

The Blotter

Magazine
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Chromed plastic fish emblems eating each other

Free in Asheville, Athens, Atlanta, Chapel Hill, Charlotte, Charlottesville, Durham, Greensboro, Hillsborough, New York City, and Raleigh
March 2006



In This Issue: Burning Unquenchable Lights of Alchemical Science! As Above, So Below: Art by Lauren Gibbes. Genie Joiner, S. M. Foran, James Mackie, Phillipp Dismukes, and Johnny Pence Distill the Elixir of Short Prose. Nancy Hunt, Matthew Mulder, and Ben Bogardus Burn Away All but the Lapis of Poetry. OneNeck and mckenzee Uproot the Fig Tree of Comix, and Remove Its Sundry Parts to Be Bruised with Sulfur. Plus, the Dream Journal.

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*This magazine may contain typos or
bad words*

Items Worth Mentioning

from the desk of Johnny Pence

Thugs in Nature

In S. M. Foran's piece "Like Chocolate Driven," the protagonist faces an ugly side of nature. I have personally been in similar circumstances, and I can advise the reader on how to handle the situation safely. Don't run. Stand your ground and sing "Hey Jude." That's what I did and the thugs left me alone.

Three-track Mind

Starting about the ides of March, and continuing until late May, I can really only concentrate on three things: fishing, motorcycles, and my seersucker suit. Until I bought my seersucker suit in April of '02, I had to sit around fantasizing about it. In this issue, I've included a little piece that I wrote at the time of its purchase.

Similarly, until this year, when it came time to think about motorcycles, all I could do was fantasize. As you can imagine, in years without a seersucker suit and without a motorcycle, I did a lot of fishing.

In the past year, some weird forces have come together to place the '72 Triumph Tiger that once belonged to my pal Erik Adolfson in my hands. It now runs. I wish Erik still did. We'd all rather have him back and healthy, but you can't always get what you want, sugar.



I can't call it "my" exceptional vehicle; I have to think of it as his. But it is *an* exceptional vehicle with an exceptional pedigree. Send pix of your exceptional vehicle for publication in this space. Honk and wave at the primer-gray Triumph in Athens.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

Petrichor, 1873

by Genie Joiner

It was the heat.
My arms were burning with it.
I moaned.
Jerome threw me a warning glance, the broom slowing
in his big hands. He knew me he did, but customers
were in the shop and he knew not to speak.

But Lev knew me too.
He turned to glare, pausing his scissors by the ear
of the man in the chair. Lev Cohen ran a quiet shop,
dead quiet. It was not unusual for a customer
to fall asleep while getting a cut.
Lev's small black eyes grabbed and shook me—

“Quiet, boy-o, I'll replace you
by closing if I have to!”

Suddenly a breeze—no, a wind—
blew into the shop. I turned toward the open door and
the polish rag fell from my fingers, sending a wad of brown
polish onto the britches of the man sitting before me.

I could barely see the cordovan sticking to his brown slacks,
and I whispered a deep thanks. I looked quickly at Lev,
whose back was to me. I took a brush to the man's boot
and buffed so hard the wax finally dropped to the floor.
The man shifted and cleared his throat and I had
to wonder if he knew.

I chanced another look at Lev, who was rubbing his
thigh. His mind was on his sciatica, not me.
Relieved, I took a breath and again looked out the door.
Out on the street a dead New York workhorse, dry
as jerky, was being dragged onto a low cart. How
any city animals survived this heat, I did not know.

I turned back to my man and was just finishing
his boots when another breeze, wet and fragrant, ringed
the shop—followed by thunder. Lev's customer woke with a start.
Jerome smiled and looked to the door,
his gray head rivered in sweat.

(*petrichor: the smell of rain on dry ground)

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

A Boring Mess

i dreamed i was somehow back in
time, watching a race of 1850s-era bat-
teaux, sailboats, and steamers down
the savannah river. i was hovering
above the race, about 100 yards away.
they still had about a day's journey.
then i was suddenly in savannah,
watching the winner and all the close
followers.

since i was already in savannah, i
decided to have lunch in the old part of
town. “i” was maybe three or four peo-
ple at the same time. we were talking
about a university press literary maga-
zine that was being sold for \$5 or \$6,
and it was nowhere as good as *The
Blotter*. at the table next to us/me, Nikki
Giovanni, Rita Dove, and Maya
Angelou were having lunch, and i/we
dediced to try to find a copy of *The
Blotter* lying around to show them, but
couldn't.

i/we then became players in this weird
Lifetime-channel movie about a killer.
“i” was now Kirstie Alley and Steven
Weber, circa 1992. both kirstie and
steven were the killer, and each was
trying to kill the other. then, at one
point, i was “only” kirstie alley and
steven weber barged into a bathroom
with me, threatened to rape me, and
then demonstrated that he had already
killed karl malden and (senator-actor)
fred thompson. i was not at all afraid
because i could totally kick his ass and
i was not at all surprised that he had
killed those guys because the movie
was so poorly written. it was all very
predictible, and then i/kirstie alley had
to sit through a long montage of how
flashing lights drove me crazy, how i'd
stolen a mercedes benz from savan-
nah after the boat race, how i had
escaped from a mental institution ... it
was all so melodramatic and pre-
dictible. i was glad to wake up because
the dream was getting tiresome.

—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.

continued, p. 6



Prudent Power Prevails

Lauren Gibbes

A meditative loss of recognition and awareness ...

Lauren Gibbes lives and works out of Asheville, NC. Her next exhibition will be with the collective Plenish Projects at Flood Fine Art Center in Asheville. April 1-May 15. www.laurengibbes.com



Number 1



Kiss



Mind Control 2



The Luxury of Seasonal Depression



They told you that nobody likes a smart ass?



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Suddenly all of us were talking about the prospect of rain and there was laughter in the shop.

Finally, Lev's customer paid up and left, and my man stood to go. He handed me four bits, then stretched.

"Keep it," he said as I stared at the coins in my hand—the most I'd ever earned for a shine. He laughed at my surprise. He was young, maybe twenty.

"Yes sir, I thank you sir!"

The man walked out the door and looked into the dark clouds gathering above him, then took off running toward Ninth. And then it fell, the rain, and as it fell dust rose from the street and entered the shop.

And the smell of it—the dust and the rain together—gave me joy and I whooped, just as though I was home already. Jerome quickly cleared his throat, fearful for me. I felt Lev's eyes blaze and try to pin me, but I did not care. I was headed for the door.

I stood at the opening for a moment or two and watched cool rain pound my city, then turned to see Lev standing behind me, watching me.

"Alright, then, we're through for today!" he rasped.

He hobbled over to the sink and ran water over his razors and combs. I ran to the stand and grabbed my things.

"But come all the earlier tomorrow, you hear?" he yelled as I bolted from the shop. "And I'll teach you how to apply soap to a man's beard!"

"Do you hear me, boy?"

"Yes, Mr. Cohen!" I said over my shoulder. "Yes, sir!"

Like Chocolate Driven

by S. M. Foran

Students of history will agree that assigning blame for any single event is a disagreeably complex issue, and this complexity is certainly not limited to moments of great national significance. A simple childhood memory can prove to be just as difficult to decipher as a global calamity—a small boy, for instance, his nose bloodied and limbs trembling in frustration—who is to blame?

In the more reflective moments of adulthood, could this boy accuse his own parents of criminal negligence, the endangerment of their own child? Perhaps the finger of reproach should first be thrust into the shadows of the past, however, at the mighty Hernán Cortés bouncing over the bright Atlantic in his Spanish carrack, its hold bursting with the first fruits of European colonization: the cacao pod. Can you not see his wide and easy

conquistador smile set to the wind as he races back to civilization with an intoxicating recipe that would sweep wildly through the kingdoms of a continent, a chocolate drink that would set even the most holy of knees to trembling at the mere anticipation of its forbidden pleasure? But, this would be too simple a solution. What about the British confectioners, Fry & Sons, who developed the first bars of chocolate for 19th Century consumption? Could they not also be held accountable? Or the Swiss chocolatier, Daniel Peter, who discovered the power of combining milk and cocoa powder? Is he not to bear some responsibility for making this overpowering Aztec elixir palatable for the masses?

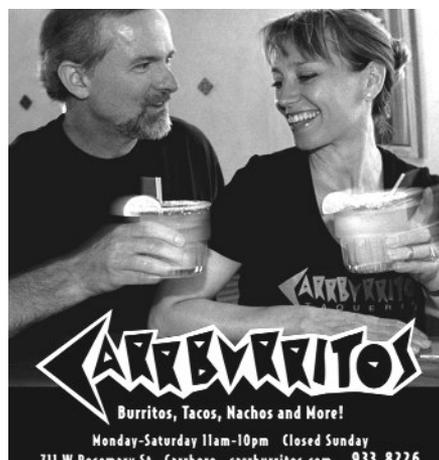
Culpability for the driving force of this childhood tragedy must be established. Justice must somehow be served.

Imagine, if you will, a sunny lakeside meadow, a picnicker's delight peppered with the shapes of blankets and baskets and families bent devotedly over legs of chicken and buckets of yellowed potato salad. A pudgy-faced lad of six or seven stands spraddle-footed over the frayed corner of an orange afghan, his very being quivering in expectancy as a dark bar of chocolate is passed reverently from hand to hand until it is finally snatched out of the summer air and clutched tightly to his chest. A triumphant chortle escapes the boy as he turns and examines the mellowed richness of the candy's earthy hue, then lifts the corner of the chocolate bar slowly to his mouth for a tentative nibble. Despite the roundness of his appearance, the boy exhibits an unusual amount of self-control. He does not rush the chocolate—without quite knowing why, he respects the ancient power of the sweet confection, somehow sensing that it is special, unable yet to articulate the centuries of cultural signifi-

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cance attached to the primal force of the cacao.

And so the boy stands, completely absorbed, unaware of an immediate threat to the almost sacred nature of his occupation, a roguish herd of antlered thugs pacing the edges of the meadow, their clever brown eyes flashing in the mid-day light, their hooves impatiently pawing furrows in the warm earth. These ill-bred creatures of the forest had long ago grown accustomed to the presence of people, and they had developed the distasteful habit of demanding payment from those who would picnic upon the grassy knoll, holding blanketfuls of innocents hostage until a ransom of tid-

bits had been dutifully surrendered. Those who foolishly thought they could avoid the furred highwaymen had found themselves on the receiving end of the swift and terrible law of the wild and had fled to the safety of their suburban homes, all the while nursing harsh-colored bruises as a reminder of their near-fatal scrape with the rawness of nature.

The boy stands in a corpulent burst of rapture as he reverently tastes the corner of his chocolate bar, and he is only vaguely conscious of a blur of movement at the extreme edges of his vision. Working off of some predetermined signal, the herd divides

itself and flanks across the grass in an attempt to completely surround the boy, however, some slight noise—a scuff of turf, a snorting of dust, the slice of an antler through the balmy air—arouses the boy's attention. His gaze lifts above the surface of the candy bar in an exaggerated and agonizing motion that distends the muscles of his face into an elongated chocolate-smeared scream, his eyes popping at the sight of the quadruped ruffians bearing down on him.

With only the slightest deflection of the dimpled knees, the boy launches across the grass in a dead run toward the family sedan parked at the edge of the picnic area, the choco-

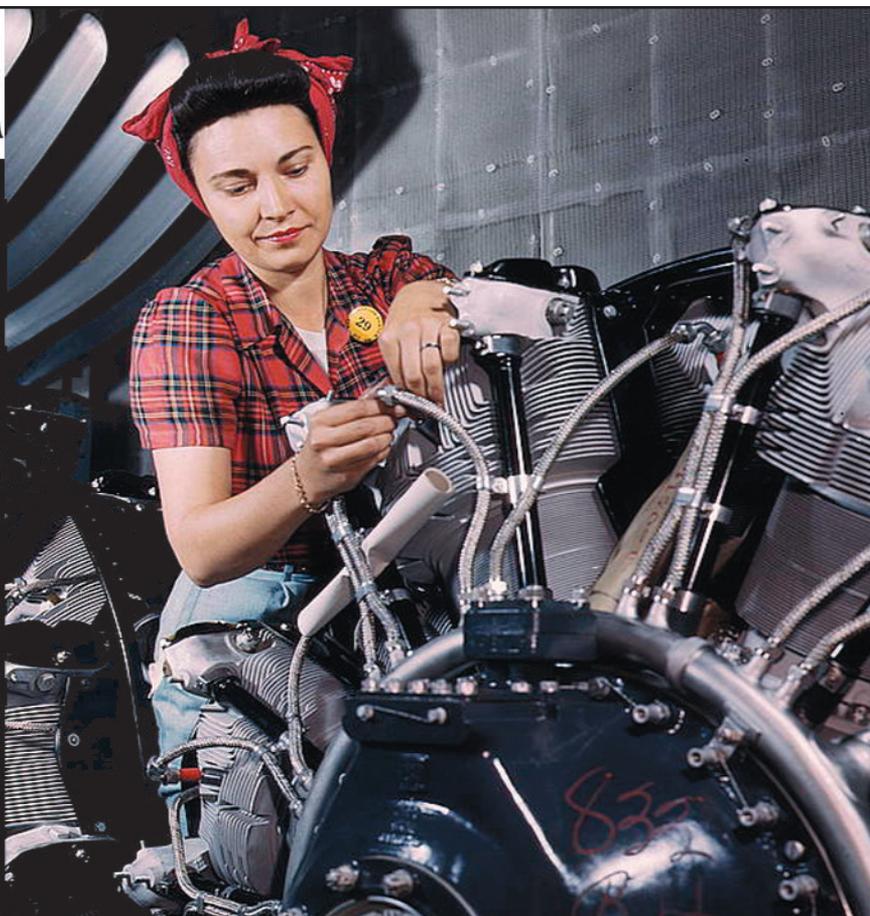
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late bar gripped tightly in one hand, but he is not swift enough. As his toes pivot into the floor of the meadow, propelling him forward, step by step, he feels the very air thicken, until it seems that he is pressing his body through an invisible blanket and he realizes, with a start, that the herd is upon him.

The boy hears his heart drumming rhythmically in his ears as the deer nudge by him, on the left and on the right, and, as they encircle him, he senses that the drumming is not merely the sound of his own frantic blood, but the pummeling of hooves upon the turf, and he finds himself pinched tightly between the

trembling flanks of the towering, rawboned beasts. Curling the fist that still clutches the chocolate into the protective hollow of his chest, the boy thrusts his body against the rippling wall of brown, hoping to squeeze through, into the clear, but manages, as luck would have it, to trip one of his pursuers. The pace of the gnashing herd falters for a few precious moments as the deer stumble and try to regain the impassioned cadence of their stride, but it is enough to allow the boy to pull slightly ahead.

And, once clear of the pack, it is as if the boy has slipped upon his feet, the pudgy pistons of his legs thrusting him

closer and closer to his goal, until he finally grips the searing metal of the door handle with the fingers of his free hand. With little thought, except for the relative safety of the rear seat of the sedan, the boy scrambles inside and collapses, breathless, upon the sticky heat of the leather. He squishes his eyelids together and listens to the labored sound of his own lungs collapsing and inflating, then jolts upright as the herd, unable to correct its enraged momentum, bounces off the side panels of the sedan like oversized hailstones—bam, bam, thud, BAM!

And it is then that the boy realizes, with a shocking paral-

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By Design Students at Alamance Community College

ysis of horror, that he failed to close the car door behind him. As the quivering terror of this thought settles upon him, the Herculean head of a young stag, devilish knobs protruding from its scalp, suddenly appears, issuing a few tentative snorts, and, before the boy can even thrust a protective arm in front of him, he is caught in a dervish of flailing hooves that knocks the chocolate bar to the littered floor of the sedan. The boy quickly pulls his legs up on the seat and wraps himself in a bitter cocoon of defeat, betrayal, and loneliness, his mind now numbed to the sound of chocolate squares being forcefully folded into a cud of meadow grass.

As the boy's shoulders slouch forward in a silent tremor of weeping, the body of the automobile gently rocks between the pressing haunches of the milling herd, and the lad's face takes on the distant look of a disappointed conqueror.

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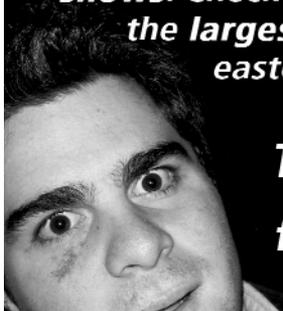
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The Cold End of January: A Letter from My Imaginary Wife

by James Mackie

My love, we have shared pyrotechnical pleasures in the past, danced those primitive dances that will not warrant us Green Cards in heaven, but now I fear you will think I have scales, a tail, and breathe fire. Wake up, Mackie. Get a life. Stop all this moping around in the woods: it will turn your brain to mush. What am I to do with your last hyperbole: "In October I heard God laughing in a rainbow of leaves tumbling in the wind"; or your last grandiose ecstasy: "When my heart stops, the world moves at the speed of light. Such

an exquisite, charming moment bubbling in joy." You may have realized every person you encounter potentially holds the key to your spiritual awakening, but I live in a fast place where people talk on cell phones, dress smartly, walk briskly. Here things are concrete, tangible. I can measure and judge what happens about me. I cannot jumble this into that metaphysical gibberish you wrote about Heisenberg's "Uncertainty Theory," Kabbalah's shattered vessel, and all that giving and receiving light rubbish. You may know, but I do not, that every

act significant or otherwise affects the balance of the Universe, and that some small act of kindness may swing open the locked doors of Eden. Sometimes, my love, I think you have gone round the bend, gone Schizie on me. Are you hearing voices, seeing things that aren't there? Should you get your medications adjusted? Have you forgotten your mantra, "Better living through chemistry"? Please, my love, remember to breathe slowly, and repeat, "Better living through chemistry." I am, however, thankful you have not entwined yourself in all that "rapture" hocus-pocus peddled like packets of anthrax by that desiccated, hair-sprayed Jack Van Impe. Yes, there may be Universes within Universes, and the soul may be "Brighter than a thousand suns" as you have written, but I have to go with what I have here: right foot, left foot, down the stairs, down the road. It's nothing magical, infinitely practical. When you finish acting like Saint Frances of Assisi, chattering away at rocks, trees, and birds, write me.



Untitled

by Phillipp Dismukes

I met this man once on a walk. He was covered ... no, not covered, but deep into red clay. Like a worm, he had embedded himself into a small hole. In the South, the clay is an easy red, nice on the eye, soft. The man had taken himself to believe that if he bore down into the dirt ... that if he lived deep into it, and slept with the mud in his pores, he would walk away sin-free. I spoke with him. He told me he had been called to lay deep in a hillside, that the clay would draw out his past and leave him free. He had a family once that he left,

and now knew very little. He wanted to be free of the weight. Resting, I gave him my water and the small amount of food I had, hoping he would somehow find a little of his life left to live. He told me stories of how once he was finally free from the sins, he would leave the mud, and how he would live a contented life without the guilt of past wrongs, able to walk a free man without the remorse of a walking empty soul. I wished the man in mud well and told him, "I too have a past to forgive myself of. I'll remember you if you will forgive me."

Genie Joiner is a writer and artist in western NC, formerly from NYC and Santa Fe.

S. M. Foran is a teacher from Halifax, VA.

James Mackie has a Masters degree in English from the University of New Mexico. He is currently working as a Mental Health Therapist at the Rappahannock Regional Jail in Stafford, Virginia.

Phillip Dismukes, born Aug 15, 1972, is just your standard bald man.

Johnny Pence is 6'3" and often unintentionally intimidating to haberdashers. He edits *The Blotter*.

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Amusing Intercourse with a Haberdasher

Transcribed 4/11/02, on the occasion of the fitting of my seersucker suit and subsequent perusal of an expensive and ugly tie selection.

by Johnny Pence

“So, I’m looking for—”

“Something like these?”
[ugly, ugly ties, \$40 each]

“Lord no! I’m looking over what you’ve got, and they all look so geometrical—”

“*Geometrical?* Hmm. That’s a good way of saying it, I guess ... something like—”

“See, what I want are big, round, organic shapes. I always liked paisley.”

“*“Organic?!”* where you gettin’ all this grammar from?”

“Well, I—”

“You a writer or something?”

“Kinda, yeah.”

“Oh, that explains it! That’s where you get all them *synonyms* and, uh, *descriptors* from! So, what you need is something to show that you’re, uh ... *flexible*, that you have, uh ... *diversity* ... presence!”

“Sure. Yeah. Whatever. What about this one?”

“No. That won’t work.”

“Okay. So what I want is something that’s bright, maybe even a little loud. I don’t have to be too serious when I’m wearing this, so I actually want it to be a little ostentatious.”

“*“Ostentatious?!”* There you go again!”

“Listen, man. I can’t just turn it off.”

“You must be really well, uh ... must have traveled a lot.”

“Well, I—”

“Surely, you’ve been to Jolly Old England.”

“Yeah, when I was a kid—”

“And Japan.”

“Nope. Never been to Japan, but I’d like to roll up in there wearing this seersucker suit with *this* tie on [a loud, hideous thing that looked like the oscilloscope dance in *Fantasia*], I tell you what!”

“Yes, them Japanese would be all, like, ‘Yes sir, welcome to-ah-Japan. Please, you are welcome.

Anything you need, just let us know.”

“Dude. You really are trying to make a sale, aren’t you?”

“They wouldn’t know what to do with you and this suit.”



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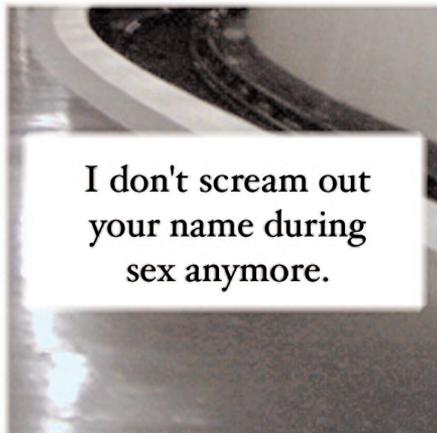
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Sinister Bedfellows by mckenzee

I think I'm over you.



I don't scream out
your name during
sex anymore.



In fact, I rarely panic at all.

Mind Your Manners by Nancy Hunt

swallow serenity
plead, promise

lips horizontal,
exposed.

cache credence
milk pleasure

heaven is for dogs.

Postulates by Matthew Mulder

Every person is a collection of items.
Every item has a given value.
The value of an item depends on its attraction;
its attraction varies as to its placement.

"Someone smells good," she says and
arranges the camera before a blue backdrop.
She bends forward, placing a stool
and reveals a tattoo of a rose just
inside her black low-cut blouse.
Attraction depends on the item's placement--
hidden when she stands erect and
asks me to have a seat.
She looks at me as a collection of items
that need proper placement under
lights to give value to
the hue and tint of my person.
Her secret attraction hidden as
I smile for the camera.

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CHIP & SAVE 20%

untitled

by Ben Bogardus

The black building
 Came out of *Space Odyssey 2001*:
 Absorbed all the light
 Emitted from overhead parking lot lamps and
 Upon being exposed, sent out suburban radiation into the night.

A man approaches across cracked pavement decked
 With black bubble gum spots
 Like stars, not holes.
 He walks between two rows of SUVs
 Glowing with radiation, and carefully
 Places his feet on the cracks, for if he does not,
 The wind will double him over as it has
 The owners of all the vehicles.

Gridlock gripped the building in the monomodal style,
 Squares upon squares, none lit.
 Cast off of vertical tile,
 He glides through the entrance
 And the building swallows him.

He remembered nothing except images:

- Running across a bed of maggots, chased by wasps, toward a flag. A little faster than the rest, he gets close enough to the flag and jumps. A white hand sprouts from the flag, longingly reaching for him, but he only grazes the fingers. He is trampled.
- Swimming in coffee, he sees the Styrofoam walls of the cup. Trying to climb, he finds them too smooth. Then a rain of sugar starts.
- At the interview, he sits in front of a suited man, who seems to keep raising the salary. None will do, and the man spills a glass of water. All of it is sucked into the surroundings. He tells the man it's not the water, but the way it moves.

Coming out of the building,
 Proven unto himself he sees the lot
 Barren, sunrise in the east, all the incandescent bulbs
 Broken.
 A river runs through the parking lot that swept
 It all away.
 I am the river.

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