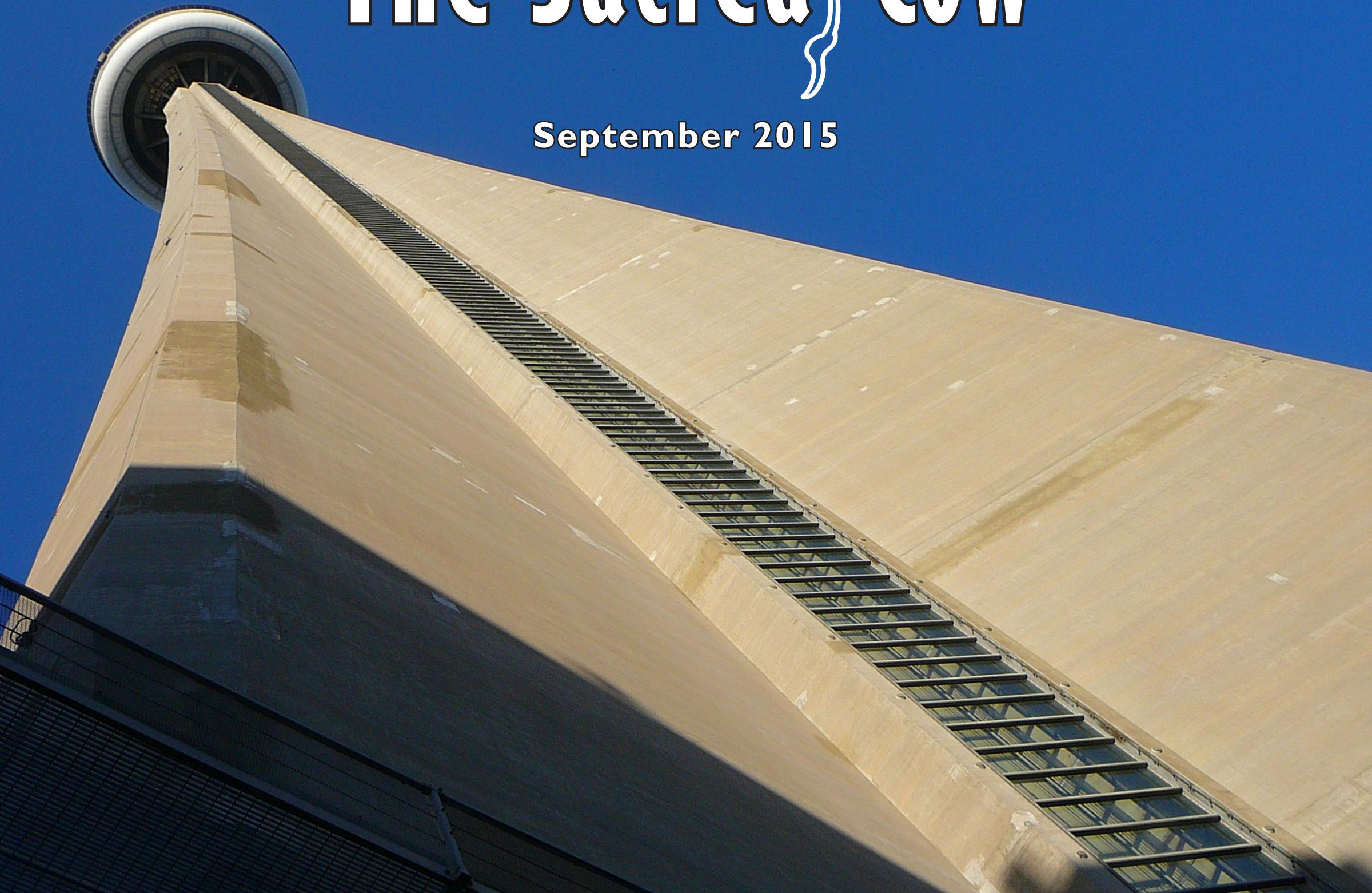


The Sacred) Cow

September 2015



The Sacred Cow

Vol. 4 No. 3
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10775 Memory Road
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Contributors

September 2015

Sarah Stoltzfus Allen ("Blessed," page 12) is a wife and mom who drinks way too much coffee. She works as an administrative assistant by day and by night she writes about her life, her love, her pursuit of happiness, and her beloved Appalachian foothills.

Terry Barr ("The Secret of Spaghetti," page 17) teaches creative nonfiction at Presbyterian College, writes essays, and lives in Greenville, S.C., with his family.

Eliza Callard ("Know-How," page 23) was born, raised, and now lives in Philadelphia with her family. Forty years of managing—and occasionally mismanaging—her cystic fibrosis have given her perspective on loss and endurance. A product of Skidmore College, she enjoys family time, hiking and camping, and playing the piano.

Valentina Cano ("Missing You - for I," page 20) is a student of classical singing who spends whatever free time she has either reading or writing. Her debut novel, "The Rose Master," was published in 2014.

Yuan Changming ("Winter View," page 12) edits Poetry Pacific with Allen Qing Yuan in Vancouver. Changming's poetry has appeared in publications including Best Canadian Poetry, BestNewPoemsOnline, Cincinnati Review and Threepenny Review.

William Doreski ("Learning from Picasso," page 20), writes mostly poetry, but also criticism, including essays and book reviews; he has published a few academic books in that line.

Juan Ersatzman ("Post-Apocalypse," page 24), grew up in the green heart of the United States, but was born on

the far side of the border. Always a bit of an outsider on the inside, he started writing terrible fiction at age 10, a pastime facilitated by the onset of terrible insomnia at age 11. He takes his name seriously, and strives to embody all that it means.

Ricky Garni ("40 Celebrities That You Didn't Know Were Atheists," page 12) is a writer and machinist born in Florida and living in North Carolina. His latest work is a collection of six poems, released in the summer of 2015.

Carol Hamilton ("Cacophony at Midday," page 16) has published 17 books: children's novels, legends and poetry, most recently, "Such Deaths." She is a former poet laureate of Oklahoma.

Ben Herr ("Peter and the Wolf Retold," page 5) lives in Lancaster, Pa., where he works as a dorm adviser for international high school students. He writes short stories, humor, and opinion pieces about whatever current ideas and projects interest him.

Donal Mahoney ("Dangling Participles," page 13), a product of Chicago, lives in exile now in St. Louis, Mo. He has had poetry, fiction and nonfiction published in print and online in various countries. He has worked most of his life as an editor of one thing or another.

Amanda Miller ("A Heaping Helping of Ethiopia," page 21) lives with her husband in Hutchinson, Kansas. She enjoys words and has a tendency to write about the intersection of life and food.

William Miller ("The Broad and Narrow Way," page 26) is a poet, children's author and mystery novelist. He lives in the French Quarter of New Orleans.

Gerard Sarnat, ("Bergmanesque Yahrzeit," page 19) was editor of the freshman literary magazine The Yardling at Harvard. He has been a CEO of health care organizations, and was a Stanford professor. His poetry collections include

"Homeless Chronicles From Abraham to Burning Man," "Disputes" and "17s."

Andrew Sharp ("Short Arm of the Law," page 13) is a journalist who works for a local newspaper on the Eastern Shore of Maryland. He lives in Harrington, Del., with his wife and two sons. He edits The Sacred Cow, which has dramatically increased the acceptance rate for his pieces.

Stephanie Sharp ("Jordan," page 26), teaches English as a second language at an elementary school in Greenwood, Del. She enjoys cooking, reading and every 10 years or so, writing a poem.

Tamara Shoemaker ("Weathered," page 8) lives in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia with her husband, three children and a never-empty carafe of coffee. Her books include the Shadows in the Nursery Christian mystery series and "Soul Survivor," another Christian mystery. Her latest book is the fantasy "Kindle the Flame."

Alannah Taylor ("Prosopopoeia: Face Making," page 23) is a student from London, UK, who likes to write mostly poetry. She is very interested in people, and how they think and feel, but likes to write about other things too.

Ruthie Voth ("Iron and Water," page 26), lives in southeastern Kentucky, where she and her husband raise their four children and run a Bible camp. Sometimes, in the aftershock of the busyness, her mind clears enough to blog and write a little poetry.

Allison Whittenberg ("Ride the Peter Pan," page 9) is a poet and novelist ("Life is Fine," "Sweet Thang," "Tutored," and "Hollywood and Maine," all from Random House). She lives in Philadelphia.

Thomas Zimmerman ("The Gallery," page 20, "The Glory That Was," page 25) works as a community college English teacher in Ann Arbor, Mich. His chapbook "Thirteen Sonnets and Some Fire Music" was published in 2012.

Mail

Dear Cow,

I must express my outrage and disappointment over your careless use of hurtful terminology in your publishing of the poem “D-----” by Jason Ropp in your June 2015 issue, the name of which I will not even type. People who are challenged by mental differences have been stereotyped and shamed long enough, and I simply cannot understand how an editor could think it was acceptable to perpetuate this kind of aggression by publishing such a poem. I demand a full apology and a retraction, or I will cancel my subscription immediately.

Ronald Williams,
Butte, Montana

Ronald,
We would have to be deranged not to issue an immediate apology. We deeply regret that the world contains painful realities, and we will do our best to mask those realities in the future.

Dear Sacred Cow,

I wanted to thank you for publishing the poem “Deranged” in your June issue. Too many people ignore the danger that deranged people present to our society, and the actions of the heroic businessman were a great example to our young people.

Sincerely,
Rebecca McIntyre,
San Luis Obispo, California

Rebecca, thanks for taking the time to read the June issue. We have also found that critical analysis on a basic level contributes to the reading experience.

Send us mail at tscmagazine@gmail.com, or message us at [Facebook.com/sacredcowmagazine](https://www.facebook.com/sacredcowmagazine).

From the editors

This November The Sacred Cow magazine will turn 3 years old. We began in 2012 with the goal of producing a literary magazine that would continue until we stopped doing it. We are proud that we have remained committed to that vision.

A look back at emails from our early brainstorming sessions for the Cow shows some interesting alternatives for the magazine’s name. It very narrowly escaped being called “Baalam’s Ass,” for example. Other suggested names included “The Slaughtered Bullock,” “The Whirlwind,” “The Warbler,” “India Ink,” and “Amalgamation.” Out of those, The Sacred Cow was clearly a sound choice, but it makes you wonder: Can a world without a literary magazine called Baalam’s Ass be the best of all possible worlds? The logo design possibilities for a Slaughtered Bullock magazine are also intriguing to think about.

The magazine has been through a number of design shifts over time, but the issue you’re reading, while it lacks the initial focus on choppy, awkwardly placed graphics and pull quotes, still has a lot of the look and feel of that first one in November 2012.

This latest issue, our ninth, is the longest one to date, and contains work from a number of new authors, as well as longtime contributors. The material covers a wide range, from satire to thoughtful fiction to food essays to poetry, a thematic approach that closely follows the traditional Hodgepodge literary school. Or, as we like to cliche it, something for everyone.

Let us know how we are doing; we want to hear from you. Did you find the pieces boring or interesting, insightful or shallow? Give three specific examples.

For more on our contributors, go to the aptly named “Contributors” page on our website, where you can find more complete background information and links to some of their personal projects.

We’d also like to draw your attention to our new email subscription service. On our home page at www.sacredcowmagazine.com, click the link to subscribe and sign up to have each new issue delivered straight to your spam folder.

Thanks for reading.

Peter and the Wolf

(retold)

Wandering Reflections at the Symphony

By BEN HERR

Complete text by Sergei Prokofiev in bold

Early one morning Peter opened the gate and went out on a big green meadow, after checking to make sure his grandfather had not seen him go. It was a highly dangerous woods, you see, dangerous to the point that it need not be considered unbelievably rare should a fierce, reclusive predator such as a wolf suddenly show up near a human residence. Grandfather, you see, had warned Peter many times to say within the gated yard.

On the branch of a big tree sat a little bird, Peter's friend. "All is quiet,"

chirped the bird gaily, unaware that the human creature in front of it did not understand bird song. If Peter had, he would have replied by chirping back the question, "Doesn't a quiet forest usually mean trouble is approaching?"

But as it was, the bird and the boy felt happy and safe in the meadow, enjoying watching each other. Since very few humans with children would live in such a dangerous part of the woods, this was the closest thing Peter had to a friend.

Soon a duck came waddling around. She was glad that Peter had not closed the

gate, and decided to take a nice swim in the deep pond in the meadow.

"Humph!" Peter said with a sigh of exasperation. How would he catch the duck in the middle of the pond? If he didn't get it back, grandpa would know he had opened the gate and gone to the meadow. "I must figure out a way to catch the duck or I will get in trouble for sure. Maybe if I had a rope ..."

Seeing the duck, the little bird flew down upon the grass, settled next to the duck and shrugged her shoulders.

"What kind of bird are you, if you can't

fly!" said she. To this the duck replied: "What kind of bird are you, if you can't swim!" and dived into the pond. You see, the duck had swum to the shore to make that reply, then jumped right back into the water to continue the argument, mostly for dramatic effect.

They argued and argued — the duck swimming in the pond, the little bird hopping along the shore.

"Actually, there are only 17 species of birds that can swim, but cannot fly ... all of which are penguins," said the bird. "So the real burden of proof lies with you, when it comes to

Peter continued

the task of disproving a claim of one's own abilities being more birdlike."

"Back off, flight supremacist!" quacked the duck. "Ducks get our wings clipped so we can't fly out of the yard. Don't hold your flight privilege over me!"

"Don't hate on me just cause I was born with the ability to fly and sing beautifully!" chirped back the bird in agitation. "Skillful flight takes HARD WORK! You don't just pop out of the egg and start flying. You have to put in a lot of hours training your wings, and staying in flying shape. Not to mention you have to eat right. An herb-based diet is important, yet everyone wants to be able to fly while eating minimum sage."

"Wow, you're out of touch, my friend. What's that saying about walking a mile in another bird's webbed feet? It's not easy! These feet are built for water! Trust me, I'd love to be able to put in the work required to fly, I just don't have that opportunity!"

Suddenly something caught Peter's attention. It didn't take much, because the chirps and quacks of the strange interaction got old pretty quickly. **He noticed a cat crawling through the grass.**

The cat thought: "The bird is busy arguing. I'll just grab her." Stealthily she crept toward her on her velvet paws.

"All I'm saying," the bird continued, with a wide gesture of its wings, "is that maybe if you ventured out here into the wild and stopped relying on handouts from Grandpapa, you'd realize how much more you could accomplish!"

"You really think that would work?" quacked the duck angrily. "Every time we —"

"Look out!" shouted Peter, and the

bird immediately flew up into the tree. From the middle of the pond ... the duck quacked angrily at the cat.

"Oh, come on! We were just getting to the point!" said the duck angrily. "Couldn't you wait a bit to break us up?"

"See?" piped in the bird. "You can swim in the water. Water. The very thing cats hate. You have some advantages too! See, we can both be a little ethnocentric, blaming problems on the other guy."

"Yeah. But still. I'm stuck in a pond." The duck kept swimming in circles.

The cat crawled around the tree and thought: "Is it worth climbing up so high? By the time I get there, the bird will have flown away. Also, I'll get stuck, and I don't think this place is fire truck accessible, so how else will anyone manage rescue me? Also, why was I even pondering the first question. Of course the bird will fly away."

Grandfather came out. He was angry because Peter had gone to the meadow. "It is a dangerous place. If a wolf should come out of the forest, then what would you do?" he said in a tone that was totally not in any way ominous foreshadowing.

Peter paid no attention to Grandfather's words, ensuring that by having the protagonist disobey an authority figure in a children's story, a lesson will be learned later. Also because he had taken the story of "The Boy Who Cried Wolf" a little too much to heart and just couldn't take Grandfather's warnings very seriously.

Besides, boys, as he, are not afraid of wolves. But Grandfather took Peter by the hand, led him home and locked the gate. Peter now obeyed and went without a fuss, because boys, as he, are very afraid of spankings.

No sooner had Peter gone, than a big gray wolf came out of the forest. The gray wolf surveyed the meadow.

"I've been hunting down a pack elk of three days and have almost caught up," it thought,

"but I guess I can put that most urgent quest on hold to go after a little duck, or a cat, or perhaps a canary."

In a twinkling, the cat climbed up the tree, because in the Rock, Paper, Scissors of things cats are afraid of, "Wolf" beats "Stuck in a Tree." Which beats "The Fifth Second of Getting Rubbed on the Belly."

The duck quacked, "OK, that's it, I'm outta here! Wait ... they locked the gate? Are you serious? How could they just leave me out here?!" and in her excitement jumped out of the pond. The wolf chuckled and gave pursuit.

But no matter how hard the duck tried to run, she couldn't escape the wolf. He was getting nearer ... "Um ... help?" quacked the duck. ... nearer ... "For real, someone help me! I'm about to get eaten by a wolf over here! Peter? Grandpa?" ... catching up with her ... "Oh, come on, I bet if that bird were getting chased they'd come out and help it." ... and then he got her, and with one gulp swallowed her.

And now, to avoid the pesky task of actually writing a piece of story so complicated that it only contains a wolf walking from a pond to a tree, **this is how things stood: the cat was sitting on one branch,** trying to figure out how to safely rub the wolf's belly for 5 seconds or more, **the bird on another, not too close to the cat,** because in order to be unified against this new enemy, they needed to be in the same tree, yet not so close as to tempt the cat into forgetting about defeating the wolf first ... and the wolf walked around and around the tree looking at them with greedy eyes.

Of course, from the wolf's point of view, trying to catch three whole elk would have been greedy. Wanting more than just a little waddling duck seemed very reasonable.

In the meantime, Peter, without the slightest fear, stood behind the closed gate watching all that was going on. Having grown up in such isolation, being

raised by only a cranky grandfather, he had no one in his life to tell him that having courage did NOT mean standing behind a wall in safety as your animal friends get hunted and eaten by a ravenous wolf. But since he cared a lot more about the bird than the duck, **he ran home, took a strong rope and climbed up the high stone wall. One of the branches of the tree around which the wolf was walking, stretched out over the wall.** A smarter boy would have beckoned to the cat to walk across the branch and into the safety of his home, and for the bird to fly over. But since his limited life experience made him a bit of a novice at heroic problem solving, he decided the best course of action was to play God and join Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego in the fire, except in a version of the story where Abednego was already dead, because everyone knows he was the annoying one in that group of friends. **Grabbing hold of the branch, Peter lightly climbed over on to the tree.** As they sat there making a plan, Peter wondered why grandfather was so upset. He had been in the meadow, but no farther away from the gate than the width of a tree. He could have run back inside in no time.

Peter said to the bird: "Fly down and circle around the wolf's head, only take care that he doesn't catch you."

"And see if you can scratch its belly, too!" added the cat. A sudden and uncharacteristic sense of altruism and compassion came across the bird, and it followed Peter's initiative, putting its life in great danger without having a clue why.

The bird almost touched the wolf's head with her wings while the wolf snapped angrily at her from this side and that. How the bird did worry the wolf in the same way as a policeman is worried by a doughnut rolling down a hill away from him! How he wanted to catch her just like that gingerbread man! But the bird was clever-

Peter continued

er, or “quicker” as a storyteller with less bias against the wolf might say, **and the wolf simply couldn’t do anything about it.**

Meanwhile, in no great rush in spite of his bird friend being in great danger, **Peter made a lasso and carefully let it down.** He had never used a lasso before, but he gave it his best shot, aimed for the wolf’s head and neck, **and caught the wolf by the tail.** A bit surprised, Peter decided to make do with the snare he had managed and pulled with all his might.

Feeling himself caught, the wolf began to jump wildly trying to get loose. “What did you manage to get yourself into?” wondered the wolf. “Especially considering this was supposed to be just a quick side snack.”

But Peter tied the other end of the rope to the tree, and the wolf’s jumping only made the rope around his tail tighter. The wolf was now very frustrated. He wasn’t caught, his tail was simply stuck tightly. He could have reached back and bitten the rope in two, freeing himself, but he worried that if he wasn’t able to the noose off of his tail, it would cut off circulation and he would lose his tail. He turned to Peter, and in a resolute and determined manner, delivered a speech that would sadly fall ununderstood by the human boy.

“I am Gray Wolf. Cousin of asphyxiated Big Bad Wolf. Second cousin of lumberjack-murdered other Big Bad Wolf. You ruined my hunt. You saved the lives of my snacks. You tricked me by giving me the bird. And now you caught my tail.

“I’m not leaving without that tail!”

Just then the hunters came out of the woods, following the wolf’s trail and



shooting as they went. It has long since been a point of debate as to whether they were the world’s worst, noisiest animal trackers, or if one of them was a PETA member in disguise, tricking them into shooting at shadows, to ensure that they did not have a successful hunt. Skeptics of the reliability of the account given by Peter and the hunters point out that Peter, the wolf, the cat, or the bird would surely have heard the hunters coming long before they emerged from the forest, due to said gunfire.

When the hunters saw the wolf, they took aim, **but Peter, sitting in the tree, cried: “Don’t shoot! Birdie and I have already caught the wolf! Now help us take him to the zoo.”**

Perhaps it was because they realized they had wasted all of their bullets with their senseless shooting and were out of ammunition. Perhaps it was because they were embarrassed for having been unwittingly hunting and shooting so close to a residence where a young boy was playing outside. Per-

haps it was because they respected the boy for doing with a rope what they had not been able to do with guns. Perhaps it was because they had a change of heart and decided that such a powerful and majestic creature should not be hunted, but should be admired by the masses while slouching around behind bars. But more likely, it was because they were so shocked and worried about the judgment and safety of a boy who thought he had corralled a powerful wolf by merely tying a rope around its tail, that they abandoned their hunt and agreed to escort the boy to the zoo.

The wolf, suddenly finding himself on the wrong end of several rifle barrels, lowered his head, amazed at his rotten luck.

And there, imagine the triumphant procession: Peter at the head, smiling broadly, and feeling rather proud of his antics and achievements, in the end, not having learned that lesson about heeding an authority figure’s warning ... after him the hunters leading the wolf, who walked with his head low, mourning his fulfilled destiny of being a powerful, cunning fairy tale wolf who got captured by a far inferior and mostly inept foe thanks to some remarkably convenient occurrences ... and winding up the procession, grandfather and the cat, who smiled, having achieved its ultimate goal of receiving a portion of the group’s glory, yet never having to lift so much as a paw or contribute anything.

Grandfather tossed his head, discontentedly, trying to instill the importance of what didn’t, but likely could have happened, with a vigor matched only by a parent whose child won big the first time they gambled: “Well, and if Peter hadn’t caught the wolf? What then?”

Above them flew Birdie chirping merrily: “My, what fine ones we are, Peter and I! Look, what we have caught!” Fortunately for Birdie, the rather tense hunters, who were still guarding the wolf, could not

Peter continued

understand bird song, or they may have shot the little birdie for taking credit for what was, in reality, the hunter's achievement.

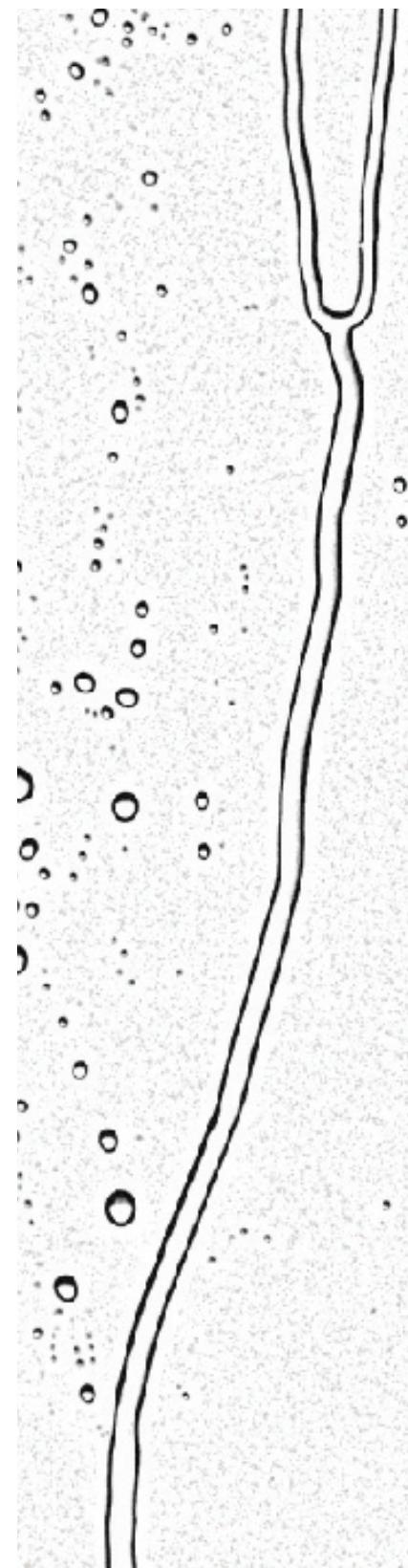
And if one would listen very carefully, he could hear the duck quacking in the wolf's belly, because the wolf in his hurry had swallowed her alive. Since an ending like that is just daring the world to come up with a worse ending: Peter took out a packed lunch of onion rings. Birdie started fluttering down to eat with Peter, but was having difficulty landing on his shoulder. One of the hunters took off his hunting coat, revealing a "Members Only" jacket and started acting fidgety. Then Peter heard a twig snap, he looked up and —



PETER AND THE WOLF

By Sergei Prokofiev
© 1937 by G. Schirmer Inc. (ASCAP)

Translation by W. Blok, 1961



Fiction

Weathered

By TAMARA SHOEMAKER

The dust of 60-plus years coated his bronzed face as he stared down at the town from his perch. The rest of his skin had grayed with time, but his lips had never cracked a smile.

His feet rested on a pedestal at the edge of a used car lot, and he glared across the river at the school beyond. They'd named the mascot after him — the Chiefs, until a court case banned the term and replaced it with the innocuous Eagles.

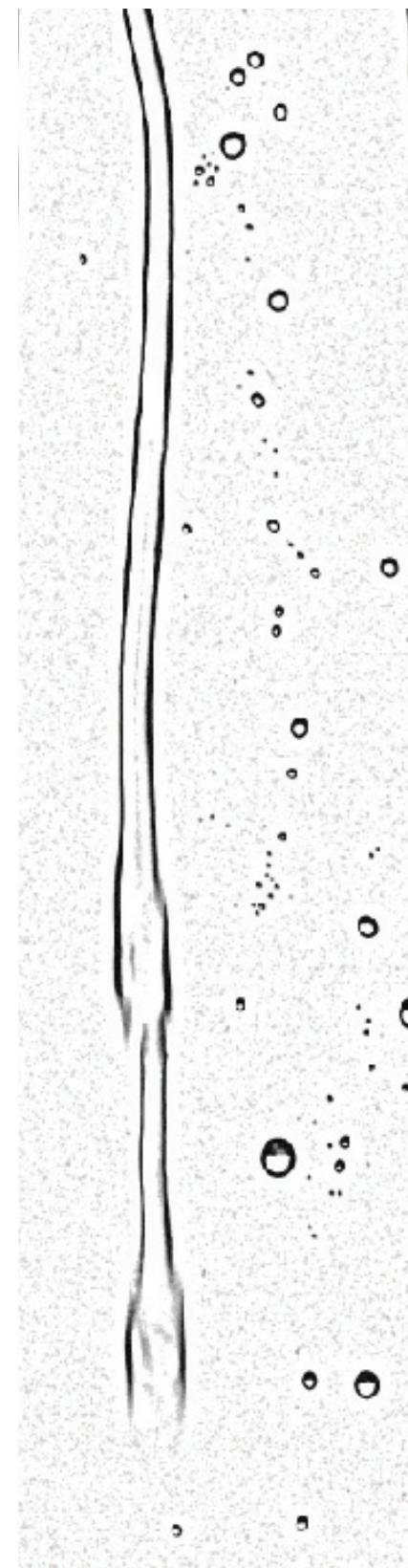
He'd become a landmark in this town. Tourists hugged a brown leg while they posed for a camera; tired Main Street meanderers paused for a break in his shadow. Gangs graffitied spray-painted tattoos on one bare calf; girls kissed interested boys behind the pedestal.

I worked in his shadow, operating my store where I could see the rigid profile. The eyes faded more each day, and rumors swirled that the city might give the old guy his final rest.

On a drizzly day, I nestled a set of books more snugly on a shelf, pulling the window closed to bar the rain from my merchandise. I traced the rivulets on the glass.

"Will that make you happy?" I whispered.

His cheeks dripped moisture below his empty, empty eyes.



RIDE THE PETER PAN

By ALLISON WHITTENBERG

There were times when it seemed like all the beauty was sucked out of my life. This was one of them. It was cold and damp, early spring, and I was Greyhounding from my old life to my new, from North to South. I was 24, master degreed, unwed, and pregnant.

All around me, I saw failure. As each passenger climbed aboard, emptiness filled the bus. I saw the unshaved and the unshowered. The angry and confused. Widows, retirees, practically invalids dragging their duffle bags. Beside me, a degenerate unwrapped his plastic wrapped sandwiches. I stared out of the windows like a peeping Tom. Riding the bus meant never passing City Hall, never going by the nice restaurants or boutiques melting into friendly pedestrians strolling past. No businessman with wedding bands checking briefcases. No, I saw a squeegee man dirtying clean windshields.

I wish I'd taken the Peter Pan, a special line that showed escapist movies. I'd taken that before when I was only going as far as NYC. I saw a flick about moving an elephant cross-country. It wasn't a box office smash but for a bus ride it was perfect. Here, there wasn't even a blank screen. I could go for another feature length; too bad that line doesn't go down South.

A man with eyes like the sky was doing the driving. He loud talked to the passengers in the front couple of rows about how fake pro wrestling was. He asked the question, "How come every time they hit each other, they stomp their feet?"

Back in high school, I was valedictorian. A decade later, long after pomp and circumstance was played, I found myself a loser. Just another confused minority waif riding public transportation bouncing the back of her neck against a greasy headrest ...

My wish was for a miscarriage. I know that was a horrible thing to wish for.

I had used up all my distractions. I put on my headphones and heard only a staticky cassette tape. The magazines I had brought, I had read too quickly. I had put away the novel I had brought miles ago. I just couldn't get into it. It was just words on a page. Now what?

There was a woman with chicken wings in her shirt pocket. Her fingers smudged the window.

I'm going to kill my baby. Strangle it with my large intestine or with my hands like the Prom Mom. It was a fleeting thought. I blamed it on the bus. Some people get motion sickness; I get homicidal thoughts.

If only the Peter Pan would go way down to Georgia. May-

Peter Pan continued

be I should have flown or rented a car. Truth is, I didn't have the presence of mind to do either. I needed to let someone else do the driving. Let someone else make the stops and turns. I was so angry. Angry at rape, domestic violence, the porn industry, sexism, fascism, racism, ismisms. My life wasn't supposed to go like this. I was the smart girl.

I should have watched my drink.

I should have reported it.

I should have taken the morning after pill.

I shouldn't have been in denial.

RU486 could have stopped this from being compounded. How am I going to look at this product for the next 18 years? How? What am I going to do? Where am I going? I know where I'm going. Macon. But where am I going?

I'm going home. I don't even have a job waiting for me. I had two grand saved; that's all.

My legs were cramping from a rocky night when I try to turn this seat into a sofa. I snuggle in the best I can.

I had no other plans than to live with my mother. My mother was loving and nurturing but not understanding. She couldn't understand this; I couldn't understand this.

A few rows behind me that Lolita pop music was playing, someone else turned on a hip hop station and overpowered it. This all could have been understandable if I dressed like that naval-centric nymphet, but I didn't. I never did. Even on that night, I had on my work clothes at the party, navy skirt, light blue turtleneck. (When groping for cause and effect, fall on stereotypes.)

I thought I knew Warren. We had talked before about peace, public education, and reparations. My life was going so well. I was saving to buy a condo, something tasteful with modern furniture. It would look like the furniture store-room at Ikea. Now look at me, boomeranging back to my same humble beginnings, to the gray borough I grew up in. I have lost control. My power is taken. My destiny. Couldn't he at least have opened up a condom package and put it on?

The woman in front of me was babbling about how thick her son's neck is. He was in the Navy and that Navy wanted to kick him out because he'd gotten fat. They have been taping his waist and throat to find the density.

My rapist wasn't big, but he did overpower me.

My rapist didn't look like a rapist. He was tall, slender, a runner's build, dark, bookish eyeglasses — kind of like me only male and a pervert.

I only had one glass of wine.

Date rapists aren't any different from rapist rapists. In a lot of ways, they are worse. They gain your confidence, then betray you. They Milli Vanilli their way into your life. They don't carry a knife or a gun. Just a drug. And surprise.

I remember my stockings pulled down around my ankles so I couldn't move my feet and run. The wheel of my mind takes in the way he braced my arms, so that I couldn't move my arms and clock him. The way he got inside my mind so even my voice didn't work. Why didn't I scream? I lived in an efficiency on the third floor where the walls and ceilings were as thin as loose-leaf paper.

I worked in the politics of shame as a counselor at a women's shelter where the politics of silence was busted every day. I should have come forward. Instead, I did what I urged others not to do, I swallowed it down ... yet the projector kept whirring and clacking.

There was a woman on the bus with her hair so uncombed she had dreads from the neglect. Her carry on was a shopping bag full of pain. I was just like her. Up until the rape, my life had been so fine-toothed-combed. Pregnancy dictated to me that all my dreams were gone. Even my distant ones of going to Africa, eating raw cashews in Nairobi, tracing my roots ...

The bus driver stopped just past Columbia. He told us to get a smoke or a coke. The previous day, I had thrown up twice. Today, I was hungry. I went to the rest room to wash up. The smell of joints hit me as did the sight of women brushing their teeth and washing up. Not just bird baths. Not just splashing under the armpits, spritz to open the dry eyes. These women had their tops off and their pants down. They were buck-naked crowded by the drain.

I left the rest room and cleansed my hands with a moist towelette I had stored in my carryall bag. I ducked into the terminal coffee shop and sat at the counter.

A waitress made her way over to me and grunted at me.

"Do you have any turkey?" I asked.

"No."

"What do you have?" I asked.

"Burgers. What did you want? A club?"

"No. I wanted a Rachel."

She looked at me blankly.

I explained. "It's like a Ruben, but you use turkey."

"We don't have no turkey."

"Do you have bacon?"

"Do you want a BLT?" she asked.

"No. Bacon cheeseburger."

"We don't have no cheese."

I squinted. "No cheese? No bacon?"

"Nope. So what do you want?"

"An abortion."

She gave me a blank stare.

"I'll have a burger," I swallowed hard and said hoarsely.

"You want fries with that?"

Soon, the moon-faced waitress slid the plate my way.

The bun was cold, and the burger looked like an SOS souring pad.

I just don't get it; I had done everything I was supposed to do right down to only using my first initial on the mail and the phone book. How did I get raped?

Some fellow with a head full of shiny Liberace hair — every strand in place — sat next to me. I eyed him. He was a brown skinned man, chubby, I don't know why I thought Liberace. I should have thought Al Sharpton.

"How's your burger?" he asked.

I said nothing.

"My name's Brian." He smiled. I noticed that he was missing a side tooth. "You know, you are exactly what I'm looking for."

I thought for a moment: Exactly what was I looking for? A life of fox furs, red sequined evening dresses? White candles in silver candlestick holders? The man kept smiling at me showcasing his missing molar. I told myself to give up. Life is not going to be gallant.

He chewed his burger favoring one side. "What's your name?"

"Ann." I lied. It was really Arna. This is what I always did. I never give strangers too much information. Even in singles clubs, when asked for my phone number, I would give only, the last digit. I'm always cautious, watchful.

"Ann. I like that. I like women like you. I like a woman whose breasts are where they're supposed to be and have a nice small waist like you have."

I turned away from him and placed my napkin over my burger.

"I have a truck," he said.

I put a \$5 bill on the counter.

"You want to go for a ride in my truck?" he asked. He smelled oily and close.

I stood up. "How old are you?"

Peter Pan continued

"I'm 42, but I don't want no has-beens. My daddy had kids up until he was 60 ... I don't date women over 21, 22."

"You don't."

"Naw, I don't want a has-been."

"Do you have any kids?" I asked.

"I have grandkids," he answered.

"You have grandkids." I absorbed and repeated.

"Yeah, but that's my daughter's business."

"What happened to your wife?" I asked.

"What wife? I've never been married —" He leered "— Yet."

I made a fist. "You're a 42-year-old grandfather. Why don't you date grandmothers?"

"I done told you I don't deal with no has-beens," he told me.

"Have you started your family yet?"

"By family, you mean a mother and a father and a child right. If you mean that, the answer is no." I made my voice icy as Massachusetts in December. I kept my cadence proper and dry.

"You know what I mean. You got any shorties?" he asked still snaggle toothed grin.

"The answer is no."

I turned to leave. He reached for me.

"Get your goddamn hands off of me."

The entire clientele craned their necks at me. An older woman next to the door looked over her glasses at me. The waitress cupped her hands over her face.

"I went to Smith!" I told them, then I gave Grandpa the finger. I gathered my coat around me, clutched my bag and walked toward the pay phone. I had promised I'd call my mother when I got close to home. I pulled out my card and pressed the digits. Ma answered on the first ring.

"How's your trip going?" she asked.

"All right," I answered. This was my biggest lie yet.

"It's a cast of characters ain't it?" she laughed. I loved her laugh. It was full, colorful, and Southern.

"How far are you along?" she asked.

"Right outside of Columbia."

"How far are you along?" she asked again.

"I'm right in Sumter. Outside Columbia, I'll be there in another two hours."

"No, Arna, how far are you along?"

"You know? How could you know?"

"I just do. Something about the way you told me out of the clear blue you were moving back home. You love Boston."

She didn't sound angry or disappointed. She sounded psychic.

"Everything is going to be all right. You're not around any smoke are you? They say that now. That ain't good for the baby."

"I'm only two months in, Ma," I told her.

"It's too bad you have to travel pregnant. You have morning sickness and jet lag."

I smiled. It felt strange to smile. "Ma, you can't get that from a bus because you feel every mile."

"Buses ain't so bad anymore. Don't they show movies?"

"Certain ones do. Greyhound has a spinoff. Peter Pan. I'm just on the regular one."

"Well, you'll be home soon. We'll all be there to pick you up."

"I don't have a job lined up."

"You're a mother now. That's your job."

"But I had a career."

"You find something down here. You've always been smart."

"Ma, I let a dumb thing happen."

"You're the first one in the family to ever go to college, Arna. You'll find something down here. We got everything's Boston's got. Just a little less of it."

I saw a mass of people heading toward the bus. "Ma, I have to go."

"See you soon."

The bus was just about to pull off as I climbed back aboard. The driver asked me if I knew The Rock.

I crossed my fingers and said, "We're like this."

There was a reshuffling of the seats, and I found my middle of the bus seat gone. I went to the back.

It's always those honor student, 16-year-olds who don't want to disappoint their parents who hemorrhage from grimy abortions. Ma took the news better than I thought.

My mother had emphatic ears. She didn't wear make-up or nail polish. She had basic hobbies; she liked to sew and cook. She was lucky; she didn't go out to the world to discover herself. She was married at 15. I was the exact middle child of seven. Maybe. Macon wouldn't be so bad; it's not like I had a job on Wall Street. There's shelters in my hometown or at least people in need of shelter.

A voluptuous big-hipped woman sat next to me. She

had swollen ankles. She was one of the nude women I saw in the restroom.

I guess I wasn't put into this world to be pampered; I was put in this world to be squeezed between a window and foul smelling misery.

Back home, kids ride their bikes and chase each other up and down the sidewalk. Just thinking of that made me feel warm enough to ignore the draft that was coming from the metal vent along side the window.

I will not end this life.

If it's a girl, I will cover her pigtails with red and purple plastic. If it's a boy, I will teach him to be kind.

The bus started up, and I got a mild case of whiplash caused from my neck bouncing against the headrest.

There are times when it seems like all the beauty is sucked out. This isn't one of them.



Blessed

By SARAH STOLTZFUS ALLEN

early morning porch sitting
before the chaos
cigarette
while flicking thin pages
gleaning morality
she closes her eyes
the weight of her tiny world
piles onto minimum wage shoulders
into growling SNAP belly
blessed are the poor in spirit
her baby can't play T-ball.
registration takes away from rent
she shouldn't have said
"we'll have to see,"
two weeks ago when she already knew.
was his hope worth it?
last night:
hot tears running streaks
down dirty cheeks
followed by angry
accusations
"you never let me do anything, mama!"
this morning:
a sleepy-warm shape
settles against her hip
"sorry i yelled, mama."
blue eyes met
tears pricked
in the corners of
mother and son
for theirs is the kingdom of heaven

40 CELEBRITIES THAT YOU DIDN'T KNOW WERE ATHEISTS

By RICKY GARNI

Beneath the article is a photograph of Sean Penn.

I haven't read the article. I am not certain I want to know who is an atheist among celebrities or even my friends. I think that if someone knew whether or not there was a God, I wouldn't ask him. I would be happy to know of course, if there were. Perhaps I would like someone to just surprise me with the news. They could say: "Guess what?"

But I still wonder about the photograph of Sean Penn. He doesn't look very happy. Then again, he never looks very happy. Perhaps he is an atheist and it weighs heavily on his soul. Perhaps they asked him if he was an atheist and he found it upsetting, because he loves Baby Jesus very much and he also gets upset easily anyway even when he can't find a parking space or a sharpened Number 2 pencil. Perhaps that was the only photograph they could find of a celebrity that looked like an atheist and frankly he kind of does. Or perhaps Sean Penn is an atheist, plain and simple. And perhaps the photographer just surprised him with good news, that there really is a God, a really great one, and he can't be an atheist anymore. Who wants to know that they've been wrong their whole life? It's really upsetting. And embarrassing. I wish the photographer had surprised me instead. I would be happy. And I never hit anybody. Except for Charlie when I was about 6 and anyway he just stole my double decker Corgi bus and so it was sort of his fault.

Winter View

By YUAN CHANGMING

Like billions of dark butterflies
Beating their wings
Against nightmares, rather
Like myriads of
Spirited coal-flakes
Spread from the sky
Of another world
A heavy black snow
Falls, falling, fallen
Down towards the horizon
Of my mind, where a little crow
White as a lost patch
Of autumn fog
Is trying to fly, flapping
From bough to bough



Short Arm of the Law

By ANDREW SHARP

Benjamin Bailey's supper fled away down the mountain in stiff-legged springs, heading rapidly out of range of his rifle. He watched the small herd of mule deer hungrily, but he did not shoot. He knew his bullet would likely just land on sagebrush and he was running low on shells.

He was running low on everything — food, water, energy and hope, along with ammunition.

Of those, the last one he wanted to run out of was ammunition. He needed at least one shell.

He had come to Nevada with plenty of energy and hope, and had picked up the other supplies after arrival, including a lightly used Winchester .44-40, Model 1873, the cowboy's gun that had captured Eastern imaginations. He wouldn't have been able to hit a bison if it had dropped in for coffee, while the real western veterans could, or liked to say they could, shoot fleas off a dog from across town. Still, the gun did give him a sense of comfort, a feeling that he might be able to augment the short arm

Dangling Participles

By DONAL MAHONEY

Every time something breaks
like the pipe in the wall
we heard gushing

this morning
my wife wants to call
a repairman because

I can't fix anything
except split infinitives
and dangling participles

and I usually agree
but this time
I mention the kayaks

in the attic and say
why don't we hop
in the kayaks

open the front door
and sail down the street
wave to the neighbors

cutting their grass
planting their peonies
worrying about crime

and shout best of luck
we're tired of the good life
we're sailing away.

Short Arm continued

of the law, or that people might mistake him for someone who could.

Despite his nervousness about the do-it-yourself style of law and order, that was part of what lured him to Nevada. Ben was no gunslinger or mountain man, no one-man kingdom enforcing his rules at gunpoint. But back in Philadelphia, he was glued in place in the social mosaic. All the property and resources were claimed and their allocation monitored by rules and regulations piled up over the generations. Merchants, traders and laborers struggled to make a meager profit, working their whole lives and then dying and passing their allotted opportunity on to their children, while the wealthy sent their children to Harvard to learn to rule. There was no unclaimed gold in Philadelphia.

In the west, though, the nuggets were lying around, waiting for someone to find them. Everyone knew the about the one found in Nevada that had been worth \$5,000, or was it \$20,000? It was just lying in a sandbar, according to the story, or in some versions in the bottom of a creek, and a man out for a Sunday stroll had picked it up, a \$20,000 profit in an afternoon. With a week's work, Ben was happy to make a few dollars.

Ben was a simple man, not a starry-eyed dreamer looking to make it rich and then throw it away on women and drink. He did not need \$20,000 nuggets, at least not right away. Small \$1,000 nuggets would be fine with him. He'd find a good claim, work it for a couple of years and get a few thousand out of it, and then build a ranch with a nice Western-sounding name like the Aspen Range or the Ponderosa. He wanted hard work with real payoff and no lawyers and government officials looking over his shoulder all the time.

Once he decided to leave, he was almost feverish to start. He imagined other, undeserving miners, probably with no careful plans of their own, bumbling into his claim through blind luck. The greedy hordes were spreading out over the land taking everything, in his mind. Later he would feel silly about this; raised in the city, he had no inkling of the vastness of the West, the long miles of empty land that swallowed up the handful of men willing to risk everything and start over on a chance.

In Philadelphia, he had been almost secretive, buying up supplies and making arrangements quietly, as if when the city found out that he, Benjamin Bailey, was going to Nevada, the dam would break and the entire city would flow west. "What, him? Well, if he's going, I'm going too."

But the few friends he did tell showed no sign of rushing off to sell all they had and buy train tickets. Instead, they made unkind insinuations about "gold fever" and warned him about the perils of greed. "You're wasting everything I spent my life building," his father had argued with him. "Not one in a hundred is going to do any good out there. You may as well sell the store and take it all to the racetrack." Cynics and pessimists, Ben called them. He had a dream for a good life. He feared missing his chance. Was that greed?

When he stepped off the stagecoach in Ely, Nevada, the first thing he noticed was the color. For all the talk of gold, what Nevada seemed to have in abundance was items in the brown and gray variety, from the dark gray bare rock of the mountain slag, down to the lighter gray sagebrush on the dusty valley flatlands. Wherever people moved, the dirt was puffed up into clouds of brown dust like cocoa powder that blew, settled down on hats and coats and store counters, and gritted on teeth. Rarely was there any rain to knock it down again.

Color here was like water — a treasure, savored when found; the vivid red of the Indian paintbrush nestled in the gray sagebrush, or the brief brilliant yellow of the aspen display in the fall higher up in the mountains, set off by the sober dark color of the evergreens. Most of the vegetation hung on, grim and determined, simply existing and not needing to make a display out of it. It had been there before the miners and was ready to survive there long after they had carried away all the metal that had brought them.

The land seemed as if it were designed to showcase the sky, to not distract from its displays of breathtaking color, the clouds blazing red and pink and orange at sunset, towering piles of white clouds high above the dust, racing through the vivid blue afternoon sky, the black and green of the fierce thunderstorms cut through with sharp lightning bolts. At night, the stars were so thick and close it seemed you could reach up with a stick and stir them into whirling galaxies.

Back east, the balance had been better. Ben did not remember much about the sunsets or the sky. What he did remember now were the creeks, the waterfalls, the almost criminal

waste of water that poured in the millions of gallons out to the sea, the constant spring rains that fed the abundant green weeds, wildflowers, and crops of summer.

Osceola, a little growing settlement of about 1,000 people, was in the general area where gold was to be found in the region. Accordingly that was where Ben made his headquarters, in a ramshackle cabin a little way up a ravine called Dry Gulch. The town was in the middle of a mountain range that ran roughly north and south. Sagebrush barrens stretched to the east and west on either side, dotted with cattle loosely organized into ranches and lonely Basque shepherds keeping watch over their flocks by night.

Ben's cabin was not the worst in town, but when you had said that, there was little more to add by way of praise. There were respectable gaps in the walls that did little to discourage the winter wind and nothing to discourage the vermin, and the chimney was apathetic about its task of discharging the smoke outdoors. The floors were dirt.

It was fairly typical in the town, which had been hastily thrown together to shelter incoming floods of men come together to compete for wealth. The more wealthy residents could boast of their simple wood frame buildings, with virtually no major holes in the walls. There were a couple of saloons, and a house or two where one could obtain feminine company. Many people lived in shanties that were more piles of material, incorporating rock and logs and tarpaper and tin and whatever else was handy.

Ben searched for a mining claim for several months without any luck, and then, with not much better luck, worked an unproductive claim for another year, eating his life savings and spending it on supplies. Doom seemed to hang in the smoke cloud in the chilly evenings in his shack, as he waved smoke out of his face and scratched out optimistic letters home. The savagery of the place pressed down on him. He saw men worn down and used up by the cold winters and brutal summers that killed their horses and cattle.

For every successful store, hotel, ranch or mining claim in the Osceola region, there were a hundred men who died without reaching their dreams, or who were killed in mining disputes or robberies, whose cattle perished or disappeared. Hard work needed some luck to go with it and the dice didn't favor most.

The dice did not seem to be rolling for Ben. His first claim had yielded only a few dollars in gold flakes, enough to buy a little food, but nothing to build on. So he agreed immediately when an old miner told him he had found a decent location

Short Arm continued

but wanted a partner so he could claim more ground and have an extra hand.

The miner's name was James T. Randolph, Ben found out when they signed their papers. Until that time Ben had known him as Bullfrog, a name the miner had earned with his habit of singing loudly and out of tune to himself when he was in a good mood.

He was in a good mood a lot, and so the neighborhood was often serenaded with his booming tones.

Bullfrog was known as a good miner and above reproach by miners' moral standards, which meant he put in long days of work, didn't cheat at cards and limited himself to moderate drinking, never more than 12 drinks in a sitting. He was welcome at every table in every saloon, and Ben considered himself very lucky to have landed a partnership with him.

Bullfrog was patient with Ben's mistakes and taught him how to find any gold, if it was there. The old miner had been right about the claim. It was a solid one, and Ben's hope, which had been running low with his savings, picked up again. They made more than enough money for their supplies and bills, and began saving extra.

"You know what we oughtta do?" Bullfrog told him one day. "We're getting enough we could put our pot together and buy a ranch or something, or a hotel, something that will make us money when this runs out. Can't do this forever anyway. We're not getting any younger."

This fell in exactly with Ben's plans, so the only discord was over which option to pick. Bullfrog was enamored with the idea of a saloon and hotel called Bullfrog 'N Ben's, but the Ben half of the enterprise thought that was a silly name and also preferred to live in the country, out in the invigorating air herding cattle.

"We're too old to ranch," Bullfrog argued.

"You're too old," Ben said. "I can do most of the work. You can just help out as you're able." Bullfrog did not seem to accept this in the generous spirit it was offered, and they let the topic drop.

Despite these divergent goals, they fell into a happy routine of hard work, beginning the days with Bullfrog's supreme

flapjacks (Ben had to wash the dishes) and ending with a quiet drink (or several) over the campfire, the air seasoned with the rich smoke of Bullfrog's pipe and filled with his stories from a life of western roaming. Even if they weren't true, Ben felt they were some of the best he had heard.

The question of future plans became more urgent one day in the early summer, when Ben uncovered some large gravel that seemed at first like gold nuggets. As he examined them, they looked more like gold nuggets. He was suspicious, trying to hold back his excitement, because he knew that only a greenhorn would expect to find nuggets this big or plentiful.

"Come look at this," he called to Bullfrog, who wandered over and took the rocks in his hand. He turned them over a few times in silence without showing any emotion, and Ben felt the disappointment begin, even though he had known all along it was not really gold.

Then Bullfrog's face cracked into a huge smile. "We've struck it, Ben!"

Ben felt as if he were going to lose his balance. The pressure he had been carrying suddenly lifted off his shoulders, and he realized it had been heavier than he thought. Its absence, and the fact he was newly wealthy, left him feeling light and giddy. What would they say in Philadelphia now? He might be covered in mud and dressed in rags like a hobo, but he could ride back East in a new suit and buy a house with running hot and cold water. He could have his old store back, and a dozen like it, if he wanted, which he most certainly did not want.

Bullfrog was shouting and jumping around, grabbing him by the shoulders, and Ben joined in, and they leaped around in circles like square dancers without a fiddle.

They worked that claim urgently for the rest of the summer, scarcely stopping to eat, and found a good deal of gold. Finally, by the autumn, they started finding less, not more. They had to take turns sleeping at night to guard their stockpiled treasure, which they kept in a chest at their campsite on the claim. Bullfrog wouldn't trust it to a bank.

"Damned if I let some bandit come in there waving a pistol and walk off with my hard-earned gold," he said.

Ben pointed out that the bandit could do the same thing in their camp, and that bank robberies were fairly rare, but Bullfrog put his foot down on this point.

They were already wealthy men, and the gold was waiting to be spent. Mining had lost its expectant savor. If they

couldn't find nuggets, it seemed like too much work. They decided to sell the claim and invest their money.

Where to invest that money was what still divided them. The day they sold the claim, they booked a room in a hotel in town and then talked long into the night. They built sprawling ranches and hotel empires, railroad stock fortunes and trading fleets. Ben kept coming back to buying a ranch in the area. He had come to like it here, and now that it was not likely to ruin him he could enjoy it properly.

Bullfrog still held out for his business, a saloon or a hotel, city life and commerce. He had been a bumpkin his whole life, he said, and now he meant to get a suit and become the mayor, and maybe a senator eventually. A modest man, he thought he would decline to run for president.

They eventually had to turn in for the night without resolving the issue.

When Ben rolled over and sat up the next morning, he was alone in the room, and the chest where they kept their gold was empty. He yanked on some clothes and rushed out into the hotel's bar to find Bullfrog and tell him the terrible news. Bullfrog wasn't there, and the innkeeper hadn't seen him. Ben hurried outside, where the street was empty in the quiet gray of the early morning. A few lamps were on in windows, and an old miner was sitting on a porch across the street chewing tobacco. He told Ben around his chaw that Bullfrog had in fact come out not long before, and headed out of town.

"Looked like he was in a hurry, too," he said. "Any trouble? Say, are you feeling all right?"

Ben kicked the empty wooden chest into shards of cedar, and then hobbled around cursing and throwing together a bedroll, some basic food, and his gun. The loss of the gold was hard to take, but the deeper hurt was that he had trusted Bullfrog completely. He had trusted Bullfrog's friendship, but Eastern greenhorn that he was, had been made a fool of.

He didn't have much of a plan. The old miner had pointed south, into the mountains, when asked which way Bullfrog had gone. Ben wondered why Bullfrog hadn't just gone to Ely and caught the stage, but realized that he was smart enough to know he couldn't outrun telegraph messages, which Ben certainly would have used to beat him to the next stop. By disappearing into the mountains, he could avoid the law, put some distance between any pursuers and come out anywhere. Ben figured, though, that Bullfrog might stick to the mountains for some time, to make tracking harder and to avoid being seen.

Short Arm continued

There would only be one pursuer, as Ben figured a smaller committee would streamline the justice process. He knew he faced long odds. The mountains were big, and Bullfrog could cut out into the valleys at any time, or double back, or head south until he got to Mexico. He could be anywhere, and certainly had the money to buy what he needed. Ben, by contrast, had nothing except a little leftover food and even had to sneak out of the hotel to avoid the bill he now could not afford.

Ben forced his horse as fast as it could go around the heaps of gray slag, over rocky ridges and through groves of stubby pines. Sometimes he would hit a stream, where there would be meadows of wildflowers and grass. The air was getting crisp with fall, and he rode through groves of golden aspen.

After a couple of days of streaming sweat, maneuvering over and around and back, starting and stopping, cursing and crying, he was saddle sore, dead tired, running out of ammunition and hungry. He had eaten the food he brought and now had to rely on his marksmanship to bring down game, which was why he was so hungry. A big target like a deer, not moving, was well within his skill, but he had to see one first. So far, all he had done was burn up a number of shells on a hopping jackrabbit.

He puzzled over what he was going to do on the slim chance he stumbled across Bullfrog. The man was not likely to stay around for a chat without some blunt encouragement. In some of Ben's more gratifying scenarios, he confronted Bullfrog, but Bullfrog tried to ride away and he shot him off the horse. In calmer moments he would hold his gun on Bullfrog until the old traitor was forced to put down the bag of gold, and then order him in a tough voice, "Now you get out of here! And I don't want to ever see you again!" If he were feeling particularly generous, they would split the gold, but that scenario did not have quite the ring of justice to it that Ben was looking for.

He also wondered what he would do if he couldn't find Bullfrog. Part of the reason he kept riding blindly was that

to go back was to give up, to trust to luck that he could scratch out another claim. He knew that was a stretch. He wouldn't get lucky again, and he may as well try his luck out here as back in town. The company mine was already crowding out independent miners, buying up land, bringing in hundreds of laborers. He would end up as a laborer, maintaining the canal, working for a meager wage, supervising a team of Chinese or Indians or worse, working with them. Or he could sign on as a cowhand at a ranch, or as a shepherd, and die poor out here. Or, he could go back East and admit defeat, and pick up where he had left off, except poorer, starting over again, having wasted years, and die poor there. Going back was the end of the dream, but out here it was still out there ahead of him, riding away.

As he watched the mule deer herd flee, delicious roasts of venison leaping down into the valley, Ben lowered his gun and rested his head on his hand. A breeze whipped down off the mountain and tugged at his shirt, bearing the advance traces of coming winter. He stood up and stretched. Time to ride on.

Then he froze. In the distance, back toward the way he had come, came a faint gunshot. Could he have passed Bullfrog? Or maybe it was just some rancher on a fall hunt. Ben pulled off his hat and rubbed his forehead, and looked around the rough terrain. Yes, he would go back. Any hint was better than riding blindly ahead.

Late the next morning, Ben sat on a rocky outcrop with his back against a scrubby juniper, looking off down the ridge and wishing for mouthful of some other food besides the remnants of the unwary marmot he was chewing. He had found no trace of anyone when he rode back in the direction he had heard the shot. After hours of meandering he had gotten desperate, riding in widening circles for miles. It was utter folly to keep going now, low on food and ammo, and he knew it. He was done.

Several hundred yards away downhill, Bullfrog walked out from behind a rock, leading his horse. Ben could see the lumpy brown pack they had stored the gold in, lashed to the horse's back. Ben watched him, a marmot bone still sticking out of his mouth.

Then Ben eased up his rifle, working to steady the sights on his former partner and friend. His finger trembled against the smooth curve of the trigger.

Bullfrog glanced his way, stared for a moment, then leaped

for his horse. Ben followed him with the gun sights and squeezed the trigger. He knew that the gun had gone off but it seemed to have made little noise or recoil, as if it were far away, a background noise that had little to do with what was going on. Bullfrog stumbled and fell, but then scrambled to his feet and clawed his way onto the horse. Ben worked the lever and fired again, then again. Bullfrog whipped the horses into a gallop. Ben aimed very carefully at Bullfrog's bouncing back and squeezed the trigger again.

The gun clicked. He was out of shells.

Cursing, he reached into his pack and felt around for more. There were no more.

He sat panting, staring down at his now useless gun.

Then he propped the rifle against the juniper tree, walked back to his horse, and rode away toward town.

"Archaeologists conducting surveys in Nevada's Great Basin National Park came upon a gun frozen in time: a .44-40 Winchester rifle manufactured in 1882. It was propped up against a juniper tree."

The Washington Post
Jan. 14, 2015



Cacaphony at Midday

By CAROL HAMILTON

Gray-edged and frosted white
where we re-enter unadulterated air,
catch breath against cold
as 12 o'clock siren starts
a train screams its passing
and a nearby church chimes in.

We insist to all frigid silence
we are
here
here
Hear us!

The Secret of Spaghetti

By TERRY BARR

Not too long after my mother-in-law got married, her loving husband called her to say that he was bringing home his boss for supper. Perhaps he didn't remember that she had never cooked a meal in her life, or perhaps he didn't know that their nanny/cook had the night off. In any case, she chose not to inform him of either scenario; she chose to say, "Yes, of course, bring him!"

And then she chose to cook spaghetti.

She said she had seen it done before and simply thought she could reproduce it. My future mother-in-law worked outside the home herself, rising in the ranks of Tehran educators to become superintendent of the entire city school system. She learned to manage teachers and principals, and of course, students. Spaghettis noodles, though, were another matter.

Not that choosing to serve spaghetti was wrong in and of itself, though given that this story occurred in Iran, and that the cast was all-Persian, you do have to wonder: why not a khoresh (stew) with pomegranate sauce (Fesen-Jun), or with fresh greens and broiled sirloin tips (Ghorma-sabsi)? Except that if you really don't know how to make spaghetti (boil noodles, open jar of sauce, heat and mix), you probably don't know much about stews that take hours to prepare and must marinate and simmer and blend in just the right way.

It actually turns out that Persians love spaghetti, too, perhaps because it provides many of the essential food groups and is also so amenable to shortcuts.

One of these shortcuts, however, is not frying the spaghetti noodles in a large skillet.

As they "cooked," my mother-in-law wondered why the vermicelli wasn't softening. And really, when there's no one else to correct you, why shouldn't you wonder? (Though again, no Persian would ever conceive of frying rice, the country's most staple starch.)

My father-in-law was a kind and loving man. When he arrived home and saw what was not happening in the kitchen, he ordered out and the evening was saved. No harm, no foul, just some poor sautéed and over-hard noodles thrown into the Tehran night.

I have since eaten Persian spaghetti on many occasions. I've even prepared it according to what I've seen take place in my in-laws' kitchen. The most unique feature of this dish is to slice a large Irish potato, arrange these slices in the bottom of a large Dutch oven already coated with oil, and then add the cooked noodles mixed with meat and sauce on top. This second cooking causes the potatoes to brown and crust just ever-so-slightly. If you believe that one starch on top of another starch can't possibly be good — for who would ever serve baked or fried potatoes with

spaghetti? — then I suggest you try it. Maybe not so good for your waistline, but then, when has that ever stopped a good southern boy like me?

When she was a young wife and mother, my Mom tried her best to vary her evening meals, satisfying taste and nutritional needs. She was creative and certainly inspired by the finest restaurants in Birmingham and New Orleans, as she conceived of the various ways to prepare shrimp and red snapper, shortcakes and lemon chess pies. She also adhered to her small-town Southern roots by stewing greens with backbone meat and serving them with cornbread and baked sweet potatoes. Her first foray into spaghetti, however, (and you do have to give her credit for trying) was to serve veal cutlets with spaghetti on the side, as I'm sure she had seen it done in her favorite Italian restaurant, Bessemer, Alabama's "Romeo's."

Only, and this pains me though it also cracks me up to say, her spaghetti came from a Franco-American can.

I was only 4 or 5 years old back in those days, and so it never occurred to me that this wasn't a meal fit for the kings my father and I considered ourselves to be. I didn't realize then how lower middle class we were, how my mother had to scrimp to manage such meals, or how tasty she made

Spaghetti continued

them despite her financial obstacles. So for me, spaghetti was Franco-American for a time, until we graduated to the finer world of Chef Boyardee: a packaged powdered sauce mixed with meat and served on a bed of plain vermicelli. Except for the potatoes, we could have been Persian.

Other than the baked spaghetti smothered in American cheese that I was served in my elementary school lunchroom, this was the spaghetti I grew up with, the spaghetti I knew. The spaghetti I loved.

And then, when I was 12, the Manzellas moved to our block so that Frank Manzella could live near his older brother Tony. Tony's sons Randy and Timmy were great friends of mine, and soon my brother Mike and I became close with Frank's son, Frankie. From football to baseball to collecting Hot Wheels cars, those years made our neighborhood whole. What really sustained us all, though, was the recipe for spaghetti that Frank's wife Pearl, the daughter of first generation Sicilian immigrants, prepared and passed on to my mother.

Authentic Italian pasta sauce with enormous meatballs. And always served with fresh Romano cheese to top it.

Our family spaghetti nights revolutionized then, and for me, Thursdays became my favorite day of the week because the evening's suppers were our traditional spaghetti night.

When I went off to college and later graduate school and began cooking for myself, the one recipe I had to carry with me was that pasta sauce revelation from Pearl Manzella. My mother wrote it down for me (though she cautioned that all recipes like this were just approximations), and I proceeded to heed all the directives and make my first, and if I say so myself, successful batch of sauce, meatballs, and tender spaghetti. Sauce is a tricky thing, and some swear by oregano while others proclaim basil leaves to be the secret. According to my mother, though, and emanating from the very lips of Pearl Manzella, the true secret to old world sauce is to cut the acidic tomatoes with sugar. Several tablespoons of pure unadulterated processed white sugar.

And if my own ears and taste buds didn't tell me this is true, further confirmation came from watching The Godfa-

ther. In my favorite scene, one of Don Corleone's henchmen is preparing sauce. And as he explains his secret to Michael, he testifies that you have to cut those tomatoes with plenty of sugar. Who would argue with him?

After my wife and I married, we lived for a time with her family, and while most of our meals were steeped in Persian stews, on occasion my wife's oldest sister would make spaghetti.

"I learned how to do this well when I lived in Rome," she said.

I always enjoyed her spaghetti, too, though what I'm about to tell might not sound like it. My sister-in-law did not make her own sauce; instead, she used Ragu. At this point, Ragu was at least bottling a newer, "garden-style" sauce. I never looked on the bottle to see its ingredients, but I did taste the original Ragu.

I don't know if the garden style was really any better or if it was the marketing guru who made us believe in the Ragu garden that pleased us.

But my guess would be a greater amount of sugar.

My sister-in-law, though, added her own secret to the sauce: extra salt. And then, more extra salt, along with a healthy dose of lemon juice. These were also our red-meatless days, so she used ground turkey fried in olive oil and onions. Mixed all together with the noodles, and the bottom-of-the-pan potatoes, her concoction satisfied us all, especially when it was served with Kraft Parmesan cheese.

Today, when I'm in a pinch, I still make spaghetti this way, though I leave out the second portion of extra salt, the lemon juice, and use either Paul Newman's sauce or, if I'm feeling extra sporty, Rao's homemade bottled sauce instead of Ragu.

Rao's uses 5 grams of sugar per bottle.

Lately, though, I've been craving Pearl Manzella's sauce. Yet making it fills me with trepidation as well as desire. Trepidation because of one night in my past. The night I realized that ancient feuds between swarthy and pale peoples must have originated in spaghetti sauce.

Christmas is a time for family, and after years of traveling to see both our families — in Alabama and Tennessee — and with two active daughters running in and out of our immediate world, we planted ourselves at home in the Christmas season of 1996 and asked our families to come to us. We

didn't have enough room to accommodate them all, and my parents, being most uncomfortable in cramped quarters, decided to stay at the Colonial Inn near our house.

On the night that both families arrived in town, I wanted to welcome them with a meal. What do you prepare for a mixed Jewish-Christian and totally Iranian set of palates?

Homemade Italian spaghetti, of course.

So I bought my cans of tomato paste and puree. I peeled my garlic, sautéed my onions until just brown, and at the same time, mixed my various meats — ground chuck, ground turkey — with Progresso Italian bread crumbs, Romano cheese, and eggs — and made the meatballs I knew my father, particularly, loved.

I also knew this: that in my sauce I must work to form the perfect blend of sugar and salt for my mother and my sister-in-law, the two who claimed the most inside knowledge of "real Italian." But I also decided to vary the recipes I had learned from them. I would not use lemon juice, but Chianti. I would add ripe olives, too, giving the beautiful red sauce an even deeper blush and, I hoped, a more refined salty taste. I would stay away from oregano, but use just the right amount of basil. And a bay leaf, making sure that my 5-year-old daughter received it on her plate so she could exclaim, as usual, "Daddy, there's a leaf in my sauce!"

And, according to my mother's written instructions handed down many years past, I would add two heaping tablespoons full of sugar. I swear: That's what her recipe called for.

That evening, everything came out on time, looking perfectly done. The meatballs were savory and browned. I tried one before the families arrived and knew my Dad would be pleased. Now they were in the pot, absorbing the sauce along with the links of Italian sausage I added (sometimes I add smallish pork chops too, but not on this night, believing that my in-laws might find too much pork unsavory).

My parents arrived first, and my mother went right to the kitchen, opened the lid on my sauce, and tasted.

"There's not enough sugar in here!"

"But I put two tablespoons, like it said on your recipe!"

"Well, I don't care, it needs more."

"OK, let me do it," and so I added another whole tablespoon. Soon my in-laws arrived, and after some chatting time and cooing over the two granddaughters, we arranged ourselves at the table, ready for the pasta.

My father, my wife, our daughters, and my mother-in-law ate quietly and with pleasure.

"Good," they all proclaimed.

Spaghetti continued

I thought it was good too, the one or two bites I could take. Because on either end of our antique French farm table, I saw this scene: my mother busily adding more sugar to her plate, and my sister-in-law, commanding the salt-shaker like it had become an appendage. And of course, neither one satisfied herself in the end because seasoning a food after it's cooked can never blend the ingredients in the right proportion. But both took the opportunity later to confide to me:

"It was good, it just needed more ..."

"It was fine, but you know it needed more ..."

It doesn't take much to cause a chef to abandon his plate, sit back from the table, and chew on a piece of fresh Italian bread. You can please a majority, but when the two you most want to please are shaking opposite ingredients as fast as they can, you could call it a stalemate, a disaster, or a holiday supper.

Or a family.

But I never tried this dish, or pasta of any sort on this blended family again.

It's taken 20 years, but on this coming weekend, I'm making my sauce again. For some friends from Portland and Chicago.

I know. I'm just crazy.

But since I refuse to run afoul of *La Cosa Nostra*, my sauce will contain two, and only two, full tablespoons of sugar, even in this, our more knowing "sugar-is-the-enemy-of-humankind" contemporary period. For I have learned that how much sugar one adds to his sauce is not just a matter of taste. No, there are greater battles in the spaghetti wars: health, culture, prowess, and pleasure (and especially two formidable women), though I remain at a loss as to whether it's possible, desirable, or forever futile to dream of pleasing anyone. Anyone, that is, except the cook.

And I also know this: the only condiment I'm putting on the table is a container of red pepper flakes. 

Bergmanesque Yahrzeit*

By GERARD SARNAT

Grandson Simon buries borrowed keys in his toy chest
to get one of my damselfly daughters' attention,
but she's glued to the tube's Sunday news shows
then the beginning of one of Woody's homages
to Ingmar's Wild Strawberries story
about old age's battle between integrity and despair.
Middle son finds them, straps both nephews
and Grams into their car seats ...
My wife tiptoes to the bedside with a bowl
of blackberries she bled for picking
from the backyard's thorny vines,
then whispers, "Dear, it's about time ..."
Don't say with sadness that Dad is no more,
say with gratitude that he was and is ever-present,
which consoling mantra Mom's hearing aids can't
as she lurches from her wheelchair
while Ell's stroller careens toward Poppa's coffin —
a collage of fetal-formed faces as I die?
Lying down, smelling the grass and counting insects,
pissed by the whirring of neighboring graves'
plastic smiley-faced rainbow windmills,
fire ants brushed off; my grandkids take turns
spinning the emoji doohickeys before converging
on the ground to gather me in.
The 6-year-old says, "Coach, I know we can't bring him
back to life, but maybe we make Great-grandpa feel better."

*Anniversary of the death of a Jewish parent, sibling, child, or spouse.

Learning from Picasso

By WILLIAM DORESKI

You're curating late Picasso at the Museum of Fine Arts. Because the paintings masticate their subjects to pulpy shards you've inspired yourself to replace your teeth with plastic, ceramic, or possibly stainless steel.

The show opens with slop and slur of cocktails and hors d'oeuvres. Thick and arrogant with power, donors pose for Globe photographers while the aesthetes like me wring our hands and hang out as far from the bar as possible. You stride

among the elite like police on the beat. They haven't heard your plan to replace your smile with the most frightening dentures you can find. But you believe in art, not nature, and art speaks the language of money, the one

global tongue. The thick people crowd the bar, guzzling drinks too volatile for people like me to handle without fracturing along predictable fault lines. They all sport custom dental work in the Carpenter Gothic style.

You want them to vomit dollars right there on the marble tile, underwriting future exhibits. Your hairdo bobs on the swells as you cross the room to shake my hand and hope I've enjoyed the liquor and snacks. Your smile

even with your familiar old teeth, is a death trap. Once you shark yourself with artificial choppers you'll ingest, by default, everything around you, learning from Picasso how to render any subject foolish for the sake of a higher cause.

The Gallery

By TOM ZIMMERMAN

Tonight the gallery will open wide as dreaming's yawning maw, the famished mind alight with torches, dogs asleep beside the fire — the wrench, the ledger left behind. Kandinskys, Rauschenbergs, and Blakes appear. Picassos, Klees, and Leonards glow. The dark of Caravaggios, the fear and awe of Turners swirl with Dürers, grow immense with Goyas, Michelangelos. Cezannes and Rembrandts, Jackson Pollocks flare with inner energies. The bold Mirós, Rossettis, and Van Goghs imbue the air with god-light. Dreamers wake, reborn to dawn, to potencies, to robins on the lawn.

Missing You - for I.

By VALENTINA CANO

You are a gap in my room,
a missing tooth my roving tongue of a mind
keeps returning to.
You are a voice missing from the house,
the quieted flutter of your presence
a flat-line through these rooms.
You are missing.
From me.



A Heaping Helping of Ethiopia

By **AMANDA MILLER**

It's not just the fire-and-earth red of the doro wat chicken stew simmering in the kettle. It's not just the spongy elasticity of the crepe-style injera almost sticking to your fingers. It's not even just the dark aroma of coffee beans roasting over in the coals in preparation for brewing buna. Something about the entire sensory experience of making Ethiopian food is so much more than just getting food on the plate (or on one round tray, in this case). My soul ends up being fed just as much as, if not more than, my stomach.

That isn't to suggest in the least that Ethiopian food simply doesn't prove satisfying, regardless of the preemptive opinion of several staunch meat-and-potatoes Midwestern farmers. I've been teaching cooking classes at a local kitchen store this summer, and was attempting to persuade one of my groups to allow me to introduce them to some East African cuisine, fully aware of the stark contrast to central Kansas dining. Their pre-class joke about "learning how to eat bread and water" expressed what can be unfortunately common social sentiment of other countries' food and accompanying culture — lack of both awareness and curiosity. I, however, have more than enough enthusiasm to go around, and was happy to share.

Accordingly, I overrode their trepidation and took the disdain as a challenge. Even just in planning the menu, I often had to stop and take a moment. Every recipe is so much more than ingredients and quantities (especially since those are all just nebulous ideas anyway) — each recipe is of names and faces and stories. I was living outside a refugee camp in northern Kenya when I met Ethiopian food and the people who make it, and they are inseparable in my memory.

I know how to watch for yeasty bubbles to pop in the thin injera batter, showing it's time to peel it off the hot skillet, because early one morning a young woman my age walked me through the steps. She didn't

Ethiopia continued

speak English and I didn't speak Amharic, but she was an excellent and patient teacher. My kitchen these days doesn't include a clay oven and a giant flat cast-iron, but I can't make injera without remembering the smell of the charcoal fire and the tin teapot she used to drizzle out the batter.

I know that transliterating doro wat into simply "chicken stew" is almost a tragedy, because that just doesn't prepare you for a stew like none other. Not only does the deep red of the long-simmered onions in hot pepper berbere catch my attention, but so will the instant flavor inferno in my mouth and stomach. Literal kilograms of hot pepper in the pot will do that. In between gasps for breath, I taste the undeniably delicious fall-off-the-bone chicken and signature hardboiled eggs; I can't help but keep eating. This is the traditional feast reserved for only holidays and honored guests, and it's rare to be able to prepare it in the camp. But there we were, being served doro.

I know brewing buna takes patience, because every time I asked my friend if the coffee was ready, she would emphatically observe, "Not yet!" The coffee ceremony is an integral ritual of Ethiopian culture, so much more than a shot of caffeine. No one takes coffee alone (which is probably good, because someone could have a heart attack with how strong it is). Starting with green coffee beans and going all the way through a triple-boil process, the process of enjoying buna is just that — a process to enjoy, something to share with others. Each round of successive almost-thick espresso brings people closer together, and the random popcorn is just another bonus.

I want to go on and describe how the earthy sweetness of cabbage is brought out in turmeric-y alicha wat, or how buttery and meaty tibs makes a day in the desert worth it, or how the pudding texture of spicy lentil shiro is so oddly delicious. The culinary aspects of those observations don't necessarily mean anything to me; what I care about is the sweet shy smile of the lady who showed me where she prepared her distinct alicha, how lines of men shoveled in their trays of tibs on long low tables in silent acceptance of the awkward white people also eating there, how my hardwork-

ing cook friend served me shiro in a mini cast-iron pot on my birthday.

It is impossible for me to forget the flavors of the food, and it is impossible for me to forget the faces behind the food. The instantaneous beam of recognition from the work-worn coffee man every time we came into his shop. We would share a nod as he automatically began to pour out the milk for my untraditional mkiato no sukari (the typical dose of black espresso and sugar is close to lethal for me). Or the silent pain in the eyes of a woman who is one of the last refugees from her region, still waiting after 22 years of watching others being resettled. She prepared our most memorable meal in the camp as a farewell, but then we left to go back to our homes, and yet again, she still stayed. Or the innocent, undeveloped grins of a girl too small and young for her age, who will never receive the special help she needs, since there just aren't extra resources when everyone is simply trying to survive. The camp is all she's ever known; maybe it will always be.

Just from the little I've known of the camp, I feel like I could keep writing for days, trying to compile a photo album of all the faces that are stories that are lives. The snapshots of memories in my mind travel all the way into my heart each time, pain plus joy. I hear reggae and catch a waft of incense and see dust floors when I cook injera and wat, in an almost startlingly holistic emotional reaction to Ethiopian food.

Food isn't just food; it's relationships and community and culture. And when you catch even just a glimpse of those through a tangible medium, such as preparing and eating a meal together, you form this bit of a connection that makes the literal other side of the world not so far away after all. Geography and anthropology aren't just school subjects anymore. Facts and figures and news clips become real.

The culture of food has something deep and real served up with it, something that lasts even longer than the five rounds of espresso. There isn't always enough injera to go around, so everyone reaches in with their hands as they gather around the same tray, focusing as much on sharing and fellowship as on eating. When guests visit, they are treated with intense



generosity, so hosts might just go without food for the next couple days.

My Ethiopian refugee friends live faith, because they have truly lost everything and maybe everyone they hold dear, and yet somehow they trust. They keep on cooking up stacks of spongy injera, stewing up pots of lentils, brewing up kettles of pitch-black buna. So do I, sharing with anyone who is willing to try.

But I went home after my time in the refugee camp. And they didn't. Most of them never will.

"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body ... and if one member suffers, all the members suffer with it." 1 Corinthians 12:13a, 26a.



Prosopopoeia: Face Making

By ALANNAH TAYLOR

The child looks up at the clouds and sees old men, horses, a fish eating spaghetti loops
She feels like the clock face is stern and commanding when it reads 9:30 a.m. on a morning when she is late for school

Her mother has smiley knees

Brisk keys

The lightbulbs are sleepy when you first turn them on

The flower grows quickly in attempt to impress her

Trucks on the road are easily made impatient: always grunting at each other

But at night, in the dark, she feels scared, thinks she is lonely.

The gambler imagines patterns in randomness

Sees faces on everything

Thinks his computer breaks just to spite him for leaving tea rings on the desk

Sees his dead son in strawberries

Posts on dating sites "lonely 42-year-old."

This old woman attends séances, speaks with spirits, reads messages in palms

Sleeps like an empty husk, grappling for an anchor.

This man talks to his gnomes

Bids the queen on his stamps a safe journey

Makes secret, unspoken deals with the numbers on the bus arrival board in the cold

Blames his pen for bad writing

Tries to seduce the Sun out of hiding on bank holidays

Sits crying in his bedroom on Christmas Day.

This boy with his lucky conker, his time honoured companion

Is scared to go to the bathroom unaccompanied.

Her with the pigtails

Playing with puppets

Scolding her shoelaces and feeling comforted by the moon

Saying goodbye to seashells and thank you to her football boots

Getting anxious at playtime.

Seeking out for other minds

Constantly projecting a mind where

A mind is not,

Feeling ourselves alone,

In spite of what we may conjure,

Spurning our imaginings.

Know-How

By ELIZA CALLARD

My days of being an Olympic swimmer

(which never began) are over. My body is 40 and tired and I never competed

even in high school, yet I had, until now, imagined that door open. The two

little girls giggling furiously while they leap-frog over one another to play a complex

four-hand piano number — I will never be one of them. It's true I play the piano, but

never like that. I could practice these skills, you say. What about the camera strapped

to the eagle's back showing the flight we can never have? Silent, smooth, feathered.

I only fly when I sleep.



Post-Apocalypse

By JUAN ERSATZMAN

“If someone wrote about us — back in the day, I mean — do you think they’d call it post-apocalyptic?” asked Marie. She was reclining against a slouchy pile of their backpacks, boots stretched out toward the fire. Jelly, deeper inside the rooftop shack, using his boots as a makeshift seat, looked up from his plate and raised an eyebrow, sufficiently surprised by the thought that he stopped licking his plate clean.

Marie ran a hand through her hair, spreading her fingers to clear the tangles. “I mean, you remember how they used to write books, and make movies about the end of civilization, climate change, nuclear holocaust … the whole thing.”

Jelly nodded, and went back to licking his plate, still listening. “And here we are now, and it doesn’t feel like those stories did, you know? The dread, the terror, the … the — you know — that feeling.”

“Wouldn’t’ve thought of it,” Jelly said, setting down the plate, and settling his steady gaze on her.

The long fingers of firelight played across Marie’s face,

rolling on the gentle curves of her forehead, cheeks and chin, resolving to bright lines on the fine edges of her lips, and shining in her curious eyes. Her hair was cast in silhouette, black against the sunset. Neither one said anything for a moment. Then Jelly, setting down his plate, asked, “Off-hand, what made you think of it?”

Marie shrugged. “I don’t know, it just occurred to me today.”

Jelly said nothing. He picked up his plate, and finished cleaning it, then sat, running his knuckles rhythmically across his jaw.

“Nothing in particular made you think that?”

“I guess,” said Marie, “I guess maybe it was this afternoon. I was out on the far side of the roof, collecting water from the rain-bin, and checking the corn, and I was thinking about how …” she hesitated, collecting her thoughts, “… about the water. You know, it used to be easy — just turn the tap — and …”

Her voice caught on a splinter, and trailed into silence. Jelly closed his eyes and bent his head. His hand became manic, rubbing at his beard in a mechanical frenzy, the only

easy outlet for his thoughts. The fire crackled languorously in a slow descent to embers.

“Hey. Jelly. Come on, now,” said Marie. “Quit that. You’ll scratch your face off.”

Jelly looked up. Marie was leaning forward from her seat on the packs and smiling at him, though pools glistened in her eyes.

“Like I said, I remembered how life used to be — and what we thought back then of what life would be like, if things ever got the way they’ve gotten, now. And — here’s what hit me — it doesn’t really feel different. It isn’t like we thought it would be, at all.”

She slipped off the packs, and knelt down beside her husband, nestling up against him, under his arm.

“We work hard now, but we worked hard, then. I mean, I don’t pretty women up in a salon, and you can’t work for the state agriculture board. Those things aren’t really options, now, but … it’s not like rooftop urban farming was really an option, then.”

Jelly chuckled. “Not too sure about that. It might’ve been,” he said. “Never really looked into it.”

He tucked his arm around her back, and rubbed his chin into her hair.

“You know what I mean,” Marie said, and rolled her eyes. “We didn’t use to camp out on a roof, barricade the stairs and hide our fires at night, but we used to lock our doors, and worry about crime stats. People didn’t use to use knives and bats a lot, but it just seemed like everybody owned a gun. Everybody took those classes so they could walk around with little cannons under their coats … Life was hard, and life was dangerous. That’s no different. You know?”

After a moment, Jelly said, “Used to have doctors, and nurses and hospitals, though.”

Marie looked up at him. Jelly was staring into the fire, but his arm resumed its restless rhythm, up and down her spine, his fingers distractedly exploring the contours of her back. Marie followed his gaze into the glow of the embers, the final flames dancing for what little life remained to them, and her mind was mired there, revolving the myriad elements of her world with the motion of the fire, in inadvertent meditation. Finally, she spoke again,

“I know. I know, but what I mean is … it just … I guess getting the water made me think. You know how we think it’s the water, or it’s the radiation from the bombs, or it’s the food, or the stress, or … whatever.”

She paused. Her words were tumbling out too quickly,

Post-Apocalypse continued

sharp edges untrimmed.

“And there’s no doctor to tell us one way or the other,” she went on. “That’s true. But maybe it’s not those things. Maybe the world changed, but the plan didn’t. Maybe it’s just like life isn’t that different. Maybe we were never going to ... to have a baby, in any world.”

She stopped. Jelly’s arm had stiffened around her back. His jaw clenched, and unclenched.

“Maybe,” he said, and breathed hard, and deep, three times, and each time, his torso heaved against Marie, and his granite muscles trembled. He turned his eyes down to her, but slowly, as though by force against a great reluctance. Orange light dimly reflected off the downturned corners of his lips.

“Does it help?”

Marie nodded.

“A little,” she said. “As much as anything can.”

Jelly resumed his silence, now staring over the dying fire into the gathering darkness of their shack, his arm still climbing and descending Marie’s back like an automaton. Outside, the city was quiet as sunset became twilight, and twilight sank into gloaming. No birds, no cars; just the wind, rustling through the verdant darkness of Jelly’s small patches of corn and beans and vegetables.

“Speaking of hiding our fires ...” said Marie.

Jelly nodded. She slipped out from his arm, and climbed to her feet. Jelly rose stiffly, wincing at the gravely rattle of cartilage in his knees.

“We closed up the barricade when you came home, didn’t we?” she asked as they crossed out of the open wall. Jelly, padding along barefoot, glanced down at the spot on the floor, where he made a charcoal mark each day when they closed the barricade, and rubbed it out each morning when they opened it. There was a mark. He nodded.

He used his foot to shove their backpacks into the shelter. Marie pulled the tarp out from its spot next to one of the two shelves positioned along the far wall. One side of the tarp was still a faded electric blue, but they had smudged the other side black with charcoal. They stretched it across the open wall that faced east. Both walls at the sides of the

opening had metal eyelets protruding from them at the floor, the roof, and two points between. Some of the eyelets, Marie had scavenged from the ruins of a hardware store, some Jelly had fashioned from wire. A short length of shoelace was looped through each eyelet. On their separate ends of the tarp, Jelly and Marie threaded the shoelaces through the grommets on the tarp, pulled them tight, and made a knot.

When they finished, the hut was utterly dark, but for the faint glow of the embers. Marie reached up and ran her hand along the roof until she came to one of the three small exhaust vents they had made for the fire. She pushed the flap of shingle all the way open, until she felt the cooler air on her hand.

Her eyes were still adjusting to the darkness, but she could hear Jelly unrolling their pad, and the sleeping bag they laid unzipped across their pad for a blanket. They undressed in the dark, and in silence. The tarp stirred and rustled, compelled by the breeze.

Jelly, as he always did, climbed into their hard little bed first, and, as always, took the side toward the wall, away from the warmth of the embers. Marie piled her clothes on top of the packs, now stacked between the head of the bed and the tarp, and crawled in beside him. She reached out, found him in the dark, and curled up against him.

“Hey,” said Jelly, wrapping his hands around her waist and pulling her tighter, “you might be right. Things might not be that different than they were, back in the day.”

“But I’ll say this,” he went on, letting go of her waist, and tracing her shoulder with his fingertips in the darkness. “You’ve got a bunch more knots in your back than you used to.”

Marie giggled in the dark.

“Cause I’ve been married to you for a whole lot longer than I used to be,” she said, shoving him in the dark. “Don’t go blaming the apocalypse for something that’s your own damn fault.”

They both laughed, and settled deeper into the bed. After a moment, the only sound was regular, uninterrupted breathing. They slept, surrounded by the silence of the ruined city.



The Glory That Was

By THOMAS ZIMMERMAN

Greece: morning light bled rose, then bronze, then gold
on Mount Parnassos. I was thinking of
the grassy knolls an ocean west that hold
my parents' graves, of all the dead I love.
Tragedian and archaeologist:
my Attic mode. I plumbed the dank and dark,
recorded music antic in the mist
of dream. I burned strange herbs at Delphi, spark
of perfumed prophecy. Olympia
reigned plain and fallen. Epidaurus, scoured
Mycenae powdered my ephemera
with dust of kings. Thoughts drifted, lotus-flowered,
from Alfa beer to Agamemnon's mask,
from ghosts to questions they and I would ask.

The Broad and Narrow Way

By WILLIAM MILLER

In our living room,
there was a picture of Hell.

It hung above the couch,
where anyone could see it,
read its dark message.

On the right, a highway
was crowded with
people drinking from
bottles, falling down,
laughing.

Hell itself was many flames,
a dark city with
black towers ...

My dad drank beer
in his favorite chair,
watched TV
and ignored us.

My mother sat with
an open bible on her lap,
“The Words of Jesus in Red.”

My grandmother lived
with us too.

Her husband shot
himself because
he had seen such
bad things in the war,
“stick people”
and “ovens.”
My grandmother drank
many drinks
on shaky legs,
said she’d kill
herself if she only
had a gun ...

But there was another
way, beside the broad
way to Hell.

A tiny pilgrim
climbed a narrow,
mountain road.

It led to golden lights,
little angels circling ...

My parents divorced;
my grandmother
married a man who drank
as much as she did ...
And I see that picture still,
have walked both ways
but not the middle.

In Hell, there is a picture
of our living room.

Jordan

By STEPHANIE SHARP

blood and water
oh God, no!
blood and water
not this!
the curse in my womb
preying in darkness
blood and water
the curse visible
weep for the child that is no more

no time to speak
when will you hear my voice?
I love you.
no time to touch
your body never clothed in skin
no toes to count
nothing to receive my kisses
nothing to fill my arms
only blood and water
the curse visible
Eve’s legacy in her daughter

blood and water
oh God, no!
blood and water
not this!
my curse on the cross
praying in darkness
blood and water
the curse damned
rejoice for the wounded who are remembered

eternity
time to speak
hear my voice
I love you.
time to touch
soft skin against mine
toes to count
feel my lips on your cheek
your weight in my arms
by Blood and Water
the curse damned
Eve’s redemption in her daughter

Iron and water

By RUTHIE VOTH

you said one time –
as iron sharpens iron,
so you’d like to be with me
well, maybe we’re not
but maybe we are
something similar

maybe...
as water smoothes rocks
I roll over you,
gently but constantly –
changing you slowly

and as rocks
change the course of water
you lead me
steadily
changing my direction
(even my chemical make-up)
as I change you

not harshly like
two iron rods, clanging,
but
comfortably

CARTOON CAPTION CONTEST

Each issue, we will feature a cartoon in need of a caption. You, the reader, submit a caption, we choose three finalists, and you vote for your favorite. Unfortunately, we do not have the budget for a cartoonist, and none of us can draw, so we also need you to submit a cartoon with your caption. Cartoon and caption submissions must be received by Monday, Dec. 14. The winner receives a print of the cartoon signed by the cartoonist. Any resident of the United States, Canada (except Quebec), Australia, the United Kingdom, or the Republic of Ireland, or any other country (except Quebec), age eighteen or over can enter or vote. To do so, and to read the complete rules, visit cartooncontest.sacredcowmagazine.com.

PREVIOUS WINNING CAPTION



"It's almost impossible to draw a cartoon using Adobe Illustrator."

THIS ISSUE'S CONTEST