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Editor's Note

Our sixty-first issue is characteristically odd, but in a reflective sort of way. Which feels about right for the month in which we're forced to think back over our indiscretions in an effort to estimate our probable position on some bewhiskered chubster's twice-checked list.

Visit Asbury Park with Kailey Tedesco; ponder the Festival of the Lamb with Geza Fuchs; explore the quiet meditations of Japanese short-forms with Abra Deering Norton and Al Ortolani; play the lottery with Dawn Corrigan, and inhabit Andrew Collard's sci-fi recollections.

Whether you're praying to Santa, gambling for chocolate, or filling a dishpan with raw caribou meat and wintergreen Tic-Tacs for the Abominable Snowman's birthday, we hope this season finds you pine-scented and filled with cheer and cocoa.

Read, enjoy, share.

— Laura Garrison

Asbury Park in the Off-Season

Kailey Tedesco

The cheshire-tooth simpers
away and the ferris wheel, empty,
persists against grey winds.

Broken glass skitters across
linoleum like dice on a table:
it peoples the abandoned casino.

The shore in its pure being:
square-scene polaroid
left to develop in the
November morning.

Huddled on a bench: we
exist with the warmth of
cheeseburgers, dazzled

by the bare horizon
bathing in the sun.

KAILEY TEDESCO's poetry aims to channel the viscerally piercing voices of Plath and Dickinson, while conveying the modern world in a disfiguring and bewildering lens. She is currently enrolled in Arcadia University's creating writing-poetry MFA program. Her work has been featured in *Lehigh Valley Vanguard* and she is a poetry editor for *Marathon Literary Review*.

The Festival of the Lamb

Geza Fuchs

Of all the celebrations we held year round, all the feasts and commemorations we had, the one I looked forward to the most was the Festival of the Lamb. Fasting during the day for Ramadan was a struggle, but the night more than compensated for that: music and dancing on the streets, everyone sharing food with friends and families. The Prophet's birthday was special because of the presents we received: colorful jilabas to wear, heavy silver necklaces with opal and topaz and jade stones. But seeing the city full of snow-white lambs, one for each family, hearing them clop-clopping down the streets, the smell of dry grass brought in from the countryside to feed them, nothing could compare to that.

In the course of just a few days, the conversation would change from the horrible summer heat or the gossiping about the new teachers at school to the fluffy new pets. All the families paraded back from the market with their lambs by their sides, a frayed piece of rope or a rusty chain tied around their necks. Big ears, crooked teeth, clumsy feet and a deep bellowing. Wooly as rugs, playful as mice, naughty as any of us kids, they were.

Everyone laughed at the eccentricities they put on display, the small feats of almost superhuman intelligence. For us children, all the games on the streets revolved around the little stumbling animals; my sister and I couldn't help but feel like the unwanted guests at the party, invited only out of pity. "And where's your lamb?" a neighbor asked me once. I just stared down in silence.

Some afternoons, while mom was still at work, we went to our neighbor's, Hakkima, and she watched over us. She braided our hair and tattooed our hands with henna. Hakkima would take the opportunity to pretend she had children of her own, just as we pretended to have a lamb of our own. Hakkima always let us ride the lamb for a little bit. I would hold on to the wooly creature's neck and it knew I wasn't afraid: it walked me from one end of the patio to the other, under my surrogate mother's constant gaze.

Going to sleep those nights, after mom kissed us on the forehead, the light would go out, we closed our little eyes, and against the silence of the night there rose an empire of bleatings. In each terrace stood a lamb; at times they sang, all together in harmony, a strange lullaby for my younger sister and me. At times they took turns, as if talking about who knows what lamb-like ordeals. I would fall asleep, counting on one day having my own.

The few times school started right before the festival, I would try my hardest to be the best student in the class. I did all my homework, always raised my hand, memorized the Quran, hoping that my teacher would tell mom how dedicated I was. Every year I asked mom, with my sweetest voice, if we would get our own lamb this time. Her invariant reply, a melancholic "Maybe next year," and then she would turn around, as if hiding a strong emotion.

Only as an adult, many years later, did I realize the way mother had been acting in an attempt to keep everything hidden from us daughters. Making it all seem so casual, Mom would whisk us away from the city on the last day of the month, taking us to a remote cabin at the foot of the Atlas Mountains, or having us travel the whole day by train, from Tangier to Essaouira—almost the whole length of the country. When there was money for nothing

else, she locked us up in the house without even the chance to peek our noses out through the window.

That year was different. Mom had been feeling sick, staying in bed until late in the afternoon, without being able to cook or pay much attention to us. The day the festival was set to commence, the fever she had been harboring rose so high she was unable to leave her bed at all. The eldest of the house, I took charge of the situation and provided care for my mother and little sister. Determined to buy some ice for cold compresses to soothe her temperature, my chest swelled with pride as I opened the door to leave the house.

With every step I took outside in the direction of the Socco, I felt, more and more, an eerie atmosphere hovering around in the Medina, in the alleys and the dead-end streets. There was a sweet smell in the air, a sweetness not belonging to sugar nor honey, not figs nor azaleas. After passing two or three corners, my shoes started to stick to the ground, which was covered in an opaque film. Then the screams: bellows that started out joyful, until suddenly they lost their strength like a balloon with its end untied. When I turned that last corner before the Socco, still walking up the narrow street laden with rugs and silverware and spices of eight different colors, I could see, in the heart of the Socco, the scene of the Massacre.

People dressed in white jilabas congregated in a semicircle. All in the pure color of white, but their clothes screamed out that something macabre was happening. Each family waited for its turn, with their white lamb next to them, playfully expectant the poor beast, like any other day. And in every family, the father stood proud sometimes, concentrated other times, playful or solemn, but always with a sheathed knife in hand. One by one, the families took

the spotlight, and effecting that rite so symbolic and so concrete at the same time, would lose the newest member of their family. Sometimes the children cried, sometimes the mothers had the caution of making them look away.

Back in bed at the end of the day, the spectral silence of the night made the hair on my skin stand up. I kept my eyes shut in a vain attempt to force myself to sleep. Not one of my lambs had been spared.

That night was the first time the thought occurred to me, going against years of feeling just the opposite: I was grateful not to have a father. Despite the laughter thrown upon us, the scorn, the discrimination and my mother's lonely sobs and sighs at night, I was grateful.

Because had I had a father, I myself would have taken the knife from his hands. I would have laid Father on his side on the street wet with blood, would have bound his four limbs together to keep him from kicking, pushed his head up forcing him to bellow one last time, and then opened his throat, liberating the torrent of trapped blood with one swift upwards motion of my childish arm. I would not have him hurting my lamb. Furious, I commanded under my breath: no, Father. Not my lamb.

GEZA FUCHS is a Hungarian-American vagabond, roaming the world in search of inspiration. He teaches English in Italy and has never been published before.

haiku

Abra Deering Norton

reaching out to touch
not like the cattails back home
purple reeds with teeth

ABRA DEERING NORTON's recent work appeared in *The Subterranean Quarterly* and *Eunoia Review*. She has an MFA from UCLA. She's written for the Los Angeles Times and her creative non-fiction has appeared in *The Huffington Post* and elsewhere. She's originally from Minneapolis, lives in California and misses rain. She's on twitter @adeerLA.

Two Tanka

Al Ortolani

high on Mt. Sneffels
hikers pass
in deep cloud cover—
no way up or down
without disappearing

poncho over my head
knees to chin
hail rattles the couloir
where I sit
with other stones

AL ORTOLANI's poetry and reviews have appeared in journals such as *Prairie Schooner*, *New Letters*, *Word Riot*, and the *New York Quarterly*. His fifth collection of poems, *Waving Mustard in Surrender*, was released in 2014 from New York Quarterly Books. Currently, he is teaching English in the Kansas City area and serves on the Board of Directors of the Kansas City Writers Place.

The Lottery Game

Dawn Corrigan

There were plenty of amusements to choose from in the city where Tommy and Annette lived—concerts, the theatre, the famous circus from Moscow. But what they liked best was dining out. And the love affair was mutual. Wherever they went, maitre d's softened at the sight of the glowing young pair. Waiters and musicians fluttered around Annette as though she were a movie star.

During their first year of marriage, they dined out every Friday night. The next morning, they would sleep in for as long as they liked, then prepare an enormous breakfast. But once the pancakes and sausages were consumed and the dishes were washed, the reality of their week began. Together they'd sit down with the checkbook to calculate what they owed that week—to the landlord, the electric company, and the church, for they'd financed their own wedding and were still paying off the debt—and determine what small amount was left for food and other daily expenses. They'd decide how much could be spent at the butcher, the greengrocer's, and the bakery. Then Annette would set off to do the shopping.

At first, Tommy had gone with Annette. Then he noticed the way the shopkeepers looked at her, and he surmised their grocery money might stretch a little further if Annette went on her own. After that he kissed her each Saturday afternoon and sent her on her way. And it was true: afterward she often came home with an extra pound of meat, or a cut above what she'd actually ordered, after a trip to the butcher's; and one Saturday when she ordered a

loaf of sliced pumpernickel from the baker she returned with a loaf of sliced pumpernickel and a caramel cake that was so delicious Tommy had eaten the whole thing by Sunday night.

The following Saturday as Annette was heading out to run her errands, Tommy stopped her at the door. "You're wearing *that*?" he asked.

Annette looked down at her navy blue suit in surprise. "What's wrong with it?"

"Nothing at all," Tommy said, hustling her back toward the bedroom. "Only this is even prettier," he added, picking a flowered dress out of the wardrobe. "Especially when you wear it with a ribbon in your hair."

Suddenly Annette understood. "You want another cake!" she exclaimed, snatching the hair ribbon out of his hand. "And you think *this* is going to get it for you!"

"Please, honey. I *need* that cake."

That night, and for many Saturdays to come, there was caramel cake for dessert. Tommy, who'd weighed 120 at their wedding, gained thirty pounds within six months. But far from tiring of the cake his craving for it only seemed to grow; so now, on their Friday evenings out, though he enjoyed the rest of the meal as much as ever, he was always disappointed during dessert; for no restaurant offering, no matter how creamy or chocolaty or light or rich or dense or dark, could compare with his weekly caramel cake from the neighborhood bakery.

But one Saturday when Annette went out to do her chores, the bakery had disappeared. The "Walker's" sign was gone. The large plate glass window, which had formerly been filled with pastry and rolls, was boarded up. When Annette peered through the crack

between two boards she saw that everything inside had disappeared as well: no cash register, no display cases, not even a discarded curl of red-and-white string remained.

Annette rushed into the fish market next door. “Where’s the bakery?” she exclaimed, but the fishmonger just shrugged and shook his head sadly, as though to indicate that the story of the baker’s disappearance was too tragic for words, though perhaps he only meant he didn’t know. Annette tried at the dry cleaners and the five-and-dime as well, but nobody could tell her what had happened.

When she’d asked everyone on the block, Annette turned her heavy steps toward home, stopping only at her butcher’s and at another bakery located next door to it. Though they couldn’t really afford it, she splurged and bought some steak at the butcher’s. At the new bakery she bought the week’s bread and a chocolate cake.

Annette debated long and hard about the latter purchase, because she knew Tommy wouldn’t be easily placated by the loss of the caramel cakes. She didn’t want to seem cavalier about his loss. But finally she thought, “Well, a person must have *something* for dessert.”

But when she arrived home Tommy’s reaction to the news was even worse than she’d feared. “Oh, no!” he moaned, and sank down on the couch in a swoon, rising only to eat the steak and a salad she’d prepared, and, after a show of some reluctance, a large slice of the chocolate cake. His face wore an expression of anguish the entire time he consumed his dessert.

Forever after this period in their lives, the caramel cake, and eventually even the lost baker himself, became the symbol of a kind of perfection for Tommy.

On Saturday evenings Tommy had to work at the Post Office. After dinner he'd go back to the bedroom to change into his uniform, emerging a moment later with the blue shirt draped over one arm and his other hand held before his mouth in the shape of a bugle, pretending to blow taps. When he finished he'd snap his heels together and salute Annette. Then he'd don his work shirt and leave the apartment.

Sometimes on Saturday nights Annette went out with friends from work, but more often she stayed home to clean house and watch a little TV. With Tommy gone it was more evident to her how poor they were. She'd walk from room to room surveying the cracks in the ceiling, the scratched surfaces of worn Formica, the odd tilt of walls and floor that nowhere met at ninety-degree angles. Some nights she cried herself to sleep.

Unfortunately, Sunday morning wasn't much better. Tommy arrived home from work, but though he often brought some donuts with him, or a wedge of Gouda, his mood was foul. Before his coat was even off he'd be railing about the profound stupidity of the man who worked at the next sorter over, or the vicious stupidity of his supervisor.

Annette knew Tommy's diatribe wasn't directed against her, that she was its audience and not its cause. Still, she didn't like it. Sundays tended to make Annette sad anyway: the weather always seemed gray on Sundays, and even when the sun was shining, it shone less brightly than on other days.

All these elements conspired against Annette's normally buoyant heart, so a Sunday afternoon often found her in tears. Then Tommy would shake off his own bad mood, wrap his arms around her, and pull her onto his lap. "Come on now," he'd say, "it's all

right. There's nothing to cry about. Let's go for a walk. We'll walk around to the drugstore and buy a lottery ticket."

Then Annette dried her eyes and grabbed her coat and they went out for a stroll about the neighborhood, winding up at Nicky's soda counter. There they bought their tickets. Some weeks, when money was extra tight, they'd purchase only one number; other times, if the jackpot was up and they could afford it, they'd buy as many as five.

Tommy was not above grabbing a QuikPick now and then, but Annette disapproved. "We have to *work* for that money," she'd say. Sometimes she'd try combinations of numbers imbued with personal meaning: their birthdays, anniversary, and street address; other weeks she'd poise her pen over the Lotto card like the pointer of a Ouija board and wait for inspiration to strike. At home she even set up a bowl with forty little pieces of paper crumpled permanently inside, and some weeks she drew numbers from the bowl.

When they finished they'd return home and Tommy would put on a cup of tea. Then they'd sit across from each other at the kitchen table and play the Lottery Game.

"Who will go first?"

"You go."

"No you."

"No, you go ahead."

"All right, I'll go. The first thing I'll do," here Tommy threw his hands up in the air and waved them like a boxer after a victorious championship bout, "is *quit the Post Office!*" He made a sound like stadium cheering. "And you'll quit your job, too."

"Well, maybe I won't right away. They'll need me through the holidays. Maybe I'll just work through the holidays and then I'll quit."

"Annette, don't be ridiculous! Let them find someone else to work through the holidays!"

"We'll see."

"Annette, it's *my* turn! When it's your turn you can think about staying on at your silly job—though let me add right now, as your spouse I advise against it. But in my turn we *definitely* both quit our jobs first thing."

"All right."

"Then we'll move."

"Where?"

"I'm going to tell you! … I don't know. Where do you want to move?"

"I don't know. Where do *you* want to move?"

"I don't know. Somewhere by the ocean."

"That sounds nice."

"Okay. We'll buy a nice house by the ocean—"

"Yes?"

"And we'll move into it."

"And?"

"And we'll live happily ever after."

"That's it?" Annette exclaimed. "That's your plan?"

"What's wrong with it?"

"It's not a plan at all! It's only the first step in a plan! A plan has to have more than one step! Besides, what about all the people we have to take care of?"

"Like who?" Tommy asked.

"Like your mother! Like *my* mother! And what about my brother and Teresa?"

"What about Teresa?"

"What do you mean, what about Teresa? Just because she's my stepmom you think I don't want to take care of her? She's been very good to me, just like a mother. And Sammie is my sister!"

"Well, of course," Tommy said, grinning at her.

"Well that means we have to take care of them when we win!"

"Of course. But I'm leaving all of *that* up to you. After we buy the house—which I'd like to have a say in selecting—*you're* handling the money."

"Well then it's my turn."

"That's right."

"Well then," Annette began, making a frame with her hands and gazing through it as though she could see their future caught in some tree branches out the window, "*first* we'll get Teresa out of that factory and move her and Sammie into a nice little house. *Then* we'll buy a little theatre for Eddie so he can direct his plays in it. Then we'll give something to Suzie—maybe we'll buy her a little house, too. Yes, that seems only fair. Then we'll have to give something to your mother and George; but how are we going to stop them from gambling away anything we give them?"

"There's no way to stop that from happening," Tommy said, shaking his head. "No way in *hell*."

"That's what I thought too. But then I thought, maybe we could set up a trust fund for them."

"Sure. What's a trust fund?"

“It’s what rich people use to take care of their children and other people who aren’t really capable of handling money on their own. I think they get it in installments or something.”

“They should call it a no-trust fund, then,” Tommy laughed. “Anyway, it’s trust funds all around for this family!” He swung his teacup merrily through the air. “A trust fund in every pot! Life, liberty, and the pursuit of trust funds! Hey, maybe we should set up a trust fund for *ourselves*!”

The lottery drawing was on Wednesday night. The broadcast came on at 11:00, after the news, and was hosted by a man named Bob and his assistant Sonya. The whole process was conducted with a great deal of pomp and ceremony, and Bob and Sonya dressed appropriately for it: Bob wore a tuxedo, and Sonya wore glittering evening gowns of a different primary color each week, to be shown off on the new color TVs that were being installed in living rooms throughout the city.

When Sonya appeared on the screen Tommy exclaimed, “Look at Sonya! Doesn’t she look beautiful this week?”

“She certainly does,” Annette agreed. “She has such lovely taste in gowns.”

“And look at her hair!” Tommy went on. “I think she’s wearing it in a new style.”

“Indeed she is,” Annette said. “And it’s even more flattering than last week’s style.”

But when the numbers had been drawn and they did not match the Hogans’, their tone changed. “What a hag,” Tommy snarled. And Annette chimed in: “That Sonya is an overly-made-up tart.”

As though not winning the lottery wasn't bad enough, on Thursdays Annette and Tommy had dinner with Tommy's mother, Margaret, and her new husband, George.

Margaret had her own version of the lottery game. It went like this: when she grew angry at Tommy—when, though he generally tried very hard not to, he had offended her in some fashion, she'd turn to him and pout, "When I win the lottery, *you* aren't getting any!" Then she'd elaborate a long list of who would receive her bounty, so Tommy could feel the full weight of his imaginary loss.

Later, when peace had been restored and Tommy was in her good graces again, Margaret would blow him kisses and say, "When I win I'm giving you *everything*! Forget about everyone else! It's *all* for you!"

Tommy's response to both phases of Margaret's game—the part where he was penniless, and the part where he'd been awarded the whole prize—was always the same. "I don't want your money, Ma."

The next lottery Tommy participated in was one he would have been happy to lose. The country had gone to war, a terrible war in the name of which young men were being scooped up and flown away. Many never returned. The men were picked by lottery. All males over 18 had to register with the government, which then assigned their lottery numbers.

When his time came, Tommy had gotten drunk before staggering in to register at the branch of the Post Office where he worked, where for once the older men eyed him sympathetically. Ever since, he'd been dreading the arrival of the mimeographed notice that would mean his number had been picked.

On the day it came, Tommy carried it in to show Annette with a stricken look on his face.

"I have something to tell you," Annette said. "I'm pregnant."

Tommy swooped over and gave her a big hug. Any misgivings he might have felt about incipient fatherhood were swept away by one crucial, beautiful fact: the government wasn't taking men who were fathers to fight in its war. Not yet, anyway. And by the time it was, Tommy was too old, according to the government's own reckoning, to fight; and so he was safe.

When Mary, their firstborn, was a toddler, and Annette was pregnant with Peter, their second, they decided that the city where they'd grown up, though beloved to them in many ways, not least in its variety of restaurants, was not where they wanted to raise their children. So they scraped together some money, took out a loan, and bought a little house by the sea.

And though with hard work and prudence they eventually eked their way out of poverty, they still continued to play the lottery game in their new home. They played it for so long that eventually everything around them learned to play it too.

Their little house said to the house next door, *When I win the lottery, I'll have new siding that won't rust*.

The cat said to the squirrels, *When I win the lottery, Peter will bring me chicken every day for lunch*.

One Japanese maple said to the other, *When we win, we'll have fertilizer sprinkled with jewels and gold dust.*

DAWN CORRIGAN's poetry and prose have appeared in a number of print and online journals. Her debut novel, an environmental mystery called *Mitigating Circumstances*, was published by Five Star/Cengage in January 2014. She lives in Gulf Breeze, Florida and works in the affordable housing industry.

In Memoriam

Andrew Collard

The ancient spacemen rode vibrations.
They were born with beards,

suckling desperately in the fore-
shadow of sports, and sudden death.

Crossing T's on mis-marked constellations
they knocked our heads,

the grace of their tango staining
our faulty parachutes.

They maimed us one by one
as we knelt in the TV light for cover.

But the kettle sleeps, sometimes.

My hands relearn the softness of cats
and my mouth, the dry

shock of molars on gravel.

Each conception, though, when the sun
reclothes their sexmaps,

I feel the echoed thump
of spacefeet on butter.

ANDREW COLLARD lives in Madison Heights, MI, and attends Oakland University. Recent work can be found online at *Word Riot* and *Ex Fic*.

On the cover:

"Dragasaurus Rex"
DeAnne Hodum

DE ANNE HODUM is an artist, vlogger, and taco aficionado in Austin, Texas. She will probably paint for the rest of her life and make no money at it.