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CONTENTS

James McKee

All Before Them 3

Urban Life 4

Robin Helweg-Larsen

Beach 5

Susan McLean

Denouement 6

Claudia Gary

The Family Booklet 7

Kim Bridgford

The Cause 8

Claudia Gary

A Visit from the Original Owner's Ghost 9

Marcus Bales

Habu Hill 10

J.D. Smith

Capital Invocation 12

Bardia Sinaee

The Home Front 13

Casey FitzSimons

Pool 15

A Note from the Editors 16

Jordana Graber

The Pink Princess 17

Contributors 18

JAMES MCKEE

All Before Them

One day, Adam gave Eve a look.
“What now?” “Up for a walk?” “No. Where?”
“You know where,” Adam said. “Bad idea.”
He stared. She sighed. The path they took
Was one not used since their exile here.

“Hello there,” the Cherub said.
“It’s been a while. You’ll need to leave.”
“Hold on,” said Adam. “Let’s go,” said Eve.
“We know we’re banned. We didn’t forget,”
Adam said. “Just a quick look. Please.”

The Cherub shrugged, “Watch out for the Sword,”
And stood aside. There was the Gate,
Towering, austere, and firmly chained.
Adam listened for some sign of God;
Eve missed feeling unashamed.

Yet beyond its bars, the landscape was more
Or less the same as that outside.
They gazed where low hills hid the sight
Of orchards once theirs to tend, which bore
Fruits not tasted since their flight.

“Time’s up,” came the Cherub’s voice.
So, not looking at one another
And in silence, they returned together
To their fields, their hut, and their two boys,
Who had never known their parents so tender.

Urban Life

I've got all the nature I need, here in the city.
Blocks of green speckle its grid where parks and zoos
Nestle like pets, cosseted and car-ad pretty,
While vermin and weeds, too close to us for pity,
Adapt to every toxin we dare to use.

The one time I went, the Orchid Show was as hot
And human-humid as the subway. I had to leave.
In its crowd, each splayed plant dangled from a pot
As if petaling just to please us, which it was not.
Out where the traffic sang through the streets, I could breathe.

Crews plant trees now with a bark said to repel
Pollution, which I call progress since whatever
Kills them is plainly killing us as well.
Down my block, saplings stand yoked between parallel
Uprights, the better for breaking them to our weather.

I saw a hummingbird last week, which was weird:
A hovering emerald, exotic even for Queens.
Something like joy rayed through me, only to disappear
Since wherever its wing-blur belonged, it wasn't here.
I try, but cannot not know what it meant. Means.

ROBIN HELWEG-LARSEN

Beach

Here on the vast beach, you, my hundred friends,
Can see how sea stretched tight round curved earth bends,
How empty sun-filled sky fills timeless Time.
My arms stretch out, but you can't see how I'm
Trapped, caged, confined, boxed in, in love, alone.
Come, sun, burn beach and skin, bleach hair and bone,
Flay life to its essentials: love alone.

SUSAN MCLEAN

Denouement

for Ben, too late

At the dead end on Pleasant Street
a choice awaits you. Will you cross
the bridge to rough ground, or retreat
at the dead end? On Pleasant Street
time seems to pause, a lovely cheat,
but every path leads on to loss
at the dead end. On Pleasant Street
a choice awaits you: will you cross?

CLAUDIA GARY

The Family Booklet

We paid a visit to the consulate,
pronounced our vows inside a backyard tent.
Soon we received a dainty document
designed as future-birth certificate,
a *Livret de Famille* from your French state
with greetings, iced in glossy white and meant
to stimulate the thoughts of those intent
on following its message: Procreate.

I fan the tissue-paper leaves that wait,
decades later, for names of our first ten
enfants. Our fragile bond would desiccate
too soon, but empty pages mock again
this would-be family sealed forevermore
and baked into a wedding *petit-four*.

KIM BRIDGFORD

The Cause

It's hard to do what's right, to have a cause.
The indignation is immediate.
But then comes all the suffering of claws,

The solitude of shame. Achilles' flaws
Are doctored books; they're washed until they're white.
It's hard to keep the beat, to have a cause,

Because most people want life as it was.
It wasn't them; it's best not to tempt fate.
The people feel the puncture. Of the claws,

They do not want to speak: the quick hurrahs
Don't cost them anything. But you wear the date
Of something that expired, once was a cause.

People long for justice, but then pause
To drink the wine and eat the poisoned bait.
The people feel the puncture of the claws.

Once they're drawn in, it has the force of laws.
Your little-light-of-mine strikes them as quaint.
It's hard to do what's right, to have a cause.
You feel the puncture of the people's claws.

CLAUDIA GARY

A Visit from the Original Owner's Ghost

What's that ruler measuring – my old shadow?
Wait, you're checking tiles for a straight edge? Don't blame
me, I did this all on a postal pension.
Sure, I cut corners,

curved some lines that should have been straight, but you know
that won't kill you. Plus, they're beside a door frame.
They'll be covered most of the time, attention
drawn to bright borders.

Don't forget the view from the attic window.
See that brick box where I was town Postmaster?
Soon retired, I needed to make the days go
just a bit faster:

add two rooms enclosing a porch of flagstone,
raise brick posts, fit tub with a new brass shower,
build garage too close to the neighbor's garden –
no idle hour.

Decades passed. It's priced like your average condo,
stripped, foreclosed, but nothing too wrong – a treasure!
You arrive and notice the dancing willow,
promise of pleasure.

Bless this hill I chose when the farmer sold it
after World War II. (You can hire a snowplow.)
Bless this cottage-castle of mine! Must go now;
your turn to hold it.

MARCUS BALES

Habu Hill

We called it Habu Hill. The men who'd dug
And died and crawled and killed about where we
Played army must have named it by its height.
The MPs caught me one day, trying to lug
A box of antitank shells home with me;
The box's lid had rusted on too tight
For me to take just one. Their tires screamed,
And even I could tell the men were scared
Of what I had. I wondered that I'd dared
A thing so much more dangerous than it seemed.

They made me show them where I'd found the box.
They took the rotted uniforms, the gun;
They labeled and took each whole and shattered bone,
Then blocked the entrance of the cave with rocks
We couldn't possibly move, and spoiled our fun.
They didn't find the tank, though, overgrown
And buried, about fifty yards away
And down the hill. So we just moved our game
Of army on down there, and played the same
Old roles of death that soldiers' children play.

I used to dare to think the hole down through
The bottom of that dead American tank
Between the ruined treads must once have fed
On special blood, because a palm tree grew
Up through that hole, up through the ravaged, dank
Insides, up through the hatch, as if the dead,
By standing back up through their war machine
In such a form won back the lives they'd lost
At war, and brought some peace that war had cost,
And stood for what they'd died to make life mean.

I used to dare to think that. Now I know

It for the hopeful bullshit that it was,
Denial yoked to ignorance by dread.
I've heard the stories grinding to their slow
Halts of bunched fists and clenched jaws
As no one said the things that can't be said,
That there is nothing good, or just, or true,
Or beautiful, or in proportion, and death
Distorts and fear corrupts from breath to breath
Everything we hope that we can do.

J.D. SMITH

Capital Invocation

Of arms and of great men I'd like to sing,
Of war unleashed by beauty and sustained
By pride and wrath unto a city's end,
A shipwrecked trickster, general and king
Condemned to exile of long wandering,
A soldier of the vanquished side who found
And fathered forth an even greater land,
For singing of this kind can ease death's sting.

But these aren't epic times. Command lies far
From bravery and seeks, above all, rent.
If genius shirks from doing what it must,
May talent's work suffice to make a tour
Of time and place to fairly represent
The spirit now indwelling future dust.

BARDIA SINAEE

The Home Front

Underneath his discharge forms, pain pills
and the flimsy army issue pocket knife
he'd brought home for his dad, he found his bill-
fold and some change, heading for the Fife

N' Drum to have a double scotch and brace
himself for visiting the family farm.
How the blood would drain from his mother's face
when she saw the hook at the end of his arm.

The old Fife hadn't changed. There were cigarettes
and peanuts in adjacent bowls. The painting
of George Washington in epaulettes
still hung above the urinals. A faint string

of mustard still clung to the barman's tie.
But the sour smell and smoke-sting in his eyes
returned him to the barracks: how he'd try
to get a day-pass into town, where rye

was cheap and certain women would forgive
his high-strung way of making love,
which seemed to him as fraught as pulling live
rounds from a chamber with the tip of

his tongue. He walked out of the tavern
in a daze and roamed the streets – the glens,
the shady lanes and groves, the avenues
affixed with names of dead, exalted men –

and found himself returning to where Chuck
and he would set off cherry bombs and jump
their bikes over the dried-up aqueduct.
Somehow, it was flowing now. Pumped

from lord knows where, a headlong gush
of water issued through the fields, flush
against the furrows of the farms and lush,
unruly orchards. It made the blood rush

to his head when he tried to trace the channel
to its end. The torrent swelled and scaled the lip
like smoke over a trench. The lattice panel
fences of the orchards swayed and dipped

down out of sight as he toppled back and hit
the water. Later, when his ears stopped
ringing, he took the footpaths – digging cow shit
from his boot soles with his hook – toward the shop

Chuck's dad had run, a five-and-dime of sorts,
but found an antique dealer called Qui Vive –
was this the right address? – selling imports
and exotic plants. A clerk asked him to leave

and come back when he'd dried off, but he
was already transfixed by the paisley
silks and rifle stocks engraved with fleurs-de-lis,
the dizzying zellige he didn't think he'd see

again, at least not here. On his way toward
the residential stretch, he saw a line
of trucks flanking the quarry: mining crews were
hauling tonnes of blasted rock and lime-

stone out of town. He knocked on Chuck's front door,
spoke to neighbours and passersby in vain:

"I don't think he lives here anymore."

The coach bus stop and train

station were only six or seven blocks
away. Shivers coursed like static through his skin.
The farm was just a twenty-minute walk.
A sharp pain echoed where his hand had been.

CASEY FITZSIMONS

Pool

Lifelong he'd rather longed to roll
his marble on a larger tray
than just to let the eightball thud
against the felt and ricochet.

He set them all forever loose
in dreams, with violent crack.
Then death's alarm: to rest arrayed
triangular, he called them back.

A Note from the Editors:

We at *The Rotary Dial* have a vested interest, not only in poetry, but also in education and youth outreach. It is in this spirit that we introduce our Youth Spotlight. From time to time, we will be featuring the work of a poet under the age of 21, who demonstrates remarkable skill in writing poetry in form. Our first poet in this series, Jordana Graber, salutes the arrival of summer. We hope that you will read Jordana's bio at the end of this issue, enjoy her poem, and salute her for her fine work.

JORDANA GRABER

The Pink Princess

So softly hum the bumblebees
Among the scarves of pinkish blooms
That drape across the redbud trees.
The butterfly ascends and zooms
Amid the woods and through the leas,
Then rests within the princess, pink
To drink of redbud's nectar brink.

CONTRIBUTORS

James McKee and his wife live in New York City, in a neighborhood where the 1% seldom go. A New Yorker by birth (and likely by death), he enjoys failing in his dogged attempts to keep pace with the unrelenting and impacted cultural onslaught of late-imperial Manhattan. After taking a degree in English & Philosophy, he held a number of ludicrously unsuitable jobs before spending over a decade as a teacher and administrator at a small special-needs high school. His poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in *The Raintown Review*, *Saranac Review*, *The South Carolina Review*, *THINK, f(r)iction*, *The Worcester Review*, *The Lyric*, and elsewhere. He currently works as a private tutor and spends his free time, when not writing or reading, traveling less than he would like and brooding more than he can help.

Raised in the Bahamas, holding four passports (Canadian, British, Australian and Jamaican), **Robin Helweg-Larsen** has been living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina, for the past twenty years. His poetry is mostly published in the UK.

Susan McLean is a professor of English at Southwest Minnesota State University. Her first book of poetry, *The Best Disguise*, won the 2009 Richard Wilbur Award, and her second book, *The Whetstone Misses the Knife*, won the 2014 Donald Justice Poetry Prize. She has also published a 2006 poetry chapbook, *Holding Patterns*, and a collection of her verse translations of 503 Latin epigrams by Martial, *Selected Epigrams* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2014), which was a finalist for the 2015 PEN Center USA Translation Award.

Claudia Gary, author of *Humor Me* (David Robert Books, 2006), became a third-time Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award finalist in 2015. Claudia's recent chapbooks *Bikini Buyer's Remorse* (humorous) and *Let's Get Out of Here* (war poems) are available via the email address in pw.org/content/claudia_gary. Her reading of love poems is at the 28-minute mark here: <http://www.blogtalkradio.com/newmercurymedia/2016/02/15/pnn--salute-to-love-2016>.

Kim Bridgford is the founder and director of Poetry by the Sea: A Global Conference, www.poetrybytheseaconference.com, and the cultural curator of

the Poetry by the Sea Reading Series at the Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts in Center City, Philadelphia. The editor of *Mezzo Cammin*, the online formalist journal by women, she is the founder of The Mezzo Cammin Women Poets Timeline Project, a comprehensive database of women poets, both at www.mezzocammin.com. Twice nominated for the Poets' Prize, she is the author of nine books of poetry, including the forthcoming *Human Interest*. She is completing a three-book series, *The Falling Edge*, with visual artist Jo Yarrington, and is the recipient of grants from the NEA, the Connecticut Commission on the Arts, and the Ucross Foundation.

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*.

J.D. Smith's fourth collection, *The Killing Tree*, which includes the poem "Capital Invocation," will be published in the summer of 2016. He is currently working on a collection of light verse. He holds an M.A. from the Norman Paterson School of International Affairs at Carleton University.

Bardia Sinaee is a poet living in Toronto. His poems have been published around Canada in places like *Arc*, *The Malahat Review*, *The Walrus* and *Best Canadian Poetry 2015* (Tightrope Books).

Casey FitzSimons has poems in print and online in *Red Wheelbarrow*, *Mezzo Cammin*, and numerous other journals. She has published twelve chapbooks, including *The Breeze Was Mine: Poems in Form* (2013) and *The Sharp Edges of Knowing* (2015). She has a master's degree in Fine Arts from San José State University.

Jordana Graber is a Mennonite born in the year 2000 in Bastrop, Texas, where she currently attends a Mennonite school. She has thus far published seven poems and one story.