



MY BUDDY VINCE CAN PULL bones out of his arm. There's a small compartment on the underside of his left forearm, near the wrist. He can open it and remove one bone at a time. Originally, when he first showed me this trick in elementary school, I thought the inside of the compartment would be red, that I'd be able to see his blood, but no, the compartment is black as pitch. He says he can't control what kind of bone it is—sometimes it's a femur, sometimes it's a humerus, a mandible, or any other bone in the human body. No matter how long or wide the bone is, Vince's compartment adjusts to compensate for its size.

8 = = = 8

VINCE'S CONDITION IS WHY we're now in the drive-thru at the pharmacy. His doctor has prescribed yet another medication that will supposedly rid him of his affliction. Vince is driving, Bigfoot's in the passenger seat, and I'm in the back, saying "No, no, no. You can't tell me that you want sex twice a day, every day."

Bigfoot turns toward me, his lengthy dark hair and beard greasy as usual, and says, "I do. I swear."

"First of all," I say, "if you weren't so tall and didn't play basketball in high school, you wouldn't have gotten any girls. Second, you look like the missing link, so I know you're not getting any at the moment. And third, sex is work, my friend. There's a point where sex ceases to be fun and becomes work, a chore."

"So how many times a day do you want sex?" he says, still pivoted in his seat.

"A day? Try two or three times a week, if that."

Bigfoot's eyebrows slope downward. "You're crazy, man," he says and turns around.

"Will you guys shut up?" Vince says, holding the prescription slip. "We're almost to the window."

8 = = = 8

THE DOCTORS AND SPECIALISTS haven't been able to explain the cause of Vince's ailment. Several tests yielded two facts: 1. No matter how many bones Vince extracts, he always has a complete skeleton, consisting of 206 bones, or 208 if you count the sternum as three, and 2. Every bone contains his DNA. That is, while he's removing his own bones from his own body, the number of bones inside him remains intact—a paradox.

8 = = = 8

AT THE PHARMACY WINDOW, Vince deposits his slip in the box. The pharmacist asks him for his birth date, types the date on his computer keyboard, and says, "Give us about 20 minutes."

Vince says thanks and drives off. We have nowhere

to go, but don't feel like waiting in the parking lot, so Vince turns out of the strip mall and onto the main road in town. He doesn't mind wasting the gas. "I'm thinking about building a house," he says.

"You building with brick?" Bigfoot asks. "Brick's the way to go."

"Where you gonna get the money to do that?" I say, thinking that unemployed Vince doesn't have the money to do anything—let alone build a new house.

"My dad's a senator," he says.

8 = = = 8

BECAUSE WE'RE FRIENDS WITH Vince, and he's nonchalant about his bones, me and Bigfoot both have exact, skeletal replicas of Vince in our bedrooms. It took months to construct each skeleton. Armed with an anatomy textbook and Wikipedia, we set to work every Friday and Saturday night of our senior year. The funniest moments were when Vince would snatch a bone out of his arm and say, "What the fuck is this?" Typically it'd be a small bone—like the malleus, which is Latin for hammer, a bone in the middle ear. We'd inspect every mystery bone by viewing it at different

The Hand Left Behind Handmade Herbal Soap Natural Skincare Products thelefthand.net Washing away last night's sins since 1999

THE2NDHAND no. 34.1 is part of our series of mini-sheets available in pdf and easily printed via THE2NDHAND.com/printjump.html. Readers, please share with interested parties. We recommend printing pages 1 and 2 on the front and back sides, respectively, of 8.5x11-in. paper, reading, then distributing in mini-stacks or singly in your neighborhoods' reading-friendly establishments' bathrooms and other spaces.

Louisville-based writer and decomp editor Jason Jordan authored the lead "Sternum as 3" piece. Find more from Jordan and others in our online magazine weekly: the2ndhand.com. RSS: www.the2ndhand.com/rss/the2ndhand.xml.

BACK ISSUES are available as free pdf downloads at THE2NDHAND.com or for \$2 (or three stamps) per issue to editor/publisher Todd Dills at the Nashville address below. A lifetime subscription for donations of \$30 or more are likewise available. To subscribe to THE2NDHAND or for information, visit the2ndhand.com or write c/o Todd Dills, 1430 Roberts Ave. Nashville, TN 37206.



PHOTOGRAPH BY MARY ELLEN MATH, ACCORDS TO PUBLISHING TIPIC ACT AT 841.41. 801.00.00.0000. 801.00.00.0000. 1999

JOIN THE COLUMBIA COLLEGE CHICAGO FICTION WRITING DEPARTMENT.

YOUR STORIES. YOUR FUTURE.

OFFERINGS: BA or BFA in Fiction Writing, with specializations in Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Playwriting, Electronic Applications, Publishing, and Story Workshop Teaching • BA or BFA in Playwriting, interdisciplinary with the Theater Department • MFA in Creative Writing-Fiction, with specializations in Fiction, Creative Nonfiction, Playwriting, and Teaching • MA in the Teaching of Writing, featuring the Story Workshop approach • Combined MFA/MA Degrees

Columbia College Chicago admits students without regard to age, race, color, creed, sex, religion, handicap, disability, sexual orientation, and national or ethnic origin.

WWW.COLUM.EDU

Columbia COLLEGE CHICAGO



angles, as if putting together a jigsaw puzzle. Organization wasn't too difficult, because we alphabetized and numbered the list of bones, so when we identified a bone, we tagged it with a small white sticker, wrote its number down, and crossed it off the master list.

The process was tedious, sure, but what was frustrating was when Vince would involuntarily create duplicates when we needed other bones. When we had 150 bones of the first skeleton arranged, it seemed like every bone was a duplicate, so we tossed the duplicates into a pile. I swear it took us weeks to get bone number 206, and that was with Vince pulling bones in his spare time, not just with us on the weekends.

8 = = = 8

BACK IN LINE AT THE pharmacy, Vince says he's going to build his house with bones, providing he doesn't find medicine that cures him.

"That's cool," Bigfoot says.

"You could build your house out of hair, Bigfoot," I say.

He laughs and says, "Yeah, you should see what I yank outta my shower drain every morning."

"And I could build mine out of... well... something," I say. "Hey, Vince. You ever thought about amputation? I bet that would stop it."

"I have," he says, "but I don't wanna lose an arm. I'd lose sixty bones if they took my whole arm. Plus, I jerk off with my left, so that's definitely not an option."

"You jerk off with your left?" Bigfoot says. He sounds as confused as he did when I told him I was perfectly fine having sex only twice a week. "I thought every guy jerks with their right. Are you left-handed?"

"Bigfoot," Vince says, "you've known me since kindergarten."

"So what? I don't know if you're left-handed. I don't pay that much attention."

"What color are my eyes?" Vince asks, turning his face away from Bigfoot.

He thinks for a second, then shouts "Purple!"

END

from *THEN*, by Rick Henry

McCarthy's Wheeling | A thousand words for the Wheeling inbreds, which words so many, what's that greaser looking at, greasers greasers everywhere, hawking dogs and peanuts and beer whenever the 'great' DiMaggio smacks the Senators around, senators and their Georgetown houses representatives aren't good enough, no, not good enough for the boxes and silverware, soup spoons christ and Heinz dripping charm, greasing palms, like its treason to like mustard any more all mighty Heinz spreading mashed tomatoes, not even the greasers mash them, what the hell is this 57, there's no 57, just a joke all of them, father, grandfather laughing, jokes on crap the bastard stuff christ note change shirt before talking to those toothless assholes, convince them foreign policy is more important than their damn teeth give them straws to suck the damn 57, not even a hot dog, just the damn 57 vegetables, a thousand words for the Wheeling inbreds, which words so many, greaser's looking at my a red stain... get a good look before I stick my finger in your eye! It has not been the less fortunate or members of minority groups who have been selling this Nation out, but rather those who have had all the benefits that the wealthiest nation on earth has had to offer—the finest homes, the finest college education, and the finest jobs in Government we can give. This is glaringly true in the State Department. There the bright young men who are born with silver spoons in their mouths are the ones who have been the worst... In my opinion the State Department, which is one of the most important government departments, is thoroughly infested with Communists. I have in my hand 57 cases of individuals who would appear to be either card carrying members or certainly loyal to the Communist Party, but who nevertheless are still helping to shape our foreign policy....

J. Edgar | Oh they are the merry men, J.E. and the Fake Beards Internationals, singing and scritch and blowing as they go. Years ago, before J.E., the Fake Beards received a Valentine's Day card, and with it they wooed J.E. J.E. loved singing and scritch and blowing and gave them g-strings, and, rat-a-tat-tat, sent them under the covers. Oh they are the merry men. They played to handsome jacks and pretty boys with baby faces, wooed them with winks and promises of the real thing. Handsome jacks and pretty boys smelled a rat and gave them a knuckle to the temple, rat-a-tat-tat. J.E. and the Fake Beard Internationals changed their name to J.E. and the G-Strings, dropped out of sight, slipped under cover, took their show on the road, singing and scritch and blowing their favorite party songs. They tuned their jugs and washboards and donned slouching hats and funny noses, shuffled backwards, sideways and played Catch-as-catch-can, rat-a-tat-tat, you can't catch me. Oh they are the merry men. Played joints and dives and hide-and-peek-a-tat-tat, finding holes to hole up in, you can't find me. Oh they are the merry men. Played rat-a-tat-telephone and pretended they were telephone girls, working under cover, wearing lace and g-strings to cover their fake beards, disguised by peroxide. 'Hello, may I help you?' smack-a-lips 'Pass it on.' 'Halo, may I help you?' smack-a-slips 'Pass it on.' Clever boys cracking the codes, cracking dots and dashes or kiss for cash. Poor Harry slipped the tongue and missed the kiss, and it was game over, kicked out of the band. They took his jugs, his covers, his g-string, his fake beard, and strip-searched him down to his pretty boy, rat-a-tat-tat. Oh they are the merry men. Singing and scritch and blowing as they go. Olly Olly amnesty.

Penicillin | A long row of men standing in line for their short arm inspection. The line extends out the door, into the hallway, and down the stairs. They all have syphilis, 'sy-phallus,' one snickers. The doctor shakes his head, coughs up a little phlegm, spits, and says in his oh-so-broken English, 'So your penis is ill?' The first guy laughs and says, 'Penis ill, pass it on,' and the second guy whispers to the third, 'Penis ill? Pass it on,' and the third to the fourth, and the fourth to the fifth, and so on down the line, out the door, and into the hall. The doctor mutters more to himself than to the men. 'It's a bacterial invasion, of course.' The second guy says to the first, 'What's that, a bactrian invasion?' and the first guy says to the second, 'It's a humping disease, but you need two humps,' and the second guy explains to the first that it's a two-hump invasion, and the third turns to the fourth and says, 'It's a humping disease, a two-humper disease, pass it on,' and so on down the line, out the door, and into the hall. A ripple of laughter follows, tittering out the door, down the stairs, and back up, an echo, a secondary wave, 'two-hump invasions,' 'Sy's phallus, penis ill,' amplified sniggers until the first guy nearly doubles

over in glee. Nearly doubles over with the sudden pain as the doctor sticks a needle right into his phallus. He jumps before he goes numb, cold, and he cries out 'I'm frozen, I'm frozen!' 'Penis chillin,' says the second to the third and begins to laugh, a laughter aborted in mid-guffaw as he receives his shot and he jumps before he goes numb. The third is too busy giggling and passing it along when he gets his shot, his jump, his numb. Then the fourth and the fifth, and on and on, down the line, out the door, and into the hall. The doctor is numb with the bacterial invasion and the endless line and he thrashes in his dreams, thrashes to their laughter, thrashes to their penis chillins.

Joyce | Thrum thrum thrum thurm murth murth murth murth murder mother murmur thrum murmur thrum best to hum heel toe don't tell mum mum mum mum mum hum hush hum hum hush your lips thrum thrum thrum thrum pickle your bum toe heel toe heel those slips step soft step soft hush hush slips the tongue hold your tongue slippery tongue rum bum hum mum don't say hush you don't say soft thrum thrum thrum thrum best a mum bum thrum hum turn toe turn heel slips the tongue spills the hum chum catholic bums, chump bums chum bumps, mum thrumps, mum thrums soft soft soft what's that toe me oh no mum's toe hush hush hush hush catholic hush catholic bums catty lick mum bums Cathy licks chum chums Cathay calloo calloy step soft step soft slip licks lick of the tongue callay calloo Cathy's lick lick hums in the loo callay calloo hush now hush now they read lips stick lick the stick lips lick licorice sticks swallow swallow swallow swallow the hums the hums the hymns the hymns the hymnals hymn now quiet quiet quit the brain dripping stain thrum thrum thrum thrum slip the stick like licorice licks dandy Candy not too randy Cathy's lick licks Candy's stick sticks Cathy Cathy's lick licks peppermint strips hys pep her man pet her man man her pet pet pet pet pet step step step step step in time toe heel toe heel so slow hushed lips censorship hushed slips sense or slips Candy's hips catholic hum thrum thrum thrum thrum step soft step soft Candy's stick is in the loft loft loft loft loft lift lift lift off thrum soft slip off bump bum bump bum lick lips slick lips chew gum sweet kiss slip miss lip stick bump chum bump mum sense or slip slips the kiss spills the lips hush hum hush hum read lips read lips sense slips red lips red slips spill thrum Candy's hips mums bum red lips sweet kiss sweet miss oh miss oh miss slips tongue Cathy licks licorice sticks hys hiss sweet miss sweet kiss thrum thrum thrum thrum murth murth murth murder mother murmur thrum murmur thrum best to hum sense slip sense or slip.

Influenza | Etiology—a microbial or sub-microbial agent, most likely *Bacillus influenzae*, perhaps *streptococcus*, *pneumococcus*, or ? Bacterial or viral to be determined. She was an angel, holding the dying soldiers in her arms, giving them a last kiss as if she were their girlfriend wishing them safety as they went off to war. ALL RESTAURANTS ARE CLOSED UNTIL FURTHER NOTICE. THIS INCLUDES DELIS, PUSH CARTS AND STREET VENDORS. Pathology—aches, pains, fever, reduced heart rate, bloody mucus, vomiting, diarrhea, hallucinations, death. Every day the orderlies empty the beds, stacking the dead just outside the door for the ambulances to take away. When we see them coming we moan as loud as we can so they don't take us for dead. It mostly works. Diagnosis—roentgenograph, sputum cultures, blood cultures... OUTBREAK OF A NEW WAR... MOBILIZE!... TROOPS!... TARGET!... RESOURCES!... WIN!... SACRIFICES!... GLORY!... Treatments—aspirin, bed rest. **The city's infested with Anarchists. I have in my hand a spoonful of mustard a damn immigrant sneezed on before spreading it on a hot dog.** Preventatives—vaccine, isolation, gauze masks. **We'd went to the market, over on Hudson Street, because we'd heard that a truckload of Georgia peaches had come and there's nothing like a Georgia peach I said to Mabel and we'd walked two blocks, and one minute I was watching Mabel test a tomato, to see if it were ripe, why she went for the tomato when it was peaches we were after, but I don't recall ever seeing the peach truck, but it was war and everyone had a rumor, and the next she was on the ground, bloody foam coming out of her nose. I thought she'd had a bad tomato! I had a little bird / its name was Enza / I opened the window / and in flew Enza.** Prognosis/Morbidity—Three in ten will be infected. Two in one hundred will die.

Rick Henry has published fiction and articles in a variety of journals and anthologies. Among his books are Chant: A Romance (BlazeVox 2008) and Lucy's Eggs and Other Stories (Syracuse 2006). The selected prose poems at right, from his 'Then' collection (in progress), he describes as responding "to the first half of the 20th Century...moments in a community, sometimes a discovery, sometimes a song, sometimes a disease that stretches across the nation. And sometimes, a mote in a moment, a scrap of ennui in the in-between."