



# THE ROTARY DIAL

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JULIE STONER

## Purple Rain

Four crime scenes. In the backgrounds of them all,  
shell-shocked Angelenos mill like sheep.  
Live coverage, as cone-shaped flowers fall  
continuously. Even as we leap  
from lens to lens, the blossoms seem to keep  
in sync. We're told a gunman has been downed.  
Meanwhile, jacarandas gently weep  
their giant purple teardrops on the ground.

A shaken student tells about her crawl  
to safety, as my scalp begins to creep.  
She can't describe the shooter: she stayed small  
and low, behind a desk, and didn't peep.  
The newsman's eyes go hard at that, and sweep  
the crowd: less useless witnesses abound.  
Meanwhile, jacarandas gently weep  
their giant purple teardrops on the ground.

Rumors. Ruminations. Doubts. Banal  
summaries "if you've just joined us." Cheap  
speculation. (Mine: *Expect 'The Call'?*  
*One victim's died in surgery – the sleep*  
*of brain death?* Hope erupts from somewhere deep.)  
My daughter needs a heart. I feel mine pound.  
Mean, while jacarandas gently weep  
their giant purple teardrops on the ground.

I didn't sow this, Prince, but hope to reap.  
Your song's *I never meant*, once un-profound,  
*mean*, while jacarandas gently weep  
their giant purple teardrops on the ground.

BRIAN STANLEY

## Genesis

Shuffling seaward comes the brute,  
sullen, banished, destitute.

Heavy-browed, he scans the stars,  
carnal Venus, angry Mars,  
while the ocean's rippled sheet,  
which begat him, licks his feet.

That realm glitters out of reach,  
this one left him on the beach:  
upward awe and outward dread  
mark the limits of his tread.

Suddenly the clouds converge,  
pulsing with a sentient surge,  
and a flicker lights his face,  
adding *sapiens* to his race.

Thunder, sharp and echoless,  
penetrates his barrel chest,  
driving out in summoned tears  
all the prehistoric years.

Rapt, he kneels on midnight sands,  
cupping seashells in his hands,  
as the droplets become rain  
and cognition floods his brain.

Dawn at last brings cloudless calm  
and a gentle breeze as balm  
to the figure standing tall,  
newly risen from his fall.

Striding inland goes the brute,  
surly, earthbound, resolute.

## The Ledger

The argument gets in the way,  
fills up the room and blights the day,  
prompting a mental résumé  
of partner Jill by partner Jay:  
her lotion, cream and scent array;  
her wanting to "touch up" his grey;  
her view of Mozart as passé;  
her dancing to "YMCA";  
her notion that his boss is gay.

But sound accounting must survey  
both sides, see what the credits weigh:  
her gamine grin; her killer sway  
of hips when strutting to portray  
a vamp who'd lead a man astray  
(his mum would use the word "sashay");  
her tap of heels across parquet;  
her serious look while she'll essay  
a dress bought for that thing in May,  
as though about to try ballet;  
her gift for childish, antic play.

There's more to list in Column A:  
the kindness which turns none away;  
the heart which never would betray  
a friend, or let a bigot bray;  
the eyes which cannot hide dismay –  
and now the faintest, fleeting ray  
tells him no longer to delay,  
to call the balance black and pay,  
to show his feet aren't made of clay,  
to pour her glass of chardonnay  
and, scotch in hand, at last to say  
his *mea culpa*: "Sorry. Stay."

GAVIN COREY

### **The Brakeman's Ghost**

I'm driving down a highway, early morning.  
Rust-bit barns hang like rotten apples;  
A certain slant of ruddy light is pouring  
Past a weather vane, ensnares a hexafoos,

And spreads it shadow-thin. Autumn's arson  
Simmers in the woods, singeing trees  
And preening amber leaves for winter's garden –  
I glimpse the brakeman's ghost skirting through the pyre.

I'll keep your secrets, friend –  
Your wanderlust;  
Your creosote cough;  
Your face of moon and snow.

I have secrets, too –  
My tongue of dust;  
My threadbare breath;  
My fallow flesh and bone.

STEWART ALEXANDER SANDERSON

**Illustration for Purgatorio II**

*Sandro Botticelli, c.1480*

A study for a miracle,  
rank upon rank, souls disembark:  
monks spilling from a coracle;  
the Allies, landing at Dunkirk.

The boat they leave is little more  
than hope and implication. Dressed  
in liver spotted vellum, near  
translucent spars seem to resist

the ardour of the unseen foam  
which Sandro had no time to sketch.  
Likewise the rigging and the calm  
*cladach*, where sea-sick spirits retch.

An angel, crouching in the stern  
points at an unseen mountainside.  
I picture kittiwakes and terns;  
what worlds this vision has denied.

I see the outlines of the dead  
ranged on some Hebridean shore.  
Perched on white clouds above, the good  
look down. Under the sea, a fire.

Like convicts in Tasmania  
they edge inland, afraid of devils,  
their bodies growing grainier;  
purged of the milder forms of evil.

MICHELINE MAYLOR

**Before the Dark**

Its penciled pages, a Rosetta stone,  
a daughter has left her diary  
home from school today  
and the little book calls to me

speaking the language of the other.  
The sun on the cover breaks the spell,  
a mother has to set herself beyond  
desire for secrets, beyond the thrill

of necessary gravity between us, like planets.  
Sun must slink dark-ward before the clock  
tells a story that begins with the words,  
a mother has betrayed her child's lock.

JANICE D. SODERLING

## Homes

A cottage with a blue back-door,  
some hollyhocks, a broom, and four  
bob-tailed cats, a package store.

Someone's heaven or hell.

A high-rise flat with one bedroom,  
a youngish bride, an old bridegroom,  
a giddy joy, a sense of doom.

Someone's heaven or hell.

A villa on a spacious lawn.  
Someone waking, someone gone.

A dildo buzz at rosy dawn.

Someone's heaven or hell.

## Bad Bed Blues

I climbed on a fast train, wearing my new Sunday hat.  
I climbed on a fast train wearing my fine satin hat.  
The rails all singing *tat, tit for tat, tit for tat.*

I come early from church feeling low and so heartsick.  
I come early from church, like a candle without no wick.  
I come early from church, I was cut right to the quick.

Put my gloves on the table and my handbag on the floor.  
Put my Good Book on the table, opened the bedroom door.  
Lawdy, what I see I won't never see no more.

Seen my man in our bad bed, naked as a jay.  
He was sweating in our bad bed, humping Billy Mae.  
She a sassy, no-count gal leading good men astray.

Billy Mae, her style ain't nothing like my style.  
She could get any man around for a hundred mile.  
She get 'em and keep 'em a week, or a little while.

She know what she got to show and she like to show it.  
She got a brass horn to toot, and she like to blow it.  
But he was my man, my Will, and Billy Mae know it.

On my soul, I'm the common-law wife of that cheating man.  
Sold my soul to the devil when that knife flew into my hand.  
This train gonna take me over to Alabam.

Billy Mae, she's a gal give all men what they want.  
Billy Mae smell good and she strut so grand and gaunt.  
Billy Mae, she a ghost now, got her a place to haunt.

Left my man in our bad bed, staring at the wall.  
Left my man in our bad bed, handsome, dead, and tall.  
I'm feeling so bad, like a baby about to bawl.

I'm riding a fast train, decked out in my Sunday hat.  
I'm riding my last train, that sheriff knows where he's at.  
Them old rails keep humming *tat, tit for tat, tit for tat, tit for tat, tit for tat.*

MARCUS BALES

## **The Trolls**

Hear the drudges and the trolls –  
Flagrant trolls!  
What a world of bull and lies their zealotry unrolls!  
How they blather blather blather  
Out in cyberspace tonight  
Where they're worked up in a lather  
While the rational would rather  
Get the facts and get them right;  
Sending post, post, post,  
As if who could post the most  
Of their tin-eared fabulation in this shallowest of shoals  
By the trolls, tolls, trolls, trolls,  
Trolls, trolls, trolls –  
As if volume were the value of the trolls.

Hear the yellow stay-home trolls –  
Verbal trolls!  
What a world of cowardice a chicken-hawk unrolls!  
How they boast of their deferment  
And the jobs to which it led  
At a time when their demur meant  
That some kid without preferment  
Went to risk his life instead.  
Wrapped in crucifix and flag –  
Real Americans would gag –  
They try to cheat opponents out of going to the polls  
Oh the trolls, tolls, trolls, trolls,  
Trolls, trolls, trolls –  
By the slimy nickel-dimey little trolls!

How they slither from their holes  
Slimy trolls!  
And what a gush of gross self-aggrandizing little goals  
How their racist views are coded

As a struggle for states' rights,  
They're patrolling locked and loaded  
As the safety-net's eroded  
Except for wealthy whites.  
How they screech across the screen  
Apoplectic in their spleen  
In an angry flush of selfish shit from puppet-socky souls:  
From the trolls, trolls, trolls, trolls,  
Trolls, trolls, trolls,  
All the needy greedy grunting of the trolls.

## Dancing With Abandon

The children squeal and clap and call,  
    Dancing with abandon;  
Their laughter doesn't pause or pall –  
They step and leap without a fall  
And never seem to sweat at all,  
    Dancing with abandon.

Their costumes swirl in scented air,  
    Dancing with abandon;  
They smile and sing without a care  
With curls and ribbons in their hair  
As if some magic kept them there  
    Dancing with abandon.

I'd like to spin across that floor,  
    Dancing with abandon –  
I've done it many times before,  
But now I'm old, and guard the door,  
And think too much, and go no more  
    Dancing with abandon.

MELISSA CANNON

**Study in Black and White**

The day begins with white lies: this mirror where  
your face appears freed from the caul of sleep;  
one bright note sending *hope, hope* through bright air;  
a sun making promises it cannot keep.  
Perhaps the song will stay, and the drowsy bud,  
lured by too-early heat, may still survive  
impending ice. And, deep in the tangled wood,  
the abducted child could be retrieved, alive.

But here comes the wind and soon the black trees shake  
limbs turning brittle under scattered snow.  
Now evening skates across the glassy lake;  
now the mockingbird repeats "I told you so"  
as light unravels like a rotted seam.  
Of smothered stars, our dark-paned houses dream.

CHARLES HUGHES

### **Monday Is Pizza Night**

A teenage Pakistani boy is missing  
His legs. He lost them when a U.S. drone  
Fired missiles at a little bus stop crowd.  
The bus was how he got to school, but now  
The trip's too much. He'd hoped to be a doctor.

A pizza place just blocks from home, our favorite.  
An older woman is vomiting out front –  
Into a trash can – while her husband bends  
To comfort her, left hand on her left elbow,  
His right at work to quiet both her shoulders.

"She didn't take her pills," her husband says.  
The restaurant owner, unconsolated, seems not  
To listen. "Vertigo from Parkinson's,  
They think; they're doing tests." The teenage boy  
Screams in the night with burning, missing legs.

Evening, six-thirty. A late August sun  
Keeps pumping heat and light – the way a heart,  
To no apparent purpose, can pump blood  
After the brain is irretrievably dead –  
As if life had a will and its own reasons –

As if a larger life than what we know  
Had biased every life toward living on  
(Maybe why love is the great good) – as if  
Life, in the end, could really turn untragic  
And weekly pizzas not go unforgiven.

## CONTRIBUTORS

**Julie Stoner** wrote "Purple Rain" during news coverage of the Santa Monica City College shootings (9 June, 2013) near Los Angeles. The title and envoi refer to a 1984 hit by Prince and the Revolution.

**Brian Stanley** was born in Madrid and educated in French until high school. His poems have been longlisted for The Montreal International Poetry Prize (2011) and published in *The Literary Review of Canada* and *Encore*. He lives in the Eastern Townships of Quebec.

**Gavin Corey** lives in Boston. Previously, his work has appeared in *Poetry Pacific*, *The Hydeout*, *Haiku Journal*, *Writing Knights Press*, and *LIEF Magazine*. He is the author of the chapbook *Stranger People*. He can be e-mailed at [gavincoreypoetry@gmail.com](mailto:gavincoreypoetry@gmail.com).

**Stewart Sanderson** is a second-year PhD student at Glasgow University, writing on modern Scottish poetry. His poems have appeared in various magazines, including *Gutter*, *Magma*, *Irish Pages*, *Poetry Review* and *The Dark Horse*. He is currently shortlisted for the inaugural Edwin Morgan Award.

**Micheline Maylor** is an editor, poet, and professor. She was recently short-listed for the Pat Lowther memorial award for her collection titled, *Whirr and Click*.

**Janice D. Soderling** was associate editor for the special translation issue of *Able Muse* guest-edited by Charles Martin. Current and forthcoming poetry and fiction appear at *Think*, *Rattle*, *Alabama Literary Review*, *The Road Not Taken*, *Innisfree Poetry Journal*, *Hobart*, *Per Contra*, *Measure*, *Evansville Review*, *Light*, *Mezzo Cammin*, *Calamario*, *Synthesia*, *Raintown Review*, *Wasafiri*, *One Sentence Poems* and *Ink, Sweat & Tears*.

Not much is known about **Marcus Bales** except he lives in Cleveland, Ohio, and his poems have not appeared in *Poetry* or *The New Yorker*.

**Melissa Cannon** has published hither and yon in the small press during the

past 50 years. Her work has most recently been anthologized in *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Vol. VI: Tennessee* and in *Obsessions: Sestinas in the Twenty-First Century*.

**Charles Hughes** is the author of the poetry collection, *Cave Art* (Wiseblood Books, 2014). His poems have appeared or are forthcoming in *America*, *The Anglican Theological Review*, *The Christian Century*, *Iron Horse Literary Review*, *The Rotary Dial*, *The Sewanee Theological Review*, *Think Journal*, and elsewhere. He worked as a lawyer for thirty-three years before his retirement and lives with his wife in the Chicago area.