

*The Cure for Your Post-Whatever Blues. Myra Sherman and Rowena Southard stir up their plots;
Maurice Oliver, Jonathan Pattishall, and Peter Magliocco dish the wordcraft:
the art of Steve Cartwright and The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE



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Failure

"Hey, buddy, will you stake a fellow American to a meal?"

I guess we've all seen Bogie in *Treasure of the Sierra Madre*. He is at his grubbiest – if possible, even more filthy than the swamp-watered, leech-infested *African Queen*, as Fred C. Dobbs. He slumps around Tampico, his clothes gray, his hat gray, his outlook, dark. One imagines the soles of his shoes to be so thin as to allow him to read Braille with his toes. He hits on those more fortunate for their pocket-silver, then blows the change on haircuts and shaves – pleasures of the now. When he is caught begging from the same fellow, he looks at the ground and apologizes, with the explanation of why things have gone wrong, and how he cannot easily make them right. Of course, we think. This is failure. Failure is falling down a well with smooth sides. Bone dry or treading-water wet, no difference. If we can just make it until tomorrow, until payday, until the tide turns, until retirement, until... (Aside – when Dobbsie finally does come into some real do-re-mi he can't handle it; he pops like a birthday balloon. Aint life a bitch?)

I sort of know how he feels. I have passing familiarity with failure. Not classic *failure* – that kind of moment that is glorious, Icarus fluttering to his death, a belly flop when a jackknife was the intent. Rather, mine was a drawn-out "I'm sure I've gone about this all wrong" variety of failure, the unwilling to say, "need a little help, here" kind. And I've found that sometimes it's just an issue of consistency that gives someone a patina of failure, like working as a Roman slave in a sulfur mine gives you jaundice.

My own work experience has always been hit-and-miss, well sort of foul-off and foul-off again. Many moons ago, I was in telephone sales and sold a lot of product with my feet up on the desk while I made my fellow operators standing by laugh with my between-call antics. Had I had been serious-minded (read "asshole"), and competitive, and comprehended the real meaning of success (need to put in more hours) I might have more swiftly been made a manager, and then perhaps a manager of managers. As it was, in the fullness of time, I left sales for support – where I finally became a supervisor – again I thought that the goal was productivity, and my theory of productivity was that happy workers are, well, good workers. This may or may not be true, but it was my experience that people not having fun intensely dislike people who are. Therefore, that position didn't last long.

Not totally sabotaged by the *schadenfreuders*, I was given what the Japanese call a window-job. There was a whisper-thin opportunity to kiss and make up, get myself back on a new good-old-boy track, but I missed it like it was a train chugging somewhere grimly dark and mysterious. Instead, I thought it more appropriate to try and climb back on the same horse which had thrown me off. And now frustration reared its ugly head. Tasks became more difficult, but I didn't look for help. I put away my

funny-bone, unfortunately at a time when I needed it most. A good friend advised me when things went truly south, “Don’t get frustrated, get mad!” But I couldn’t put away my frustration. Perhaps my lack of success was even due to a need to be liked, even by those who it seemed were “out to get me”. (That shouldn’t have mattered, right? Heavens, no, not in the world of business.) Finally, I couldn’t achieve my minimum goals, and was let go. I’m the first to admit I should have been let go, maybe the second, but I should have gone down, well, laughing.

Because the truth was, being canned was a blessing in disguise. I was not having any fun, I no longer enjoyed the company of my co-workers (who were just as glum as I), and I was not appreciating any small successes I might have had, because now I was just trying to complete the whole working-years task: expend effort, get promoted, make more money, accumulate a pension, arrive safely to retirement. Each day had become just another small part of a calendar that stretched out into a pale and ineffable future, rather than being something unto itself, to be experienced for no more complex reason than *here it is*. Like getting a haircut and a shave.

My Dad says with a wink, “Carpe Deus, son. Worship fishing. If you go fishing and you don’t catch any, you didn’t fail. Fishing is about sitting by the water with your line in, eating yodels and drinking strawberry pop. Smell the roses, fella. That’s why we grow them.”

I began to realize that so many things I had done, from dates to movies to meals to jobs to vacations, had not been appreciated for what they were – being parts of the journey - but had become things to be completed so that I could move on to the next task. And somewhere along the way I’d lost the capacity to put my feet up on the desk and laugh.

With one year of it under my belt, I am an editor, and a home-Dad. Sure. I’m not all that good at some parts of it, but I must admit I’m having fun again. I apologize for my flubs, in both roles. As an editor, I am glad for one of my decisions – to personally respond to every submitter, tell about what I liked in their work, whether we accept the work or do not. It’s harder than just saying “No, thanks” but I take the time to enjoy reading the submissions and the finished issues themselves, and I’m having fun. The soles of my shoes are pretty stout. And as a Dad I’m not always pushing my girls so hard to learn to do things for themselves. Instead we are taking our time growing up together. We talk about how *today* is a good day. Every day. I still make the peanut butter sandwiches, and we go to the park and I push them on the swings, although I am certain that they can swing themselves. I push the swings, without thinking about what comes next, and I watch their hair blow in the wind we make.

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CAUTION

Somewhere along our lifelines we go from “If you’re happy and you know it, do all three” to “yer gonna go to hell if you keep doing that.” Let it be said that we long for the simpler times.

“Violet and Jay”

by Myra Sherman

I was proud of Jay for taking the jail job. Working with inmates seemed admirable. Of course, there was the money, but that was beside the point. My satisfaction was vicarious. My envy was hidden. I longed to help people and be useful, but didn't know how. I was in one of my *lost* periods.

Jay came home from his interview revved up. Pacing the length of the loft and smoking a joint, he stripped to red silk briefs, strewing charcoal Armani on the sand cork floor. He snorted from excitement. His face was flushed. He kept cracking his knuckles. I found his self-congratulatory swaggering repulsive.

“Violet, you're looking at Colusa County's new jail psychiatrist,” he told me. “They loved me. Zelna, the supervisor, spent three hours showing me around. I had her in the palm of my hand.”

By then we were sitting on the burgundy velvet floor cushions I spent a week making. Our backs were against the sofa. Isis, my German shepherd, was on my right side, with her head in my lap. She smelled of juniper organic dog shampoo from a recent bath. Jay, on my left side, smelled of the cigarettes I made him smoke outside. He leaned over to kiss me and Isis growled. After a month, she was still jealous of Jay.

“Bad girl,” I scolded.

“Your dog doesn't like me,” Jay grumbled.

“Give her time. So, how was the jail?”

“Hard-core, brutal, stimulating; like a real world Oz.”

“That prison show? I heard it was a ridiculous exaggeration.”

“More like a taste of reality for the middle class. You have to see it. I want to again, anyway.”

“Whatever,” I said. I didn't want to argue. Jay managed to get four seasons of *Oz* delivered the next day. He stocked up on alcohol and cigarettes. I had a deli platter delivered.

“We have three days. It'll be like a film festival,” he said, grinning with enthusiasm.

We watched episode after episode, season after season. The theme music marked the hours and days. I became desensitized to blood, violence and male frontal nudity.

By Sunday afternoon I was fed up with *Oz*. “I've had enough,” I said.

“Watching this, I'm glad it didn't work out with Doctors Hospital. Even with the commute, I'd rather treat prisoners,” Jay said, like he didn't hear me.

“When I volunteered in New York, the jail was full of homeless mentally ill,” I said.

“I'm not afraid of the bad guys. Just bring them on.”

“That's not what I meant.” I was talking to myself.

“Maybe I'll make a documentary.”

“Maybe I'll go to sleep,” I said. My back was stiff and my chest ached. I felt drained and empty.

I was on the floor with Isis. Jay was sprawled on the couch, wearing my leopard print robe. The sleeves came to his elbows and the hem to his knees. I let him wear it our first night together and the robe became his. An almost empty bottle of Grey Goose vodka was on the table beside him, next to his pre-rolled Hawaiian sativa joints. His eyes were red-rimmed and inflamed. The three day white-blond stubble on his face made him look old, but sexy.

“Babe, you have to watch the last episodes, for me.” His smile was sweet, sheepish and well-practiced.

“Everything's for you,” I said.

“That's great,” he said.

Selfish idiot, I thought. But I let him pull me on the couch. His arms felt comforting and his hands were warm. Like the characters in *Oz*, we had quick, hard, exciting sex. Jay grunted, I screamed. Isis watched us and whined.

I watched the last episodes.

Monday morning, after a restless anxious night, I woke up sick. I had a racking cough and elevated temperature. It was 11:00am.

“Will you be alright?” Jay asked.

He was freshly showered and shaved, dressed in a business suit and tie. He'd overslept and was two hours late.

“Fine,” I said. “You better go. Your first day at the jail...”

“I'll phone,” he said.

After his third call, I disconnected the phone. I didn't have the energy to talk or listen to his detailed account of what was going on. I felt feverish and disoriented. I had ugly dreams involving Jay that disappeared and dissolved into formless anxiety.

I dragged myself out of bed at 8:00pm to walk Isis, drank a quart of orange juice, then went back to sleep. Jay got home at midnight.

“Babe, the jail's a blast,” he said. “I'll get you in...you have to see.”

I sat up in bed and rubbed my eyes. My chest hurt from coughing. I was

weak and clammy with dried sweat.

“Tomorrow,” I croaked. “Tell me tomorrow.”

“I was on the ad-seg module, with all the bad actors. One had KILLER tattooed across his forehead. The deputies bring me this huge white dude, shaved head, swastika on his neck...starts bawling like a baby, tells me he misses his mother.”

“Tomorrow,” I repeated. “Please.”

At that moment I hated him. I wondered how a psychiatrist could be so self-absorbed and insensitive. Was I so depressed I needed his whirlwind emotions to make me feel alive?

Isis climbed into bed with me and moaned. Jay looked angry and stormed into the front room. “I thought you'd be interested,” he yelled.

*

I was introduced to Jay at a holiday party. The kind where well-meaning people search among their acquaintances for hapless loners in need of company and cheer. Not that we were total losers. I had my inheritance, and Jay was, after all, a psychiatrist.

When we first met, I thought Jay was homely. His head was too large and his features were bland, he had reddish blond hair and freckles. He was forty-five, ten years older than me.

“I know I'm not conventionally handsome,” he said.

He was self-effacing and smart, animated and charming. He made me feel desirable and unique. I brought him home with me that night. I saw him everyday. And because Jay was filing for bankruptcy and giving up his Marina condo, he moved in with me after two weeks.

“How does a psychiatrist go bankrupt?” I asked.

“I wanted to do something large scale and creative,” he said. “I had all these internet domains, to create an international web-driven community. ‘My World— New York, London, Los Angeles, Amsterdam...’ then My Space and Facebook came along. Fucking squeezed me out before I even got started.”

I understood. I'd been there. My urban artifact sculptures of salvaged metal embellished with semi-precious stones were gathering dust, cluttering the loft with art no one wanted.

I was renting, but had a five year lease. The three story brick barely converted warehouse was at 6th and Mission, in the part of San Francisco tourists are advised to avoid. But I had Isis for protection.

After three failed attempts, I was finished with marriage. Jay was waiting for the perfect woman and had never

married. We didn't talk about our future together. Our lives were day by day. I loved his energy and passion, but wasn't sure I liked living with him.

Jay had a big ego and even bigger problems. Between his addictions and mood swings, I wondered how he got through school. I thought he might be a fraud. But I saw his degrees from Harvard.

My issues, as the therapists liked to say, were different. I was the family eccentric, emotional and intense, prone to periods of depression, a throw-back to relatives who weren't quite respectable. "I'd rather die than be normal," I always said. *My defensive, ego-salvaging lie...*

We were two damaged people. We were like characters in a Charles Bukowski story.

*

After sleeping on the sofa, Jay woke me the next morning at noon. He served me chamomile tea and toast in bed. His solicitousness was unexpected and out of character.

"I walked Isis," he said. "She's starting to like me, kept licking my hand."

"That's good. But why so nice?"

"Babe, I always am. Feeling better?"

I was too groggy to know, but nodded. I got up and went to the bathroom. Jay helped me back in bed and pulled the comforter up. He was wearing another Armani suit. His pale pink dress shirt was open at the neck.

"Do you think I need a tie?" he asked.

"I'm surprised you're so dressed up. Aren't you late?"

"Doesn't matter, they're lucky to have me."

"You don't have appointments?"

"It's impossible to see everyone. Yesterday I had ten inmates and had to leave four. Zelna said not to worry, the nurse would figure out the scheduling."

"Still, shouldn't you get going?"

"I am. Soon as I tell you about yesterday. It'll blow you away."

I listened as Jay described his first day at the jail. It was a performance, with waving hand gestures and dramatic expressions, especially when he got to the grand finale.

"So then I was called to Intake. There's this big black guy in the safety cell, stripped to his shorts, screaming gibberish, chained to a metal ring in the floor. The deputies said talk to him from the doorway, but I got right in there with him, on the floor. Got him to calm down and take meds, impressed the hell out of everyone."

Jay was on a roll. If I hadn't stopped him he would've talked for hours. It was after 2:00pm when he finally left.

I was relieved to be alone. He was so full of himself, so arrogant and smug. Working in the jail was just a chance to show what a great psychiatrist he was. He didn't care about his patients. *Did he care about me?*

*

When I woke up it was dark. Isis was on the bed, with her head on the pillow, staring at me. She wanted dinner and a walk. I didn't know what I wanted. I was feeling maudlin and sorry for myself.

I regretted rushing with Jay, but didn't want to give him up. For all his faults, he bolstered my ego and gave me confidence.

"You're a fantastic artist," he was always telling me. "You're so sexy, attractive, interesting..."

I hated feeling so insecure, but I needed him.

"Isis, my darling, what should I do?" I asked.

Get yourself out of bed and attend to me, I imagined her answering.

I got up and took a long, hot shower. I put on red yoga pants and my 'Queen of Maybe' t-shirt, then the black ankle-length hooded cashmere cape Jay hated.

"That thing's stained, shredding. You look like a medieval street person," he said.

"The cape's my trademark," I said.

I felt clean, but lousy. I had a sore throat, my legs were rubbery and my skin felt tight. But I had to take Isis out. She reared up when she saw the leash. I felt guilty for ignoring her.

The steep, open stairs to the street left me breathless. I followed Isis to the weed-filled empty lot that was her bathroom. Then I slowly walked her around the block. The cold damp air smelled of diesel fumes and rotten fish. I felt nauseous and light-headed.

William was at his corner. Because I was from the neighborhood, he never asked me for money. He was wearing the down-filled parka I gave him for Christmas. When I gave it to him, he cried.

"Ms. Violet," he greeted me. "You haven't been around much."

William always spoke proper English. He had a past he wouldn't talk about, and no future. He drank fortified wine and hand-rolled Bugler cigarettes.

"I've been sick, and busy," I said.

I used to spend hours roaming the streets with Isis. I stopped because

Jay thought the area was dangerous.

Bizarrely, the image of the Protosaur at the Natural History Museum flashed in my mind. The prehistoric small-headed marine reptile had a neck twice as long as its body, and was sucking up a fish.

*

I felt worse after my outing with Isis. My fever increased. I collapsed into bed and stayed there. Everything seemed blurred and confused.

I had vague recollections of Jay telling me about work. His mood was erratic. He told me how great he was doing. He complained of being overwhelmed and stressed. Sometimes he didn't make sense. He was late leaving and coming home.

Jay took me to the emergency room on Saturday. The doctor said I had the flu. I spent the weekend sleeping. Jay spent the weekend at the jail, trying to catch up.

*

By Monday evening, I felt better. I got out of bed and showered, then took Isis outside. I ate canned chicken noodle soup. I gave Isis a can of Grammy's pot pie dog food. Jay had taken over the front room. His discarded clothes were everywhere. A dinner plate filled with cigarette butts was on the table, three empty vodka bottles were on the floor. I didn't know whether to laugh or cry. I retreated with Isis to the bedroom.

Jay came home at 3:00am and woke me up. I moved over and he sat on the edge of the bed next to me. When he touched my cheek, his fingers trembled.

"I had a terrible day," he said.

"Were you at work this late?" I asked.

"I may've screwed up."

His cuticles were jagged and torn. As he talked, he kept picking at them. He told me Zelna got on him for being late. She asked him to evaluate an inmate on the female module who was threatening suicide.

"But I wanted to see the psych patients on M, the mental health module, first. I didn't get to them the day before," he said.

Jay's voice sounded flat. His face looked drawn and tired.

"I went to M last week, with Zelna. But this time was different. The inmates were locked in their rooms. Some of them were screaming, some talking in word salad. It was a fucking Snake Pit, like going back in time. It was too much...I didn't know where to start."

He seemed unaware of the tears leaking from his eyes. His forehead was creased.

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He kept biting his lips.

"Did you eat?" I asked.

"No time," he answered.

I'd never seen him depressed and defeated. I felt protective. Jay sat at the kitchen table, smoking a joint while I scrambled eggs. It was like he was talking to himself.

"I had to see Kahana. He was four-pointed to his bed. Then the kid in the rubber room and the old lady..."

"You did the best you could," I said.

"Time got away from me," he said.

We were in bed when Jay told me he never got to the women's module.

"I was ready to work all night if I had to. But when I left M, the lieutenant said it was too late to see inmates. I was on my way home, when I remembered the suicidal woman."

"Don't worry," I reassured him. "You'll see her first thing tomorrow."

"You don't understand. Not seeing a suicidal patient is negligence. If she hurts herself, I'm responsible. Set the clock for me," he said. "I want to be out of here by 8:00am."

"Three hours sleep? If you want," I said.

*

I didn't hear Jay leave for work the next morning. I was still in bed when he returned.

"Violet, wake up," he yelled in my ear.

His voice was a pain-filled growl. I opened my eyes. He grabbed my hands in his. He'd bitten off his nails and his cuticles were bleeding. Instead of a suit he wore black slacks and a pale blue sweater. The sweater had a coffee stain down the front.

"I fucked up, big-time," he said. Jay's eyes were red. His skin looked grey. His face was sagging. He looked old. I held him in my arms. He laid his head against my chest, like a baby. I heard muffled sobs. Isis came in from the front room and jumped on the bed. We stayed like that for a long time.

When I got up to use the bathroom, Jay followed. Isis followed Jay.

"Isis needs to go out," I said.

"I'll take her," Jay said.

Isis licked his face when he bent down to put on her leash.

Jay and Isis came back smelling of cigarettes and outside air. I brought French roast coffee to the front room. Bright morning sun poured in through the smudged windows, exposing dust motes and dog hair.

"Want to talk?" I asked.

"That girl..." Jay said. "She was just a kid."

He was crying. He told me

Zelna was waiting for him with the jail commander. The inmate Jay didn't see was dead. She cut straight across her throat with a blade extracted from a disposable razor and died before her roommate woke up.

"It was my fault," Jay said. "I fucked up, just like last time, at Doctors Hospital. I never told you..."

"You don't have to," I said. *I was afraid to know.*

"There were three suicides while I was there. The medical director told me I didn't understand inpatient acuity. That I should stick to treating the worried well. I thought he was full of shit."

"You were the scapegoat," I said. But I couldn't help wondering...

"I don't know... Maybe I shouldn't practice at all, stop being a psychiatrist, do something else, anything else."

Jay's face was red. The veins in his neck were bulging. He looked ready to explode. Still I was stunned when he threw his coffee cup against the window. The cup was vintage porcelain and part of a set my mother gave me. Pale blue shards and black coffee, Jay's angry face, his ugly mood, my dismay...

I backed away, threw my cape over my nightgown and grabbed Isis. In sheepskin slippers, I fled to the street. I was beyond thinking. I felt drained and lost.

William was at his usual spot. "Are you alright?" he asked.

"No," I answered.

I walked for a long time. Isis wanted to stay out. So did I.

*

Jay was waiting at the top of the stairs when I returned. He looked pitiful. His hair was standing on end, like he'd been pulling it. He looked flabby in his underwear.

"I was set up," he screamed down at me. "They gave me an impossible job. Fuck them. I'll sue. They're corrupt, twisted..."

I climbed the stairs with Isis. I was shaking. Because he didn't move, I had to squeeze past Jay to the front room. His face was twisted and florid. Spit was dribbling from his lower lip.

"You fucking bitch," he ranted. "I'm sick to death of you. I despise you. I loathe your stupid, mangy dog."

I felt like an ice statue, ready to shatter. I couldn't move or speak. I'd never seen anyone go crazy, not in such a monstrous way.

"Fucking bitch dog," he screamed again.

Isis was standing beside me. When Jay rushed toward us, she lunged up. When Jay kicked her in the stomach, she fell backwards, down the stairs. My

heart twisted. I wanted to die.

Isis stood in the street, whimpering and waiting for me. Her dew-claw was torn and her nose scratched.

"Get the hell out of here," I screamed up at Jay. "I'll call the police if I have to."

I walked Isis around the corner to the animal hospital. The vet gave her a tranquilizer. He cut off her dew-claw and taped her foot. She licked his face.

Jay was gone when I got home.

Even in the midst of my hatred, I felt confused.

*

Six months later, a mutual acquaintance told me Jay had throat cancer. I felt guilty for thinking he got what he deserved. It was a hot August day. I guessed his illness started when he was with me. I pictured malignant evil cells dividing and multiplying. I wondered if his growing tumor had affected his behavior. I called the hospital, but Jay wouldn't talk to me.

In December, I ran into Jay at a huge party. It was a year since we'd first met, in similar circumstances.

I was with Stuart. It was our third date. Jay was with Anna, an older but stunning blonde in good jewelry. Jay's cancer was in remission. After radiation and chemo, he was gaunt and pale. His head was shaved. He had a martini in his hand and was smoking a cigarette. Jay and I talked. He ignored Anna, who didn't seem to mind.

"I'll get you a drink," Stuart told me, and went off in search of the bar.

Jay pulled me into a side room, leaving Anna behind. He seemed bitter and self-obsessed.

"Are you working?" I asked.

"Hello, throat cancer?" He sneered. "I'm staying with Anna."

"I'm sorry you got sick."

"Sorry? You fucking don't have a clue."

His anger engulfed me.

"I have to get back to my friend," I told Jay.

"You're not going?" he asked.

His mouth hung open, he looked hurt and stunned.

I had to escape. I shrugged, then turned around and left.

I felt disoriented. I wandered from room to room, looking for Stuart. When I finally found him, he looked relieved and rushed over.

"Where've you been?" Stuart asked.

"I got lost for awhile," I said.

Stuart looked at me quizzically and smiled.



"Top and Bottom"

by Rowena Southard

I am a midget. They call me Itty Bitty Betty, the Smallest Woman in the World. Sometimes when people come to the carnival they think I'm a little girl dressed up to look like a midget, but I'm the real thing. I am about three feet tall and I am almost twenty-three years old. Everything about me is perfect, just smaller than normal. I've worked with the carnival now for the past ten years. I've made a good living out of being small and the other folks in the carnival have always been great to me. Up until recently, I always did part of my act with Matilda who was billed as Matilda the Oldest Woman in the World. She was like family to me.

When I was born, my parents thought that I was the most beautiful baby they had ever seen. At least that's what they say. I was tiny, but I was healthy. My folks named me Elizabeth, after the Queen of England. I have two older sisters who are normal, although the oldest has one foot that's bigger than the other and so she has to buy two different sized shoes. My family liked me in the beginning, but as time passed, they began to realize that I would always be smaller than normal. My mother tried to pretend that there was nothing unusual about my size, and she kept buying me bigger and bigger clothes every year even though I wasn't growing. By the time I was eight years old my dresses dragged along the ground when I walked and I tripped a lot. My father was a door-to-door insurance salesman. He used to go to people's homes with a book full of pictures of disasters just to get them to buy insurance. He had shiny color pictures of floods, earthquakes, fires and all sorts of people lying around in hospitals with tubes coming out them.

"Disaster can strike at any time," he would tell them, and then he would stare them right in the eyes like he was daring them to deny it. Then he would turn the pages in his disaster book to get them to buy insurance. "What would happen to your family if you were to drop dead today?" he would demand, and wave a picture of a crumpled car in their face. He was very forceful when he spoke, and he prided himself on catching people off guard with his "difficult but necessary" questions. "They never have an answer for that one," he would say. He was right. The "drop dead today" part of his pitch usually con-

vinced most people to buy some sort of insurance.

Sometimes he would take me along with him to people's houses. He would introduce me, and they would stare at me in my over-sized dress with the dirty hem and wonder what was wrong with me. The more polite people never asked. They would just nod when my Dad said his bit about disaster striking at any moment and look sadly at me, like I was living proof. Some of the more curious people would ask right out. Dad just told them that I was a slow grower and then he'd bring up the subject of tornado insurance.

By the time I was thirteen, the novelty of my size wore off and my family decided I should live somewhere else. My mother was tired of trying to explain my clothes and my father said I was hurting his business.

"No one wants to buy insurance from a man whose daughter's dresses don't fit," he said.

And so they sent me to live with a traveling carnival. Early one morning, they packed a small suitcase for me with one giant dress and a geography book about the United States. I was wearing my only other dress, which was flowered with a green tie around the waist. It dragged behind me like the train on a wedding dress, and one of our cats sat on the train as I tried to walk from the house to the car. I struggled to walk towards the car with my suitcase and the cat weighing down the back of my dress, and my sisters cried. They hugged each other and said how sad it was that I was

getting to see the world and they had to stay home and lead a dull life. My mother kissed me goodbye, I climbed into the back seat of our Ford Galaxy and my father drove me to the carnival. When we got there, he opened the car door and threw my suitcase out.

"Go see Freddie," he said, as he watched me struggle to get my skirt untangled from around myself. I climbed out of the backseat, pulled out my suitcase and stood there as he drove away. He stopped for a minute and yelled back at me, "Let me know if any carnival folks need insurance." Then he drove off, leaving me at the front gate of the carnival.

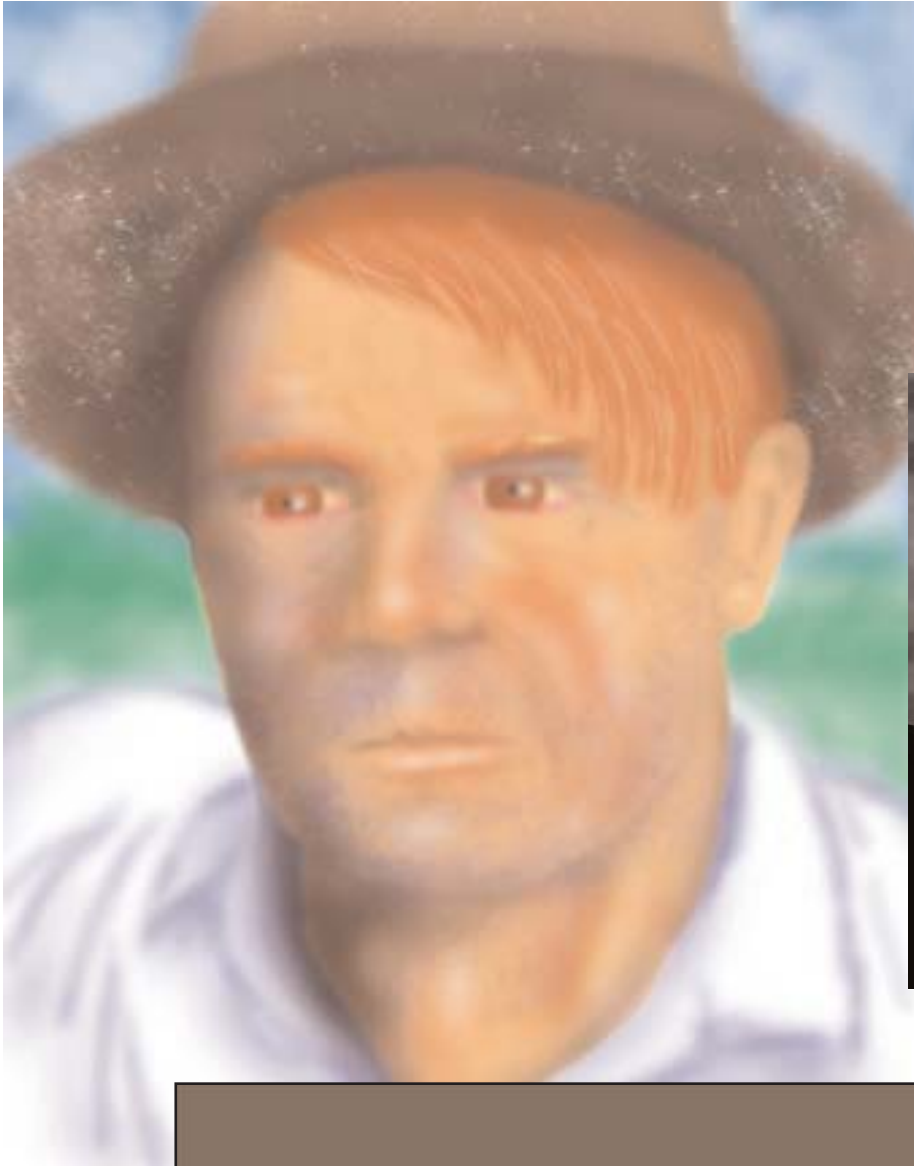
I was pretty scared when Dad left me off that morning, but I did what he said and went looking for Freddie. It turns out that Freddie was the head of the carnival and he put all the shows together. I found him sitting on top of a pickle barrel talking to one of the women trapeze artists. He was waving a pickle in the air and staring at the woman's legs while he talked. I introduced myself to him. I guess he could tell who I was just by looking at me. He's the one who started calling me Betty.

"We were expecting you. You look just like your father described you! From now on you'll be Itty Bitty Betty," he said. "You're going to do your act with Matilda the Oldest Woman in the World. Her trailer is out at the end of the parking lot." He pointed out towards the end of a dusty lot at a small aluminum trailer with a red door. "Go see her," he said waving the pickle.

I struggled across the lot towards the trailer with my suitcase. My dress dragged along in the dirt, and I wondered if I would live with Matilda from now on. I missed my family. I knew I

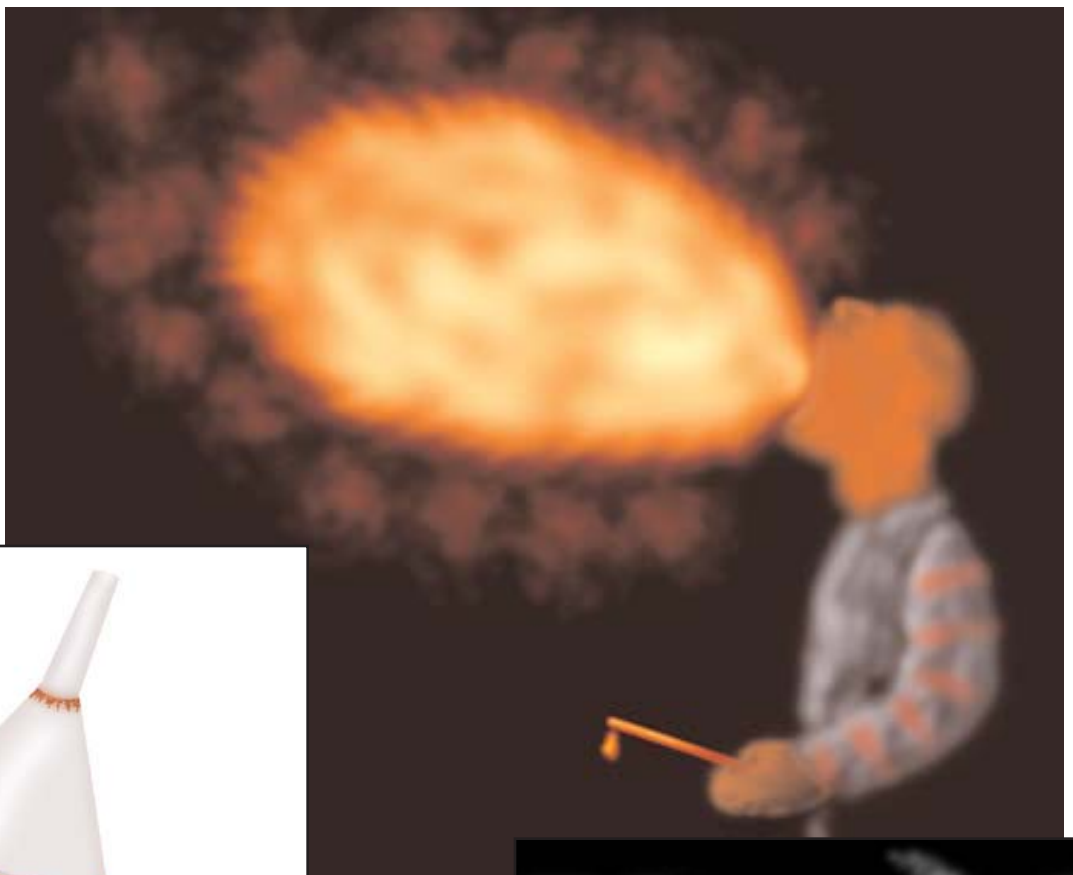
Steve Cartv

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wright

artoonsbycartwright



Upper left: Farmer

Left: Bad Boy

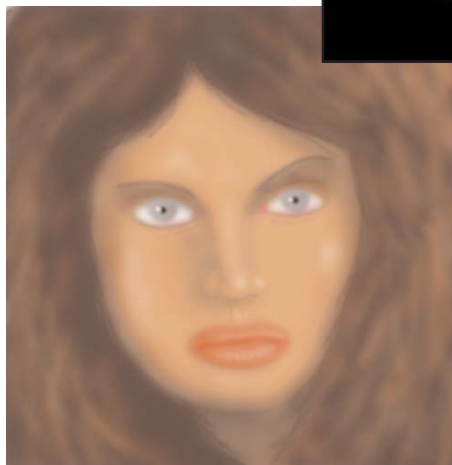
Above: Tin-man-rusted

Upper Right: Fire-eater

Right: Man-blurry-windows

Lower Right: Woman-gray-eyes

Lower Left: Torso



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didn't fit in with them, but at least it was a life I knew. The carnival life seemed so different from my life in town. Everyone lived in trailers, and even though it was ten in the morning almost everyone seemed to still be asleep. I finally made my way to Matilda's door and I knocked. No one answered.

I stood there uncertain what to do. I was hot already and my suitcase was terribly heavy. The geography book had a special appendix about unusual vacation spots that must have weighed at least ten pounds. I couldn't stand the thought of traipsing back across the dusty lot to find Freddie again, so I sat down on the front steps of the trailer to think. I sat there and wondered what my sisters were doing. Suddenly, the front door was pushed open and it hit me in the back. I jumped up and met Matilda. I wasn't certain at first exactly what I was looking at because she was wearing a gold turban and she was very hunched over, almost at a right angle. The top of the turban was pointing right at me. It sort of waved and nodded at me.

"What! What is it?" she demanded.

I wasn't sure how to respond and I could tell she couldn't see me because she was looking down at the ground. Besides the turban, she was wearing a long gold dress that was made out of the same fabric. It was close a fitting knit and it had long sleeves. I could see smoke wafting up from the sides of the turban. She was smoking.

"Freddie sent me," I said.

The turban bobbed a few times and she finally lifted her head. It was like she was getting a running start in order to bend her neck. Her head had to bend at an impossible angle to her neck in order for

her to finally look at me. She had small black eyes and a very pointed nose.

"Boy are you small," she said. Then she dropped her head again and started to cough. She held out one arm to support herself while she choked and spit. I could see she had a cigarette holder in her other hand. It was long and golden and must have been a foot long. I wasn't sure what to do, so I just stood there. The turban bobbed and waved at me, and I was afraid Matilda might die before I found out where I was going to live. Finally she stopped coughing and yelled out, "Well, come on in."

She coughed and the door slammed shut. I dragged my suitcase up the two small stairs and struggled with the door. It was very dark and smoky inside. Matilda lay down on a torn green velour couch and stared at me. I could get a good look at her dress and her turban. She wasn't very tall, maybe five feet two and she was skinny as a rail. When she was lying down her head was at the perfect angle to look right at me. She had a hoarse voice and talked really loud.

"I'm 128 years old. My birth certificate is here on the wall and don't you ever forget it. How old are you?" she said taking a long drag off of her cigarette.

"I'm thirteen," I said.

"Why is your damn dress so big?" she said staring at me with her beady eyes.

"My mother didn't want to believe that I was really a midget," I replied.

"Hang up your clothes in the closet and get me a beer," she said.

Matilda told me I could sleep in the bedroom because she rarely slept any-

more and liked to rest on the couch. I hung my one dress in the closet next to her clothes. She had six more gold dresses with six matching turbans all hanging in her closet. I brought her a beer from the little refrigerator in the kitchen. I noticed that all that was in it was beer.

"Why do you have seven copies of the same dress?" I asked her.

"Show business, Sister."

Matilda wasn't like anyone I had ever met before. She seemed to know everything about the carnival business, and I felt kind of relieved to know I would be living with her. I sat on the worn green carpet of the trailer floor while Matilda lay on the couch and smoked and talked and coughed. She told me all about how to get along with the other carnival people, saying things like "Don't tease the tightrope walkers. They don't have much of a sense of humor," and "Stay away from the strongman. He's a walking time bomb." After several beers, she finally got up off the couch and walked me around the carnival grounds, introducing me to people. She walked along with her neck bent at a right angle to the ground and her head bobbing, tapping the air in front of her with her turban like a blind man using a cane. She gave me a tour of the big top and introduced me to some of the clowns. Then Matilda took me to the costume tent to get me a costume that fit. She decided I should wear a smart little polka dot jumpsuit that was just my size. I guess they had a midget act before and the woman was just about my size. She had tried to do an act with Matilda, but it hadn't worked out.

"She didn't like smokers," Matilda said, coughing and waving her cigarette holder.

That evening we did our first act together. It was a hit from the start. People loved seeing the oldest woman in the world along with the smallest. Freddie, the ringmaster was the one who thought up the idea of joining Matilda's act with mine. Because I'm small, I somehow made Matilda seem older. Sometimes when you put certain acts next to each other, it makes the acts seem better. That's why carnival acts usually put the tallest man with the shortest man. Matilda and I were the perfect pair.

There was a small stage set up inside the main tent. It wasn't much higher than a man's shoulders. In my part of the act, Freddie would introduce me as Itty Bitty Betty the World's Smallest Woman. The



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music would start playing and I would run out on the stage and do a couple of somersaults. I could usually hear a great gasp come up from the audience. Freddie would point out my small feet and my tiny hands. After that, some music would play over loudspeakers and I would do a short tap dance. I'm really a very good dancer, but sometimes I think the audience just wanted to watch me move around. They always seemed amazed that I could move so well. I loved my little polka dot suit and I had six others made just like it.

Matilda's part of the act came right after mine. As soon as I was finished dancing and the audience had quieted down a little, Freddie would hold his hands up, his palms facing out towards the audience and say, "Quiet now everyone, it's time to meet a piece of living history!"

The audience would get very quiet and I would walk Matilda out onto the stage. She walked sort of bent in half like when I'd first met her. Her turbaned head always arrived well ahead of the rest of her. She'd be in her gold dress and she would yell out at the audience, "History hell!" and shift her skinny hips forward so she could raise her head far enough to see the audience. Then she would answer questions from the crowd. Questions were pretty much the main part of her act.

It's funny what people would ask her. They always asked her the same things. What do you attribute your long life to? What do you eat? What was it like to live without electricity? Stuff like that. She always told them that she ate hot dogs and doughnuts, you know, carnival food. That always got a big laugh out of the audience. According to the sign outside the tent, Matilda had been a nurse in the Spanish-American war. I guess if you're over a hundred years old there has to have been something for you to have done with your life. There were always men in the audience who thought they were experts on the Spanish-American War. These guys would try to trip her up with impossible questions about really specific things. They never could. She would tell them how she was shot trying to drag a wounded man off of a battlefield and how she had to amputate the man's leg while she was bleeding herself.

That first night we did our act together, a guy who seemed like a real expert gave Matilda the third degree. He claimed to be the world's authority on the Spanish-American War. He asked her what sorts of medicines they used to treat the

injured men. I didn't know much about how Matilda's act worked yet, and I was real nervous about him giving her a hard time. I was worried that he'd make Matilda look bad. I knew I was too small to protect her if anything happened because I only came up as far as her waist. The guy claimed that if she were really a nurse she would know the answer to that question right off. She told them that they used Absorbine Jr. on the injured men.

"You, Madame, are a fraud," he declared. "Absorbine Jr. was not available to the poor injured soldiers of the Spanish-American War!"

Matilda accused the man of being unable to take a joke and then she bent further forward than usual and lifted her gold knit skirt all the way up to her thigh. You could have heard a pin drop. I stood nearby afraid that she might fall forward from the weight of her turban. I could see that her stockings were held up by rubber bands. She waved for the man to come up to the stage. He reluctantly came up and she placed his hand on the outside of her skinny thigh.

"Feel that lump, Sonny," Matilda asked him. "that lump is a piece of shrapnel from a crazed Spaniard during the war in 1898!"

The audience went crazy with applause, and they started to boo and wave the unbelieving man off of the stage. Matilda declared that she could prove herself to anyone who didn't believe her act. All those years watching people stare at her made Matilda a real good judge of character. She could outsmart just about anyone in the audience. After that, a loud "Ta Da" played over the loudspeakers. That's really about it. That was her act.

From then on, Matilda and I were like family to each other. I got older but no bigger. We did three acts a day together, her in her gold knit and me in my polka dot jumpsuits. During the time we weren't working, we would hang around together in the trailer and look up things in the geography book my parents gave me. I would quiz her about the towns we were visiting. She knew the capital of every state. She would drink beer and tell me all about how things had been a hundred years ago. I would drink Cokes and tell her about my family and how I made them nervous.

We didn't usually do a show until two o'clock and sometimes I liked to go over

to the big top early and watch people's faces through the slit in the tent wall. I used to spend hours watching the crowds push and laugh. I particularly liked watching the families and the children with their cotton candy and prizes. I always wondered what their lives were like and what the fathers did for a living.

I also liked to watch to see if I could see Matilda coming to work and to see from how far away I could spot her. She was usually easy to spot from a long way off because of her unusual outfit. Sometimes though, the crowds would block my view and I couldn't see her until she was almost at the tent. On days when she was running late, I would feel a sort of panicky feeling when I couldn't see her, but eventually she always arrived. She was never late for a show, never. She was a real professional.

Occasionally I missed my family and I would call them when the carnival came to town. They were always uncomfortable when they talked to me. Over the past ten years, I've talked to them less and less. Once in a while when I've called, my dad has asked me if any of the carnival people needed insurance.

"A person never knows when disaster might strike," he reminds me.

One of my sisters eventually got married, but no one told me about it until a few weeks after it happened. My mom said my sister looked beautiful in her wedding dress.

One of the things Matilda loved to do was go to the horse races. Every time we were in a town where they had a track she would drag me along with her. We would spend our days off making bets and eating hot dogs. She wore that gold knit dress and turban everywhere, even to the racetrack. People recognized her wherever she went as Matilda the Oldest Woman in the World, and she was famous at the tracks around the country. After I started hanging around with her, we really caused a stir. It's not every day that you see the world's oldest woman with the world's smallest woman at the horse races.

Anyway, a few weeks ago we went to the track. It was our day off and I was happy to have some free time. Some drunk had tried to trip me during my dance routine the night before and I was glad to get away from the carnival for a while. Matilda was really excited because it was hat day and they were giving away free hats to the first thousand people. She

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wanted to be sure to get there early. I don't know why she wanted a free hat because all she ever wore was that turban of hers, but she was determined. We left the trailer early and took the bus out to the track. We got our free hats and Matilda made me carry hers. Then we got box seats right near the finish line and Matilda started reading the racing form.

"Top and bottom, Sister. Top and bottom." That's what she said to me in her hoarse loud voice. Then she pointed to the racing form and showed me the first horse in the third race and the last horse in the third race.

Matilda was always coming up with different systems to try to win big. One week she only bet on the horses whose names began with the letter "M" and another time she decided that only horses who had been bred in a southern state were worth betting on. The thing is, she never won. I guess that's probably why she liked those free giveaway days. Maybe she thought that the free hats made up for all the money she lost.

So, on this day she had come up with her own system to win the exacta in the third race. She decided to bet the first horse and the last, or top and bottom as she called it. She waved her cigarette holder in her left hand and shook the racing form at me. "Don't you see, Sister? The first horse is called Bitty Babe and the last horse is called Olden Times. Just like me and you. Top and Bottom!"

She was so excited and sure that we would win big. Both horses were long shots and I thought the idea was pretty silly. I walked her up to the \$2 window and she placed the bet. I had to help maneuver her through the crowds because with her head down she couldn't see very well, and once in a while she would ram someone with her turban. I never could place a bet because I couldn't see up to the window, but I liked listening to the machines spit out the tickets when Matilda placed a bet.

Matilda bought a beer and a Coke for me and we waited for the third race. We sat in the box seats and she talked about what we would do with the money. By the time post time came around, I was kind of sick of listening to her talk about how she would spend all her money. She was going to quit working the carnival and move the trailer to Florida and find a young husband who didn't mind if she smoked. Then she was going to lounge around and be waited on by handsome

young pool boys.

When the horses were finally at the gate, Matilda stood up to try to watch what was happening. Everyone else stood up at the same time so I couldn't see a thing. Even standing on a chair, I couldn't see over people's heads. Matilda couldn't see very well either because she couldn't lift her head for more than a few seconds at a time. I could hear the announcer calling out the race.

"...and it's Bitty Babe followed by Peek'n Ease. And here comes Once in a While followed by Olden Times."

People began to yell and scream and I couldn't hear the announcer anymore. I could tell that Matilda was really excited because she kept lifting her head every few seconds and her turban was bobbing like mad. The race ended with a huge cry from the crowd. I couldn't tell what happened, so I turned to the man next to me and asked him how it had turned out.

"It's Bitty Babe and Olden Times," he said.

Matilda went crazy. She started waving her arms and shouting in her hoarse voice, "Top and bottom, Sister! Just like I told you!"

I was excited too, and I hugged her around the waist and jumped up and down.

It turns out that the ticket paid \$450. I couldn't believe it. We went out for a steak dinner that night, and Matilda got drunk on martinis. After dinner, we took a cab home and stayed up late talking about what we would do with the money. It really wasn't enough to move to Florida, and Matilda kept talking about going back to the track on our next day off and parlaying the money into thousands.

"It's our ticket out, Sister," she said. That was the last thing she said to me before I went to bed.

The next day I woke up around ten o'clock and went to the main tent to watch people through the tent wall like I did sometimes. Matilda was still sleeping. It was the weekend and there were a lot of families playing games and going on the rides. They all looked so happy. I stood there all morning watching the kids having fun with their parents. Anyway, that day it got to be near two o'clock and I kept watching for Matilda,

but she never showed up. I searched for her face in the crowds, but she never arrived. I started to feel kind of sick and I called for Freddie. I know I was kind of hysterical when I told him, but in all those years, whenever I was afraid that she wouldn't show up, she always did. Freddie agreed that there must be something wrong because she would never be late to a show. We had to cancel the two o'clock show to go out to the trailer and find out what happened.

Freddie and I walked out to the aluminum trailer together. I was dressed in my polka dot jumpsuit and he was in his ringmaster's tuxedo. As we walked, I kept saying over and over, "There must be something wrong. I know there's something wrong. She's always on time Freddie, you know how she's always on time." I kept hoping that maybe she had overslept or forgotten what day it was, but I knew better. Matilda had never been late for a show, not ever.

Freddie went into the trailer first and I followed him. It took a minute for our eyes to adjust to the dark room, and when we could finally see, there was Matilda laid out on the couch all dressed up in her gold knit dress with the racing form, dead as can be. I knew she was dead as soon as I saw her. The turban had fallen off of her head and her thin wispy hair looked like white spun sugar. Her eyes were still open, but they just looked like two small, dull, black, empty spots. She was so still and quiet, with her hands folded on her chest holding that stupid racing form. Matilda must not have been dead long because there was still a lit cigarette in the long golden holder in her mouth. The holder and cigarette were still there, held perfectly upright between her teeth. Freddie and I both stood there staring at Matilda as she lay dead and still smoking on the worn velour couch. Freddie put his hand on my shoulder and I started to cry.

"Do something, Freddie! Call someone. Maybe they can do something."

I knew there was nothing anyone could do, but I felt like I had to say it anyway. I picked up Matilda's turban from the floor and tried to set it back on top of her head, but it wouldn't stay. I looked at the racing form that was still in her hands. She had been looking at the form from the day before, the day we had won \$450. I told Freddie about how she wanted to move to Florida.

"She wanted to get married and be waited on by handsome young pool boys. Just last night we went out for steaks and

martinis. She seemed fine then," I told him. "Matilda had finally come up with a winning system, top and bottom, and it worked, Freddie. You should have seen her. She was so happy. It was Bitty Babe and Olden Times. It was our ticket out."

Freddie called someone to come and get Matilda. He tried to comfort me by telling me how old she was and what a good life she had, and I stood there crying, staring at Matilda and the racing form. I took the cigarette holder out of her mouth and I tried to smooth her wispy hair back from her face so she would look nice when they took her away. About half an hour later, two men in black suits carried her out on a white stretcher and loaded her into the back of a long black car. It's funny, but all I could think about was what would happen to her turban.

I wanted the men to take her turban when they took her away, but they said she wouldn't need it anymore. Even Freddie kept telling me that it didn't matter. For some reason it seemed to me like it mattered a lot, and so I made them take her turban anyway. I know it's a terrible thing, but besides the turban all I really wondered was whether I would be able to keep doing my act. Without Matilda, my act didn't seem very interesting. Without her next to me looking very old, there would be nothing to compare me with, nothing to make me seem younger or smaller.

I guess some people didn't believe her act, and they wanted to find out the truth about Matilda. She had actually been pretty famous. Once in a while they would have her picture on one of those newspapers racks they have in grocery checkout stands. Once I saw her picture with a caption that read, "Oldest Woman in the World Seen at Belmont!" The newspapers found out about her and someone decided that an autopsy should be performed to find out how old she really was. I guess someone thought it was important to find out how old a person could really live to be. I felt kind of bad about all those strangers taking her apart and cutting her up. It all seemed so unnecessary.

Anyway, what happened was, when they investigated, they found out that she wasn't really 128 years old. She was only 62. I swear I couldn't believe it. The bump on her thigh was actually part of a radio knob from a '67 Chevy that had gotten stuck under her skin during an accident when she had been driving drunk. They said she looked so old from

drinking too much beer and sitting in the sun at the horse races. It turns out her birth certificate was really an altered sign from the health department. If you looked closely you could see that it used to be a sign telling workers to wash their hands. All that time I spent with her and I believed everything she said. I had believed the stories she told me about how things had been a hundred years ago. I felt like a real fool. It also turns out that she had a couple of kids she had abandoned in a K-Mart back in the sixties. They were grown now, but they showed up to try to claim any inheritance they might have been entitled to. There wasn't much for them to inherit, only a closet full of race track hats and race track t-shirts, and some of the money we had won.

Freddie paired me up with a new woman last week. She's really tall which helps to make me look small. She's billed as, Willemina, Lofty Queen of the Stratosphere. I guess she must be at least seven and a half feet tall, and she's a little younger than I am. They say that she has traveled with some carnival out of Toronto for the past few years. She seems nice enough, although I tried to talk to her about Matilda, you know, to let her know how it had been before, but she wasn't interested. She said that things have to change and I'd better get used to it because the new act wouldn't be anything like the old act. We've only worked together a few times so far, and I guess it'll be okay. At least I know her act is real.

I don't know why, but when I found out the truth about Matilda, I called my mother. I hadn't talked to her for quite a few months. I told her I was calling because the carnival was going to be in town in a few days and I wanted to stop by and say hello. That wasn't true. Really, I just wanted to hear her voice. She sounded the same, and it was almost a comfort to talk to her. She was happy because my Dad had just sold a big earthquake policy to the local school. She sounded nervous when I said I might stop by, like she always does. I said I'd call her when the carnival got to town, but I never did.



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

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@blotterra.com

I think that my dreams are colored by how I fall asleep. If the television is on, and it has finished a Tivo'd recording, it leaves the peaceful steady light of the menu which bathes my sleeping eyes through my lids, permitting peaceful stories of beach-weekends from college days to be the theme. However, if I am watching a taped movie, my TV-VCR combo permits the tape to end, and then run out to the completion of the tape, where some pre-determined pressure-point causes the rewind function to engage but without stopping, causing the movie to flicker backwards in a "Terminator" type of hellish scorched-earth-and-sky light and machine noise that takes me to one of two dream positions: where I am a semi-super hero who can fly but only about eight to ten feet off the ground, or a terrified potential victim running on ground alternately covered with molasses or salt-water-taffy. In either case the dream can also morph into some demi-Hollywood predetermination dependant on the nature of the movie I was watching, as the rewind completes and the tape begins to play once more. A top hat and tails musical from the '40's can add a very weird touch to an Arnoldesque action shoot-em-up, I've found.
RCS - Charleston, SC

"Whine-Up Helicopters, Circling The Train"

In this scenario she wants to blow-up a train and then serve it for dinner. I want

to grow-up to be a bullet-proof vest worn by a high-ranking homeland security

official. By lunchtime, we find ourselves on a train with a sniper in the dining car

and a ticking bomb in the caboose. No one appears to panic. The conductor

does an impromptu shtick in German. Perhaps we are in Germany. Perhaps

we made love in one of the couchettes the previous night. All we can be sure of

is that no one understands the culprit's language and that the tattoo on his left

forearm is definitely an anchor. Maybe he was once a sailor. If he was, would it

mean he'd be lousy with a gun? As a precaution, the next city the train pulls

into uses a disguise. Even she and I take the hint and forget our names.

by Maurice Oliver

"Spotting The 'Trick Questions'"

Sometimes she makes me feel like Xmas morning.

I can fuse my bones of dawn in Worcestershire sauce then waffle my syrup in a place where every dove is an antidote in fancy emperor's clothes.

On those occasions I can toss up her bright harmless corner into a string of bad years and never once have to bolt-down my whirligig to any pharmaceutical treasures. Every vote is for legs. The Venetian blinds are a crack. Tarred scalpels taste like index cards. Why even Orlando becomes just another Disney vacation too fine to punk rake the downtrodden. But the remaining 80% of our relationship is more like a foreclosure letter delivered via certified mail. When it rains it pours any number of collateral disabilities and even yoga can't scratch the hummingbird. Go tell it on the mountain might as well be hypnotic fog with a ring around the collar and no intention of wearing a seatbelt.

You do the math (but for heaven sakes use a complete sentence).

"Aphorism"

by Jonathan Pattishall

Words are weak, he said.
What do you mean?
You know, he said, ambiguous.

Sure, I could see that.
Ambiguous like the tiny,
Indistinguishable buds on the elm tree
In my backyard, biding their time on
Branches reaching out beyond the horizon,
Waiting for the April showers.



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 as the Void appears
 rivaling beautiful cam glimpses
 of what was always before us:
 sand, surf & wind blemishes
 on an infinite ocean
 beached.

By Peter Magliocco

"Of Your Picasso Ceramic Dancing Fern Satyr"

I imagine the milk of flesh
 was too much for him, approaching 90
 the way azure waves trickle into surf at Antibes.
 We're much younger, of course, admiring ourselves
 in the cooled ceramic glow
 of figures heavenly erotic —
 there disporting before us from another antiquity,
 refashioned as cartoonish posturings
 in the master's hoary mind
 peopled by lust, memories, shadows
 & that precious lint collecting
 so dirtily in our Mickey Mouse ears.

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Myra Sherman lives in Berkeley, CA with her dog, Sadie. She's now concentrating on writing, but in her previous life worked as a social worker/therapist, most recently with inmates in a San Francisco Bay area county jail. Her fiction has appeared in 'The Write Side Up'.

Rowena Southard writes "I am a college English teacher in Northern California, and my most recent story appears in the current issue of Sybil's Garage."

I've told you, haven't I, that we wish they all could be California girls? I'm sure I did.

Steve Cartwright exists for us only in the electronic ether of website and e-mail. He says, "It's well known that an artist becomes more popular by dying, so I'm typing this with one hand while pummeling my head with a frozen mackerel with the other. I've done art for several magazines, newspapers, websites, commercial and governmental clients, books, and tavern napkins. I also create art pro bono for several animal rescue groups. I was awarded the 2004 James Award for my cover art for Champagne Shivers. I recently illustrated the Cimarron Review cover. Please hurry with your response - this mackerel's killin' me!"

After almost a decade as a freelance photographer in Europe, **Maurice Oliver** returned to America in 1990. Then, in 1995, he made a life-long dream reality by traveling around the world for eight months. Instead of taking pictures, he recorded the experience in a journal which eventually became poems. His poetry has appeared in Potomac Journal, Pebble Lake Review, Taj Mahal Review (India), Dandelion Magazine (Canada), Stride Magazine (UK), and online at thievesjargon.com, interpoetry.com (UK), kritiya.com (India), and blueprintreview.de (Germany). His third chapbook, "But Mostly, Simple Precautions", was published by LilyLit Press in Nov. 2006. He is the proud editor of a new e-zine called Concelebratory Shochorn Review (www.concelebratory.blogspot.com). He lives in Portland, Oregon, where he dreams of icebergs while working as a private tutor.

Jonathan Pattishall is a young writer from Durham, NC, and he and I had a running e-correspondence not unlike scenes from the film 'The Agony and The Ecstasy' in which I played the warrior pope, and he the beleaguered Michelangelo. Not that Michelangelo had e-mail, of course. Anyway, as you can see, the poem turned out just so, so I think it was worth it.

Peter Magliocco has recent poetry in TRYST, HUDSON VIEW, SCARS, POEMS NIEDERN-GASSE and elsewhere. His recent book of poetry & art, Ex Literotica, was published by Publish America (www.publishamerica.com). He writes from Las Vegas, Nevada.

Oh, and \$10 on black and let it ride.



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