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Online Editor: Laura Garrison

Production Editor: Samuel Snoek-Brown

Associate Editor: Monica Rodriguez

Readers: Rebecca Vaccaro, Amanda Chiado

Founding Editor/Publisher: Eirik Gumeny

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Editor's Note

“May” occupies a curious place in the English lexicon. It appears when we seek permission — “Mother, may I take seven sasquatch steps?” — and also when we withhold or grant that permission — “No, you may not, but you may take three toad hops.” It bestows blessings, as in, “May the Fourth be with you.” It suggests potential paths, offering not the certainty of resolution but the allure of possibilities: “It may be.”

In this spirit, our eighty-ninth issue grapples with some of life’s toughest questions. What have you lost? What if the circus didn’t have to die? What was Mary Jane Kelly like before she met Jack the Ripper? What’s in the box? Why aren’t you a spoon?

— Laura Garrison

What You Don't Hear

Marie Baleo

Ariana and I had been best friends for thirteen years on the day that she became a box. She and I had been closer than the Earth and the Moon, for a long time. I was summoned to her room by none other than her wailing mother, who hoped I'd identify her. The box smelled like Ariana's damp hair on wash day.

"Yes," I said, as the room broke down and began to cry.

"Where has she gone?" her dog Cooper asked, always late to the party.

"She's right here, Coop." I motioned to the box, a sturdy cardboard number with photographs and images pasted on each side. On one side, a Wall Street occupier with a dollar bill taped to his mouth; on another, a placid sepia lake; on another still, a European painting, depicting what my lack of classical education told me was either a biblical scene or an elaborate Italian orgy.

"Ari, can you hear me?" I asked the box. Ari's mother, Mrs. Strand, looked at me, then at the box, her face contorted, her breath held tightly.

Ariana, the box, remained silent.

If you are curious to know how a person becomes a box, allow me to present two theories. The first: simply because a coin falls to the floor every time you drop it for a million consecutive days does not mean, come the million-and-first day, that the coin won't fall upwards, or perhaps not fall at all, hovering in the air, where it might best destroy your certitudes. The second theory (my favorite) is that my best friend of thirteen years, who in recent times had

exhibited the behavior of a vapid pail, within which I suspected no shred of my quick silver-tongued, gold-hearted love remained, had finally achieved to match form to function, becoming what I had known her to be for a while: an empty shell. It made sense, if you thought about it. You might call it an allegory, even.

In her final years as a non-box, Ariana and I had maintained appearances with admirable devotion: we still saw each other for dinner regularly, still hugged and posed for photographs, which we plastered over the Internet with the faith and energy of a dog humping a chair leg. I feigned interest in her life; she touched my face too often.

I remembered her leaning on the railing of a ferry boat in Ireland, twelve years prior. Her hair had flown horizontal, a flag, as the sun tipped into the water. I had struggled to hear the sound of her voice, which came to me as episodic bursts on a familiar wavelength. I had just nodded and smiled.

"Have you looked inside?" I asked Mrs. Strand, with the cool and precision of a medicine man called to the bedside of a feverish child.

"No."

I understood: it felt too intimate, looking inside her daughter like this. "Someone has to," I said, peering into Mrs. Strand's face long enough to ascertain I had her permission. I opened the box with the Mrs.'s head tucked behind my shoulder, and what we found inside, of course, was a key. I chastised myself for not having guessed it would be.

"Do you know what this is?" Mrs. Strand asked.

"I don't, but I'll find out," I told her, with the debonair demeanor of a noir detective.

Coop and I set out for the streets, box in one hand, key in the other, just as the moon rose, floating in a light blue sky above the Douglas firs. Kids on skateboards zipped past us.

"Ever seen anything like it?" I asked the oracle, which was a rhetorical question, because by that age you would hope he had seen a key before.

"It's a key," the oracle said.

"God bless," Coop replied, in veneration.

I fidgeted in my seat, my impatience bouncing against the ceiling of the deserted train station where the oracle officiated. "What does it open?" I asked, no kindness left in me for this fifty-dollar-note-gurgling charlatan prescribed to me by Mrs. Strand, whom I had left behind in Ariana's room, hugging the box to her chest as though it might love her back.

"Your mind!" the oracle exclaimed. He turned to grab something behind his seat: a plastic cup filled with water. "Here, take the key with this," the old man suggested. I placed the key on the tip of my tongue, where its iron taste spread between my tastebuds like an oil spill, and with one swift gulp ushered it into my stomach.

On the deck of the Irish ferry where I had stood twelve by twelve months ago, the water rumbled, relentless, below our feet. I could hear Ari's voice, perfectly clear above the crashing waves, as though her lips might have been touching my ear, as though she were, perhaps, indistinct from my own mind. When she was done speaking, I nodded and smiled.

MARIE BALEO is a French writer born in 1990. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Panorama: The Journal of Intelligent Travel*, *Litro Magazine*, *Five on the Fifth*, *Five 2 One Magazine*, *Foliate Oak Literary Magazine*, and *Eunoia Review*.

An Invitation, and Virgil

Mark Bonica

You were just out for a walk
you tell Virgil when you run into him on the path —
just taking the dog for a stroll in the woods —
you're pretty sure you know the way forward
or back.

the path may not be straightforward,
but you're confident you haven't lost it.

Virgil gestures to a gaping hole,
a gash filled with darkness
where the leaves and rocks
have been pushed aside,
a hole that was not there
the last time you walked this way.
The hole is big enough to drive
your minivan down into it,
and maybe even do a three point turn.

His gaze says,
one must go down in order to ascend,
and the two of you stand looking into the black
while your dog pulls at his leash.

You consider the lions and panthers of your life.
You realize Virgil is here by invitation.
What have you lost? you ponder.
Is today the day to make the descent?

MARK BONICA was a soldier once, and young, but neither of these anymore. These days he teaches management at the University of New Hampshire where he enjoys helping launch young people on their own grand adventures. His poetry and fiction have appeared in the *Loch Raven Review*, *Words Dance*, *Oak Bend Review*, *Vagabondage*, and others.

The Silverware Club

Carly Brown

‘Why aren’t you a spoon?’

‘Excuse me?’ I asked.

He gestured to my striped t-shirt, my jeans.

‘You’re not a spoon,’ he said.

There was a cardboard oval behind his head. The oval was spray-painted silver and held in place with an elastic band that stretched across his forehead. It made him look oddly like an angel or a saint. His entire outfit was silver too: silver button-up shirt, silver bowtie and shoes.

‘No,’ I said. ‘I’m not a spoon.’

Everybody else in the room was similarly dressed, with huge ovals behind their heads. One girl had an oval made of what looked like tin foil. A guy near me playing the piano wore a white plastic one.

‘You made it!’ Someone behind me called.

I turned. There was Jay. The guy I had met yesterday at a bar and the only person I knew at the party. He was taller than I remembered, sporting a wooden oval. It looked heavy. I wondered if it was an old toilet lid.

‘Welcome, welcome,’ he said, gesturing to the leather couches, the shining hardwood floors. There was a single spindly plant in the corner. A glass table with clear bottles of vodka and gin. It looked more like the waiting room of an expensive office than somebody’s actual house. Did Jay really live here?

He hugged me and my head fell just below the wooden oval. When we pulled away, he smiled at me like we had known each other for years and this was the moment of our glorious reunion. It was one of the warmest smiles I'd ever seen. I remembered it from the bar and felt a little better.

But it was one of those smiles that was *so* wide, so welcoming, it made you question for a moment if it was fake. Like when you run the bathwater really hot, then you place your hand under it and, for a second, it feels cold.

'Nice place,' I said, unsure of where to start with my questions.

'Is your costume in your bag?' he asked, gesturing to my beat-up brown backpack.

'I didn't know about ...this,' I said.

Jay stepped back, grimacing. He ran his fingers through his hair. He had a swoop of thick brown hair like a Kennedy. I liked it. It was one of the first things I noticed when we'd met yesterday.

'It was on the Facebook event,' he said.

'We're not friends on Facebook.'

He paused. 'And I didn't mention it when I invited you?'

I shook my head.

He was exuberantly drunk when I'd met him and he'd told me a lot of things. I wasn't sure if he had been flirting with me or if he was just a friendly, open book kind of guy. He had told me how he was about to start law school but he wanted to be an artist (he didn't say what kind), how he had a pet gecko called Franz Kafka, how he bulk ordered coffee from Sweden because the Swedes knew how to properly roast coffee.

But he hadn't mentioned that this was a costume party.

And everybody was meant to dress as a spoon.

‘That’s my bad,’ he said, shaking his head. The wooden oval tilted in the air. ‘It was pretty last minute anyway.’

When he had invited me to a party, I figured: Why not? What’s the worst thing that could happen? If it’s boring, I stay for one beer and then I leave.

The chance to make some friends in Cambridge was too appealing to turn down. And he was nice. A little wacky, sure, but nice.

I hadn’t expected — whatever this was.

‘I’m sorry,’ he said, slapping me on the back. ‘I feel like an idiot.’

I looked at the wooden circle attached to his head and his pinstripe suit.

‘Yeah,’ I said, quietly.

‘Well, as you can see, tonight we’re all spoons. I’m a wooden spoon,’ he said.

‘I figured.’

‘But we’ve got silver spoons, plastic spoons. It was actually Peter’s idea. Peter!’ He gestured to the all-silver man who had accosted me earlier.

‘Peter, I’d like to introduce you to ...’ Jay paused, trying to remember my name. He knocked a fist against his forehead and the oval teetered a little. ‘It’s right on the tip of my tongue.’

‘Emily,’ I said.

‘Of course. Emily,’ said Jay. ‘And Emily is from ...’

‘Michigan,’ I supplied.

‘Michigan!’ he snapped his fingers. ‘Of course, of course. We met at the bar last week.’

Last night.

‘Well, if you’ll excuse me for a just a sec,’ said Jay, flashing that same smile. ‘Sam is mixing the cocktails and I have to make sure that she doesn’t try to dump twice the amount of gin into them.’

He smiled at Peter and patted him on the shoulder. Peter grinned to himself. I looked down at my tennis shoes, which stood out bright white against the hardwood floor. When I looked back up, Peter was examining me, still evidently displeased that I wasn’t dressed as a piece of cutlery. That I hadn’t managed to transform myself into a spoon in the last minute or so.

‘I didn’t know about the theme,’ I said, taking off my backpack and sticking it near a leather armchair.

He sipped his martini. ‘It’s not a theme,’ he said.

‘Excuse me?’

An awkward silence followed. It seemed like he hadn’t heard my question. Piano notes punctured the air between us. The music was slow, jazzy.

‘Isn’t that thing uncomfortable?’ I asked, breaking the silence, gesturing to the headband that his silver oval was attached to.

‘Yes,’ said Peter.

I looked around desperately for someone else, anyone else, to talk to.

Ordinarily, if I showed up to a party dressed how I was, I would be the most unnoticeable person in the room. But here, I stood out. If we were actually utensils in a drawer, I would be the cheese grater. It was strange, but I almost wished for a stupid oval to stick behind my head, just so people would stop casting sidelong glances at me, pursing their lips in judgment that I didn’t adhere to the party theme.

It isn't my fault. I didn't know! I wanted to shout. And if I had, I wouldn't have come to this damn party in the first place.

Maybe it wasn't too late to bail. Jay could barely remember my name so it seemed unlikely he would miss me if I just walked right back out the door. Peter would probably be pleased.

'Well, I just remembered that I actually have to—' I started to say, but then I heard the clinking of silver on glass. I looked over at the drink area, where Jay was standing and holding aloft a martini with a fat olive floating in it.

'Can I have your attention, please. We're going to start the games shortly, but in the meantime, please grab a drink and form a circle.'

They all started tittering with excitement, grabbing more of the elegant martinis that were laid out on the edge of the table. One guy knocked the top his cardboard oval against the doorframe as he came in from another room. He had to duck to come in. I felt like laughing, but everyone else was taking it all so seriously, it didn't seem appropriate.

Jay handed me a martini and indicated for me to sit down. I held its thin stem and looked down at the olive that had sunk to the bottom. It was too late to bail now. If anything, this would be a weird story to recount later to my friends back home. You wouldn't believe what kind of stuff they get up to on the East Coast . . .

I sat down in the armchair. The leather was firm and didn't seem to bend at all under my weight. There were about eight of us in total. Everyone kept looking over at me, then whispering to one another and giggling.

'Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Silverware Club. Thank you for travelling here from your various destinations.

I am Wooden Spoon. I will be in charge of this meeting for today. First on the agenda, introductions.'

He gestured to the girl next to him who was dressed in all silver like Peter. A silver strapless dress and silvery eye shadow. She was hot in the way that 1960's film stars are hot: languid, dewy-eyed and a little absent.

'What spoon are you?' Jay asked.

She pulled up her silvery gloves that stood out against her tan skin. 'I'm a silver tea spoon,' she said. 'I'm used primarily to stir the coffee of a very wealthy woman who lives on the Upper West Side in Manhattan. I only get used once a day and then I'm immediately washed, by somebody else.'

The others nodded and we began going around the circle, everyone inventing a story to go alongside their spoon outfits. No hesitation. No laughter. One girl dressed in green said that she was the plastic spoon that was part of a child's tea set and that she was used to stir imaginary tea. The guy who was playing the piano earlier was a plastic spoon that a family kept in a crowded bottom drawer, alongside the spare light bulbs and underused tablecloths, and only brought out for picnics in the summer. He was used to spoon egg salad onto bread.

I guzzled my cocktail like it was water until, eventually, it was my turn.

'Hi there,' I said, waving awkwardly. 'Sorry I'm not a ...' I trailed off. The whole room stared at me. Some looked a little sad for me, others amused. Some seemed too preoccupied with their own costumes to care. Peter grinned at Jay.

‘I can tell you a little bit about myself though. My, actual self,’ I said. ‘I’m 22. I graduated from college last year. Computer programming. I just moved here from Michigan to start a job—’

Jay held up a hand and gave me that smile again. ‘It’s okay. You don’t need to tell us about that. Just tell us, what kind of spoon would you be?’

‘What kind of spoon?’ I repeated.

He nodded, smiling encouragingly.

I tried to think of all the spoons that I’d seen in my life. The thing is: spoons are not the type of thing I’d ever really noticed. My mom had spoons in her kitchen drawer with dark blue, plastic handles, I remembered those. I once went to an antique store with my ex-boyfriend back in Michigan and we saw spoons lined up on a silver tray with pictures of a forest carved into them. Woods and creeks, all in miniature, scraped into the silver. They were dusty and we got dust on the pads of our fingers when we touched them.

A few days ago, as I sat alone in a café, I had stirred my iced tea with a long, thin spoon. I watched some people outside playing a pick up game of soccer in a park, calling out to one another and kicking up dirt as they ran. I’d played soccer for years back home and as the ball rolled towards the café, I had the urge to rush outside and kick it hard. To feel that knock of pressure as the ball hits your foot and the burn in your lungs as you run through grass. I liked the camaraderie of it, too. How we all huddled around the cooler after games, sweaty, exhausted, drinking blue Gatorade from paper cups and dissecting what we did right and wrong.

As I watched their game, I knocked my iced-tea spoon against the ice chunks and when I pulled it out the body was freezing. You

don't use iced-tea spoons very often. It's the type of spoon you would only really need one of.

But I didn't identify with any of these spoons. I didn't identify with any type of spoon at all.

'I don't know,' I said. Peter smiled smugly.

'Because you're not a spoon,' he muttered.

'No,' I said loudly. 'I'm not a spoon.'

The others stared at me with pitying looks and I almost wished I had an oval strapped to my head. I wished that I wasn't the only one who didn't have a costume, who didn't have a story. I wished, most of all, that I hadn't been so excited for this goddamn party. At the prospect of making more friends in the city. People that I could meet for a cold beer after work. Who would find the Midwest things that I said charming, like 'pop' instead of 'soda'. Who would come over to my apartment so the space wouldn't feel so blank.

'It's just going to be a little gathering with some close friends,' Jay had said at the bar, buying another round of cider and cheering with me. The cold liquid sloshing on to our fingers. 'Why don't you come by? It would be great to have you.' When he had invited me, I felt flattered, chosen.

Now I stared at the group of spoons. 'I'm not sure I understand what we're doing.' I looked over helplessly at Jay. There was pity in his eyes. I wished that he was annoyed with me. Pity was worse. Pity made me feel naked and helpless, all those eyes staring at me, faces made larger by the ovals of plastic and wood behind them, expressions amplified. I felt dizzy. When I stared down at the polished floorboards, not looking at anyone straight on, it seemed like their faces were flat. Flat, smooth and spoonlike.

I felt flabby, three-dimensional. As if my nose and forehead jutted out into the center of the room and my face was all waxy, fleshy. My cheeks burned. This cocktail was really starting to go to my head.

I didn't want it to be my turn anymore, so I just said something, anything, to get them to stop looking at me.

'I'm a spoon you eat breakfast cereal with. A silver spoon with a blue plastic handle and I belong to a little girl who lives in Michigan and who eats Coco Pops with me every day while her mom listens to local news on the radio. I sit on a red and white checkered table cloth.'

The group smiled. Jay beamed with pride and raised his martini glass to me and took a sip. My body began to cool down. Peter was grinning at me, looking pleased with himself. Then I saw him take out a black moleskin notebook and begin to write something. He looked up at me periodically, then down at the paper again. It was almost like he was trying to sketch a portrait of me.

People shared a few more stories and then we all stood up again for a break. I moved to the window. There was a little balcony and I stepped out onto it, looking down at the street below.

Jay came and stood next to me. The air suddenly felt warmer, boozier and he leaned down and patted my shoulders.

'Sorry about all this. I wasn't very nice,' he said.

'It's okay,' I said, looking out at the house opposite. They were having some sort of dinner party. Candles twisted at the center of the table. All of it framed in red curtains like they were actors in a play. Like, if you got close, all of the fruit would really be made of wax.

'I really am sorry,' he said, slumping against the railing.

‘It’s alright. You forgot to tell me. It happens. I think I might head off now though—’

‘I didn’t forget,’ murmured Jay and at first I thought I didn’t hear him properly. He wiped his mouth and looked down at me. Again, those watery, pitying eyes.

‘What do you mean?’ I asked.

He leaned towards me, like we were co-conspirators. I felt my cheeks burn a little as our faces got closer. ‘It’s kind of funny really. Peter told me that I should invite one person to the party who didn’t know what it was going to be and then we’d see how they reacted. To see how far you’d go along with it. I’d be like . . . performance art, you know? He’s writing about it for his blog.’

‘Performance art?’ I repeated. I wasn’t entirely sure what that meant, but I hadn’t come to see some sort of art. I had come to meet people.

And it seemed they had all lied to me.

‘All that stuff about forgetting to tell me?’ I asked.

He just smiled weakly at me and waited, as if he expected me to smile back. As if he was waiting for me to let him off the hook, waiting for me to say, ‘Oh Jay, it’s okay. You lured a complete stranger here under false pretenses so that you could make a fool out of them for some sort of fucked up art thing.’

‘This is messed up!’ I gestured indiscriminately to the whole city street. I thought of the girl who had walked up the street earlier that evening, nervously ringing the doorbell, adjusting her shirt, hoping that she’d make a new friend, or at least acquaintance, tonight. I felt sorry for that girl.

Jay's expression darkened. His head was sagging onto his chest, like his neck could no longer hold it up. 'Seemed like a fun idea at the time. We were going to tell you the truth, eventually.'

I didn't say anything else, but just walked off the patio, crashed through two spoons who were talking and sent some gin and tonic splashing to the floorboards. I grabbed my backpack and hoisted it on. The music stopped abruptly, but maybe I was imagining that.

I walked straight downstairs and out the front door, back into the night air.

A fucking spoon. I told them that I was a spoon that a girl used to eat cereal.

There were no sounds as I walked down the street towards the subway station. No cars, no wind, and the quiet seemed to stretch out forever on all sides. Row after row of houses where people didn't know me. And I didn't know them.

I knew everyone on my block back home, but nobody inside these houses would recognize my face if they peered out the window. They wouldn't know that I'd fallen out of a tree when I was five and broken my knee. That I still had a white, comma-shaped scar on my kneecap. Nobody knew that. To them, I was just a narrow shape running through the autumn dark.

My lungs were burning by the time I got to the subway station. I gripped the cold metal railing outside the subway entrance, trying to catch my breath. I glanced over at the empty park nearby, where I'd seen people playing soccer a few days ago. Even in the dark, the open field looked inviting. I remembered the shouts of the players, red faced, hair flying, high-fiving each other as someone kicked the ball through the gap between two trees.

Originally from Austin, Texas, **CARLY BROWN** is a writer, performer and PhD student based in Scotland. She is the author of a children's picture book, *I Love St Andrews*, and a poetry chapbook, *Grown Up Poetry Needs to Leave Me Alone*. In 2013, she was Scotland's National Champion of Slam Poetry and 4th at the World Series of Slam Poetry in Paris. Her website is: carlyjbrown.com

Whitechapel

Megan Mealor

Mary Jane rang an Irish refrain,
drunk on Ten Bells whiskey.
Her unpolluted apron ablaze,
she surrendered a scarlet shawl
and her weary wildgrass heart
to the rogue incubus cloaked
in the serrated fog, haunting
every step of squalid streets,
preying on its darkest shadows.

She placed the native beauty berries
upon her wooden churchyard grave,
marked with the Unfortunate's brand
she seared upon her own scars
when she abandoned everywhere
that could tie her to anyone.

In the end, there was nothing
she would not do
for a fire.

MEGAN MEALOR resides in Jacksonville, Florida, and works full-time as a mother, writer, and pet-sitter. Her poetry and short stories have appeared in *Digital Americana*, *4 and 20*, *Midnight Circus*, *The Rathalla Review*, *Obsessed With Pipework*, *Hello Horror*, *Dark Moon Digest*, *Belle Reve*, *Skidrow Penthouse*, *Broad!*, *Deep South*, *Black Heart Magazine*, *The Belleville Park Pages*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *Rat's Ass Review*, *Better Than Starbucks*, *The Front Porch Review*, and, most recently, a ten-poem feature in *Sick Lit Magazine*. Her writing style is patchwork potpourri infused with venom, volcanoes, and raw clarity.

The Day the Circus Died

Kristen Rybandt

After the very last performance, Blaze Stevens took Miss Dorrie for a spin inside the Globe of Death, an act strictly forbidden by management. Miss Dorrie's blond curls fanned out from the bottom of her helmet and spilled up and down as Blaze's bike circled the steel sphere. Dorrie couldn't tell if they were upside down or rightside up and clung to Blaze like he was the edge of a cliff. Miss Dorrie's dobermans watched through the open squares of a cage, their sleek heads bobbing back and forth like Dorrie and Blaze were a very exciting tennis match.

Whispers and Jellyroll swept the same pile of confetti back and forth and thought about finding some place to dry out for a while now that the circus was over. Sunny Florida sounded nice. But because neither said this out loud, they headed back to the trailer instead to take off makeup and have a nip and their good idea vanished like confetti.

Bruno, Pancho and Pee-Wee found themselves in the considerably buoyed spirits of out-of-work circus performers who already managed to book themselves through the next year with a reputable if vague entertainment agency Pee-Wee found online. It wasn't clear what their jobs would be exactly, and it might lean heavier towards birthday parties for very wealthy children than any of them cared to think about, but it meant their party, at least, wasn't over yet.

When small children asked why the circus was closing, their parents blamed greedy owners who in turned blamed disinterested

parents, PETA and, ultimately, the elephants. The elephants cost too much to move around the country, they said, plus they complained loudly when mistreated, unlike the clowns. No one ever thought to sit the elephants down and explain the alternative. If given the choice between performing tricks to the dull roar of a crowd and one surprisingly loud slide whistle or being trapped in a dank, second-rate zoo cell, they would have no doubt waved off their self-appointed soldiers, those sad-looking women waving protest signs on the periphery of circus parking lots. Those women, now filled with free time, might have volunteered to bottle-feed kittens at a local animal shelter, a clear win-win.

But no one asked the elephants, certainly not Peaches or Cream, the beloved albino pachyderms best known for their rouged cheeks and teal headdresses in the ten-tail march. As soon as Peaches got her walking papers, she enlisted Cream to scour the internet for a new place to call home. No dank zoo cell for them. Peaches couldn't read, but she had a good eye for potential and jumped on a foreclosed summer camp on 40-acres in upstate New York. There was plenty of room for everyone, even though the cabins were crumbling and the mess hall had to be completely rebuilt. This is work an elephant is born for. The Flying Fortunado brothers were instrumental in securing supplies from town and overseeing construction. The clowns were surprisingly skilled with regular sized hammers. I wouldn't say the chimpanzees did much besides bruise all the apples from the food trailer in their endless quest to juggle, but what else is new.

At first no one knew what to do with the lions and tigers. They paced and growled inside cramped cages while handler Burt wrung his hands and paced outside. There was hushed talk of

selling them to an exotic animal dealer in Los Angeles who offered to fly out the same day and pay cash. Burt was feeding the lions questionable scraps of London broil through a veil of tears when the idea came to him. What if the circus didn't have to die? What if the circus didn't have to go anywhere at all? What if they could make the children come to them, summer after summer?

Miss Dorrie and her dogs became the camp welcoming committee. After the first summer, Dorrie traded dobermans for poodles dyed the soft pink of freshly spun cotton candy. There were fewer maulings this way, live and learn. The children arrived in caravans of SUVs and minivans from late June through mid-August, not even crying when it was time for their parents to leave. They learned the lost art of flying trapeze and riding unicycles. The same children who always got in trouble at school inevitably gravitated to Whisper and Jellyroll's mess hall table with its whoopee cushion soundtrack. The chimpanzees taught a well-attended juggling class, though not very well. Burt carefully selected the bravest girls and boys to join his team of lion and tiger tamers, who were the highlight of every performance.

The end of every camp session culminated in a show under the big top, which was raised by the elephants in early summer and disassembled before the first leaf had fallen. Parents brought grandparents and aunts and uncles and often very young siblings to see what their children had been up to that summer. They discovered tight-rope walkers and knife-throwers they never knew they had and thought that might not look bad on a college application one day. The too-young siblings grabbed fistfuls of buttered popcorn while taking in the elephants and slide whistle, completely unaware that anything had changed.

KRISTEN RYBANDT has written for *The Fix* and *AfterParty Magazine* and been featured in *Corvus Review* and *The Donut Factory*. She lives in southeastern Pennsylvania with her husband, daughters and cats, but sadly, no juggling chimpanzees.

On the cover:

“Unity”

SKYLER DARSHINI

FREIMANN is a retired mental health care practitioner and an award winning, published photographer. She is a lifelong student, practitioner and teacher of spiritual traditions. Among her publications are the books

Ring of Dreams, a California Living Book, and *One With The Sofa, a Taoist Guide for the Physically Challenged*, available at www.amazon.com. Her mandala designs on t-shirts and greeting cards can be found at www.darshiniarts.com. Skyler Darshini lives in the Northwest with her human and animal family.

