



William Snyder, Jr.

## A Crown of Jokes

A butcher's window frames a slick, white head on ice. A calf, its blue-black eyes staring up through shadows to the cupolas across the street, or to the sky. I've been morose, you tell me. My behavior at the café last night embarrassed you when the men bought us rounds, toasting our fertility.

So today, I try humor, though I can count my cache of jokes on one finger. I do see them, the jokes, like the Christs in the shops by the cathedral: sinewy bodies punctuated, nailed, oozing blood from puckered wounds. Today is a failure. Punch lines elude me. Drum rolls. But I was funny once, I say. Honest.

This Calf's head and Crucifix wait patiently before the Pearly Gates. Calf's head turns to Crucifix, says, Saint Peter's screening for hang-ups today, what's yours?

Or

This scrawny guy, stuck by thirty-two arrows, nine hundred and six acacia thorns, and lugging a two-ton log, stumbles into a saloon. The bartender asks, what'll it be? The guy sighs, looks to the ceiling, says, gimme a Rusty Nail.

Or

There's a man and a woman in this old city, in a cathedral shop, ringed by pasty figures and grisly weapons. The woman is vexed. With a string of jokes, the man tries to temper her dark

mood, his own uneasiness. But the woman will not smile. Nor do the Christs. A very tough audience, the man complains.

Or

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William Snyder, Jr., is a widely published poet living in North Dakota.

Photo from The Rusty Nail