

## MELTDOWN

This game stinks. I can't recall a single person who left a winner. The dealers change their masks so often the newspapers no longer bother putting their photographs in the financial sections.

These slogans drubbing us to believe otherwise are, quite frankly, appalling. Who'd imagine the insertion of deities into excursions of chance? Come on now! Are *They* really up there tossing the bones and begging for new footwear?

Even the shepherds are useless, all conveniently gone south. Why blame them, really? What with creditors trolling for salacious-sounding damages and a glut of stray sheep wandering the streets. They'd be nuts not to button it up and make hay in greener fields.

The old-timers say it used to be different, better, that they placed their bets on tightly woven red felt, flanked by voluptuous women enshrouded in smoke, taffeta and paper flowers beneath their powdered bosoms. Each beauty an eponym for a cocktail shaken in ice.

The deck's not stacked, exactly. There are simply way too many face cards. When the odds of a pair are precisely the same as a royal flush, it's impossible to remain focused or, to the crux of it, inside your skin.

Borders have all but vanished. Walls and exit signs nothing but rubble. Space equal to anyone strong enough to help himself to it. Silver-tongued alchemists fond of horsehair pens handicapping the downtrodden, deluding tax examiners with perfect sangfroid.

Cross my heart, I never wanted a whole lot more. Or less, to be frank. The middle was once a place wide enough to pile up stones, drive down stakes, cross a neighbor's threshold with a covered casserole, drag mattresses into yards, take meteor showers.

I've decided to fold here and now while the dealer stuffs his oversized shoe with worthless script. The house is long beyond redemption. The owners recline behind cameras and one-way mirrors, wearing tiny flags in big lapels, moistening their lips.

## BY NAME I CALL YOU

*BY NAME I CALL YOU*  
*Church Hymn by Carey Landry*

If you're out there  
be assured I no longer  
fear the dark  
and silence now soothes me  
like a hot soak.  
I'm sure as an avid reader  
you can appreciate  
the value  
of a solid night's rest.  
Today I took a flyer  
on a mousey heliophysicist  
met by accident  
on the morning train  
and learned  
that the sun will cook  
on high 5 billion more years  
before becoming  
a Red Giant then White Dwarf  
with  
or without you  
bothering to remove the cover.

## FALL SHORT OF THE GLORY

*For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.*

*Romans 3:23*

At first it annoyed him not the least.

He'd nothing to confess.

His grandmother was all but deceased.  
Who knew there'd be a test -  
a hoodoo at the Y in the road,  
one stark conjuration -  
for the deed itself would be exposed,  
all the shit hit the fan,  
if he went and assuaged his conscience,  
elocuted the act  
of premeditated fraudulence  
behind the old gal's back.

## EVENING WINTER CLOUDS

Floating up there like bellies of whales.  
Tufted like grandmama's quilt.  
Going south with wind in their sails.  
Darkening. Darkening. Kaput.

## FORM D-80669, APPENDIX B

Codes unalterably the number  
of dependent(s) not otherwise listed  
as next of kin.

Identifies bridge(s) and tunnel(s)

under/over river(s) of ink.

Ascertains fact(s).

Verifies (i.e., i.d's) trustworthiness  
without reference to genotype(s).

Restates norm(s).

Encloses chain(s) of anticipated event(s)  
not yet previously revealed  
and/or implied.

Restores order.

Deletes contradiction(s).

See(s) above/below.