

The Sacred Cow

November 2013

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a booming economy

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problem solved

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Celebrating one year
of publication!

The Sacred Cow

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members only)*

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Mail

Better than a meeting!

Dear Cow,

I received notification of the appearance of the May 2013 Sacred Cow while buried in a mind-numbingly wearisome meeting at work. I immediately unfolded to the first page (digitally, of course) and was saved from the indignity of sleeping on the job, which at that point seemed the only other viable option. Congratulations on a publication that is notably less dull than a boring meeting.

Also regarding the estimable Mr. Swartz's back page account of a campaign of misplaced fear (Smoke, Mirrors and Satan), this scenario is not confined to the nefarious Mr. Manson and his obviously provocative, yet surprisingly genuine, shtick (genuine in the sense that such histrionics do give voice to a very real element of youthful disillusionment). It seems to me that this practice of demonizing those who subscribe to alternative viewpoints as a means of establishing the validity of one's own views, is alive and well today. One doesn't have to look far, whether in the politics of the nation or the politics of church to find it.

Thanks for the good work,

Jesse Bontrager
Milford, Delaware

Send us mail at tscmagazine@gmail.com,
or find us on Facebook.

		North			
		♠	9 8 2		
		♥	Q 10 3		
		♦	K 7 8 2		
		♣	A Q 5		
West				East	
♠	A 10 7 5	♠	J 6 3 4		
♥	7 8 5	♥	A 6		
♦	J 5 4	♦	A 10 9		
♣	J 3 2	♣	10 9 8 4		
		South			
		♠	K Q		
		♥	K J 9 4 2		
		♦	Q 6 3		
		♣	K 7 6		
		Dealer: Yes			
South	West	North	East		
3 ♥	1 ♣	Pass	Double		
Redouble	Pass	4 ♦	Foul		

Bridge

In this scenario, North leads with a daring queen caper, and bids the rummy. East then redoubles to cover the declarer's lead, as indicated. Faced with this dilemma, South responds with a takeout double for three no-trump. That leaves West with no option but to execute the heart king's jester, unless he resorts to the risky Montague gimmick. If he takes the latter course, however, he knows that North will promptly draw up the contract, so he guesses that North will instead claim a trump wallaby. He calls for a club ace and cashes the check.

North's partner can see what is happening, as indeed everyone can, and has no option but to watch helplessly as East denies the rebid and flies the grouse. Since he can force the values, East then supports a spade split and plays high to the dummy's nine. That forces a rebid, with six winners and two losers, but West knows he can't tumble the hat trick so he settles for a spade split and jumps the ruff. That forces South to indicate his opponent's dummy, claim a suit trick, and call mother.

As you can see, this kind of conservative play can pay dividends.

From the editors

A year ago, we launched the first issue of The Sacred Cow, wondering if anyone would read it besides our immediate families. We were staggered by the response: dozens of people from all over the world have visited our website, and given us very positive feedback, like, "This site make me very impress and I want to share permanent way to improve of hits, click here." One reader even offered to share a \$4 million inheritance with us if we could send a small down payment to pay some legal fees. (We anticipate coming out with print editions of the magazine once the money comes through.)

In addition, we believe we have also established our credibility as a literary magazine by reaching several other ambitious goals:

- Publishing more than one issue (thus outlasting about 85 percent of startup literary magazines)

- Publishing several issues in the same calendar year

- Meeting the exacting standards of all reputable literary magazines by publishing only poems that do not rhyme

- Providing sophisticated, angst-ridden literary pieces, whether our readers want them or not

- Receiving at least one letter to the editor that we did not write ourselves or hire a family member to write

As an editorial staff, we pledge to not let this unexpected success go to our heads and take the edge off our drive to excel. We will continue to provide thoughtful, incisive, organic, fair trade, and (when practical) readable material at everyday low prices. That's our guarantee.

Income vs. Jobs: The Minimum Wage Red Herring

By Andrew Sharp

The guy ringing up your order of fries can't survive on his minimum wage paycheck. But can anything be done about that? Recent debates about the minimum wage — what it should be and whether there should even be one — have been brought to the forefront by fast food workers demanding their pay be doubled. Well-meaning people take different sides of this argument. The problem is that it's the wrong argument.

The standard argument generally runs as follows:

Kind-hearted labor advocate: These people can't live on the money they're making. They deserve fair pay and the minimum wage needs to be raised to give it to them. People should make enough at their jobs to pay the bills.

Thoughtful capitalist: Raising minimum wage won't help. Rich business owners will keep their money, and they'll just raise the prices on all of us to cover the higher wage. Then there will be fewer jobs.

Arrogant capitalist, chiming in: Yeah, and the poor people need to get college degrees or actually get a real job that pays the bills, not a high-schooler's job. They signed up for that wage, they should just be happy with it or go work somewhere else.

I hardly need to rebut arrogant capitalist; his argument is snide and flimsy (especially because I made it a straw man). But the other ideas are worth careful thought.

Many of those who argue against raising the minimum wage insinuate — or say outright — that

there shouldn't be a minimum wage at all, because then the free market could have full reign as God intended and there would be plenty of jobs for all.

Presumably, we could then all go back to a happier day when everyone had a job at whatever rate the rich people felt like paying, and lived in squalid shacks without health care or enough food or heat in the winter.

In those golden days, when the free market reigned with an iron hand, its serfs often lived and died in squalid conditions. Ask your grandfather, if he's still around, how he liked breathing coal dust for a living in Appalachian mines. He died at 39, you say? Well, at least it's a mercy that the family has been able to make a new life on the inheritance he passed down, since he received a fair reward for his hard work. What's that? Penniless? Oh.


Therein is the flaw, of course. Rather than argue about whether the minimum wage will fix anything, why are we not questioning rich business owners who refuse to cut into their profits for fair employee benefit, but instead choose to pass the costs along to the customers? Of course it's legal — and good capitalism — but does being legal make it good? The relationship between law and justice is often only a casual one.

While we argue over whether the minimum wage will work, we often ignore the deeper issue of whether free market capitalism, as touted by many of its proponents, is really a good thing. At this point in the discussion, some people will start to get very upset. Their faces flush. They breathe faster. They howl, "BUT THAT WON'T WORK

PEOPLE ARE GREEDY AND SELFISH CAPITALISM IS THE BEST WAY CONSIDERING HUMAN NATURE ADAM SMITH HARD-EARNED GAINS NO WELFARE STATE YOU CAN'T FORCE PEOPLE TO BE GENEROUS" and so on.

Sure, maybe unchecked capitalism works, for some people. But again, is it good? If we let people compete savagely with greed and selfishness, with only the fit surviving, we may indeed end up creating vast wealth. But will we end up with a prosperous, happy society? Minimum wage is not a fix, in such a system. Rather, it is a sad symptom of greed.

While I can't answer these profound questions that people have been wrestling with for centuries — this is an opinion column, not a philosophical breakthrough — I would like to make two simple suggestions. (And no, for those who have been getting worked up, it's not to get rid of capitalism.) One suggestion is that we no longer assume that business owners who hog all the wealth they can get are somehow virtuous, achievers of the American dream, if they got there by screwing their workers. That kind of behavior should be a shame, spoken of in hushed tones, rather than lauded as success.

And two, I submit that a minimum wage is a good check on greed. If we raise it back up to 1970 levels, adjusting for inflation, and as a result we all have to pony up a few more pence for a hamburger, I don't think it will kill us. Although the hamburger might. 



Sleepless

By JASON ROPP

Marcus blinked back to reality. “Such a lovely dream,” he said as he leaned to the left and mashed the snooze, inciting five light puffs of air that struck his face. Thirty seconds later he opened his eyes yet again and yawned, sprawling his arms as wide as the sleep-eaze would allow. “Now that’s more like it.”

The glass door, framed in a bright polished stainless steel opened with a hiss as the airlock released. Marcus glanced at the clock on the opposite wall, which glowed 9:01 in neon. “One of these hours I’m going to stop sleeping in so much.” He slipped out of his red friction-free velvet, sleep-eaze compatible jumpsuit and into his tailored three piece suit, a steal he had picked up the other day for only \$2,395.99 from the body scan seamstress booth down the street. This would catch Murphy’s eye. He grabbed his tablet off the bureau, folded it to the size of a wallet and tucked it in his breast pocket.

Since he was in a bit of a hurry, Marcus grabbed a light second dinner. A 10-ounce New York strip with a side of steamed shrimp lightly buttered

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with a touch of basil, and garlic mashed potatoes. “Perfect,” he said to himself, “and perfectly lonely.” He poked at the steak with his fork. “Bah! Pull yourself together.” He set the plate, still half covered with second dinner, and the silverware into the dishwasher, which whirled to life with a soft hum, ejecting the now spotless plate onto a side tray with a ding. The silverware dispensed like change just below. He set them on the shelf next to his cup and headed for the door.


During his commute, Marcus turned on the auto-drive, unfolded his tablet and eased into the dark unit by responding to a few emails as he made his way down the 429. “Send message to Diana Marton, Same-Unit Shipping Solutions. Begin:

Diana, thank you for the update on the overseas costs. I know I’ve been pushing you pretty hard on this one, but I promise I’ll make it worth your while. Maybe an all expenses two unit, double stop vacation to Antarctica, and that new inland Congo river resort that just opened up. I heard they give the staff access to the sleep-eaze, so it’s not one of those nasty shut down for dark hours places you hear about outside post sleep countries. I don’t have any promises, but Murphy has been upping incentives lately.

But that all depends on what we can do with shipping. I mean 51.5 hours to get 45.8 tons from St. Louis to Beijing? Really? We’ve got a waking economy here, which you know means double income, double consumption, double demand, which means we need the surplus inventory, before this all goes down. Remember what happened when Australia switched over? The strike by sleep lovers, the infamous 35.25 hour shutdown in Sydney’s port? Pandemonium, riots, disruption in global economy growth. Do you really want to be responsible for economic chaos in the world’s most important emerging market? Beijing is only the beginning. They’re predicting the first billion will be on half-sleep masks by the end of this decade.

In summary: if you value the wonderful relationship our companies have had for the last 25 meta-units, you know what to do.

End message.

Marcus looked up just in time to see a billboard for a new casino lighting up the rolling underside of the ever-present charcoal clouds. A debonair billionaire surrounded by other celebrity types, a slender blonde on his left arm as he rolled the dice. Marcus sighed. “If only there were more hours in a unit.” 

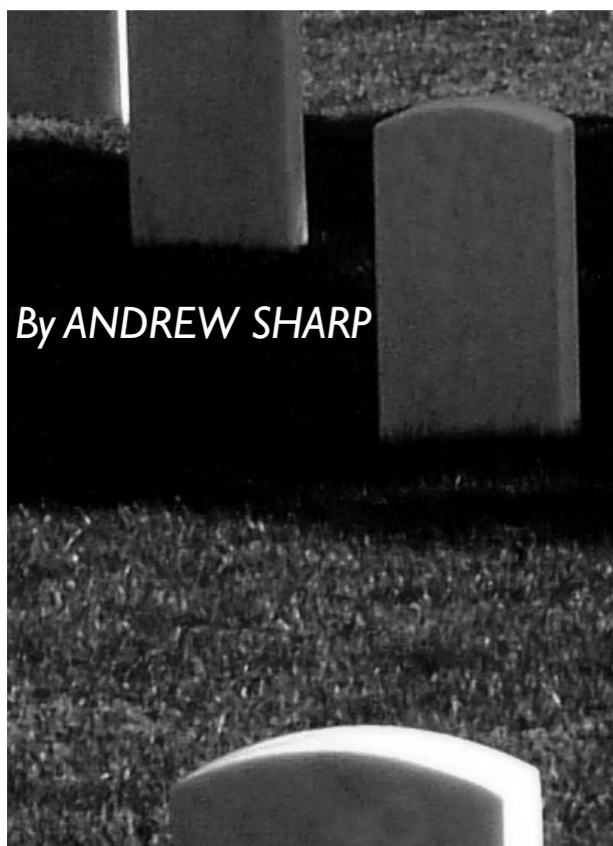
Lucky

By CANDICE MAST

I drink my caramel latte and feel the heat from his arm bleeding into mine.
I watch the bouncy girl in the movie get her hair pulled violently.
My stomach is a fizzing acid burn
Remembering her pain as I walk with him from the theater out into
The shadows of the city.
On the dim street in a press of bodies, cook smoke clouds,
A teenager with an ad pinned to his shirt sells big-eye contacts
To other teenagers who want to look more Korean.
A girl sits at the bottom of the escalator, hunched into her knees,
A begging bowl cupped over her head
Still as a country night in the chaos around her.
The man in black looks normal
Then he bends over the garbage, poking, hooking bags
Takes a long pull from a cup of trashed ice.
On the train home, a man is wearing a beret and talking on a cell phone
As she slips into a seat behind him, head down,
At first I’m not even sure they are together and he doesn’t look at her at all.
With him. Not with him.
Scum and victim, vain and lost, I stick my labels on them all.
I tuck my lucky hand into his arm.
As we go toward the exit
I see one perfect petal on the platform, alone, glowing from inside.



The Bullet



By ANDREW SHARP

A man strolled through a field of ragged grass and wildflowers, swinging a metal detector back and forth over the ground as he moved uphill toward a low, well-maintained stone wall. The metal detector beeped. He stooped quickly and ran his fingers through the grass and dirt, then stood and held up a small piece of metal, blown out of shape by a long-ago impact. He smiled. A find! It would make a treasured keepsake.

A dusty cow pasture soaked up the late-morning summer sun. The pasture was empty, except for thistles, stones, and scattered cow pies left by its vanished occupants. Behind a stone wall on a hill overlooking the pasture, a line of soldiers stood. They stared down the pasture toward a patch of trees at the bottom of the hill that clustered on the banks of a creek. The soldiers sweated in the sun and some of them swished flies away with their hats. They could see flashes of colorful uniforms moving down by the creek in the shade of the trees.

Behind the wall, a hand reached into

a pouch and felt for a cartridge, a bullet pre-wrapped with powder, ready to load. A ramrod pressed the bullet down into the darkness with a metallic swoosh. The bullet was forced down the tight grooved sides in a slow circle, packing air ahead of it out the gun's breech, until it smashed down tight against the powder. It was finally ready. Outside, other much larger and heavier bullets were already on their final journey, tearing through the air overhead, smashing into the trees along the creek. A thousand smaller bullets all sat snug in their black tunnels, the rifles that held them hanging over the stone wall, waiting in silence for the big shells to drive the men up out of the sheltering grove.

The cone-shaped bullet, a .58 caliber minie ball, was cutting-edge technology at the time. It had been conceived in a munitions factory mold about a year and a half before, poured out of a hot vat of molten lead. Before that, pieces of it had led all kinds of careers. Some of it had been typeset at a newspa-

per. A very tiny piece had once been plumbing in a villa in Roman London. A goodly portion had been a candlestick-holder in an upright Pilgrim's house in Massachusetts, supporting the candle by which the family read the Scriptures in the evening.

The man who gave the lead its bullet form was named Josiah Owens. He did not really care much about the war and why it had to be fought, the endless moral points and counterpoints, freedom and justice and righteousness and honor and duty. He would have made typeset, if it were desired, or candlestick-holders, or even plumbing, if those in power had been willing to pay him to do so. He needed to feed his family. He did not personally kill John Hawkins or the hundreds of other men who met death through the bullets he carefully made. Other people made the decisions; that is why they had ordered the bullets. They did not personally kill John Hawkins either. They delegated, as good leaders do.

The motive for making the bullets was debated viciously and endlessly.

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The Bullet continued

Was the cause a right one or an evil one? A very few crazy people, Quakers and other radicals, suggested that lead ought to be used for candlesticks, and never for ending lives, but for most, the big question was the Cause.

The destiny of the bullets was also not clear, although it merited no debate. Some would end up buried in tree trunks or fence posts. Some, buried in soil. Others would smash into living people.

Neither motives nor destiny meant anything to the bullet. Its purpose was clear. It would perform as asked. And this particular minie ball was destined to carry out its purpose: It would kill John Hawkins. Whether Hawkins' death was murder or a necessary tragedy in a noble conflict, the bullet made no judgments.

At the moment Josiah Owens was pouring the bullet, John Hawkins was sitting outside the office of a bank manager, his palms sweating a little and his foot fidgeting, waiting to sign papers on a loan. On his list of concerns was not bullets, but that his coffee had been a little cold at breakfast, and coffee was starting to cost a lot, and he thought he could feel a cold coming on (he hated colds, but got them frequently), and of course the risk from his startup manufacturing business. He wondered if he and

his wife had been getting a little distant lately, and was troubled when he thought about the bitterness between himself and his father. A business transaction he had conducted several months ago was also eating at him. It had not exactly met the standards of ethical business dealing, and he had always cared about things like that. He would go back and make it right, once he got on his feet with the business, of course.

Like Hawkins, the bullet was not yet moving toward the pasture. After a short wagon ride over bumpy dirt roads from the factory, and a very long ride on a train, the bullet spent many months in a warehouse. It was in no hurry.

Hawkins had his opinions about the war, of course, everyone did. As it became obvious that it would not be over quickly, as everyone had assumed, he imagined his neighbors whispering. A young and healthy man such as himself staying home with the business, while others fought and died ... well. Not without ethical feeling, he was also bothered by the nagging feeling that he was not doing his part, and even stood to profit from the conflict with his business. He debated whether to volunteer. He could come back, after the war was over, and restart things. If he did not go, he would always wonder if he should have. And if they began a draft, he would surely have to go anyway. He should leave on

his own terms, he decided, although it was a difficult thing to leave not just his business but his wife and his baby in the care of relatives.

The bullet and many others was bundled into convenient paper cartridges by overworked and hungry young women making low wages but much reward in heaven. Their handiwork was loaded into horse-drawn carts in a military wagon train and was finally on the way to the man who would carry it into the pasture. Soldiers on horseback rode along with the wagons, ready to shoot anyone who would steal their bullets for nefarious purposes.

While the bullet traveled, Hawkins prepared to get into a wagon himself, after hugging his wife and holding his baby one last time.

"Don't worry about me," he reassured her. "I have a job to do ... all do our part ... home soon ... write often." He handed the baby back. The wagon left. He and the bullet were traveling toward each other now. He was 26 years old.

A line of men advanced now out of the creek bed, prodded forward by the screaming death that pulverized the trees. The line moved up the pasture toward the wall at the double-quick. Behind the wall, the rifles came up. The barrel that held the bullet pointed not at any par-



The Boom Inside

By CANDICE MAST

We watch from a distance,
From a parking lot smelling fish and lemons.
Tiny spark and shower.

Remote as stars
The children dangle their feet from the hood of the car
The radio blares songs about American pride.
“Where at least I know I’m free.”
We’ve been gone so long now
Am I immigrant?
Citizen?
Adopted child?
Am I any freer here under the same moon?
Homeland love, homeland hate.
Are my children still your children too?

We are so far away, we can’t feel the boom now,
The one I remember from my childhood
Watching fireworks lying on my back on the New Market
battlefield,
Where I could feel them inside my small body,
Like an wild and alien heart,
Overriding my own heartbeat;
Panicked delight.
I look up now at my children’s lit faces,
Want them to feel the boom inside.

The Bullet continued

ticular man, but at the mass of uniforms. The bullet sat still and silent in its dark tunnel, facing a round hole of light ahead. Waiting.

In the first microseconds after the explosion, the bullet expanded slightly and tightly gripped the tunnel’s grooves, which set it on a deadly, stable, straight-line spin. The bullet spat out of the barrel’s mouth on a direct course down the hill, an unalterable straight line toward a tree root that was sticking up out of the pasture behind the line of men. There was only empty space between the bullet and that tree root.

John Hawkins still had a chance. A step just a hair to the left or right would change things. He could trip and fall. He could slow down just slightly. It had happened before. Once, he lost his

hat. Another time, his finger was shot off. This time, he strode forward, directly between the barrel and that tree root, a line he could not see.

The air rushed past the bullet and the stone wall shrank away in one quarter second and was far away at half a second. A uniform coat with brass buttons rushed closer in the next quarter-second and there was a terrible crash. The bullet smashed through its target with a muted thump and expanded, leaving behind a gaping hole. It made it out the other side, its precisely engineered shape crushed into a lumpy mess, and dropped out of the air. It fell to the ground and lay still. It was destroyed, but it had completed its journey and done what it was made to do.

John Hawkins fell to the ground and lay still too. 🐮

Find more work by this issue’s cover artist,
Debbie Sommers, at her Etsy shop
Clear Vision Studio.



www.etsy.com/shop/ClearVisionStudio

All is Forgiven

By HANS SHENK

The reception was held in the Valley Heritage Hotel, a building curiously located at the top of a hill. The ballroom for the reception was a cavernous affair of polished wooden floors, with polished marble arches all along the margins. A galaxy of chandeliers glimmered overhead, and beneath them dressed-up 20-somethings sipped punch out of tiny cups that never held quite enough, nibbled appetizers, and said nothing in as many witty ways as they could fathom. George Sines — a dressed-up 20-something, punch glass in hand — always felt slightly out of place at these events. He dragged his modest celebrity as a successful musician from conversation to conversation, chained reluctantly to fame and its obligations. Famous for his effervescent personality, he now felt either that exuberance was his duty to an audience of friends and acquaintances, or that effervescence would seem a sign of egomania. As a result, he spent a great deal of time vacillating unhappily between the two.

This reception in particular was giving him fits. Not only had he been thrust into a wilderness of people who had ‘known him back when’

and hadn’t caught on that they no longer did, but Penelope was here.

He’d guessed she would be, and since the thought struck him, had spent a good deal of time brooding on the matter, writing mental scripts for potential conversations, and subsiding into helpless anxiety.

Thirteen years previous, at age 15, George and Penelope had fallen for each other with all of the inescapable gravity of summer camp romances. So strong was the bond that the relationship had not only lasted in between weeks of camp, it had come to thrive. George was idealistic and enthusiastic, Penelope was pragmatic, and gentle. She kept him grounded, he kept her light.

For two years, it had grown into the stuff of apple-pie biographies, and it had never entered George’s mind that any ending was possible save the two of them, together.

And then, junior year, he flew a little farther, and between her basketball and his mini-tours playing guitar for his sister’s

band, time became a question. And Penelope questioned while George drew concentric circles further and further out from his base.

When they came together in the summer, even he could see the distance. But he reassured himself that knew they could fix it, they would work it out.

At last, halfway through an awkward week, she pulled him aside, alone in an empty room on a rainy evening to tell him that she had finally realized that it wasn’t going to work out. That they were now moving in separate directions, and the only thing that could be done was to let it happen, and to let go.

It flattened George. In all the doubt and change and trauma of becoming an adult, there was one thing he’d never doubted; that his fate and that of Penelope Masterson were inextricably entwined. Hitherto, he’d

never imagined that the bond was anything but iron, and now, too late, he saw that it was crystalline, fragile, and falling.



Summoning all his optimism, all his eloquence, and what remained of his wits, and he attempted to explain. His explanations turned to begging, and his begging into babbling, and finally he pattered out.

Penelope was crying, and George felt cold. In the end, she said nothing, only shook her head, and George — with no words left to say — felt the final collapse of the crystal and heard his foundation sweep away in the rainwater. Having no part left in her comfort, he walked outside again, and waited out the storm under a leaky overhang.

When George walked away that sodden summer night, aware for the first time of how far he was from who he believed himself to be, he promised himself that he would not let Penelope go. He would become the man she needed, and when he had, he would call her.

Looking back, he wasn't positive why he never did; whether he'd never become the man he thought she needed, or if his resolve had faded. Whatever the case, he'd never really dated since, a phenomenon his mother (and secretly, George as well) attributed to a chronic fixation with what might've been.

Now, escaping from the clutches of yet another acquaintance from bygone years, trumpeting their friendship, borrowing his notoriety, George hurried toward the punch bowl, rubbing his five-day beard and feeling exhausted.

And suddenly, there she was, darting out of an arch, headed someplace. He sidestepped, and pirouetted to avoid a collision, noticing, as he did so, the baby balanced on her hip.

"Oh, sorry!" she said, "I was just — George!"

She stiffened in surprise, and seemed suddenly unsure of herself, staring up at him.

George, all nerves and uncertainty himself, made a shaky attempt at a reassuring smile.

"Penelope!" he said, stepping back out of the arch and into the ballroom, "It's been —" he searched for the word, and gave it up, "It's been a long time."

She nodded, and laughed a little laugh.

She'd been beautiful, at 17, a decade ago. Boyish, and jaunty, sharp angles and red cheeks. She was much, much more beautiful now. The weather of adulthood had softened the sparkle of her eyes and the redness of her cheeks. The angles had softened into curves. The girl was gone, but the woman was stunning.

"It has!" she said, "And now look at you! You've got a beard. And you're famous!"

George waved it off,

"Eh, I'm not that famous. Besides, fame's a lucky accident. You've got kids!"

"Kid," she corrected.

"More than I've got," he said, bending down to regard the curly-headed infant. "What's her name?"

"Caleb," she said, stifling a giggle, "Caleb Anthony Thomas."

"Ah!" he said, "Well. Shows what I know."

Just then a short little man in a gleaming grey suit with dark eyes, and carefully styled hair came

through the arch, and tossed his arm around Penelope.

"Hey, honey! I was wondering where you'd gotten to," he said, then noticing George, "Oh, hey. Who's this?"

"This is George, honey. From camp — I've talked about him before."

"George, George ..." said the man, searching his



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eyelids for any recollection. He gave up remembering with a shrug of his tailored shoulders and held out a hand. “I’m sure I’ve heard all about you. I’ve just got a terrible memory. I’m Edson Thomas.”

“George Sines. Pleasure to meet you.”

“Wait, wait, wait!” said the little man, still holding George’s hand, “I’m remembering. You’re …”

He looked closer, narrowing his eyes, and Penelope, gently bouncing the baby, said,

“He’s in a band, honey.”

“YES!” said Edson, his eyes widening, “You wrote that song, that one song …” he let go of George’s hand, and turned to his wife, “That one song. We listened to it all the time when we were dating.” He hummed a line. The baby moaned.

George nodded. He knew the song. He remembered a string of hazy nights spent perched on the edge of a mattress, fueled by a hell-brew of coffee, insomnia and cigarettes, scratching the lyrics down in a tattered notebook. And somehow that had become the anthem of Penelope’s love for another man. As George processed the thought, he was surprised to discover that he was pleased to hear it.

“Long Summer,” he said. And the baby vomited. Both of the adult Thomases clustered around their child, messing about with napkins and rags and cooing at their discon-

tented baby. Penelope disentangled herself from the huddle for a moment and met George’s bemused eye. She shook her head.

“Kids are just so messy, sometimes,” she said.

George nodded, and smiled. He told Penelope that it was awfully nice to see her again, and it was a pleasure to meet you, Edson, and I’ll follow your future career with the closest interest, Caleb, you precocious child.

Penelope told him it was wonderful seeing him, Edson told him not to be a stranger, but they were distracted by the cleanup efforts. Meantime, Caleb began to howl.

George turned away, still smiling. He remem-

bered he’d been looking for the punch bowl and sought it out. He filled his glass, and rolled the punch in his mouth, eyes fixed on the ceiling, past the chandeliers to the shadows beyond, lost in meditation. He was still standing in that posture when his best friend and bandmate, Anthony Windsor found him.

“Hey,” said Windsor, shaking George from his thoughts, “You ‘bout ready? I’ve had enough for one day.”

George blinked, looked once around the ballroom, drained his glass and nodded decisively.

“Yep. I’m good to go.” 🐮

The Draft

By JASON ROPP

Listen up!
Vagabonds, down and outs,
Embittered, addicts, and wounded,
(even self-shot in foot).
And dare I say it,
Open your ears you
Like-me self righteous,
Apathetic regarding and numb to the
Pumping heart that brings life into
Most repugnant places.

Stop. Don’t read. Listen.

Did you hear it?

Did soft wind work gently
Through leaky old house of heart
With poorly hung doors
And unsure locks?
Did furious love-gale
Raging against needless fall
Bend walls groaning
Further out of square?

Did draft chill you?
Did howl and creak turn you
Again to child with somersault heart?

Listen.

Because fanner of waterless wave
Is magnificent worker of wood —
A carpenter,
Hanging new doors,
Furnishing home with finest antiques,
Mouth-made by supreme artisan,
Origin of all chair-crafters.
And He finds greatest pleasure in
Well working over
Timbers once carved fresh for
Current tenant ungrateful
With deposit insufficient
To make good on damages due
When time comes to vacate current
residence.

The Back Page

By Matt Swartz

On Red Meat and Mortality



The other evening, I visited a newly-opened grocery store. The marketing and signage made it clear to me from the street that its intention was to compete with Whole Foods. I pulled in hoping that its strategy would be price competition, rather than an escalation in the arms race of foodie esoterica that has recently gotten so obnoxious (“I wanted some gluten-free pine-nut-based energy snacks with acai berries in them, but the only ones I can find have soy isolates in the ingredient list! Thanks, but I can’t buy these. I care too much about my family!”)

On the whole, my expectations were met. The in-nards of the store were filled with healthy snacks at inflated prices, much like a Whole Foods, but all the important deals are on the outside edges of a grocery store anyway: produce, dairy, bulk dry stuff and meat. These were wholesome and reasonably priced, so much so that I intend to return regularly. But I had an interaction at the butcher’s counter that stayed with me.

At the butcher’s counter, I could see that they were doing everything right. My powers of description aren’t anywhere near equal to the shiny redness and thickness of the steaks, marbled, stacked high, and priced cheaper than I’d expect-

ed. On the wall behind the counter, various marketing blurbs were written (did I mention how good ALL of the typefacing on this store’s advertising looked? Painstaking effort had clearly been taken.)

One of the blurbs was styled like this: “ask me about _____.” “Me” was clearly the butcher, so I asked him the scripted question. He paused for a moment, considering, I suppose, that we were of similar age, build, social class, and level of grizzledness, and went off script: “Oh, they have a big speech I’m supposed to give you, but basically it just means we massage the cows before we kill ‘em.” We MASSAGE the cows, before we KILL THEM.

I bought two steaks and left, but on the drive home, I realized that in his parting words, I’d found an ace that I could keep (apologies to Kenny Rogers, of course). It is a natural fact that every one of us is going to die, and we don’t know when. Luxury deadens our awareness of this looming fact, in the same way small acts of conscientiousness (Buy grass-fed! Buy organic!) lead us to imagine that we can delay it. But neither change facts. On a day we don’t and can’t plan, we’re going to be led down the chute, and

when we get to the bottom of it, whatever messages we’ve had recently will be utterly beside the point.

My drive home took me past what I think is the oldest cemetery in Columbus, Ohio. I looked over the stone fence into the tree-filled, shadowy resting place of those now, some of them, nearly 200 years dead. Some are marked with crosses, some with obelisks, and a few, signage informs me, aren’t marked at all. Those people ate grass-fed and organic, and I suppose if they’d had health care plans they liked, they would have been able to keep them. But they’re gone and forgotten.

I’m a Christian man; I have hope for the next life, and for that I’m thankful. But what I don’t have, what nobody has, is control over this day or that one. Our mortality is a fact that bears reflection. And when a meat cutter at a yuppie grocery store can spur that reflection, it’s been a good day. 🐮