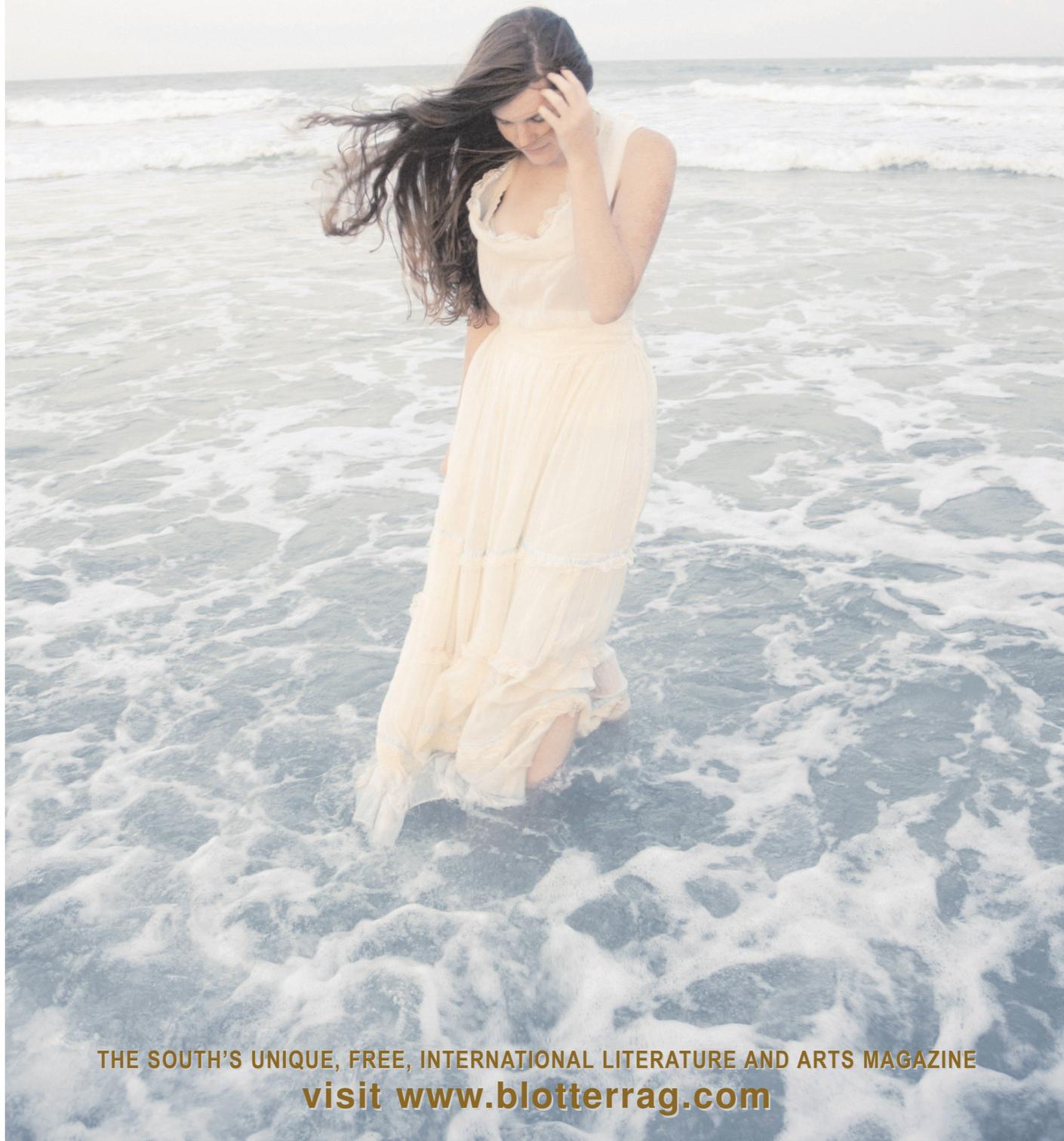


*Back to school? Not quite! Peace/Out with Ross J. Pudaloff,
Penelope L. Mace, Stephen McCollum, Judy Katz-Levine,
Laura Johnston, our comics and The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

September 2011

MAGAZINE



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We love press releases. Really? Really.

FRONT COVER “The Ocean is My
Home” by Laura Johnston. See
centerfold for more.

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[c l m p]

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“Ping-Pong”

I don't care if Texas Pete has an expiration date – I'm never throwing out something so hot that it obviously and indiscriminately kills germs and viruses.

I don't care how big cockroaches are, I know I can smash them with a Birkenstock flip-flop.

I don't care who's in the car with me, I'm going to comment disparagingly about other drivers - it's just good anger management.

I don't care if everyone else has one, I'm not getting a Facebook account. I may, however, someday get a working cell phone.

And just for the record, I don't care who does it, but I'm not texting in the car, even from the passenger side. Cars are for listening to the radio, or talking, or looking at license plates. Or commenting about other drivers.

I don't care how badly they do in wars, the French gave us Descartes, Pasteur and Curie, and the brothers Montgolfier and that makes them alright in my book.

And speaking of books, I like them better than screens of any kind. I don't care; I like turning pages. I like licking my finger to turn a page. I like the feel of good paper.

I don't care if it's gross, if a fry is only on the floor for three seconds, I'm eating it.

I don't care what two out of three dentists say – if you brush a really long time with a back and forth motion, it must do *some* good.

I don't care how bushy my eyebrows get, so if you want them neat, trim them yourself.

I don't care if it's cold, if the pool is open we're going swimming.

I don't care how old I am, I'm going to eat peanut butter until the day I die. In fact, I'm going to have a peanut butter sandwich on the day I die. Jif, Wonder bread and Welch's grape, thank you very much.

And I don't care who knows it, but I still like coloring with crayons. Don't like it? Go text someone, *ya grownup*.

I don't care if it's silly and there's nothing there to be afraid of, I still whistle in the dark.

I don't care what kind of animal it is, if you name it, it's a pet.

And I don't care - if a pet dies, you bury it and have a funeral, and someone says something.

I don't care if I've seen them thirty times before; if *Spartacus* or *The Best Years of Our Lives* come on, we're settling in for a watch, and we're gonna cry at the end.

I don't care if the fat lady hasn't sung yet, the game's over if we hear thunder. Same with the pool. But if we're at the beach, we can sit on the deck for a few more minutes.

I don't care how cold it gets; we're not turning the heat on until Halloween! We can, however, wear sweatshirts.

And I don't care if it's foul, if I find a sweat-shirt on the floor, I'm going to give it a sniff before I decide if it's laundry.

And I don't care what the sportswriters say, if the umpire calls it out, he's out. Even if he's obviously safe. It's not about being right, it's about the perfect imperfection of the game.

And I don't care if the baseball season goes on into November, I love it.

I don't care what the doctor recommends, it's just an allergy and I'm not taking anything for it.

I don't care who says otherwise; it's spelled ketchup. And while we're at it, bad ketchup is better than no ketchup at all.

I don't care about the traffic, I like it when the kids come back to college.

I don't care - if NASCAR is a sport, then Ping-pong is a sport. And that strange thing with the stones and brooms on ice. And eating contests.

I don't care how old I get; I'm going to wear Chucks.

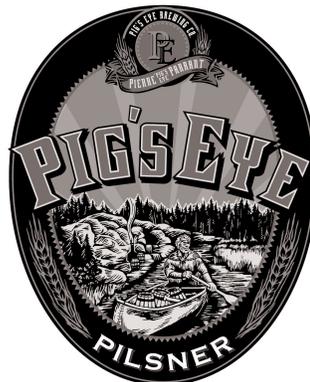
I don't care if they're hard as rocks, we'll keep those marshmallows for hot chocolate.

I don't care if the prize is a billion dollars, I won't play the lottery and each time I think that thought, I put a dollar in my winnings jar.

I don't care what anyone says, there's probably a bear in the woods.

I don't care how short a drive it is, I'm going to pee before we go. Who knows, we might get caught short in traffic.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



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CAUTION

Just sitting here trying to hang on to the last sweet sip of summer.

“Ring”

by Ross J. Pudaloff

Tyrone was in a hurry, but he was stuck behind Hilda, who was shuffling up to the timecard machine. He touched the new ring in his left eyebrow while he watched her fumble with the card. He had to stop himself from picking at the scab. The timecard slipped out of Hilda’s fingers and he saw her look down, her mouth opening but her body remaining still. He ducked down, grabbed the card and shoved it back into her hand. She finally got it into the machine and then, after fumbling some more, back into the slot. As soon as she took the first half step away, he grabbed his card, punched it, slipped it into the space under his name, and went out back to see what Gary had for him.

Tyrone had worked at Harold’s IGA Food and Pharmacy (“Good Prices for Good People”) since he dropped out of Lakeside in his senior year, well senior by count but only a sophomore or maybe a junior by credits. Usually he

worked 3 to 11, including cleanup after the store closed. He liked that and didn’t mind mopping the floors after almost everyone else had left except maybe the manager or assistant manager, sometimes even Harold himself, busy toting up receipts and balancing the registers. This week, though, Gary had told him to come in days since Tim was going up north to hunt.

When Gary saw him, he just said, “There’s canned veg over there; take it out, do the shelves, and restock.” Tyrone groaned. He had to put each carton on the roller, stack them 4 high, and then pull that mother out there over that linoleum with all those bumps in it. Then he had to stamp each one with the price, using the gun to do that and to attach the stickers to the top of the cans. Worse, he couldn’t just shove the cans on the shelves after pricing them, though he didn’t know why not since people who ate that crap couldn’t possibly tell or care whether

the stuff was expired. Just about everything Harold sold was crap, in Tyrone’s considered opinion, from the faded flowers at the Floral Fiesta by the front door to the gristly steaks and water-filled chicken in the meat department, aka “The Olde Butcher Shoppe.” The place was for losers who dragged themselves around behind shopping carts whose wheels went every which way but straight. He’d quit, but his mom’s new boyfriend, Jared, not so new actually since he’d been living there 5 months, had convinced her to take a strict line. Since Harold’s paid better than Mickey Ds, he was stuck. He actually had to pay rent and they had told him if he screwed up, out he went. Fuck ’em.

By the time he got the veg stacked and out on the floor, the store was filling up, mostly women, mostly with those silly leatherette zippered bags in which they kept coupons clipped from the paper. They’d go down the aisle, stop, look at the cans, open the bag, rustle through, probably come up with some coupon that had expired before Tyrone was born, all the time blocking other customers, not that Tyrone particularly cared, but screwing with him, which only got Gary saying, “Look, Tyrone, you gotta pick it up, man . . .” in that voice he put on, your friend who tells you how much it hurts him when he throws you out on your can. Sometimes he’d go on, saying, “Hey Tyrone, this is a pretty good place. I’ve done all right. You could too, man, but you gotta show the boss you care.” Yeah, right. At least, out here, he was practically invisible to the customers and Gary never came out front. He just sat in his rinkydink office with the pictures of his wife (she was a fox) and his kid (seriously ugly) except when he went out on the dock for a smoke or when a truck had to be unloaded.



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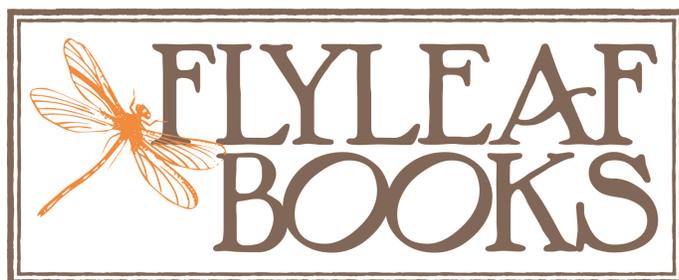
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So Tyrone crouched in the aisle, got bumped by the passing carts, and hauled out the first couple of rows of cans since the rule was, always make sure that the ones going to expire first are in front. But that didn't work, 'cause some of the ladies checked the dates, shoved the older ones to the back and reached for the ones with the longest to go. You were always rearranging the damn shelves, always doing the same thing and it never looked any different. Every day, the same thing. By lunch time, Tyrone had done the vegs, brought in strawberries from California, lettuce from Mexico, beans from who knows where, and got soaked by the misters which kept the produce looking good. Someone had dropped a jar of vinegar which he had to clean up. The smell had made his eyes water. He hadn't brought a coat and one look outside convinced him that going out for lunch wasn't such a good idea. A sort of rain/snow thing was going on and even Gary had abandoned the dock, saying, "Shee-it, man, it stinks out there." So Tyrone went to the deli where the sign advertised "Fresh Delicious Sandwiches on the Roll or Bread of Your Choice Made Just for U

in a Jif. All Sandwiches \$5.99 or LESS." This was new, part of Harold's attempt to fight off the Wal-Mart out on the highway and the Costco on the River Road. Hilda tottered up—God she was old, why wasn't she like in some home?—and said, "Well, how can I help you, young man?" Christ, he had been working there for almost a year and she still didn't know him. "Gimme a ham and cheese on white, employee discount." She peered at him, but must have finally seen his name tag and just nodded, went rooting around in the counter for the ham which was right there in front of Tyrone. Not the good stuff, of course, but the discount brand ("ONLY \$4.99 a Pound this WEEK ONLY"), which you could tell from the other because it was bubble gum pink and oozed some whitish liquid when you cut into it. And then there'd be the same search for the cheese. Tyrone rocked back and forth. Now he'd just have to wait until Hilda finished. It all sucked.

He touched the new ring, remembering Saturday when he'd done it after he and Kelly had watched that dvd of what Kelly called anime. It just looked like cartoons to Tyrone. Kelly had liked the

piercing, hanging on to his shoulders from behind and bracing him as he looked in the mirror to make sure he put it in right. Then she got a cotton ball to press against the blood until it stopped. It got her hot.

There was someone next to him, also waiting for Hilda, who was now trying to saw through the shrinkwrap around the ham so she could take it to the slicer. "Poor dear, it's so sad she has to work at this time of life." Tyrone knew that voice and that tone; sure enough, it was Mrs. Campbell, the counselor at the high school and director of the choir at the church Tyrone's mom now went to. She turned to look at him directly, "Well, Tyrone. It's such a nice surprise to see you. That's right, you work here don't you, ever since you left school. How have you been? I see your mother and sister of course, but not you so often. We'd really be pleased if you could come to church one of these Sundays. I think you'd really enjoy yourself and I know your mother would be delighted if you came with her. We have many young people, you know, so many in fact that we're thinking of starting some new activities, you know, maybe bowling, or basketball, or

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dancing, something for them to do.” As she spoke, she leaned toward him, so close he could hear the hissing in starting, Sundays and something, so close he could watch her eyebrows go up and down, so close he could see the blue eyeshadow. He arched back as she advanced and found himself looking at the thick brown hair around her face. He stared, amazed at how unmoving it was even as her face jumped and twitched. It was like a helmet.

Wasn't she supposed to be at work? “Oh, hi, Mrs. Campbell. I didn't see ya. I'm just getting my lunch.” He glanced toward Hilda, c'mon, dammit, I only got a half hour here.

“Yes, lunch of course. What about those?” She pointed at his eyebrow.

“What?” although he knew, and would have known without the pointing, that she was talking about the rings in his nose and eyebrows. They had been strictly forbidden at school; you got suspended for having even one, and the first thing Tyrone had done after dropping out had gone to Sina's Body Shoppe to have a gold one done in his nose. Sina had checked his id to make sure he was old enough to get it done without parental consent. It had hurt like blazes, but he had loved walking through the mall like that, no longer some dippy high school kid. He had hung out by the big fountain near the GAP; you could see down to Sears and Penney's from there and everyone walked by sooner or later. Kelli had come along and asked about the ring. Most people didn't, though they stared, but she had come right out and asked when he'd done it, if it hurt, what his mom had said, if he was going to do more, did he know anyone who had a stud in their tongue, volunteering that she wanted one for her navel but that her mom would kill her. The ring had

really worked. She had even blown off her geek friend, Cara, to talk with Tyrone. They went off to the Cineplex down at the other end, saw Oceans 13 or maybe 12 (who cared) and when Tyrone put his arm around her, she turned her face up toward his and they kissed. It had been really hot and he was trying to slide his hand under her sweater in no time. She had stopped him, but he felt that was only because they were out in public. In a car, yeah, that would be something.

Mrs. Campbell had started talking again or maybe she hadn't shut up.

“Yes, Tyrone, we had an in-service from an educational psychologist from the state college just last week. He was talking about how self-mutilation in the young indicates a lack of self esteem and how to recognize and deal with those problems. And he said that even apparently minor things, like earrings on men, are often the first step toward self-destruction and really a cry for help. We must do something because you are the future.” These last words said with finality and force.

“I just like them, Mrs. Campbell. Nice to see you.” Hilda had finally reached the counter and put the sandwich on top. He gave her a five, then waited for his 38 cents change, which took forever. Finally, he was free and he split for the back. What a creep she was. She was always talking about how important it was to build your self-esteem, whatever that was and sometimes held these meetings when she asked you how you saw yourself in 10 years. Like he ever thought about that.

The weather was still shitty when his shift ended and Tyrone stood on the loading dock wondering where he ought to go. He didn't want to go home; Mom and Jared got home about now and they just camped out in the

living room with the tube blaring away. Maybe he'd go to the mall. He took out his cell to call Kelli. He really wanted an iPhone, but he just had this cheap piece of junk he bought at Walmart. You had to buy minutes for it by paying for a card and then calling in with the secret number and it just didn't look cool at all. Kelli had an iPhone, of course, but then she lived up the hill and was going to college next year. He called, but she didn't answer: “This is Kelli. I'm just having too much fun. Leave a message.” Damn.

He got in the Focus and headed to the mall. Maybe he'd see somebody there. But it was pretty empty when he got there so he stood around the fountain for a while until some jerk rent a cop came up and told him to move along. This was private property, he said, and not the town square. Tyrone wanted to pop him one.

He drove down to the Walmart, maybe he'd look for some jeans or even a winter coat. It was bright in there, busier than Harold's ever was. But the hum of the lights and the voices of mothers yelling at children drove him back out into the cold. He fiddled with the radio, finally got some hiphop and cranked it.

There was nowhere to go but home which was as noisy as ever. His mom said they had ordered pizza for dinner and there was still a slice on the kitchen table. It was sitting in the box, probably growing some germs. Naturally, it had mushrooms, which Tyrone hated. He ate some Captain Crunch instead and went to his room. He didn't have an iPod either, but he did have a stereo and headphones. Maybe if he got a computer he could do things. He had sort of liked the “Introduction to Computing” class. Everything was new



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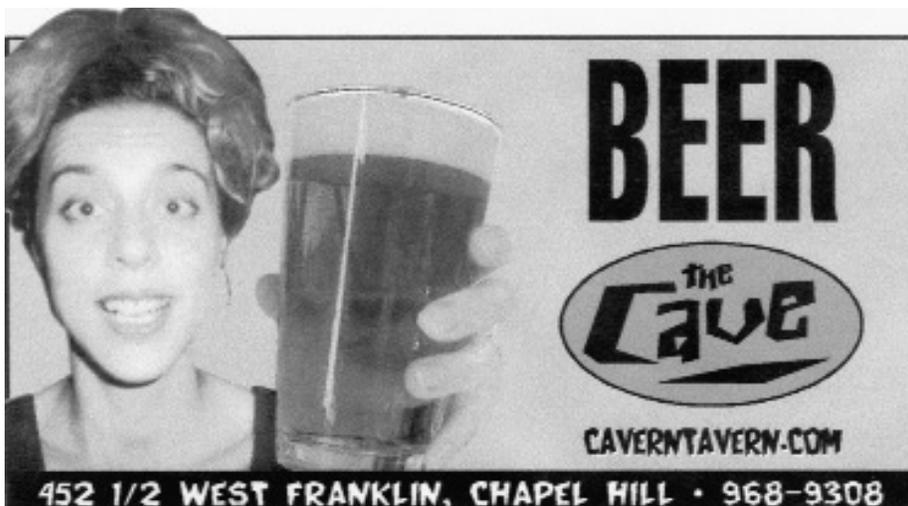
and shiny and you could surf the net when Mr. Garner wasn't looking. Yeah, maybe he'd ask for a computer for Christmas. That'd be way cool. He called Kelli, but got her voicemail again. She probably was out having fun. Her parents didn't like him and didn't want her to go out with him. Every time he went to pick her up, her father glared and her mother looked at him like he was some piece of shit on the sidewalk that she had to walk around. Kelli had told him they didn't matter. But this anime stuff bothered him and she talked about all this stuff like "Second Life." He didn't really know what that was, but pretended he did. She'd go on and on about avatars or whatever. She was still hot for him all right but before and after they made out was getting worse and worse. Maybe he should go back to school; at least that way he'd get to use some computers. Right, he'd have to go to Alternative for his GED since he was 19. Everybody knew that place was for losers. Mrs. Campbell was always going on and on about how the students there had settled down and realized they had a whole life in front of them. She said it was the first great opportunity to begin life's journey. He picked a safety pin off the top of the dresser. Could he put it through his cheek? That would sting lots more than any of the others. Besides, he knew it should be sterilized. Maybe he ought to go back to Sina's, but that would cost at least 25 bucks. Wish I had some dope. But it would look great. Gary would choke. His mom might even notice, and Mrs. Campbell would just freak. That damn Hilda wouldn't notice of course; she was so bent over that she probably couldn't even see his face. But she didn't count. Maybe this weekend.

Kelli did call him back later although Tyrone, with his earphones on, didn't hear the phone. Chrissie just barged in the room with the portable and mouthed "Kelli." It was already after 9, so there was no chance that he could see Kelli. She told him she had been at the SAT prep class her parents had signed her up for. "It was so boring. They make me turn off the phone and we just do all these practice exams. Tonight it was vocab. You should see the words, like no one ever talks like that."

Tyrone grunted a couple of times during all this. Kelli didn't seem to need him to say much, but she sounded disappointed when he didn't laugh at the words from the prep—placebo, recon-dite, imbricate, fallacious. So Kelli laughed and said she had to go 'cause she could hear her mom coming up to nag her about finishing homework. "Hey, Ty, give me a ring tomorrow, okay?" He lay on his bed with the phone in his hand, clicking the talk button and listening to the dial tone until his mom came in looking for it. He thought things couldn't get any shittier until he got to work the next morning. This time Gary told him that there was going to be a short meeting with Harold before they opened the doors. Harold had started holding these meetings—he called them QUEST (Quality Excellence Service Today)—after he had come back from the IGA convention in Minneapolis last year. Tyrone usually just stood in back and stared at Rita, who was the only girl in the place worth looking at it, build like a brick shithouse and with a not bad face either. But they had already had a meeting this month, so something else must be going on. Harold was wearing a blue suit with a green and blue tie and actually looked

pretty good. He climbed up on a chair, smiled at everyone, and said, "Hey guys, how we doing? Pretty good, that's right. And we're going to do even better for all the good people who shop here and all the good people who work here." Here he paused and looked around, smiling, his too white teeth shooting out death rays. He continued, "Yeah, all right. We're going to celebrate Halloween and give our clients an even better time, more reason to come and shop at Harold's. Halloween is a week from today and starting tomorrow, everyone will be in costume. Which I am providing, of course. Each department will be allocated costumes which will be distributed on the basis of seniority. There will good fun for all the good people." With that, he gave them one more shot of the rays, waved his hand, jumped down off the chair, and started for the door.

Tyrone had a bad feeling. He was the junior guy in Receiving and Stocking. He'd probably end up as some geek. But when he asked Gary, Gary said he hadn't a chance to look through the costumes and told Tyrone to flatten, bundle and tie cartons. There were hundreds. Tyrone ripped at them with his utility knife, almost cut himself a couple of times, and had to stomp on a few. It was okay work except that everyone could see him. Then he had to stack them against the wall until the recycling guy could come by and pick them up. After that, Gary had him sorting bottle returns for the different companies, which was the most boring work in the world, Pepsi here, Coke there, what difference did it make? Gary was in his office during that time and when Tyrone looked up later, he saw Gary unpacking what had to be the costumes. Just before lunch, Gary came out and posted something on the board. Gary loved the board. He like to say how putting information on it was the best way to make sure everyone knew what was going on and to treat every one fair. Tyrone waited a few minutes until everyone had cleared out and then walked across to the drinking fountain, stopping to look at the piece



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Right - Metamorphosis
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of paper. It was the list all right, names on the left, costumes on the right. He scanned down till he got to "Tyrone Godfrey" and looked over, "Sponge Bob Square Pants." Oh no. No way. He wasn't going to do that. Not a chance. Not in this lifetime. He'd quit before he'd go out there like that. Goddamn Gary. He was doing it on purpose. It got worse when he saw the other costumes—doctor, Dracula, wizard, pirate, Batman.

He went up to Gary, who was out on the dock having a smoke. "Hey, Tyrone, how's it hanging?" "Gary," he started and stopped. He started again, "Gary, can I have another costume?" Gary flipped his butt out onto the driveway, turned, and looked at Tyrone. "Man, Sponge Bob is the best. All the kids are going to like you." "But I don't want it. I don't like it." He couldn't tell Gary how humiliating this was, even though he suspected Gary had done it for that purpose. Gary used his all purpose answer. "Geez, Tyrone, if I thought you wouldn't like it, I wouldn't have given it to you. But now that the list is posted, I can't change it. People would say I'm not being fair and consistent and you know how important it is for all of us here. You remember how Harold talked about it at the last QUEST?"

Tyrone did call Kelli after work, but got her voicemail again. He tried to remember if she had said anything about stuff to do after school. He went home and flopped on the bed. His mom and Jared got home about a half hour later and turned the tube on to "The Real Housewives of Orange County." Tyrone shut his bedroom door, but he could still hear them for a while and then much louder when it ended and they started watching a rerun of "So You Think You Can Dance."

He put his headphones on to keep out the noise. Later, his mom knocked on the door and told him they were going

to Taco Bell and did he want to come along. He said no, but asked her to bring back a superburrito and two beef tacos. She started to say something like did he think she was his servant, but didn't, instead looking back over her shoulder and then leaving.

While they were out, Kelli called and they talked about going to see Crooz 'n' Looz at the Blue Dot on Friday night, getting some headbanging on. Then Kelli said she had to go and anyhow didn't want to use up his minutes. Hid mom got back and yelled that they were going to eat in the kitchen. When Tyrone got up, he found places set and Jared and his mom sitting there unwrapping tacos. His mom said, "Come sit down, Ty. We're going to eat together. What would you like to drink? We got coke, diet coke, Dr. Pepper, diet Dr. Pepper, Squirt, diet Squirt, even milk or water if you'd like. Really just about anything you want." Tyrone grabbed the chair closest to the kitchen door and started looking through the bags for his burrito and tacos. "Coke, I guess." He decided he'd eat one taco, then have the burrito, and finish off with the second taco. That sounded right. There was only the sound of crinkling paper and the snap of tacos for a few minutes. Tyrone looked around for some hot sauce, found the packets in the bottom of one of the bags, and spread some over his first taco. Man, that's good. He took a big swig of coke and started unwrapping the burrito.

When his mom started talking, he didn't really listen, figuring she was saying something to Jared before he realized that she was speaking to him. "I wish Chrissie were here so we could eat together like a family is supposed to but I guess her cheerleading practice isn't over. Ah, um, Ty, you know who we saw today?" She paused for a moment, put her taco down, and continued without waiting to see if he'd respond: "At choir practice. Mrs. Campbell.

She says she saw you at the store yesterday. She said she felt compelled to speak to us about you, that you might be in trouble, that the rings in your body were a symptom of some psychological distress, that you needed to be helped." She stopped, having run out of things to say or at least out of what she had prepared and a silence filled in the spaces between the wrapping papers and bags on the table. Tyrone couldn't believe it—that interfering bitch. He wasn't even in high school anymore and she was still butting into his life. He glared across the table at his mom and said, "She's nuts. She don't know nothing about me, that damned bitch." Jared's hand hit the table. "We aren't going to have that kind of language here. That woman's just trying to help you." He glanced over at Tyrone's mom and said, "Do you want me to say something?" She nodded, then ducked her head, took another drink of her coke, and picked up the taco. Jared stared right at him and went on, "Mrs. Campbell said there's a group at Alternative you could join; she leads it herself. She said it's important. You could get your diploma too. There's no future for someone who didn't finish high school. You've got to go back to school and if that means taking those silly rings out, so be it. You can go to Alternative in the mornings and still work at Harold's, lots of kids do it."

"I ain't no kid."
"While you're living here with your mother and me, you're still a kid. Do you think you could rent an apartment for what you pay here? Do you think a landlord would pay your phone bill or let you into his refrigerator whenever you're hungry?"

"I don't want to go back to school."
"Then," now he glanced at Tyrone's mom, "you will have to find a place and move out. Soon, next week."

It was so unfair. What would Kelli think when she heard this? How could he ever go to the mall again? Everyone

DRAGIN

by Michael Cole



would point at him and laugh at him. Nobody said anything until Tyrone started to get up. Then Jared said, "You had better go over to Alternative tomorrow and sign up. Mrs. Campbell said she be there until 5." "Tomorrow! But school's already started."

"Mrs. Campbell said that Alternative takes new students all the time. Your mother expects you to do it."

The next day Tyrone was about to shift some bananas when Gary came over to tell him that he had to put on the costume before he went out front. Gary was a pirate. He had a red kerchief wrapped around his head, a stuffed stupid looking parrot that kept wobbling on his shoulder, an eyepatch, and a knife in his belt and said "Yo ho ho" every few words as if that were funny. Tyrone could barely move his arms in the SpongeBob costume and complained about that, but Gary just jerked his finger toward the swinging doors and out Tyrone went into the hum and chatter of the store. His face burned and he kept his head down but he still saw the underpants reflected in the meat counter. It was bad. He hadn't been out there five minutes when some dirty-faced kid sitting in grocery cart pointed her finger and "Sponge Bob, Sponge Bob" in a voice you could hear across the street. Everyone turned and looked. Tyrone kept piling the bananas, but then Harold showed up, grabbed his arm and whispered in his ear, "Look, when some kid talks to you, you smile at 'em. We want to keep these people happy. And sound like Sponge Bob, use that squeaky voice. And sing the song." Kelli did call him just after he got off to say she had heard about his costume and thought it was so cute. She wished she could see him. Maybe he could keep it until the party at the twins' house.

Alternative was out near the highway. Tyrone parked and went to the front door, which was locked. Shit. Now

what? He banged on the door and then noticed a card saying "Push Bell for After Hours." He waited there until he saw Harry, the geek, come up the hall. Harry said, "Hey Tyrone. What's happening man. Cool to see ya." What a jerk. He followed Harry down the hall with its shiny floor to a classroom in which the desks were arranged in a circle. There were maybe 10 or 12 kids sitting across from Mrs. Campbell. Tyrone knew most of them, the most seriously uncool of the uncool. It was geek central.

Mrs. Campbell nodded at him and said, "Why don't you introduce yourself?"

Introduce himself. They all knew who he was. Tyrone looked around to see if anyone was snickering. No one was, but several were smiling at him the way Harold's death rays went out to customers and employees. They were turned in his direction, waiting for his message. What was he supposed to say—"Good Prices for Good People"? "Um, I'm Tyrone Godfrey, you know."

A chorus of "Hello Tyrone" came back at him. Mrs. Campbell smiled and said, "Well, Tyrone, we are glad to see you. Our group meetings are a very important part of succeeding here at Alternative. We encourage all our students to talk about their hopes and fears, about what they want for their lives. You'll find talking about those essential in successfully transitioning into a healthier and more focused lifestyle. At the next meeting, we'd like you to introduce yourself by talking about your dreams and aspirations. But you are a little late for today's session; we're almost done." With that, she turned to the group and said, "I can do this. I will do this." Tyrone, who had slunk back into a chair, almost choked when he heard a chorus of voices repeat "I can do this. I will do this." Everybody started to leave, but Mrs. Campbell called his name and said they had to take care of paperwork. She had

his school records in a yellow folder on the desk next to her chair. She handed him a piece of paper: "Here's your schedule, which is based on what you've completed so far and which will lead to taking and passing the GED. You start classes on Monday. This is the plan that will change your life if you let it. Look it over; I'm happy to answer any questions though I have to go to choir rehearsal." Tyrone took it, pretended to look at it for a bit and then shoved in his right pants pocket and got up as she went on: "Tyrone, the same rules as at the high school are in effect here. No rings. Please remember that when you come back on Monday. Remember, this is your great opportunity to go forward in life."

His Mom, Jared and Chrissie were at the Thursday night church services so Tyrone had the place to himself. He grabbed a Dr. Pepper and went to his room. He turned his phone on and found a voicemail from Kelli; she said she couldn't see Crooz 'n' Looz after all because her parents were taking her to Frankenmuth for a chicken dinner on Friday but that they could still go to the twins' Halloween party on Saturday and he could wear the Sponge Bob suit. She was going to go as Barbie or maybe Xena Warrior Princess. Then it was, "Bye, gotta go. Love ya." Tyrone sat on the edge of his bed. He stared at the bars on the phone's display, punched in some numbers, wondered briefly who would answer if he pressed call, and then flipped it shut. He reached over, and picked up the safety pin. He opened it, closed it, put it down, got undressed, pulled the blanket over his head and went to sleep.



Best In Show



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by Phil Juliano

"Approaching Black Holes" by Stephen McCollum

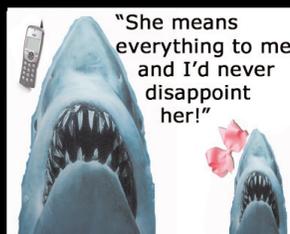
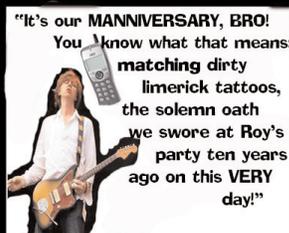
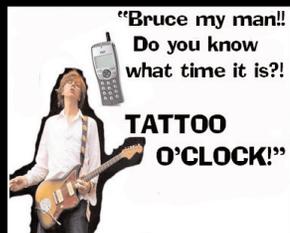
The hole is not an emptying out
but an implosion in-
to spaces deep and dark
of secret things and all that matters
is the matter with time and space
and their relation, I think.

The hole is a space without borders
where thought bounds into
the spatial, the special
relationship which we as boarders
plan it as we dig to-
ward the singularity
of the matter, to make particular,
concrete the foundation
from which to make a-
basements in massive things
of energy

thinking.
The hole is a grave, a place of
much gravity acting as a lock
on time and makes the sea which closes
the thing clock make time
which is emit gravitated back
upon itself, thinking.
The hole is a pit,
the tip of time emit-
ted from
our memories, intervals
which are mirror reflections
of our proper time/emit(ted)
which is now/won from the matters
of evil
which is live and well into the pit,
past
the event horizon of thinking
back and forth fascination becomes wonder/
it is like re(a)d now

THURSTON MOORE, SONIC BACHELOR IN: "THE BRUCE IS LOOSE!!"

BY CHRIS FOX



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is gravitated upon itself
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which is no thing (except the beginning
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the sea does to the
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But the word
is the ward
of being and time
in spatial matters
and the ward gravitates to
draw
and so
we draw to words, towards
that which matters
the things
of our thinking.

The whole matter is
the thought
which is
the grave into which we
must plunge
if the universal
is ever to abstract
itself from the a-
basement of
massive energy in things (e=mc2),
which is the variable
in the constant gravity of
our relationship
to the black hole.

"Two Girls (The Old Stone House)"

by Penelope L. Mace

Two girls sit at the top of a hill in the summer dusk and watch as the sun tags the distant trees. The smell of damp grass unfolds around them and in the middle distance they see the first blink of a firefly, followed by another and another, magic, silent, lighting up for such a fraction they are hard to believe in.

One girl is flushed from the sun, blotchy from bug bites and nerves. She holds back, not moving, barely breathing.

The other girl is tan and relaxed, chomping on a wad of sour grass, spewing plumes of pale green juice as expertly as the ballplayers she sees when her dad takes her to games.

First girl is nabbed immediately when the mosquitoes awake for their breakfast of blood. She jumps and claws herself and starts to say, I wanna go in, but dreads the teasing and stays quiet.

Tan girl says reflexively, you ok? And first girl nods though it has grown half dark, reached that precise point in the long summer sunset when outlines are bolded and darker objects have disappeared completely.

Both girls go silent now and watch the valley below, the straight dirt road down the hill, the field where the road dissolves into the wild grass, the lake to one side, the old stone house to the other.

No one has lived in the old stone house for how long nobody knows. Battered and grim, it has stood long because of its walls of chunky rocks wrenched

from the ground long ago by settlers making farmland. By day the girls play in the shell of the porch, pretending it's their house and they are dad and mom and there are children and animals and they act out plots dreamed up by tan girl, stories of death and babies and mystery. Blackness presses the windows of the old stone house, even in unflinching daylight but only first girl notices and she says nothing.

Tan girl has told first girl so many lies about the old stone house that she hates herself for it. Suffocated children, ghosts, other ugly things. She has made her believe that if you wait here on the hill until dark and mist rises from the lake you might see them at the windows. Little pale faces crying to be in heaven but trapped in this ugly stone house until other children free them.

Oh, come on, tan girl groans at some point, hearing first girl begin to sob. Will you stop? Here's a joke I heard at camp: mommy, mommy, why is daddy crawling on his belly in the yard? Shut up and reload the gun.

More sobs. Tan girl sighs and spits out the now tasteless lump of grass, disappointed that she can't make it go farther.

First girl glances over her shoulder at the house where tan girl lives but tan girl's mom hates the heat and starts cocktail hour early on nights like this. She won't be calling them.

Inside her somewhere, tan girl is aching to cry too, to grab her friend and say, it's just stories, you idiot, you should hit me, hate me, I love you.

But she never cries. Or says a word. Just waits, feeling first girl's waylaid breathing between them, tasting the bitterness of the spent grass in her mouth.

No mist rises from the pond. Slowly, the deep comfort of crickets reaches out to them across the valley. Distant cars whoosh down the highway, and the stone house dissolves into the blackness.



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@blotterrag.com

Sex dream - following the woman around in the too-hot summer sun - she's wearing daisy dukes and a shirt advertising a sandwich shop. Her legs are too short and her hair, pulled into a pony tail, is falling out of the rubber-band. She smacks her gum while she talks on her cell phone. Is that her voice? It can't be.

Will - cyberspace

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Final Tidbits: We're moving up to a circulation of 10,000 per month. Can you say "Big Dog?" We'd like you to consider making a donation to The Blotter (www.blotterrag.com) as your good deed for the year! And visit your local independent bookstore, they have hot cocoa! I'm serious, I don't want to see any of you hanging out at the Student Union saying, "I'm bored." Get that paper done, ask a friend to proofread it and have a Chai Latte. Got it? Good!

"Brooding"

by Judy Katz-Levine

In a brooding moment, I nod.

There will be thunderstorms this afternoon, they say
but predictions can be
wildly off-key.

The chairs wait to tremble - my left thumb shakes.

And the tremors of yesterday listen for an alto
who starts crooning, then stops.

Saints prepare by wrapping themselves
in the haunting sobs of children.

That - I know.

Call for Entries!

"The 2012 Laine Cunningham Novel Award" The Blotter's Third Annual Long Form Fiction Contest for Novella and Novel length works

1. The purpose of our contest is to provide a venue for writers to have their work read and commented on by our editors and judges. Additionally, the winner of this contest will have his/her work published here on these pages. And last but not least, the winner will receive a monetary prize! (Award monies are provided by the prize sponsor and the entry fee for the contest helps offset The Blotter's costs.)
2. Our pre-reader judges are intelligent and highly proud of their educations. Our final judge is smart, well-read and dangerous if she doesn't have her morning coffee. But we told her that she could be the final judge and what can you do?
3. In a world chock-full of scandal, transparency is very important to us, and we make every effort to eliminate any conflict of interest situation from going down in our contest. Blotter volunteers and their family members and/or employees are prohibited from entering our contest.

To enter the contest, please submit your work with a \$25 entry fee by check or money order to: The Blotter Magazine, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Entries must be received between October 1, 2011 and January 31, 2012 (you see, we're already giving you an extension, so don't put it off!)

Your entry must contain the following: no less than 10 pages, no more than 20 pages of the opening of your novel or novella, (or subject/character-connected short story chapbook) typed & double-spaced, without your name. On a separate cover page type your name, snail-mail and e-mail address, telephone number, the title of your novel or novella and a one page synopsis of your novel or novella. Remember, you have to have the entire book written, so that if and when you win, you can show us the rest!

BONUS: Enter the writing contest AND get a year's subscription to The Blotter for only \$30! (Regular annual subscription donations are \$25 total and you don't even get to enter a writing contest with that price!)

Well, now. \$650 in cash prizes, plus anything else we can wrangle together that we think has value. All placements, including honorable mentions, will receive an award certificate, proof positive of your success as an author, suitable for mocking your sophomore English teacher, who always wondered how it was that you graduated at all.

Our contest will be run in line with the rules of ethics and mechanics recommended by the Council of Literary Magazines and Presses, as outlined in their 2006 monograph on the subject. You can't view for free, but you may purchase the monograph entitled "Publishing Contests: Ethics and Mechanics" through the CLMP at <http://www.clmp.org/about/monographs.html>. This is the document we have used in coming up with the rules and conditions of this contest.

So that's it, then - now get to work!

CONTRIBUTORS

Ross J. Pudaloff of San Francisco has been a reader and teacher of literature all his life, including many years on the English Department faculty of Wayne State University. He has only recently tried creative writing, which turns out, as you might expect, to be both really hard and a lot of fun. He hopes you like "Ring."

After the late A. R. Ammons expressed some degree of satisfaction about this black hole poem, **Stephen McCollum**, who resides in Greensboro, NC, is happy to see it escape the gravitational sink of his computer to find the light of day. In a nice twist of irony, how perfect to have it in a pub by the name of Blotter! Reach him at smccollum@triad.rr.com.

Penelope L. Mace writes, "I am a recent arrival here in Chapel Hill from upstate NY. I have published short fiction and poetry in small magazines both print and on line. Scenes from my play *Mauve* were produced at a community theater in Upper Jay, NY. I am currently revising a novel that takes place during the US civil rights movement of the late 1960's."

Judy Katz-Levine of Norwood, MA, writes, "I am the author of three collections of poetry - the most recent is *When Performers Swim, The Dice Are Cast* (Ahadada-2009)"

Our featured artist writes, "My name is **Laura Johnston** and I'm a self-taught photographer & artist living in Raleigh, NC. My photographs are primarily portraits inspired by youthful beauty, the solace of nature, and the journey of discovering oneself. I am a passionate person and I love letting that passion drive my work, because that's when the most honest and beautiful pieces are created. I'm always exploring new styles and concepts within the realm of portrait photography (and even in other mediums) to push my work further and open new creative doors."

Chris Fox, is a secret, wrapped in bacon, deep fried and served on fresh pita.

Michael Cole and **Phil Juliano** both used to work in Asheville, but they don't any more. I mean, they both still work, but not in Asheville. I mean, one of them does, but not the other. See how hard this is?



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