

# SOME LIKE IT HOTTER

by Sandra Beasley

The restaurant waits behind a steel door  
through the back of a Fort Worth drycleaners.  
The password is “Scoville.”  
On tap? Blenheim Ginger Ale, Old #3.  
Four shakers on the table—  
pink, rainbow, cayenne, Sichuan.  
The waiter brings a napkin for my lap.  
The waiter brings a handkerchief for my eyes.  
Soup of the day: cream of horseradish.  
Salad greens: Osaka Purple mustard.  
The music is always salsa. The salsa  
is always mango and ghost chilies, over  
catfish farm-raised in firewater.  
If the Serrano ribs don’t elicit a *Holy Jesus*,  
I get my money back.  
The shrimp cocktail is served with a sauce  
the regulars call “pepper prom”—  
Trinidad Scorpions grinding on Naga Vipers,  
Carolina Reapers smuggling in Red Savinas,  
poblanos feeling up habaneros in a dark corner,  
a seven-pot Douglah in a single pot.  
The chef recommends two dashes for flavor,  
a third for bravery. I order a cup.  
I dangle each naked, maidenly shrimp  
over that pool of lava.  
This island may be small, but I am its chief.

Illustration by Natalie K. Nelson



# INDIANOLA SUNRISE

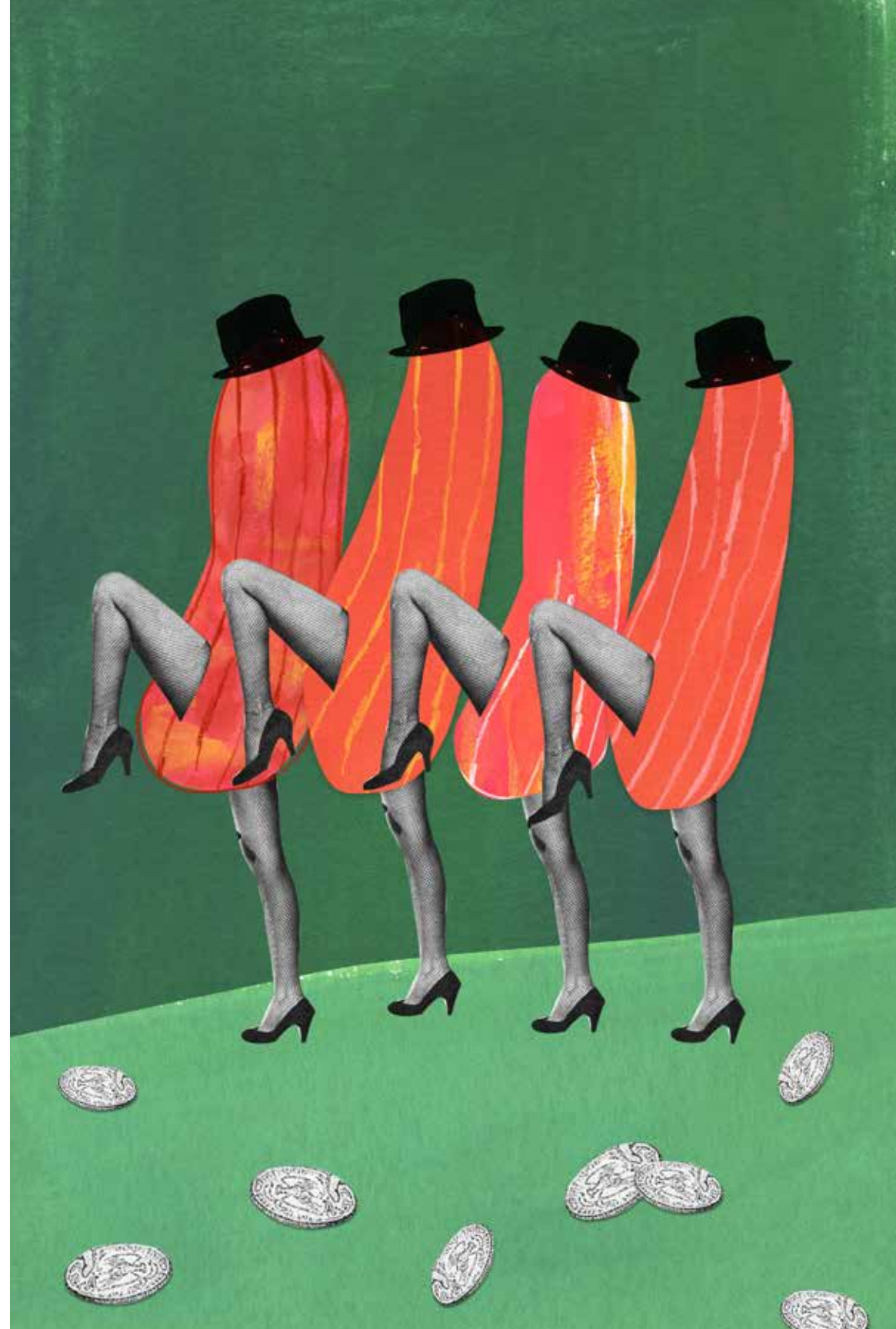
by *Sandra Beasley*

He leans against the car  
while the rest of the band loads out,  
scratching one quarter against the other,  
finding two where he'd hoped for four,  
knowing at the Chevron  
he'll have to bypass the ToastChees,  
knowing when hunger  
is a leaking roof  
a man sidles up to the hardware counter:  
those cool, five-gallon glass jugs  
full of rubbery this and redhot that,  
knowing the soft click  
of fifty cents on a grimy counter  
as the clerk ladles out one lone, fat pickle,  
hand-pricked with a fork,  
from its tropical bath of Kool-Aid  
into a tall styrofoam cup,  
knowing he'll get halfway to Tunica  
before pulling to a dirt shoulder,  
how alien it'll look in his hand  
as he leans against the car,  
as he takes a bite—  
overripe sugar yielding  
to briny yellow flesh,  
braced by seeds, the only hint  
something green ever lived here.

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*Sandra Beasley's latest collection of poetry is Count the Waves, published by W.W. Norton. She read these and other pop-culture poems at the 18th Southern Foodways Symposium.*

Illustration by Natalie K. Nelson



## Chester "Butterbean" Biggins

It didn't take long for Chester's gravy empire to implode, felled by a truly horrific biscuit recipe. Sadly his soft, fluffy pompadour wasn't a prescient hairstyle.

## LOST FAST FOOD FRANCHISES OF THE COUNTRY MUSIC WORLD

Art by Brooke Hatfield



**W**E CAME ACROSS BROOKE Hatfield's weird and wonderful art in 2013, when we used one of her multimedia pieces as the cover image for *Gravy*. It was a portrait of Scout from *To Kill a Mockingbird* dressed in her Halloween ham costume, and it was made out of...ham.

If you are familiar with the SFA's sensibilities, you will understand why we fell in love with Hatfield and her work. So when we decided to commission an

art installation for our pop culture-themed symposium, we knew just who to call.

Hatfield brought together two pillars of American pop culture that have deep ties to the South: fast food and country music. Riffing on cornpone stereotypes and bending genders and genres, she created five characters who tried to make it big in both industries, with disastrous results. Meet them on the following pages. —SCM



## Jerry Lee Williams

Jerry Lee bought a tanning bed when he signed to Tennessee Records. At the height of his ultraviolet radiation addiction, this would-be cheese straw baron was a perfect shade of sharp cheddar.



### *Sue-Bob Caruthers*

Her friends would later joke that pear salad held a Freudian appeal. (They would be correct.)



### *Erline Lang*

Her early success opening for the Carter Family did not prepare her for the cut-throat world of potted meats. Erline spent much of the 1980s finishing off her inventory and licking her wounds.



## *Phyllis Terwilliger*

She tried to popularize popcorn possum nuggets, but aside from some cousins on her mama's side, consumer demand played dead. Her star resurfaced during the disco era, when she had a crossover hit with "You SOB (Sure Oughta Boogie)."

# DEEP FRIED FORTUNE

AFTER BROOKE HATFIELD'S PORTRAIT OF "PHYLLIS TERWILLIGER"

by *Sandra Beasley*

*Hand me the cleaver*, Phyllis asked her brother. That woman chopped possum like nobody's business, which is to say, nobody makes business out of chopped possum.

Albert saw what Phyllis did not: tightening smiles, whitening grips on their pens as Tyson Foods' regional scouting team got a lesson in gland removal. Scalding. Scraping.

*Tastes great with A.I. Sauce*, she chirped, before popping the creature's jaw so they could count all fifty teeth. Phyllis had always been an optimist.

When they'd been kids, running a roadside stand, Phyllis squeezed the lemons. Phyllis sweetened the tea. But it was Albert who thought to charge extra for ice,

and watching her sift Mama Terwilliger's secret spice batter, he had a vision—a handful of black-eyed peas, cast into that same oil, bobbing to the top like easy money.

*Thank you*, the reps said. *We'll be in touch*, the reps said, declining to taste another nugget. Phyllis wiped her hands on her apron. Her shoulders slumped.

That was when Albert hugged his sister as Romulus must have once embraced Remus—loving, but already leaving, eyes fixed on the glittering lights of Little Rock.