

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

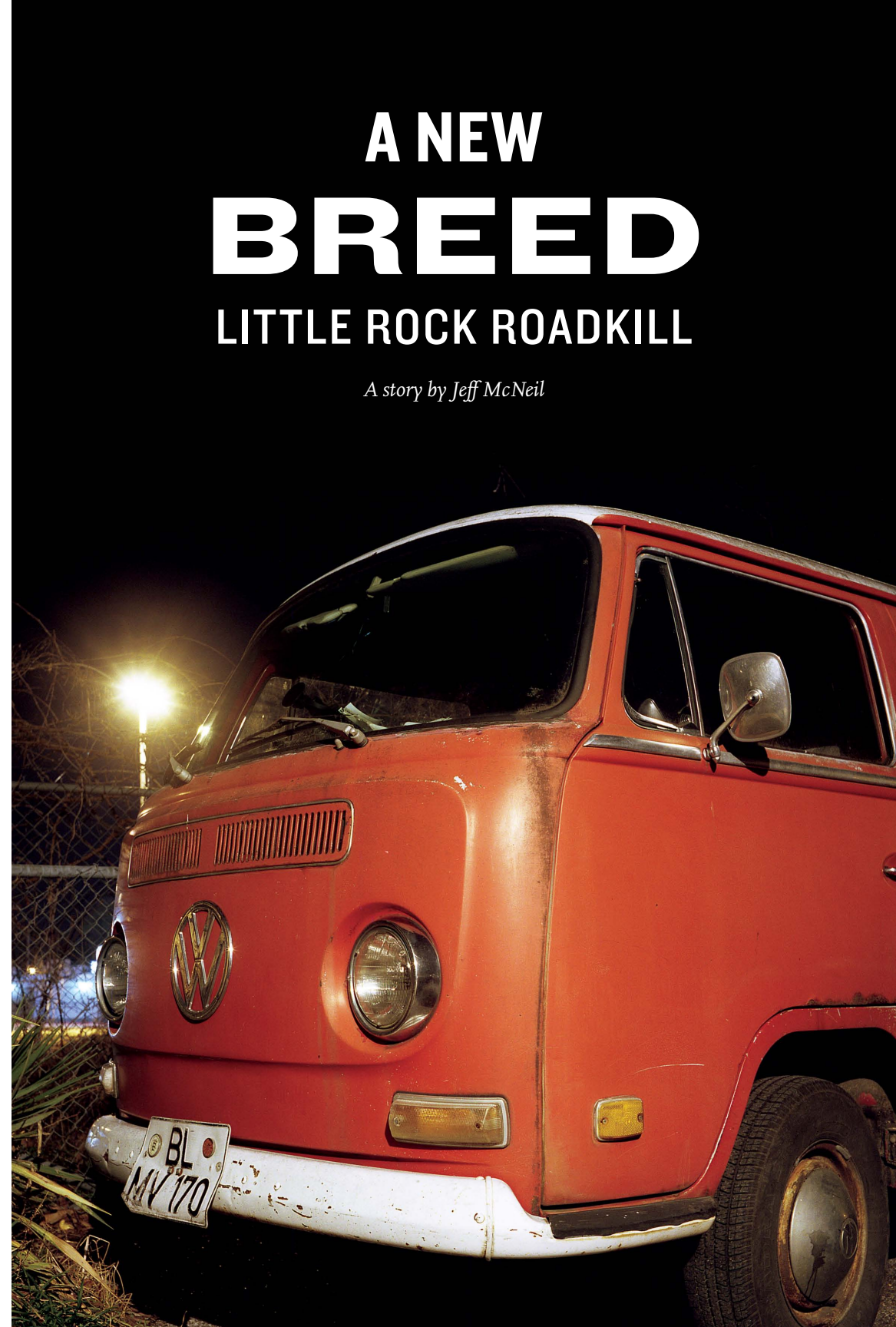
Put 2 cups flour, 2 cups sugar, and 1 teaspoon baking soda in a mixing bowl. In a saucepan, put 2 sticks margarine, 2 heaping tablespoons of cocoa, and 1 cup Coca-Cola. Bring to a boil. Pour over dry ingredients; mix thoroughly. Add 2 eggs, 1 teaspoon vanilla, 1/2 cup buttermilk, and 2 cups miniature 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.

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- 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.

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