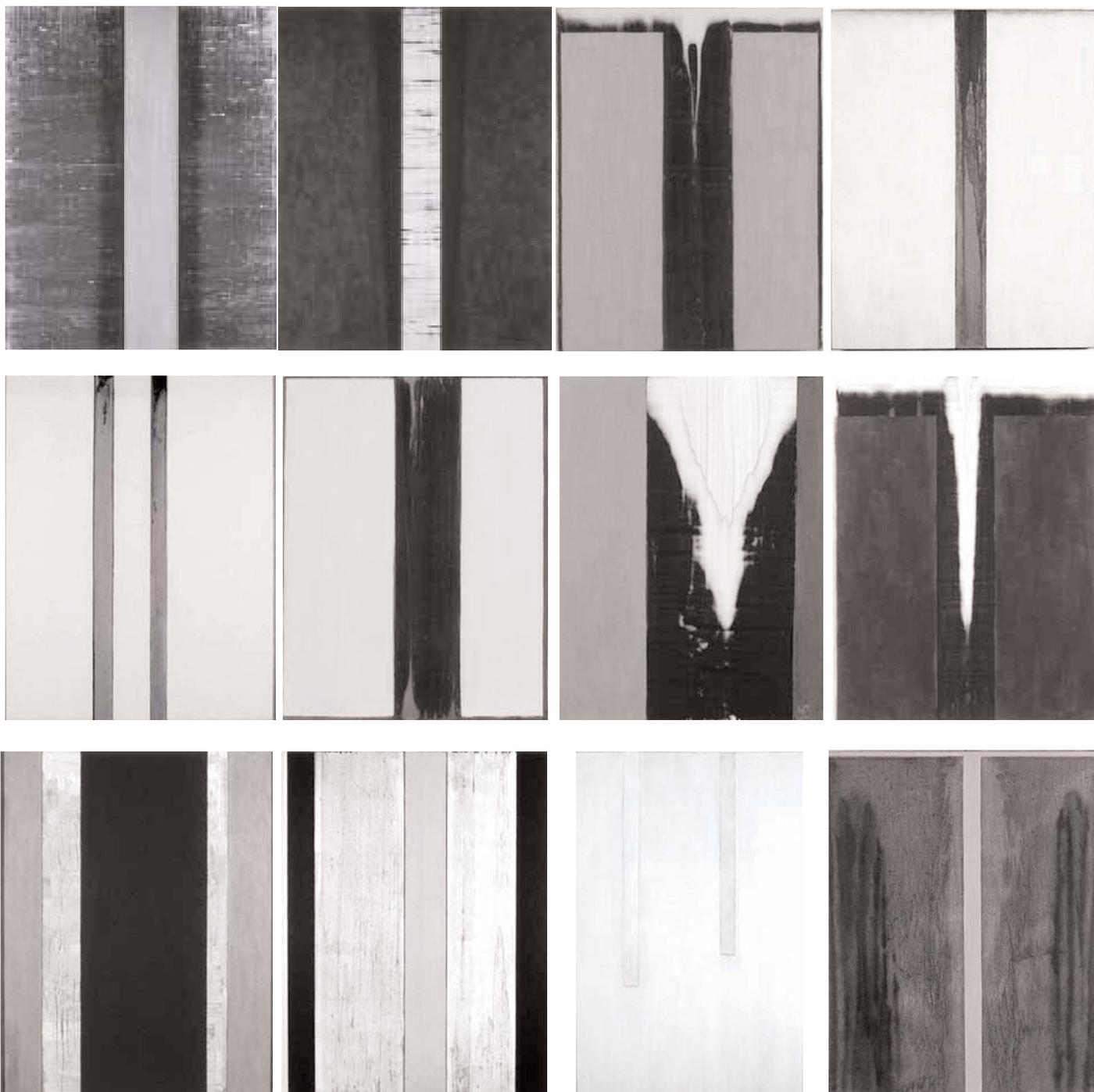


We're pleased as punch with all this Autumnal stuff. Peeking under the cover at Ron Cooper's new work; beneath the bandage with Richard Lewis; and beyond the words with John Grey. Also, the cool weather art of Mark Brown; a new Staccato and The Dream Journal.

The Blotter

OCTOBER 2007 MAGAZINE



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will ye fight for me?**

Cover art: A selection of the paintings of Mark Brown, cunningly arranged to look like an acid-blotter. See centerfold for more.

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You Are Here

My writing desk is in the living room, an arrangement with its pluses and minuses. The desk faces a wall; no windows, I've done tried that, given myself a beautiful view of green forest and songbirds at the feeder in front of me, and learned about *unproductivity* the hard way. Once I had a great professor who told me that when you wake up in the morning there are a thousand things you have to do, but you must ignore them and write. OK, that wasn't exactly what he said, but it was a long time ago, and my memory isn't what it used to be. And at the time that professor had no children. Children will light things on fire if you ignore them too much.

Speaking of a long time ago - we are closing in on the fiftieth anniversary of the Soviet launch of the first man-made satellite into space, during the day, October 4th, 1957. By only the most suspicious of coincidences, my mom was at the hospital in Newark, NJ, giving birth to me - late in the evening of October 3rd. You see - it's not important that both events happened on the same date - but if you remember that the world is round, and look at the time zones, you see that the events were *simultaneous*. Space child. Garry-nik.

I have friends who tell me I'm a prolific writer. They left-handedly praise my ability to scribble with adverbs like "ridiculously" or "compulsively". And although I do not feel that I write enough, I wonder why writing a lot seems to be troubling to some people. I have been told that Asimov used to have a writing room set up with five typewriters, each loaded with paper. He roamed from one to another machine as his attention called him, barely missing a keystroke, with a laser focus on the subject and place of each writing project.

I'm worried that my wife thinks I fool around when I'm sitting down at my desk. "What're you doing?" she asks, as if there was a mystery about tippity-tapping on the keyboard. She leans in and checks out what I'm writing. I think she imagines that I'm online - sending e-mail or text messaging someone. Occasionally she tells me, "Say hi to her for me, willya?" which is somewhat off-putting and tends to derail whatever train of thought I've found a ticket for as effectively as a jab in the kidneys. All of this is also very weird because my workstation is stand alone. That's right - I word-process only. No internet. No link to the outside world. Double-plus-ungeek. Low-tech. Kissing-cousin to luddite. I'm ashamed, but there it is.

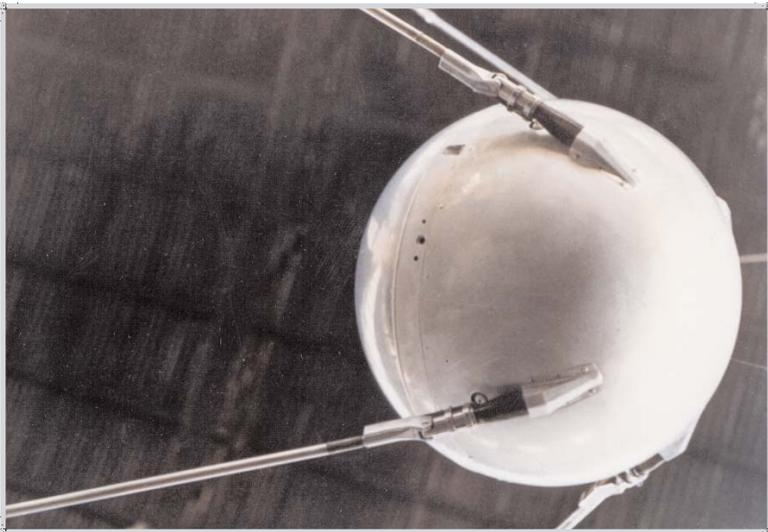
Does she really think I am having an electronic affair? Text-sex? Of course not. I mean, I don't think so. I suspect that she's jealous of the writing, that I spend too much time with it. True, I ignore everything when I'm writing. I don't listen, and I forget things. And it makes me happy. That's worth thinking about for a moment. Perhaps this is all that writing really is, text-sex with yourself - or with your muse, whatever form that happens to take. I cannot have discovered something here, can I: that if you are doing writing right, you're having an affair the likes of which any living partner would envy?

So here's my desk. It's an arts-&-crafts piece, mission oak, with nice basket-weaving over the bookshelf ends. I found it about twenty years ago when I wasn't writing, and it's too small for my menagerie of computer gear, including the scanner and printer which now bogart a large portion of the workspace. It would be terrific, if all I needed was a sheaf of creamy stationery and a Mont Blanc, but I have learned long ago that my writing capacities are out-shot by the unsafe at any speed that my brain wants to

travel. Once upon a time I did write everything out longhand. The act of scribbling reduced me to poetry. Fairly bad poetry, if I recall, even for a teenager. Good desk for it, however. And here above my desk are the aforementioned muses. They change from project to project. Currently, they are carved wooden masks from Ghana. Ten-thousand-villages stuff, but decent. I think that they put me in the right frame of mind for the book I'm working on, a sequel to my Maasai slave tale. They don't bother my wife as much as the previous one – the model Stuka hanging from the ceiling – since deposed from its place by the completion of a first draft of a novel about French boys in 1940. Funny how inappropriate a Nazi airplane is in one's living room. On the shelves nearby rest a couple of encyclopedias, a Webster's, Funk & Wagnalls, my Brewer's Dictionary. I can't find something, though. My brass Zippo lighter. Where'd that doo-dad go? And my replica deck of 1861 playing cards. The clutter! The clutter!

Ah, well. We have good things for you this month. My friend "Bird" Cooper has a new novel, and Mark Brown has a new gallery show. Dr. Lewis is thinking of taking up residence on the Big Island, and Mr. Grey is letting us show you some fine and melancholy poems.

And here I am, bashing away at this keyboard, my third since I left IBM. It turns out you can break one of these things, if you try. I've discovered that sometimes sections of a story can be even more violent than a writer originally imagined. I'm not fooling around, I don't answer calls, and sometimes I'm a little bit slow on the uptake responding to e-mail. Just so you know.



Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

The Blotter cannot be held responsible for the unpredictability of the weather, or the nuances of our language. Apropos of almost nothing, in Churchill's "...we will fight on the beaches and in the streets...we will never surrender" speech he consistently used words with anglo-saxon etymologies. Hey, you don't think he wanted to call Hitler a shit? Come on, you must be kidding me.

“All The Body Can Do” an excerpt from the novel *Purple Jesus*

by Ron Cooper

Purvis shoved an empty condensed milk can across the dinette table towards boney, blueish Armeiy Wright. “You got more room in here than I thought, old boy,” Purvis said. “I guess some things are bigger on the inside than they look from the outside. That’s more work for me.”

He slid another condensed milk can across the gray mica tabletop. It stopped on the edge, hovering over Armeiy’s lap. “Touchdown!” Purvis said. “Now you supposed to make a goalpost with your fingers for me to kick the extra point, but we can skip that part.”

Armeiy’s head was tilted towards his left shoulder as if he were coursing a distant sound. The glasses with the one blackened lens had slipped to the end of his nose exposing a squinting eye and another completely white with just an outline of iris. One shiny hand clutched the front of his green coveralls as if trying to unsnap them.

Purvis stood and picked up the crowbar from the top of the stove. “I’m going to try whatever you call that room with all them books in it. I might have to come back tomorrow if I can’t find it in there.” He kicked aside more empty condensed milk cans and stepped over the pots (a two-quart and a stew size), a skillet, three coffee cans (one filled with spoons, one with finishing nails and wood screws, and one with empty aspirin bottles), and two blue willow plates (now broken) that he had dumped from the screened pie safe.

If the storied million had been in one of those coffee cans where normal people keep their rainy day dollars, Purvis would not have to tear down half the house. This was all Armeiy’s fault, Purvis thought. The old boy knew this

day was coming, what with everybody knowing he was rich, so why did he have to make it so hard? Nobody likes to ruin a house like this, but by God Purvis was not the one who hid it.

Wallpaper peeled; boards fell. What kind of fool stuffs a fortune in the walls? Not Purvis. He could sure enough buy some Easter presents with that kind of money! He could get his father that airboat. His mother could have a dryer and would not have to hang everybody’s drawers out on the line anymore. His brother DeWayne could quit work at the hash plant, and they both could sit around drinking Michelob and not turn a lick for a year or two. The rest of those Wrights were no better than Armeiy. When they finally came to check on Armeiy and found him dead, they would probably be too stupid to know how to look for it. And if they found it, they would blow it on more of those sooners. Running around the country dogfighting—how much sorriness can one family hold?

The floors sloped as if the house had been built on a bevel. Purvis’s ankles ached from leaning. He plopped down on a pile of books and wondered how it remained stacked. Maybe Armeiy thought dirt would just roll out the door, and he would not have to sweep. Purvis opened another can of hot Pabst. “You could’ve at least had a Frigidaire that worked,” Purvis yelled. “But I reckon you didn’t need one, living off canned cream.” He looked at the books at his feet. *A Treasury of Humorous Verse*. *The Mysterious World Under the Sea*. *Religious Symbols of the Orient*. *Aristotle for Everyone*. His cousin who had gone off to college once told Purvis about Aristotle. He was some son of a bitch

who lived thousands of years ago and was supposed to know everything, like this thing he wrote about, Purvis’s cousin said, how the soul is all the body can do. That did not help out Armeiy very much, whose body was doing a pile of nothing right now.

Purvis returned to the kitchen. “I got about all I can stand of this today, old boy. Going to be too dark to see before long anyway.” He slid another empty milk can across the table and knocked the teetering can into Armeiy’s lap. “I should’ve come out here a week ago and used this wrecking bar for the first job I figured it’d have to do. That’d been better for you, quicker at least, than poisoning. Look.” He held a can before Armeiy’s eye. “See that little plug in the middle of the bottom? That’s lead they stop it up with when they vacuum fill the can, you dead ass. What kind of groceries is that, anyhow? If the lead hadn’t got you, you would’ve give up the ghost from misnutrition, you scrawny dead ass.”

Armeiy could not be more than a day or two dead, Purvis figured, since he did not stink and no flies were crawling on him. His old watch was still running, the kind with the stem that you have to wind every two or three days. That watch made good on its lifetime guarantee, and he wore it with the face on the inside of his wrist like Purvis’s tenth-grade art teacher from New York or somewhere like that had. Unnatural was what it was, bending your hand back like a woman to tell the time.

“I’m gone now. Anything you need, besides somebody to stick your dead ass in the ground?” Purvis moved around the table and adjusted Armeiy’s glasses to sit straight on his nose and not make the old man look so pitiful. He nudged his head upright, but it fell forward as if Armeiy were reading the condensed milk can in his lap. In the back of the coveralls two inches below the collar was a small hole.

Purvis stuck the tip of his latex-cov-



ered pinky into the hole and felt it enter into Armeys back.

"You double-dead bastard! Why'n't you show me your new—what's it called?—orifist before I worked my day-late ass ragged looking for money done stole? Goddamn Aristotle!"

The back porch was a clutter of rust and decay: a twenty-horse-power Johnson outboard motor with no top, a sling blade, a shovel, a grubbing hoe, a bush axe, two foot tubs, cane poles, more empty milk cans, a partial roll of chicken wire, radios, a typewriter, a rocking chair missing an arm, rat traps, a Phillips 66 sign, an unvarnished shotgun stock, and a foot locker with screwdrivers, drill bits, saws, hammers, and wrenches. A stack of cinder blocks led to the yard. The fifty yards from the house to Wadboo Branch had grown up so bad with palmettos and elderberry that the water could not be seen. The train trestle was just a dark line running behind the cypresses. The walk of boards, which would probably crumble like dry-rotted sponges beneath your feet, leading to the branch had surely not been used in years. What a sorry way to be, Purvis thought. You got to have something in life—a hobby like fishing, or a woman to fuss at you. Why not go ahead and slit your throat instead of just sitting at a little table nursing cans of cream, nobody even missing you until maybe they notice you didn't walk to your nephew's liquor store for your pack of Red Man this week? Whoever put that bullet in Armeys back did not know what a friend he was. Not long ago either—he was not stiff yet, and some dogfighting Wright was already running around rich.

Purvis checked to make sure he had left nothing. The crowbar was in his right hand. His left held the plastic sack with his beer cans, three pairs of latex gloves, cigarette butts, and a tiny roach from the joint he smoked while crapping in the bushes. The FBI can analyze shit, he had been told; so he was careful

to go outside where it would not be found. He had returned the GQ magazine to exactly where it had been inside. Cigarette ashes were safe. Not even the FBI can trace those, although they can analyze your spit on a butt. They put it under a high-powered microscope and find a pattern. Then they use a computer to match it up to all their files, one for everybody in the world, and a little card prints out: Purvis Driggers. Cordesville, South Carolina. Twenty-four years old. Unemployed. They would say that because the government thinks working a bunch of jobs here and there does not count as employment. The good thing is that unemployed means no taxes.

Purvis made his way along Wadboo Branch several yards into the woods for cover, using the crowbar to push limbs and thorny vines out of the way and watching for moccasins—they bite just for meanness—in the fading light. A moaning sound skimmed along the water, downstream near the trestle. Purvis squatted to listen: voices, maybe singing. He crept to the edge of the woods and could see people, twenty-five or thirty of them, dressed in white and gathered on the other side of Wadboo under the trestle. A few were in the water, and others stood on the gravel embankment. They sang, and Purvis could here *Jesus calling* but not much more. He reentered the woods and tried to move faster but quieter. He made it to his side of the trestle and came back out to the edge. They sang the same song, and this time he could hear it clearly: *Softly and tenderly Jesus is calling, calling for you and for me.*

The Holiness are out for a baptism like they always do around Easter, Purvis thought. They have to come out three or four times during the week to get everybody because of people's work schedules. That might be Aunt Raylene's bunch, but you won't find her out by Wadboo, scarey as she was since

she had seen that big gar sideswipe the boat. Last year she tried to get the church to raise money to buy a big above-ground swimming pool to put behind the fellowship hall. She saw a TV program about ancient Christians and how they baptized indoors. Jesus might have done the same thing for all we know, she said. She just couldn't see risking slipping into Wadboo to get fished out down in the rice fields if a gar didn't get her first when water is water, but she was outvoted. The man doing the dunking, who had to be the preacher, had his back to Purvis, but he did not look like Aunt Raylene's End Times Holiness Church preacher. This guy looked bald, and the water was up to his chest. The End Times preacher waded out only to his waist, better to protect his swooping and shellacked hair.

Calling, oh sinner, come home

The song was pretty. Purvis was glad they sang the same verse and chorus over and over. He nearly had it memorized. One part had him stumped, something like *See all the mortals she's waiting and watching*, but that made no sense. Then again, none of it made sense, Jesus thousands of years dead as dirt. The preacher dunked four people as Purvis sat down in the mud,

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feeling calm, feeling a little bad about Armeo who probably never came down to the water at all, much less to listen to some good singing. He wondered what the monks at Cainho thought about these Holinesses, who are kind of Christian and a different religion than monks, dunking and singing at the foot of the abbey. He wondered what the monks would think of a guy ripping boards off a dead man's walls to try to find a million dollars. He knew what the church people would think, but he also knew some of them would grab a crowbar a yank a plank or two for that kind of sweet offering.

Purvis had not eaten since some Frosted Flakes that morning, but these other things kept his mind off his stomach. A joint would be really nice about then if he knew nobody would see the fire.

Another sound pierced through the song—the train. This could be fun when that trestle started rumbling and shaking the hell out of those baptizers. Gravel would fall down onto them, doves and bats would fly out from under the support beams, the *whop whop* of their wings amplifying off the embankment to sound like buzzards.

The sun was dipping below the top of the trees, but the failing light turned on the mercury vapor lamps on either side of the trestle. The glow fell onto the group and especially onto the next wader in line. She was about Purvis's age and slim, but her arms looked strong. Her hair beamed purplish-black. Her white gown had been splashed, and it clung to her chest. If he had binoculars, Purvis was sure he could see nipples. Something was different about her, not just being more beautiful than the regular Holiness heifers, something in her face.

The train whistle blew. One of the women said, "Oh, Lordy!"

"Come on in, Martha," the preacher said. "The church and the Good Lord

welcome you home."

Earnestly, tenderly

The preacher drew her to him and said something Purvis could not make out. Martha covered her nose and mouth with her hands. The nearing train's wheels scraped against the rails.

You who are weary come home

"I baptize you, Martha—"

"*WooooOOT!*" The whistle blew. The train clanked over the trestle. Beams groaned. Birds scattered. Baptizers ducked. The rumbling and creaking and coughing of the train filled the whole swamp.

What name did the preacher say?

Martha rose from the branch spreading her arms out like those snake-neck diving birds that aren't ducks do when they perch on a limb after chasing fish. She turned—quick but not jerky, like two people held her arms and lifted and spun her—to watch the boxcars cross the trestle. The gown clung to the slope of her hips. When she lowered her arms, which seemed to fold like the blades of a feeler gauge, the top of the gown slipped down over a shoulder. Purvis wondered if the hollow of her neck would feel cool to his cheek, if her skin would smell like a mix of the muddy creek and her purple-black hair, if a bead of creek water that slid to his lips down from her ear would taste like condensed milk.

Had he seen her face before, a face that shifted like the elusive colors on a fish scale? Was that a scar at the corner of her mouth? She wore the same expression as when she went into the water. She had not cried like the pre-dipped others, and she was not smiling like the post-dunked. She smirked. That was it—one side of her mouth curled up into a wild look. Couldn't the preacher tell she was smarting off with her face? Could anyone look at that face and not fall in love with it, the face of Martha Something?

The bushes rustled at the border of

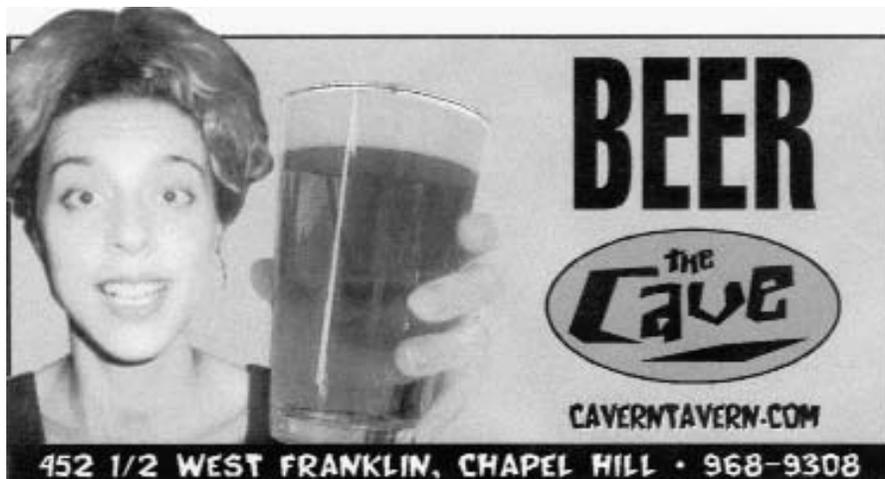
Purvis's vision. He looked across the water to a point about twenty yards from the baptizers. A brown outline of a face nested in the merkle bushes. Purvis glanced downstream, but Martha had slipped back among the other white gowns. He looked again at the face. It moved and gave him a better look—hairy, stretched face, huge eyes, and a crown that seemed to come to a point.

The Hairy Man! The stories were true! The ape-man rumored to haunt this swamp was no ignorant pecker-wood's myth. This was no lie brewed up to keep vandal boys or young lovers from wandering too deeply into the wild to get lost or pregnant. He was watching the dippers, too, his monstrous thoughts heaving in his pointy skull. What could Purvis do? If he yelled for the church people to run, he would risk giving himself away. Or, the Hairy Man might vanish into his stomping grounds, unseen by the others, and Purvis would look like a fool. Maybe he could throw a rock at the beast to scare him away. That might anger the ugly thing, and he might attack the church people. Even the Hairy Man could recognize beauty, and he would jump with his gorilla legs over those plain holy roller girls to get to Purvis's love and drag her away to a hellish den.

Something rolled in the water, something brown and fat, not three feet from Purvis.

"Godamighty!" He could not help it. The tension of a day's work beside a dead man, finding his true love, and seeing the Hairy Man all merged into a burst of nerves. He jumped, fell over a cypress knee, and banged his shoulder on a tree trunk. "Fish-eating Jesus! River bastard dog! Church up my *ass!*" He ground his teeth and clutched his shoulder. Purvis thought all the otters, those shad-and-shit-eaters, had been killed from Wadboo the year before. Or maybe it was that humongous catfish that ate Rally Villeponteaux's bluetick. Stretching his head up through the bushes, he saw the Holiness bunch looking in his direction. They were motionless, like posing for a picture, not stretching their necks or straining forward to see the source of the cursing but simply awaiting its end. He looked upstream—no sign of the Hairy Man. The Holiness people lost interest and sloped up the embankment. The long gowns that even the men wore hid the working of their legs so that they seemed to glide like boats. What a peculiar sight they would make floating down the track the half mile out to the road. A voice began to sing, and the rest joined in by the second bar.

Have you been to Jesus for his cleansing power?



Wet Martha stopped and turned to the water as the others continued their ascent. She seemed to glow brighter now in the aura of the mercury vapor. She must have been looking for Purvis. He was tempted to jump into Wadboo and swim to her. He would tell her that no one was so beautiful, that those Holinesses were not good enough for her, that he had saved her from an ogre.

Are you fully trusting in his grace this hour?

She would throw her arms around him, cradle his scraped shoulder, and tell him he would always be happy.

Are you washed in the blood of the lamb?

Purvis watched Martha walk up the embankment and out of sight.

From the trestle the rails looked like a pair of wires stretching away and up towards the full moon, which made the evening seem lighter than it had been an hour earlier. The church people were long gone now, and probably the Hairy Man, too. Purvis should have already started his three-mile track walk home to, he hoped, some left over supper. He had come home late too many times recently, and his mother warned him that she was tired of saving him a plate that he did not touch. He could sure use it this time.

If he cocked his head the right way one of the rails would glow like a flashlight. This is what he always said the Cordesville Light was. The story of the ghost woman looking for her dead train engineer husband was sure enough horse shit. The moon on the tracks is what it was. His cousin said it was swamp gas, maybe phosphorous, like the sailors in the olden days called Saint Elmo's Fire. That was horseshit, too. What the hell *is* a saint, anyhow? His other cousin, the one who had gone to college, said it was the power of suggestion, people seeing what they wanted to. If you go there thinking you will see a

ghost light, then sure as bulls' nuts knock you will, he said. What Purvis knew was when he looked in the moon's direction, he saw a reflection on a rail. When he looked down the rails away from the moon, he did not see it.

He stepped to the edge of the trestle and dropped his bag of trash. As it spun on the surface of the water, he thumped a cigarette butt at it but missed. The bag slowly gave in to the current and eased downstream. It looked white on the dark water, like Martha's baptismal gown. Martha, floating like a boat. Not a jon boat with a little Johnson outboard on it or one of those big ski boats with a tall Evinrude shooting up a rooster tail but a sailboat like the one that sometimes skims around in the cove of Lake Moultrie on holidays. Martha, a sleek sailboat that never sinks, changing her course at will by zig-zagging with and against the wind, mistress of water and air. Purvis would never have to worry about drowning with the Martha boat to come to his rescue.

He knew she was not really a boat. He remembered the word for this sort of thing—*metaphor*. Sometimes people do not understand that a metaphor, like a story, a parable like they said at Sunday School when he used to go, is not real but just a way to talk about what is real, a way to understand things better. Those ignorant Holinesses do not understand this. They probably thought Wadboo was a purple stream of lamb's blood, like that could really wash you clean. A boat seemed like a good metaphor for Martha. That was what Purvis needed, a good metaphor.

He walked to the home side of the trestle. Somewhere out there the Hairy Man squatted on matted haunches, the evening's images rolling around in his horrible skull. What kind of sense did the white-clad figures moaning at the water make to that fearsome thing? Maybe he had watched Purvis, picked

up his scent and flanked him along the branch, thinking Purvis and not the baptizers a threat to the dank slough he considered home. Maybe he would follow Purvis a while until a nerve tightened and he sprang. Did the train scare the man-ape so that he would not wander up to the track, and so Purvis would be safe between the rails? Or had the beast grown used to the thunderous machine, like a yard dog loses its fear of a lawn mower?

"I know you out there, you hairy unnatural freak bastard," Purvis said. "Now I'm coming through. You just stay out yonder, unless you want a crowbar laid to your shaped up head."

Purvis walked into the night, sometimes striding on the ties, sometimes balancing on the rails, all along thinking about wild things.



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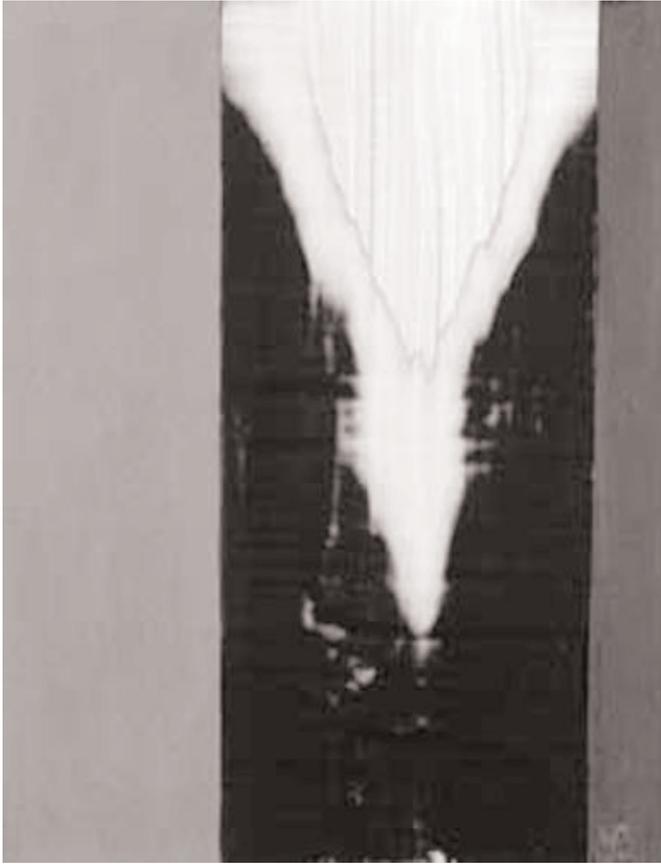
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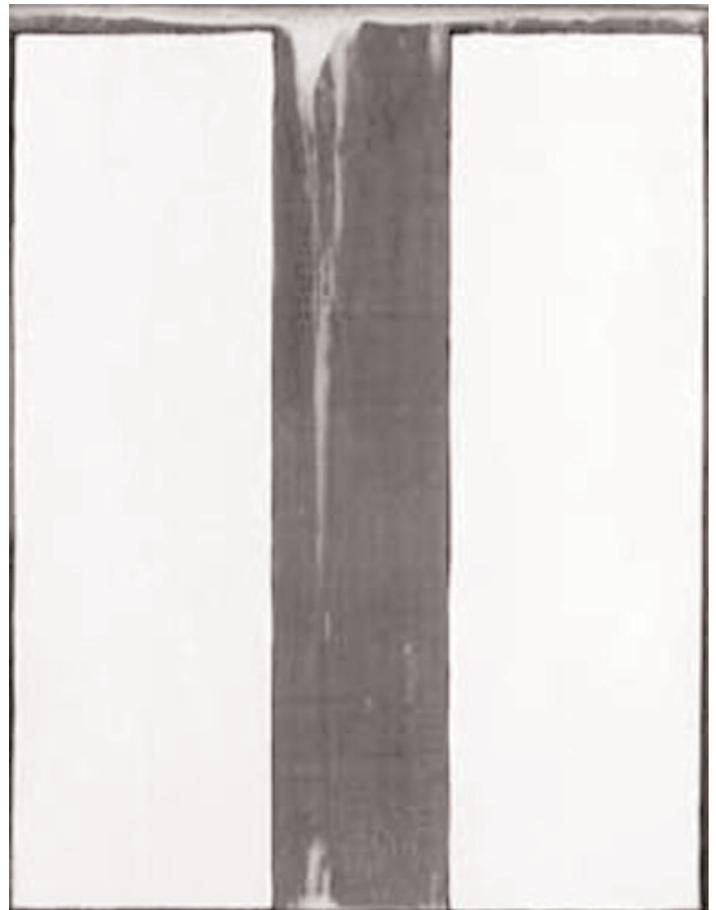
Winterreise (variations on a theme based on Franz Schubert's song cycle)

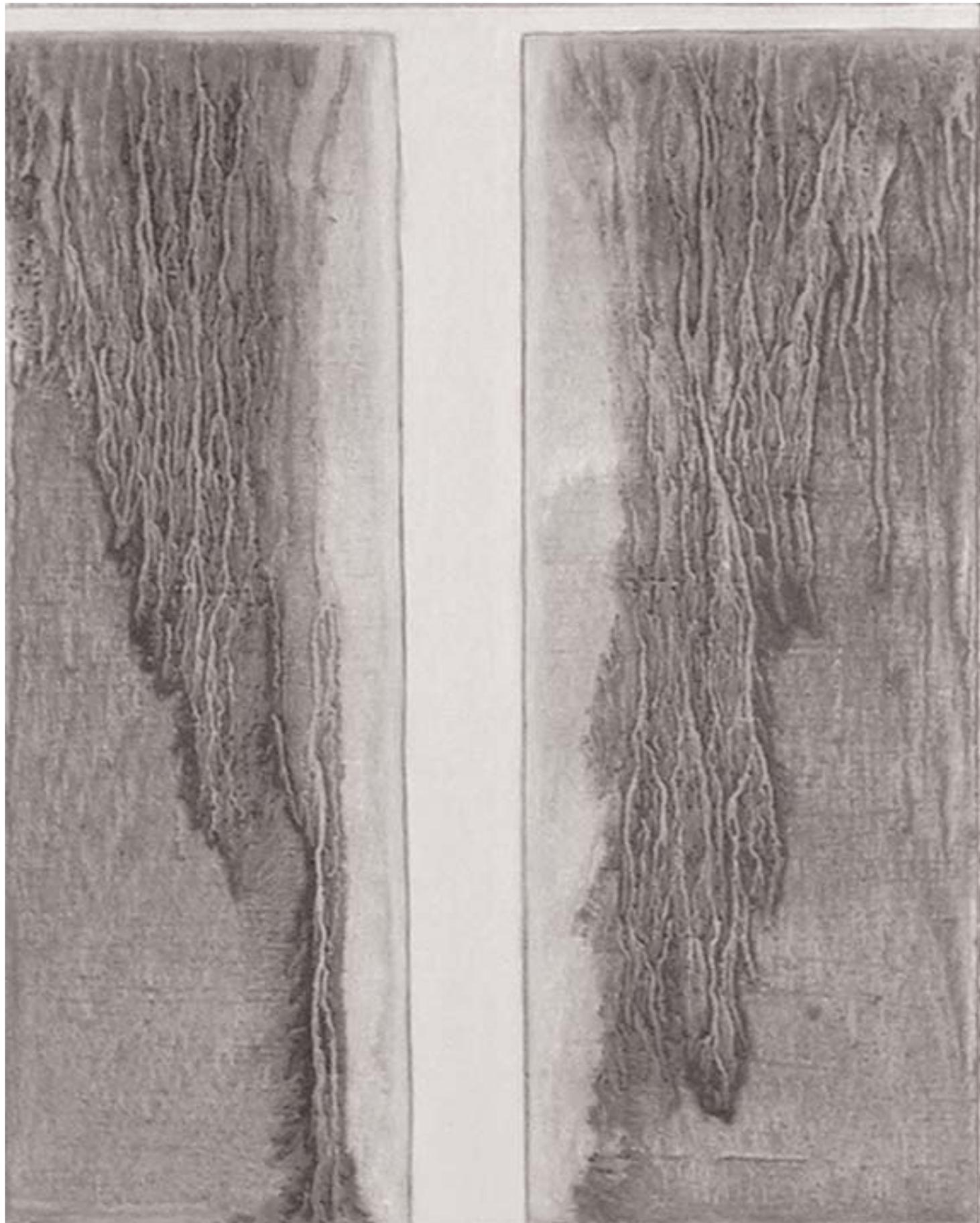
by Mark Brown

www.markbrownpaintings.com

“Many of the phenomena of Winter are suggestive of an inexpressible tenderness and fragile delicacy. We are accustomed to hear this king described as a rude and boisterous tyrant; but with the gentleness of a lover he adorns the tresses of Summer.”

H. D. Thoreau - Walden





The Hemorrhoid - Tales from the CASF

By Dr. Richard J. Lewis

Everybody called him Todd. But his name of record was Ken. Don't ask me why because he doesn't even know. I asked him. It's one of those things in life that just is, especially if you are from the Midwest or south. Todd's from Texas. The funny thing is he looked like "Opie". You know, Andy and Aunt B's Opie. Strawberry blond, freckles, 19 or 20 years old and high school football strong, kept that way by a year and a half in the Army. He acted like Opie, too, Todd did. Polite, respectful, kind, persistent. Many of those things that make you appreciate good upbringing. The persistent part was what made him the burr under my saddle. He was really beginning to annoy me by being persistent. Politely. Respectfully. Looking like Opie. The worst kind of burr.

He came to us at the CASF at Ramstein Air Base in Germany at the beginning of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Contingency Aeromedical Staging Facility, in case you didn't know. Pronounced "KASS' IF", accent on the kass. CASF. Kass if. Typical military abbreviation lingo. He had an injury and

was going home to CONUS; CONtinental United States.

I was one of the flight surgeons there. No, I didn't do operations in the airplanes. Everybody thinks that and I have to explain. The term surgeon is associated with military doctors going back as far as wars and doctors first got together. Up until the mid 1800's or so about all a doctor could offer a soldier was to be a good surgeon cutting off a shattered or infected limb with no anesthesia in 10 seconds or less, sewing up gashes, digging out projectiles stuck in flesh, plugging up holes from projectiles gone through and through. You know, surgery. They were surgeons. If you got sick and surgery wouldn't fix it you either got sicker and then got better and survived or you died. Mostly you died. There wasn't a damn thing anyone could do about it short of holding your hand and praying. So the moniker "surgeon" stuck. When it became clear during the Great War (WW1) that most of those newfangled war machines, a.k.a. airplanes, and their crews were not being lost to enemy gunfire but to problems with combining

human physiology and flight in primitive aircraft, Aerospace Medicine was born. Those doctors became "Flight Surgeons" and that name stuck.

In the CASF the flight surgeon is the final authority deciding whether a patient is ready to be aeromedically evacuated. Flight surgeons check all the issues a patient has and make sure that the problems are reasonably stable for the long flight in an airplane at high altitude with limited medical resources available; basically nurses and med techs armed with pain medicine, nausea medicine, oxygen and some other special things if needed like an IV or antibiotics. We are also the doctors that are responsible for the patients in the CASF while they are waiting to be manifested for their flight along with nurses, medical technicians and administrative folks. It's like they are in a hospital step-down unit. They are officially discharged from the hospital and sent to us for flight preparation and clearance. If I say you are OK to go, you go. If I say no, you stay until we get you ready. During my time there I passed judgment on (and took responsibility for) over 4000 patients.

Todd was discharged from Landstuhl Regional Medical Center to be aeromedically evacuated to CONUS to his home station, somewhere like Fort Lewis or Fort Campbell after arriving there via Ramstein Air Base from the Combat Support Hospital at Camp Wolf in Kuwait. He had a fractured metacarpal bone of the fourth digit in his left hand. That's the bone that goes from the knuckle to the wrist forming the majority of the palm of your hand. It's a long bone like a finger and his was broken bad enough to have needed surgery to place a pin into it to keep it straight in addition to a splint dressing. Also bad enough to get him sent home as the policy was that if you weren't going to be recovered in 15 days you had to go home so you wouldn't be clogging up the system just sitting around in Europe or in the desert someplace. We had a war to fight, for God's sake.

Anyway, it wasn't a bad injury but bad enough to get him sent home. When I first met Todd as he arrived to the CASF I interviewed him as per our normal procedure, looking for issues that might need to be fixed before he was put on a CONUS bound mission home. There were none but he said to me, "Doc (everybody called me Doc), the docs up at the hospital said my dressing needs to be changed before I go home. Can you do it, bein' a flight doc and all? Besides I really want to see the scar from the operation they did on me." I told him, "Of course I can change it. No problem. I'll get to it before you go." That was that. Simple request. Piece of cake answer.

"Hey, Doc. ('Hey, Paw.' Opie-

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"Hey, Todd"

"Sir, are you going to change my dressing today? Remember, the docs up at the hospital said I should get it changed before I go home."

"Yeah, I remember, Todd. As soon as I get back from this meeting with the commander and the executive staff I'll change it."

"OK, Doc. Man I really want to see what it looks like. The cut on my hand from the operation." Opie-like smile and total respect.

Meeting went long, I was pooped and so I blew off the dressing change till the morning. The wound was dry (not bleeding or weeping fluid and not infected) so I didn't feel bad about leaving it in place another 12 hours from a medical point of view. Still, I knew Todd was going to be looking for me all evening and be disappointed when I didn't show. I felt a little bad.

"Mornin' Doc! Hey, I missed you last night, sir. I sure do want to see what this cut looks like. I ain't never had anything like this before and I think this stuff is so cool."

"I'm sorry, young dude. I got sucked into that meeting and we were working on all kinds of new stuff with us just getting set up here at the CASF. Let me get to morning report and I'll come back after to change the dressing."

Morning report gets interrupted by a planeload of casualties "dropping out of the sky" which means the lines of communication screwed up somewhere and a plane landed at the base full of patients and no one knew it was coming. We all had to scramble out to the flightline and take care of business. Guess whose dressing didn't get changed.

Todd proceeded to bug the crap out of me over the next few days that he was with us about changing his dressing. I kept triaging his dressing change down my list of things to do. Todd ended up being with us for about 9 days which was

the record for anyone waiting to get home in the CASF. He kept getting bumped off missions because sicker people kept pushing through the system and when we needed space on a mission we would look at Todd and he would politely agree to wait till the next mission to let the sicker patient go first. Like I said, polite and kind, but persistent. Which was what made him the one of the first of many hemorrhoids, as I came to call them over the next few months at the CASF in spite of his Opie-ness. In fact, because of his Opie-ness. As much as I liked him, he became a pain in the ass. Just one more thing I had to do on top of all the other things I had to do that no one else could do.

On about his fifth day with us it was a Sunday and I was "off". This meant the other flight surgeon, Mark, was on as first call and I was backing him up -- there were really only two of us to do this job. The commander was a flight surgeon, too, but he was, well, doing commander stuff and not a whole lot of medicine. I decided to walk over to the CASF to check my e-mail that afternoon. I was in civilian clothes when I walked in. The moment I went through the door, there was Todd.

"Hey Doc! How ya doin'? Got time to change this dressing? You said you would."

"Jeez! OK, Todd. Let's go. I'll do it right now. Hey, Sgt. Snuffy!" the generic name for any sergeant so I can avoid naming names, not that it's a bad thing to name names but I just don't remember who helped me, "would you get me some dressing stuff, a pair of scissors and meet me at Todd's bed? Thanks."

Checked my e-mail. Nothing new. Went out to

Todd's rack. Actually a "Standard NATO Field Bed." It's a fold up, metal frame cot that is up higher off the ground, like a bed and has a canvas sling like bottom on which we placed foam pads. The patients liked them pretty much as they were used to sleeping on the ground or in a hole in the ground or in tanks or trucks or hummers. No major complaints. We had a hundred of them set up on the base's basketball court floor and often had them all filled. Like I said, it was busy. That day it was quiet and my dressing change turned into an educational seminar for the med techs and nurses because they hadn't seen much stuff like this prior to being activated and deployed. A lot of reservists do things in the service other than their civilian careers. Like the surgeon who enlisted to be a jet mechanic, not a doc, so he could play with jet engines in his spare time. The coolness factor I call it.

We put all the dressing change material on the bed and sat in folding chairs next to the bed with Todd's arm resting on the bed for support while I cut

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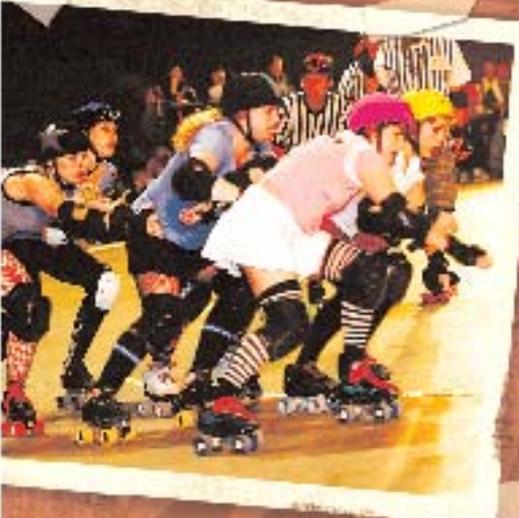
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The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

I had a dream I was dating Elvis (HELLO, as if I hadn't had that dream many times while I was wide awake). In this dream, it was the Elvis that was neither skinny nor fat, but rather the in-between Elvis, if anyone can remember that Elvis (it was a brief moment in history, but it existed).

Before I went to bed, I had an actual pain in my knee. In the dream, the pain manifested itself as a huge ugly blue vein popping out all along my calf. Elvis was very concerned, as you could imagine he would be. He tried desperately to get me to a doctor, speeding along the highway. A few of Elvis' people were also in the car with us, but they weren't very helpful as I recall. They just sat there like lumps, doing nothing, not even showing a little concern about my medical situation. Elvis was driving like a maniac, like I said, trying desperately to get me to the hospital. At one point, we drove into a prison, and down a steep flight of stairs, which was very scary because there was a lot of ice and no railing, and we came very close to falling off a cliff. We finally got to the doctors, but it was the wrong one.

On the way back out to the car, I was barefoot in the snow, and I knew this too would cause Elvis to be concerned, like, 'what the heck are you doing woman, put your damn shoes on!' But instead, he became all concerned with the fact that I was wearing red toenail polish, as if it was too harsh for a lady to be wearing. And he was kind of mean about it, telling me that he had only seen ladies wear bright shiny nail polish, not chipped like mine.

That upset me enough to wake me from the dream; actually, I guess you could say it became a nightmare at that point. I mean, if your girlfriend has a blue vein sticking out of her leg, her chipped red nail polish shouldn't sidetrack you. Especially if said boyfriend is Elvis, a person we can all assume was a gentleman and a very attentive boyfriend. And in my dream he was all that and more, until he saw my red toenail polish. Then all hell broke loose.

By the way, at one point in the dream/nightmare, my mother was off to the side, wearing a very tight skirt with very high heels, trying to balance a ham in her arms. She was very annoying, trying to get my attention. I was like, 'Oh, kind of busy here mom.' I think she wanted to tell me she had made the ham for Elvis and me, which would have actually been nice, but I had to take care of that big ugly blue vein sticking out of my leg, not to mention deal with a very emotional Elvis over that whole toenail polish business.

C.M. Manalapan, NJ

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterrag.com



Cdulhuvida

III. The Death of a Bull

Early the next morning, Thor awoke to hear Hymir grumbling because there was no food left for breakfast. Thor sprang up and reminded Hymir that they were to go fishing together that day.

Hymir was feeling ale-sick and wanted to get away from this annoying youth. He tightened his coat. "It's bitterly cold out there, Voerr. Are you sure you want to go? You may be able to eat and drink like a giant, but you won't be able to row like one. A young fellow like you could catch cold sitting out to sea as long as I usually do."

Thor assured him that he had no fear of the cold and that he didn't think he would be the first to want to return. "I know you have fishing gear on your boat, but what shall I use for bait?"

Hymir was getting increasingly angry and replied that Thor could find plenty of worms in the field where the cattle had slept. They walked outside and Hymir pointed out the field where the cattle slept.

"Just look for the steaming dark spots in the snow. The cows always mark where to dig for baitworms. But be sure to watch for my bull, HeavensRiot. I'll be preparing the boat and won't be near to help if he decides to have you for breakfast."

Thor knew that the bull, HeavensRiot, was also called the Walker of the Waste. He was a huge black beast, with a heart of ice and fiery eyes. The local Eskimaux tribe, who believed that he herded glaciers to the sea, worshiped him.

Thor climbed among the cliffs and found the giant's cattle grazing. Walking directly to HeavensRiot, he stared into the fiery eyes, swung his hammer Mjollnir and knocked off the bull's massive head. Leaving the body cooling in the snow, he carried the immense head back to use as his bait.

Thor found Hymir pushing the boat off the shore. When Hymir saw that Thor was carrying the head of HeavensRiot, he quickly shoved off, leaving Thor on the beach.

"No, good giant," Thor laughed. "You invited me to go fishing, so fishing we shall go. I have my bait and would match my luck against yours." Thor balanced his grisly trophy across his back, seizing a horn in each hand and leapt onto the boat.

Dropping the head onto the deck, Thor sat at the stern and took up his oar. Hymir seated himself at the prow and they started rowing in silence. In his head, Hymir was raging at the arrogance of his unwanted guest.

The fog closed in to hide the dawning sun as they traveled across the bay and out into the ocean.

...To Be Continued

The Blotter

away the dressing. His was tickled pink about seeing this scar. He had never had a cut or stitches or anything. This was a big deal to him. No kidding! Like I said, he'd been bugging the crap out of me to see this incision.

"OK, Todd. Here we go."

"Thanks, Doc. I can't wait to this scar. I love looking at cuts and stuff like that."

"You're weird, Todd."

"Yeah, I know Doc. Everybody tells me that."

"Hey, Todd, how did you break this thing, anyway? It's kind of an unusual fracture, especially because it needed a pin. It really doesn't say anything on the 3899." (the aeromedical evacuation patient record)

"Oh yeah. Well, sir, I got hit by a 40mm grenade."

"What, with shrapnel or something?"

"No, sir, with the grenade."

"You mean the grenade was flying through the air and hit you in the hand?"

"Yes sir, sort of."

Meanwhile, I am gingerly taking this complex dressing off by unwinding and peeling and cutting layer after layer of gauze and Ace bandage off his hand, not quite sure what I was going to find underneath.

"Jesus, Todd! What the hell happened?"

"Well sir, we were out on patrol in some shithole place in Iraq and we were done with the mission and we were goin' to get taken someplace else. They sent this APC to pick us up and take us. You know what that is, Doc, an APC?"

"Yeah, it's an armored personnel carrier."

"That's it, Doc. Anyway, we're getting in the back of the APC up the ramp. Everybody else is in 'cept for me and my buddy who's last in line. He was carrying an M-4 with 40mm grenade launcher attached on the bottom. You seen them, Doc?"

"Yeah, I know what you're talking about."

I'm down to the last layers of the dressing now. The M-204 grenade launcher is a big tube with its own trigger and handle that's attached under the front of the M-4, a modified M-16 semi-automatic rifle. The M-204 can launch all kinds of projectiles, from tear gas, to flares, to high explosive rounds all about the size of a jumbo egg. Mostly, high explosive gets used. Things in Iraq pretty much just get blown up.

"So anyway, Doc, I had this funny feeling about the guy behind me with the way he was moving. When I looked back he was trippin' on something and getting ready to fall comin' up the ramp. Hey, Doc, where's the scar?"

"It's under this band-aid thing here, Todd."

"I thought it was going to be bigger."

"Yeah, me too. So anyway, what happened?" I am not doing the dressing now, I am looking at Todd as he tells the rest of the story.

"Well, I seen that he was fallin' but the shit-head had his hand on the handle of the grenade launcher. So I put my hand over the end of the tube and pushed it over to the side 'cause he was pointing it into the APC. I was afraid he was going to launch a round at us."

"Jeez! What'd you do, fall and break your hand?"

"No sir, he pulled the trigger and launched a round right into my hand."

"Holy shit, Todd. Did it go through your hand or something?"

"No sir. It just hit my hand real hard and landed on the floor of the APC. Kind of went bouncin' in there like boink, boink, boink. Everybody in there was lookin' at it on the floor. Hurt my hand like a bitch though."

"How many guys were in the APC?"

"Well, there was the crew of three or four guys and my twelve guys so I guess sixteen altogether with me and the guy what fell."

"How come the round didn't explode?"

"Well, Doc, those rounds have to turn a bunch of times after they launch before they arm and can explode. I guess it didn't turn enough times to arm."

"How come it didn't go through your hand instead of bouncing off like it did?"

"Oh, they travel real slow, Doc. When you shoot 'em you can see them going out. They don't have a whole lot of power behind them."

"What'd you do with the round?"

"Somebody picked it up and threw it out in the dirt."

"What happened to it?"

"It went off."

"What'dya mean it went off? It blew up?"

"Yeah Doc. It exploded. But it was far away."

"Anybody get hurt?"

"No Doc, we were all in the APC!"

I look up and there are about eight or ten techs and nurses surrounding us watching and listening to this story. They all look at me with the same look I had on my face. Drop-jawed incredulous.

"Jesus Todd! Do you realize you saved the lives of all those guys in that APC, including your own. You're a God-damned

hero if I ever heard of one!" I have to admit to a few tears in my eyes. His wound is now uncovered and was just a thin surgical red line on the back of his hand about 40mm long, coincidentally. The same as the width of the round that hit him. Very minimal, just a scratch really. Not even a bruise.

"Yeah, I guess so." He shrugged.

"I never really thought about it. Hey, is that the scar? COOL! That's really cool. Thanks, Doc! Man, that's cool! I mean 'sir'."

"No problem, Todd." You hemorrhoid, you.



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"Second Coming" by Maia Morris

1 There's a graveyard on North Campus where the dead lie in wait. Their tombstones read from witty to bland to interesting to sad to nothing, but no matter what they read, they never do justice, good and bad, to the souls without. *Margaret Anne Johnson, beloved mother of five, devoted wife, Christian woman. Jonathan Dufay, a man of integrity. Cynthia DuBois, loved life and her dogs.* Passersby would never know that Mrs. Johnson raised those five children on her own, working three jobs because her husband had left her for her sister. They would never guess that Jonathan had raped three women and was killed in the act by the father of his would-be fourth victim. They would laugh upon learning that Cynthia DuBois had not an inkling of French background, but had changed her name from Betty-Lynn Rogers when she turned 21.

2 There's a graveyard on North Campus where the dead lie in wait. Their families and friends do a convoluted dance along the ground as they try not to step on the graves of those below, believing that it's bad luck or disrespectful or are not really sure why but just don't think they should. The children don't bother, though, because they know, somehow, that it doesn't matter anyway. They know that not stepping on someone is important when the person is alive, but not now, not when they can't feel it.

3 There's a graveyard on North Campus where the dead lie in wait. Their graves, over flowing with flowers and grass and tears, are guarded by a huge, moss covered oak tree that was there long before the graveyard was. Its branches bend over each grave like a grandmother over her grandchildren ready to scoop them up in a warm embrace. In winter, though, the trees are bare and thin, and give the graveyard the proper look of, well, a graveyard.

4 There's a graveyard on North Campus where the dead begin to stir. Tombstones topple as hands, arms, heads, bodies rise from the ground. Deep breathes are taken as lungs fill with air for the first time in one, two, twenty, a hundred years. Eyes take in familiar and unfamiliar surroundings as dirt falls from them and tears moisten them. Fear, joy, wonder, and confusion pulse through the air as the risen dead realize what is happening.

5 There is a graveyard on North Campus that no longer serves its purpose.

Staccato Microfiction

is a holding pattern, per se, of
Staccato Magazine,
Matthew Boyd, Editor.

Submissions, five hundred (500) words
or less, to staccatomag@yahoo.com.

two by John Grey

LAKE CABIN, 6.00 A.M.

There's always a boat
on a lake at dawn.
I can only think
that shaped, that wooden,
this early in the morning
The rippling surface
speaks for the consciousness
I float upon.

Someone's fishing
in the gold-studded water.
I drop my nets
in the breath, the skin.
A taut line
blunts the edge
of too many years.
I skim like dreams do.

There's always a boat
that faith won't sink,
always a lake
that devours storms.
Out there, a fisherman tests
the unseen hunger.
Here, the clamor of instinct
inquires after life.

FADING

The album almost falls apart in my hand.
People in the photographs are fading,
Girlish looks can barely be discerned
from bam doors and tractors.
And what of tall, grim men?
They shorten.
Their faces loosen, emulsify.
To know them there's just memory
and it too loses outline, withers.
My heart almost falls apart in my head.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Ron Cooper's novel *Hume's Fork* is in bookstores and online booksellers as we speak. We're lucky that we saw him first, folks, because he's going to be big, I tell you.

Mark Brown is a Chapel Hill artist, who will be showing at Somerhill Gallery from October 14th to November 10th. Link to his website from our blotterrag.com, and read Michele Natale's comprehensive review of his Winterreise works.

Richard Lewis is from up New Jersey way, and is an Air Force colonel and a gynecologist, as well as a pretty good storyteller. So salute him when you see him, because that's a hell of a combination.

Maia Morris is a UGA grad in English, now living in Lithonia, Georgia, yet originally from Charleston, SC - blown away by Hugo (as was this editor).

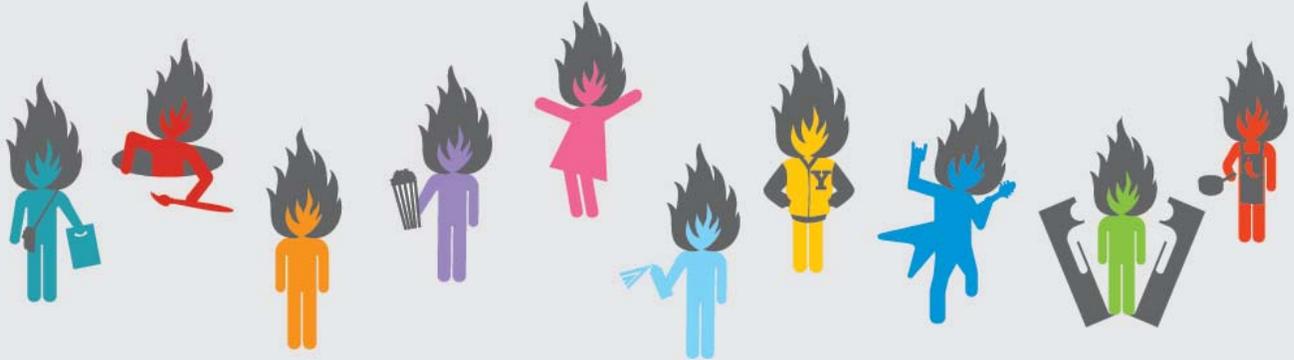
Larry Holderfield (*Cdulhuvida*) is our newlywed man-of-many-talents and creator of *Sinister Bedfellows*. He lives just west of hereabouts.

Australian born **John Grey** is a poet, playwright and musician living in Providence, RI, whose latest book is "What Else Is There" from *Main Street Rag*. He has also been recently published in *The English Journal*, *The Pedestal*, *Pearl*, and the *Journal of the American Medical Association*

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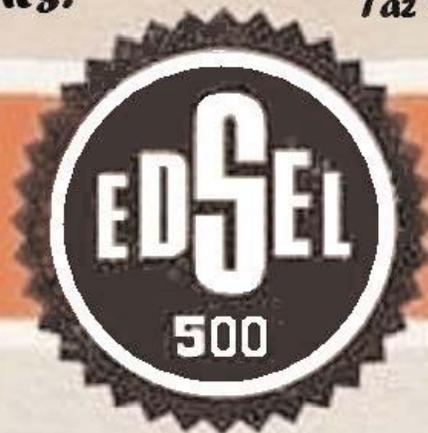
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