

The Blotter

Magazine
www.blotterrag.com

Picking Up Needles from the Bottom of the Sea

Free in Asheville, Athens, Atlanta, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Charlottesville, Durham, Hillsborough,
November 2005
New York City, and Raleigh



Welcome, welcome. Come inside. Let me get your coat. We have Stories from Matthew Boyd and Darrell Kinsey waiting for you. The Art of Mark Watkins is in the kitchen. Poesy from Matthew Farrell just called; it'll be here any minute. Oh, and here comes an exceptional vehicle, the Dream Journal, and mckenzee's Sinister Bedfellows.

The Blotter is:

Johnny Pence.....Peppermint-
Striped Shotgun
Martin K. Smith...Publisher-at-Large,
Treasurer
Jenny Haniver...Pseudonym
James C. Werner..Minister of
Information

Advertisers and Subscriptions Contact:

Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:

Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Johnny Pence, Editor in Chief
ediot@blotterrag.com
706.583.9098 (business hrs. only!
you may call for info. about snail-
mail submissions)

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9 for more from this artist.

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*This magazine may contain typos or
bad words*

Items Worth Mentioning
from the desk of Johnny Pence
Gratitude

Thanks to everybody everywhere who distributes *The Blotter* for us each month: Asheville, The Traveling Bonfires; Athens, Darrell Kinsey; Atlanta, Jamie Allen; Chapel Hill, Hillsborough, and the Southwestern Triangle, L. Haywood Coffey; Charlotte, Jim Murray; Charlottesville, James C. Werner; New York City, Matthew Boyd.

Jenny's Two Cents

Jenny Haniver, submissions editor, would like me to pass along the following: "*Don't send me no more damn press releases about your acoustic-electric, fusion-jam, southern-fried soul deathcore funk bands!*"

The reason being that we are a literary magazine and not a hipster newsweekly. You might have noticed that we have **never once** written a single thing about music. It is always funny to watch her cuss when she gets those press releases, but seriously, they are coming to the wrong place when they come here.

Exceptional!

In response to our running request for pictures of "exceptional" vehicles, Robert Seddon of Mineral, VA, offers an exceptional vehicle and an exceptional set of improvisations which allowed him to ride it. He writes:

The pic is from 1992....the bike is a 1990 FXR custom softtail Harley with rings and things done to it (100+ horsepower) ... there is a 2x4 in front of my foot is so I can hit the brake (it is bolted on to the brake pedal), the split in the pants is so I can get them on over the cast, the duct tape is holding one of those one-size-fits-no-one bedroom slippers you get in a hospital to the bottom of the cast so I can walk without wearing it out, the string is to keep the pants from riding up my leg in the wind ... put over 3000 miles on with that arrangement ... talk about run-on sentences....



—ediot@blotterrag.com

Echo

by Matt Boyd

In the mirror, I look like a big, green P. The felt itches around my neck, and the duct tape under my arms shows, but my mom says we did a good enough job, you know, considering. She wants to take a picture of me before we leave and runs to get her camera. I hear her in the next room, rummaging through her closet, yelling something about how she thought her camera was right here and just wait one minute because what's a wedding without pictures anyway? My arms dangle in front of me and I can't reach backwards to itch my neck. I look like the monster in those old Frankenstein movies my dad used to show me. Saying hold on, I'll be back in a sec and sneaking up on me from behind the couch at a real scary part, yelling and grabbing my shoulders, making me jump and then laugh and then cry. And his stories at night about the girl in the car and how she hears scraping and scraping and how when she finally goes to look for her boyfriend, he's hanging from a tree and his shoes are scraping the front of her car. It made me not tired, the way he told it.

My mom says to say cheese, and before I can turn around, I see a flash and then red dots. Precious, she calls it. Absolutely precious. And she knows what else I should wear. Of course. Talking to herself and walking away again. The bus should be

here soon. I can see Jimmy and Mason already outside, kicking a tennis ball against the curb. My legs are taped together at the knees so I can't play today anyhow. My mom sets a box down by the couch and digs through it. She hopes it will fit. Probably dusty though. Oh Jesus look at us. Can you even believe how young we were then? And there you are, Molly. Well not you exactly, not you like you are now, but, well, I'm sure you'll learn about it soon enough. And she puts something around my head and pulls this white fabric over my face and it reminds me of my dad's windshield when it was snowing except without the windshield wipers. Now you're ready to get hitched. We have time for two more pictures before the bus pulls up and honks its horn and my mom has to carry me down to the street so I won't trip.

I have to stand up in the back by the older kids because if I sit down, the duct tape might rip. I hold onto the back door because the bus is going fast and I can't see that good with this thing over my eyes. A boy asks me what I'm supposed to be and I tell him and he looks angry and says that's stupid and anyway it doesn't even look like a Q. I tell him that I'm lowercase because we ran out of felt and mom didn't feel like going back to the store. I think his name is Glen, but I'm not sure exactly. I saw him kissing a

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

the cute loft

I'm in a loft, looking through boxes of crap that I packed up when my family moved in my teens, and that never got unpacked. There's protractors and carpentry squares and watches. I need a watch, and I look for a wind-up. I'm sick of batteries. There's a nice ladies' watch with diamonds across the top. I find that there's an elegant older lady in the loft space with me, and she's just made up her mind that she wants to get a job in a department store to keep busy. She's rich and fancy; taking a job in a department store would be a step down for her. She grabs a heavy-set lady who's now there with us, and walks her over to the window, ingratiating her "you didn't just fly in from anywhere, did you?" They look out the window, and there's a crowd in the streets, getting ready to watch a band play. She picks out someone in the crowd (or pretends to) ostensibly a cute girl, and convinces the heavier lady to buy a "cute" little outfit so that she'll look "cute" like that.

—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.

They told you that nobody likes a smart ass?



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girl by Mr. MacGregor's fence one day and he saw me too and he stuck out his tongue and wagged it and said you're next, oh yeah, you're next.

Miss Julie asks me where I've been and didn't I hear the bell ring already? Yes, Ma'am, I did, but I can't walk fast with my legs taped together like this and also I was in the bathroom trying to splash hot water on my neck to stop the itching. My neck looked red in the mirror like it was bleeding like that story my dad told me about how that man chopped his wife's head off in her sleep and she woke up and started running around, crashing into things and falling over chairs and screaming bloody murder until morning. Still, women never do shut up, no matter how

much you try to make them, he said and he tucked me in and turned the lights off.

Mitch is wearing his regular clothes and I wonder if I accidentally got dressed up on the wrong day. He doesn't even look at me when I shuffle past him. I stand by my desk all the way through spelling and when we go to Art, Miss Julie takes me aside and asks did I get confused, didn't I know that I was supposed to be Q? In Art, Miss Sharon makes me stand in the front of the class and she traces her hand in chalk on my stomach. It doesn't come off so easy and there's still some that I couldn't get off and some of the tape is coming off because I'm sweating and my legs are tired. I see Mitch at lunch and he sees me and laughs with his mouth open even though he has food in it. Mike and Brandon laugh with him and then I can see them look at him the way I sometimes look at him like he's a drawing in some book and we get to color him in and sometimes I color myself next to him, touching his hand.

When we get back to class, there is a banner that says congratulations Q and U with three red exclamation marks. There are flowers on the desks, plastic ones with yellow centers and white petals. I think Mitch is probably nervous too even if he doesn't look like it. He is looking in the mirror behind the door and combing his hair back. He smiles at himself and then pushes his nose up with his fingers, going cross-eyed. Then Miss Julie asks him if he is ready and he says yes

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and he takes off his sweater. Underneath he is wearing a white shirt with a small red U ironed on in the middle.

He stands at the front of the class with his arms behind his back and Miss Julie puts on a tape. When I hear the music, I know I'm supposed to start walking, because I've seen it in movies, where the brides walk when the organ plays. Before he left, my dad showed me a movie where the bride had really been dead for ten years, but her husband didn't know this until after the wedding, and I wondered if he got to eat that cake all by himself then, but I didn't ask my dad because he was quiet and when I tried to sneak up and scare him, he said come on, Molly, just watch the fucking movie.

I stand next to Mitch and Miss Julie asks Q, do you take this U to be your lawful wedded wife to have and to hold and I say yes, I do. And Miss Julie asks U, do you take this Q to be your lawful wedded husband to have and to hold and Mitch starts laughing and shakes his head and

the whole class starts laughing except for me. Miss Julie puts her hands on her hips and says but Mitch, you know that Q and U are always together. But Mitch says he doesn't want to marry me because I'm all sweaty and I smell like he doesn't know what. Miss Julie says she wants to see Mitch after class and that the wedding's over now, Molly, you can take your costume off.

But I only have a shirt and underwear on under this and so I stand by my desk during cursive and social studies and then the bell rings and I take the costume off as soon as I get home. My mom wants to know how it all went. She asks if I kissed him or did we just hold hands and I said just hold hands. She says she's so proud of me because you never see a Q without a U, well, except for those rare words or, you know, in other languages. It looks like she's been crying. That night, my dad calls to see how the wedding turned out. I don't say anything because Mom's watching, but when she leaves, I get up and turn off the lights and

lie down on my bed. He tells me about a girl that's home alone and she sees a man's face in the window. When she calls the police, they tell her that she saw his reflection and he was really sitting behind her couch the whole time. But they didn't catch him so every time the little girl was alone she was always scared that one day he'd come back, but he never did, and I must have fallen asleep listening because all I can hear when I wake up is the operator asking me if I'd like to make a call and then the dial tone.



Sinister Bedfellows

by mckenzee



Why does she spend



so much on flowers?



I'm just going to eat them.

Banging Before Bed

(excerpted from *Rucker with a Hunker*)
by Darrell Kinsey

Have a meeting time. Go under the porch. Lil Buck's under the porch. Sitting on a mattress. Old sagging mattress. Keep the ground soft. Keep the blocks soft. Folded, back and a bottom to sit on. Folded and comfortable. Pretty comfortable. Lil Buck look comfortable. Got big puffy shoes with the tongue pump. Sitting on em indian style. I say to him. I say, "Hey Lil Buck." He wants to be called Lil Buck. He used to wanna be called

Tugboat. Now he's gone to liking Lil Buck though. His mama call him Wendell. That's his name. I call him Lil Buck. That's what he's writing on his school folders now. That's what he likes now.

"Hey Terry," he say. "You gone sing me a song today?" he ax and laugh. Big puffy cheeks. Big white teeth. Lil Buck got his eyes closed laughing. Lil Buck snort laughing, and I like to see his belly shake.

"Yeah, Lil Buck," I say. "That's why I come over here. I'm gone sang you a song."

"I want you to," he say.

"I'm going to," I say.

Got to get over the lawn mower first though. We in the lattice work, and we got peep holes. Can look out to the yard. I look out to the yard. I know there ain't nothing to see. I just got outta the yard. I look to the yard anyway though. The grass's tall out there. My legs still got to be scratched from it. White lines from where my legs still got to be scratched from it. Bugs hopping in it. Big green bugs. Might be a grasshopper. Might be something else though. I don't know. Lil Buck laugh, "You got a little patch on your eye."

"What? I ax Lil Buck. I ain't understood Lil Buck cause he laugh sometimes when he say something about something funny. Something Lil Buck thank funny. I come away from the peep hole. See them little light squares on my tank top. Lattice work light diamonds. On Lil Buck too. On everywhere. I know what Lil Buck's talking about. I sure am glad I know what Lil Buck's talking about. He's still laughing, and I ain't even got the square on my eye no more. Ain't even at the peep hole no more. I get

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the barrel from the corner. Five gal-
lon barrel. Sitting there in the
corner. It's my drum.

"You got patches on you too,
Lil Buck," I say.

Get two screwdrivers. They my
sticks, and I got two sounds. Got
more than two sounds, but just two
from the sticks. One from the rub-
ber end. That's the handle end.
One from the metal end. That's the
screw-driving end.

I done said I got more than two
sounds. I make em all when I warm
up. I got the sound when I hit in
the center of the bucket. Big boom-
ing sound. I got the sound when I
hit on the edge. Little crack sound,
and the crack sound like my snare.
The one I got at home. That ain't
all.

Hit between the edge and the
center somewhere, the middle.
Sound sound middle. Not a boom.
Ain't a crack though either, and it
sounds like my tom tom. The one I
got at home. That ain't all.

My feet go around the bottom
of the barrel. I pick up the bucket
lip. The sound get loud. That's all.

I warm up the loud sound. I
warm up my feet, but I ain't settled
into a beat.

"Gah lee, you gone sang a song
or not?"

"I got to get warmed up," I tell
Lil Buck.

"Check, check," I holler. I tell
Lil Buck all the sounds.

"Center with the handle,
check," he holla. "Center with the
metal, check," he holla. I hit em all.
"We're go for recording," he holla.
"We rolling," he holla. "Go." All
the sounds got to get warmed up
though. Try to count the sounds for
him. Count the fast way we done
learned. In school we got cards

with the multiply signs on it. Xs on
it. Big flash cards. Big round table
we all gots to sit around. When it
comes my turn I'm the best little
black boy in class at it. There's a
black girl better though. Don't
even care about the others. Shout
those answers fast. Got two sounds
from the screwdriver and one, two,
three at least bucket sounds, but
that's all two-timesed cause my feet
make all those sounds sound differ-
ent, and that problem's too hard
for me. It's too hard for me even.
The best black boy timeser they is.
Drumming's easy though.

Lift my feet. Hit the center
twice with the handle. Put down
my feet. Hit the center. Hit the
middle. Hit the edge. Lift my feet.
Hit the center twice with the han-
dle. Put down my feet. Hit the
center. Hit the middle. Hit the
edge. Lift my feet. Hit the center
twice with the handle. Put down
my feet. Hit the center. Hit the
middle. Hit the edge. Lift my feet.
Hit the center twice with the han-
dle. Put down my feet. Hit the
center. Hit the middle. Hit the
edge, and keep it going. "Alright
now, Lil Buck."

"Yeah?"

"I want you,"

"Yeah?"

"To get your hands in the air
up over your head," I holla. He put
em up over his head. Keep it going.

"Bring em together over your
head," I holla. He bring em
together up over his head. Keep it
going. Lil Buck's clapping. Lil
Buck's laughing. Got his arms
shaking. Big puffy eyes closed.
Cause big puffy cheeks push em
closed. I make Lil Buck move.
Round head move. Round cheeks

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cont'd., p. 10



Council of Mice



Eve, Older

Mark Watkins

Fairy Tales that Have Yet to Be Told

"Making art is a lot like wrestling a greasy baby elephant. You constantly feel like you've lost the upper hand, but because it's a baby elephant, you can't help but to love it. I never really know what's going to happen when I make a picture. I start with an idea and rough it in. Characters take shape and I learn about them as I draw. The medium teaches me something new with every picture. The main plot and atmosphere of the drawing twists under my hand, and little jokes find their way into the picture. Sometimes the work is incredibly tedious. Sometimes I'm a little drunk."

Mark will be showing at Lowrey Gallery in Danielsville, GA; Middle Georgia College in Cochran, GA; and Clayton Street Gallery, Athens, during the month of November.

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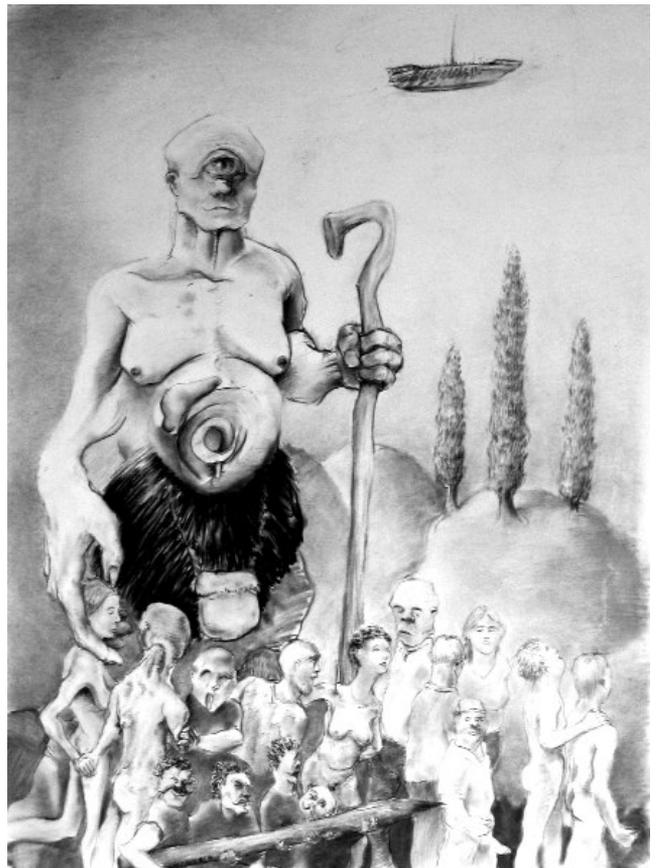


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dimple. It's simple to rhyme.

"I first met Lil Buck by the monkey bars, and we played Tarzan. We hung there. I saw Lil Buck's underwear, and he saw mine." Keep it going.

"Cept he wasn't Lil Buck, but I was still Terry Ruck. I'll holla this note. He was Tugboat, and he ain't changed his name yet." Keep it going.

"He ax me says, 'Terry, can you rhyme. Says, 'yeah,' says I. Showed him at nap time, and whispered so the teacher ain't heard." Keep it going.

"Graduated first and second grades. Tugboat made Cs, but Terry made As. They still both going to college. Both gone have knowledge and play basketball for the school." Keep it going.

"Terry dunking on Lil Buck's going to be tragic. Terry can jump

like Magic. Lil Buck can hit threes though. Shoot a swish when please so. We probably just gone tie." Keep it going.

"Gone get jobs with diplomas. Our mamas won't own us. Our wives will. They gone hang flowers out the window sill, and maybe we'll be neighbors." Keep it going.

Another beat's added to the mix. It ain't any of my sounds. I don't know how many I got, but this one ain't one of em. It's coming from somewhere else. It ain't with my beat. It ain't with the beat

I see Lil Buck going to with his hands. I say, "Uh oh, hold up," but Lil Buck ain't heard what I done heard. He hear it now though. It's his Mama Bonell come to collect him probably. I done stopped. I don't like it for no grown ups to hear me rap. They might thank it's dumb. I don't thank it's dumb but

sometimes, and Lil Buck don't never say he thanks it's dumb. They might thank it's dumb though. Can't never tell what grown ups gone thank's cute. That's worse than dumb. I hope she ain't heard me. We hear her now good since I done stopped the song. Ain't sanging it no more.

Her steps on the porch floor done sent the dust through the boards. Dust glow in the light. Go out the light. It hit a lattice strip. It hit a lattice dip. Shine in a square. Can't pick it up til it hit the next one. I pick it up. It ain't shining. I pick it up. There it goes on down.

"Wendell? Where you at?"

"Down here, Mama," Lil Buck holla up through the floor. She standing up over our heads.

"You ain't down there with that low down Rucker boy is you. Um, he's so sorry. Don't want none of his kind up under my porch no time soon. Un un." she say. "He ain't down there is he?" she ax, and Lil Buck give me a funny face. Funny like Lil Buck faces are. Lil Buck hem and haws. Don't know what to say, but Mama Bonell don't give him no chance. She say, "Terry you is down there ain't you?"

"Yes, yessum," I say. Say with a stutter problem. She start a wild laughing. Big old belly laughing.

"Boy, you know I'm just fooling with you. You eating supper here?" Mama Bonell ax still a little laughing.

"You want me to eat supper here?" I ax Lil Buck. He say he want me to eat supper with them. I say up, "Yessum."

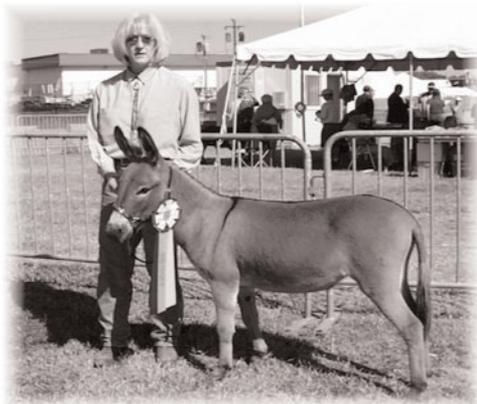
She say, "You want to?"

I say, "Yessum if that's alright."

She say, "That's alright. What

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yall hungry for? Pork chops? Terry always likes my pork chops don't he?"

"You want pork chops?" Lil Buck ax, and I nod.

He holla up, "Pork chops good."

Mama Bonell holla down, "Terry, you liking my pork chops ain't you?"

I say, "Yessum."

She say, "They better than your Mama Odella's ain't they?" I look at Lil Buck cause I don't know what to say. Don't wanna have to say, but she don't make me. Mama Bonell just laughs. Big belly laughs. "You ain't got to answer. It'd be a shame if word got out Mama Odella's own kids like my pork chops better. That'd be a shame. Yes it would. Don't answer, hear?" she say and laugh.

"Yessum," I say.

"You staying the night?" she ax.

I look at Lil Buck. I ax to Lil Buck, "You want me to stay the night?"

Lil Buck say, "I want you to stay if you want to."

"I want to," I say to Lil Buck. "Yessum," I say to Mama Bonell.

She say, "Alright then. I holla for yall when it's getting clean for supper time. Yall come when I holla now though, hear?"

Lil Buck start just before me, "Yes ma'am," and then I start, "Yessum," but Lil Buck saying, "Yes ma'am," out long. Saying it sang song. Saying it silly. I finish before he does even though he done started saying his okays sooner. Mama Bonell's going back to the kitchen. Going back loud. The beat of her feet shake and make us know she's walking on the boards. The

boards up over our heads. Small round heads. Old wooden boards. We see through em. We hear through em. Mama Bonell walking loud.

Lil Buck's good at going to sleep. He get beside me, and he asleep.

"Goondnight, Lil Buck. See ya tomorrow," I say. He don't say nothing though. He asleep already. Sometimes it's ice cold out. I remember when it's been ice cold out. It wasn't in Lil Buck's bed though. Lil Buck being in it makes it warm, warm. He sleeps hard, hard. Breaths his air hard while he sleeps. When I'm in Lil Bucks room spending the night with him, he's a big old bear. Big old brown bear. When the sheets leave me, they go up over to his side. High to his side. Go up over to cover him high, and when he breathes, they go up higher still from off my chest. Then he blow that air back out, and them blankets come down again. Come back down. Go to my chest. It stays warm in Lil Buck's bed though. I feel safe. Just as safe as I can be. No burglars coming in couldn't even see me. Couldn't see past Lil Buck. Like I done cuddled up by a big old bear in a cave. It's dark in Lil Buck's room. Dark cave dark. Ain't scary like one though. Ain't hard rock uncomfortable like one either. What do I sleep on at home? Bunk bed. What do I sleep on at Lil Buck's? Bed. Like a bedtime bed. A bedtime at my man's house bed, and we done banged today, so I'm getting ready for this.



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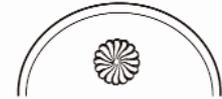
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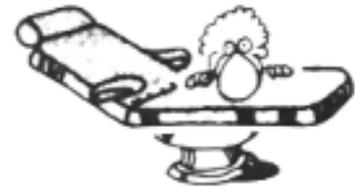
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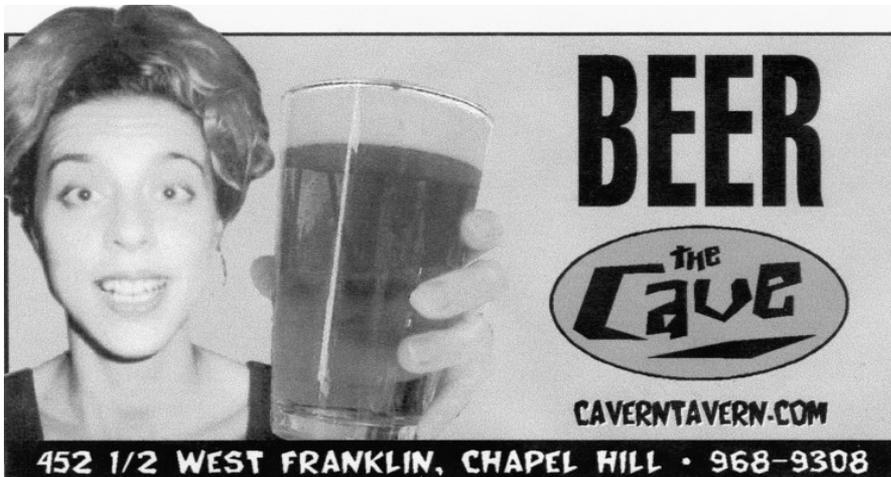
The Fight (Excerpt from *Hume's Fork*) by Ron Cooper

I started the first interracial fight in our county's schools. When the public schools finally integrated in ours, the hold-out county of Berkeley in the hold-out state of South Carolina, the tensions that had both deputies patrolling the high school spilled over and trickled down to the grammar school, and I, a fourth grader, brought it to a boil.

Our bus driver, a black woman named Zenobia Major renowned in the county for her homemade wine, arranged passengers according to age: twelfth grade in the back, first up front, which is probably how they would have sifted out on their own. The school board had instructed all the bus drivers to place white and black middle and grammar school kids in the seats together to promote "fellowship." The Board wisely did not submit the high school kids to this seating scheme. Mrs. Major placed me between her son Lyndon Johnson Major and another black boy

Poitier Prioleau, son of the local root doctor Poinset Prioleau, an albino whom everyone called Forty-Four believed to have the power to throw spells. I had seen Poitier fishing the other side of the creek from me two or three times and remembered an occasion in which he laughed after catching a respectable redbreast while I had caught none, howled when he pulled in a sizeable warmouth to my still nothing, and hopped around in a mud-slapping buck dance when he yanked up the biggest bluegill I had ever seen as my bobber remained half dry. I hurled a rock that did not make it across the creek and went home.

We rode the bus together in silence for the first three weeks. Lyndon Johnson slept to and from, and Poitier, who gave no sign of recognizing me, stared out the window. One afternoon on the way home Poitier turned to me and said, "Been catching any?" and in my eight-year-old way of thinking I needed no further provocation. I popped him in the mouth, and his head slammed against the window. The other kids, all of whom had been shooting glances and casting unspoken dares to look back, instantly took the signal, the girls screaming and throwing books and ducking under the seats, the boys exchanging wild swings at each other while trying to steal peeks at the girls' drawers. Lyndon Johnson woke up and must have thought we had wrecked and started screaming.



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The reactions were so fast and confusion so abundant that Poitier had no chance, although I suppose he tried, to retaliate. Mrs. Major, muscular and about thirty, stopped the bus in the middle of the road, leaped to her full height that was close to six feet, and started flailing the leather strap she kept under the seat, leaving welts on fighters and the innocent alike. Six or eight high school boys of both colors tumbled out the emergency door and rolled around the road and into the ditch.

Calhoun Funderburk, who had recently retired after ten years as sheriff to become bully of most of the county, stopped and helped Mrs. Major get everything settled down. He crammed all the white kids into the back of his flatbed truck and took us to our homes. Funderburk, who had built a fearsome reputation on KO-ing drunks and back talkers with his fists instead of a billy stick, said to me as he dropped me off at home, "Looks like you tagged that boy pretty good, sport. Your daddy'll be proud

of you."

He was not. After hearing my brother Lucian's excited recounting that I did not deny, the Old Man took me first to Mrs. Major's house and had me apologize to her and to Lyndon Johnson (I was tempted to ask, "For what, waking him up?" but did not). Mrs. Major and her five children, of which Lyndon Johnson looked to be about the middle one, all ran out onto the porch as we drove up. She crossed her arms and listened to me and then said that she appreciated my coming to her like a young gentleman and understood that the tension coming from the parents of "all two" colors was the real cause of my outburst. Nevertheless she would make her report to the principal the next day, and one more incident from me and I would need to "take my foot in my hand for go to school." Some sort of mutual respect sprung up between her and the Old Man, and she gave him a bottle of scuppernong (or muscadine, whichever one you get red

from) wine, and he asked if she liked venison. She said that she and the whole family "loves some deer meat," but since she ran her husband off, she had not had any. The Old Man promised to bring her some soon.

We then went to the Prioleau home, a two-story, unpainted, splintery clapboard building with a rusted tin roof. You could not see the house from the paved road, but everyone knew that the root doctor resided down that barely discernable, grassed-over lane, which ran out about fifty yards in front of the house. The Old Man parked his International truck behind Forty-Four's old Nomad station wagon-with the back part of the roof cut off and the trunk dug out to form something like a pickup-and walked through the muddy yard across springy one-by-six planks to the porch.

Forty-four was rumored to have had thirty children by nearly as many women charmed by his hoodoo. None of the women lived

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with him in this house, but various, overlapping combinations of the children did. During the years that I rode the bus to school, it was anybody's guess as to how many—usually four to eleven—would be at the bus stop that week. His prodigy was explained by another rumor that he had three testicles. Any woman dropping by to ask that a haint be placed on an enemy or for some herbal remedy for the woman's miseries was liable to leave seeded.

Daddy rapped on one of the square posts holding up the porch roof. Heads peeped out through the windows, but no one answered. Chickens scratched in the mud, and something, we presumed a dog or two, bumped around under the house. He rapped again.

"Mr. Prioleau? Pledger Hume, the gunsmith. I fixed your old double-barrel Fox a few years back."

"I know you, Mr. Hume." Forty-Four emerged from the house. "That old gun still shoots good."

I had never seen him up close, and despite the bizarrely white skin, he did not appear as frightful as I had expected. He was thin and looked like Chuck Berry, the resemblance reinforced by the curling-iron-straightened hair, also white, and appeared to be older than the Old Man, but that could have been due in part to the limp from his wooden left leg. The standard tale was that a jealous husband had shot him in the kneecap when he was a teen. He hid in the swamp for several days and came out with a gangrenous leg that had to be amputated. Still fearing the murderous cuckold, he left the county for several years and returned immediately after the other man died from a fever while, so the story goes, franti-

cally calling from his deathbed "Poinset Prioleau! I sorry about your leg!" The story served as proof that Prioleau had been trained in the hoodoo arts while on hiatus, and, as the gun that took his leg was reported to be a .44, it explained his nom de guerre as well.

"My boy has something to say to your boy."

"Which one?"

The Old Man turned to me. "Which one?"

"Poitier."

"Well, tell Mr. Prioleau."

"Poitier, Mr. Prioleau."

Poitier, who had surely been peeking out the window, eased through the door and came to the top of the steps. His top lip was swollen with a bright red split running through the fleshy part. He stuck his hands into his pockets and looked at me, but something more was in his gaze. It sounds like a cliché, almost like the bar fight in the old Western movie that ends in friendship between the lead and his rival, but Poitier and I came to an understanding, and I sensed that he too resented the adults' meddling in something that should have remained between us.

"Tell Poitier what you came to tell him, son," the Old Man said.

"Poitier, I'm sorry I hit you."

"OK," Poitier replied.

"Now go shake his hand," the Old Man said.

We did an exaggerated up-down pump as little boys would. The Old Man sent me back to the truck while he and Forty-Four talked for a few minutes. I saw Poitier beside the house throwing a stick up at dirt daubers under the eave. He glanced my way a couple of times. The Old Man came back with a rusty .410.

"Mr. Prioleau asked me to re-blue it for him," he said. "Probably for your buddy to shoot squirrels with."

Daddy and I had to attend a conference with Jackson Elementary's assistant principal Rev. Sinclair T. Vanish, former principal of R. A. Purify, the former black school. County council member and tireless voter registration canvasser, he had worked hard but in vain in the previous months to quell the fears of white and black parents alike and make the school integration as smooth as possible. Even in his ministerial regalia—three-piece, dark purple, pinstripe suit; Lions Club and VFW lapel pins; gold watch chain stretched from one vest pocket to the other; gold college ring ('56?); gold cross on a necklace over a yellow necktie propped up on a gold collar pin; round, gold cufflinks with little Bibles etched onto them—he looked less resplendent than exhausted. He spoke for fifteen minutes, sometimes to himself it seemed, about how he had dreamed for years of equal access to education for every child and had all but given up on seeing it in his home state in his lifetime when finally the good Lord answered his prayers. He must have seen my eyes welling up when he said, "You get me, Mister Man?" calling me by his favored term of endearment for boys.

"Yes, sir. I'm sorry. I'm sorry for what I did to you." A tear escaped along the side of my nose.

He understood me, too. He shook my and the Old Man's hands and sent us on our way, back into that world where little boys think they must fight, for reasons they hope they will someday understand.

Anthem for the Official Rhode Island State Shellfish by Matthew Farrell

Oh beau-ti-ful, crus-ta-ceous life
A-bid-ing in our muck
Through what a bi-valve knows of strife
We wish you e-very luckkkkkkk

Tho' sed-i-ment, and kinds of silt
May blanket o'er your reign
Sow seeds of roe and mind your milt
Peee-ple your wet domainnnnnnnnnnn

Behind your bulging azure eyes
Through your breathy mollusk sighs
A clammy ethos mild and meek
Your shell is strong but mind is weak.

When aenemone with stinging spine
Or jellyfish with limbs like twine
Should on your restful time impinge
You just contract--and close your hinge.

While quick seas rush and swell above
The lang'rous shellfish dreams of love
But below in lonely briney sand
His mussel amours meet faint demand

And Lo! his mournful wails expand
Across the Stygian marine land
To fill with rueful cry the oceans
With his forlorn longing a-balone notions

Though sun may shine in air-filled skies
In ombrageous aqueous torpor he lies
His love as great as ever seen. She
Now doth garnish cheese linguini.....

Embittered neither, not to grow sick
From thoughts on fate: a clam is Stoic
Would suffer samely less nor mo' joy
Had she wound up upon a PoBoy...

On sunny beaches all palm-fretted
Natives drumming frond-envetted
Stew-pots boil with what they've netted
Clams seek not to be so feted

New England too, its sounds and shores
Abound in Yale and Harvard bores
Who deem it is a mark of stah-tus
To shew our friend their learned glottis

Still so some other humbler genus
Treat the clam in ways as heinous
See the otter on his back
Give the Quahog rocky whack

Seagulls using no stone mallet
No less seek clams to gift their palate
Even octopi, of man-like heart
Are known to prise their shells apart

But though many foreign nation
From his husk seeks his ablation
He cannot loathe he doth not hate
Regards placidly his fate

For when there are two halves of you
Whether in chowder or island stew
Seabird slurp or otter bang
The end is self-same, yin or yang

Matt Boyd ("Echo") graduated from the University of Georgia and is now "kind of a big deal" in New York City. He's the editor of Staccato magazine, which you can see at www.staccatomagazine.com, and he is not looking forward to the winter.

Darrell Kinsey ("Banging Before Bed") enters data at an Athens, GA, mental health clinic. "Banging Before Bed" is an excerpt from his novel manuscript, *Rucker with a Hunker*.

A native of South Carolina, **Ron Cooper** teaches philosophy at Central Florida Community College in Ocala, FL. His novel *Hume's Fork* (Bancroft Press) from which "The Fight" is excerpted, should appear in about a year. He is a bluegrass enthusiast who spends a great deal of energy trying, unsuccessfully, not to embarrass his three children.

Matthew Farrell: Boulevardier, fop and dandy, decaying morally and apace physically in the grand-old tradition of the South. Resident of Charlottesville, habitue of Asheville.

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