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The Blotter

magazine

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The Blotter

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"Symbolic Logic"

My daughter came home from the first day of school this fall with documents to read and sign. Schools are big on "covenants" and "agreements" between teachers and students and parents – joint pacts to study and teach, to complete syllabi, to not lose or break computers – and so am I. My daughter (the younger) is still in the satisfaction-through-successful-task-completion age and I understand that, too. There are other types of children, of which I was one, who surrender at sixteen to just not delivering the goods. Oh, I learned the stuff, but didn't do the homework, or write the papers or study for the exams and my grades in high school showed that truth. Amply.

I read and signed documents placed in front of me, and she was satisfied and so I was satisfied. We talked about her classes. She was quite pleased with the proportions of friends to classes and the subject matter and the expectations that teachers have of her. She was not so pleased with the number of freshmen on her bus ride home (apparently, they were noisy and insubordinate and had hygiene issues). And what was up with the decision to move away from Macbook to Chromebook laptops? I assured her that they are quite adequate, but she sniffed at my opinion. "So, where is yours?" I asked. "Tomorrow," she said, waving the document I just signed that gives her permission to have one distributed one to her.

Arriving home on the second day of school, she was mightily frustrated. The permission document from the previous day was not the right piece of signed paper. Or it was not sufficiently bureaucratic. Or something. In any case, I had to read and sign a different agreement/contract. And, she explained, they ran out of them in English, so the one she had for me was in Spanish. "You need to sign here, Dad." "Sweetheart? What does the document say?" "I don't know."

Now, I am fully aware of all the triggers this situation had scattered around within it like little gifts in a yard where a big dog lives. The school is short of funding and doesn't want to waste it making copies of documents in English, when they are readily available in Spanish. And I'm a snide, snarky old man with too much time on his hands. And turnabout is fair play, you Anglo-Saxon privileged male. Just sign the damned form.

But here's the thing, thought I. What does this teach my daughter? Does the form have relevant information for me? Is it binding, in some way? Will this come back to bite us? How? Am I not mitigating risk? Is that a good lesson to teach? Can you understand my logic, daughter of mine? Then I need to be able to read the form, before I sign it. At the very least, she needs to be able to read it. My daughter understood this, but still wanted me to sign the form. Is the form unimportant (I asked the bureau-

crats in my head)? If so, then give my daughter her laptop and stop wasting time, and when you come across some more forms, send one home. Don't make the unimportant form a hurdle she must jump. My daughter also understood this. But she is practical, and more than another object lesson from me, she needed her laptop. Needed to complete this task (as well as getting on with her homework – trapped inside an application on her laptop). And so, she and I discussed her frustration, (mostly with me for not just signing the damned form) and I was reduced to the point of irritated dad-ness, at which point I failed as a parent. I took the form and wrote "NO" in big letters across the front. Handed it back to her.

Yes, I was wrong. I was wrong, wrong, wrong. But being able to clarify a situation and move on is always the big hammer in my toolbox, and often I'm not permitted to wield it anymore. The truth is, as I read what I've typed here, I made a rookie mistake, and after fourteen years, shame on me. Because the worst form of *mansplaining* is *dadsplaining*, a word defined as "it's not what you deliver, it's how it's received, dumbass!"

At six-thirty in the evening, there is little one can do about much of anything. You can't call the school. You can no longer make dinner on time. It's too early to go to bed and hope that tomorrow is a better day. In the end you have to suck it up and accept that today you're not as good a stay-at-home-Dad as you've been before. Well...OK then. Shit.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

I like little baby ducks, driving

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"The Stories We Tell"

by Marisa Crane

I'm sitting up in bed, reading about which celebrities had which ugly babies and drinking an Irish coffee. The real kind, not the Americanized version that includes a healthy splash of Bailey's for those who can't stomach the taste of Jameson and coffee. The only time I get up is to refill my drink and put a new *Boy Meets World* disc in my fifteen dollar DVD player.

On the screen Topanga Lawrence gives up Yale for Cory Matthews and I imagine the entire feminist world groaning. But in the next breath she proposes to Cory, which is super bad ass even though he's the human equivalent of a frozen bag of peas and she's a champagne and lobster feast. I keep hoping Topanga will crawl out of the TV and ask me to go out for a lobster dinner with her, or at the very least shake her hair at me and tell me to get out of bed and actually go mingle with humans.

I'd forgotten how much I love the dramatic music and a recorded crowd that alternates between

laughter and cheers. It's as if nineties directors didn't have faith that humans could figure out how to feel all on their own.

I know how I feel. I feel alone, but that's nothing new. No amount of company can fix that.

My iPhone 6 vibrates and crawls across my nightstand like a centipede, alerting me that I have two new messages from Melissa.

"What u up to tonight?" reads the first one.

"Come with us to Punch Bowl Social at 9."

I begin responding that I'll meet them there when something hits me in the head, nearly knocking me out. My eyes go black for a second and when my vision returns, I look around for the weapon of attack. There's a large, thick book on the floor that wasn't there before. It looks like an old encyclopedia.

"What. The. Fuck."

I examine the ceiling expecting to find a gaping hole in it, but it's just as it always is: hospital white

except for the glow-in-the-dark stars I stuck to it in a sentimental fit last year. No hole, no crumbling, no signs that a massive fucking book could have come from the sky and clobbered me on the head.

I grab the book and flip to the first page.

It's the only page with any words on it. The handwriting resembles mine, but a little shakier, as if I'd snorted an exorbitant amount of blow before writing it.

Your friends don't give a shit if you come out tonight or not.

"Fuck this," I say, closing the book and chucking it across the room. The book quivers in the corner like a kicked puppy, then regains its composure and slowly rises, levitating a few feet in the air, almost willing me to curse it out again. We eye each other up in a standoff, then with the urgency of a murder of crows dive-bombing an intruder, the book flies at me, once again aiming for my head. I cover my face with my arms and the corner of the book digs into my forearm, slicing it open. The blood that drips down my arm is almost black. I use a sheet to put pressure on the cut and stop the blood flow.

Maybe I'm drunker than I



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thought. Maybe this is Hagrid's twisted way of telling me "yera witch, Sam."

The book wiggles in my lap, purring like its looking for affection. I stroke it in spite of myself. It rolls over on what I assume is its back so I can reach its belly. It's actually kinda cute, in a trippy, *I need to get out more often* way.

I re-read the inscription a few times, taking it in. Not the nicest thing I've ever heard, but I'd be lying if I said I didn't believe it. Every time Melissa and co. have invited me out for the past seven or eight months, a thought has slithered its way from my gut through my spine and to the base of my skull where it marinates before invading my amygdala and erupting into a feeling similar to rejection if rejection were not in its right mind. *You don't matter to them, or anyone.* Usually I can chase the depressing thoughts away with a few shots of Jamo, but it feels more real, more finalized

when written down then thrown at my head.

Whenever I hang out with Melissa I feel more like an ornament than a person, as if I'm part of her curated image or something. *And to my left, we have an Olympic rugby player,* I imagine her saying even though I haven't played in five years and my left hip is starting to go, just like my brother's. On the rare occasions when she asks me a question about myself, she never waits for my response. She interrupts me to provide her own answer.

E.g. "How's work going?"

"Oh it's—"

"I just got a promotion, so now I can buy that Mercedes and of course donate regularly to charity."

"Which charity?"

"I don't know, just *charity*," she says, her arms held out wide as if charity is one big fuzzy entity and she is giving it a hug.

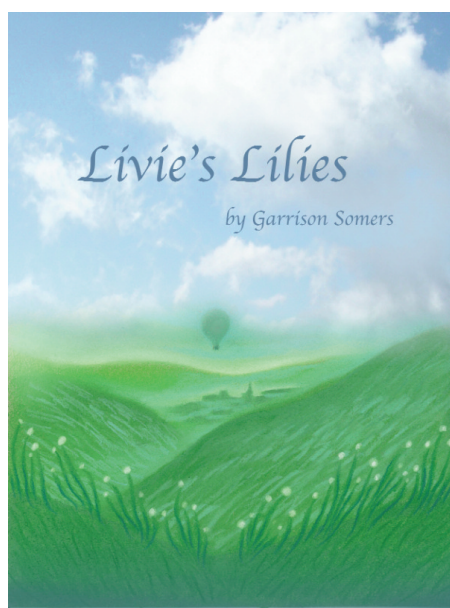
"Okay."

I get up to go to the bathroom and the mammoth book begins to wail like a banshee (the sound is *truly* horrific) then flies into my arms. I set it down, and it

immediately bounces back up to my arms. Okay, guess I carry this everywhere I go now. I pee with it in my lap. It grumbles a few times to let me know it's disgruntled, does a few circles on my thighs, then settles down and purrs again. I dry my hands on its leather cover. It doesn't appreciate that. It wails again. So many rules.

I know Melissa is a shit friend but I don't have many other options. Ever since I moved to LA I haven't been able to make many friends. Back home in New Jersey I used to be good at socializing. I had loyal friends that understood me. Here everyone's flaky as hell and if they happen to be reliable, they're self-absorbed. So I accept Melissa, try to will myself into believing she gives a fuck about me as me and not just me as an accessory.

Maybe I'll stay in and have a *Boy Meets World* marathon tonight. Even set the book up with its own pillow and drink. I think I have my old dog's water dish packed away somewhere. I can read the book some trash mags. Hold up photos of the royal fam. *Look, they are*



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humans who are more special than all the rest. Try to explain how that can be when the book inevitably chirps like, *What do you mean?* Drink a pitcher or two of Irish coffees. Run my hands through my oily hair, recite Shawn Hunter's best pick-up lines.

Melissa texts me again.

"I can see you typing, bitchhhhhh."

"Come on, let's get weird."

Perhaps she does truly enjoy my presence. I shouldn't be so hard on her. I message her quickly that I'll see her there and just as I press send, a second book, even bigger than the first one, clunks me on the head. This is worse than rugby-tackling someone twice your size. I don't even have to open the book. It flips open to the first page, where a phrase is written in my handwriting yet again. I close my eyes for a second and once the dizziness dissipates, I read the inscription.

You can't go out like that. Your face is bloated, everyone can tell.

"You're an asshole!" I shout at the book which I know sounds stupid but when mystery books materialize out of nowhere and confirm your insecurities you're allowed to insult them, even if the windows are open and the neighbors can hear you yelling at no one.

It does this cat-like hunting chuff in response.

I pat my cheeks feeling around for puffiness then use the camera on my iPhone to examine my reflection. I jump a little when I see myself.

This always happens when I drink too often. It's the reason I only drink on the weekend, but this week I broke my own rule and got drunk at Blarneys on Wednesday and Melissa's studio on a Thursday. I bite the insides of my cheeks and make a slurping sound like I'm sucking out of a straw. That old trick I do when I wanna accentuate my cheekbones and thin my face out. I massage the sides of my cheek a few times, trying to will the built up fluid to drain out of my face. I go into the kitchen (the two books follow me, poking me in the ribs on both sides and I let them) and return with two ice packs, one for each side of my face. Now I have two heavy books on my lap. They seem happiest when they are on top of me. It's like they don't *want* to hit me, they just do it out of duty.

I definitely can't go out now. But I already told Melissa I would. It's okay to back out, though. It's self-care—avoiding embarrassment over my hot air balloon face.

I hold the ice packs on my cheeks and the books clean each other's faces, or what I have deciphered are their faces. After a few minutes I reexamine my face in the self-facing camera and I'm starting to look a bit better. My slightly chiseled jaw is reappearing.

Melissa: "Maybe we'll even find

you a girl! It'll be like a game of Clue. Which girl, with which drink? Lol."

Nothing like comparing my romantic life to a murder mystery. Imagine me doing a Shawn Hunter sexy hair flip.

You're not gonna believe this, but a book flies out of my mirror and punches me in the chest then lands on top of the pair on my lap, vibrating louder than my Hitachi magic wand vibrator.

"Okay, get on with it, then. What this time?"

You don't deserve love.

Fan-fucking-tastic.

"You don't know me," I tell the book, even though it very clearly does know me, as do its siblings.

I don't understand who is writing these things down or why, but the least they can do is invite me to Hogwarts, where I'll likely become the world's lamest squib and won't be able to find a date to the Yule Ball.

I ran into my ex, the one who turned down my proposal, in New Orleans last year. I knew she'd be there; it was a work conference. But I wasn't prepared for the clusterfuck of feelings I'd have upon seeing her. She was standing by the bar with a pretty girl. They were drinking hurricanes. The girl grabbed my ex's hand and ran her fingers along it tenderly. My ex looked up at her and smiled shyly, planets orbiting in her eyes. Before I knew what was happening I was approaching them, my blood on fire. My ex did one of those uncomfortable, close-mouthed smiles when she saw me. The

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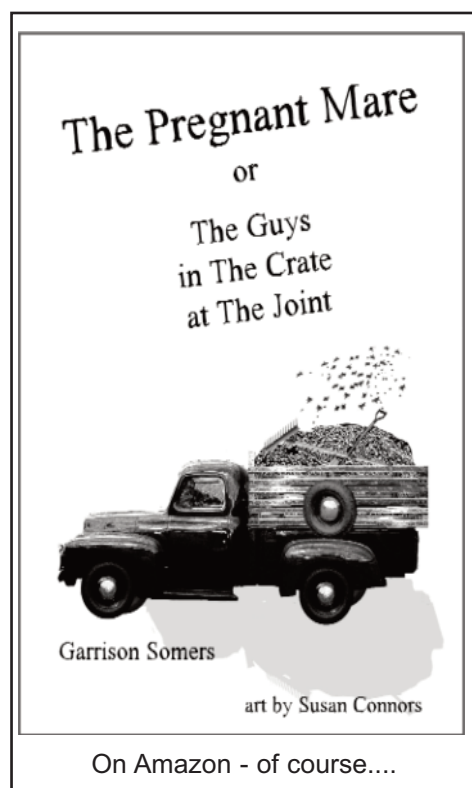
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pretty girl released my ex's hand. I don't remember much about the interaction, but I do know it ended with me spitting on my ex and the pretty girl shoving me hard in the chest before the bouncer picked me up and carried me out of the bar.

So yeah, I think the book is right. I don't deserve love.

I close the third book and give it a little kiss. The others purr so I give them kisses too. They're not going to let me forget the bad, that much I know for sure. They nuzzle me, burying their hard noses in my thighs. I take a sip of my Irish coffee and suddenly I don't feel so alone. ❖



"Spelling Bee"

by Chris Jansen

I lost the fifth-grade spelling bee.

I had made it through the preliminaries in class and on to the final round on stage in front of the school. The previous days (or weeks) I had missed, sick with asthma or more likely just pretending to be sick with asthma. Had I been in school I would have known that the spelling words were taken from our weekly vocabulary tests, and if I'd bothered to ever do homework I would likely not have missed my word.

Cumulus.

That word will haunt me forever. I think I spelled it with a Q, trying to use my powers of divination to pull the correct answer out of the air, the same way I did on tests.

But I was wrong. I had to turn and walk off the stage in front of the whole school, finally and forever exposed as being not good enough at the only thing I was ever good at.

I wasn't upset though, when I realized I could have won had I studied. I wasn't regretful. I didn't want to win the spelling bee for something I did. I wanted to win it like it was a beauty contest. I wanted to win simply for who I was.

Cumulus. C-u-m-u-l-u-s. Cumulus. ❖

**"Four short poems
routed to incoming spam folder by different bots
(including one that flirted with plagiarism)"
edited by Jenny Haniver**

Shona: Maybe we don't know each other but you have to read it.

I'm a perky cutie who got into danger place.

Let me send you my location and you'll take me to your house for sex.

Anastasia: Yeah! I'm a crazy bitch!

mates call me a moll because I am always searching for new men.

It is so boring to have sex with the same guy permanently.

Isn't it? Contact me on my profile.

Lorenza: Do you know how difficult is to be alone?

A female is always in need of attention and love.

If there is no a beau around, I feel so upset.

My intimate life is so poor that you have to help me ASAP!

Julianne: Maybe we do not know each other but you have to read it.

I am a delicious honey who got into danger place.

Let me send you my location and you'll take me to your house for some fun.

"CREATIVE"

by Jayvon Benford

My creativity will walk in and run out as it pleases.

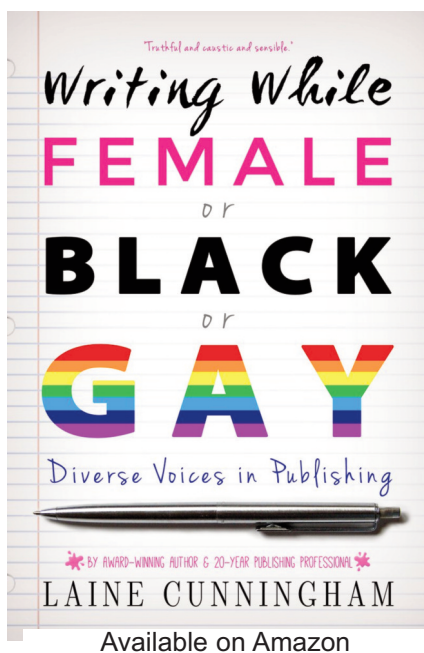
My creativity says bang, crash, bang and more sounds that you usually don't want to hear.

It looks as big as a skyscraper or as small as an ant.

It smells a little funny because I started to like mixing things that I know don't go together.

It tastes delicious because I can make Kool-Aid like Maya Angelou can write poems.

I am creative.



"Ghosts of the Yellow Dog"

A homage to August Wilson and his play,
"The Piano Lesson."

by Rupert W. Nacoste

They rises up
fierce and strong.

They rises up
'cause it's been too long.

They rises up
'cause nobody sings the song
of that terrible wrong.

When they comes back
it's always at night.

When they comes back
it ain't for no Halloween fright.

When they comes back
it's to take away
one of those who stood by
and let them burn like hay.

Yeah you see
when those klu kluxers set that boxcar on fire
some colored mens was locked in thar.

I know some says that stories as flat as a tire.

But I got no reason to give you a scare.

I'm gone tell the truth.

It's the only way to be fair.

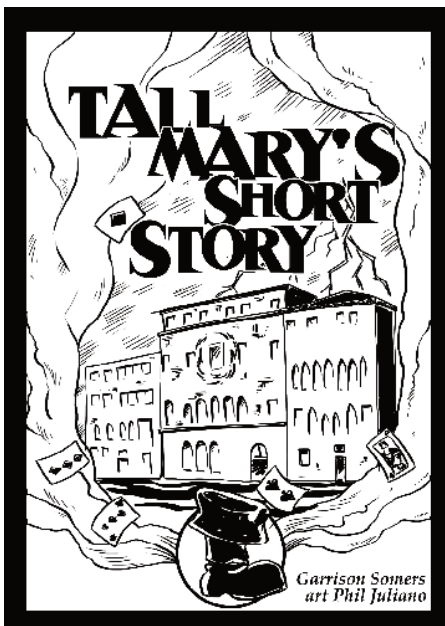
You could hear 'em...
 oh... yes you could.
 First just-a banging on that doe...
 Then they started to scream and yell.
 Sounded awful,
 just awful, I'm here to tell.

That fire set off a high bright light.
 And the rest of the white people came to see the sight.
 But not one would help,
 not even when they heard them men yelp.
 This was sumpen' evil,
 sumpen' straight out of hell.
 Nobodied even ring the fire bell.

So now...
 now they come; yes they do.
 And when they come
 there's always a sound
 You might think it was a train whistle
 Or the howl of a hound.

But oh lord...
 when they rises from that bog,
 they comes through
 a smoky yellow fog.
 And all I know...
 all I know...
 is that it's the ghosts of the yellow dog.

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 a small miracle on Amazon



Rupert W. Nacoste
 rupert@makinggumbo.com

Two by Chella Courington

"Flight"

The first thing I had of Winston Walker
is that Saturday afternoon he shot me
in the eye. BB the size of a mockingbird
iris and about as yellow. Arm draped
over the fence, I watched him walking
toward me. Cock. Pop.
Wasps nested. Screams covered me.

Ice cubes froze the sting blue. Weeks later
my sight, sharp as ever. But the pasty scar tissue
turned my head down, hid the eye behind
cloud cover. No meteor showers
visible. Just an ugly white
glob Winston Walker called an accident
no doctor could erase till I was sixteen

and had moved to Atlanta. He scraped clouds
off blue iris—ashen crater in its place.
When I raised my lid, the sky appeared.
After thirty years Winston Walker telephoned.
Honest to God, I just wanted to scare you.
Said he dreamed I shot him full
of Adriamycin exploding under his skin

infrared starbursts burning every breathing cell.
Then, in November, I expected him at New Hope
to be cremated, ashes scattered where he hunted
whitetail deer. In a simple casket he
was lowered near his mother as shadows
passed through us.

"The Pond Heron"

The dead don't write
but my cousin's letter arrives three days

after he's blown away by some kid
in his own platoon.

Maybe another Georgia boy
who's never been so far from home

so scared he shoots at anything
moving in shadows.

The letter feels light for my cousin's voice.
He speaks of sheer petals rising

out of muddy fields spreading before the sun.
Of a copper heron in shallow water

who dips his black-tipped beak
to spear his prey.

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...

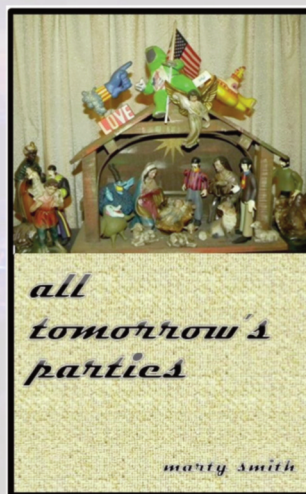
A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...

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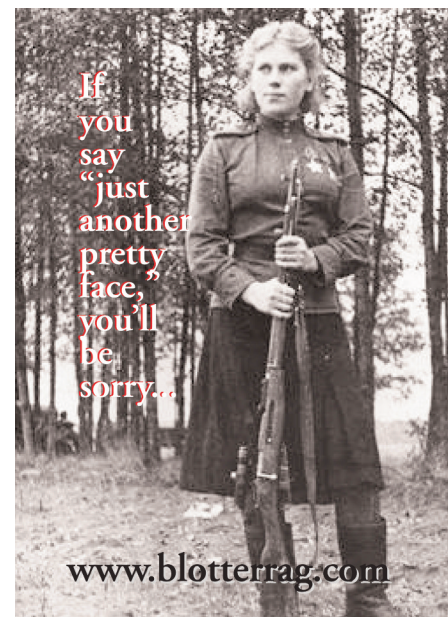
All Tomorrow's Parties

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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The Dream Journal

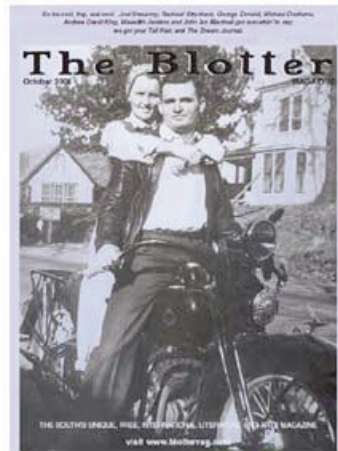
real dreams, real weird

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

I'm with my parents and sister walking through underground tunnels with caves along the edges. In one of the caves, there is a bedroom that is supposed to be an exhibit relating to *The Scarlett Letter*, but it looks more like the red room from *Jane Eyre*. In the center of the room, there's a king-sized mahogany bed covered in a crimson comforter with thick bedposts at each corner. Heavy red curtains hang on the walls. My dad and I walk in. There's a cracked blue robin's egg on the floor. My dad picks it up and opens it. Inside, there is a bright red bird fetus that is so close to being fully developed, but it's dead. He puts it down and we go into an adjacent cave that's a bookstore, and my grandfather, who died years ago, is there, much taller than he was in person. My grandfather and I consider scaring the group of people we can hear coming around the corner, but then we remember they're heading to a wake in another cave, so we decide not to. I wonder why anyone would have a wake in such a dark, musty place

E. D. - cyberspace



The Blotter Magazine lost an old friend recently; Mrs. Trixie Heath. She was a good sport, demanding and kind, made the best hamburgers and chocolate cake on Earth, kept up with her garden, rocked her babies in the nursery at church, watched her stories on the TV, and she had more friends than anyone we know. She permitted us to use this amazing photograph of her for a cover a while back, and she was the inspiration for one of the main characters in our Little Book "The Cucaracha."

She was 101 years old and is loved and will be missed.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Marisa Crane is a lesbian fiction writer and poet. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Pidgeonholes*, *Cotton Xenomorph*, *Okay Donkey*, *Riggwelter Press*, *X-R-A-Y Magazine*, *Pithead Chapel*, and elsewhere. She currently lives in San Diego with her partner. Her Twitter handle is @marisabcrane.

Chris Jansen lives in Athens, Georgia, where he feeds carrots to a disinterested guinea pig named Poozybear. His books include *Illumination: New Translations of Rumi* (with Fatima Saidi) and *100 Love Sonnets of Pablo Neruda* (both from Kinch Creek Press). He is an IT guy, boxing instructor, and grateful recovering heroin addict.

Jayvon Benford is 12 and attends middle school in Louisville, Kentucky. He wrote this poem during Summerbridge Louisville, a 6-week, summer academic program for high-need, high-potential middle school students in Jefferson County, Kentucky. Our thanks to Blotterfriend Dr. Heather Hoffmann for bringing his work to our attention.

Rupert W. Nacoste is a Professor of Psychology at North Carolina State University and a writer. His books include his memoir "Making Gumbo in the University" (Plain View Press) and "Taking on Diversity: How we can move from anxiety to respect" (Prometheus Books). If you haven't guessed from the gumbo title, he is a native of the bayou country of Louisiana which might somehow explain his mix (his creole) of interests in the rhythms of language. When it comes to his fiction writing, "The Bayou Seven and the Time of the Walls" is the title of his as yet unpublished gothic novella of black teenagers thrust into 1965s Hurricane Betsy to battle for the soul of the civil rights movement

Chella Courington is a writer and teacher. With a Ph.D. in American and British Literature and an MFA in Poetry, she is the author of six poetry and three flash fiction chapbooks. Her poetry appears in numerous anthologies and journals including *Non-Binary Review*, *Gargoyle*, *Pirene's Fountain*, and *The Los Angeles Review*. Originally from the Appalachian South, Courington lives in California with another writer and two cats. For more information: <chellacourington.net>.

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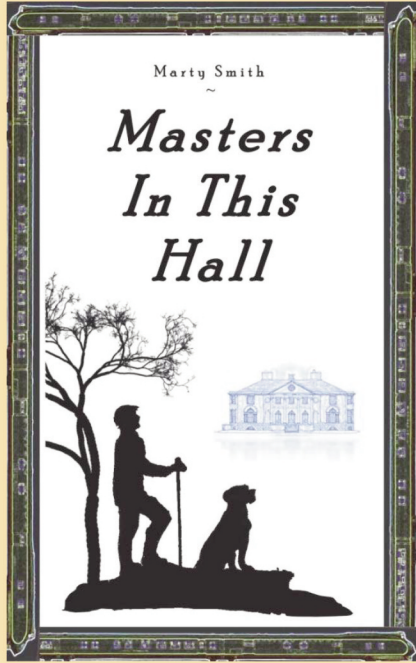
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