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magazine



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"The Four-Minute Coffee Symphony"

They say coffee lowers your chances of developing cirrhosis of the liver. It is a strange sentence with unfortunate word choice, because by saying "lowers" rather than "reduces" a reader might assume that one wants a higher chance of developing cirrhosis of the liver. They – a completely different they as far as I know, say that the caffeine in coffee and the milk-fat in half-and-half and the sugar in sugar puts a great big *meh* in your libido. OK, actually it was me that used the phrase "*meh* in your libido" but that's because I'm uncomfortable talking about anatomy.

And I don't know who *they* are, and not knowing puts a really dull edge on the point I'm trying to make because it could be that my hypothesis is built on a troll, and depending on how you define troll - nothing has been done like that since either 7:45 this morning or in a story told to either one of the brothers Grimm, that is Jacob and Wilhelm (also known as Rumpelstiltskin) back when they wandered the Upper Palatinate trying to come up with a new way to harvest rye or join the Bavarian Army as ad-hoc farriers - your morning cuppa has been... tainted.

That was one heck of a sentence, wasn't it?

My suggestion – never read, watch, scan, check or listen to anything before your coffee. Talk? Yes. Gaze? You betcha. Scroll? Unless it's something you found in the wreckage of the library at Alexandria, best to play it safe and ignore said electronic parchment until after you've hit dregs.

I think what actually happens after your Joe is that coffee speeds up your actual space-time continuum until you're going at 45 or even 78 revolutions per minute when the rest of the world is at 33 & 1/3. I am reliably informed that the medico-technical term for this is "zoom." Effectively, you live the same life-span and do many of the same things – respond to e-mail blasts, curb your appetite, binge-watch "Stranger Things," consume the *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, only with much greater celerity, so that in the end your life seems way longer.

And speaking of celerity, auto-correct keeps trying the following words out on me as alternatives to what I already know I meant: celebrity, celery and calorie. No, no and no. Thanks for playing, Silicon Valley, California, programmers, and it's still your turn.

It is also, so far, so that under espresso's very much not so-so (hee!) influence I have a better chance of finding rhymes to various word choices for the schemes I select in the doggerel I like to pen in my writers' journal while sitting on my front porch watching the neighbor mow his lawn. I am peculiarly fond of this activity, because it uses three of the five basic laziness groups: sitting, watching and brainstorming. Based on this, in our house we are renaming the fifth day of

the week "Thesaurusday." Please feel free to celebrate this in your own home, suggesting to your kids that they must come up with three verb-subject-object alternatives to the interrogative "may I play World of Warcraft now?" before you will relinquish the iPad. Also it won't hurt anyone if they first have to play "international rules tag-team vacuuming." Note to self: you've put the two words in the English language with double-Us (not W's) in your essay. You may now die a happy scribe!

Regarding libido - the subject that no one wants to talk about but it's already out there and how can we avoid thinking about it even if we don't *talk* about it (go ahead, try to not think about it!) there are so many other things to blame and using Occam's Razor (which should always be used even when the concepts of male performance and razors do not combine well in the old Venn diagram, no, not well at all) it is more probable that any of the current socio-political discussion streams is more likely to make you want to go hide in a cave and no that is not a thinly-disguised metaphor.

Anyway, as you go about your daily thing, your body, preparing to begin its cirrhosis of the liver phase, so to speak, performs an end-run around the ailment and crashes headlong into the other vehicles in the parking lot called death. And I'm not going to tell you that life is short, and that what you ingest is harmless, although for the most part it is, as long as you chain yourself to a big, big rock before ingesting gamma rays or any kind of hallucinogenic pharma. So eat a burger, pink on the inside. Have another mug of Breakfast Blend. What the hell. You're going outside to fight giant insectoids from *Klendathu*, for crying out loud.

Of course, I've had a couple of cups of French Roast this morning and could be wrong, but I'm already working on something else and really don't care.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

Cleverly Disguised as a Responsible

“FUL STOP”

by Jesse R. Stowe

Tallulah unknowingly introduced the trend a couple of months ago.

ANY COMEDIES THE FAM COULD WATCH TOGETHER, she texted.

RECENT?

NO. JUST FUNNY. FOR EVERYONE. INCLUDING HUBBY.

I hated when she called Donald, Hubby.

ANCHORMAN, I texted.

THE KIDS CAN'T WATCH THAT. AMERICAN PIE.

SERIOUSLY, EDNA. DON'T ACT LIKE A PARENTLESS ADULT.

I PREFER THE PHRASE CHILD-FREE.

NOT ADULT LACKING TRUE RESPONSIBILITIES?

HA! BETTER AN INDEPENDENT ADULT THAN A STRESSED SCREAMING OVERWORKED RAPIDLY-AGING LOSING HER MIND MOTHER. NOT THAT I'M DESCRIBING YOU.

YOU SUCK. MOVIES?

Because we were best friends, Tallulah and I teased each other about the joys of parenthood and the freedoms of being in a child-free marriage.

MRS. DOUBTFIRE?

OK. BETTER.

HOME ALONE?

TOO CHRISTMASY. I'M NOT

READY FOR THAT.

GOONIES? WHERE THE RED FERN GROWS?

OVERWATCHED AND TOO SAD, she texted.

I GOT ONE. THE MASTER OF DISGUISE.

WHO'S IN IT?

DANA CARVEY. IT'S PG. DAN AND I SAW IT AT THE THEATER. STUPID BUT GOOD FOR FAMILIES.

WHAT KIND OF MOVIE?

SPY HUMOR.

COOL. SOUNDS GOOD. I'LL CHECK IT OUT.

The next week she asked me about FAMILY FRIENDLY ACTION MOVIES.

GOOGLE IT, I texted.

IT'S MORE FUN ASKING YOU.

AM I IMDB NOW?

WHAT'S THAT?

GOOGLE IT.

From there we branched out into other topics: FAVORITE PIZZA PLACES IN THE REGION, THE BEST RESTAURANTS TO STOP AT WHILE TRAVELING, THE SEXIEST LIPGLOSS COLORS, WAYS TO DESCRIBE THE PERFECT WEATHER. Whatever mood we were in, we ran with it.

Today I needed something that was going to piss me off. For a slow

build, I used the game with Tallulah. I chose, THE BEST MOVIES ON ADULTERY.

She responded almost immediately, FATAL ATTRACTION.

UNFAITHFUL, OBVIOUSLY, I texted.

AH! RICHARD GERE!, she texted. She added many emoji including some of the sexually explicit ones I added to her phone. She followed it with the text, THE WAR OF THE ROSES?

NO. THAT'S DIVORSE.

A PERFECT MURDER?

DID YOU JUST GOOGLE MICHAEL DOUGLAS?

I DON'T KNOW EDNA, Tallulah texted. WE CAN'T WATCH THOSE KINDS OF MOVIES BECAUSE THEY UPSET HUBBY.

I was stuck in my office listening to students explain why they needed more money, why they needed an extra quarter to graduate, and why they needed a second chance.

"Please, Mrs. G. My parents won't understand," a cute young man explained. He sat forward in his chair like they always do when they really want something.

"Most parents don't understand why their bright, full of potential children lose their funding."

"Last semester was weird. It started out good. Then after a couple of weeks, stuff happened."

My phone, strategically placed on my lap, vibrated. "Hold that thought,"



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I said.

AMERICAN BEAUTY.

I totally forgot that one, I thought.

I texted back, GREAT ONE TALU. EYES WIDE SHUT.

"Sorry," I said. "Please continue."

"Extraneous events demanded my attention, but I was learning valuable life lessons."

College age kids. First, this one stumbled through a word his girlfriend gave him so that it looked like he gave our meeting some thought. Then he pulled the college get-out-of-jail card. Neither worked with me. "Your financial aid contract does not include anything about life lessons. It focuses on attendance and your school GPA because *school* is why you are taking out the loans," I said, although I knew the truth. This young man was using his money on frat bullshit and beer. Not even anything exciting or different.

"College is about more than classes. It's about learning to be an adult."

Not you too, you little shit. Even though I hated his pathetic, vague excuses and his whiny voice, he was really cute. If I was his age I would have taught him a few life lessons, but I couldn't even classify him as a young man yet. A more accurate assessment would be a boy-about-to-find-himself-in-an-adult-world. He had many years before he became a man.

"We don't fund 'life lessons.' We

fund students working towards a degree," I said in my well-rehearsed tone.

"I am doing that Mrs. G. I promise. I just got sidetracked."

"I am going to quote to you your financial aid contract. This is what *you* signed." I passed him a copy of the contract he had signed online. "If the student loses financial aid for a failure to maintain satisfactory academic progress, the student may be able to regain eligibility by getting better grades. Until then, however, the student will be ineligible for financial aid and will have to pay for the college costs on his own."

"I know, but this wasn't my fault."

"Did someone in your family pass away?"

"No."

"Were you severely injured or ill, to the point that you were unable to continue classes, and if so, do you have proof?"

"No."

"Then there isn't anything . . ." I felt my phone vibrate. "Hold on."

TITANIC.

I texted, GONE GIRL.

"There isn't anything I can do for you," I said.

He wanted to plea. I saw it in his eyes. Instead, he thanked me, got up, and walked out of my office. I knew I was going to get a call from his moth-

er later that day. *Another boy asking a woman to clean up his mess.*

While I was at lunch, Tallulah texted, BROKEBACK MOUNTAIN.

I texted one of my all-time favorite movies. LITTLE CHILDREN. I love Kate Winslet's character. I can't believe I had forgotten about it.

BRIDGES OF MADISON COUNTRY, Tallulah replied.

LAST NIGHT.

THE PIANO.

INCOHERENCY, ALTHOUGH THAT MIGHT BE A STRETCH.

UNFAITHFUL. I LOVE RICHARD GERE.

I ALREADY SAID THAT. HOW ABOUT RICHARD GERE IN INTERNAL AFFAIRS?

THAT'S AWFUL EDNA.

INDECENT PROPOSAL.

SCARLET LETTER?

ONE HOUR PHOTO, I texted.

WHAT IS THAT ABOUT?

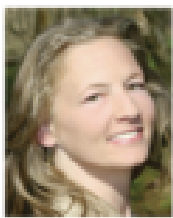
OMG. YOU'LL HATE IT.

GOOGLE IT.

We watched a lot of these movies growing up. Sometimes on group dates when we were in high school. Other times it was just Tallulah and I, dreaming about the future.

"I will never be in a relationship like that," she said leaving the theater after watching *Election*. We were in our early twenties. She continued,

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"My husband will never desire another woman. I will give him everything he needs."

"Everything?" I asked gesturing blow job.

"Every night."

"Even if you're sick?"

"Especially when I'm sick. My husband needs to know I care."

"You're a freak, Talu" I said.

"No. I just know how to keep a man."

"You've *never* had a man."

She ignored me. "Keep him well fed and taken care of. That's all they need."

"Where'd you learn that?"

"My grandma and reading. It's not a secret."

"But it's not that easy."

"Why not?" she asked.

I didn't have an answer. I had been in sexual relationships, and all of them ended unsuccessfully. But I still hadn't been in a relationship where one of us cheated. We were just assholes to each other.

In our thirties, we began to have friends who spoke openly about their affairs. Candace Waterson, more Tallulah's friend than mine, met us at Rawr for lunch to brag about hers.

"I love it," she said. "I get my kicks and it's good for my relationship with Rob." She was dressed both professionally and provocatively. Business with a black skirt that was a quarter of an inch too short and a red blouse that was unbuttoned one button too much.

"Rob's your husband," I said. "He's a good man."

"Oh, I know. He *is* a really good guy. I love him dearly." She took a bite of her raw vegan Pad Thai salad. Even the way she ate was sexualized.

"Than why are you having an affair," I asked rather loudly.

"Geesh, Edna. Relax," Tallulah said, always protecting her friend.

"It's ok, Talu. I understand that it's not conventional. Most people think affairs are bad, but life is funny and complicated. Not everything works for everyone. A monogamous relationship doesn't work for me."

"Does it work for Rob?" I asked.

"Yes. He's happy." Candace took another bite of her salad. Tallulah and I waited. "And I'm good to him. He's good to me. We have a great relationship."

"Except for when you're fucking someone else," I said.

"No. Especially when I'm fucking someone else. Rob and I are regular, like once every week or two. It's nice. He is a caring lover. But he has a low sex drive.

"I, on the other hand, love fucking. I want it every day."

"Haven't you heard of masturbating," I asked.

"Edna," Tallulah said in a disapproving motherly tone.

"I masturbate, but I prefer the connection with another person. That's how I get off."

"That should be your husband," I said.

"Can I refill your waters," the server asked as he approached our table. The ease for which Candace spoke of her extramarital activities had completely taken me out of my world.

"Thank you, Jazz," I said as I watched him.

Candace peeked at his bulge then she looked him directly in the eyes. *God damn her.* "Thank you, Jazz." Her voice oozed sex.

Jazz smiled at her. He turned to me and said, "Are you not enjoying your Super Power Wrap?"

"It's delicious. Thanks for the suggestion."

"Any time," he said winking at

me.

Candace stared at his ass as he walked away. "He is a beautiful man. And that butt." She wiped her mouth as if she had been drooling.

He did have a great ass. I noticed and appreciated it many times before, but I hated the way she so brazenly ogled him.

My friend Nate existed on the other side of one of these situations. He was a very loyal man. His relationship with his wife was the most important in his life. "I chose her and she chose me," he told me before and after they got married. "And I will always continue to choose her." But outside the walls of ideal, people choose to dilute the boundaries of relationships.

"She says they are 'just friends' and 'just talking,'" he told me one night as we sat at The Grape Bar. My husband, Dan, was with us.

"That's bullshit," I said. I wanted him to hear me, even if he was trying not to.

"I believe her," Dan said. "Men and women can be friends. You guys have been for years."

Immediately pissed at how my husband chose to jump in, I said, "What she is saying is not the same."

"Why? What do you know that we don't?"

"Are you listening to Nate? It isn't just that they are friends. She tells him . . . what's his name?" I asked turning to Nate.

"Joe."

"She tells Joe things she shouldn't and she texts him at all hours of the day."

"That's what friends do," Dan said.

"At night? After sex?"

"Who said anything about that?" Dan looked at Nate. He shrugged his

shoulders.

"No one. I'm just saying that all of the texting is not appropriate." I downed my glass of wine. I looked towards the bar. *Where the fuck is our server?*

"Do they work together? Is it work-related discussion?"

I glared at Dan. *Just shut the fuck up.* I know he liked playing the even headed counter argument but *come on, dude. There's a time for balance and there's a time to be a supportive friend.*

I looked around the bar. *Where the fuck is our server?*

THE OTHER WOMAN.

WHAT LIES BENEATH.

A WALK ON THE MOON.

REVOLUTIONARY ROAD.

THAT MOVIE, Tallulah texted. I NEVER MADE IT THROUGH IT.

I work at The University as a Financial Aid Administrative Specialist. I have a title, get paid well, and have a great health plan but it isn't my dream job. Dan is a creative writing instructor for a small college outside of The City. He is adjunct and has no benefits but he gets to "talk about his greatest love," writing. Yeah. His words. "His greatest love."

Dan is a great teacher who is good at creating stories because he lives in a fucking daydream. "I'm perceptive," he likes to say to anyone who will listen. "I'm open to energy. Most people build an emotional wall that blocks it, but I have a door. A huge, glass sliding door. I can see and accept the manna, the presence, the all that is everything. The good . . . and the bad." He is perfect for his small liberal arts college: a delusional, walking cliché, a man lost in his imagination. He doesn't know what reality is and has no difficulty stepping into the fictional worlds created by his stu-

dents.

"Use your talent for a larger paycheck," I suggest on a regular basis.

"Focus on writing and publishing essays."

"I'm not an essayist. I'm a storyteller."

Not a very good one.

"I have a banging body," I tell Tallulah after I hook into my Bluetooth microphone for the drive home. "I've never had children or significant growth spurts so I have no stretch marks. My breasts are big enough to show a little cleavage and I have a great ass."

"You are a beautiful woman," Tallulah says. I adjust the volume.

"Beautiful? I don't give a shit about beautiful. I want to be *fucking* sexy. I want to wear a black spaghetti strap dress and have every man who sees me long to kiss my neck and bite down my shoulders. I want them to imagine standing behind me, running their hands from my breasts down my waist to the heat between my legs. I want to feel their throbs in the small of my back and hear moans escape their throats."

"Every man?"

"No," I say. "Well, maybe. Anyway, I want to feel the veins on their cocks against my sculpted ass while I grind on them."

"I shouldn't be listening to this while I'm still at the office. It's NSFW."

"You're still at work?"

"Yeah. I had some things I had to finish."

"Sorry," I say. I go back into my rant, "I shouldn't have to remind myself that I am still attractive. That's my husband's job."

"It's just life, dear. We're all a little too busy for our own good."

"You have kids, Talu. Rob has his classes."

"He's your husband, Edna. You have to ride the waves."

"Don't think that Dan doesn't recognize attractiveness. You know we have that twenty-three-year-old neighbor who likes to strut around. Every time that stupid bitch lays out in her teeny bikini, something snaps in my head. The next thing I know, I'm outside, in the shortest shorts I own, digging in the garden. My ass hanging out. I know it's pathetic, but I lose my fucking mind. Dan comes out of the house, and acts like he's doing something. He thinks he sly. God-damn, asshole."

"Lucky for you it's late fall."

"Yeah, but she goes to our church. I can't get away from her. I swear she does it on purpose. And I'll tell you, she wears short dresses and thongs. I know this for a fact. She has a way of crossing her legs when she's sitting behind us. God. The little fucking bitch."

"And now Dan goes to a HIIT class at his college. I guess the instructor is a thirty-two-year-old babe build like a 'brick shithouse.' Dan's words. And of course, he's a class favorite. Mariah said this and Mariah said that. 'Mariah is happy I'm in the class.' 'Mariah designs the classes with me in mind.'"

"Are you ok?"

I ignore her. "I'm an adult. I realize I am not always the apple of my lover's eyes, but . . ." I stop.

After an extended pause, Tallulah says, "At least you still consider Dan your lover."

I cannot believe I said lover. Dan is my husband. That's the problem. He has not been a lover for a long time. Our love life is stale and I'm bitter. My lover touches me in ways that makes me shiver. He gives me over-the-shoulder glances when he doesn't think I'm looking. I get little treats, gifts, and nice little ass rubs. I have

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worked hard to sculpt my butt and it deserves to be grabbed or smacked. Dan doesn't do any of these things.

"I heard the song 'Escape' the other day. Maybe that's what you and Dan need."

"What?"

"You know. 'If you like Pina Coladas, and getting caught out in the rain.'"

"We should drink Pina Coladas?"

"No. You know what that song is about, right?"

"Personal ads?" I make an educated guess.

"Yes. But more than that. A man answers a personal ad because he and his partner are in a rut. When he meets up with the woman from the ad, it ends up being his wife. They have a good laugh."

The traffic is always awful when I'm going home so I am only half paying attention to Tallulah. She is used to it though.

"Good analogy, right?"

"For Dan and I?"

"Yes!"

"So, he likes Pina Coladas?"

"No. I am saying that you two need to do something to get your relationship out of a rut. You used to like

each other. I know that from first-hand experience. Maybe it is just a matter of meeting in a different manner."

I pause again. I turn onto the main road that leads out of The City to the bypass.

"Hello?"

"I'm here."

"You guys just need to find common ground again. Think *Crazy, Stupid Love*."

"What?"

"Except for the cheating," Tallulah adds. "It takes time and effort but everything will work out in the end."

"In the movies, maybe. Most relationships don't work that way."

"How about *Date Night*? You liked that one."

I turn on to the bypass. "What's up with all these Steve Carell movies?"

"You want something without him? Ok. Let me think."

"Honestly I don't want an answer. I want to be angry. I want to tell Dan all of the beefs I have with him." I look in the mirror.

"What's up? You're hiding something from me. Did he cheat on you?"

"No," I say a little too quickly.

"Then what's going on?"

"Maybe I'm a forty-year-old woman and I don't have children."

"It's better that you don't."

"Why?"

"Children add stress to a relationship."

"You and Donald are ok."

"Yeah, but it's our personality. We were meant to have children. Are you sure you want them?"

"Yes. You know that. But my husband . . . Ha . . . That listless fuck."

"Please don't say that."

"Why not?"

"Uh, because it accomplishes nothing."

"It makes me feel better."

"Come on, Edna. I know you love Dan. You're my best friend. I've known you for a long time. Don't do something you'll regret."

"I've gotta go. It looks like there's a wreck up ahead."

"Hey," Tallulah says. She knows I am lying.

"Yes?"

"I'm not going to tell you what to do. You know that. Whatever you decide I'm here for you. I promise."

"Thanks Talu. I Love you."

"Love you too, babe. Hang in there."

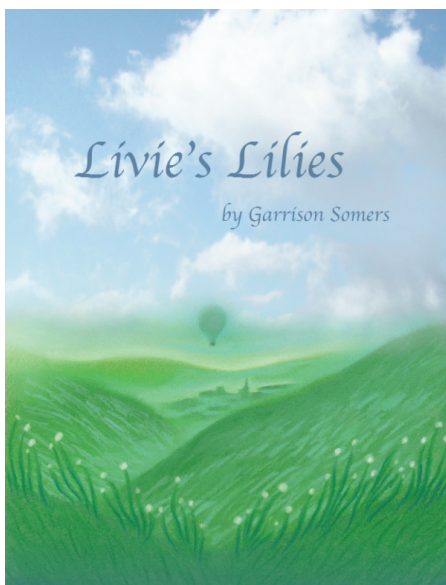
Before I shut off my microphone I say, "Hey Siri. Play Apple Music." It starts right in. "Different types of love," Thom Yorke sings.

"Hey Siri. Play My Chemical Romance, 'Honey, This Mirror Isn't Big Enough For the Two of Us'"

Yes, I think. *I need to be pissed*. But I don't want to just be angry. I want to be on the verge of making something happen.

"The good thing is that Dan does not have a problem producing sperm. If that were the case I would be a little worried. As it is, we're looking at a case of poor sperm motility.

"In a typical male, ninety percent of the sperm are deformed. That includes large or misshapen heads,



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double tails, or no tails at all. Luckily, you fit in this normal range.

"The problem for you, Dan, lies in elsewhere."

Dan and I were in our thirties. We had an active sexual life and could not understand why I could not get pregnant. Both he and I took tests. I was healthy and able to conceive.

Dr. Berman had called us into his office to discuss Dan's results. He sat behind his oversized oak desk which he reminded us that his grandfather had built. Dan and I sat in the two leather barrel chairs.

Dr. Berman continued, "Dan's sperm are listless and depressed."

"What?" I said, (pushed out with a ha!)

Both men looked at me.

"Sorry."

Dr. Berman focused his attention on Dan. "They just don't have any get up and go."

He explained the possible causes, but I had difficulty paying attention. I was mentally laughing. A spotlight had fallen on Dan. His failures were out in the open and I was there. He cowed in a corner, and I stood over him pointing, and laughing. "You listless fuck," I said.

I couldn't help it. I didn't know where my aggression was coming

from. I loved Dan, but that was too funny. And then I heard Dr. Berman say something about Dan working out too much.

I looked around the room for a camera. It had to be a set up.

Dan reached over and placed his hand on top of mine. It completely took me from my thoughts and pulled me back into the room. I looked over at him. He watched Dr. Berman, who continued to discuss the situation. He pulled his lips into his teeth. I could see his sadness and his fear.

I felt anger. He pulled me from my world into his.

Listless mutha fucka.

I turn off of the bypass and follow the exit that leads towards my neighborhood. It is late fall and most of the leaves have fallen. Families have raked them into piles that line the road. I remember being a young girl and walking through the leaves on my way home from school.

My neighborhood is the perfect mixture of modest ranch and slightly more upscale raised ranch houses that sit back from the road. The streets are lined with deciduous trees and sidewalks. It is my piece of the Norman Rockwell world.

Dan fought me on the location.

He wanted an apartment downtown away from families and the middle-class lifestyle.

"Cutting grass seems a little . . ."

"Beneath you?" I said when we discussed purchasing our home.

"No," he said defensively. "Cliché was what I was going to say."

"Cliché?"

"Yeah. And if we live here we can't walk to Sazerac's for a cocktail. We have to get into our SUV and make a date of it."

"I don't know if you realize how offensive you are being."

"To who? Suburbanites?"

"Me," I said.

"How?"

"I have always wanted to live in an area like this. I want a family, neighborhood friends, and walks to the park."

"I want to walk to the corner store, to be a regular at my local coffeehouse, and to stumble home late at night after too many rye whiskey old fashions."

I made my argument and he explained that he would never be happy. I told him he should have a happy life because he was married to me. He didn't have an answer for that.

We bought our home and that was when he started coming home later and later.

I pull into my driveway. I take a deep breath because it is good to be home. I open the car door and the cool late autumn air surprises me. I am not ready for it. I don't remember it while walking to my car from the office. There is a bite now.

I fumble with my keys as I walk towards our raised ranch house. I open the storm door and try to get my house key in the lock, but it does not want to go. I take it out, try it again. I

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by Marty Smith

(publisher & book reviewer, "The Blotter Magazine;" contributor to the "Urban Hiker;" former host of "New Frontiers" and "Laugh Tracks" on WXDU - FM, Duke University Radio)

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wiggle it and push on it. Nothing. *What the fuck?* I work it a little more gently and the lock gives. The key slides in. Success. I walk into the house.

I am immediately greeted by the welcoming aroma of our home. It is a mix of Dan and me. I am a fresh, clean, summer flower smell. Dan is a rich, earthy, musky scent. Yet my lavender, rose and ylang-ylang works perfectly with his patchouli, lemon-grass and vanilla. People have told me that our smells are both calming and sexy.

I turn to shut the door and look out towards our yard. Even though Dan pretended not to enjoy the landscaping process, he was always ready to plant in the spring. "If I have to do it, I might as well get it done as soon as possible so I can enjoy it more." But I know he loves it. Coming home to see our April flowers in full bloom wakens him from his winter slumber.

Our house is quiet, small and with little possessions. Bookshelves only contain those things that we find it necessary to own. Dan chose expensive leather furniture that adds to the rich aroma and to our comforts. Our walls have few, but large and strategically placed abstract paintings that add color and complexity. Our tables are matching refinished black walnut pieces we bought from a close friend, and our lamps are antiques collected by Dan's grandmother.

I make my way upstairs and the warmth of the atmosphere that Dan and I have created over the years overwhelms me. Sensations of love, hurt,

lust and sadness take my breath; my face flushes; and the vivid memory of my lover's breath an instant before his lips brush my neck send a chill of sexual desire through my body. My knees buckle but I catch myself. I push the thoughts aside.

The rules of a clean, minimalist house break down in our bedroom. My dirty clothes mingle on the floor with his, like an unbridled orgy as our comforter and sheets attempt to join the madness. Our dressers are cluttered with the unnecessary objects we cannot let go of. A trail of towels lead to the master bath.

I get undressed and without a hint of shyness, my clothes join the debauchery. I imagine their heat and the strong musk of my dampness sends the rest into a frenzy. My head is swimming in arousal as I crawl naked into my bed. The redolence of our unwashed sheets redirects the heat from my face.

I think of Dan after a summer run. I tell him he stinks, to take a shower, but I want him to pull me upstairs. My body craves the salt.

I see the bulge in his pants as I chat with the twenty-three-year-old neighbor girl at church. He knows I am wearing my sheer, red thong panties. She is wearing none.

Jazz, the server at Rawr, places his hand on my shoulder as he comes to my table. I feel his youthful energy. As he leaves, his fingers brush my neck. My thoughts drop with my blood and for a brief moment I squirm in my chair to right myself.

Jazz whispers my name. We have hidden ourselves from the world. We have to be quiet. He is my secret. Not even Tallulah will ever know.

I hear Dan pull into the driveway and I am back to my bedroom. The light of the day is almost gone. I look up at our fan. The shadows from

beyond the window make interesting shapes and I wish that I would have painted clouds on the ceiling. I wonder if there is still time.

I force myself to leave the bed. I pull up the sheets and the comforter to cover the damp spot I have left behind. I grab a fresh pair of panties from my dresser and pick up a t-shirt I wore a couple of nights before. I put on yoga pants and I make my way to the living room.

Dan lingers outside of his car. It looks like he just finished speaking with someone. He looks in the direction of the twenty-three-year-old's house and I wonder if it was her. He doesn't seem bothered by the cold.

I questioned him once about the girl a couple of weeks before. I saw him coming from her house and I couldn't help myself.

"I am not into girls. I see them at school every day, and every day they seem a little younger, a little less mature. I am attracted to women," he said.

Like thirty-two-year-old fitness instructors, I thought.

"I told you. Women don't come into their own until they are thirty," he continued. "That's when they are most confident and strong. They begin to accept the beauty of life and the aging process."

"Yeah. I remember. You told me that on my thirtieth birthday," I said. I hated him that day.

Dan turns to the house. I sigh. I love the man. Our world is complicated. BLUE VALENTINE.

Should I get the door for him?

I feel like I am sitting awkwardly, unnaturally. *Should I sit on the couch?* I get up from the chair. I decide that I will be standing when he comes in and I will sit next to him on the couch if that is where he chooses.

The doorknob turns and the door opens. I feel guilty, like he

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caught me doing something, although
I have just been standing there.

“Hey,” I say in a small brittle
voice.

“Hi,” he returns at a similar vol-
ume.

I want to ask him about his class-
es. I want it to feel like an ordinary
day but I can see the hurt in him.

“I’m going to change,” he says.
He sounds defeated.

As Dan goes upstairs, I wonder if
he can smell my after-work activity. I
wonder if it arouses him or if it ever
will again. The realization that he may
never again want me physically hits
me and I begin to truly accept the
reality of the situation. The battle has
begun, and I may be more on his side
than my own.

He lingers upstairs but not too
long. I hear him come down the
steps, and upon entering the living
room, for a brief moment, one I want
to capture forever, I see him as the
beautiful man he is. I lost my way.

I am still standing, I think as he
sits in one of the chairs. I was hoping
he’d sit on the couch. Our close prox-
imity and a strategical touching of our
knees would have worked to my
advantage.

Dan leans forward and puts his
elbow on his thighs. He lowers his
head and gently shakes it in disap-
proval.

I am stiffly sitting, waiting for him
to say something.

“You really messed up every-
thing,” he says. ❖

for Brad

“The Cats of Key West”

by Katharyn Howd Machan

At 1 a.m. a naked man
walks along Duval Street:
perfectly sober, perfectly
shaped, casually strolling
alone. It’s obvious
he has just eaten –
a fragrance of fish
follows after – and clearly
he feels comfortable
belching softly into night.
Some people look, some
turn away quickly, assuming
he’s costumed, or drunk.
Past stores with bold t-shirts,
green jewels, famous ice cream,
past doorways of music alive
with thin beer, he moves
toward short shadows where
no human ears hear
the hiss and spit and the growl
of true knowledge, a soft moaning
groan: *The King’s here!*

Waves of depression, they say: Waves of guilt. Get on my wavelength, they say. Ride the waves. Swim the waters.
(“Oh, how many people I have helped!”)

-the spirit of Monroe County activist Connie
Gilbert (193902916), speaking to the poet in
her dream.

“Dream: Storm, 2017” by Katharyn Howd Machan

But it isn't: at 7 a.m. winds are lashing
Key West, Big Pine, Cudjoe, the eye
making landfall after Cuba's mountains,
Barbuda an island for lost ghosts.
“Monster” sensational newscasters call it,
Irma as “Mother Nature's wrath”
whirling thunderstorms like a deadly skirt
wider than the whole long state. Here
far north where September turns
oak and maple gentle gold and red
I sit with my fists pressed together
not even able to pray. Nancy
with her 26 rescued parrots
tumbling toward La Concha hotel.
Flower fleeing to New Orleans
while her aunt refuses, stays behind.
Jeanne – first time in forty years –
giving in, boarding windows, inching away
on Highway One to supposed haven,
Fort Myers where now the crimson line
shows the hurricane will turn its dance.
Shireen in her Sarasota home,
so many windows, so many trees,
gathering in her beloved rabbits
beneath roof straps she hopes will hold.
Surge, surge, surge the warning
that the wicked worst is yet to come,
water rushing into streets and buildings,
Hemingway's house with its 54 cats,
no food, drinking water, sewers, lights,
ocean slapping and clapping its breakers
in a rising roar of darkest applause
for the hurricane waking us at last:
even Disney World has closed.

"Socks"

by Jason Sallinger

When I was home from college for a year, and recovering from a brief lapse in judgment, my father took care of me. Looking back now it was a great second wind of parentage which to this day would not be matched, even remotely.

During these protective years I came to know his cab-driving uniform. Then he was a vest man, to be sure. At several men's shoppes, he became known by the proprietors for his particular style. The one item of his wardrobe that stuck with me was his canvas pants.

Years later I would eventually add a pair of sharp, tan canvas pants to my collection. They fit over any of my footwear, even boots. Having trained in a number of martial arts, I felt like I

was wearing a pair of karate *gi* bottoms, only stiffer. The pants imparted an extra sense of confidence and daring when worn.

My wife warned me that they didn't fit in with the rest of my wardrobe. She said that these were pants which hard workin' men wore out in the hot sun, on construction sites and up on ladders. The rest of my clothes fit a desk-stationed computer driver. My pants were most usually found in the cotton-golf-pants to denim-jeans range. So she did have a point.

But I had a history of not taking advice when I should and so did she.

With her, I did everything in my power to get her to go the nice, but quiet Italian restaurant in the North End so I could present my proposal. But she had to get her way, and to this day I proudly tell the story of how I got down on one knee at Pizzeria Uno.

With me, she cannot let an opportunity pass to chastise me when I wear footwear without socks. If I'm walking the dog for what might only be five minutes I get the talking-to. She even goes so far to talk about "those people" who never wear socks at all. "Who even does that?"

I suppose we both firmly believe that the other should listen. If she listened, she would have had an overblown, ostentatious engagement which she would never forget. For me, I would have saved us hundreds in footwear which had been rendered too acrid, and thereby unable to perform their duty.

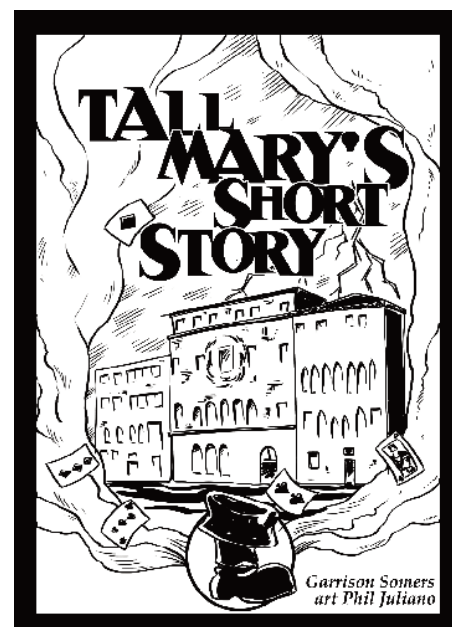
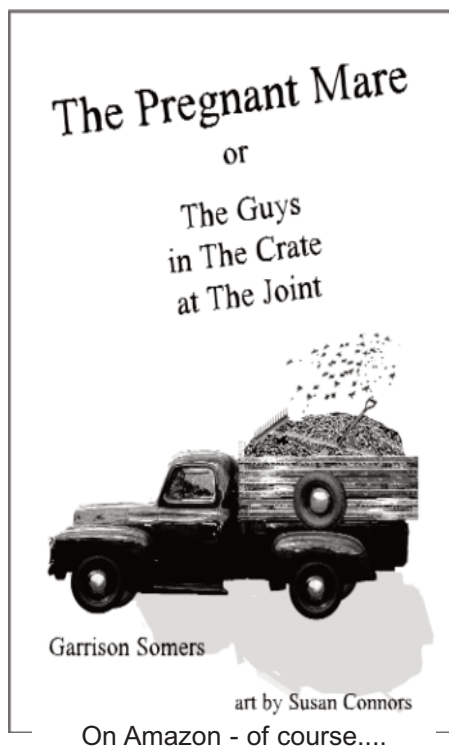
This past Sunday night we were ramming through our early evening

chores so we could get in front of the TV. (And do the 'suspension of disbelief, no it's not really the end of the weekend', stupefied zone into the RGB glow) But first, bust out the kitchen, trash, and *recykes*. My duty was breaking down the morass of cardboard boxes that had choked any entry into the spare bedroom. She was buzzing in the kitchen.

I was popping around in my tan canvas pants, sans socks. I only had three boxes left to zip. Jessica asked me to take the dog out. I would leave these couple of boxes for when I came back upstairs. I dropped the utility knife as I was using it onto the has-sock. I slipped into my sneaks, still sans socks (of course!) and took the dog downstairs.

After my poor pup of 14 years finished her duty (a mysterious itch had recently gripped her, with little explanation), I bounded up the stairs. Jessica noticed me coming through the door and started in about the socks. "Do you remember that we bought you those sneakers two months ago? Do you *not* remember

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the discussion we had..." Ugh. Here we go.

"Listen. I showered two hours ago..."

"That doesn't matter! What are you going to do, shower every..." By now, I was looking around the room for something into which I could escape. I glanced to the TV and thought how maybe I would even skip our Sunday night show. What I was seeing wasn't easing the static from the next room. Showing was a replay of a game that finished not an hour ago. The Sox and Yankees were emptying benches into a brawl. Unsure where the remote was, I settled for the conclusion. But even this was a safe haven from the sock castigation. I kicked off my sneakers (very easy to do without socks) and flopped in a silent huff onto the hassock.

At the same time as the screen showed me the Yankees' most dangerous hitter turn around the final pitch with a walk-off grand slam, I felt an odd pinch, near the bottom of my gut. A new place for a pain like this. I let out an odd utter, 'Gobbbb'.

Jessica, who had still been rabbling apparently, turned silently towards me with a look of curiosity, but more so of concern.

I stood slowly and felt this pinch turn to a locally, steadily pulsing, hot ball of pain. The TV now showed me basketball, but I think it was women playing. I felt a couple of drips on my left leg, and then suddenly, a splut on the top of my corresponding sockless foot.

I looked down to see what looked like two clam bellies, lying on the dark hardwood floor, in a scant piddle of clear (gel?) tinged with tears of ferrous blood. Only they didn't really look like clam bellies. As the clear gel took to the hardwood, it spread slowly away from the lung-phlegm-colored bodies. What appeared to be solid now became a network of hundreds, thousands of tiny (tubes?), tightly coiled, and yet slowly relaxing and unwinding as the gel thinned. At that moment, a swift memory from my youth came to me. Of dissecting golf balls, of all things. Some had a core of tiny elastics. Once you pulled the core of a golf ball away from the husk, the elastics unraveled. And once you commit this extraction, you can't put the golf ball back together.

To this day I wear socks when I wear sneakers. Any footwear. Except sandals. She at least agrees there.

Also, I no longer own canvas pants. That tan pair had to be destroyed, what, with the hole and all. I wouldn't keep fighting with the wife to get another pair. I didn't have the stones to replace them.



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@blotterrag.com

Dream: part two.

I then was only in close contact with a few people living and experiencing this newfound life we all had gained.... Then I traveled to a village nearby, still near the beach.... I came to them and spoke of peace and health, of which they knew of...then, within the courtyard I had climbed up a makeshift scaffolding to help a lady with the front of her house, I was attempting to balance something, a small black and white object on her front entrance (which was a row of what looked like wooden shaped boards about a foot in length and an inch in width, 20 of them) for aesthetics. But these boards kept coming out of place; I was attempting to keep my balance on the scaffolding (which was essentially me standing on a ladder at this point) while putting the boards back into place while attempting to balance this black and white object on top of the boards.... Everything eventually came crashing into the mud and I fell along with it. This village became sad and upset of what had happened and the lady still loved me and cared for me, but she knew that I couldn't stay there, the village was unhappy with me. The leader asked something to her "did she wish this to occur?" She replied no and I left the village.

Christopher - cyberspace

CONTRIBUTORS:

Ed. note: **Jesse R. Stowe** is a bartender, amateur triathlete, and grad student in the MFA Creative Writing Program at Goddard College. He had been reading *The Blotter* for a while before submitting his story "Glass Eyes" to us, with its subsequent placement in our August, 2017 issue. I have to admit, I don't even know how copies of the magazine end up in a bar named Jackie O's in Athens, Ohio, and I don't care as long as they do. Jesse, keep on writing. We like long form short fiction.

Katharyn Howd Machan, Professor of Writing at Ithaca College, holds degrees from the College of Saint Rose, the University of Iowa, and Northwestern University. Her poems appear in many magazines and anthologies, and she has 32 previous collections. Former director of the national Feminist Women's Writing Workshops, Inc., she edited ADRIENNE RICH: A TRIBUTE ANTHOLOGY (Split Oak Press, 2012). In 2018 FutureCycle Press will publish her SELECTED POEMS and Cayuga Lake Books SECRET MUSIC. Dr. Machan lives in Ithaca, New York with her beloved husband, fellow poet Eric Machan Howd.

Jason Sallinger comes from a prestigious lineage of trades: developing 1-hour photos, selling car washes, and de-worming fish. At one time he wrote HTML for food. Now he is a bit farmer. Jason writes exclusively for *The Blotter*.



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