

The Blotter

Magazine
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We Eat Cold Eels and Think Distant Thoughts

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July 2005



Special for-no-good-reason 24-page issue! Our first ever!
Get Ready to Lose Your Mind, Because It's 150% Pure Blotter.
Art by Jemima Boncales. Stories by Garrison M. Somers, Robin Macklin, and Tomi Shaw. BBQ advice from Terra Elan McVoy. Let's see, What Else ... Oh. Poems by Greg Brown, Chris Fox, Isai Jaimes, Marvin Brown, and Michael Gaspenny. Plus the Dream Journal and McKenzie's "Sinister Bedfellows."

The Blotter is:

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Cover motto is a quote attributed
by Stanley Crouch to early 20th-
century heavyweight champ Jack
Johnson in Ken Burns' *Unforgivable
Blackness*. It's worth Googling.

Cover art: *Pop Green Woman* by
Jemima Boncales.
For more, see pp. 8-9.

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*This magazine may contain typos or
bad words*

Items Worth Mentioning
from the desk of Johnny Pence**What Does Johnny Want?**

Ever since we started planning out *The Blotter* around
Christmastime '02, I've had this itch to keep the readers involved. We
get plenty of submissions, oftentimes too many, but not everybody who
reads this magazine is a writer or an artist. I still want you to feel like
you can contribute to the sixteen pages of weird stuff we put out each
month. Y'all are always welcome and encouraged to send your dreams
for the Dream Journal, but I'll be the first to admit dreams are weird
and personal and hard to remember.

So maybe that's not your thing, but here are some topics I'd like
y'all to e-mail us about:

Pictures of you wearing a Blotter T-shirt doing something apeshit.
"Apeshit" is admittedly relative. You could be striking a dorky pose at the
lip of the Grand Canyon, riding an elephant, mooning a politician, or
competing in a Mixed Martial-Arts cage match. If your face is in the pic-
ture, we'll assume you don't mind us publishing it. If some other body
parts are in the frame, we *might* have to blur them out.

Pictures of your exceptional vehicle. Ever since the beginning I
wanted to do a "reader's rides" piece like you'd find in any gearhead
magazine. Your exceptional vehicle can be any number of wheels, in
any shape from mint to duct-taped, good or bad. Cars, trucks, motor-
cycles, scooters, bicycles are all welcome. Whatever. Here are some
adjectives and adjectival phrases that might describe the kind of "excep-
tional vehicle" I'm thinking of: *art car, rat bike, daily driver, hoopdie,
rustbucket, streetfighter, hot rod, hearse, restoration project, basket case,
Edsel, heap, etc.*

No, but Seriously,

Maybe you missed it last month when I wrote in this space that
we're looking for ways to raise money so we can start publishing books.
That's okay. I won't get mad because you missed an issue. We're all
busy. But really:

We are looking for ways to raise money.

Hint, hint. The website has a "donate now" button if you want to
just give us money, but maybe you'd like to offer up your field for a chili
cookoff benefit, offer your band to play a benefit gig, offer your expert-
ise throwing \$500-a-plate black tie functions and a list of high-roller
arts patrons or something like that too. See that e-mail address down
there? I'd love to hear your ideas.

Watch OUT!

Don't let kids or Christians see Jemima Boncales' art on p. 8.
There's a naked lady in one of the pictures. It'd probably be better for
everybody if you just burned this magazine right now.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

Painting with the Boys

by Garrison M. Somers

In stately, genteel Charleston, the June sun stares down in a white sky. I have aluminum foil taped on my bedroom windows, as I have heard that Elvis does, so that no errant rays can leak in and interrupt his well-deserved rest. My small table fan oscillates, its hum rhythmic and somnolent. Outside, the humidity is choking, and tourists roam the streets and alleys. How terrible. For centuries no self-respecting student has remained in town at classes' end. Nor would I if I could, choosing instead to slip on Birdwells and escape to Folly for midmorning surf and ocean breezes. I smile.

The alarm clock goes off. No, I quit. This morning, I quit. Heat is bad on both paint and painter. House painting. Climbing up and down a ladder carrying buckets. What crime have I committed?

Mom comes in.

"Get up!" she says, and I do because my crime is that I am pathetic and home.

My sister drops me off on her way to summer school in her Rabbit. This is my first summer job, so I don't own a car. It is marginally less sorry-ass riding along with her and listening to her singing "Strawberry Letter 22" than walking all the way to campus.

"Nice duds," she smirks. She works nights waiting at the Pizza Inn in a striped puffy-sleeve shirt

and polyester elephant pants and shouldn't talk. My baggy white trousers and shirt have spatters of paint all over them, like I've been sleeping under a tree full of magpies, and my hat looks apparently prison issue. This is a Pizza Inn from Hell uniform, I think. Slumping in my seat. I project to the end of the day, taking the bus home, sopping wet and swamp-rank, trying to ignore the summer kids with their boom boxes. How much do I hate disco? I can't begin to fathom that kind of math.

My Inferno. Only my third week. The supervisor is an old guy named Winston. You know the type: heavy around the gut, white hair cut short so it sticks up, skin that's all broken veins around his nose. When he's angry, he smiles. His breath smells like the later aspects of digestion. Still, he prefers to lean in close when he talks, or when he's showing how to cut in a corner of a windowpane. He painfully writes on a pad of paper in childish capital letters where he drops the paint crew. Does he forget? I wonder. He doesn't like college kids. My mantra: "It's a job." My parents have made it clear I may not hang out this summer doing nothing.

Winston drives the paint van, bent over the wheel. An unlit Kent hangs out of his mouth. He looks left and right like he's working a tour bus. It's

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

hugginkiss, classic rock drummers

In this dream, I had a male friend who used to be an airline flight attendant. Also within the context of this dream, it was customary for airline flight attendants to hug and kiss departing passengers as they thanked the passengers for choosing that airline and wishing them a good stay in whatever city.

My friend in this dream liked everything about this job except for the hugging-and-kissing part.

I dreamed I was at a party thrown by old hippies who I was trying unusually hard to impress. So for some reason I was talking with them and went into an elaborate explanation of why I thought [The Who's] Keith Moon was a superior drummer to John Bonham [of Led Zeppelin].

In reality, John Bonham is my favorite rock drummer by far, but it was important for some reason to lie to these old hippies. The problem was that my lie was flawed by factual errors and a general lack of conviction, so they immediately recognized my insincerity. To prefer John Bonham over Keith Moon was a terrible offense among these people, but to make matters worse I had tried to lie about it.

There was also some mention of Charlie Watts [from the Rolling Stones], [the Grateful Dead's] Mickey Hart, Ringo, and [beat jazz hero and Benny Goodman drummer] Gene Krupa, but they were not held in anywhere near the same esteem as Keith Moon. That's ridiculous, because Gene Krupa is the best drummer ever, with John Bonham a very close second.

—J. H., Richmond

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrag.com.

If nothing else, we love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

an old Econoliner, with a sliding door that doesn't slide anymore, but rattles in the open position. Pavement heat breezes in. I can feel the wet in the air already. How it can hold so much fluid and not be raining?

The van also has bad shocks or struts or something. It bottoms hard when we go over Charleston's cobblestones. Rome sits shotgun. Mose and Deacon are back here with me, squatting on paint buckets. We lean with every turn for balance because there's nothing to grab that won't fall over if you pull on it. Mose and Deacon taught me what to do the first time I went over a bump and bounced my jewels hard on the lid of the paint bucket. They didn't actually say

anything about busting my balls, or how not to bust my balls, but I kept an eye on them and saw how they were perched so that when a bump came they lifted off into a squat, taking the weight off their backsides. Now, I imitate them at each jolt of the old paint van.

Frat Row. One same-looking, Charleston-Row-House after another. They're empty of students, those pink-polo-shirted creatures who act like college royalty. I suppose everyone from Alpha to Omega is home now or visiting Europe or whatever it is that young men in lime-green Dickies and penny loafers do. This permits the paint crew to come over and slap on a coat or two.

"Rome" is short for Jerome. He's big and dark and keeps a toothpick lodged between his front teeth, talking around it when he has something to say. His face is round and clean-shaven, with a perpetual smile that doesn't show up in his eyes. He smells like coconut, the scent of lotion he spreads on his arms and neck to keep from blistering in the Charleston sun. He's the head of the crew, the one Winston tells what to do when we get somewhere. He hands out the assignments.

Mose and Deacon look like they could be twins, except that Mose has a full head of hair and a long, strange goatee beard and that Deacon is as hairless as a baby. Last week I asked Deacon

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if he was named for Deacon Jones, the old L.A. Ram. Mose started cackling, his teeth as sparkling white as he was blue-black.

"He talkin' you, Deacon," Mose poked at Deacon with a long yellow-nailed finger. His cigarette waggled and spilt ash from the corner of his mouth. "You tell college boy whatchoo name mean. Gone, you tell!" I fought off the urge to squint as I tried to keep up with the conversation; the two men laughing at me and at each other.

"It ain' Deacon. It deekin'!" Deacon said firmly. I tried not to frown. What did that mean?

"Ol' Deac get mo' den he share. He deekin' them skinny wimmin day an' night an' day again," Mose was giggling now, all tied up and squeaky. He and Deacon were jabbing and slapping each other like little boys. I went red, as much from enlightenment as stupidity. Deacon and Mose laughed at me and started slapping my back. I looked over at Rome smiling his quiet dark-eyed smile. From then on, they busted on me, too, nudging me with sharp elbows when I did something stupid, same as they did each other.

Here's another bad part. Row houses are three storeys tall. The longest ladder on the paint van is 30 feet, three extensions of heavy aluminum. It must have been expensive or perhaps it's hard to replace because it's old and bows in the middle when you climb it. Rome sets the footing ten feet out from the side of the house, so it almost bumps against the

foundation of the house next to us. I'm not fond of climbing a ladder. I'm terrified climbing a ladder with my hands full. The guys on the crew don't seem to mind it; they have balancing skill that comes from practice. Up I go with a bucket of paint and my roller in one hand and a flat in the other. The flat hooks to a gizmo on my ladder so that I can pour paint into it and use my roller to spread the paint on the side of the house. Rome is ten feet away from me on another ladder. He has a fat cutting brush to daub paint into the spots where rollers can't reach. The house is lapstraked clapboard, so there's a lot of cutting to be done. My brush is down on the ground, next to the lid of my paint bucket, instead of in my back pocket. Crap. I'll go back down for it but not right now.

My knees, leaning against the ladder, immediately hurt like they do every day. But they are swiftly outpained by the insteps of my feet. My Chuck Taylor low-tops, frayed and paint-spattered, bend unnaturally and painfully around the rung.

"Wrong shoes again," Rome says to me. He says this each morning, as he goes up a ladder. The appropriate shoes, he demonstrates, are heavy leather brogans with heels, to keep from sliding off the thin ladder step. I shrug without replying because he is right and there's nothing to say. He slathers his brush in the cream-white paint and slaps against the side of the bucket. Then it moves surely under the

edge of the clapboard, not so wet that the paint dribbles, just wide enough of a line of color that rolling will complete the coat. We don't talk after his initial observation because Winston—who after dropping off ladders, paint, brushes, rollers, tarps, a small thermos of water and some cone-cups, scribbling the address and driving off in his van—sometimes returns surreptitiously to see how we progress. Just to make sure that no one is, as he likes to say, grab-assing.

Here's another bad part. I gotta go. Every morning for most of my life, I woke up, wandered around in a daze, had a glass of something to drink, juice, milk. Something to eat. After a certain amount of internal combustion, I have always had to go. The current problem is that this doesn't jibe with my work schedule. Not to put too fine a point on it, here I sway at foot 24 or so and it's hot and I'm thirsty and I have to take a dump. A sad combination. I don't know how long I'll last before I must find a quiet place.

"You in 'Nam?" Rome's voice is whipped butter. A lot of air and very smooth. I look over. He's leaning around the ladder, reaching, doing circus tricks as he daubs the paint. I don't know what he meant by that so I look at him without replying. "You over in 'Nam?" he clarifies, somewhat.

"No. I was too young."

"Yeah, yeah," Rome says, as if making fun of me. I look over again, but he's not. He's just emphasizing. Maybe that I was

Submit

The Blotter Needs and Wants Your Stuff

We prefer e-mail submissions in all cases, and they go to mermaid@blotterrag.com. Other arrangements can be made; see contact info in the masthead.

Send us:

Short prose (stories and nonacademic essays),
Poetry,
Photojournalism/-essay,
Journalism that goes beyond or beneath what you might find elsewhere,
Comix, and
Fine art that would reproduce well on this type of paper.

Guidelines and Administrivia:

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Do not send original work of any kind! Your submissions will not be returned.

Lo-res images may be attached to e-mail submissions, but keep e-mails under 1 meg. Hard copies and CDs can be mailed, but call or e-mail first for details.

WORDS:

Send text in virus-free Word .docs, Rich Text Format, or in the body of an e-mail. We will not type anything for you.

IN ALL CASES:

Try to send stuff that is somehow resonant with what we have already published.

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too young. Maybe pride in the rolling he's doing—he's finished his cut work and has the brush sticking out of his back pocket alongside the big comb that he occasionally fixes his hair with—fussing it back into place and stuffing it back under his white painter's hat.

"I was too young, too. Lot of boys too young," he says. Again, I'm not completely sure that he isn't mocking me, but I'll lean towards the idea he was just commenting that there were too many young men in the war.

My arm is tired, and my bladder and bowels are both full now. This just sucks. But Rome goes on.

"Twelve mont' I was there, you know? Hot like this all the time. Spend all my time on point, 'cause niggers on point.

Not just black niggers, but white niggers, too. S'pose you nigger, you go on point. How it is. We go out and come back. If you bring ears you get beers," Rome says. Then he stops. I can't tell if it's because he's on a particularly difficult part of the house wall or if he's just stopping. This is more talking than he's ever done with me before. What is a white nigger? I don't ask. Glancing over at him, he is looking at me, waiting for something, anything. I realize that this was his exclamation point, his punch line, said to make sure I was listening.

"Ears?" I ask.

"Yeah, ears. Cut 'em off and bring 'em back. Turn them in for beer by th' case. I'se so thirsty there, I drink all the time," says Rome. "Wore ears around my neck on a shoe-cord. Keep 'em,



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trade 'em. You know." No, I don't know. But I'm thinking. Damn.

High part of the wall is done. It's time to come down off the ladder to do the lower half. You can use long-handled rollers below. I climb deliberately down.

"Scare the gooks, too, finding they men without ears," Rome says next, after pouring new paint in our rolling flats. We're almost out, and after this we'll have to wait for Winston to bring more.

"But they still fuck all the time wid us, so we catch this one and string him up in a tree, alive. Hanging with rope around him, hands behind his back. No ears, though. He howling, 'cause if anyone try to take him down, we shoot his ass before they can. He yell for a day or so, then stop. We was gonna cut him down after, but then someone shoot him 'fore we could. Maybe one of us, maybe one of them. I don't know." Rome is kneeling, and I am staring down at him, my roller motionless in my hand. He's working that toothpick around in his mouth. Then he starts rolling paint and says no more.

I picture Rome in an ear necklace, the bits of flesh and cartilage drying to black on a knotted piece of string, like hot peppers.

We're done here and out of paint. Rome has a spray of paint across his face, like snowfall in the night. He sits on the ground, leaning against the other house. Right here there's still some shade from our newly painted house, and Rome pulls from his shirt pocket one of those little cigarillos that look like brown cigarettes and lights it. I squat down into the tiny bit of shade. Oddly, I don't have to crap anymore, and I think I've sweated away all my piss, but I stink and my head hurts.

"Spent mos' of my time drunk," Rome says, puffing on the little cigar. It smells sweet and sort of fruity. He holds it out to me, and only then do I realize it's a bone. In a clever way, Rome has scraped out the cigarillo's original contents, mixed it with some grass and repacked it. I take a hit and hold it, handing the doobie back to him. He hits it again himself and, carefully tamping out the cherry, pockets the remaining

inch. Whoo! I don't know if it's the heat or what, but my sonar is instantly pinging. Yahoo! What a treat.

Rome grins humorlessly, his teeth like gravestones.

In a minute or five or so we gather all our junk, ladders and paint and rollers, and bring it to the curb. It's mid-morning and we can sit and take a break, not counting the one we just took. Here comes Winston. The dope has made me all cool and quiet and empty inside. The boss starts muttering for us to hustle, get a move on. Buckets go in the back, ladders up on the roof. Rome gets in his seat, and I sit with my feet hanging out the van door. Mose and Deacon are sitting on paint cans, soaked to the skin with sweat. They've been working outside, too. New spots of wet black paint on their shirts and hands say that they've been touching up the iron-work around the Cistern, the park-like area in the center of campus. Rome has a new toothpick in his mouth, some sort of sleight of hand causing it to appear.

We're over at another house, doing the porches and outside windowsills first. All brushwork, splish-splash. I piss in the bathroom as soon as Winston shows us what to do, gives us the paint buckets—interior flat, ivory—and drives squeakily away in the Econoliner. It's a girl's bathroom. I can tell by how clean it is after a year of occupation by college-aged children. Don't let anyone tell you that girls are as filthy as boys. They may be, but at least

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cont'd., p. 10



JEMIMA BONCALES



Jemima Boncales, also known as rubbishriot, also as ~<*_*>, is from somewhere like Durham or Chapel Hill. She confesses a short attention span and spends some time awake late, late at night.

Other Page: no title given for the one at the top, *Bham* for the one at the bottom.

This Page: *Window Pane* at the top, then *Wedding Portrait*, and *Pop Green Woman*.



they're offended by it a little.

I'm alone on this porch, starting at the far end—in Charleston, porches are on the sides of houses and extend back from the street. Mose works on a porch of his own below me while Rome and Deacon do windows on the back side of the house. Mose has a little radio that swings from his neck on a lanyard while he paints. It only gets AM, and the Gospel station he has selected must be pulling from Georgetown or Walterboro, because when he turns it fades into static. He's only catching half of every song. Andrae Crouch is trying to get the spirit, but the electrons aren't willing. That doesn't seem to bother Mose. If his singing along is any evidence. Mose has neither the inclination nor the ability to carry a tune. Perhaps if a gun were held to his head. Nevertheless, he slogs along.

Every once in a while, however:

"Jeez, Mose, you give us a break?" It's Deacon, down on the ground beneath the porches. His shouting sounds like someone who's been losing sleep for a couple of nights.

"What, ol' Deac?" Mose is a happy man, hard at work.

"You 'bout killin' me and Rome. Can you turn you down a notch or three?" Deacon stomps back around behind the house.

Mose is put off. He huffs and puffs under his breath, as Bebe and Cece ask for forgiveness with the Mississippi Jubileers. I can hear him slapping extra hard at the wall with his brush.

Lunch cannot come soon enough. The fun has worn off, and I've been sneaking bites of my sandwich. It's a hunk of ham between two slices of white bread. No mayo or mustard because they soak the bread and everything breaks up like Apollo

13. I've about five big Piggly-Wiggly deli-dills in waxed paper, but the joint has given me no taste for such saltiness. What I really could use is a nap. It's peaceful enough up here, and as cool as it is anywhere in the city. I clutch my wet brush and squat down against the rail. If someone comes up the stairs, I'll hear him and hop right up to work. I just need fifteen ticks or so. Honest.

Yet another bad part.

"What the hell!" More disgust than anger. "What are you doing, boy?" I jump. The wet brush goes skidding on the floor. Winston is looking at me, his face screwed up in a look I can't quite interpret. It's like he's my dad, all disappointed and everything, but with an added dash of disgust. I stumble all over myself, saying "sorry, sorry" over and over. Back to the wall, back to get my brush, back to the wall, back to the paint bucket to put new paint on my brush. Winston doesn't say anything else; just waves his hands at me and stomps off. I can smell him as he leaves. Hai Karate and dung. You'd think I would have smelt it coming. I couldn't have slept for more than ... three minutes? Idiot. Winston must have parked somewhere else and walked back to the house when I decided to catch some zees. Well, dope does kill brain cells, they say.

And then it's lunch. Only I've already eaten mine. I go downstairs to look around for a Coke machine. Mose and Deacon are spread out on the stoop. Rome is sitting under a

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tree on a folding chair he found in the house. Winston has driven away again, to some mystery task. Turns out there's no Coke machine within walking distance, so I squat in the shade.

"You student?" Mose asks me. Deacon looks over.

"You stupid? He student," Deacon says. He looks at me, "What you learn here?" Does he mean 'What is my major?' or 'What have I learned about life here?' I presume the former.

"English," I say.

"You learning how to talk?" Mose says, with a cackle. "Din't you mam and pap teach you?" He pokes Deacon, but the other man isn't having any.

"He learn books, fool Mose," Deacon lifts his chin at me in recognition. I return the chin-thing to him, with a smile.

For a while, everyone sits quietly. I'm looking up through the leaves of this swamp oak, at the dappling of the sun.

"What do you do during the school year?" I ask no one in particular.

Mose looks over at me, a question in his eyebrows.

"Paint. Whatchoo think, it just in summer?" he grins. I grin back because it was foolish. What they call a dumb-shit question. Of course they paint all year. I wrack my memory banks to see whether I can remember ever having seen them on campus during school. Painting dorm rooms? Touching up the oxblood-red side of the old administration building? No. Of course I didn't. To me, who only sees those things pertinent

to himself, they are nigh invisible. Just the help, staying out of the way of the students. Then Mose, who has let the previous question roll off, asks me one.

"Why you work painting? You folk rich, right?"

"No. My mom and dad were teachers. They're retired now," I say.

"But you live on beach, right? You mus' be rich," Deacon follows. I've already told them about how I go surfing after work, about my folks' house. It's difficult to explain mom and dad not being rich but having money anyway or me paying my own way through college. Instead of trying, I shrug.

But Mose plugs away.

"You gotta work in summer to go to school in winter?"

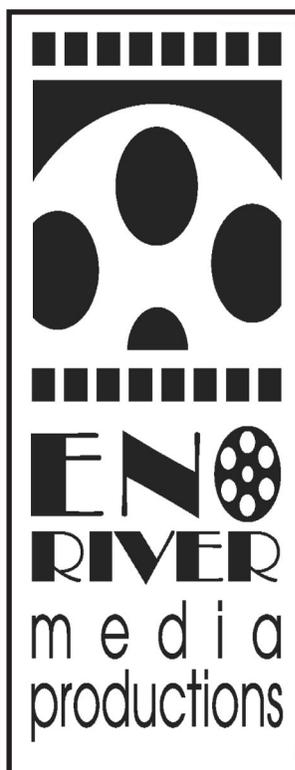
"Yeah, I gotta work," I say. What will help clarify? Mom and Dad badgered me into this summer job. I can't just lay around

the house. I didn't want to take summer-school courses. But then, instead of leaving it, I muck it up. "I'll make enough working this summer to pay for my books." That's true, but it doesn't clear up anything.

"Whoo! You make money at paint?" Mose says, teasing me and smiling.

"Five bucks an hour," I say proudly. I finally have to admit to myself that it's better than minimum wage, and I don't have to wait tables, and I don't have to get a haircut and wear a clean shirt and a bunch of other good things. I don't even see the slow transformation of smiling conversationalist to frowning painter that is coursing across Mose's face. Bad part dead ahead.

"You, Deacon. Boy make five dollar," he says to Deacon, who had stopped paying attention a bit ago.



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"Five dollar," says Deacon, ears perked. "A day?" He's shaking his head at my poor wages.

"No, fool. Five dollar a hour," says a deeply frowning Mose. I look at Rome, and he's looking at me. Not exactly frowning, but with a dark impenetrable glare. He already knew.

"B've don't make five dollar a hour," Deacon says, almost a whine. "Well, that some shit."

"You damn right," says Mose, angrily. He stalks back into the house, and in a minute he's upstairs, slapping paint on the wall of the porch. There's no gospel music. Deacon just sits there, his mouth open, trying to fathom how it is that I, who knows jack-shit about painting, make more than he, an expert in both the brush and the roller.

After a moment, Rome stands up. He walks past me.

"Le's go," he says coolly, and we go back inside.

I work a roller with the interior latex satin and Rome cuts the doorjamb and window sashes. It's quiet, and the air is heavy and still. One room is fin-

ished and we move the tarps into another. I glance over at Rome and he's working a new toothpick. Despite his story this morning, we don't know each other well enough for me just to start talking, but I'm confused and want to try and clear things up: something about work-study being subsidized, or how I didn't mean to say anything about what I'm paid. Or that I'm sorry that I'm not a white nigger. Stupid of me, though. Because who cares about the whys when the whats are so strange. What I want is for him to tell me is that it's OK and I'm OK for a white guy. But he doesn't.

The next day I am fired as soon as I show up for the shift. Winston shouts it at me, and I cleverly tell him to fuck off. The grounds administrator, who is a quiet man in a short-sleeved shirt and tie, breaks us up and tells me I'm no longer employed on the painters' team because I fell asleep on the job. But I think I know better, as I always do.

Anyway, summer wafts by. I apply for a dishwashing job at Pizza Inn but don't return the

calls offering the position. I find I can stay out of my parents' hair by going surfing early every day. Fall semester finally starts and I never see the painter boys again, or maybe I do, but they don't see me.

You might actually know **Garrison M. Somers** better as Garry Somers, a frequent contributor to these pages, a pathologically prolific writer, and a stay-home dad living in Chapel Hill.

Larry "mckenzee" Holderfield has traveled the world, taking photos, writing bad poetry, and falling in love. He now combines these interests in "Sinister Bedfellows," online at SinisterBedfellows.com.



Sinister Bedfellows by mckenzee



Bottom of the ninth,



score tied, bases loaded,



I really need to pee.



How to Have the Perfect Barbeque

by Terra Elan McVoy

First and foremost, remember that at all times—but particularly when one is hosting out-of-doors—a clean grille is not only a sign of your own sense of discipline and personal hygiene, but also an outward sign of respect and honor for your guests.

Fresh flowers are never a mistake. Contrary to popular belief, they do not have to be formal and fussy. A simple jelly jar of varying, colorful blossoms on picnic tables, kitchen counters, and in each bathroom makes an inviting and lovely accent.

A pitcher of white *san Agria*—green grapes and fresh pineapple bobbing among the ice cubes—is a bright, refreshing drink to have on hand. Prepare this at least four hours before guests arrive, preferably in a clear glass pitcher with a simple, curved handle. Wineglasses for serving may be chilled beforehand to your taste.

Regarding the guest list: Invite only those whom you truly enjoy and feel might enjoy the afternoon themselves. Your thrice-divorced, chain-smoking Aunt Clemence may prefer to visit your home during an evening meal on some clear evening in October, for example, preferably when the children are visiting your mother-in-law. The ex-partner

in your law firm who still harbors a grudge for being fired while you were promoted to Junior Partner—may be better met over Scotch in a heavily-populated hotel lobby.

Do not, under any circumstances, invite your daughter's violin teacher. [The one who confessed her lust for you last July and who, against your better judgment, in a moment of drunkenness (and perhaps sad nostalgia for your first fawn-haired lover, of whom you always think around major holidays) kissed backstage in December at your daughter's Joyeux Noell concert. (It was a sloppy kiss, you regret, and reeked of egg nog. You have always known you could do better, and wish many times you had another opportunity.)] When she does arrive (a confusion on the part of your wife, no doubt), on the arm of a linen-jacketed Italian twice your size and half your age, avoid her at all costs.

It is wise also to avoid having children present, including your own. When no babysitter can be found, here is where Aunt Clemence can be handy. She can occupy the boys and girls with stories of her days in the circus, and doing tricks for them with her false teeth.

When selecting music for the occasion, choose records that are uplifting and celebra-



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tory in tone. Avoid bands too jarring or harsh to the ear. Jimmy Buffet and Herb Alpert's Tijuana Brass Band are wise choices. Early Joy Division, White Noise, and Joni Mitchell are certainly not: not even if you happen to know the violin teacher loved Joni Mitchell in college. (No, not even the new album. Absolutely not.)

Do not be afraid of variety when it comes to grilling. Hamburgers, steaks, and sausages will of course be necessary. However, grilled eggplant, squash, asparagus, mushrooms and corn on the cob are not only healthful and delicious, but make one's vegetarian friends feel welcome, and are also extremely pleasing to the eye, especially when displayed on a well-scrubbed and maintained grille.

Any buns, of course, should also be grilled, though the decision to butter them or not beforehand can be made to your preference. Keep in mind this can be a nice, strictly-platonic and therefore extremely safe activity to do with the violin teacher after she arrives.

(Yes, licking butter off one another's fingers is playful and therefore only friendly, even if the Italian has difficulty seeing it that way.)

Exotic condiments are also a nice touch. Blue cheese sour cream mayonnaise, for example, or olive-garlic tapanade, can be prepared and chilled hours before, and set alongside the more traditional standards of ketchup, mustard, and relish in simple glass bowls. (Chopped jalapenos and pickled green beans are also always a lively addition.)

While grilling, be attentive to the coals, keeping everything at a hot but even temperature. Distractions of any kind should be ignored, including your wife standing suspiciously close to your ex-law firm partner under the low-hanging branch of the large magnolia at the rear of the yard, her slender foot making suggestive sweeping circles in the soft dry earth. Turn the meat and vegetables carefully. His hand at the small of her back and the girlish way she tucks her hair behind her ear

while giggling is not worth sacrificing the quality of the meal.

That tar-black sausage you dropped twice on the ground on accident? Dust it off and give it to your ex-partner, who clearly appreciates his meat well-done.

When it is time to eat, seat the children at a separate table, so that the adults may enjoy conversation together without rowdy interruption. Aunt Clemence will surely benefit from their youthful liveliness, so let her oversee the table, even if she complains that the seats are too low and will give her back pains.

During dinner, invite all guests into the conversation. Inquire about Fred's new lawnmower, of which he is so proud, even if he is a boring dullard who can't string two words together without pausing for breath. Ask Jeannette to relay the details of her charming Grecian cruise, even if you have heard them to excruciating detail. Others may appreciate her history lesson on the drachma, and her constant nattering will prevent anyone from noticing you stroking the violin teacher's toned calf with your bare foot under the table. (Be sure of course it is not the Italian's calf you stroke.)

Backyard games are particularly good for entertaining the inconvenient children, but are fun for the adults as well. Have several balls of varying



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size on hand, along with lawn bowling or croquet. Volleyball and badminton are also good choices, though may require more setup on your part, and can be known to cause unpleasant competitiveness in guests. This could possibly erupt in unfortunate outbreaks of violence, so be warned.

Should your ex-partner and the Italian pair up against you and your nine year-old daughter for badminton, do not show signs of anxiety. Especially do not argue every line call given by your wife, even if they are all clearly in favor of the other team. Neither must you throw your racket at your daughter when she misses a shot that she clearly could have made.

When your ex-partner backs up to return an extremely high, long volley delivered by you and trips over the stack of bricks you were intending to use to line the patch of hydrangeas planted three summers ago, do not shout out in triumph. Nor should you insist angrily that you were not, in fact, aiming for the bricks, as your wife suggests. Attend instead as a gentleman to the victim's injuries, applying heavy pressure on any bleeding areas (so long as no length of bone protrudes), until your wife takes over and directs you to notify medical professionals. The Italian may come in handy here if the victim must be carried to an elevated position on the living room sofa.

After you have stood in the kitchen for a sufficient amount of time to make your wife believe you have actually called an ambulance, return to the living room and announce that perhaps this is a good opportunity for everyone to change into their swimsuits. Do not look at the violin teacher when you say this, raising your eyebrows and gesturing towards the staircase.

Neither must you be tempted to meet the violin teacher as she is coming out of the second-floor bathroom in her shimmering aquamarine bikini. Though both she and you may be upset from your ex-partner's unfortunate fall, interaction with her is a mistake. Placing your hand against her hard, smooth, flat stomach, or leaning in to sniff her hair, even if invited, is likely a *faux pas*.

"Googling" your long-lost fawn-haired lover secretly in your study after kissing the violin teacher in the hallway would also be in bad form.

When your wife calls you downstairs with that tense tone in her voice, really, you must go back outside.

Another pitcher of *san gria* may not be a good idea at this point, but make some anyway. If there is no more pineapple left, tequila (preferably Cuervo Gold) will certainly serve as a good substitute.

Desserts can be brought out at this time also. Homemade banana pudding, key lime pie,

berry parfaits, or chocolate wafers with minted whipped cream appropriately chilled ahead of time are perfect for such an occasion.

When returning to the backyard, express relief upon seeing that your ex-partner is not in fact injured badly enough to be taken home, but is instead diving handsomely into your pool, looking quite Pierce Brosnan-ish with his slicked black hair and trim swim trunks.

Who has put on the Joni Mitchell? You are certain you left that blasted CD upstairs in your study.

Healthy play among the children is a wonderful sight. When they begin tossing chunks of their desserts in one another's hair and faces, do not

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interfere. In fact this may be a good opportunity to show your plucky daughter the "Monster Mash" technique you perfected in ninth grade summer camp.

If Jeannette insists on leaving in a huff after her sundress has been spoiled by a wayward glop of garlic-olive tapanade, let her go. More fun for the rest of you.

Sleeping on the couch tonight is not a bad idea. Therefore show no concern when your wife begins threatening you with it after you have tossed your ex-partner - all in good fun, of course - unawares into the pool.

Tiki torches and citronella candles make an excellent, glowing effect after dark, and can serve as deterrents to any unwanted insect pests. However they can also be use-

ful when chasing the Italian and your ex-partner out of the yard after they have ridiculed your too-clean grill and suggested that only men compensating for small appendages would place an eggplant on the coals.

Before she leaves with the Bangry, half-scorched Italian, grab the violin teacher on the ass. This will let her know in no uncertain terms that you mean to finish business at another time.

Shake hands firmly, and smiling, with everyone as they depart.

The tequila you left on the counter would now be a good idea. Take a full and healthy swig. Offer some to Aunt Clemence as your wife ushers her out the door, both of them glaring at you.

Bedtime is for babies. Insist your daughter remain with you, cleaning up the entire mess (including fishing out the soggy slices of key lime pie now floating in the pool). Pretending that you are the evil pirate and she is the discovered stowaway-turned-slave girl will be a funny and educational adventure for you both.

If you are unsure, pass out immediately on the sofa as soon as your daughter is tucked in, preferably before your wife returns from escorting Aunt Clemence home.

Two days after your event, be sure to compose personalized, handwritten notes to everyone in attendance, thanking them for the lovely time and insisting you hope they will come to your next barbeque.

Terra Elan McVoy received her MA in Creative Writing from Florida State University. Her work can be currently be read in *Creative Loafing*, the *Chattahoochee Review*, and the online magazine, *Salt*. She is editorial assistant for the Duck and Herring Company.



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The Flame Game

by Robin Macklin

The fire was getting really big now. It licked hungrily at the walls like a kid with a fudgecicle in July. I asked Amy to pass the marshmallows and took another pull on the wine. She tossed me the bag and fished a joint out of the pocket of her baby blue short-shorts, lighting the tip of it with a smooth and thoughtless grace—definitive wu-wei.

I picked up what remained of the TV's rabbit ears and stabbed two marshmallows with it, then shoved them into the flames shooting out of the box of papers at my feet. Rather quickly the

marshmallows caught fire as well and turned to black ash on the outside, gooey in the middle, just the way I liked them.

We sat in silence for a year or more, the only sounds being the sticky marshmallows sucking at my teeth, Amy's Smoky Joe cough, and the quiet explosion of the TV in what was once the living room. The grass was getting damp and seeping into the back of my skirt, but the fire and wine and pot made me feel waterproof. There was another explosion from the back of the house, loud enough to echo past the hill.

Amy cocked her head and thoughtfully took a drag on her joint, "Do you think that was the?..."

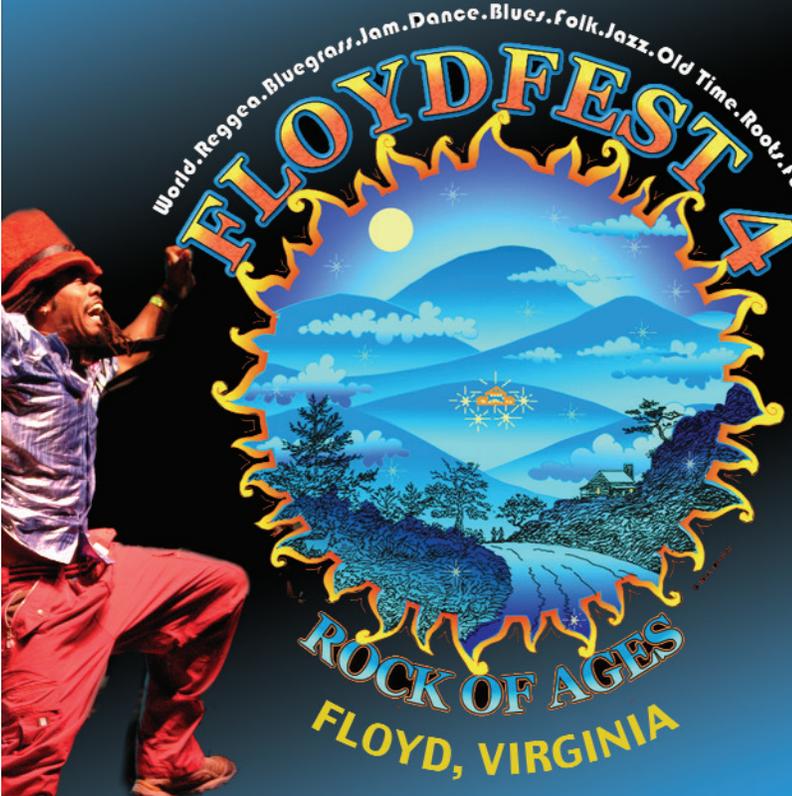
"Water heater," I finished her thought and lit a Tareyton. The last of our kindling lay scattered at our feet, and I looked it over. "We might as well throw the rest of this shit in."

Amy was staring at the house again in a melancholy daze. Her dark blue eyes were tinged with red and I couldn't tell if it was caused by the burning house or the burning ganja, but it looked painful to me all the same. My eyes never turned that hue. I

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studied her studying the fire until I got bored and restless. With a heavy sigh, I stood up, yanking my skirt back down to where it belonged- damn thing never stayed put- and surveyed the scene. I tossed the wine bottle toward the house and it sailed in through a hole where an Andy Warhol once hung. It was a Chairman Mao print, a gift from that idiot Ray. I had hated them both, but now I felt nothing but relief. They were both finally out the picture so to speak.

My movement must've motivated Amy because she picked up an old pink Converse high-top from the pile and swung it by its tongue like a pendulum, letting go at just the right angle so it would spin white toe to heel in the air, reminding me of a peppermint, and landed in the flower bed, which was now nothing but flaming weeds. The shoe lace caught fire and we could soon smell the rubber sole as it melted.

"That was my favorite shoe," I mentioned, trying to pass the time, but Amy only shrugged, so noncommittal.

I picked through the albums

scattered on the ground. There weren't many left. I tossed aside Blood, Sweat, & Tears, Credence Clearwater, and the Byrds, finally settling on Cream. I reverently pulled *Live at the Fillmore* from its dusty cover. It smelled like stale hash and, inexplicably, chocolate pudding. I closed my eyes and began humming "Crossroads." I remembered Golden Gate Park, and acne pocked Ricky Lane who could never remember my name, the teeny townhouse on Ashbury where the floors all shifted different ways, and the night of vodka over her head before she jumped off the roof and fell on the neighbors' beagle, killing the poor bastard and breaking her leg. We left her in a puddle of her own vomit for about an hour to teach her a lesson about responsible drinking.

I spun the album on my little finger and put my left index nail to the vinyl, producing a screechy, scratchy noise unpleasant enough to appreciate. Amy coughed, serving as a reminder against nostalgia, and I stopped the spinning, grasped that beautiful piece of legendary music in

my right hand like a Frisbee and whipped it toward the roof. It smashed on the chimney, and fragments bounced hectically in the air and down the shingles. Then the gutter fell off.

The sun was mostly gone by now, and the sky above had turned a muted purple, at least what I could see through the haze of smoke and dust and ash. I gathered up the rest of the albums and flung them distractedly into the blaze. It wasn't as much fun now, but it wasn't a bad feeling either. I was hungry and just wanted to finish up.

"Do you have the letter?"

Amy opened her hand and I could see it crumpled there. I nodded and she stood. I grabbed the picnic basket and we stood at the edge of the fire, gazing up one last time at what remained. The roof was starting to cave and when it did the fire would lose a lot of its beauty.

"Okay, then." I sighed.

"Yeah." She carefully unfolded the note and placed it under the flame-retardant tarp we'd placed on the decrepit stone steps. We didn't know if they'd find it, but we'd done our part. I put one arm through the handle of the basket and the other through hers as we started down the hill. It was going to be a long walk back. As we reached the bottom, we heard the crash of the house falling in on itself. Amy turned and blew a kiss at it. I laughed, surprised that she suddenly felt sentimental and squeezed her arm. She squeezed back, smiling to herself, and we walked until dawn.



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No More Banana Bread

by Tomi Shaw

"Only those women get the good stuff," your husband says to you.

Twenty years ago when you looked into his eyes, the same eyes that look at you now, in them you saw yourself then. Now, they are the same eyes, but you don't know who is behind them any more. You know some things in his eyes: his work with computers, his fun at the bowling alley, his crises of women here and there, his motorcycle.

You're making dessert for the women's club luncheon, banana bread. He's kissed you on the neck, popped a nut into his mouth with a vigorous snapping of his teeth, and with coffee in an insulated mug has left for work. You think if he'd been paying attention he could see the rotten bananas in your eyes.

A week ago, you turned forty. The oldest came over from campus, the two youngest silenced their cell phones long enough to watch you blow out a milieu of candle flames. Your motorcycle man, who never rides anymore except around the track at the vintage bike show on that pristine shiny machine, gave you fuzzy bunny slippers and a bottle of Coty Musk, not realizing that you haven't worn musk since you stopped braiding your hair. He was too tired later to make love.

You can't be mad, can you? Maybe you can't, but mad isn't logical sometimes. Right now you

want to be as completely illogical as you can get. Right now you'd like nothing better than to do something totally unexpected.

For starters you don't want to make this God-damn banana bread!

But the batter is complete; it's just a matter of baking it now. The oven's preheated.

#

When you were younger, nightmares were premonitions. At three in the morning, the fright was cause enough to call up your favorite, closest cousin just to make sure he hadn't been blown to smithereens inside his hot rod during an illegal drag race. The silent screams that followed you back into the land of the conscious were reason enough to get into the car, drive across town to your son's dorm room and sit in your car until he came down for his 8:30 biology class. There has never been a reason to wake your husband to help you through one. He's slept through them all. Sometimes you wish you were a screamer. Maybe he'd wake up then, notice. But you never scream even when the car goes around a corner too fast and flies off the edge of a cliff. Never a sound as you find the dog cut to ribbons from a bowl of hamburger glass the neighbor who can't stand the man next to you fed him. Not the simplest noise at seeing your husband's severed head sitting on the hood of your car.

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#

In your kitchen at three am and shaking from the images of your husband's head cut from his body, you round up all the ingredients for the bread only the women get: eggs, oil, flour, sugar, vanilla, nuts. The bananas aren't rotten though. If you pop them in the microwave maybe? When they explode their insides all over the oven, you just have to cry. You just have to. Banana bread is the only thing you know how to make from something going bad. You don't even clean the oven before going back upstairs, drop your robe on the hope chest at the end of the bed and climb beneath the covers to stare at the darkened ceiling until you hear the coffee pot

start brewing, smell the bitter scent as it drifts through the air breezes in this old house.

#

When he comes into the kitchen for his coffee, there's a quirk of his eyebrows at the scrambled eggs, orange juice and buttered toast. It's been years since he left the house with a breakfast like this on his stomach. You can tell by the look in his eyes that he can't eat it, that he won't. He's not that person any more. He smiles, and it's patronizing. As is his kiss on your neck.

"What are the ladies getting today?" he asks, filling his insulated mug.

You shrug a casual shoulder, slip a fluffy bit of egg between your lips. It'll be good whatever it is;

you know. It always is. And today, unlike last week, you'll make it special. Extra special. And the women who get the good stuff, who want it, will love the bouquet you'll cut from your garden. And you'll love that they love it and whatever it is you'll create from eggs and butter, sugar and a touch of orange juice. And when that one soft voice speaks to you in whispers about the rendezvous place and time, this time you'll nod, saying yes to everything she's ever whispered in your ear. You'll smile pretty, and your heart will start beating again.



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Ethnically Ambiguous by Greg Brown

I am not 1/4 Cherokee, 1/2 Eskimo and 1/4 Persian
 I am not 4/5 Basque Separatist and 1/5 Indian Siek
 I am not 1/3 Sandanistan rebel, 1/3 Sicillian and 1/3 Tibetan monk.
 I am not from French Polynesia, French Indochina, French New Guinea,
 Quebec or France
 I am not from Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Pakistan or
 Afghanistan
 I am not from Botswana, Bhutan, Burma, Baghdad, Bangkok, Bangladesh,
 Borneo or Brunei
 I have never lived deep in the jungles of the Amazon or in Antarctica.
 I am Ethnically Ambiguous.

My name is Greg Brown
 and I am Ethnically Ambiguous.
 And my name serves to confuse you as well
 with Gregory, which is Irish in its origin, meaning:
 Handsome, Attractive, Intelligent, Witty and Charismatic.
 And then Brown that is of the German origin from the Braun
 which was changed around the time of the First World War
 by those Germans not wanting to be so, well, German.

But I am Ethnically Ambiguous and you don't give a damn
 about the etymology of my name,
 you just want to where I am from:
 California.
 Where my parents are from
 Father: Detroit
 Mother: California

I am Ethnically Ambiguous so that when I visit the Middle East
 or South America or Mongolia,
 and I get stopped by men with large guns and
 am asked " Where are you from?"
 My reply is this:
 Where do you want me to be from?
 What can I say that won't get me killed?
 You want me to be a Kurdish rebel.
 Fine, I'll be your Kurdish rebel
 but only for you and your AK-47 but for no one else,
 because I am Ethnically Ambiguous.

And on census forms and surveys and college applications,
 I check all the boxes for race.
 I get the best service from ethnic restaurants.

I am Ethnically Ambiguous,
 and people don't know whether to love me or fear me.
 Love me they might,
 Fear me they should.

Because one day
 everyone you know will be
 Ethnically Ambiguous
 just like me.

Tomi Shaw lives in Kentucky, late of the woods but now in the big city lights. She loves the sound of rain tat-tattering on a tin roof. Summer weekends finds her at the drag strip in a bittersweet-colored Mustang, cutting killer reaction times and putting guys on the trailer home. www.tomishaw.com

When not being a force of nature, **Greg Brown** likes to beat small children in Connect Four, checkers, and Candyland. This helps to stroke his fragile ego. **Greg Brown** is also certified in the state of North Carolina to assist nurses. No eponymous .url was given, but **Greg Brown** totally needs one, don't you think?

Chris Fox, an Aries, lives in Greensboro, NC and plays guitar for the political ghoul-punk band Crimson Spectre.

Marvin Brown says, "...young American recently from stint in hometown (HunterstowneUSA; New American Paradise) and now back in Asheville for month or two to work and see old friends/town before journey to Boise for undetermined amount of time ..."

Michael Gaspenny neglected to include a bio and I neglected to remind him. If you're looking for someone to blame, blame me.

Isai Jaimes, however, declines to send a bio. If you'd like to know more about him, you can ask. We'll pass a note along for you.

Love Poem (a.k.a. Area Code 666; SexSexSex, The Number of the Beast with Two Backs) by Chris Fox

Satanists chased us from the rave Friday night.
They wore featureless white masks
and referred to themselves as
"The Shadows."
We ran to the police station
but the cops were all Shadows, too-
arcane symbols, dribbled in pigs' blood,
shone on the station's walls.
Your parents
my parents
all of our friends and enemies
-Shadows, every one of them.
Even the two of us,
 in the pentagram of our five senses,
 in the chalk circle of our bodies,
 in the goat season of our love,
worshipped, in secret,
the Great Horned One
-just like Blake said-
with prayers like arrows pointing straight down.
So what the hell were we so afraid of, anyway?
Take off that featureless white mask
and kiss me.

Comrade by Michael Gaspenny

I live in the woods along the interstate;
 You know me; you flashed by yesterday.
 I saw you look away.
 I come to the clearing only on Indian Summer days
 When even the wasps are frayed and stunned.
 I am the one you will become,
 Head in the white-gold sun, feet in the leaves,
 Shadows rising above my knees.
 You know me. It won't be long.
 All my dogs are gone.

22 Ounces Olde Englishe by Marvin Brown

My guru told me
 I would never have to worry about money.
 He told me
 I would not care if the tomatoes were rotten
 things would get figured out in Durham
 and not to go home.
 I like Durham well enough
 home is in dispute.
 As far as the money thing
 that fucker lied.

"I sure do miss to fly again" -Wink by Isai Jaimes

To find a pronunciation
 alluring, open and free;
 an independence in the wind,

for hopes yet to be words,
 yet to be screen, yet to cocoon
 will not fall before the rain;

even when upon resembles its tears:
 the silken idea under a laurel leaf
 is a butterfly winking from her fragrant hair.

18TH ANNUAL BULL DURHAM BLUES FESTIVAL

FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 9, 2005

- BO DIDDLEY AND THE DEBBIE HASTINGS BAND
- BETTYE LAVETTE
- DUWAYNE BURNSIDE AND THE MISSISSIPPI MAFIA
- MATT HILL BLUES BAND

SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 10, 2005

- RUTH BROWN
- JOHN LEE HOOKER, JR.
- LIL' BRIAN & THE ZYDECO TRAVELERS
- DIUNNA GREENLEAF & THE BLUE MERCY BAND

6-11 PM / HISTORIC DURHAM ATHLETIC PARK
(Gates open at 5 pm / rain or shine)



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