

The Blotter

Magazine
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All the Tender Sweetness of a Seasick Crocodile

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God Bless Us Every One. In this Issue: Three Stories. One by Brent Powers, One by Z. van der Meer, and one by Courtney Brown. Comix by One Neck and Allen Sessions. Plus, the Dream Journal, and good riddance to bad rubbish.

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*This magazine may contain typos or
bad words*

Items Worth Mentioning
from the desk of Johnny Pence**So Long, Suckers**

Man, I don't know what I was thinking. Almost three years as unpaid editor of a deep, deep underground anti-intellectual literary magazine? Yeah, sure. I'll sign up for that.

This will be my last issue as editor, at least for now. I'm handing this hot potato over to the inestimable Garry Somers. I'm sure it'll be great with him at the helm, and I'm psyched to see what he'll do. Garry brings talent, energy, and enthusiasm, qualities that I admit I've been lacking for awhile.

For most of my time as editor, I was a stay-home dad. I did the editorial and layout work while my son napped, and everything was mellow. The problem was that I started going a little nuts cooped up in the house. I started losing my creative spark big-time. I also kinda had to get a "real job."

I like the job. Despite the time I spend working, it's really not the manhours that are a problem for me, I just don't want to be creative right now. I want to try being normal. The folks where I work have *no idea* how weird I am. It's fascinating. Like I'm in disguise.

I'm sure this perverse attraction toward being normal will change one day, and Garry's already giving me deadlines for new material (which, Jeez, where am I going to come up with that?) so I'd better get my head straight. But for now, I just want to stop forcing myself to be creative. That doesn't work.

To brass tacks: submissions can still go to Jenny Haniver, mermaid@blotterrag.com. We haven't got Garry's e-mail straight yet, but if you want to reach him, you can e-mail me and I'll forward it. I'll keep that **ediot** address just because my mom uses it.

There *might* be a January issue, and there might not be. Garry hopes and thinks so. But if not, February is a pretty sure bet. We won't be losing any distribution sites except Charlottesville, VA. So all you Charlottesvilleans had better get your subscriptions in order.

There's also, like, an *organized* committee of *professionals* who are trying to figure out how to make the magazine financially viable. So there's that. Wow. I'm really glad it's still going to carry on. I'm also really glad I can step away for the time being.

Thanks everybody. It really has been a blast. Let's give Garry Somers a big fat round of applause and show him some *Blotter Magazine Love*.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

I Shot Santa Claus

by Brent Powers

Running. What else can I do? What can you do when you shoot somebody, and not just anybody but a myth? Ever shot a myth? Well, I have. So, I'm running along here, kids are giving chase, parents giving chase to the kids, everybody's after somebody else it seems, big ones eat the little ones. But look. I shot Santa Claus. That's the story.

So, go back. I've had a problem with this guy for years, maybe all my life, I don't know. He's a fat fool with whiskey breath who guilts the shit out of you. "You been good this year? You eat your peas and carrots and things? You fuck up the way you did all them other years?" So, who's he, Mister Clean? Son of a bitch goes home to a one room flop and watches the Weather Channel. No Mrs. Claus, no reindeers, no nothing. This is one big loser here, lemme tell you. So, I should be letting him put me down so I can get what I ask for? You know what? Fuck him, that's what.

Next time I see him I says, "What do you mean by all that crap yesterday?"

"What crap is that, son?" he asks mildly.

"All that guilt crap? Who do you think you are, laying that crap on me? So then you expect me to ask you nicely for what I want. Well, dig, fat boy. I want you in an icebox with the power turned up all the way. I want you sitting on tacks in a world of tacks that extend all the way to the horizon. I want your beard on fire, your stupid red suit run through the wrong cycle and come out looking like its made of crinkle chips, you crapulous crud."

"Son, why don't you buzz off or

something. You could buzz off. That's a good thing for you to do."

I pointed the Finger of Doom at him. It is a long finger, an adamantine finger, this Finger of Doom of mine. It is a finger that you cannot fly from into a land of homegrown tomatoes or thoughts of thy neighbor's ass. No, no. You're doomed, daddy-O, when that one casts its long shadow over your smug face, saying, "Hey! Kingfish. Tonight you sleep alone."

Yeah, so I tell him, "OK. OK, big guy. I'll buzz off for you. But I'll be back. This ain't over yet. Just you wait and see."

That's when I know that Fate has me by the balls. It's helping me along, I can feel it. A big warm breath of Fate gently pushes me along, pushes me right into the door of a gun shop. Oh, yes. A gun shop, whoopy! Wall to wall guns. Rifles, cannon, bazookas, Uzis. Then a long glass case with the lovely killer pistols, Mister, the BANG BANG guns you want from a man. Oh, and holsters, god damn it. The tooled leather, studded and beaded and bedazzled, place for a monogram, even a name if it's a short one, Tex or something, maybe just "Kid." I like that. Kid. Gun first, though. Let's see, let's see. There's gangster models, little chickenshit Derringers, big ole Magnums I figure for stupid, but then, but then ... well, dang it all if it ain't the venerable cattleman's friend, the 44.40 of yore, which is class, Jack, I ain't bull-shittin.

Espying me, the proprietor says, "You look like man knows his ordinance."

"I am a man of purpose," I told him.

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Shatner Sarajevo

I was in an older but very nice apartment in Sarajevo, on a high floor, with lots of windows. I was sitting at a long table, taking a deposition in a war-crimes investigation. Outside one of the windows, in the middle distance, a blimp shaped like a pink pig wearing Ray-Bans drifted by.

The apartment belonged to Willam Shatner. It was one of many properties that he owned world-wide, and he was letting me use it as the base of operations for the Sarajevo phase of my investigation. Shatner himself lounged in a corner, wearing a plush and expensive-looking white bathrobe.

At a certain point, I got up to go to the bathroom, which was very nice and where I pissed and pissed and pissed, for what seemed like forever, into an old-fashioned urinal that reached all the way to the floor. Seriously, that piss seemed to take all day, and was just the best.

As I was leaving the bathroom, I noticed a second door. Behind the door was a huge walk-in closet - much bigger than the bathroom - which contained what seemed to be hundreds of fluffy white bathrobes, all hanging in neat rows on wooden hangers around the entire closet.

(When I woke up, I really needed to urinate. No surprise there.)

—L.T.V., Richmond, VA

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.

"A tall man."
 "Lean and mean."
 "Not bad looking."
 "Rugged more than handsome, wouldn't you say?"
 "I can go with that. Yeah. Rugged."
 "And I have the look of a stranger in town."
 "Yeah. That, too."
 "OK, ring 'er up. And that holster there. Cut me a moniker on it. I want "Kid" there on it."
 "Well, my K knife's busted. Can you think of something else. Initials? What's your name."
 "Dunno," I told him.
 "So you're the famous Man Who Don't Know His Name."
 "Yeah. That's me. How 'bout it? What can you do with that?"
 "Well, simple. Put a X there? How are you for an X in that place?"
 "Nope. Rings false. Has implications I can't live up to."

"Well. Maybe just leave it blank, then. Folks'll get the point. They see a guy, he's tall and lean and mean and more rugged than handsome, they figure, Why that must be The Man Don't Know His Name."
 "Sure looks like him," I go along.
 "Has the walk."
 "The talk."
 "He don't say much. Leave out that talk stuff. He don't say much. That's how it should be."
 "How it is, Mister. Like you say. Just like you say."
 "Well, how 'bout you just put an O there. Got an O knife?"
 "I surely do."
 "That can be for Zero, dig? It can be interpreted that way."
 "Some would agree. I would. Others, maybe they sort of scratch their heads and wonder, 'Is that an O or a Zero? What do you think, Clarence?' 'I figure it for an O.' 'Just an O? What's that stand for?' 'Well, maybe for something unsayable.' 'Unspeakable.' 'Filthy dirty.' 'Vile, fetichistic, the stuff of dreams in a low bar at the end of the universe.' 'Yeah.' 'Yeah. I'm agreein with ya.' It could be like that, am I right?"
 "Could be. Figure it'll work?"
 "I figure. Them as don't get it, well, all the worse for them. For they don't know they are looking upon the Man Who Don't Know His Name and might misspeak them-

selves. You know how people are. 'Hey dude, where you get them artificial shoes?' So you have to turn to them and give your enigmatic smile, and either they trifle with you further or they get it who you are. But this here?"

He withdraws the venerable pistol and holds it up before me. "This is what awaits triflers," he says. "Do I not speak the truth here?"

"I feel that you do. I sense that about you."

"Well, then. Let's outfit you in a suitable way and get you stalking the streets of this one Wi-Fi town, seeking Truth, Justice, and the American Way."

"What's all that?"

"All what?"

"All that you just said."

"Dunno. It's a cowboy thing. Long time ago thing. Nobody rightly remembers."

"Well. I'll remember."

"Good for you, son."

So I shot the son of a bitch.

I stood in line with the gun concealed in my duster. The others paid me little notice. Figured me for a store detective, possibly a kid from another planet. "Nah, that ain't from no other planet, dude," one of them said. "That's what you call bad news wearing artificial shoes." "Got a point," said another. "Could account

They told you that nobody likes a smart ass?



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for his unnatural height. Kids don't get that high around here. Mom says it's all the sushi. Sitting across from her my father, who is short and fat, sings, 'Show me the way to the next sushi bar!' and they both laugh a great deal about that, slobber all over the food. I don't get it. I don't understand them half the time. Anybody's from another planet it's my parents."

"Yeh, well my parents are from hell, so there. Ever read that Cocteau shit? *Les Parents Terribles*? Yeah, so that's my parents."

"So, maybe this kid's from hell, too."

"Don't think so. Heaven is in his eyes. You don't get that effect when you're from hell. That's a known thing in science."

"You believe in science? What an asshole. You know how many cool points you just lost? Science. What are you, a particle weighing boy? Peekaboo universes jumping in and out of existence through black holes? Up from apes? Shit, man, anybody's looking knows apes are better. What an asshole."

But there is a low rumbling of an approaching elevated train. That's my signal. When the big old thing comes thundering overhead I rush forward, gun drawn, pushing everybody aside.

"You're not supposed to butt in line," someone reminds me.

I stand before him. Santa Claus. He has just let a girl down off his lap, which is wet, and is about to take a quick little snort when he gets it: what's happening here, who I am and what I'm going to do.

"Didn't I take your order a while back there, squirt?" he says. His eyes start from their spheres and roll like roulette wheels. "Think you can pull a fast one on old Santa? Well, let me tell you—"

"No, no," I says. "I'll do the

telling. I'm here to do the telling. And this is what I must say. You, Santa, are a responsible Myth, the Stuff of Legend, That Which Keeps a Boy Marching to the Same Old Drummer. But you think it's OK to just guilt a guy like that, to put him through all that police procedural crap. Wants to know if on the night of such-and-such you finished your peas and carrots, did the dishes as required, folded all the newspapers into paper airplanes just the way Dad wants 'em so he can play war with the fireplace. You do your homework? The one with all the mix and match—the Meter Reader's job description *is* ...? The official duties of a Cockroach Wrangler *are*...? When you have a wife, will you stop beating her? You mow the lawn? Take out the trash? You collect your cool points, call 'em in to Number Crunch, win a free prize? I doubt that. Can't say I believe that. You don't look like the right kind of kid to me. Something all sideways about you. Something all mislabeled and poisoning the old Populusque. Problem boy. Boy with funny ideas rolling around loose in his head and making him hear things ... Have I covered it? Isn't that one of your standard raps? Boy goes away from you feeling so worthless he don't deserve nothing but a day fulla Rossini overtures played on a million hurdy-gurdies, or Miss Black's long

vampire nails run down the blackboard as she says, 'Thus we see how Pythagoras imposed the Harmonic upon a delinquent Universe.'"

"Look, son," he says, "look here, now. I got business here. So you ... well, you just go on. You just go fishing. Ever think of that? You go on and go fishing. That's a good thing to do, isn't it? What I always do when I'm upset. I just grab me a quart a whiskey and a dozen baloney sandwiches and I just ... well, I just go fishing, is what. That'll straighten you out. Now you get along now, you hear?"

"Smile when you say that," I told him, and let her rip. Several holes appeared. Then he busted wide-open and party favors shot forth. Little kids ran up and started yelling, "I want the red one,—"

Fuck off, you like the blue—"

"The red, I want the red, I shall have the red—"

"No, the blue, you are allergic to the red, see, already you're breaking out, but here's a striped, trade you a striped for a red one."

"Get your own red one, I already wet on it."

But I was already running. And I'll keep on running, run all down the days and all the years, finding no resting place, no food or shelter within the borders of the Empire. I bear the mark. It showed up on my forehead



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moments afterwards. It is a sort of hoofprint, cloven, with the brand name of the Demiurge, owner and maker of all things, the whole works, the mess in your room, your smelly wife, the drifting dogs, wens, fogs, dirigibles. You must take care not to let it show. Do not go bareheaded in the sight of God. Pass swiftly, in a cloak and flat top hat. Keep that gun loaded, always. Be ready to fire upon all those who would show you kindness. All those who would smile and lick your nose. All cab drivers, desperate pilgrims yearning for Happy Hour, the Dogs of War, the Wings of Song. Beware, O Son of the Morning, always beware.

Mr. Spanky's Wooden Leg (From the recollections of Zelda van Charlotte) By Z. van der Meer

“Damn it,” Sammy said under his breath as he pounded the ground with his club head; which created an unsightly divot that he didn’t bother to repair. “I’ll be spelunking for that one.”

Sammy Galoosh had hit his ball into a patch of woods off the first fairway, where it landed in the trees. After a couple of minutes he finally found his ball resting behind an old trolley; a burned-out wreck with a charred roof and a rusty, sagging frame. Though he was surprised to find a trolley in the woods off the first fairway, he didn’t give it too much thought because he was thinking more about how difficult his next shot would be. The trolley effectively blocked any decent shot Sammy had. After pondering the situation a little bit, he decided that the trolley should be considered a loose impediment and demanded that it be removed, and removed on the dime of the Autumn Leaf Golf Club where the tournament was taking place. After some significant deliberation by the rules committee, the trolley was determined to indeed be a loose impediment which could, if so requested, be removed, at no cost to the player. So the tournament was halted for three days while a large crane was brought over from Acorn Grove’s budget construction group, the Summer College Student’s Construction and Heavy Equipment, to move the trolley so that Sammy could play his ball. After it was moved Sammy hit his ball, which collided with a tree that stood just off the edge of the fairway rough, and then promptly plopped into

Shannon Lake. Unfortunately, the rest of the tournament produced no better luck for Sammy. He finished in thirty-first place.

But that, of course, is the end of the story, and is not really important, nor particularly interesting. However, it was necessary to mention it so that the rest of the story could be told and mad sense of. It continues as follows:

Fig (which stands for Farley Ichabod Garrett); Hof, a wiry ex-classical music professor; and myself were standing around watching the spectacle of the crane, piloted by some fraternity rushee, hoisting the metal wreck out of the woods. As the trolley was hovering tediously over the trees, Hof asked:

“Anyone ever wonder why there is a trolley in the middle of the trees off the first fairway?”

And actually, nobody knew, and even more than that, nobody had ever heard of, nor seen, this trolley before. So, after asking around, talking to anyone who might possibly have an answer to the trolley question, and not finding one, we finally, reluctantly, agreed that our desire to know would unfortunately force us into the presence, and mind, of Mrs. Zelda van Charlotte; a situation none of us particularly relished.

Now, there are a few things you should know about Zelda van Charlotte, for the record:

Mrs. van Charlotte has been a member of the Autumn Leaf Golf Club since it opened, and she is, we think, approximately one-hundred and twenty-seven years old. She is originally from the town of Hello, NC, where she married her husband, Clifford van Charlotte III. As far as

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we can tell, Hello doesn't exist anymore; and it hasn't existed, it would seem, during any part of this or the twentieth century. She and her husband moved to Acorn Grove shortly after they were married, and after her husband died, Zelda moved into one of the small retirement cottages on the grounds of the Autumn Leaf.

Zelda van Charlotte's main occupation these days is story-telling; stories which she insists are true, but which are so outlandish and exaggerated that no one in their right mind could ever consider them to be plausible—at least not completely. It is possible, as our investigations have shown, that some part of her stories could be true, but we can only find so much evidence, and then the trail dead ends. Mrs. van Charlotte assures us that she hasn't the inclination, nor the imagination, to invent her recollections or any part of them, but we are not so sure.

She is a short woman, with a squatty, wrinkled face and a little hairy chin. Her manner of dress is that of an upper-class lady from the 1920's, complete with large, heavy pearls that seem to bow her forward and into your private space when she addresses you. In addition to the pearls, she wears a thick, gray fur shawl, and a little hat with faded, plastic fruit and flowers atop it, with a trim of yellowed-with-age lace around the short brim. Back in the day, she probably looked quite elegant and fashionable. However, nowadays, her clothes have given way to the steady persistence of time and have become faded and torn, and she goes about with runs in her stockings that seem to go on forever, and unsightly patches on her fur shawl which reveal the blotchy hide underneath. Though Mrs. van Charlotte doesn't smoke, she always smells like a stale ashtray.

But getting back to the story...

We had a few beers at the Back Nine Swill and then headed over to Mrs. Van Charlotte's cottage, dragging our feet and looking for stray balls on the way. It took a few moments to gather the courage to ask her about the trolley, but we eventually did and she replied:

"Of course I know about the trolley. Doesn't everyone?"

And we told her no, and in fact we had never even seen the trolley before. Then we asked her if she knew why it was there. She replied, "Because of Mr. Spanky's wooden leg, of course."

After a moment or two of staring dumbly at each other, and at her, we asked if she wouldn't mind elaborating a little. Mrs. van Charlotte then proceeded to tell us the whole story.

Mr. Franklin Spanky was courting a lovely, wealthy, young woman who was originally from the Ashville area. This young woman went by the name of Portia Bumm. They had been seeing each other for a long time, and there was talk of marriage. Mr. Spanky, who very was well-off himself, decided to take Miss Bumm on an elegant date here in Acorn Grove, which would begin with a trip to the Diamond Ice Show and dinner, and then would be topped off with a little nighttime putting out on the first green of the Autumn Leaf Golf Club. Depending on how the putting went, he would ask her to marry him. And she, hopefully, would say yes. This was what he had in mind.

The problem for Mr. Spanky, when it came to orchestrating the logistics of the date, was his wooden leg, which prevented him from traveling long distances on foot on account of it dragging along behind him like wheel-less wagon. This leg of

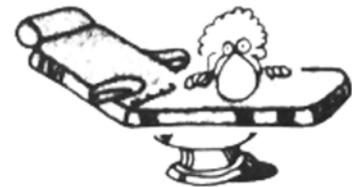
his never seemed to fit right, but it was purchased for him by his mother as a get-well gift after an accident he had with a church organ (his right leg got caught in one of the pipes), and was of quite some sentimental value to him.

The main issue for Mr. Spanky was how to get out to the green on the course so they could putt. He couldn't really walk the distance... well, he could, but he felt that it might take too long; and having some cart boy pull them around in a rickshaw simply wouldn't do.

To deal with the issue, Mr. Spanky decided upon an elaborate plan. He obtained permission for trolley tracks to be laid from the fountain at the front of the clubhouse to the green of the first hole, with a route going through the picturesque woods of the course. The idea was that Mr. Spanky would take the trolley on a fifteen minute moonlit

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saunter through the woods to the green. There they would putt from the same spot, balls side by side, and if both balls went in they would know that they were made for each other and then he would ask her to marry him. It was to be a most romantic affair—the show, the ride, the whole club to themselves, the trolley... it must be remembered that Mr. Spanky was not a poor man, to say the least, and when seeking Miss Bumm's hand in marriage, there was to be no expense spared.

The night of the big date came,

and the trolley was a beautiful sight to behold; painted in a dark, rich burgundy, with black and gold trim, and large gold-leaf letters written in a flamboyant script that read "My Sweet Bumm's Chariot." Away they rode into the night, with the crickets chirping gleefully, and the trolley cheerfully clacking and shuddering in time. They made their way slowly through the trees, toward the first green, where a putt would establish their romantic pledge to one another forever.

Unfortunately, as so many of you

men know, your best laid romantic plans only go right about one in every ten times ... no, not even that really, because the times when they do go right, it's actually just us ladies playing along, mercifully ignoring the incessant blunders which you, in your childlike cluelessness, simply do not see. Well, unfortunately, on this night, this is the way it was to be for poor Mr. Spanky, who, up until this portion of the date, foresaw a most wonderful and remarkable evening.

As the trolley approached the edge of the trees, about sixty yards from the green, in precisely the spot where you found it today, the young couple's revelry was interrupted by a mercilessly loud grinding noise, followed by some sort of explosion from underneath the carriage which sent poor Miss Bumm up off the bench and onto the trolley's hard, unforgiving floor. The subsequent back-and-forth jerking of the contraption was so violent that not only was Miss Bumm face down on the floor and twirling around, but Mr. Spanky's wooden leg was wrenched so badly that by the time the trolley finally gave up the ghost and came to rest his foot was actually pointing backwards. The poor man didn't realize his leg was twisted until he stood up to give Miss Bumm a hand; by the time he knew what was happening he was on the floor next to her, face down, with the false toes of his right foot pointing up towards the ceiling.

The crickets had stopped chirping by this time, halting their song momentarily in an attempt to figure out just what all the racket was. It would seem that the problem had to do with the trolley jumping its tracks, which is funny because you usually think of a speeding train when you think of track-jumping, and as far as we can tell, that old trolley was clipping along at about six miles an

A Cartoon (?) by OneNeck



hour—hardly a track-jumping speed. Some speculation as to the cause of the accident has to do with the fact that the track was laid, in part, by the Special Limpin' Rangers, an offshoot of the local Boy Scout troop that was created for boys with particular challenges.

Another theory is that the track was laid faulty on purpose by Jack Chump, the new boyfriend of Mr. Spanky's ex-girlfriend, Misty Poe. The Autumn Leaf had hired Mr. Chump to be in charge of the track-laying operation. It was said that he was hired at the request of Miss Poe, which is certainly suspicious, and lends credence to the latter interpretation of what might have gone wrong. However, Mr. Chump did hire and use, in part, the Special Limpin' Rangers, so both theories, as far as we know, could be true.

After picking themselves off the floor and sitting a while, and catching their breath, it was finally decided that they would attempt to continue the date by proceeding on foot. This required much more convincing of Miss Bumm on the part of Mr. Spanky than I am probably conveying, for Miss Bumm was quite badly shaken by the whole affair, and though she had escaped the fall without serious injury, she did have more than one bruise, and more than one tear in her dress to remind her of the frightful episode. What had started as a date reminiscent of the most happy of endings in the most romantic of movies had suddenly become a short horror story entitled "The Ride on Hell's Trolley." Not only that, but in order to convince his lady that they should continue on their outing, Mr. Spanky thought it would be a good idea to get down on one knee and look upon her with the moon in his eyes and an earnest and pleading look on his face. However, before doing

this he neglected to re-rotate his leg, so instead of the moon in his eyes and a pleading look on his face, all Miss Bumm noticed was the disconcerting sight of the toes of his right foot pointing awkwardly toward the ceiling. They were bent slightly so that they were essentially pointing directly at her, almost as if they were telling her that all of a sudden, something was just not right about the whole affair. It was a rather macabre sight, as opposed to a romantic one, and from that point on all Miss Bumm could think about was the wooden leg. The wooden leg, she thought. The wooden leg will propose to me tonight.

As Miss Bumm stood she could feel a bruise beginning to form on her lower back, which was slightly throbbing. At that point, her feelings of uncertainty and uneasiness gave way to annoyance. It had, Miss Bumm thought, become high time the date

was over. She'd had just about all she could take, the poor girl, and the prognosis for the rest of the evening, now that the trolley was dead, and they'd be hiking instead of riding, was not good. She was a proper girl, you see, and wrecked trolleys in the middle of the woods, with dislocated legs and such, were no circumstances for someone of her social standing. So she said, rather testily, that she would agree to continue the date as long as they could make it quick; and before, she added with some spite, things got any worse.

They came down from the trolley, where Mr. Spanky spent a moment leaning against a tree attempting to re-adjust his wooden leg. This delay caused the already aggravated Miss Bumm even more exasperation, and her disposition was not lost on Mr. Spanky, who noted the fact that she was not waiting around for him to finish with his leg.

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Consequently, he was unable to adjust it quite as securely as he would have liked; he gave it just two turns instead of the usual four, and off they went; her bounding ahead in a quick double-time walk—head up in an aggravated determination, and the thumb and index finger of both hands holding up the front of her long, light-blue evening dress—and he hoofing along frantically behind her in an attempt to keep up the pace. He wore a pained expression on his face, and held a limp, outstretched hand before him. He looked like an exhausted dog pleading with its master to slow down. But slow down she didn't. She headed for that green as if it were the earth and she a meteor plummeting to it.

The speed of Mr. Spanky's gate was faster than what he was normally used to. In addition to this, and compounding his trouble, was the fact that his leg, as I mentioned, was not

properly attached. This gave the poor man a significant amount of difficulty.

In the course of his journey, Mr. Spanky noticed, much to his chagrin, that the heel and toe of his prosthetic leg were leaving unsightly divots and drag marks along the artfully manicured fairway behind him. Sweat was now flowing freely from his brow, as much due to the fact that he would have to explain to the club the reason for the unsightly marks in the morning as it was to the exertion of the exercise. Miss Bumm noticed the marks on the fairway as well; she noticed them because she would turn around periodically and demand that he pick up the pace. When she did this, Mr. Spanky's limp hand would stretch out one index finger in an attempt to protest, but this was a rather weak gesture, and soon the index finger would join the other fingers in their exhausted dangling, and

he would nod and grimace and attempt to hop a little faster.

Miss Bumm was extremely put off by the drag marks on the fairway for two reasons: first, it made the leg, as the backward toes had earlier, the dominant feature in the evening's escapade; and second, she wasn't sure she could marry a man who would so blatantly disrupt the turf of the county's finest golfing establishment simply because his leg didn't fit.

Normally, she would have been perfectly right to oppose such a flagrant disregard for the golf course grounds, but, given the circumstances of the moment, one can hardly blame Mr. Spanky for his lack of protocol; it was hardly his fault. Then again, the whole trolley thing was his idea, so I'll let you gentlemen decide.

As if all of this weren't enough working against the poor duo, there was yet one more problem that

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entered the picture.

I have already mentioned the fact that, even apart from the circumstances of the evening in question, Mr. Spanky's wooden leg didn't fit quite right. As a matter of course, it was a bit loose and hung a little short, which led to Mr. Spanky always leaning at roughly a fifteen- to twenty-degree angle when he was standing (poor man, he always looked so strange in the group pictures, as if he were trying to distance himself somehow from the person next to him; which gave the impression, to people who didn't know him but for his picture, that he was quite rude). But the other problem with the leg was that Mr. Spanky didn't keep it manicured properly, in large part due to the fact that it was difficult to do so, it being a lesser model prosthesis. The exterior of the limb, as opposed to the smooth, lacquered finish of the finer models, had a rather gritty, rough texture; splintery, you might say. This resulted in the leg making a scratching noise as it rubbed back and forth along the inside of Mr. Spanky's trousers. The noise was normally just a simple byproduct of being in the presence of Mr. Spanky, of which one would take notice momentarily, and then push into the background with the babble and the clinking glasses. However, at this moment, it became a very intrusive part of what little conversation he and Miss Bumm were having, which went a little like the following:

"Portia, my ... [screatch] ...love. My Bumm who ... [screaaatch]... takes a walk ... [scratch] ... with me to the hole on this most sparkling... [screaaaaaatch] ... moonlit evening. Please, my dear, I beg you ... [scratch]... please slow down that I might ...[screaa-a-a-atch]...catch a breath or two before we continue."

"Spanky, my dear, would you

mind telling that ... that thing to be quiet?"

I suppose it could be said that Miss Bumm momentarily forgot her good graces, and succumbed to the rudeness that sometimes lurks inside every proper woman of stature; a rudeness just waiting for the door to crack. She would later come to regret this comment, as she should; for it was not a very nice thing to say. However, at the time, and given the circumstances, it seemed somewhat excusable. Upon the tension in the air that connected them like an electrified wire through which every negative perception and feeling and stimulus traveled, the dreadful scratching clawed its way into her consciousness with the volume of a bullhorn. Thankfully, Mr. Spanky hardly noticed her slight; for he was too busy trying to keep from collapsing. He would be very sore from the exertion for the next few days. He would even swear that his wooden leg ached.

Thankfully, and in spite of all of their troubles, the story does have a happy ending. You see, they arrived at the hole—which is a most beautiful hole (you've seen it), perhaps the most beautiful on the course, which is why, I'm sure, Mr. Spanky chose it—to find the moon sparkling above Shannon Lake, a light breeze coming in off the water, and the cool night air filtered fresh by the lush foliage around them. The light on what is now called the Star Lighthouse (back then it was referred to as the as the Autumn Light, or simply the Big Candle, by many in town) was lit up with a light that was of a soft pink hue, colored by special glass just for the occasion. Two lovely gold putters had been laid criss-cross, with the hole and the flag in the middle of the cross near the handles. A long, soft, pink ribbon was elegantly tied

around the putters where they crossed.

The sight of it all was enough to make Miss Bumm forget her recent distress, and almost immediately her disposition returned to its original tempered sweetness. Similarly, Mr. Spanky, upon noticing the beauty of the place where he intended to make his proposal of marriage, and also upon noticing the effect it had on the lady, almost immediately recovered his strength.

He stood up straight and tall (well, slightly leaning), and with a confident, determined look, he properly fastened his wooden leg into its correct place. All of a sudden, the beauty of his surroundings, and the look on his sweet love's face had restored his faith in the evening. The bent, twisted, and by now smoldering trolley, had been forgotten, and forgotten it stayed in their minds, never to be thought of again. Which, incidentally, is why it was still there up until recently, when that vulgar crane contraption moved it.

Well, I guess it could be said that the trolley also remained because Mr. Chump had been arrested two days earlier for robbing the grocer on Wellington Street, and there was no one to organize the Special Limpin' Rangers. The Autumn Leaf paid for not only installation, but also removal, but the Rangers never got around to it. Unfortunately, the Autumn Leaf had run out of money in the budget to hire a new team for the removal. I suppose they could have sued to force them to dismantle the tracks. But then, let's be honest; what would suing the Special Limpin' Rangers do to the reputation of such a distinguished club?

Mr. Spanky and Miss Bumm picked up their putters and leaned in gracefully to give each other a kiss, with the moonlight and the noises of

the creatures of the night cheering them on. Mr. Spanky gently untied the ribbon that bound the two putters. Then he leaned down, and with a wink and a soft smile he lined up his putt. He gave it a knock, and away it went, slicing a path that was as straight as an orchestra conductor's back toward the hole. But, too bad, it was not to be. Not even his love and his intimate knowledge of the green on which he was putting could defy the laws of physics. The speed of the ball was just not enough, and it stopped an inch from the hole.

Mr. Spanky stood up, his heart crushed to a formless pulp inside his chest. Crestfallen, his white hat seemed to sink over his brow. For a fleeting moment, Miss Bumm shared in the disappointment; it would seem that destiny had declared them ineligible. Perhaps they should have taken cue from the trolley and its charred frame; or from the wooden leg which had so protested their journey across the fairway.

But then she stood, her disappointment fading. She realized she had not yet putted, and therefore hope was not yet lost. She was determined to finish the evening's agenda, and she would trust her heart and believe that her love for Mr. Spanky was not lying to her.

She turned and gave him a warm, sympathetic smile, and caressed his cheek down to his chin with the palm of her delicate, gloved hand. She leaned down and, looking over her dress, lined up her putter and gave the ball a soft but solid "clack." The ball spun away from her, churning aggressively toward the hole. The speed was greater than she would have normally used for such a putt, but this would prove to be a good thing; for as the ball approached the hole it found Mr. Spanky's ball to be in the way. Now, Miss Bumm was

a very determined woman and so it should seem only fit that the ball that belonged to her would likewise be a determined ball. So, this being the case, instead of finding Mr. Spanky's ball an insurmountable obstacle to its objective, her ball simply plodded through it, knocking Mr. Spanky's ball into the hole just an instant before it tumbled in as well.

Well, you gentlemen will no doubt realize the symbolism of all of this, and you can believe that it was not lost on our friends either. They embraced; Mr. Spanky proposed; and six months later they were married; and stayed so for fifty-six years. You haven't heard of them until now because they moved away from Acorn Grove two years after they were married. They moved to Chicago and opened an art gallery and studio (a longtime dream of both) with the money they had, which was substantial. It was an exquisite gallery, to be sure, full of marble and velvet, and richly colored paintings. Unfortunately, at the time, folk art—in particular farm animals and dogs with rubber boots on—was not considered a very desirable commodity in the art world, so they decided to switch from paintings to sculptures, which were much more the rage. They created a regal and clever business name to go along with the new direction they were taking, and off they went to the top of their field. I have heard it said that no gallery in Chicago, either before or since, has had as marvelous a grand opening as theirs.

I don't think about them that often, except when I catch a glimpse of the sun glinting off that old trolley in the woods (which of course won't happen anymore). When I do I remember them, and I smile.

What's that Mr. Garrett? The tracks from the front of the club

house to the woods? Well, they were removed eventually, though I can't remember exactly when. My Charles used to complain every day of tripping over them on his way to the restroom from the first tee. (A custom for dear Charles, and it was much to the chagrin of his playing partners and those waiting behind him that he never learned to go before the first tee. I would try to speak to him about it, but he'd just shrug and say, "Zelda, dear woman, my physiological necessities do not abide by the rules of proper etiquette, therefore, though a man may disobey the rules, he cannot disobey nature.") Then one day he simply stopped complaining about tripping over the tracks, so I assumed they had been removed."

"Well, shit, Zelda ... that's quite a story," Fig said.

"Thank you, Mr. Garrett. It is one with a happy ending. I love that about it. So many stories don't have happy endings these days. Look at the news for example," she replied.

"You know me, Zelda, I always try not to."

Mrs. van Charlotte shuffled off at that point; it was getting on ten o'clock in the morning and it was time for bridge and brandy with the other old ladies over at the clubhouse.

We walked on our way back to the first green. The crane had now lifted the trolley to a great height, and was slowly moving and rotating it towards a taped-off location on the grounds. Unfortunately, the college student running the crane overshot his mark by about a hundred yards, and also hit the release button about two minutes too early, so he ended up dropping the despondent-looking wreck into Shannon Lake. And there it sat, roof sticking out of the water, maybe a foot or so, looking like a

large, half-submerged crocodile. The words "My Sweet Bumm's Chariot" were still visible, and could be made out easily from the fairway. And there the trolley stays to this day, though, thankfully someone from the grounds team did swim out there and buff away "My Sweet Bumm's Chariot." Well, not completely. You can still see "wee bum." Oh well. I guess they had a sense of humor. The Summer College Student's Construction and Heavy Equipment Company never pulled the trolley from the lake. The reason? They don't do water.

Hof and I never looked into the story much; we were kind of inclined to believe it, actually. I don't really know why except that I guess we thought it was a stretch for anyone, even Mrs. van Charlotte, to make up something like that.

Fig wasn't placated so easily,

though, and he went ahead and did a little research on his own. He discovered that an old trolley had been used as a drink stand many years ago, and that it had been quite a popular thing with the members back then. He approached Mrs. van Charlotte about this one day, confident that he had finally proven her wrong. He should have known better; after all, we'd been trying to discredit Zelda's stories for years, but hadn't been able to disprove anything completely. We still haven't to this day.

Fig looked so triumphant, so confident, the poor guy. But Mrs. van Charlotte just smiled at him nonchalantly and said, "Oh, yes, young Master Garrett. I know all about that trolley. Yes, it was the blue and gold one over near the Wolf Woods next to the eighth tee. Oh, my dear Charles used to love to get his vodka and lime there. And then there was

the all-silver trolley that used to sit over where the Star Lighthouse is; that was a grand trolley, just a grand trolley indeed. You could get the best hotdogs in North Carolina from Sam Sparks, who ran that trolley. And the Cottonwood trolley in the trees near the Brandyloch castle; that one was for the kids to play in. And..."

All in all Mrs. van Charlotte described in detail not one, not two, not three trolleys, but eight, that had graced the grounds of the Autumn Leaf Golf Club at one time or another, not including the one that is now sitting in the lake. Poor Fig just stared at her dumbly for what seemed like forever. Well, what could he say? He said, basically, all he could say:

"Zelda?"

"Yes, dear?"

"Never mind."

The Dream Thief

by Courtney Brown

Dora ate her neighbor's dreams. He lived across the street and he was younger than she was. She did not know his name, but she knew that he had a particular feeling about long dark halls, full of sharpness and anticipation. She knew he loved the first bite of an apple, if it was crisp. She often tried to watch him through the windows, but he always darted past them. He did not stop.

She did not mean to be a thief, but one night she just stumbled into his dreams. Dora had insomnia. Her eyes were

often ringed with heaviness. She used to dread the bed. One night, she got up for water, and found out the hall never ended. She just kept on walking, and then the sharpness and strange spicy scent just got stronger and stronger. Then, she saw her neighbor. He was bending over the flowers growing from the rug. He was talking to them, and their stems grew long and fast enough to curl loosely about his arm.

"Hello," she said. He looked at her.

"We've got to crimson the roses. They're dying," is what he says. He grabs Dora's hand and

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the flowers start curling around her arm, too. Then he coughed, because the vine was reaching down his throat. Dora grabbed the vine and pulled it out. She choked on the sudden smell. It was like roses, caught, tangled.

She turned to look at her neighbor. Where the vine had crept down his throat was emptiness. She could see through him. His eyes crinkled and fluttered. "Nothing!" he said without his mouth. "Help!"

Dora embraced him. He dissolved into her. There was no him, except the him that was inside of her. She felt wonderful, euphoric, all of a sudden. She is in her own hall again, and there are dozens of rose petals all over the floor. She knew then: that had not been her dream.

Then it happened the next night, and the next. They were different dreams, sometimes with the same themes, but they always ended in the dissolving and the ecstasy. Sometimes, she would try to stop the final disintegration. She did not understand how she could be doing any harm, but still, she was uneasy.

Every night it seemed like she was trying to save him. "Help!" he would scream. Sometimes he would be drowning in huge leaves that his father had raked into piles on the lawn. He was a child. He would jump in the leaves, exuberant, and then he would keep falling. Sometimes he would be running from something. Dora did not always know what. But she would pull him into her arms and he would fade.

The dream would end, leaving her breathless with a strange pleasure.

She knew that he was tired all the time, because she watched from her window the way he walked home from his car. She thought maybe that he would remember her. She tried to watch him, unseen.

One night, Dora was in his hall again. She was eating an apple that she had brought from her kitchen. He walked up to her, and the floor became wet. They were standing in a small puddle. Dora could see her reflection in the water. "Hello," she said. Her throat ached. She knew him very well. She knew his scar behind his left ear; she knew how his voice cracked when he was scared. She knew he loved the vines that sometimes engulfed him. She had studied him from a hundred different angles.

"Get out of my dream," he said. The water rose in the hall. It was suddenly chest-deep. She moved towards him and he backed away. He started trying to run, but the water was still rising. Soon they were both underwater. He did not know how to swim. Dora did. She swam up to him. He flailed his arms and legs about, madly. She did not worry about breathing, but he was struggling. She took him in her arms. He tried to get away, but he could not. Dora was strong in this dream and she did not know why.

Dora kissed him even though he was still trying to get away. He did not dissolve. Instead,

strong vines entangled them and pulled them down further. She was in the heaviness of roses and they were definitely on his side. She was afraid for the first time but she still would not let him go. She held on to him and they kept falling.

She woke up the next morning on a damp bed. She was sick with love. She did not sleep for three days. She wandered her own halls trying to find that particular sharpness, trying to get back in.

The ol' **Brent Powers** is a Californian and rather an odd fellow. He usually offers up an eloquent biographical sketch with a short story but did not this time.

Zach van der Meer is an audiologist in Apex, NC.

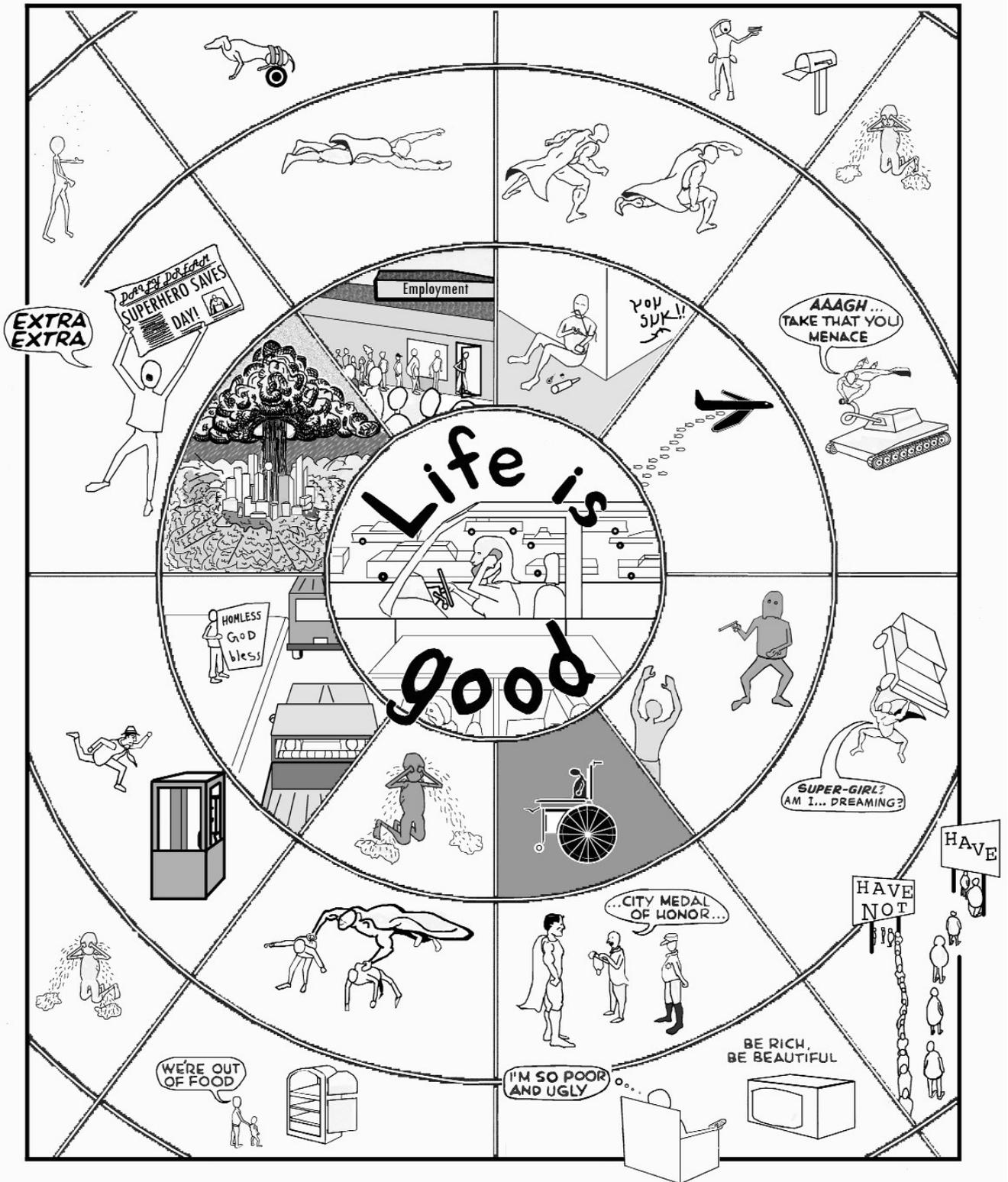
We don't know much about **Courtney Brown** except that she lives in Lebanon, NH.

OneNeck is a crazy Scottish cartoonist.

Allen Sessions ("Twisted Web") recently doodled 17 years away as a molecular geneticist. He now doodles and does carpentry in Raleigh, NC.

Twisted Web

by Allen Sessions



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