language and then complain about your poverty like it is the government's fault. You use the benefits and then disappear when there is a fight for them. You take and take from me, you ask me if you are beautiful, you ask if I think you are smart, you want me to love you — I'm only there so you are not alone and ugly. When you are with someone then you are never really with them, the whole world is only there for you to exploit for whatever you call art.”

“You said that you loved my art.”

“I also said that I loved you. I said what you wanted me to say.”

Our fight paraded into the street as daylight spread over the tops of buildings and the sidewalk puddles like a hand reaching for something that was unseen. I swore in English and he swore in French and, despite the accusations of my ignorance, I was grateful I couldn't decipher the implications of his sharply cornered sentences. Finally, climbing over the wood steps of his front porch, it was as if we'd scratched our throats on the contours of our language — we'd screamed as if our words were razors — and now we only had pointed silence.

His bedroom was in the damp basement. I watched a silverfish scamper across the hardwood and disappear under his mattress as he sat himself on the floor beside it and lit a cigarette. He didn't exhale the smoke, he spit it out in violent o-shapes and directed his gaze away from my face as I reached for his arm.

"Let's stop this. We aren't being our best versions of ourselves right now. I love you. I love you and that's all that matters. Let's go to bed. We're drunk. It will be better after we sleep."

He shrugged me away. I moved backwards and leaned against a red flag with a hammer and sickle, a flag with a political message he'd outgrown but kept hanging like an old photograph of how he used to be.

The door creaked open and one of his roommates' dogs slobbered towards him. He smiled at the animal and it rested its face in his lap. He affectionately rubbed behind its ears. It was like I wasn't even there.

"Well," I said, trying to get his attention.

"I don't think we should have sex with each other anymore," he said matter of fact.

I felt like my stomach was drowning in my stomach.

"What? Why?"

"I just don't think it is a good idea."

"You think I'm bad in bed?"

"No."

"You think I'm not pretty?"

"Maybe. It's more like I have a switch and it gets turned on and then it gets turned off. I don't know why. It happens all of the time. Maybe I have commitment issues."

I did what people do when they don't want to face the spectre of impending loss — I focused on finding some small point of confidence so that I could retain my dignity. I did it in an undignified way though. I cried. I bent into my knees and cried, not because he was dumping me but because he was cold and indifferent, he had said maybe I wasn't pretty. I focused on that. I said how mean he was to say I was maybe not beautiful.

"I'll still hang out with you. I want to be friends with your friends but I just don't want to have sex anymore."

He said it like it was a gift he was giving me, his presence, his friendship. I thought about the way he looked at me after the art show, like he wanted to penetrate my head so intensely that my lips fell off and I never talked again. Like he wanted to gag the cool, like he wanted to possess something of me by defiling me. He had looked at me like he hated me. Now he wasn't even watching me. To him I was as mundane and superfluous as his furniture, as his broken lamp that he kept but never replaced the bulb, as his awkward bright flag.

"It can't be that easy," I said. "It can't be so easy as you loved me yesterday and then because of one party and a dumb girl and a debate over — over the fucking strike — you just don't care about me anymore. This is shallow. This is unkind. This isn't nice. You're better than this. I love you. I love you though."

The dog was curled into him now. Théo-Simon's hand idled on his furry back.

"I'm tired. I think you should leave."

"Can't you kiss me or anything? I think you are making a big mistake. Your mind will change tomorrow. This is so impulsive."

"I don't want to have sex with you. Maybe in a week we can go to one of your friend's shows. That is fun."

"But you loved me?"

"I loved you yesterday and today I do not."

Standing while he was sitting was gravely uncomfortable. For the first time I was taller than him and I wasn't used to it — to feeling so comparatively large.

I walked up his stairs and exited into a quiet morning with birds singing in trees and grass plucked by the wind as if they were strings of a harp. The sun was bright. I knew it didn't have eyes to see me but, as I lit a cigarette and pushed down my dumb surfer girl skirt while bending to take off my shoes, as I carried the heels in my hand with the pavement cutting the balls of my feet and my buns unraveling into lopsided pigtails, I felt its heat was a deliberate and personal resolution to mock me.

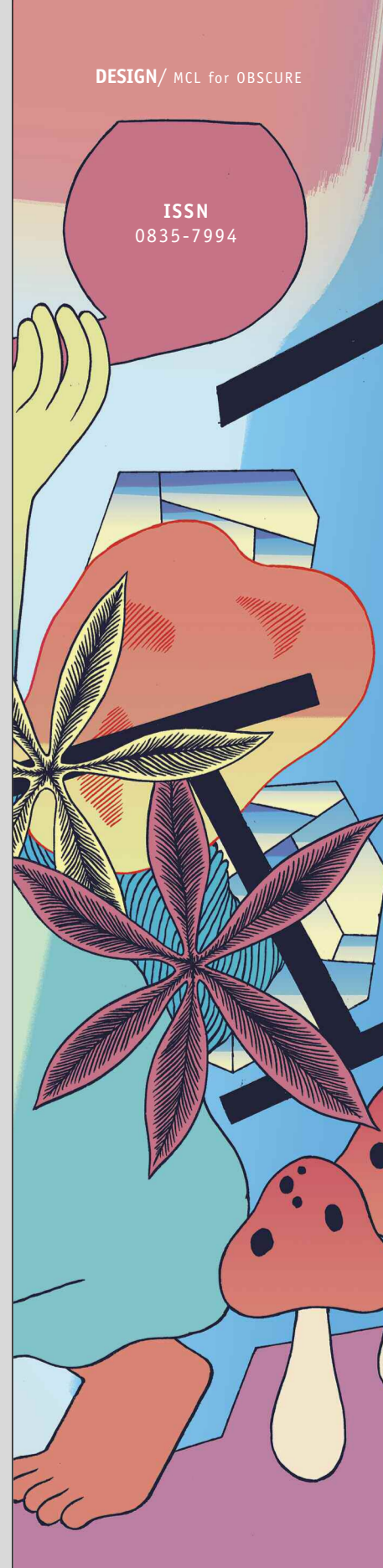
Separatism is a word for when somebody breaks away from you because how you are is not how they see themselves.

Frivolous is a word for love that is faked in order to waste your time.

Humility is a word for a love that lives like a mirror. It shows you yourself and in doing so makes you recognize that you deserve to hate yourself. After humility, beyond love and hate, there is only the cold fact of shame.

Headache occurs because you can only fuck around a person and be fucked around so much until you make each other sick.

My cigarette had long since died by the time I reached the gas station at the corner of Pie X and Saint Catherine. I lit a second and sat on the stone block base of the red and blue Esso sign. I was certain my tears had made streaks of eyeliner on my face. Cars sped by. A woman pushed a buggy. A man sprayed and wiped a windshield. Above me a plane was descending so close to earth I imagined I could maybe scratch its belly. I thought about booking a trip. ✈



CONTRIBUTORS

Alex Asher
Frank Beltrano
Jane Buyers
Mike Caesar
Chelsea Coupal
GG
David Haskins
Patrick Kyle
Mark Laliberte
Julie Mannell
Sandy Pool
Sean Rogers
Eric Schmaltz
Neil Surkan



4 PANELISTS

Cole Closser
Eleanor Davis
Sophia Foster-Dimino
Noel Freibert
GG
Clayton Hanmer
Nathan Jurevicius
Aidan Koch
Hannah K. Lee
Aaron Leighton
Keiler Roberts
Alex Schubert
Ben Sears
Daryl Seitchik
Julia Wertz
Eric Kostiuik Williams

