



# STEAM TICKET

A Third Coast Review

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Two men sip cappuccinos and play chess, both as concentrated as espresso, and then—ah, the bungled bugle of Edgar Reindeer marooned in the coffee shop! The men jerk, drowning warriors and courtiers in a milky Colombian roast. The reindeer gambits a half-squawk, half-whimper, as the mugs milling along the counter have been known to kamikaze to black-and-white tiles, and he takes care not to jar them. (The proprietor, Mr. Wellaby, has replaced seven dozen already and scolded Edgar not to be so clumsy.) Meanwhile, jars of black hazelnut and amaretto flavored beans shudder as Edgar shuffles along. A bishop excommunicates a rook; one man shakes his head as the reindeer lopez past, *en passant*, knocking down royalty like the French Revolution.

Edgar Reindeer, whose head was to hang upon a wall but never made it there after all (he was much too polite about the situation) galumphs along the hall, looking for the store of cheesecakes and liquored petits-fours, and barges into the pantry, checking for anise drops. His antlers catch on bags of flour, and, spilling white, he becomes a ghost. He snuffles six pounds of strawberry bon-bons stuffed in a corner, and samples gateaux, and bugles again. He does not prefer the black forest cake; bored with cherries, he lumbers back into the shop. Too noisy to be a specter, he startles the men nonetheless, and even the Kings cower.

The clop-clopping of his hooves wallops a vessel of lollipops from its high shelf, sending lime and lemon and blueberry and watermelon suckers into a bumbling ballet. Edgar snags a tart tangerine between his teeth and stands at the door to be let back out. When Mr. Wellaby returns from the kitchen, he sees floured reindeer and assumes him a wraith: for things unseen as spirits and such (though one could hardly miss a whitened reindeer) Mr. Wellaby always had great faith. It is a forfeit. He expects the reindeer to pass through like smoke, but Edgar continues to stand there, sucking on tangerine.

One man laughs, "I've captured your queen!" The other replies, "Who can think with a reindeer blundering about?" Edgar blinks and bugles and drops his lolly and stamps his foot. Four mugs jump to their demolition, followed by two knights and a bishop, mid-

contrition. Mr. Wellaby winces, and opens up the creaky door, and Edgar Reindeer, ivory as half o' chess, flounces out, scents the air with coffee and tangerine and bakery, and bugles something which the men think is "Chocolate," but Mr. Wellaby knows is "Checkmate."

## Rite of Passage

*Kelly Talbot*

I'm going to break these blue sky chains.  
You say "Don't soar so high; don't dive so low."  
I'm going to kiss the sun. I'm going to swallow the sea.  
In this individualistic apocalyptic embrace,  
don't tell me how to be.

I know you've always loved puzzles.  
Here, then, is a riddle:  
What do you do when you are trapped between  
sapphire and aquamarine?  
How do you escape a maze without walls  
when you are already free?  
When you lock a bird in a cage for too long,  
does he not tear out his own feathers?  
What else do you expect, father?

As I rip off this mantle,  
can you hear the sirens screaming?  
I am laughing as I plunge  
like a javelin into the Mediterranean,  
finally a man.