

*Crossing our fingers for luck with Laine Cunningham,
Lara Falberg, Ally Malinenko,
Dragin & Best In Show & The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

January 2011

MAGAZINE



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Alas, press releases, we knew them well.

Front cover, "Hey, I hope that's her."

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"Last Legs"

My old cat was one tough bastard. He had the run of the place for a long time, yowling from room to room, sitting in a sunlit windowsill, sleeping mostly. But he turned seventeen this fall and was struggling in his dotage. Occasional seizures sent him spinning around the room, banging into furniture, teeth and claws flashing, trying to tear into whatever terror a cat's brain creates. He would recover from those episodes stiff in his back legs and slow to walk again. His sense of smell had gone, and he didn't enjoy food as much as he might. So he was thin and often tired, but still a sweet thing. Tough enough to have weathered seventeen autumns. Not that he'd ever been outside and roughed it up with the neighbor cats, or raccoons or other scoundrels, coming home all limping and blink-eyed, wiping his muddy feet on the carpet. Oh, he caught an occasional cricket that sneaked in through the front door left ajar, or swallowed a bitter-tasting daddy-longlegs before it could frighten the women of the house. Once or twice he even pounced on a mouse, setting that nocturnal gift near the foot of my bed, to prove his worth. More often he was a TV watcher, turning in my lap until reaching that ineffable position aligning him in the cat-universe. But no outdoor warrior he.

I did have a cat like that once, back when I was what Walt Kelly used to call a shirt-tail lad. An orange and white tom named Ulysses. That was back before boy cats regularly got the snip and changed from fighting fools to round Buddha-cats, parceling out wisdom to their suspicious owners. Back before Sondheim tried to encapsulate everything feline into an *EastEnders* meets Yoga rock-opera in faux-fur and spandex. I liked cats back then. I still like cats, of course, but I liked more what cats were back in the day. It's one thing to be independent because you don't come up and slaver at your person's feet, skillfully slip out of Tutankhamen-cat-jewelry and turn up your nose at chunk-lite tuna. It's quite another to come and go as you please, eat the kibble and drink the milk, but still show affection only on St. Patrick's and Arbor Day, secure in the cat-knowledge that some skinny kid still says "Yeah, a big orange and white cat" when asked "got any pets?"

It seemed to me when I was young that the world was built for cats. A neighborhood of connected yards, each uniformly mowed and edged with roses and peonies or other human frivolities. Tall shade-trees, perfect for perching to see the universe (or climbing retreats). No big non-human predators - coyotes had only just begun to migrate east, searching for a food group to replace prairie dogs, so a cat could often have the run of the place. Only the occasional mama raccoon would stand toe-to-toe with a big tomcat. Protecting her kits, she might snarl at him, bare her chopping block full of knives. Pretty normal stuff. Otherwise, Ulysses was king of the neighborhood, pissing on every telephone pole just to let everything with a nose know who was boss.

But suburbia is a dish best served cold. There was a fellow that lived down the street from us who owned a beautiful German Shepherd he'd named Baron. This was the early 1960's, so I can't say for sure what he was thinking when he came up with that *nom-de-guerre*. I do, however, know what he was thinking when he used to walk the dog up near our house. He didn't want Baron's business in his own flower-beds. This didn't seem quite fair to me, but there was little I could do about it. Baron's owner was much older and I was a slight boy, often afraid to stand up to other boys for fear of having my head handed to me. (Not that I'm much different today. I'm just a lot bigger and stronger and as old Pat Conroy says, that's a powerful bluff.)

Even without my help, though, Ulysses was quite used to getting his way and protecting his home base. One day old Baron coming up to crap in Mom's peonies didn't sit well with him. He ambled over to the pooch and had a seat on the lawn. The shepherd, spying the big orange cat, was suddenly barking like a madman and straining at his lead. Ulysses, just out of reach of the big dog, arched his back and began calmly spitting and flashing his claws at the big dog. Baron's master was pulling back on the leash, yelling at my cat to go away. When I arrived, shouting at his dog to stop slavering at my cat, my neighbor immediately turned to yelling at me that if I didn't "get my cat" he wouldn't be able to protect him from his dog. My cat in my yard. So I changed my shouting direction to my neighbor, to get his dog out of here, and out of my yard. Baron was working himself into a froth, yanking the leash tighter around his neck, teeth snapping without result. Only Ulysses kept his cool. When he'd had enough, he reached out and slashed the tender tip of Baron's nose with his claws. Barking immediately changed channel to keening in pain and Baron galloped off down the street, his master in tow. And my big orange and white tom sat nonchalantly and washed his face.

I think he loved the thrill of it all, the going out at night and picking a brawl with strangers, even when it meant coming home beaten up some, by younger, bigger, stronger. But in the end, Ulysses wasn't the king of the hill. He didn't live seventeen years, that's for sure.

And so I wonder if my good old cat dreamt of wars he might have fought, chasing the squirrels he saw when he sat in the sun on the back porch, and scrapping all feisty with the raccoons that invaded his yard, the yard he never patrolled. Or did he shake his head at such foolishness, turn around in my lap one more time and gently bump the top of his head against my stubbled chin?

Gettysburg – 9/15/93-11/20/10

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CAUTION

Yeah, last month was kind of...interesting, from a language and artistic taste perspective. Do your best to KBO, won't you?

An Excerpt from "Seven Sisters: Spiritual Messages from Aboriginal Australia"

by Laine Cunningham

Life in the far north of Australia was different than in the desert. There were kangaroos and cockatoos and gum trees, of course. There were also small crocodiles living in freshwater billabongs and large crocodiles that lurked in salt marshes. The estuaries breathed with the tide and termites built narrow mounds that always pointed north.

In this stunning place lived a stunning young woman. Her body was long and her limbs as supple as young cane. Adding to her beauty was a joy that poured out like the sudden monsoon rains. The touch of her hand was as soothing as the flush of cool river water through a mangrove swamp.

This woman loved to dance. She added new moves every day by mimicking different animals. When she saw a cormorant spread its wings to the sun, she

threw her arms wide. The stomp of cockatoos along tree branches became part of her steps. And when the archer fish shot a perfect stream of water out of the marsh, she arched her back in that perfect curve.

Oh, how she loved to dance. She whirled and twirled for the sheer joy of movement, for the bliss of feeling the wind whisper across her skin. Men and women from every tribe stared. They couldn't help it; she was that radiant. Even the spirits that lived in the sky and the earth and the air watched her.

Despite the endless number of suitors who tried to woo her, she took neither a lover nor a husband. The chores of a wife and mother would leave little time for practice. A man might be known as a good hunter and a woman might spin hairstring that never frayed but everyone was expected to perform a vari-

ety of chores...even dancers who spun with their souls.

Although it wasn't unheard of for a woman to stay single, it was unusual. Many people didn't believe the dancer would remain dedicated to her art all her life. Her resistance, they assumed, was temporary. They couldn't imagine making that kind of sacrifice themselves so they were unable to imagine it in anyone else.

When those people talked about her and even when they talked to her, they claimed she would change. Her heart would long for a companion less fleeting than the wind. She would replace her passion with a husband and then a baby. Perhaps some of those people really did mean to help the dancer. Only they knew.

One man listened to the chatter with glee. This man could throw

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a spear farther than anyone else. He could spin a hunting boomerang so hard it would lodge in the trunk of a paper-bark tree. His arms were knotted with muscle and his teeth were wide. Whenever he smiled, many single women hoped they would be the one to catch his eye.

He wanted nothing to do with them. He refused to be promised to the pretty ones, the strong ones, even the ones who might enhance connections between tribes. His younger brothers had already married and a few had even made him an uncle. It wasn't that he wasn't interested in marriage. But he wanted only the young dancer.

Whenever he saw her, his heart squeezed into a tight little stone. You'll marry me, he thought. Yet doubt filled up his chest and left little room for breath or blood. He would have given up his muscles and his smile, he would have traded away all his skills for that one woman. The two were very similar in that way. Both were consumed by a passion for only one thing.

Oh, how the bachelor tried to woo the beautiful dancer. He

played the didgeridoo while she danced. After every hunt he took the choicest meats to her mother. He even traded with the desert tribes for ochre and painted his body with the symbols of love magic. None of it worked. Although the woman treated him kindly, she would not make a place in her life for him.

He became frustrated...very frustrated. Soon he'd had enough of wooing and romance and magic. He decided to steal her away. He would force himself on her and make her become his wife. She could still dance...after she gave birth to the babies and gathered the family's food and captured small game for their daily meals and cooked the meat of the large animals he would occasionally kill....then she could dance as much as she liked.

And so he made a handful of strong, accurate spears. He bound sharp stones to the ends of fighting sticks. He selected his best club, the one made of iron-wood, and tied it to his belt. The whole clan might defend her so he had to be ready. It was also

possible that another man might ambush him later. What he stole could be stolen. He would kill to keep her.

He was ready. The girl had been dancing all night, so she and her family would soon be asleep. If he did everything right, the pair would be deep in the bush before anyone realized the dancer was missing. He stashed the spears along his escape route so both hands would be free to capture the lovely young woman.

The wind spirits happened to brush against the bachelor just then. They immediately knew his intention. If he succeeded, the tribe would lose an important source of joy. The spirits rushed back to find the woman still dancing at the edge of the fire's light. Everyone else was asleep. No one would witness her capture, no one would be able to save her. Only the wind spirits could prevent the tragedy, and even that could only be done one way.

They brushed over her twirling, twisting body. They painted her

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skin with invisible ochre and whispered magic words. Her lungs pulled hard at every breath. She'd never felt so willowy and supple, her legs had never felt so long. Throwing back her head, she shut her eyes and spun in the shadows. She did not see how her body was changing; she felt only the ecstasy of becoming.

The bachelor crept through the camp. None of the sleeping forms were the prize he sought. Perhaps she has already been stolen, he thought as anger gripped his throat. Then he spotted her in the shadows. Of course! She would dance until she dropped into the cool, dark dreams where love made her truly happy. When it was done, when he had forced her to become his wife, she would realize he was right. She would have it all...and he would have her.

He lunged. Just then, the magic whispers fell silent. The dancer's arms had become wings and her long neck and legs made her as tall as any man. Before the bachelor could grab her, the wind lifted her beyond his reach. She

had become the brolga, a steel-blue crane that dances its joyful courtship in the marsh.

The Message of The Dance

True transcendence occurs when passion and creativity lead you to your divine self. No suitor or elder or friend can force you to become that which you are not meant to be. Only you can decide to dance on the winds that support you, only you can connect with the spirits and energies that will shape-shift you into new life.

In this story, a young woman was promised the best marriage, a dedicated husband, and all the support a mother could want for her family. But that vision belonged to people who believed that a satisfying life looked like everyone else's. If she had accepted the mainstream version of happiness, she would not have been able to express her joy. The usual trappings of bliss would not have brought her any pleasure.

People are as individual as river rocks. Not everyone will be

happy in the deepest current, the lifestyle defined as normal. Even when a goal is only somewhat unusual, there is still pressure to perfectly fit the mold. If you are one of those unique individuals, you must dedicate yourself to achieving what is best for you. What you sacrifice won't matter. As long as you feel passion, you will also feel joy.

The key is transformation...spiritual, mental and physical. You might remain single, have fewer children or take a sabbatical. You might move, go back to school or switch careers. At every step you will be guided by the best compass people have, passion. Passion will point the way to the contribution only you can make. It will bring you back to yourself.

Even when others disbelieve, even when they talk about you and to you as if your passion could easily be turned to other pursuits, you must hold true to yourself. Not everyone has the courage to start their own journey. Once begun, the journey requires extraordinary strength just to stay the course. When people try to saddle you with their own limits, thank them for speaking their truth and recognize that those limits are not your own.

When you transform, you will feel the ecstasy of becoming. You will bless the world with gifts no other living being can offer. Along the way, avoid the shadow side. Since no one was courageous or outrageous enough to



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be the dancer's friend, mentor or true lover, she was dangerously isolated. Her passion became a dark undertow. Left in human form, she would have danced herself to death.

The bachelor had already been swept away by his own rip current. He adored the young woman yet he did not really love her. No one did. They loved her energy, her beauty and grace; they loved the pleasure she brought them when she danced her own joy. But they could not truly love her because they did not believe that her passion was real. If they had, their love would have transcended mainstream expectations.

Today public and private schools squelch a child's natural ability in order to create a well-rounded individual. By producing adults with many opportunities for a modest level of success, passion is stunted or eliminated. From cradle to grave, those who would follow their hearts must break rules and overstep boundaries. Only the bravest and

strongest...or the wealthiest...ever get the chance.

To allow everyone the opportunity to transcend, we must recognize that expectations are nothing more than guidelines. They can create pathways for people who are floundering but should never become prisons. Individuals who veer off for a while or for a lifetime are our entrepreneurs and our geniuses, our small business owners and our Einsteins. When individuals follow their dreams, they benefit everyone.

No one offered the dancer that freedom or support. They could not transform themselves enough to reach beyond society's expectations. They did not have her vision; they loved only how her exquisite sacrifice brought them joy. They meant the best for her, of course. But in pressuring her to follow the common path, they pushed her further into the shadows.

Perhaps the bachelor felt her slipping into the darkness.

Perhaps his subconscious knew she must connect with society to avoid being lost. He could have married without expecting children or he might have loved her as a friend. Despite his wealth of abilities, though, he lacked creativity. He was as unsuited to the task as the dancer had become to her community.

The pair represents extremes. The blending of their lives could have enabled them to remain unique and to uniquely benefit their tribe. But the bachelor's sheer excellence at what was expected of a man blinded him to anything except what was expected of a woman. Because he couldn't imagine a relationship that fell outside the norm, he chose a path that threatened them both.

In thinking he could force her to be his wife, he failed to respect the fullness of what she might have given freely. In plotting to kidnap her, he planned to steal a source of joy from his tribe. By preparing to kill any who might defend her or steal her from his own arms, he proved himself willing to destroy the people who loved her. In the end, he failed himself. Once she was gone, what woman could ever stir his passion?

The wind spirits saved the dancer from the misery the bachelor sought to impose as well as the misery she was creating for herself. We achieve our full potential only when we interact with a larger community. Her single-minded path



The Blotter

threatened to tumble her beyond the light of her tribe. Even the most beautiful dance performed alone would not have prevented an important part of her humanity from being destroyed.

When she transformed into an entirely new species, her humanity ceased to be an issue. The transformation also benefited the people she left behind. While even an astonishing dancer might eventually be forgotten, brolgas continue to bring humans joy. Her descendants remind us that passion is as important to our lives as reproduction is to our species.

This is the gleaming side of transformation. This is the message sent to us from the Dreamtime. When we pursue our passion, when we generate our own bliss, we spread our joy to everyone around us. Dance your dream into life and you dance for us all.



"Holiday Gift List" by The Blotter Gang

It's never too late for a Christmas list. In our family we have a tradition called "Holiday Amnesty" that involves a combination of physical distance and procrastination to determine if it's OK to be late with a present. It works pretty well, and no one's feelings are hurt because you happen to have a case of the slows. However, with regards to this little shenanigan, we weren't sure if it should be in the December issue, which rolls in November, and therefore become part of our own pet-peeve – the early autumn holiday season – or just slap it down in January, where it might seem weird to have it but actually works more-or-less perfectly. And what exactly do I mean by more-or-less perfectly? And what is the etymology of procrastination? Does it mean that we are for crastination or against it? Anyhow, the Blotter Gang has been nice, with occasional naughtiness – but no more or less than you would expect from anyone. Here's our wish-list, for your consideration, or at least your edification:

Marty sez, "What do I want for Christmas, the fat guy in the red suit asks. Hmmm. I already have my two front teeth; and given my family's dental history, will most likely continue to do so until I

become deceased. Well then.... maybe you've heard the line, often quoted by Harlan Ellison, that "the amount of intelligence in the world is a constant, but the population is constantly increasing." So Santa, if you would be so kind, bring us sufficient intelligence to run this setup



"For Me? Really?"

properly, without shooting ourselves in the collective foot, or feet. And while you're at it, we'd really appreciate a large number of people who'll buy large, expensive color ads in The Blotter, for long periods of time."

Garry? He wants a new computer, with software that was at least manufactured in the current millennium. And one of those wooden tabletop baseball games where you hit the little steel ball-bearings with a spring-loaded bat. That's because Garry can't decide whether to become technically astute, or a Luddite. Meanwhile, here on Earth we call that bi-polar. That being said, he also wants bars of dark chocolate with ginger – yeah, the



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ProFlowers

green-wrapped bars right there on the shelf. No, those. Ahh, *chocolate*. Marilyn's Christmas wish would be for Santa to bring the Goat House Refuge all the help it needs. A \$30 contribution will sponsor a cat for a month, \$100 for spaying or neutering, or even \$25 to buy a brick to help construct an isolation building. All donations are tax-deductible and can be made online at goathouse-refuge.org. Merry Christmas!

As for Laine? "Oh bearded jolly red-clad god of the snowy north, reach deep into your bag and deliver a cattle prod straight up the tailpipe of any publisher that ever again publishes a children's book just because the author is a singer who thinks she can write, or blogs-as-books, or Twitter posts as prose; likewise lobotomize with a reindeer horn any writer wannabes who insist on adding their torturous first drafts to the publishers' slush piles. And from this beatific holiday season forward, drop napalm on those sweatshops wherein ghostwriters/

coauthors/indentured wordsmiths churn out books for bestselling authors who claim they have too many ideas to actually do the writing themselves, because we all have tons of ideas and part of being a writer is actually knowing which ones are worth the effort. And if it isn't too much trouble, oh ye of the patent leather boots, let us all stop bemoaning the woes that have plagued publishing since monks first began scratching on parchment and recognize that today's chaos will actually force some of the most ter-

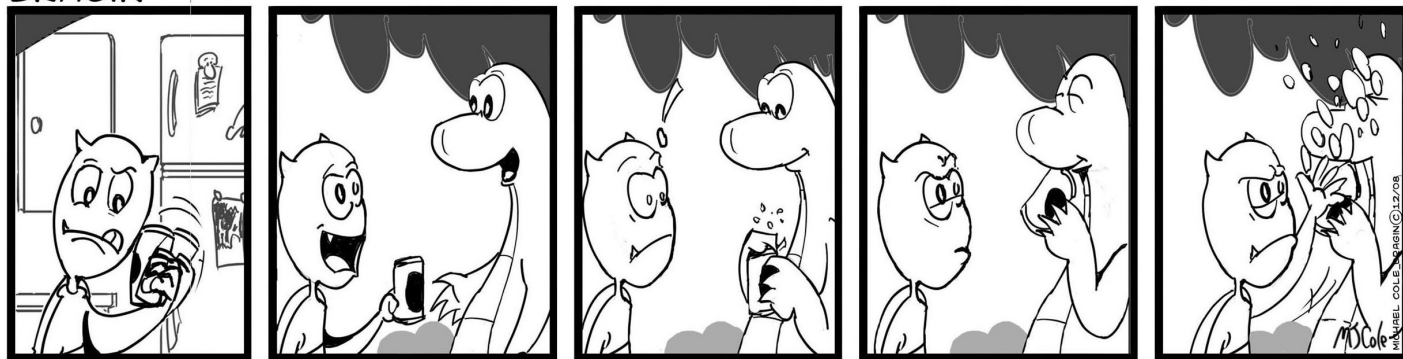
rible industry practices to be replaced with things that will benefit writers, readers and publishers. For this will spread THE WORD, and THE WORD will create peace in the world for now and for evermore. Amen.

P.S. I left extra peanut-butter cookies under the tree!"



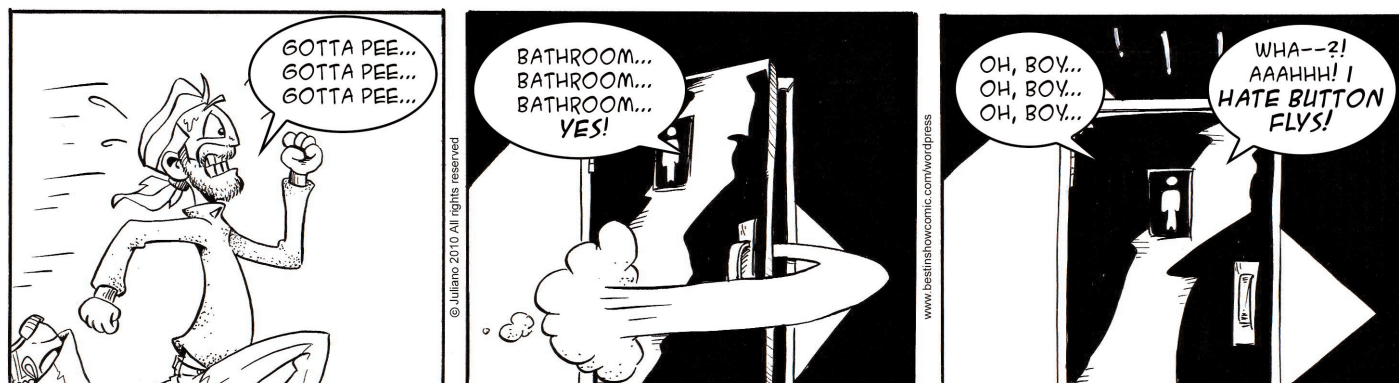
DRAGIN

by Michael Cole



Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



"My Father's Life Work"
by Ally Malinenko

He picks up the other extension
and starts right away.
Hello?
Hello?
My mother gets off the phone.
Hello? my father says again.

Hey, dad. The phone crackles in my ear.

He tells me how great he feels
about how he mowed the front and the back lawns yesterday.
Both in one day.
He hasn't done that in years.
He's very proud.

Then he asks me about paint
and the Yankee game.
What kind did you get, paint and primer?
You need paint and primer. All in one.
Good.
Is it flat? You should have gotten eggshell
but it's okay. You didn't know.
Good. Good.
Did you see the Yankee game?
No dad, we put on a movie.

Oh Ally, you missed a great game,
he says, his voice going high.
The pitcher, oh man, that pitcher. What is his name?
I don't know.

No, really what is his name?
I yell into the kitchen to ask my husband.

I tell my father.
Yeah, my father says, that guy. That guy is so good.
Don't worry about the B12 shot. It's nothing. It's nothing.
It was such a good game. I swear, one of the best.
So what else is new? All these kids are here. I'm hiding
in the garage. Now he starts to laugh, this high wheezy laugh.
I gotta tell you honey, I'm here hiding in the garage.

This goes on for half an hour.
At the end he tells me about the drugs.
I've never felt this good honey.
I don't want it to end, he says.
I finally feel like I should. Not like a 90 year old.
Like a 45 year old. This makes him laugh again.
I laugh along.
It's been so long since I heard him sound like this.
The way he used to.

I feel like before 2003, he tells me.
Before the cancer, and the surgery, the chemo
before the stooped walk he now has,
and the leg pain,
and the sickness and the vomiting
before the catheter and the pain killers
and the exhaustion and the struggle to get out of the chair.
And the struggle to get into the chair.
And the struggle to get down the hall, one damaged leg after another.

It's terrible like this, I think. To go, piece by piece. To fall apart, to live
through the cancer and watch the rest of you break down
until your life's work is just
holding yourself together long enough to get through the day.

I can't remember the last time I felt this good,
he says laughing.
He tells me again, before the surgery I guess.

I guess so, Dad, I say and swallow, my mouth full of words.
It's great. It's really great, I manage to get out.

It is honey, he says.
I don't even feel like I'm dying anymore.
And then that laugh again, high,
like air coming out of a balloon.

Call for Entries!

"The 2011 Laine Cunningham Novel Award"

The Blotter's Second Annual Long Form Fiction Contest
for Novella and Novel length works

1. The purpose of our contest is to provide a venue for writers to have their work read and commented on by our editors and judges. Additionally, the winner of this contest will have his/her work published here on these pages. And last but not least, the winner will receive a monetary prize! (Award monies are provided by the prize sponsor and the entry fee for the contest helps offset The Blotter's costs.)
2. Our pre-reader judges are intelligent and highly proud of their educations. Our final judge is smart, well-read and runs the hundred in nine-point-eight. But we told her that she could be the final judge and what can you do?
3. In a world chock-full of scandal, transparency is very important to us, and we make every effort to eliminate any conflict of interest situation from going down in our contest. Blotter volunteers and their family members and/or employees are prohibited from entering our contest.

To enter the contest, please submit your work with a \$25 entry fee by check or money order to: The Blotter Magazine, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Entries must be received between October 1, 2010 and January 21, 2011 (you see, we're already giving you an extension, so don't put it off!)

Your entry must contain the following: no less than 10 pages, no more than 20 pages of the opening of your novel or novella, (or subject/character-connected short story chapbook) typed & double-spaced, without your name. On a separate cover page type your name, snail-mail and e-mail address, telephone number, the title of your novel or novella and a one page synopsis of your novel or novella. Remember, you have to have the entire book written, so that if and when you win, you can show us the rest!

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Well, now. \$625 in cash prizes, plus anything else we can wrangle together that we think has value. All placements, including honorable mentions, will receive an award certificate, proof positive of your success as an author, suitable for mocking your sophomore English teacher, who always wondered how it was that you graduated at all. Our contest will be run in line with the rules of ethics and mechanics recommended by the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, as outlined in their 2006 monograph on the subject. You can't view for free, but you may purchase the monograph entitled "Publishing Contests: Ethics and Mechanics" through the CLMP at <http://www.clmp.org/about/monographs.html>. This is the document we have used in coming up with the rules and conditions of this contest. So that's it, then - quit fooling around and get to work!

CONTRIBUTORS

Laine Cunningham is an award-winning author who, since she doesn't write blogs or tweet fanatically or FaceSpace herself into oblivion with bad grammar, has of yet escaped the attention of the megalythic publishers. Instead you can order her books at any independent bookstore.

Lara Falberg checks in with us from time to time. She worries that her writing is not what it should be, and shouldn't, of course. We think it is right where it is, which makes us happy. Lara is teaching yoga in Columbus, OH, and being careful on icy sidewalks. You should be, too, you know.

Ally Malinenko is published all over the place and keeps a poetry blog at <http://shipwreckedpoetry.blogspot.com> and a selection of her stories at <http://campfire.blogspot.com>. She is currently working on a novel and lives in the part of Brooklyn that tour buses don't come to.

Phil Juliano and **Michael Cole** show these same 'toons in other fine organs and zines and we appreciate their sharing skills over thisaway.

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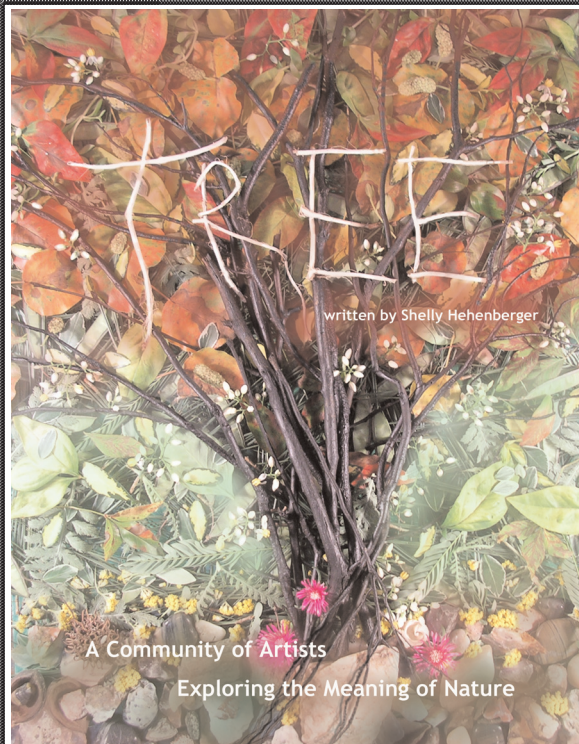
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Thank you.

"20 (or so) Questions"

by Lara Falberg

What's your go-to practice in the a.m.? If you are lucky, it's sex. Well, I guess that depends on the sex you are having. Is coffee a part of it? Of course it is. And you're real, real picky-like about what you load that coffee up with, aren't ya? Do you French Press? I feel like that's code for sex, but now you know what my mind is on. Sex and coffee! Do you like/crave to continue the quiet, or are you all about bringing on the noise? Is it the news, is it? Are you sure, I mean really certain, it's vital that you know the latest car crash/politico-scandal/financial upset/movie review first thing upon cracking open your eyelids? I promise, someone will tell you if there is something unusual going on. Do you play spades on your laptop? How many times? Oops, there's me projecting. I do that. Does your dog/child/spouse/ one-night-stand wake you, or do you spontaneously burst from the bosom of slumber? Do you shower in the morning, or did

you take care of biz before hitting the futon? Do you cleanse the slobber off your face, or just leave it till it's time to brush anyway? Do you meditate? Do you check the sports scores, convinced if your team one that it had something to do with your prayers and dreams? If they lost, do you allow it to set the tone for your whole day? Is it a license to be cranky and barky and all-around curmudgeonly? Are you thinking about the day and all of the promise and surprises it might/maybe be holding? Or are you already all serious-faced about the firing you have to commit at 9:30? Is it a thin or fat day? Is your face blemish free or bleary and ruddy? Do you have to, I mean really have to, shave? Have you walked the dog, or is someone else getting to it once their

combo breakfast of Count Chocula (it is after Halloween after all), Total (for the vitamins), and Captain Crunch going to handle that while rubbing their eyes and stumbling along trying to text their friends whom they have been ex-communicado with for a full 9 hours. That's a long time! Do you do yoga? I do, tons of it. But I only do a few poses first thing. Must you reach for the laptop before you even locate your spectacles? Have you allowed the anger over what your significant person said in that passive-aggressive way they have to envelope you first thing? Or are you running shoes on and reflective safety vest so you can do your 8 miles before the morning meeting? Do you switch it up? If so, good on you! Whatever you do in the morning, I hope you do it with gusto, love, and a positivity to open you up to a real stellar day.



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"They Shine"

by Ally Malinenko

like little stained pearls
all glossy opaque and tan.
he pulls back the wings so that
I can see underneath
where it turns red.
It is bone and tendon, vessels wrapping.

There is no meat here.

Everyone just crushes them he says.
turning the insect over so that
it's segmented stomach
the plates of armor are visible.

and this one, he says,
pulling out another tray,
look at this.

It's a praying mantis,
it's legs stretched out
like an sacrifice, pinned to the board.
It is so green it is almost violent,
and the desire to both look away and to touch is overwhelming.

They don't look different,
these creatures, when they are dead
then when they are alive.

Flesh loses the soul,
its elasticity turns taunt and stiff,
there is a harsh change you cannot undo.

But these creatures, their hard scabble
crunching lives, they still stare up at me
segmented eyes, beaded like dew, watching, always watching,
claws, shining under the light, at their mouth
legs with jagged teeth
wings like handmade paper, veined
ready to un-tack from this prison

and beat
then lift,
like cilia pumping on the first water insect,
the need for survival quickening the heart.

"Living Girl"

by Ally Malinenko

When my father was lean, and young,
with dark hair,
and strong tan arms,
we went to the beach as a family.

I don't remember this.
This is a story I was told.
Like all stories, it has a beginning
This one goes:
When my father was lean, and young.

There were birds in the air, flying low
and lazy, waiting in sky like old
women waiting for a bus

and there were broken seashells to find
worn smooth by the water and sand rubbing together.
There was New Jersey food to eat,
with wet fingers dampened with water and
dusted with sand. We were a young family then,
in the predawn of the 80's. This man, this woman
and their daughters.

My father lean and young
put my fat toddler feet in the water,

lifting and dipping
wave after wave
and sometimes I think I can remember;
can smell his skin,
mixed with the briny water I can taste
on my tongue,
can feel the water, just this side of warm,
frothy pools over the wet sand like a bed,
that I wanted to lay in,
the scratch of my father's stubbly cheek
as my white baby hair catches on it.

I think I can remember but I cannot
the moment his hands were gone,
the water over my head and under my feet
the steady heartbeat of the undertow
the tumble tumble tumble of my body
the sound of my mother screaming
and then
the ocean said No, it wasn't this hair,
these feet, those eyes that I was looking for.
The ocean spat me back out
and crawled farther down the beach
searching for the woman she needed to take.
She said,
Not yet, living girl,
someday, maybe soon, but
not this day.

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.. If nothing else, we'd love to read them We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterra.com

I wake up and look blearily at the clock – 6:30 AM. It is the last few days of sunlight presenting itself at this time of morning – and the first bits of daylight and the very reason I am awake. Circadian rhythms as thrown off as a rumba band with a spastic drummer. Soon winter dark will be in full force and I will sleep right through my morning alarm and have to race my commute. As such, I feel the tension in my clenched jaw and frowning forehead muscles and even in the back of my neck where it joins with the base of my skull. This tension invaded my final evening's dream, not subtly, not insidiously, but full force: It is a silent thing, like a Chaplin film, but without the snide edge of comedy seen through the eyes of adults who survived the first World War. Bland, like a Milltowned housewife's view of things, all uncomfortable furniture and fallen leaves and unread books. There is a television and it is on, but the sound is suppressed, and the picture is black and white. Glare from an uncurtained window flashes off the screen, so that nothing can be discerned. I cannot turn my head, but if I could I would look out that window and see the cold white sunlight of a midwinter's day, gray clouds sitting still overhead and dirty slush and ice on the pavement, a day to sleep in, a day to not get up and muddle through to work. In the kitchen now. There are dishes in a drainer, tipped just so, that rinse-water will drip tap-tap into the sink. A single spoon rests on the kitchen table where someone poured a cup of old coffee from the percolator and stirred in some sugar to try and make it better. The refrigerator is ajar, has been for some time now, so that the room is colder and the light in the fridge is flickering, not sure whether it should carry on or burn coldly out. CS - cyberspace

Final Tidbits: It almost feels like we should batten down the hatches and cuddle together under fleece blankets and not go outside to work or go shopping or anything like that - just share our human heat and affection and use this opportunity to remember that we're all the same warm-blooded creatures in a rather cool universe. Just a thought. While you're mulling that over, consider a donation to The Blotter (www.blotterra.com) as your good deed for the year! And visit your local independent bookstore, they have hot cocoa! I don't want to hear any of you saying, "I'm bored." Got it? Good!



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