

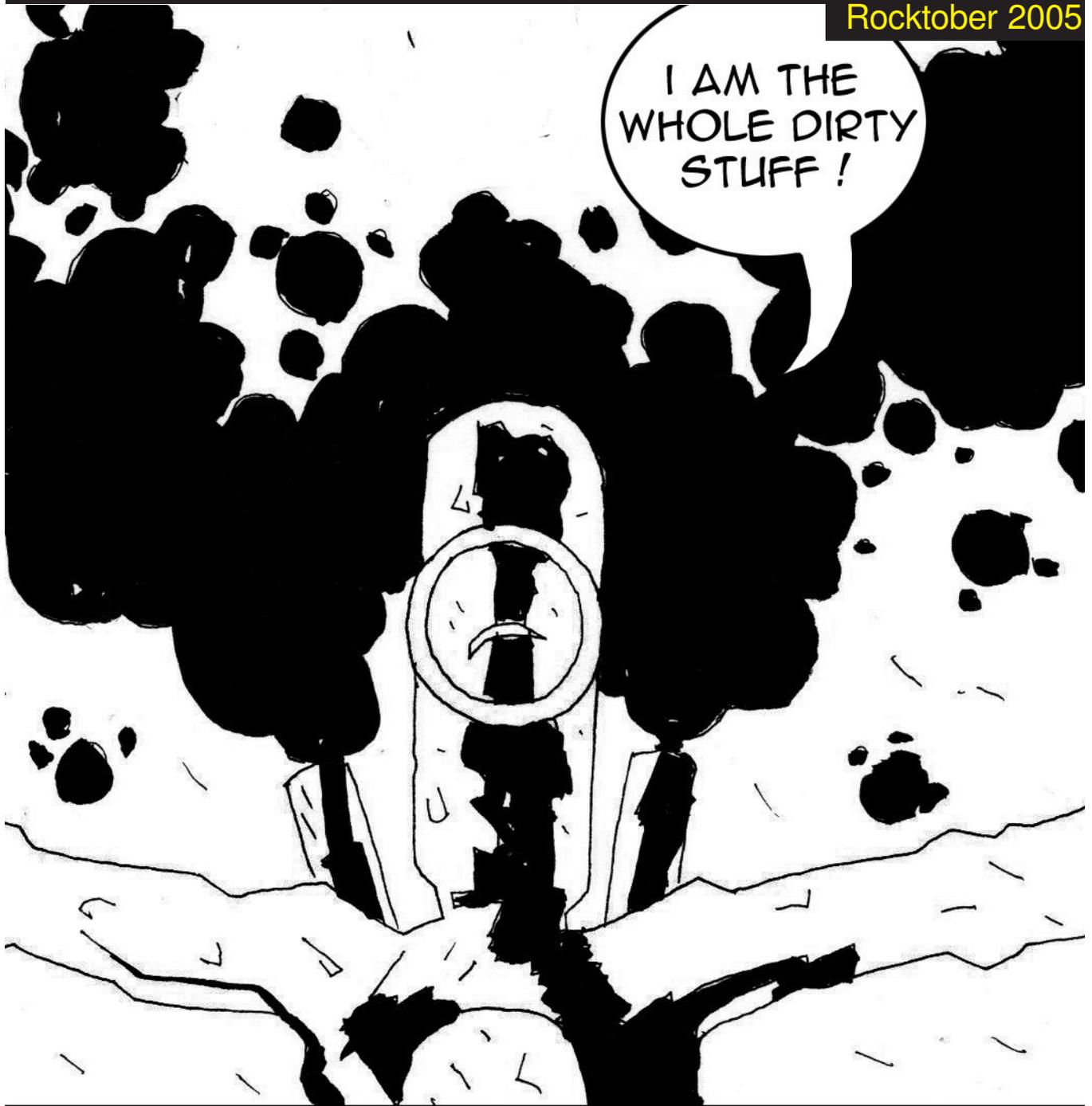
The Blotter

Magazine
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I'm Not Real Impressed by the Hair of Our Bodybuilders—What's with That? The Baltic Sea?

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Rocktober 2005



Rocktober Can Only Mean One Thing: Time to Get the Led Out.

In This Issue: Ovidiu Bufnila and Gospo's Romanian Sci-Surreal Comic "The Dragon of the Clouds." Linda Schmoltd's Epic Tale of Floridian Intrigue, "Flamingo Flame-out." Plus mckenzie's "Sinister Bedfellows," A Photo of an Exceptional Vehicle, and the Dream Journal.

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This magazine may contain typos or bad words

Items Worth Mentioning

from the desk of Johnny Pence

Effect without Cause

I was back-tracking all the links to the blotterrag.com website this past month, like I always do, and I found where one person had linked to us from a livejournal.com entry. Posted in reply was a single comment from Badger5, who simply wrote, "I hate the blotterrag." As it happens, my In-Sinkerator is a Badger 5 model. I don't know what that omen means, but I'm watching it.

Fell Swoop

In response to our request for pictures of "exceptional" vehicles and people in Blotter T-shirts doing "apeshit" things, Josh Koons, of Athens, GA, writes:

... at your request I am enclosing a picture of what I think is one of the hottest cars around: an '85 Subaru GL, Chinese red with white wagon wheels, high ground clearance, shift-on-the-fly 4-wheel drive, 223,000 miles, with a glove box held closed by fishing line....

I'm sorry to say that I don't have a Blotter t-shirt and am unfortunately unable to fulfill the second request for photos.... At any rate, as far as I'm concerned, if you aren't wearing a Blotter t-shirt, then you might as well wear nothing at all (except, perhaps, a well-traveled cowboy hat that you bought at a grocery store and suede creepers that you wore to your high school prom).



(I did the best I could with the photo. You, Dear Reader, should send yours in too.)

—ediot@blotterrag.com

Flamingo Flame-out

by Linda Schmoldt

Wanda trudged up a wide marble staircase, big enough for ten Wandas to kick-dance their way up, Rockette-style. With a purple fingernail, she scratched her thigh. The black polyester maid's uniform made her skin itch. It was a size too large. That was fine with Wanda. She knew she had a curvaceous figure. So many idiots harbored lusty maid fantasies. It was better to lay low, play it nun-like. That way the boss wouldn't get any stupid ideas. She'd been cornered by an infatuated moron at a Christmas party, up against the wall with his meaty arms on either side of her, while "Deck the Halls" boomed from the speakers. Whenever she heard "Deck the Halls" she remembered looking into bloodshot eyes and sighing, then kneeling that Lothario.

On the way upstairs, Wanda glanced at the life-sized enamel statues of tigers, leopards and panthers, perched, crouching or snarling, on every marble step. They came from a store on Las Olas called Treasures, specializing in what Wanda thought of as "Mob Chic." Just the presence of such furniture ought to be enough to justify a search warrant. Something criminal had to be going on—at the very least, criminally bad taste.

Back in St. Petersburg, (Russia, not Florida), her par-

ents—an engineer and a chemist—kept an austere home, decorated with literature, simple wood furniture and comfortable sofas. Ft. Lauderdale style was heavy on color, gloss, and faux. The result was visual overload, like the bikini-clad breasts on the beach. Everything bigger and shinier than in Russia, or anywhere else, except perhaps Rio.

"Wanda, Wanda," a spectral voice called.

She slowed her steps to a lobster's pace.

Two minutes later, Wanda made her appearance in the bedroom of Mrs. Charlotte Win. Mrs. Win's room was in keeping with the Oz-like dimensions of Winipeg, as the house was called. Wanda knew the lump in the bed, visible in the distance, was Charlotte—covers, as usual, drawn over her head. Charlotte's closet housed enough designer-wear to keep every country-club mama in Gucci for years. Wanda knew because she'd personally inventoried every silk shirt, every leather pump, every linen dress. Charlotte liked to keep Wanda busy with tasks that made no sense. Futile expenditure of energy turned her on.

After Charlotte turned forty, she'd embargoed daily life, deciding to hide away rather than face the diminution of her blonde beach-girl beauty. Her years as sorority queen (Summa Cum Laude graduate, tennis star),

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird
guitar school, chthonic boxbiter

I finally made it to "guitar school." We were in a large classroom auditorium. My heart raced as I looked around at my classmates, feasting my eyes on cute Austin guitarists. Then I was transported to a small seminar room. Middle-aged women were sitting on yoga mats in a large circle. The leader, a very intimidating woman, said that we had to listen to her sing a song and then we had to take turns singing it solo. The group nodded in agreement. I felt the anxiety that comes from not preparing for an exam. I thought, what the hell, she won't call on me first and I'll learn it by the time it's my turn. The leader stood, sang her song while doing an aerobics routine, sat down, turned to face me and said, "You're next."

—H.H., Austin

i was in a cave with a deep, clear pool full of fish that i had to walk around to get where i was going. i looked in, and the fish were huge, awful monstrosities with teeth like knives. i dipped the corner of a cardboard box in the water, and they bit at it. so i tried to catch one of the fish this way, with the corner of a cardboard box. a fish bit and i had it. but i realized that i didn't want that awful thing anywhere near me and shook the box until it let go.

then i got home and saw a TV ad for a book about that species of fish called *El Maroon, The Devil with a Tail*. i woke up thinking, "that's dumb, because the devil already has a tail."

—J.P., Athens

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.

then wife of an influential businessman, made personal imperfections untenable. She couldn't stand to be less than the perfect embodiment of American glamour. In Ft. Lauderdale, the ravishments of age were denied with single-minded ferocity. Most women chose the surgical route, slicing and dicing their way to a younger self. Charlotte panicked at the sight of blood, especially her own. She was cold-turkeying off the drug of youth and beauty. It didn't make her a pleasant person to be around.

"Wanda," the voice under the Freschetta lace coverlet commanded, "Roscoe needs a walk."

Too late for that. Roscoe, a Great Pyrenees who was white and wooly as a baby polar bear, sat dejectedly in the middle of the Aubusson rug. Discreetly off in a corner, Wanda saw Roscoe's elephant-like droppings. Imelda was going to love that. Imelda,

the other maid, had no patience for dogs. "In my country, they live outside, they stay outside," Imelda had announced. "They are dirty." Wanda really wanted to tell her, "Yeah, but at least he's got a good personality," but she didn't. Roscoe was better-looking and more charming than Imelda, or, for that matter, Charlotte Win. It was a fact that needed to remain unspoken.

Forced by the cruel hand of fate to clean up after the lowest of the low, and also after Roscoe, Imelda cursed her fate while wielding the mop, dreaming of the day she would get her green card and could off the huge dog. "Come on Roscoe," Wanda lilted, smiling at the behemoth. Roscoe's plumed tail slowly wagged, gathering momentum as he realized that he was officially relieved from guard duty.

Wanda and Roscoe walked through the underground tunnel

to the beach, emerging in Floridian paradise—palm fronds waving, sun shining, waves lapping the sand. Lighting up a joint, Wanda surveyed the scene. When she started working for Charlotte, three long months ago, after escaping from a New York winter featuring grey slush, icy waits for subways that never came, and cold winds that barreled down the Grand Canyon of New York, 6th Avenue, she thought she'd landed in paradise. Like every other northern transplant, she gazed at sunsets, baked herself daily on the clean, buff sand, frolicked in warm waters, oohing at small white fish swimming around her legs. That lasted two weeks, just as long as her savings.

Looking through the online want ads, Wanda scrolled through listings for go-go dancer, waitress, hotel clerk, security guard, maid and nanny: a cornucopia of low-level work paying almost enough to live on if you wanted to subsist on a diet of Wonder bread (the "Wonder Diet," trailer-park equivalent of the "Miami Beach Diet"), thought giant flying cockroaches made good roommates, and were willing to do the unthinkable—live without a car.

After just a week, former New Yorker Wanda caught on. The non-car owning are the untouchables of America. Recent immigrants, recently released perverts, alcoholics, little old ladies who finally gave up their licenses after running into the newspaper delivery boy, and others one step below hookers

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and pimps in the eyes of society, took the bus. Without a car, Wanda would be instantly categorized. She gave herself a week to get a job; meanwhile putting out \$75 for a Rent-a-Wreck red Chevy that emitted syncopated jazz sounds and dense gas fumes.

Wanda tried out for a go-go dancer job at Tony's Beach Party. Sucker-punching Tony when he reached for her g-string put her out of the running. The nanny agency liked her background in education (Wanda's brainstorm, turning herself into a graduate of Columbia University Teaching College instead of Brooklyn Community College), but after one look at Wanda's 36-28-34, wives terminated the interview. You don't get to be a Ft. Lauderdale trophy wife by letting Attila in the front door. The maid agency, "At Your Service," hooked Wanda up with an interview at a house that looked like a Vegas casino, right down to a nightly colored light show. Wanda was no stranger to gaudy and tasteless, after growing up in Babylon—Long Island, birth-

place of design trends featuring gold-plated chandeliers—but even she was impressed by the door-knocker, cunningly shaped like a buxom mermaid, and bearing a strong resemblance to Marilyn Monroe.

A black-haired woman, dressed in black Capris and turtleneck, short enough that two inches less would have put her in the midget category, flung open the door.

Come in, she announced, turning her back and marching towards the living room. "I'm Imelda" said the munchkin.

"Glad to meet you—" Wanda started to say. "Done bother," Imelda commanded, "I'm not the boss lady. I'm house flunky like you. Sit down."

Imelda's thick accent made it sound like she'd said "Thithnow," so Wanda stared at her in confusion until Imelda yelled, "Thithnow, I said! Do you not hear so good?"

Wanda dropped into a massive orange leather chair that sucked her into its depths like an octopus.

Imelda said, serious expression on her face, "You like dogs, you smoke, you take drugs, you speak English."

Getting the hang of abbreviated Imelda-speak, Wanda replied, "Yes dogs English, no smoke and drugs." Imelda gave her an approving look, stood up and started the march back to the front door. Wanda struggled to free herself from the chair, then hurried after the black-clad figure, in time to hear, "Be here tomorrow 9:00 A.M."

One minute later, Wanda was standing outside the door, staring again at the door knocker, feeling like Alice in Wonderland after an encounter with the Red Queen. Wanda Stanislovski, graduate not only of Brooklyn Community College but also of Upstate Correctional Facility, had found a job.

Climbing in the '86 Chevy, she smiled, pulled out a Virginia Slim, lit up, and popped a white pill in her mouth, swigged down with warm Cherry Coke, her favorite combo. Oxycontin, Rush Limbaugh's drug of choice,

Sinister Bedfellows by mckenzee



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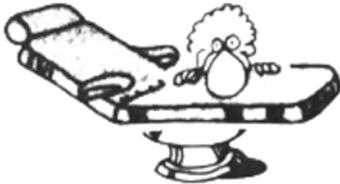


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was a great favorite with Wanda, Manero. Tommy had stiffed as it had been with her mother. And with that, another proud, buzzed resident of the sunshine state started her car and headed onto Flamingo Drive.

M-c-k-e-n-s-i-e, Ramon spelled. The receptionist's lavender perm wiggled as she laboriously spelled out the name. "That's an unusual name," she told Ramon, who nodded politely but wearily, having heard the same comment at least once a day for the past five years.

Ramon liked selling wrestling mats, since the job gave him a chance to remember his glory days, Florida All-State Champ, then US champ, sent to Europe and Asia to compete.

Graced with an easygoing personality off the mat, he liked most of the people he met, the coaches, principals, and school secretaries. Ramon started his company in Miami, where knowing how to speak Spanish was a plus. Poppy Castro, his grandfather, AKA the Puerto Rican Pyro, was behind bars doing 10-15 for attempting to set fire to his insurance agent, a man named Todd Marshall, AKA Tommy

Poppy walked into Sun State Insurance holding a cup of gasoline, dumped it over Todd's head, yelled "Burn Baby Burn," and lit a match.

Todd's secretary, Marla, a former mud wrestler who suffered from a secret passion for Todd, dove at Poppy, knocking him flat. A cop walked by, noticed the large spandex clad redhead splayed on top of an old man, and arrested Poppy, despite Poppy's claim that Marla was trying to sexually molest him. The cop probably saved Poppy's life, since Todd was seriously annoyed and had decided to shoot him.

Marla regretted tackling Poppy after she found, in the back of Todd's desk, photos of Miami High cheerleaders, courtesy of a video camera installed in the locker-room Tampax machine. She also found an autographed photograph of Cindy Sin, toy machine gun in one hand, crucifix in the other, inscribed "To my very own thug." Love died a quick death that day.

Ramon missed Poppy. The old man taught him how to pin a man in under two minutes. Under Poppy's tutelage, Ramon grew from a weedy kick-sand-in-his-face type of kid to a robustly good-looking young man, with a solid build that was almost rectangular in shape, thick black hair on his hair and chest (not so popular with the American senioritas, but as Poppy told him, "the more hair you have, the more virile you are, the more

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manly. Look at Al Pacino. You think he's hairless? And Sylvester Stallone? Hairless? No! You could probably stuff a sofa with their chest hair!!") Soft brown eyes and a boyish face completed the package. Ramon wore the "casual day" uniform—chinos, button-down shirts in hip colors like aqua blue and teal, and loafers. He carried a laptop, drove a Toyota Corolla, and used a wireless headset. Despite this, he was not a jerk. On off-days, he volunteered at the Animal Shelter, adopting out aggressive Chihuahas to the trendy and portly Labs to the lonely.

His own dog, a fat beagle named Myrna, kept him from feeling too sad. It was hard some days, remembering how happy he and Teresa had been, before she got hooked on meth and their life turned into a made-for-TV movie. The day she walked down to his apartment holding a semi-automatic and singing "Raindrops keep falling on my head," he knew they had to break up.

She still looked good, since the meth helped her take off about 25 pounds, though her current wardrobe (courtesy of a "new friend" Johnny the Pimp)—hot pink tube tops, cut-off shorts and three-inch acrylic nails—wasn't his style. She swore Johnny wasn't really a pimp. "Pimp is a description of a man with style. Get with it, Ramon." Ramon, still lost in the 1970's mindset, couldn't get with it. He heard the word pimp and he imagined a scarred black man driving a gold Cadillac.

Teresa was in lockdown now. Everyone Ramon loved wound up doing time. It was a curse that he had to live with. His grandmother, a priestess in the Santeria religions, sacrificed a chicken to change his luck, to Ramon's great dismay. "Mami, I'm a member of the Humane Society, the ASPCA, and Have-a-Heart Sanctuary. Why would you think I'd want an animal to die for me?"

"Ramon, I'm sorry. I'm a priestess. Sacrificing chickens and goats is what I do. You have your job, I have mine."

Josephina McKensie used a purple velvet ribbon to tie a neat bow around the package. She laid it down on her kitchen table, along with 51 others. The baggies were attractively printed with flowers. Each held 20 Oxycontin, presents for media mogul Charlie Win's nearest and dearest. It was going to be a very medicated crowd.

As a party planner in South Florida, Josephina had hired alligator wrestlers, called in legions of strippers, supervised the blowing up of millions of leopard-print balloons, and released more doves than PETA. After ten years of catering to the whims of drug lords, socialites, and NFL wives, Josephina was more jaded than a tourist trap in Chinatown.

Casting one last uninterested look at the platoon of bowed baggies, she picked up a 1960's style pink Princess phone and dialed. "Imelda, the goody bags are ready. I'll send Ramon over with them tomorrow."

"Thas goo," Imelda said.

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A SINGLE CREATURE, THAT WILL FIND THE TRUTH REVEALING THE WHOLE



NOT FOR LONG, BECAUSE IN THE EVENING, AFTER RELEASING THE STORM, I WILL GIVE YOU UP, I WILL THROW YOU INTO THE OCEAN, AS LOUSY, AND EXTREMELY BORING DROPS.

ONE'S SECRET ?



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Click went the phone.

“Yes, goodbye to you too.” She has the manners of a gorilla, Josephina thought, not knowing she’d guessed the truth. Imelda, AKA Tina (in South Florida, you’re nothing without an AKA) led the Tamlaroni Guerrilla Rebels of Bolivia for five years, before a bad affair with the squad cook turned her against the cause.

Imelda found out he’d been cooking up more than beans with the Republican chief’s wife, Lisette. To assuage her hurt feelings, Imelda speared Lisette with a stiletto heel, thereby earning the sobriquet Imelda, after the shoe-loving exiled Philippine monarch.

Forced to escape to America after death threats from Lisette’s husband, Imelda took the second job she was offered. As an undocumented immigrant with training in hand to hand combat, she could have worked in any number of Florida households, and in fact turned down the Governor’s offer to work as his nanny. She would have felt an irresistible desire to plant a bomb in his Volvo sooner or later. Old habits die hard. To her, all estab-

lished politicians were the enemy. Crouched in the hull of the leaky boat that brought her to America, Imelda vowed to leave behind her life of bombs, murder, and mayhem. No more bandannas tied around the bottom half of her face, no more yelling, “Down on the floor, now, motherfucker!”

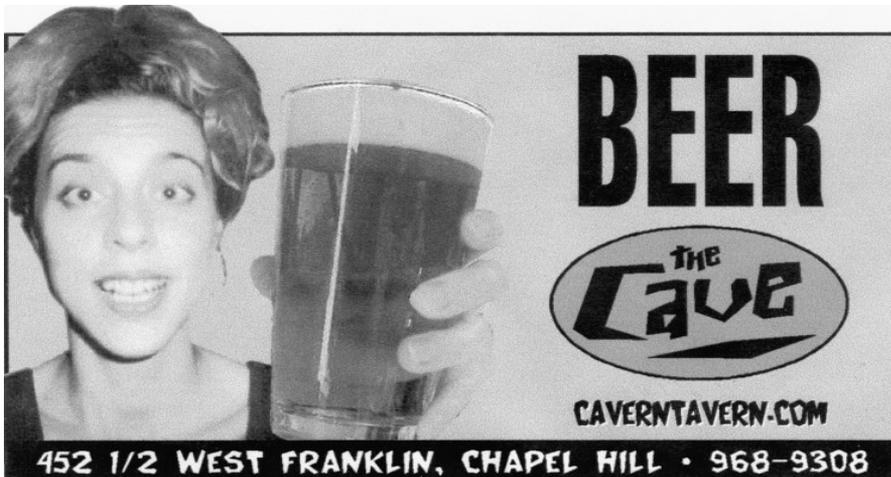
When she did feel an urge to yell commands, she shouted at Roscoe, who grew to believe that “Down on the floor motherfucker” was the command for sit. Imelda taught Roscoe to attack, using the coded command, “Play that funky music, white boy,” a phrase that transformed Roscoe into a murderous fur ball.

Ramon was coming over. “Excellent,” she thought. “He’s so hot. I bet he would love to get to know a political genius such as myself. He’s so pure, so idealistic. What a great guerrilla he’d make, no one would ever suspect.”

Imelda hissed and murmured to herself like a burbling tea kettle, while she swept and vacuumed the mansion, readying it for the big big big party. Charlotte explained to Imelda that every important person in Florida would be attending, so everything must be absolutely perfect.

“Oh it will be.” Imelda thought. “Perfect for me. Not so perfect for you.”

“What a statement I can make, blowing up these bigwigs in honor of all the miners killed March 15, 1958, in the Marimeco explosion.” It was her country’s version of the Triangle



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Garment Workers fire in New York. Two hundred and fifty dirt-poor miners lost their lives.

The Marimeco shaft should have been closed years before. But the Florida Mining Association, a group of powerful tycoons who met while wintering in Palm Beach, refused to shut down the mines while even a spoor of silver might be found.

When Charlotte told Imelda the date of the party—March 15—Imelda almost passed out. All the humiliations of the past year were forgotten. This divine sign told Imelda to blow up people she didn't know, to honor other people she didn't know.

If she did know them, she might not have been as giddy. The men of Marimeco were infamous for enslaving women, using them as sex toys, maids and cooks. Hey, even the lowly need someone to kick around, and what excellently kickable material the innocent women of

Marimeco made. Short, squat (much like Imelda, whose grandmother rejoiced and danced a happy dance that day in March 15, when her tormenter was found dead. "It is fate," she whispered. "I am free.")

Imelda gazed at the calendar as she dusted the vases.

"It is fate," she crowed. The doorbell pealed to the tune of Jimmy Buffet's "Margaritaville." Since moving to Fort Lauderdale, Wanda had heard that song over 100 times, 99 times more than she'd heard the National Anthem.

Wanda turned off Judge Judy, tied on a white frilled apron and sauntered to the door.

She peered through the keyhole. "Oh la la," she whispered. Then added "Fine, fine, fine." She opened the door, smiled, and said "Hello sir."

Ramon looked at her, smiling, which jumbled her mind. She saw white teeth, honey-

brown skin, and thick, wavy hair. "Hello," Ramon said, putting out his hand. "I'm Ramon."

Wanda took his hand and shook it gently, but he didn't release her. He stood there, looking at her. Her heart was pounding against her chest.

"This is ridiculous," Wanda thought, "I'm going into cardiac arrest."

She detached her hand, and nervousness gave her eyes a steely look. Ramon asked, "Is Imelda in? I have something for her."

Wanda turned on her heel and started walking towards the kitchen. Ramon meekly followed, thinking, "Damn, what went wrong? She was grooving on me, I know it!"

He appreciated the sway of her hips as she led him down the long hall, then through a swinging door into a showroom kitchen. He said, "Nice," drawling the word, while taking in the grey marble countertops and ultra-sleek stove, refrigerator and

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shelves, all as shiny as mirrors.

"Yeah, it's a real showpiece," he said, "I'll see you at the party." Charlie looked deadly serious. Wanda said. She gave him a look to see if he understood that she was joking. He winked at her. "Phew, not an idiot," Wanda thought. If he'd been seriously impressed by the insanely mod kitchen, au revoir romance. She might be a jailbird and a maid, but she had standards.

Imelda appeared suddenly, and reached out to hug Ramon. "Ramon," she murmured, "I feel I know you, since I talk so often to your wonderful mother."

"What happened to the accent?" Wanda thought. "Suddenly she's speaking like a Harvard grad."

Ramon turned his multi-kilowatt smile on Imelda, whose knees buckled. "Would you like a drink?" she asked.

"Thank you but I have to get back to the office. Where should I put the gifts for the party?"

Imelda opened the door to the pantry. "Would you stack them in there for now?"

"Sure, I'll be right back," Ramon said.

While he was away, Wanda and Imelda looked at each other. Wanda said, "He's kind of cute." Imelda looked away, "Yes, but nothing special," she answered. Wanda noticed that Imelda was applying fresh lipstick. "Ah ha!" she thought, "so it's like that."

"Yes, nothing special," Wanda said, while checking her hair in front of the shiny refrigerator.

Ramon walked in carrying four large wicker baskets, which he carefully placed in the pantry.

"Have a terrific day ladies," and white, leather and maps, Imelda made a choking noise. "You'll be at the party?" she asked Ramon.

"I promised to help mother. She's short a bartender." Imelda went silent. Wanda said, "Good bye Ramon. Thank you for bringing the party favors. I'm sure the Wins will love them."

"Yes, so am I," Ramon answered dryly. He'd seen the contents of the party bags. He loved his mother, but he had to get her another job. Being a party planner was way too dangerous, at least being a party planner in Southern Florida. She'd be better off selling real estate or working for a bigwig as an executive assistant. She loved her career, and claimed to be phobic about office work, so he was going to have to figure out some way to lure her into a straight job. Mulling over his mother's options, Ramon didn't notice a man in a red Porsche driving in as he drove out.

Charlie Win breezed in, slamming the door and yelling for someone to get his clubs out of the car. Imelda scurried out to greet him.

"Imelda, sweetie, get Wanda in here. I need to talk to that girl," Charlie boomed.

Imelda walked into the kitchen and jerked a finger at the door. "He wants you," she said, "in the study."

"Oh, oh, here we go," Wanda thought.

But when she walked into the nautical-themed study, all blue

and white, leather and maps, Charlie looked deadly serious.

"Sit down," he said

Wanda sat in an armchair.

"Wanda, I know about you. I know you got in some trouble kiting checks, did a little time. Hell, I don't hold that against you, we've all got something to hide."

Not sure how to respond, Wanda gave him a small smile.

He was probably leading up to a threat to fire her unless she boffed him. He wasn't all that bad to look at. Charlie was your basic-looking successful middle-aged guy. Dirty blond hair, blue eyes, reddened complexion from too many weekends on the boat or golfing and drinking gin. Tall, the beginning of a paunch. The only problem was that once she slept with him, he might think she was on call. Unless she was really bad in bed. Actually, she was really bad in bed, so no problemo.

He broke into her thoughts.

"I need your help," he said, still serious.

"I'm having a party here. We're going to have important people, rich people, all the usual fuckers looking for a handout." He grinned.

Wanda gave him an intent look, concentrating on figuring out what he was implying.

"You've got certain skills. All ex-cons do. You're comfortable lying and you don't care much for the exact word of the law."

Wanda started to object, then nodded, realizing this would play better with him.

"Okay. I'm glad you didn't

give me any bullshit line. We're off to a good start."

"The problem is Charlotte. I need her out of here. Permanently. She's become a liability. She'd be better off in a nursing home. Preferably in Paraguay or some fucking place thousands of miles from me."

Wanda stared.

She said, "Look, all I did was play around with checks. I'm not into anything rough."

"No, no. You're not getting it. I thought you were a smart girl," he said. "We're going to put on a little show. Charlotte's going to exhibit some bizarre behavior. She's going to act so weird that putting her away will be no problem at all. And the reason she's going to act this way is that she'll be sky high, with the help of these babies."

He held up some stamps.

"Good-old fashioned LSD. Just drop one, or two, in her coffee on the day of the party."

"I don't want to do this," Wanda said. "I've been to jail once. That was bad enough. Now you're asking me to do something that could get me into big trouble," she continued, "and what do I get for it? The opportunity to keep on being a maid? No offense, but working as your maid isn't that much of a thrill, Mr. Win."

"No, baby, I'm offering you something much much better than that. I have a friend, a lawyer with major connections. He owes me. He can get your name deleted from the database used to check up on criminal records. Voila, Wanda, no more

ex-con. You can get a regular job. A secretary, or whatever. A job where you don't need to wear a uniform."

"Mr. Win, we have a deal." Wanda gave him a brilliant smile, and in that moment, Charlie realized how gorgeous she was. Not pretty, not cute, but stunning, with high cheekbones, hair that shone, green star-filled eyes, a rosebud mouth. He stood and looked at her.

"I'm going to enjoy working with you," he said.

Imelda tiptoed away. She'd heard enough. The big blow-up would wait. Imelda hated Charlotte more than she'd hated any gringo. If Charlotte went, Roscoe could be disposed of, dropped off at some animal shelter in another county in the dark of night. And she didn't want Ramon to get hurt. Imelda decided to wait until next year to bomb the place. There would be other opportunities for a nice big explosion. She smiled, thinking of Ramon's soft brown eyes.

Ramon, stuck in traffic on the Sawgrass Expressway, smiled, thinking of Wanda. Such a sweet girl. They had a future, he could tell. She was a straight arrow, the type of innocent he'd been waiting for. The demure way she dressed, her reserved manner. A real lady.

Wanda, unbuttoning her uniform, looked at Charlie, and smiled.

Roscoe snuggled next to Charlotte, licking her face once, with a tongue soft as a silken sponge. She reached out a slender white hand, and caressed his

ears. Charlotte thought, "All I have to do is make it though the party. Then I'll get Wanda to sell off all my jewelry. That ought to give me enough to buy a house in Mexico. Roscoe and I can get away from this damned town. I can learn to be more than a face and a body. I know I can."

She picked up Mansfield Park and began to read, with a smile on her face. "The indignities of stupidity, and the disappointments of selfish passion, can excite little pity," wrote Jane Austen.

Roscoe stared ahead, enjoying the softness of the bed and his mistress's touch. His tail beat softly on the coverlet.

Linda Schmoldt didn't give much of a bio, but we know she's from Leasburg, NC, and this might be her first publication credit.

This will now be a smear on her permanent record.

Ovidiu Bufnila is a prize-winning Romanian novelist, specializing in really short, really odd "speculative" fiction. "The Dragon of the Clouds" originally appeared in our pages in October '03 as a prose piece. It was one story in five stories about clouds. The only bio I could find for **Gospo** was in Romanian, and I couldn't make heads or tails of it.

Larry "mckenzie" 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.

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