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PUBLICATION OF GRAVY IS UNDERWRITTEN BY MOUNTAIN VALLEY SPRING WATER

Gravy

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ABOUT GRAVY

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COVER ILLUSTRATION
by Natasha Allegri.



THE GRAVY FOOD & CRIME ISSUE

Not as easy as it sounds

by guest editor Jack Pendarvis

THERE'S A WOMAN WHO LIKES to audit the classes I teach at the University of Mississippi. Her name is Margaret and she grew up in Yazoo City, Mississippi, as a contemporary of the late writer Willie Morris. "We went cradle rolling together," is how she put it to me.

Margaret took a couple of my classes that focused on crime fiction, and in one of them she happened to mention that she had known eight murderers in the course of her life—and the daughter of a ninth murderer. Margaret is not the type to frequent low places ("You know the difference between this and pornography? Pictures," she said of a Scott Phillips novel we read), and the startling amount of homicide with which she has an incidental connection must be put down to bizarre coincidence.

Naturally, I thought of her when it came time to edit this “Food and Crime” issue of *Gravy*. So I asked her whether any of the murders in her life had to do with food.

Because that’s the trick: Food + crime = easy. Food + “The South” = easy. Crime + “The South” = easy. But food + crime + “The South” = not as easy as it sounds.

Even Margaret had to think hard to come up with a food-related murder. It happened in 1950. The boy who did it “lived out in the county,” she said. He and his mother disagreed over the girl he was seeing. “There was nothing wrong with her,” Margaret hastened to add.

The boy had plans to take the girl on a double date to “the midnight show,” and the mother denied permission. So the boy killed his mother, “wrapped her in a quilt, and threw her in an old cistern.”

That night, when he and the girl and the other couple were on their way to the movie, the boy said, “My mother wants me to stop and pick up some bacon and eggs. She’ll be very upset if I forget the bacon and eggs. We have to go before the show because the store will be closed later.”

“So that was his alibi. Bacon and eggs,” said Margaret.

Margaret, a high-school cheerleader then, was practicing out on the football field some days later. “The big football game with Canton, our rival, was coming up,” she told me. She was right beside this boy, who was “blowing his horn” (trumpet) in the marching band, when the sheriff approached, along with the boy’s father.

“We have found your mother’s body in the cistern,” said the father.

“You need to come with us,” said the sheriff.

ME, I THINK OF THE BACON AND EGGS sitting there in the car on a warm Mississippi night. Well, it was football season, so maybe they were cool enough to keep. But I think of them spoiling.

Crimes of a more appetizing nature wait within. 🍷

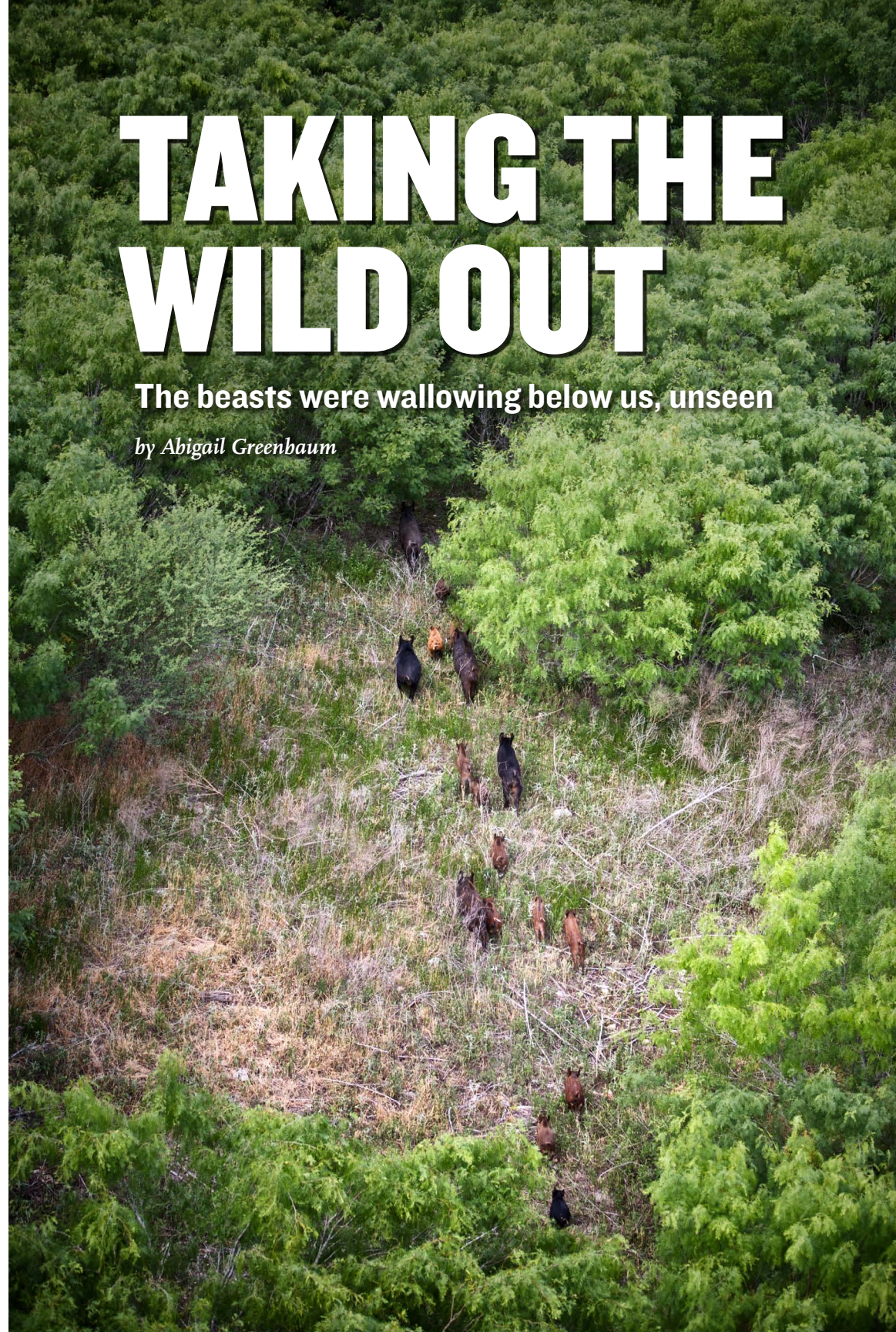
Gravy guest editor Jack Pendarvis of Oxford, Mississippi, is the author of *Awesome* (a novel), *Your Body Is Changing*, and *The Mysterious Secret of the Valuable Treasure* (short story collections).

ILLUSTRATION, PAGE 1 by Jason Polan, the illustrations editor for *The Believer*.

TAKING THE WILD OUT

The beasts were wallowing below us, unseen

by Abigail Greenbaum





PEOPLE FROM ATLANTA CALL Tommy Haskins several times a week, begging him to sell them feral hog. In order to sell meat to the general public in Georgia, the animal must arrive alive at an approved processing facility, and be inspected prior to slaughter. “It isn’t legal to sell the hogs we hunt,” Haskins tells them. “But you can come down to Twiggs County and shoot one.”

Feral swine eat a low-fat diet. Most are too lean to use for making bacon, even the 160-pound hogs that Haskins and his clients bring down. Folks searching for the wild meat are often immigrants from Vietnam, where lean pork is wrapped with banana leaves in a dish called *gio lua*.

Local food advocates also clamor for field-shot pork. *Afield: A Chef’s Guide to Preparing and Cooking Wild Game and Fish*, written by the Texas hunter and chef Jesse Griffiths, includes recipes for smothered wild boar chops with anise brine and wild boar rillettes. Haskins doesn’t bother with anise brine. He prefers hickory-smoked hams, basted with apple juice.

On his property southeast of Macon, Haskins rarely goes a day without glimpsing hogs, which he calls “piney woods rooters.” These



hogs have mixed pedigrees. Some may have descended from Spanish swine introduced in the 1500s. Others are released or escaped domestic pigs that bred with Eurasian wild boars imported for hunting.

Haskins refuses to sell me hog from his freezer, but he allows me to join a guided hunt on his property. I spend eight hours in tree stands in a swamp where hogs seek thick cover and wallows. In this part of Georgia, wild hogs are considered an invasive species, so it is legal to hunt them over bait year-round. Haskins stocks his metal feeders with corn and rotten peaches.

The property edges a chalk mine, and jets from Warner Robins Air Force Base drone above. The floodplains are wide here, and the soil is white and sandy, since this land sits south of the fall line. Here on the Ocmulgee River corridor, feral hogs devastate fields of soy, cotton, and grain sorghum, and farmers pay hunters to exterminate the beasts. Haskins pulls up Google Earth on my phone and shows me hog-torn craters in his sunflower fields.

These hogs acquire the violent tendencies and long tusks of feral animals after just one generation off the farm. Although owls and coyotes sometimes kill piglets, no other predator threatens the

adult hogs. They damage both cultivated and wild areas—trampling fields and riverbeds and competing with native wildlife for food. Hogs harbor diseases such as brucellosis and pseudorabies, which can also infect domesticated pigs and humans who eat feral hogs. Because of these diseases, captured feral hog can't be sold in Georgia Department of Agriculture–approved livestock markets.

I spend a night in Haskins's swamp with a man who designs stealth bombers and two hunters from Ohio. They bring down six hogs. I never get to sight a single one through the night vision scopes the hunters attach to their rifles; I merely hear them splashing in the water-oak thickets. The next morning, when I see the killed hogs laid out in bloody truck-beds, their black or red coats crusted with mud, I flash back to the moment when they were wallowing below us, unseen. And I recall hearing that they're capable of splintering a human shinbone with a single snout thrust.

To find hogs in the swamp, some Georgia hunters use what they call "bay dogs." Then a "catch dog," often a pit bull, holds the hog by its ear while the hunters tie down and knife it. Such primal and violent sport seems somehow warranted. The hogs are a toothy and aggressive reminder of how civilization can go wrong when what was meant to sustain us now roots and ravages. Where I live, north of Atlanta, some doomsday enthusiasts stockpile assault rifles, while others bury food-filled freight trailers in the ground. The war against hogs might be another version of end-times preparation.

Haskins brings all his clients' hogs to Thomas Deer Cooler, a meat processor. Vinyl curtains partition the room where show cattle are killed. A Georgia license plate tacked above the door reads GIVE WILDLIFE A CHANCE. Fliers offer hog extermination services. Neither Haskins nor I have slept much when we meet early in the morning at the processor, where he fills my cooler with chops and bratwurst and ground sausage. The Ohio hunters are there, too, strapping garbage bags of surplus meat to a tailgate drop rack. Standing amid so much extra meat, I think again of the would-be hog cooks calling Haskins, unable to buy.

Maybe I'm just on edge from dozing in a tree-stand. But as Haskins reminds me to cook the meat to an internal temperature of 170 degrees to kill bacteria, I feel somehow transgressive. Later,

because I remain nervous about brucellosis, I consult a friend who works in clinical microbiology about how to prepare feral hog safely. In addition to hitting the right temperature, she suggests that I soak the meat in buttermilk to "take the wild out of it."

On a rainy Sunday one week later, my scientist friend and her husband join me for a feral hog dinner. The back ham chops turn out rich, not heavy or piney like some hog I've tasted. And the meat splits easily under the pressure of our forks. The forager's diet, not the borderline legal status, gives feral hog its distinctive tang, but I also sense a particular pleasure that comes from setting my table somewhere between cultivation and wildness. 🍷

Abigail Greenbaum received her MFA at the University of Mississippi and now teaches English and writing at Berry College in Georgia.

PHOTO, PAGE 3 by Jody Horton, whose work can be found at jodyhorton.com.

PHOTO, PAGE 4 by Kate Medley, the creator of aspokendish.com.

PHOTO, PAGE 5 by John McElwee, the fiction coordinator for *The New Yorker*.

PHOTO, THIS PAGE, by Denny Culbert, of dennyculbert.com.





CITIZEN'S ARREST

Dad, that old man is stealing plums!

by Kelly Hogan

IT IS THE SPRING OF 1974. I am nine years old. I am standing behind my dad in the check-out line at our neighborhood A&P on Ponce de Leon Avenue in Atlanta, Georgia. My dad is holding our shopping basket—fish sticks, Corn Chex, Mr. Bubble, Michelob, black Kiwi shoe polish, and a big can of Consort for Men hairspray. It's taking a long time to get through the line because the cashier lady pushed two buttons at once and jammed up the cash register. She called for a manager on the little bendy microphone, but we're still waiting.

I concentrate on the racks of candy to my left—candy that I don't even bother asking for, because I know I won't get any. My dad came back from flying helicopters in Vietnam two years ago. He says that my little brother and I got weak from living with our mom while he was gone, so he's trying to make us strong. That means reveille every morning, a duty roster for chores, yes-sir-no-sir 24-7, and zero candy.

When he first came back, my dad tried to act normal. I remember seeing him outside in a lawn chair last summer, studying from a giant notebook labeled C&S BANK. The sun was shining on his perfect hair, but he didn't look happy. Then, new things started showing up around our apartment: heavy black flashlights, wooden nightsticks, handcuffs, and a gun. Now my dad is a policeman. He's training my brother and me to live "by the book."

An older gentleman is in line behind me. He reminds me of my Paw Paw. He's wearing grey Hush Puppies and a dark blue tucked-in polo shirt with a little white penguin stitched on it. He has a mustache—not bushy like my dad's, but thin and fancy. Just a line

drawn above his lip, like Rhet Butler or Martin Luther King, Jr.—two of my biggest crushes. He catches me staring and smiles at me, just like my Paw Paw would. Then he casually takes a big juicy black plum out of a plastic bag in his cart and inserts the whole thing in his mouth. I can't believe he just did that. I have to turn around.

Three seconds later, he sets a plum pit, slurped perfectly clean, on the candy rack just at my eye level, next to the Chuckles. Then he does it again. Another wet plum pit next to the first, then another, and another. He's spreading germs! He's stealing! I need to report it to the police!

I move forward and tug on my dad's belt loop and whisper, "Dad! Dad!" He turns around, already annoyed from having to wait in line for so long.

"What?"

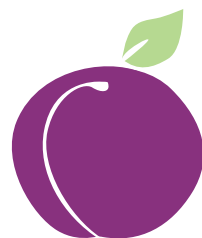
"The man behind us is stealing plums!"

I motion toward the man with my head and point at the collection of sticky pits on the shelf, but my dad only sighs, rolls his eyes, and says, "You need to learn to mind your own business."

"But! But, Dad!"

He turns around.

I feel burnt. I feel stupid. My cheeks are hot. I'm confused. I'm embarrassed. I'm mad. I sneak a look back at the plum man (who now doesn't remind me of my Paw Paw *at all*), but he isn't looking at me anymore. He's looking up at the store ceiling like nothing ever happened, humming along to "Billy, Don't Be a Hero" coming out of the round silver speaker. 🍷



Kelly Hogan is a singer and writer whose most recent solo album is I Like to Keep Myself in Pain.

PHOTO, PAGE 8 by *Kate Medley*.



COCA-COLA FUDGE CAKE

by Laura Lippman

Bestselling novelist Laura Lippman, creator of private eye Tess Monaghan, has won every major award in crime fiction. She usually sets her work in or around Baltimore, though her Georgia roots shine through in this recipe.
—JP

THIS RECIPE FOR COCA-COLA FUDGE CAKE has been in my family for years and I am no longer clear on its origins. I always thought it came from one of those old-fashioned group projects that schools and neighborhoods used to do, and that it might be from the Lovett School in Atlanta, which my first cousin attended. But maybe not. One thing I know for sure is that it is important not to gussy it up, although I feel bad about using margarine these days and sometimes substitute real butter, a sentence that encapsulates something important about the times in which we live, although I'm not sure what it is.

Whenever I tell people—well, non-Southerners—about Coca-Cola Fudge Cake, they say "Ewwww." When I serve it to them, they ask for seconds. And the recipe.

In Richard Bradford's novel *Red Sky at Morning*, there is a scene in the first chapter where the narrator's mother is asked for her ham recipe. The narrator, her son, recounts:

'There's really nothing to it,' said Mother. 'The trick is, you're supposed to warm the Coca-Cola before you pour it over the ham. Then you just keep basting. Lacey got it right the first time I showed her how.' The son, clearly not a fan, thinks: 'Yeah, she got it right, and she still cries every time she has to pour Coca-Cola over a country ham. You messed up the best cook anybody ever had, and I'm glad she's got a good job at the compass factory. They don't float that old needle in Coca-Cola.'

I love *Red Sky at Morning*, but I think Bradford is unduly harsh here. Or maybe it's Joshua. I'm always telling people not to think that I share the opinions of every character in my novels.

Coca-Cola Fudge Cake

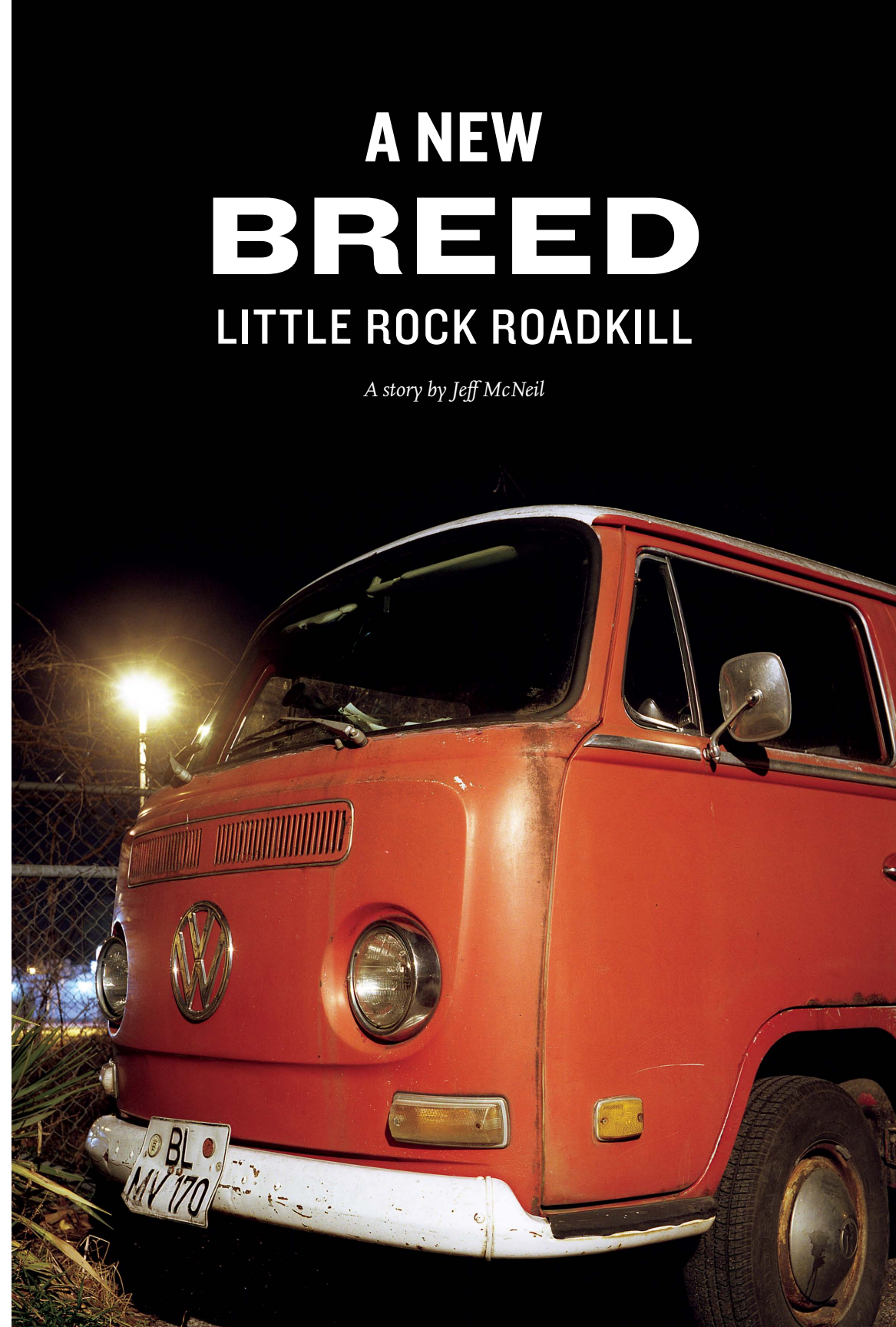
Put 2 cups flour, 2 cups sugar, and 1 teaspoon baking soda in a mixing bowl. In a saucepan, put 2 sticks margarine, 2 heaping tablespoons of cocoa, and 1 cup Coca-Cola. Bring to a boil. Pour over dry ingredients; mix thoroughly. Add 2 eggs, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1/2 cup buttermilk, and 2 cups miniature marshmallows. Bake in two eight-inch aluminum pans at 350° Fahrenheit for 40–45 minutes.

While the cake is still hot, make the icing by bringing 2 heaping tablespoons cocoa, 1 stick of margarine and 2 ounces of Coca-Cola to a boil. Add 1 box confectioner's sugar and 1 teaspoon vanilla; spread over cake. If it hardens too quickly, add a few drops of Coca-Cola. If it's runny, add more confectioner's sugar or even cornstarch. I've had more runny ones than hard ones. Please don't use that sentence out of context.

The cake freezes beautifully, which is why I recommend using disposable aluminum pans. 🍷

A NEW BREED LITTLE ROCK ROADKILL

A story by Jeff McNeil



-YOU MIGHT WANT TO GET IN THE LEFT LANE HERE.
-Here?
-Yeah, there's a school and it's around a curve and people stop and it's hidden.
-Ah!
-Yeah, see.
-Yeah.
-Hey, look at that.
-What?
-That looked like a dead penguin on the road.
-Ha.
-You never can tell what's going to get clobbered on the road these days.
-I guess.
-I read this story in a magazine at the doctor's office. Well, not—I mean in the actual office...
-In the back?
-Yeah, not the waiting room. After they had taken my b.p. and temperature and stuff.
-When you're doing all that waiting around?
-Yeah, it's a pain in the ass.
-They should give you a meter like a cabbie, you know, and whatever it says at the end they should take it off your bill.
-Good one. So...what was I talking about?
-The dead penguin.
-Yeah. I mean, it was what I read about in the magazine.
-Right.
-There's a hole in the ozone.
-How old was this magazine?
-I know, right?
-Seriously.
-But the point was that the hole started a long time ago. I mean when it first started, way back in the '60s or something, at the South Pole.
-Uh huh.



-And it kept getting bigger and bigger and bigger until not only did it let a lot of important stuff out, but it was letting a lot of bad stuff in, like radiation.
-Dude, that's unacceptable in my worldview.
-I know, right? Long story short, some of the penguins started flying again.
-What magazine was this?
-A serious one. Mutation is the name of the game when nature plays it. Who can know its many wonders.
-For real.
-So these new penguins started flying through the ozone hole, which acted like a wormhole. The space-age kind, not the early-bird kind.
-I'm with you.
-The wormhole turned out to be a shortcut to the North Pole, where penguins have never lived before, even though it seems like they should have, right?
-Definitely. Because what's the difference?
-I know, right? Top and bottom? The article didn't go into it.
-That's some freaky-deaky shit right there.

-You can't ever be surprised at what you see on the side of the road these days.
 -Could you eat it?
 -What?
 -The penguin.
 -I think that's illegal.
 -Even if it's dead?
 -Sounds like you could, right? But you never know about the law.
 -You should be able to eat whatever you want no matter what it is or where you find it.
 -True.
 -No matter how radioactive or mutated it is.
 -I read about a guy outside Little Rock who only eats road kill. You just ran a red light.
 -Damn!
 -The guy even eats owl meat. Put it in a lasagna for a dinner party.
 -This cop's pulling me over.

-LICENSE AND REGISTRATION, Reckless Rex.
 -Is it against the law to eat owl meat in Arkansas, officer?
 -Is this a bribe?
 -Is what a bribe?
 -This illegal, though savory and exotic, owl meat proposition.
 -I think that's what I'm asking.
 -I thought so. Pop the trunk, Sparky. 🍷

Jeff McNeil, who teaches writing at UNC-Charlotte, has been published in Quick Fiction, Avatar Review, and Kitty Snacks.

PHOTO, PAGE 13 by Ben Couvillion, whose work can be found at bencouvillion.com.

PHOTO, PAGE 15 by Kate Medley.

ILLUSTRATIONS, PAGE 17 by Natasha Allegri, a writer and illustrator for Adventure Time.

It would be a crime if you didn't know about... **POTLIKKER NAPA**

Join us on August 18 at Whetstone Wine Cellars in Napa, CA.

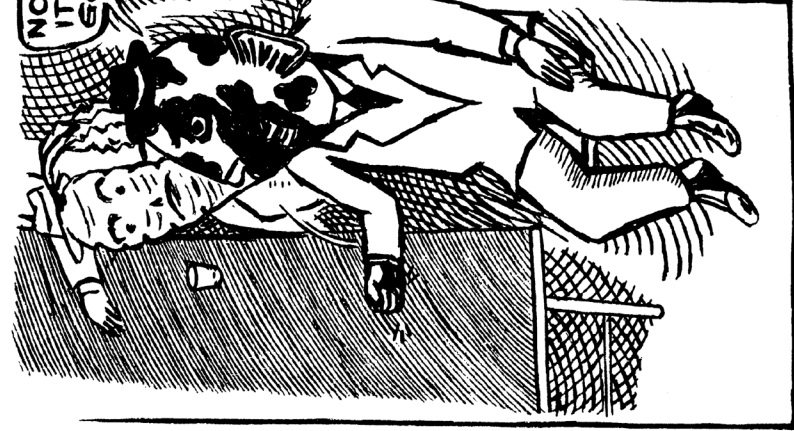
- Featuring Samuel Jones of Skylight Inn, Ayden, NC, Rodney Scott of Scott's Bar-B-Q, Hemingway, SC, and Alabama rib slayer Nick Pihakis.
- With swine from the Fatback Pig Project.
- Plus slaw, beans, potato salad, sweets and other good things by Stephen Barber of Farmstead, Christopher Kostow of The Restaurant at Meadowood, Daniel Patterson of Coi, and Drew Robinson of Jim 'N Nick's.
- With beer from Blackberry Farm. Water from Mountain Valley Spring Water. And wine from our hosts, Jamie and Michelle Whetstone.

Tickets, priced at \$125 per person, are available at southernfoodways.org.



NO, FLOUNDER

by Michael Kupperman,
the creator of Tales
Designed to Thrizzle



NO FLOUNDER!
IT'S NOT
GOOD ENOUGH!

THE COPS
CAN'T
STOP
US!

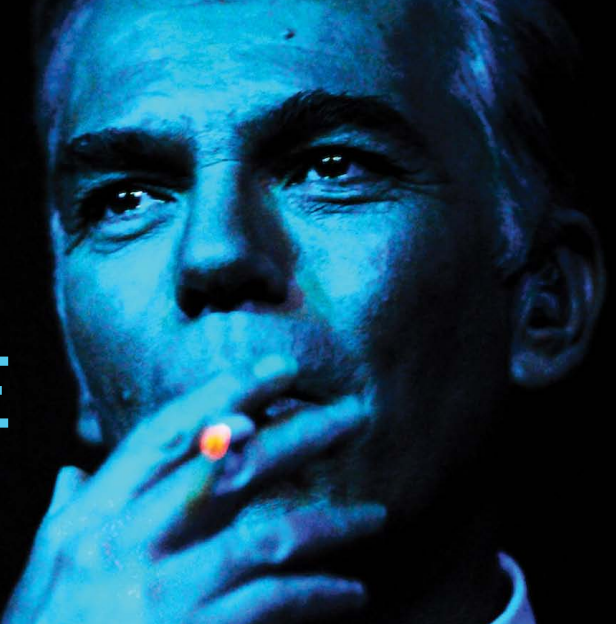
I'M GOING
TO RULE
THIS "SOUP
OF A
CITY!"



WELL, ACTUALLY
BOSS, I WAS ENJOYING
AN EXTENDED FANTASY
WITH FISH AND
VEGETABLES AS AL
CAPONE & HIS
GANG...



LOVE TRIANGLE



I didn't understand why she left me

A story by Chris Offutt

SHE LEFT ME FOR A WAITER who dealt coke out of a ribs joint. I told her that was better than a guy who sold ribs in a coke place. She didn't understand the joke and I didn't understand why she left me. I watched TV for fifteen hours. During dusk and dawn, it was mostly news, a gray time illuminated by a gray light. My eye didn't operate at capacity, the pupil never quite knowing whether to open or close. The constant hideous flickering light made my head throb. I decided to be on the news. I dressed in dark clothing and walked in drizzling rain to the ribs restaurant. Cold water ran into my collar and down my back. I should have worn a hat. The waiter was working late. I stood in the employee parking lot beside a dumpster that smelled of rotting meat. I breathed through my mouth. The kitchen crew played loud music as they cleaned up, the kind of raucous music I hated. The waiter left. He walked by without seeing me and I stabbed him twice in the ribs. Maybe now she'd get the joke. 🍷

Chris Offutt is an Oxford, Mississippi-based writer of fiction, nonfiction, and screenplays, including several episodes of the television show True Blood.

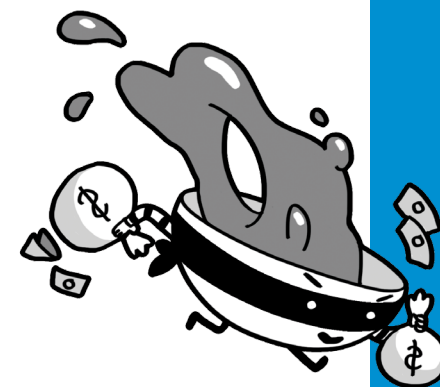
PHOTO, ABOVE by *Denny Culbert*.



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IF YOU'RE READING THIS IN PRISON,
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www.southernfoodways.org.

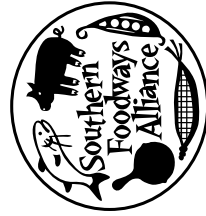
IF YOU ARE AN SFA MEMBER,
well, thank you.



THE MISSION of the Southern Foodways Alliance is to document, study, and celebrate the diverse food cultures of the changing American South.

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