

The Blotter

October 2004

Doing 90 between the Jersey Wall and the Swerving Semi, 3:00 A.M.

www.blotterrag.com



Ladies and Gentlemen, The Blotter Magazine proudly presents the

Society / Anxiety

issue. In it, you'll find: Artwork by Jane Filer. Stories by G. Kay Bishop, Jamie Allen, and Marty LaFleur. Poems by Chris Frazier, Erik Pohl, and Michael L. Austin. There's no rhyme or reason to the decision to call this our Society/Anxiety issue, it merely is. And don't freak out: There are a lot of words and only a few pictures this month. You can handle it.

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 artist.

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 available, 5 for \$5. Inquire about availability
 by e-mail: ediot@blotterrag.com.

This magazine may contain typos or bad words

Items Worth Mentioning
 from the desk of Johnny Pence

Get Thee Behind Me, Satan!

The other day I was out walking and just after I made it through a fairly busy *crossroads*, a big black poodle (remember your *Faust*? A big black poodle is the first glimpse that we get of Mephistopheles) appeared in the intersection and stood in the middle of the crossroads tying up traffic. Then a big tough dude got dragged out into the intersection by his big tough pit/mastiff mix, who apparently wanted a piece of Old Scratch.

I kept on walking and didn't look back.

Hail, Fair Athens

We bring tribute of barbecue, vinegar, and NASCAR from our kingdom of Durham, NC! Y'all may have seen a few copies of *The Blotter* around in a few bars here and there over the past few weeks, but this issue marks our official release in Athens, GA. Thanks, thanks. Charmed, I'm sure.

Our editorial offices are now located in GA, while business offices are in NC. Just so you know.

So, I guess since I'm going to be calling Athens home, it might be worthwhile explaining to y'all what this magazine is all about. And since I've never made any attempt to explain it to anyone else in print, after more than a year perhaps I should.

What is *The Blotter*? People always ask me that, and it's a damn hard question to answer. I guess it's a literary magazine, but I'm the editor and I don't hold an MFA from some Yankee liberal-arts college, I haven't been published in *McSweeney's* or the *Paris Review*, we don't get any funding from the NEA, and I've never even met Daniel Foster Wallace, so I guess we have pretty shabby credentials as such.

Maybe we're an underground "zine," but we don't print political diatribes or write about bands, so that's not really it either.

So I guess it's a combination: an underground literary magazine. But then, we also do art spreads, comics, humor, found-object poetry, and other stuff too. If you have even half an idea to do so, please send in a submission! We welcome them and respond to queries. Believe it or not.

The Blotter is just for your amusement. It's free if you see it lying around, \$25/year by subscription. If you have the patience to navigate our Godawful website, there is a complete archive of back issues at blotterrag.com and we can mail you hardcopies of just about any back issue you'd like, five for five bucks. The magazine is designed to fit on most toilet tanks, on coffee tables, rolled up in your back pocket, and in your brain, where it will certainly eat its way out.

And maybe you shouldn't worry too much about defining it. Maybe I shouldn't worry too much about explaining it. Let's just be here now, huh?

—ediot@blotterrag.com

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Traffic Pioneers: An Atlanta Love Story from the Future

By Jamie Allen

April 12, 2014

This spring ATL morning, Dorothy and I carpooled again. But it was so much different from the times before. Fate moves in mysterious ways, and this day it moved in the form of a thirty-car pileup somewhere on the Atlanta interstate system, which ultimately served to shut down traffic everywhere in the city, including the point where we sat on the top end of I-285.

So tightly packed was traffic and so angry were the drivers around us

“.. We should go to the bathroom someplace else, but we should definitely just live in the car. You know?”

that we were unable to make our exit. The drivers merely blared their bitter horns as we tried to change lanes. Hours passed. We crawled approximately 20 feet. Dorothy managed to conduct a few business calls on her PDA. I sent e-mails from mine and spoke with my boss for a good hour. In fact, Dorothy and I got a lot of stuff done just sitting there, and no one at our respective offices seemed to notice that we were missing. Maybe they were missing, too.

The late afternoon came to us after another 20 feet. A man strolled by selling hot dogs. We bought two for a late lunch and two for dinner. Another man came by selling canned beer and coolers; we bought a six, but

promised not to drink while inside the car because that would violate open container laws. (Since we weren't actually driving, there was no danger of driving while intoxicated.) We stood outside our car and sipped our beers. I called my car sitter and told her to pay a visit to Horatio; I wouldn't be home any time soon.

The sun faded to peach as it set below the tree-lined horizon. Dorothy popped open two new beers for us. I was thinking of how this wasn't so bad at all, that most of the

stress of being caught in traffic actually comes from having to be somewhere. But this day, for whatever reason, we had finally given up on getting to work or getting home, and with nowhere to be the stress fell away. It was like we were on vacation, right in our own town, right in the middle of the road.

It was at that moment that Dorothy looked at me and said, “We should just give up the rat race. We should just live in the car, on this interstate. We should work from the car, we should sleep in the car, we should eat in the car. We should go to the bathroom someplace else, but we should definitely just live in the car. You know?”

The Blotter Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

I am walking through a crosswalk with four people, like the Beatles on *Abbey Road*, when I'm struck by the fact that I'm dreaming. I decide not to follow them and to stand in the crosswalk and decide what to do now that I'm "lucid dreaming." A loud noise on the porch wakes me up and I'm terrified.

I was having one of those really mundane dreams about ordinary conversations and everyday chores and crap, then the person I was talking to said, "to hell with that World War III just started!"

I turned on the TV to find a map of the US with missile trajectories like in *Dr. Strangelove* or *War Games* or something blinking on and off.

We'd launched "conventional" warheads at "several civilian, paramilitary targets" in the U.S., at "command and control" sites in Japan, and at various buildings, factories, and whole towns throughout Europe.

I was not at all surprised or anxious, and was resentful that I'd been distracted from my chores.

—S.K., Hillsborough

I am in a courtroom sitting at the defendant's table with the Hilton sisters. The judge asks why we are here, and the DA says this case involves something improper. Immediately there is a commotion in the courtroom. A uniformed officer comes to the table and leads us out of the building. I ask if I have to go along too and the officer answers that the whole party must go, as written in the "statute". When we get outside one sister says something that includes a comical malapropism. Then the other one asks the officer if he is taking us to see the "statue."

—R.G., Raleigh

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterag.com. If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

It sounded crazy. But was it? Or was it crazy to fight the flow of too many cars on too little road, every morning, every night, until it's too late to realize that your life has been one long struggle down one never-ending, traffic-addled road? Once, in college, my mates hatched a plan to

take a road trip at 3 A.M. We all went along, giddy with the adventure it might bring. I felt the same sensation when I looked in Dorothy's eyes. In all the times I had given her rides to her work — what did she even do for a living? — I didn't know she had this in her.

"So what's stopping us?" I said.

"Nothing," she shrugged, before taking a swig of beer.

And so our adventure has begun. We are throwing caution to the wind and living in my car. We are circling the ATL perimeter of I-285 like stars swinging round and round in a very, very slow-moving galaxy. We will see the world of Atlanta from our windows; we will discover adventure from our seats. We will sing to the radio and keep in touch with everyone via e-mail and cell and the wild cry of the free. Wish us luck.

July 5, 2014

Boy, the fireworks show at Stone Mountain is really nice. I was afraid we might not be close enough to see it, especially calculating our travel pace of 112 yards per day, but you could even hear the tiny pops of explosion with each color burst.

Everyone set up camp on the hoods of their cars. The night was clear yet humid. Children chased each other in a game of hide-and-seek between cars in the 285 lanes. And Dorothy and I finally kissed. I never saw her. What I mean is, when I used to carpool with her, I never saw the real her. She was just the corporate struggler, like me, wrapped in a business suit and the time-consuming responsibilities of her life. She's a marketing consultant, by the way. Just got a raise and a bonus; a real go-getter (from our car!). But since our adventure began, her hair has come down

and her eyes have lit with a sign of poetic meaning. Sometimes, when she sleeps in the seat next to me at night, I watch her breathe, watch her soft face and open mouth against the dark interior, and I wonder how I got so lucky.

After the fireworks had cleared and everyone had gone to bed, we decided it would be best to retire to the car. Inside, we had amazing car sex (which always was my favorite kind). Everything is just going so well. Touring around Atlanta is at times like really traveling. For instance, as we passed Buford Highway over the course of two weeks, we had the best Chinese, Mexican, Mexi-Cali, Vietnamese, Cuban, Colombian, Sushi, Asian-Fusion, you name it. It was like traveling the world by our taste buds.

Even the everyday stuff is working out. We're always close enough to an exit to access Starbucks wireless with our laptops, and we also use those times to freshen up in the bathroom and visit the laundry mat. While passing the Perimeter Mall exit, we bought standard road-trip apparel. In the summer heat, Dorothy prefers to don a bathing suit top and shorts with flip-flops, and I go with a t-shirt and baggy bathing trunks with boat shoes. Several people have admired our clothing and playfully asked us if we're going to the beach. We always laugh.

"No, we're working!" we say.

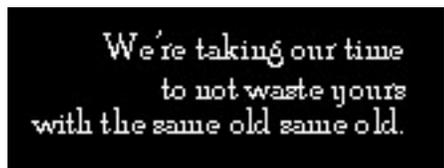
"Hey, us, too!" they say.

"You just have to quit fighting it, you know?"

"Yes! Exactly! So free!"

Horatio's doing fine. The sitter pays daily visits to him, and I send her a check via the Internet. To tell you the truth, I don't really miss the guy. He's an example of that little bit of added work each day, the kind that clogged

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my former life. Now, on 285, it's as if I'm sailing on a calm ocean.

October 27, 2014

The fall is so pretty on the south side of ATL! And Dorothy and I are so glad OutKast is back together. Their new album just smacks in the crisp air, mingling with the color-tinged trees and the smell of wood-smoke. If you walk past our car at just about any time during the workday, you will hear its low, cool sounds.

Have I mentioned that we've met the coolest people on this adventure? Our current lane neighbors, Hal and Junie, came over for dinner the other night. Dorothy cooked a nice autumn stew over the Coleman and we opened a bottle of wine, which turned into three bottles of wine and a great conversation on Modern Human and All His Self-Inflicted Limitations. It segued into The Possibility of the Automobile, and as we sat on our hoods I secretly saw us as auto pioneers, bumping down a new road of discovery.

Word carried from other cars to us that someone had spotted Andre 3000 working the 285 crowd, but that was just a cruel rumor. Late in the evening, tipsy, we went down the highway to Navigator's and danced. What a huge place! As Dorothy and I bumped and grooved in the cool night, our eyes didn't part. I think she knew what I wanted to ask, what I longed to ask.

What I will ask, I suppose.

February 21, 2014

Dorothy and I married on Valentine's Day, beneath an overpass outside the Vinings. Hal was my best man; Junie was the maid of honor. Our parents wished they could have been there, but we assigned handy-

neighbor Jeremiah the role of sending clips via video-phone every minute or so. It was like they were there.

And Dorothy was so happy that it was raining, because it is good luck, and because it would surely keep traffic from moving for several days. She wanted to honeymoon in the Vinings, you see. After the ceremony, we hiked in the cool drizzle to a quaint inn. We walked to the shops during the afternoons and had sex at night.

After a few days, Dorothy admitted that she missed home. We hiked back and found our car right where we left it, found our neighbors right where we left them. They greeted us with favor and we spent the rest of the day regaling them with our travels.

I'll tell you the truth. I never want this life to end. Sometimes, in the very early mornings, cars (driven by people who have not yet given in) will honk. Traffic surges ahead much too quickly, as if it might really get going. Sometimes we get apprehensive, thinking it might lead to a clear run, to our homes and actual places of work ... to our old lives. But then it stops and we breathe a sigh.

I don't miss that old life. I don't even miss Horatio, though Dorothy wants to pick him up and take him on the journey someday.

She feels the same as I; our life is here. Where traffic stops, we have begun.

Jamie Allen is an Atlanta-based writer and apparently organizes the occasional reading event in that fair city. I don't know if he has a real job or not. Heavens forbid, though, right?

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Under the Green Sun

by Martin LaFleur

Now, people say that Chicago is the Windy City, but I cannot imagine that there is any city windier than Oswego, New York. I can't rightly explain Chicago's claim to that moniker considering that in Oswego the trees grow sideways on account of the wind and the sidewalks are lined with ropes so pedestrians don't blow away in a sudden gust. I remember once sticking my head out the front door during a windstorm and a runaway milk crate missed me by a matter of inches. That's how bad it gets. It could be why there are so many bars in Oswego (more per capita than any other city nationwide). Besides the flying debris, there is nothing better than stepping out of a chill wind to grab a nice warm pint of comfort while old-time pop music jangles out of a juke on the wall. But the day I arrived there, there was no wind and it was hotter there than ever it had been recorded.

My car, being from Canada, was in no shape for the heat that day and knowing better than to let the radiator blow, I parked it in the downtown section so I could look around at what a small town in America had to offer.

But like I said, it was hot. So hot that the soles of my sneakers became a soft, gooey substance that pine needles, dirt, and candy wrappers clung to like static socks to a sweater straight from the dryer. It was certainly too hot to walk. I decided that swimming might be a better mode of transportation, or at least a bit more refreshing anyway, and as luck would have it I parked my car right by the river. What I didn't know at the time was that, while the surface of the river looked quite calm, a deep swift current ran underneath. By the time I surfaced I was thirty feet downstream from the place where I had jumped in.

I once considered myself to be a strong swimmer but now I am a bit more humble with my self-judgments. Like a fool I panicked that day and struggled so hard to get back to the edge that I wore myself out. I decided I had better just do the dead-man's float for fear that if I didn't then I would actually become one. Finally the river saw fit to spit me out into the great lake of Ontario, one hundred yards at least from shore but in smooth waters minus one pair of shorts. The river had taken my boxers, but at least I was in one piece.

Back on shore I decided that I was never one for convention and I set out, naked as a jaybird, in the general direction of my car. I quickly had to turn around though, not because of shocked faces and sidelong glances, but because the pavement was too damn hot for my young bare feet to handle. I figured I was due for a day at the beach so I spent the afternoon basking on the rocky shore of Ontario, swimming when I felt like it, thinking about the ominous nuclear reactor on the horizon, and skipping stones while

I waited for the sun to set. At least I wouldn't have any tan lines.

Now, I didn't know this at the time but Oswego ranks in at number eight on National Geographic's list of the top ten best sunsets. It is one of the few places where the sun will actually turn green in one last flash before it finally passes below the horizon. I don't know why it happens, maybe it is something to do with the atmosphere, or the angle of the sun in relationship to longitude, or even maybe the nuclear haze from the power plant, but I can attest first hand to the fact that it happens. It happened on my first day in Oswego and I thought that perhaps I had finally lost my mind. After sunset it was cooler so I left while the leaving was good.

Even though I was comfortable with my nudity, I worried that other people might not be. I wasn't fond of the idea of spending the night locked up in this sticky-hot, crazy-river, green-sun, freak town, so I decided that I'd better keep a low profile. I hid behind shrubbery where I could, and stayed behind buildings as opposed to walking down major thoroughfares, and I was doing good too, until I hastily turned a corner and banged heads with some unlucky character that happened to be walking in the wrong place at the wrong time. We both fell, and I'll never forget the three words that popped out of his mouth.

"Freaking dick, prick!" he said.

He was rubbing his head and I muttered some apology while trying to help him up.

"Get away, you freak!" he said. "You're buck-freakin-naked!"

I did the only thing that seemed sensible. I ran.

Marty LaFleur writes, "Born and raised in Canada, I moved to Illinois as a teen. I attended university in Oswego for several years and am now living in Chapel Hill where I work in computers."

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an excerpt from
Checks and Balances,
 a work in progress by G. Kay Bishop

It is a truth rarely digested that a single woman in possession of a small fortune may not be in want of a husband. However finely molded her financial profile may be, this truth is so unpalatable to the better part of the business community, that not one marketing strategy has ever been devised to address such a woman's actual views and wishes.

None of our more respectable advertising agencies will court her for fear of blunting the keen edge of the young blades who are busily carving out market shares in the gooseberry tart of prosperity. In any case, the well-known brevity of the general public's attention span permits no time to be lost in dawdling over one's breakfast. A fast, snappy campaign, preferably one capable of being printed cheaply on cereal boxes in primary colors of ink, must be sketched out and provided every day as grist to the general mills of commerce. Idle dreaming over the big ticket items that an unromantic woman might be willing to buy raises no one's interest rates.

Home and garden publications vainly strive to lure her attention with seasonal cake decorations and year-round diet tips; whereas illustrated sports periodicals openly mock her. The fashionable e-magazines, perhaps fearing the cut direct, simply refuse to acknowledge her existence. How is such a woman to be tempted to open the clasp of her purse? Perhaps she does not even carry a purse! No purse, no pocketbook-what if she does not, as the more horrid rumors have sug-

gested, even use commercially prepared deodorants? She is accused of brand disloyalty, gender-inappropriate purchasing habits, and every sort of statistically anomalous behavior. University-based industrial psychology departments hastily throw out any data they chance to collect upon her, shuddering at the eerie kurtotic skew she introduces into their nice clean graphical representations of Reality. Ad agency focus groups

The general disregard with which a woman of independent tastes is treated by industry may be heightened into somewhat of a particular nature, however, when she goes shopping for undergarments.

throw up their hands in despair, doubtless feeling that such a monster of nature might be capable of any economic enormity.

She might have a natural sweetness of disposition and the most generous heart in the world-her disposable income might be as free as a one-time special offer-yet she will still fail to attract the adoring, concentrated scrutiny that well-established firms afford to any prospective bride.

The preference that mercantile society shows for the married or the about-to be-married is generally thought to be a sign of healthy speculative interest in futures as well as in future customers (since the child-care industry has been known to boom now and then in a most spectacular manner). However, it may also be due to the fevered flush of degenerative distribution disease, which requires a

shocking number of malls as its outlet. As it happens, the only members of the global village who have any degree of certainty with regard to a modern old maid's custom are the mortuary and tax-preparation establishments. However little a wealthy woman may like to be classed with the dying and the about-to be-dying in terms of her attractiveness to the aristocracy of trade, her position has several advantages, not least of which is the comfortable ability to wear any kind of shoe that she likes.

The general disregard with which a woman of independent tastes is treated by industry may be heightened into somewhat of a particular nature, however, when she goes shopping for undergarments. Astounding quantities of scratchy lace and hot pink polyester satin are employed in the manufacture of women's intimate apparel. The frills, furbelows, and general inadequacy of their construction are proportional only to their price. Most of these apparitions of allurements are the pure, unspoiled product of man's benevolent, creative fancy-owing little or nothing of their composition to the precepts of nature. Indeed, these confectionary creations bear so little affinity to the human female form as to warrant suspicions of dadaism, wishful thinking, or (most likely) substance abuse on the part of the designers.

However, the inferior quality of the workmanship is generally held to be indemnified by the quantities pro-

And the paper copy doesn't have big red type over the pages



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two friends for tea
drink
dance of
the lunar moths, pie king



it turns out that from the early days of *the blotter*, i've been publishing work by students of jane filer. finally somebody said "hey dummy, since you're always publishing stuff by her students, why don't you check out jane's stuff?" and you know, i always meant to, but i could never get urls to work or i was never in the right place at the right time. in a very lazy way, it almost became a quest for a *Sangreal* of pretty, magical, insane art. then, just before i left north carolina, i saw some paintings hanging in the tyndall gallery that blew me away. i walked inside and asked who they were by. the lady said,

"why, that's

jane filer!"

-ed.

And the paper copy

doesn't have big red

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duced. An infinite variety of shoddy fabric, coupled with a narrowly mediocre range of taste, generates positive mounds of commonplace finery, freely supplied to retailers everywhere, upon whose generous counters this vast monotony of merchandise is displayed for the public's critical inspection and approval.

It was in the town of D-, in the county of Fairfax, where Ms. Charlotte Anna Penelope Darling consulted the opinion of her good friend, Ms. Gertrude S. Kingsley, on an item she had selected for purchase.

"What do you think of this one, Sam?"

"I think you could do a lot better. But I fear your only alternative in this barbarian gulag is the Sky-Mart Blue Tag special. But don't mind me. It's up to you how you choose to waste your money. If you do not mind having your soft tissues gouged by peripatetic underwires, by all means, carry off your prize. For the record, my guess is that it is marked down 75 percent for a damned good reason."

Anna hesitated then replaced the item on the table where she had found it, after carefully restoring its original neat folds. Before she had inherited her fortune from a deceased and much beloved aunt, she had been

in retail herself and knew a great deal about maintaining tidy clothing racks. Despite her brief experience in the juniors department, she had a stronger reliance on her friend's judgment than on her own-at least in such worldly matters as this.

The lingerie department of Billier's prided itself on the elegance of its offerings. The saleslady in attendance was excessively offended by this gratuitous comparison to a cut-rate warehouse located in the newest and rawest strip mall in town. However, she was a professional (in every sense

of the word) and showed none of her displeasure to a potential customer, however rude. This particular customer, as she and every other merchant in town already knew, was one of the wealthiest women in a five-state area-not that you could tell by the way she dressed. On occasion, to be sure, Ms. Kingsley appeared in public in an outfit calculated to strike stark terror into the hearts of insurance lawyers, but in general she dressed in the most casual, sloppy way imaginable for a woman of her age and substance.

Though her wealth was inherited, her family background was distinctly blue collar-a fact that she took perverse satisfaction in and occasionally

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exploited in her rare personal encounters with the New York financial in-crowd. She was British by birth, but her childhood had been spent in many different countries. In addition to her native intelligence and shrewdness (a legacy from both her parents), she had been educated by that rarest of professional teachers, a superb Swiss governess, and, as a consequence, had achieved a level of university honors of which she was justifiably proud. Fraulein Kloninger still resided with the family and was superintending the education of Mr. Kingsley's young brother, although she had retired from active teaching. She had cultivated in her willing pupil a strong regard for the refinements of manner—the little courtesies and ceremonies of human interaction.

A childhood spent chiefly in continually changing residence and the duty of adjusting to many different cultures had enforced the practical value of maintaining an elevated degree of formality in conduct. Unfortunately, this same childhood had also bred in Ms. Kingsley a fine, careless disregard for the niceties of dress. It was an odd combination of personal traits, made all the more disconcerting by a sharp, satirical turn of

mind, and a tongue to match. Yet despite all this, people were seldom really aggrieved by what Ms. Kingsley said, for they took it all as a mere effusion of wit, not as a serious criticism. In this regard she was something of a Cassandra, for she could seldom spark outrage where she intended to affront.

The lingerie saleswoman at Billier's was one of the few who took exception to Ms. Kingsley's freedom of speech, for she had been on the receiving end of it upon more than one occasion. She kept a judicious silence and overheard as much as she could, with the firm intention of retailing Ms. Kingsley's words among her fellow employees in the break room.

"I am by no means pleased with your U.S. American custom of addressing strangers by their given names."

"It is not my American custom," Anna replied, smiling.

"The American custom, then. They think it jolly; I think it uncivil."

"I am sure it is meant to foster a warm-hearted camaraderie, and to promote the idea of equality among all citizens."

"Whereas it actually fosters insolence and promotes personal

disrespect. However, I grant you that it creates a certain sort of equality: speaking to all as if addressing a horse or a bootboy lowers the dignity of everyone concerned in a perfectly balanced and impartial manner."

"Oh, come now Sam—would you really have people go backward in time—start addressing each other as Mr. This and Ms. That? What possible purpose would such formality serve?"

"Indeed, I would. It is not a going backward in time, but a going forward in propriety. And it would serve at least one purpose very clearly to check the little habit men have of patronizing and infantilizing women. I have observed many instances where men are addressed as 'Mister' and the women in the same group are called 'Betty' or 'Jane'. I suppose stripping women of their professional and social titles is the first move towards stripping them of their other personal effects."

"Sam, really! Do lower your voice. People are beginning to take notice."

"I say nothing of which I am ashamed. Let them eat cake—and choke on it if they like. If people will be so dreadfully uncivil to me, the least I can do in return is to be perfectly rude. It fosters mutual understanding and promotes equality."

"Oh, Sam!"

"You needn't 'Oh Sam' me—it is as true as a wheel. Women should insist on being addressed properly at all times and follow up infractions with the most dire consequences: No address? Then no undress!"

"Please, Sam!"

"Oh, very well. You may take comfort in hoping that this unattractive trait is not peculiarly American,

And the paper copy doesn't have big red type over the pages



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for I understand that Australians are equally crude. There you have it-if England will export her criminal elements to the colonies, she must expect criminal negligence to be cultivated abroad."

"The sun never sets on the British empire?"

"Precisely so." Anna's riposte made her friend laugh delightedly and turned off the rapid flow of Ms. Kingsley's diverting diatribe.

Ms. Darling's good nature and grateful heart could not fail to lead her into the jungle, red in tooth and claw, of non-profit organizations. Volunteers are hungrily sought out by every breed of good-doing animal; and unmarried women who have trust funds are, naturally, the preferred prey of all species. Ms. Kingsley, though well able to defend herself (being a sort of hybrid of skunk and armored dragon) in this vast field of human endeavor, had, through her association with Ms. Darling, been drawn in to assist one or two of the charities that Ms. Darling held most dear. Sam was not so déclassé as to actually perform volunteer work, but she sat upon the Boards of the few associations she deemed worthy of her time.

Anna's immediate supervisor (or 'coordinator' as she dubbed herself) was a well-turned-out woman of a certain age-the exact certainties of which she kept to herself. Mrs. Arielle Withlow was a tall divorcee with a strenuously maintained, elegantly trim figure. Her features were rather handsome than pretty, and firmly declared her Boston ancestry. She was always carefully made up, chicly coiffed and was very blonde indeed. True to her type and her calling, she

gave frequent dinner parties, teas and other types of social events, sometimes as public benefits, sometimes for private advantage. Anna was dutiful about attending the benefit concerts and \$500-a-plate dinners, but was beginning to shy away from the more intimate affairs that Mrs. Withlow often pressed her to attend. The uttermost promise of these ill-assorted gatherings lay in a total absence of sound, intelligence, and fury, signifying nodding.

Anna, despite her appearance of mildness and calm, was really rather nervous and shy in large groups of people. She also had begun to realize that Mrs. Withlow had ulterior motives in inviting Anna so frequently to her home. It appeared that she was arranging semi-blind dates for her friends and that Anna was being served up as an amorous hors d'oeuvre or, actually, a leftover, to the men Mrs. Withlow's friends had declined to date. Anna was not at all interested in dating anyone at this time of her life. From junior high school all the way through college, she had loved and been loved by a young man who suffered from cystic fibrosis. He died in the first semester of her senior year in college. She had never yet been tempted to form any serious attachment, though she had casually dated a number of men since then.

After dodging a fair number of these naturally abhorrent vacuums, upon the successive pleas of minor ill-health, previous engagement, preparing to go out of town, and just-too-tired, Anna's market of excuses was finally cornered and Mrs. Withlow was closing in for the kill. The very next party was to be tomorrow night. Would Ms. Darling be so

kind as to favor her and Mr. Keith (Mrs. Withlow's current flame) by coming to dinner? No? Well, then could she attend later in the evening? She could bring a date if she liked, it was a very informal group. Oh, she was so glad! Mr. Keith would be delighted to see her again, he had scarcely had a moment to talk with Ms. Darling the time she visited. There never seems to be time enough to have a real, old-fashioned conversation anymore, does there?

In this exigency, Anna recollected an occasion when she had been beseeching the necessity of attending yet another one of Mrs. Withlow's drop-deadlier dull divertissements and Sam had expressed a willingness to rescue her from the solemn festivities at a moment's notice.

"Just Bunbury it, Anna," Sam had said. "Tell them I developed an acute attack of *Anatidae viridia* and I asked you to come and soothe my fevered brow."

"Very well. But what is *Anatidae viridia*?"

"Green goose syndrome."

Anna smiled with a less strained expression and accepted Mrs. Withlow's invitation with a more natural grace than she could otherwise have achieved.

She called on Sam as soon as possible to enlist her aid. Sam only answered her phone at specific times of the day and week, and Anna wanted to be sure of her help.

"Alas! But I must be in the public eye that very evening. I am to introduce Dr. Brotersen at the kickoff of the lecture series. 'Tis a far, far Broter thing than I have ever done. Will I not shine with reflected glory? Tra la!"

Sam struck a pose of mock magniloquence. Anna's face fell.

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"But see here, Anna, don't worry. If I can't haul you out of the line of fire, at least I can go with you into the den of iniquity. Or is it a vortex of Dissipation? Or a rabbit hole? Or a Black Hole of CalcuLatte? Into the Jaws of Dopes! Poured the Four Hundred!"

"Do stop your eclectic ejaculating and help me out here!" Anna pleaded, laughing in spite of herself.

"Hee, hee! Don't fret, dear friend. You shall dine with me and then we will call Mrs. WideLow—"

"Withlow."

"Mrs. Swinglow Sweet Chariot—is she not the one who looks like she has been the victim of a hostile takeover? Yes, I thought so. We will call, or rather you will, since I have not been introduced, and you will ask her if I may join the Galas of Gloom by gliding in upon the train of your gown. A literatively yours, Gertrude S. Kingsley, equestrian esquire."

"She said I might bring a date."

"Yes, dear child, but I do not wish to be classed as your date. It not only gives people the wrong idea about my sexual orientation, it gives them a glorious handle for gossip not dissimilar to the handle that Nonconformists are always in search of. I have noted many similarities between the two religions."

"What two religions?"

"The Gospel of Gossip and Nonconformist Evangelism."

"Sam, you are totally absurd."

"True enough. But I am also punctilious. Call please."

"Very well."

Mrs. Withlow's voice was of the carrying sort that does not require a handsfree set to be easily overheard. Sam listened with no little amusement as Anna held the receiver far

enough from her ear to avoid being deafened in the noble cause of civility.

"Oh! Dining with Ms. Kingsley! Why, yes—of course! She would be most welcome to join us. I cannot express my gratitude warmly enough. I am so looking forward to seeing you and would be most happy to make Ms. Kingsley's acquaintance. Please do come by as soon as you conveniently can. Thank you. Very good of you to call and let me know."

**"Not evil, Anna.
Dreadful perhaps. But
not evil."**

This welcome was so effusive and surgingly gracious that Anna had the distinct sensation of being soaked in a warm spa bath. She wondered if she had misread Mrs. Withlow's intentions all along. Perhaps she had been angling to get her hooks into Sam the whole time.

She expressed her misgivings at once.

"Oh! Sam! What if this is exactly what Mrs. Withlow wanted me to do—to drag you to one of her parties. You said you were not interested in meeting her."

"Ah! But I made a promise to you, did I not? 'A moment's notice' I said. I am inexorably bound to fulfill the terms of my contract and without demur. If I must be a martyr on the altar of true friendship, I shall at least have the consolation of knowing that my noble character is preserved."

"No, Sam. You need not come. It was my folly and I will not drag you into the mess."

"Too late, Ms. Anna! The engagement has already been made. I am now committed both to you and to Mrs. Whitlow's glutinous gaities."

"Glutinous gaities! Good heavens! Such language."

"That is nothing to what you shall hear when we are in company with said Mrs. Whatlow."

"Sam! You wouldn't!"

"Wouldn't what?" Sam's face was a cunning mask of innocence.

"You would not—you shall not—be rude to Mrs. Withlow!"

"It depends upon what you consider rude, I suppose."

"Sam, I have to work with this woman three times a week."

"I am fully cognizant of the implications. You need not fear-much."

"Sam! I will have to watch you like a cat at a mousehole."

In that deeply meditative attitude, you will certainly be rewarded twice over: Once in that you are likely to catch every nuance of the situation when I maneuver our hostess into providing a form of lively entertainment completely unprecedented in her limited experience of society, and second in that you will never be bored for an instant.

"Oh Sam! I am sorry now that I asked. I am sorry for everything!"

"Tsk, Anna. You worry too much. I am not going to damage your public or private relations with the good woman. I am merely planning to set a cost on my company that she may not be willing to pay in future."

"You are planning something evil I can tell."

"Not evil, Anna. Dreadful perhaps. But not evil."

G. Kay Bishop is quickly becoming a regular on our pages. With any luck, Raleigh/Chapel Hill/Durham will soon see some of her "irregular" publications in print very soon.



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Para Isidor

Near Isis, where she is searching missing parts,
 pieces of her husband's music, I hear fizzy pop,

the kind which seltzers its way into you,
 dissolves, never was there. She's all in purple,

the royal dye, and gleaming in moonlit silver,
 two horns crescenting from a single stalk;

queen of the night, marked with indelible ink,
 only I know where you will not find the last piece.

Blinded by Erik Pohl
Gaze of Sphinx

A poem missing parts lies face downward,
 unread and lost. It's "Blinded Gaze of Sphinx",
 a circular, meandering maze of words.

So you won't hear what this shy poet thinks,
 and see inside the whirlpools of his eyes,
 the darkened eyes, what visions still remain,

he left this winding eddy where it lies:
 reciting riddles, landscapes of a mind,
 and all concentric paths they spin around,

until they never reach inside your heart.
 The center could have held him, were it found,
 the whole within the vortex, at its hearth,

two arms, a shock of hair, a face, its lips:
 without them may the world outside collapse.

Smoking by Michael L. Austin

Flick the switch
 for fire.
 Wood on my lips
 to smoke.

Pull it in.
 Hold it there.
 Keep it down.
 Close your eyes.
 Lift your chin
 Let it go
 slow,

smoke rolling,
 sinuous,
 creeping,
 gliding, through the air.

Tendrils grasp inside,
 relax.
 Wisps in my eyes,
 glaze.

Light it again.
 Pull it back.
 Lifts your body,
 almost there.
 Full up again.
 No more pain.

Let it go.
 Refrain, over and over:
 Inhale.
 Hold.
 Buzz.
 Exhale.

Erik Pohl says he used to get published all the time in lots of different journals, but he quit for a while and then submitted to us. I trust him in that; why would he make it up?

Chris Frazier comes to our Serious Literary Events at Branch's Bookshop right often. He reads stuff that he cuts out of his notebook and then tapes into the current copy of *The Blotter*. That's hilarious.

Michael L. Austin was about ready for autumn to come when he sent us this poem. Poor feller had gotten tired of the heat.

the odyssey of thought
by Christopher Frazier

Why does one person call up another
years later?
After the Dear Jane
and the Pomp and Circumstance;
after the sorority luncheons and sit-ins,
and the peace before the war;
after the media was thought to be a good translation,
after experimentation was broiled salmon
in a lemon dill sauce and marriage
was sturdy and boiling like a mossy stone.
And even late still,
after the body was forgotten by its caretaker,
and the mind was washed in tidal rue;
after the mailman became threatening
with his tall socks and his discontent; and information
crowded the electric sirees?
Now, after all this, could one person
call up another years later
(as if memory were collecting his fee)
and ask forgiveness
for that moment at the lake, or outside the window
on a roof, or in the café bruised by shadows –
that moment
when life took in a breath and then collapsed
and emotion was likened to a priest
and a prison guard?
Will the apology be refused? Can it be?
Does the breath go with the voice
and love sink further into the stomach?
Or does the odyssey of a million thoughts
between two lives
warm the remembrance and fill the lungs?

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Also at Branch's in the near future:

Oct. 9, 3:00 PM Alexander Blackburn—*Meeting the Professor* | Oct. 14, 7:30 PM
Elizabeth Trinkaus—*Conversations on
Success.* | Oct. 21, 5:30 PM Courage
Night: Breast Cancer Awareness
Fundraiser w/ reading from GERALYN
LUCAS' *Why I Wore Lipstick to My
Mastectomy* | Nov. 18, 7:30 PM Michael
Leahy—*When Nothing Else Matters:
Michael Jordan's Last Comeback* | Nov.
20, 3:00 PM Silas House—*The Coal
Tattoo*

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but you didn't buy it.

Too bad, because *The Blotter* is read by about 5,000 die-hard fans in three states every month.
Oh well. Instead, here's a picture of a weird yellow tomato I grew last year. It was delicious.