

August 2018

The Blotter

magazine



The South's Unique, FREE, International Literature and Arts Magazine

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The Blotter

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"Going Out of Style – With Style!"

Recently I was explaining home ownership to my eldest. This is easily one of my favorite things. She enjoys (sometimes) hearing me talk, and likes (always) pulling my chain – often asking the next question before I've finished answering the first. In this particular conversation, however, things deteriorated subject-wise to the point where I was trying to tell her what a mortgage was and how it works, while she was already off on the tangent of renting, then leasing, and then wanted me to clarify the difference between taking out a loan and paying rent, and so on. All this while we stuffed our faces with pork chops and mashed potatoes. It was glorious, because we both knew how boring it was, and yet we continued forward like two crazed individuals rappelling down the side of a mountain, knowing that the rope wasn't quite long enough to reach the bottom.

"Hey Dad," she eventually interjected. "What is the difference between loaning and lending?" And my brain hiccupped, because it was a good question, a scholar's question. But all I could think to say was that *loan* is a noun and *lend* is a verb.

Ahhh, but Google told it differently. A quick search showed they were both words from the old Germanic (with proto-Indo-European roots), origins timed in the fifteenth century. Both have noun and verb uses. It didn't say when they were locked in place with grammatical rules, but I stubbornly reiterated that I was taught that one never says, "can you loan me your car?" but rather, "can you lend me your car?" The car is that thing which we lend. It is the loan (noun). The act of lending it, the verb.

I was also a little surprised that one of the examples given to explain this usage was, "can I have the loan of your car?" which threw it all into deeper, muddier grammatical water. And that "lend" is used more in British English, and "loan" in American English. Why this is so, it didn't deign to say.

How much of the change, the *evolution* of the words, I asked myself, is due to faulty usage in the first place? Faulty usage that gains traction with so many users that eventually it becomes the new *norm*. And how much to *ease of use*, to economy, where two words that basically mean the same thing (in their root) are beginning to overlap in all functions until they reach synonymity?

And so all I can think is that one of them is going out of style, and the other will eventually be the common usage. I like to imagine that evolution is something that happens so slowly that it's difficult to pinpoint the event and it doesn't upset your personal appletart, but words are excellent examples of items whose comings and goings we can date with some

accuracy.

I will tell you right now that I prefer “indisputably” over “undisputedly,” if they are traveling down some vague path towards synonymousness. (And I must say that I prefer using synonymousness over synonymity if for no other reason than because if you are a reader who subvocalizes, you’re going to stumble a bit there because of all the susurrations involved. Hey, if we can’t have fun with words, what’s the point.)

But here we are hoisted on our own petard, because indisputably and undisputedly are not really synonyms. Not yet, anyhow. Indisputably means that after discussion, we all agree. Undisputedly means that even with no discussion, we all agree. That is what we call in the scribbling business a *clear distinction*. But the writing world is not the real world. When we make mistakes in word choice like this, it means that we don’t see the clear distinction. But the point is moot, if we’re in evolution mode. And ironically, moot does not mean that the point isn’t worth arguing about. It means that the point is worth arguing about (but perhaps we just don’t have the time for it, so let’s move on.

So words change. I know that, in the bones where I write, but I don’t always like the changes, or have to like them but must deal with them. Maybe I’m getting old. Words are meant to be remodeled, tweaked. We are creatures of language, but we are also provincial, no matter how cosmopolitan we claim to want to be. We talk the talk of our neighborhoods and townships, our cliques and clubs. It assists us in belonging, making things comfortable. So betwixt mutates into between. Or maybe they start at around the same era on two sides of the same mountain, and for similar reasons. Expanding, reaching out, they meet somewhere near the middle; the two words that mean the same thing hash it out, like duelists, for supremacy in the lexicon of the new, amalgamated people.

And I also think some mistakes require a society that occasionally takes out its red pen and marks up the copy. Fewer becomes lesser. One person’s inadvertent idiocy become idiom. Inexplicable inexplicably becomes unexplainable. Some root I cannot even hazard a guess at becomes persnickety, like a twig stepped on in a forest after a tree falls, alone. I’ve been told that one most common type of linguistic foul-up is called an “eggcorn,” a word or phrase that was passed along misheard, misspelled or misunderstood. A good example is “tow the line” rather than “toe the line.” Fun, almost clever, but wrong.

Instinctively (or instinctually – I can no longer say with confidence which), we editors try and make sense of the evolution of language, as it unrolls beneath our stumbling, but comfortably shod feet. Sometimes we get

continued on page 15

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CAUTION

Welcome back my friends to the sho

The Blotter

"Persistence/Memory"

by Marguerite Alley

I write this now because I missed my chance to speak.

It's funny, the sort of things that stick in your mind after it's all done with and passed. Or maybe funny is the wrong word. I have always held onto memory in meaningless, half coherent fragments, but you—well, I can't remember.

What I do remember is that coffee shop in Chelsea. The first of many.

The neon and the faux red leather and surreality of all of it, breaking through a night as black as the inside of my own eyelids. It's easy to think now that maybe it existed outside of space and time, but back then all I recall was that it was four in the morning and something inside me needed an espresso.

(Could that really have been the only reason?)

I know why *you* were there, of course. That roommate of yours

who got up three hours early every day to grind Nicaraguan coffee beans until the sun came up and the first cup could be filled and *Jesus fucking Christ, if I have to listen to that machine a moment longer I'll blow my brains out.* But for the life of me I haven't the faintest idea how I ended up there, novel beneath my hands and boots on my feet.

And how did our conversation begin? Did I fall so deep immediately, or did I simply want a warm body to complain about Salinger to? I wonder if you'd think it despicable of me to lose the details of our first encounter, but it's been a long time, you realize. A fucking long time.

(*"Things fall apart, the center cannot hold."* I can't remember if you liked Yeats.)

I like to think you'd understand.

Spain, too, could've been a century back, or maybe forty-eight

hours. I still have the most vivid picture of that sofa we'd dragged into the backyard of your aunt's cottage, when we'd fallen asleep in the humid, seething dark. When I came to and all I saw was the crooked line of your teeth and the creases around your smiling eyes I was sure that that's what I wanted to wake up to each morning until I didn't wake up at all.

There was that cafe again, though, wasn't there? Where the neon seemed out of place among the sunflowers and grazing sheep and the Spanish pop pouring out over the radio. There was something in it that was both familiar and out of place. We sat in the same booth, were served by the same platinum blonde waitress, and finally *home* slipped off my tongue and ruined everything.

From this vantage point, with an ocean below and the sky above me, I think that that may have been the beginning of the end.

I can say it now, I think, with



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August 2018

some measure of accuracy. I loved you. I love you. Sometimes I lose track of whether I always have, if it's strengthened over the years or dulled. I loved you then, though. I wanted you to be mine and for a bit there, I think, you wanted me to be yours.

Another year, the same coffee shop. The same order and the same product. I'd moved neighborhoods in London—out of Chelsea and into Islington but still the neon invaded my peripheral vision on a rainy Tuesday and there I was, waiting for you. I make all this fuss about the holes in my memory, but I've never forgotten a single physical detail, not when it comes to your features and mannerisms and the like. The way you'd lean forward for the punchline of any joke, the way your hands curled around each other on the formica table as you thought and worried, the location of every crinkle in your smile. Don't think that I've forgotten. You know I haven't.

You used to say you wanted to

be cremated, your ashes dumped off a cliff and into the sea. Which cliff? Did you ever specify? Wales? Ireland? Newfoundland? Maybe you said, once, under a neon sign that held off the dark world beyond, and just like you yourself the memory has escaped me as well.

That last conversation we had I spent the entire time on the edge of my seat, waiting for the moment when our lips would align in just the right way, when our eyes would meet at just the right moment. By the time my coffee was drained I realized that that moment was never going to come. Or maybe it had already, a long while ago, and I couldn't remember the proper arrangement anymore. The table in the booth separating our minds and bodies stretched on forever. The cafe was empty save us.

I've always hated coffee.

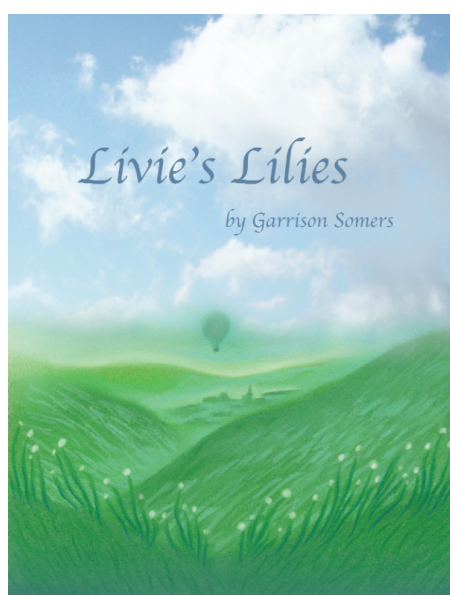
I think this is a good cliff, the one I'm standing on now. I think you would've approved. It's hard to write this letter, though, with the

incessant, tugging breeze. I'm nearly finished, however, and then I'll let it go. I thought about burying it in the sand but it seemed too likely that someone might unearth it, someday, and the idea of that is horrific. These words are only meant for you, so they're going into the sea.

Somewhere off to my right there's a splotch of neon, an ethereal glow that's cutting through the mist and the gloom of the afternoon, surrounded by nothing but countryside and ocean. Is it what I think it is? Will there be red leather booths and hot espressos and a waitress with bleached blonde hair?

Will you be waiting for me?

I'll go and check after the next wave. ❖



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The Blotter

"Jericho Hill"

by Jason Sallinger

The town where I went to college had two colleges, five restaurants, three bars, and one stop light. The stop light was a four-way. To the north at the stop light was a state college, to the south, the university. To the east, the closest McDonald's sat a 20-minute drive away. And to the west, a damn good sub shop, also 20 minutes away.

Both of these next-towns-over had a good liquor store. I didn't prefer one. But on this evening, preparing for festivities, I chose the town with the good sub shop. Not for the subs, though. It had a better drive. The height of land a couple miles out was called Jericho

Hill. Coming away from school, as soon as you wound through the curves and bends of the high-limit road, the earth gave way much like a roller coaster. At the bottom of Jericho Hill it wound some more, then gave way to some high-limit straightaways.

Before getting into town, this road culminated at a T stop, with a yellow arrow across the intersection pointing left and right, pleading that you not hit house just behind, which had happened several times that I'd heard.

Into town, just beyond the sub shop was the liquor store. Now that I was a senior I didn't need to use the license of a man seven years older. The clerk didn't seem to care about my recent change in identity.

Excited for the ride back to school, and for the festivity ahead, I turned towards Jericho Hill at the T. As I accelerated away from the intersection, I noticed a new light on my dashboard. My gas light had come on and I hadn't noticed

when. I knew I could go back towards the liquor store and gas up. But since I was getting towards the straightaway, and moving at a good clip, I figured I had this.

As I neared Jericho Hill my dashboard inspections became more frequent. At first the gas needle was perfectly in line with the E line, eclipsing its edge. Now the needle was below far enough you could make out a full line of black background between the red needle and white E line. And for this I should not have been surprised when the engine knocking started. Even though it had been dusk for a while, it wasn't quite dark yet. I had made it to the base of Jericho Hill and could see it hulking before me.

My car had come to rest about 200 yards shy of a solitary house. I was very happy about this – since I had attended college in the early 90's, the advent of cell phones hadn't happened yet. I was sure there must be a landline at this house.

As I approached the house on foot I could see some lights on. They were coming from the second floor. The wooden steps in front led me to a door at the second level of the house. This hurricane door was closed, but the wooden door behind it was open. I knocked on the hurricane door's

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or

The Guys
in The Crate
at The Joint



Garrison Somers

art by Susan Connors

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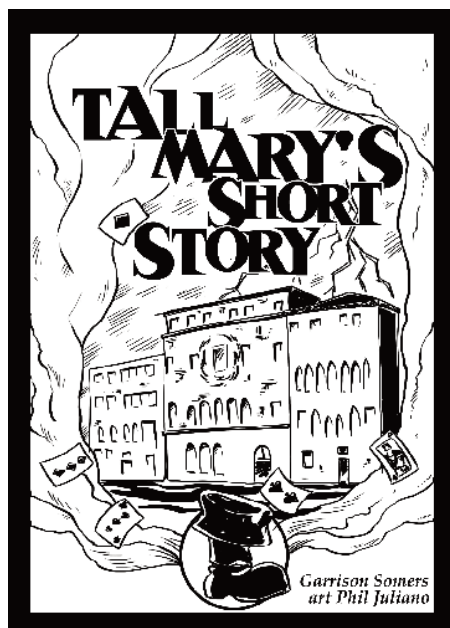
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glass pane. Nothing. I inspected the room on the other side of the door. It was a living room, earthy colors, lit with a warm yellow glow. A sofa, paintings, what looked like a grandfather clock from the side, no TV. Beyond the grandfather clock was an arch and a kitchen beyond that – lights also on in there, brighter. In there, I thought, must be a phone.

I tried the push handle of the hurricane door with my thumb and felt success. I opened the door enough to talk though it and said, "Hello?" No one answered, no one came. I moved through the door, slowly and deliberately towards the kitchen, keeping my eyes looking towards what could be a phone.

As I passed the grandfather clock on my right, through the arch, a kitchen table came into view to my left. On it were several bills and envelopes, fanned across the surface like a deck of cards left

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unattended after the game was done. On the wall across the table from me was a white phone hung at eye level, its spiral cord hanging to the floor.

Now a sigh of relief and I caught my breath. I moved to the phone and called my roommate. It rang for what seemed like a longer time than usual. As it kept ringing, I moved my gaze from the phone base toward the tabletop, scanning the various paperwork. I was trying to make out a name. I'm not sure it would have mattered – I didn't know any locals. As I bent over to get a closer look on one of the bills, my roommate picked up. I told him where I was, and he said he'd be there in 15 minutes. Now, very relieved.

I hung the phone and retraced my steps towards the front door. As I walked through the arch I verified there was no television looking to my right. Looking to my left, I suddenly felt sick. This was not a grandfather clock. This was a gun case. There were three shotguns and one rifle. I moved, quickly now, to the door and pushed the

hurricane's black handle.

I stepped and almost misstepped on the wooden stairs, my legs feeling rubbery now. I reached the ground and got 20 steps from the stairs before turning around. I did a quick scan of all the rooms with light for signs of life. I noticed another set of stairs to the left of the house. At the top of these steps was a deck, and leaning on the railing was a silhouette of a man.

"Oh. Uh, hello, sir."

"Hello." A calm, serene voice.

"I'm sorry. I ran out of gas."

No response.

"I hope you don't mind. I let myself in and used your phone. I called my roommate to pick me up."

"I know. I was watching you the whole time." ❖

"Who gave these idiots
microphones?"
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Chapel Hill & Carrboro, NC





Lauren deSerres
Pittsboro, NC





"Questions of the Day"

by Carol Smallwood

Coffee Rub: salt, coffee, brown
sugar, paprika, chili peppers,
garlic, onions—but what's it for

How do spiders walk on ceilings

By phone we hear: use our
website. Entering stores we read:
visit us online

Why so many words for dying:
deceased, departed, croaked,
pushing up daisies, passed,
moved on, demise, expired,
gone, no longer with us, with
the angels

How well could you see with the
first mirrors—polished obsidian
stone

What's the best theory where
the oceans came
from

When did bees begin using the
hexagon as the best shape to
store honey

Who wrote: "Life is Short;
Enjoy Your Trip" for the spare
tire cover on the car ahead

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

Two dreams, two dreamers

1: Sitting down in a job interview when out of nowhere I just burp the biggest burp I've ever burped—that seemed like it went on forever—it was like the scene from “Step Brothers” with Will Ferrell and John Reilly when they were both in a job interview. In an interview with Seth Rogan's character, Reilly lets out the longest and loudest fart that makes the movie add an extra minute onto its watch time just to include the entire fart.

2: I was in a ballet studio and there were fireworks everywhere and rockets standing upright, and no one else was there, and I shot a small basketball into one of those children's plastic basketball hoops, and I slid down a plastic play-structure sliding board, and then I went into the bathroom and there were two people: one was a girl ghost that looked like Carl from “Jimmy Neutron, Boy Genius” and the other was a girl who was part human but turning into a ghost. The lights in the bathroom were off and a swordfish was floating in the air out of a bathroom stall and then it charged at me...

Chapel Hil sisters

The Blotter

"For Bob"

There are deaths that surprise like DUI checkpoints
where grief looks like intoxication
where we're forced to get out of the car and recite
the past, like the alphabet, backwards.

I'll tell just one story from when we were sixteen
filling out McDonald's applications side-by-side.
In the space where it asked "Desired Wage"
you drew an arrow pointing straight up.

I don't believe in any kind of afterlife at all,
but part of me hopes
you finally got that raise.

Two by Chris

Friendship, loyalty, nostalgia; and the joy and healing power of music...

A Southern college town and its thriving local music scene,
where the music's neither "sacred" nor "profane" so long as it's
good...

A lost tape of a beloved band's legendary show...

A record label, poised to break big, which certain people want
to be part of - by any means necessary...

Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over
long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student,
who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't
face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in
danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...

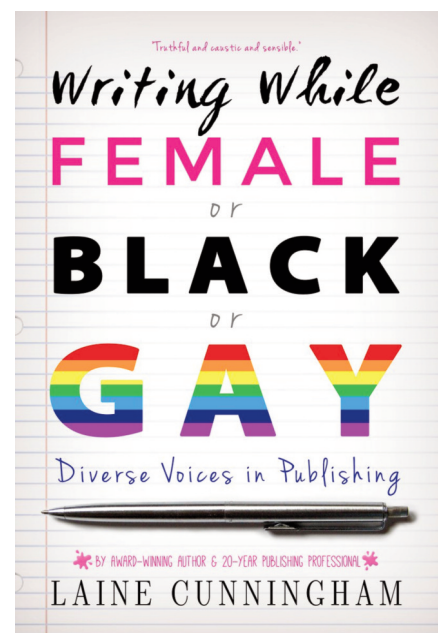
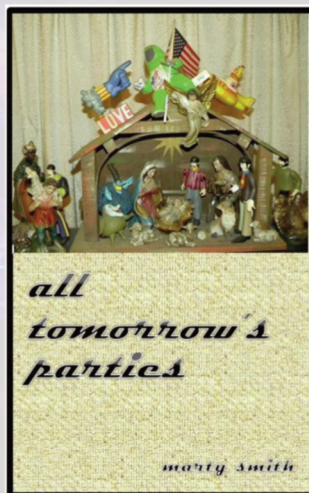


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by Marty Smith

(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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August 2018

ris Fox

"Our Show"

I landed the role of "The Amnesiac"
but could never remember my lines
—nor the nature
of our relationship.
Not that it mattered:
the lines of dialogue we were asked to recite
were all parallel lines
and never touched or even
acknowledged one another.
When filming finally wrapped
on the pilot episode,
it turned out that the pilot
was Amelia Earhart on her final flight
and our show was never seen
again.



CONTRIBUTORS:

Marguerite Alley was born and raised in Durham, NC and will attend NYU in fall of 2018. Her work has been recognized by The Claremont Review, NYC Midnight, and the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards. She is an alumna of the Iowa Young Writers' Studio.

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.

Carol Smallwood of Mt. Pleasant, MI, recently returned to college to take writing classes.

Chris Fox is a poet and librarian based out of Greensboro, North Carolina. His work has appeared in *Blink*, *Lady Churchill's Rosebud Wristlet*, *Treehouse Magazine*, and many other publications.

Lauren deSerres co-owns Proud Chicken Farm and Studio in Pittsboro NC with her partner, Walt DeHaven. She is an artist and teacher and has been making art for over 15 years. She holds an MFA from the University of Massachusetts Dartmouth and a BFA from East Carolina University. Lauren creates colorful paintings that celebrate and explore nature, whether it's woodland creatures playing bluegrass, or vibrantly colored garden scenes. Lauren tries to bring out the playful energy and joy in all her subjects, focusing on local flora and fauna. She tries to capture a story with each image. Lauren uses acrylic paint primarily, with the addition of water-color and ink.

For more on Lauren deSerres' process and most recent works of art, please follow her on Social Media (Facebook and Instagram) @Proud Chicken Studio. Lauren's work is available on the website www.laurendeserres.com or Etsy www.etsy.com/shop/proudchickenstudio

continued from page 3

snarled in the mundane barbed wire of *em* dashes or Oxford commas, single or double spacebars after a period, but some of us run on through this no-persons' land to leap into the trench on the other side, only to find that its occupants are no less or more enlightened about whether GIF is pronounced with a hard G or soft J sound. If we're lucky, the disagreements don't come to rancorous tweets filled (inasmuch as 144-character outbursts can be) with smarmy, sardonic wit. And then we are dashed against the stone by apps with no text, only pictures, because they tell a thousand words. Or do they? We hush and carry on. We leave that alone.

There is no check for this kind of change. Grammar police have no teeth. Educators are busy with more critical concerns. Journalists are...surrendering to the mob. The truth is, there is no more expedient way to age than start correcting someone else's use of language. Insist that *google* is not a verb and the massed rolling of eyes will crush you like Sisyphus clambering up a hill in Hades. Your family and friends will assume that you've lost your ever-lovin', blue-eyed mind. In *My Fair Lady*, no one likes Henry Higgins. No one. Be honest, he was a bit of a putz. Act like that and people will cease talking in front of you.

They will, however, talk behind you; nudge-nudge, wink-wink. And, in the end, we wish you good luck, for you cannot edit the entire world as it hyphenates, abbreviates, misspells, misuses, misquotes, misinterprets, takes out of context, acronyms, deafens, italicizes, subtextualizes, dangles, predicates and horsewhips the language into something so vague and mutant in its construct that it is nearly indecipherable. You'll be boiling an unconjugated ocean.

And dinosaurs like me were intended to die out anyway, were they not?

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



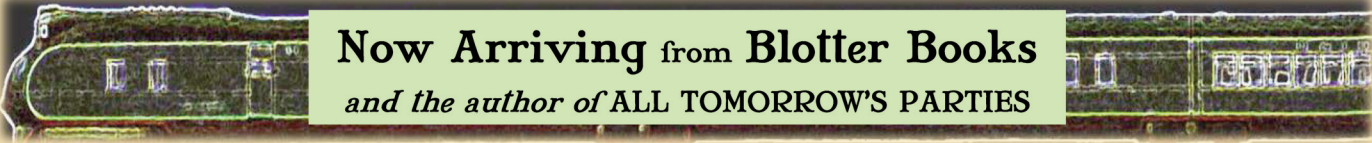


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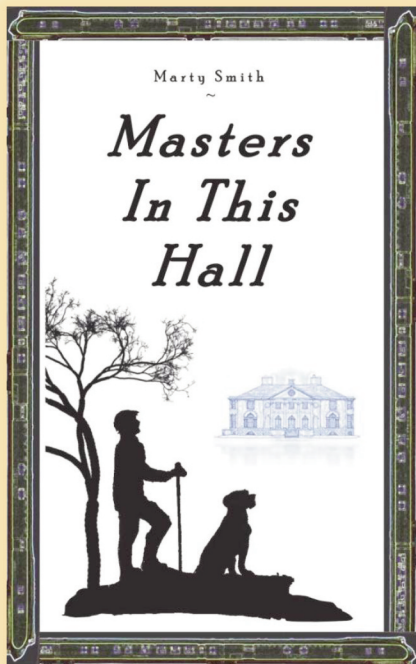
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