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## “Paper”

As I type here it is inevitably Spring and the younger one has a confirmed case of the flu, with fortunate timing as we have only just returned from a week at Disney World. So she sits on the couch, occasionally lapsing into a dry hacking cough which causes me to glance at her in trepidation, hoping that it is just a cough and not a precursor to throwing up. I hate cleaning up after throwing up, I'll not deny it.

Despite a slight fever and general malaise, she reads her Kindle Fire. Harry Potter, I think; the fourth book, which cost me \_\_\_\_\_, which I paid almost happily even though we have a hard-cover volume of that book out on the porch in a box. Mrs. Rowling gets a little bit richer, as does Amazon, but I don't care so much about that, because my goal is to help instill the lifelong love of reading. Time was I did care about the format, but no longer. Pay twice, shame on me? Nah.

This is a big deal, I think. She seems to care not a whit that there are no paper leaves to turn, that the book resides in the ether and not on a shelf for her to occasionally view in passing and mark as *done* – *read that* – in her own ever-growing trophy case of knowledge acquired by the...brute force of intellectual ingestion. Or is that my own private foolish behavior/argument for paper – with all its NPR audio-essay details about the satisfying heft of a book?

I do have such populated shelves, with rows in front of rows of volumes blocking the titles and making my wife wonder why. Perhaps this is my so-called trophy case. Or is it a variation of my legacy? Or just a format for collecting dust? Have I reached that place between worlds, my old one and a new one? How antiquated is the idea, and how many of us still find, what – solace? – in bookshelves lined with printed matter.

Which begs the unintentional pun. How much does printed matter? Ten years in, we believe that some writers like to be in print, *prefer* to be in print, and consider this aspect of their career literally. For them, it's not enough to have friends hear your stories over a few beers or to let your husband read your manuscript over your shoulder. Or to be in someone else's online blog or 'zine. Or their own. Only paper will suffice. Even cheap paper (like ours). Something about the more tangible manifestation of the words is assuring, if not reassuring. And being chosen is also a necessary factor of this process. The editor is wanted – needed - if only to tell the writer “no, not this time” in some way or another. Polite is good. Useful feedback, better. In a reasonable time, a minimum requirement. And certainly to say yes. Yes, *please!* We may trust our own sensibilities, but we tend to want that old chestnut, validation, too. Everyone agrees with that, except those people whose egos are so large or mistaken that they only require the voice inside their head. And there's nothing wrong with that, I suppose.

Or is this merely an age-related response to things? Older folks want paper, peer recognition, recompense for effort. Younger people want...what? Ease of use (or sensible convenience, pick your poison).

Shareability. Reasonable cost. My daughter gasps at the price of the book I'm reading. Really, Dad? It is exorbitant, true. I cannot explain why I thought it was worth paying. Maybe I like carrying it around, it makes me look dignified. Maybe I need the individual page's layout to better understand the universe of pages that have come before and the, albeit smaller, universe of pages to come. Right or wrong (write or wrong) I trust the written word on paper more than I trust the electronic. Perhaps because I read *1984* at a formative age. On the other hand, I just read Danielewski's *House of Leaves* in which it discusses the transitory aspects of truth, and how in the future readers of newspapers and magazines will view news pictures as illustrations rather than reportage. I believe that, but also believe that this readership will die with my contemporaries.

I worry about losing my credibility as my girls become teenagers. I anticipate some degree of my own deterioration as my girls become adults. I trust the written word on paper, and part of me wonders how much they even want words at all. At the risk of devolving into that NPR audio-essay schtick again, I think that words are a necessity to a young person. Not an affection. Not a love-affair, like they are for me and those of my ilk. I read for joy. I read to cause joy inside me. Are there young people who prefer everything graphical, audio-video. They seem to make no bones about a picture being worth *at least* a thousand words, and so why bother otherwise? I don't fear insulting any of those people, as I just passed the eight hundred word mark on this rant and lost them at the quarter-house turn. Oh, don't worry about books, they would say. There'll always be books. Just not printed books. I don't believe them. The time will come when reading is too much like work. For crying out loud, show me the picture, they'll shout. In fact, cry out loud. That's what we really want. Yeah, and when all films are made from adaptations of comic books and graphic novels, all galleries filled with prints made from those "pages" and animation cells from those movies, when all songs created for said movie soundtracks and drawn for video performed by artists selected for their ability to dance, then you'll come crying to me. You won't have books to kick around anymore.

School awaits my elder child. At the top of the hill we stop. To turn onto our main road at this time of day the year is nearly impossible – the Sun glares mightily on the eastern horizon, flush with the surface of the road. I cannot see oncoming traffic, cannot back up because there is a car behind me. Shading my eyes with the flat of my hand helps not at all. Going forward is a leap of faith. Existential and ironic, if I do say so myself. This has been a feature of March every year and will remain so until my girls go off to college. Only a problem for me for a week, maybe two. The Earth will move about the Sun in its time.

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## “Candace” - an excerpt from an upcoming novel

by Pete Pawsey

“This is a much better story, Momma...” Her voice is a happy chirp again, which I’m very grateful for. She’s right, of course. She’s very often right, of course.

“I know, baby. Momma was depressed yesterday,” my voice is somewhat less than chirpy, remembering how I felt. Because as much as I want to shield her from whatever I can, in this case there doesn’t seem to be any point in it.

“That story sucked.” I flinch at the sound of this coming out of my baby’s mouth, but I flinch a little more knowing

how likely it is that it came from me.

“I didn’t know you were awake...” which is no excuse for what I said, obviously. And doesn’t even serve as much of an apology.

“Well, I was...” Her Momma’s sarcasm is strong in this one.

“Well, I know that now. Will you let me tell the story now?” I’m kinda expecting a “no” at this point, but I’m going to keep going regardless of what I expect to happen.

“So...” (Wait for it).

“Wait. I’m not comfort-

able.” There follows a nightly ritual of melodramatic shuffling, pillow-work, and wriggling I know well by now. I let everything die down before I attempt to continue. I’m not a fool.

I breathe in slowly and try. “How about now?” I half raise an eyebrow. I open my face as much as I can.

“Yes. Better. Maybe. Yes.” Maybe. My money’s on maybe. She does say “Yes” and “Maybe” with the same degree of certainty, which is reassuring. Or maybe it isn’t.

“So, once upon a time there was a...” (Wait for it).

“A turtle? A fishy? A sealion?” I can feel my eyes rolling back in my head and I’m powerless to stop them. I’m guessing this is the kind of thing that makes me a terrible mother.

I hush my sigh to almost inaudible, but somehow it floats out in my words: “Who’s telling this story, exactly?”

She’s unfazed. I got away with it. “It’s *your* story, Momma. Yours and mine.”

“Yours *and* mine,” I clarify. I see how it’s going to be tonight. I’m too tired to resist.

As I tuck her in a little tighter, I dip one foot in the water. “Are you trying to tell me something?”

She shakes her tuck-in loose before I’ve even finished my sentence. “No. Nothing.



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What?” She’s innocent. She has absolutely no idea what I’m talking about.

I give her the gentlest nudge with my arm, displacing her head momentarily from the pillow, shaking out her loose curls, curls that, too, are her daddy’s. “Something about the aquarium? About the beach?”

Wide-eyed innocence greets me. She knows nothing. “I didn’t say anything, Momma.”

“No, you didn’t.” I shake my head slowly and look down. I wait for a moment until I feel her eyes move, then I turn my face up to look her right in the eyes.

I breathe in and let my tired shoulders roll back slowly. “But you’d be okay with going with me if I was going, right? To keep me company?”

“Yes!” she chirps, before I’m even halfway into the sentence. Her eyes say “Yes” about five more times before I’m done.

“Just so as I know where we’re at on this. I wouldn’t want to have to go by myself.” I picture her rolling me along some shitty boardwalk in a wheelchair, but I don’t tell her so when the thought makes me giggle out

loud. She looks at me puzzled but I’ll never tell.

“Momma...” Her second-ever word hangs in the air like bait. I let it hang. After about a minute she dangles her hook again.

“Momma...” And while I’m trying to decide whether to answer or not, looking like I’m thinking about it hard, she asks again. And again. And again. I thought we were past this stage. I sigh quietly and turn soft eyes towards her.

“Which beach shall we go to?” She turns her smile to light. This was not the question I was expecting.

“I hadn’t really thought about it, little one. Had you?” I can tell she has, perhaps a whole lot.

“I was thinking...” I get a dread chill all of a sudden and I don’t quite know why.

I push through the shiver and weakly let slip a “Yes?”

“...that maybe we could go find daddy.”

Now I know why. Her first-ever word turns my stomach over when I hear it pass her lips. I don’t have anything to say back

to this. Nothing at all. Her face is open like a question. I don’t like this question. I want a different one.

The sick feeling in my stomach starts to give over to dizziness and I start to slide out of the here and now. I think about my crazy week and my lost weekend, think about the black eye I’m covering and the bruises on my body. Think of how my little girl slept soundly at her crazy grandma’s so that Momma could have a playdate.

I didn’t know him well enough to hand it over, but I wanted him and it was no sooner decided than taken.

“Momma was a bad girl, baby,” I gulp it down like a drowning girl gulping air.

She gulped too, maybe in sympathy for Momma. Maybe just in fear of what I might say next. I don’t mean to punish her for saying what she feels, but I just can’t stop my mouth from running away from me. I have this problem all too often.

“Momma made a big fuckin’ mess in the bedroom, baby.” I think about my Sunday night scrubbing the blood from my lip off the wall above the bed. About my Sunday night spent hand-washing cum out of the curtains. Out of the fuckin’ curtains.

I would never tell her, of course, but it reminds me of one time with Whitman when things got out of hand. I was *not* expecting it that time. This time I was kinda hoping for most of

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## The Blotter

what I got. Begging for it, even.

\*

I might have mumbled. I guess he didn't hear me clearly. His reaction to what he thought I said surprised me so much that I didn't quite know how to react. I don't remember what we were talking about before that, but he spun me round when he answered what I never said. His voice softened measurably from its usual crackly showiness:

"I love you, too."

I burst into spontaneous laughter like an ejaculation. "I said..." I couldn't stop laughing... "I love *weed*."

And then his reaction surprised me even more. Before I'd even stopped laughing, his closed fist was in the side of my head, behind my eye. My ear rang from the impact. My skin snapped like elastic under his punch. My whole body rolled off the bed onto the floor, crumpling up like a bedsheet.

Whitman looked half-sorry, but mostly just surprised that he'd caught me off-guard and hit me hard enough to throw me clear across the room. It was not in the least in his nature to react that way, and I have a feeling he was more stunned even than I was.

I stared back at him, open-mouthed, glowering like a day-old fire revived with a sharp poke. My mouth wouldn't form words for me, but my eyes asked him what exactly the fuck he thought he was doing? He  
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couldn't look me in the eye, but seemed equally puzzled by the whole episode. We never once mentioned it again, nor did anything like it ever happen while we were together. But the memory stuck in my brain like a thorn and I could never get it back out.

\*

My father loved brown liquor. When I was a little girl, I'm told, he let other things divert him from his one true love, but in the time I knew him, he was single minded. He was resolute. My mother loved him still, but he couldn't return her love from the place he'd gotten himself into. He just couldn't find the way back. Sometimes he slept in the truck and sometimes he slept in the pool hall. And some of the time he'd fall however far he'd made it into the house; front porch or hallway or bathroom.

Once when I was tiny, he came home in the middle of the night just as I woke up, half-asleep, craving a glass of water. I was groggy and disoriented, but

he was wide awake, lively, excited to see anyone to talk to. I just wanted to go back to bed, but he insisted I sit down with him at the kitchen table – the one I still have – and share a rare father-daughter bonding moment. I have relatively few memories of him at all, and although he was drunk, it counts for me as a happy memory of him. A memory untainted by violence or fear.

He slurred badly, a taste of the collapse that would kill him in the end. He wanted no so much a conversation, moreso an audience. I sat, halfway to slumping over the table, while he blessed me with one of the very few stories he passed down to us. I felt for a moment like Scout Finch, about to be read an instructional speech on the nature of honor. But this was a funny kind of honor he told me about. I was just hoping to get out without getting called "Sport" or "Slugger."

"When I was just a little older than you..." he slid away from his mind for a moment, uncertain, then coughed so loud I thought he'd wake the house.



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When he came back, I wasn't sure he'd remember his place, but he was solid. He knew what he wanted to tell me.

"My daddy, your grandpa, had a truck a lot like the one I have now. Only his was newer and a little heavier on the mileage, on account of how far he traveled for work." He sat motionless for a moment, thinking of how to get to what he meant to say.

"I missed my daddy when he went on the road, so when he was home, I would grab every chance I could to ride around in the truck with him," his eyes got lonely as he talked. I could see a hollow pain inside them.

"We were driving out to my uncle's place one time, out across farmland, open fields and wide empty counties..." He talked slow, emphasizing each syllable in a gentle, tender reflection of his reminiscence.

"The truck just seemed to float, to fly. The big, soft seats held me safe and upright." I did not hear this tone very often in my father's voice. He was dream-

ing.

"When we were about halfway there, some small thought got a hold of my daddy's mind and he let it flash across his face for an instant, like a spark jumping from an old outlet. I had a question held fast in my eyes when he turned his my way, but not a word passed my lips." I felt like we were at last to the edge of the cliff, about to look over, about to see the view my father wanted to show me.

"My daddy nodded a slow, grand nod and a quiet agreement passed between us. He gestured with his hand and his voice: *You reach up there, under that seat, tell me what you find.* I did as I was told and I came up with a cold-ish glass Coke that he'd somehow stashed underneath the seat without me noticing." He smiled slowly across his whole face like streetlights coming on. His smile flashed mischief for a second and I was lucky I saw it coming ahead of time.

"Now, catch this...He tossed me a little packet of Lance

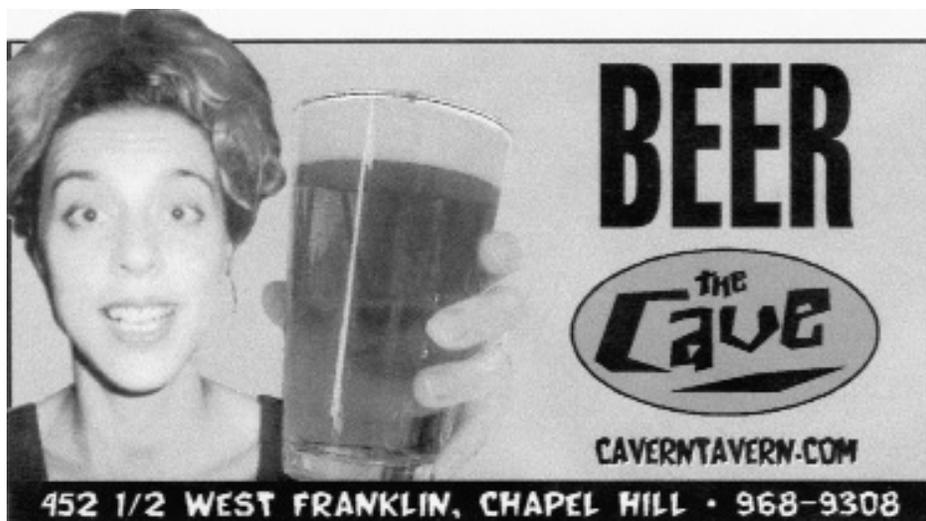
salted peanuts he'd gotten from a vending machine somewhere along the way. I caught them, opened them, and was about to pop a few in my mouth when he stopped me dead.

"No! I flinched from the force. He gestured, a little spasmodically towards my Coke. *In there!* I cupped my hand around the neck of the bottle, letting a few tumble into the fizz and getting a little buzz from hearing the tiny splashes. I was about to taste, but I saw my warning waiting in his eyes.

"And the finishing touch...My eyes flashed disbelief as a pint bottle of cheap brown liquor slid effortlessly out from his pocket, already open, and across the seat. The buck stopped firmly with me, with a dull and solid thud. He motioned unmistakably what I should do, and I started to follow orders, my hand and the truck both shaking badly enough I was afeared of more anger if I spilled the precious liquid. I stammered, begging for us to slow down, just for a moment so I could pour. He brooked no argument and no insubordination.

"Boy, you better learn how..." And with that, he put his foot down. And I learned that day a skill I never forgot to this day. Except now I can pour while I drive. My daddy gave it a name, the one I still use.

"That there, what you got, boy...is a road soda."



# “Three Short-shorts”

By Steve Cushman

## A Cat, A Car, An Accident

I didn't see the cat, barely felt the bump, but I heard the girl, her too loud scream. She was reaching out, toward my car, but it was too late. I'd killed her cat, flattened it.

The girl was seven, maybe eight, blonde and small in a purple dress. Maybe she'd just come home from church—it was a Sunday afternoon—and let the cat outside, and for some reason it ran straight for the road.

The girl kept screaming, her hands in the air, when I saw the front door open, her parents

standing there, staring at me: Mom in a pink dress and Dad a grey suit. Then he pushed past his wife. It didn't look like a particularly large front yard, but as he walked, then started running, toward me, the grass seemed to go on forever.

I expected him to stop at his daughter, to comfort her. To say it's okay honey or sweetie or whatever it is a father might say to his young daughter in shock, but he passed her without a word, and came at my car and me.

I had not been drinking, had not been hung-over or dis-

tracted by a ringing cell phone. I'd been on my way to Sears to buy a new blade for my lawn mower. The cat wasn't there and then it was. Thump. That's all that happened. No more, no less. Things can change that quickly.

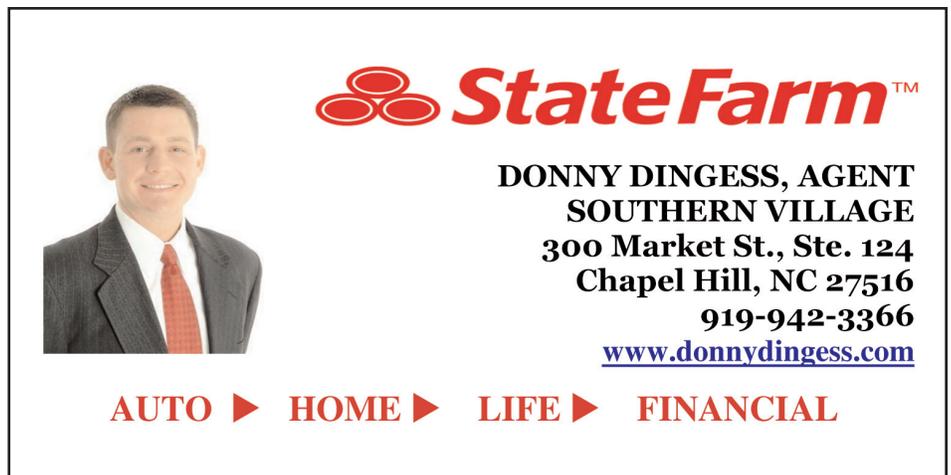
But he, the well-dressed father, was pulling at my door and before I could say anything he had me against the hot hood of my car and he was calling me the worst names I'd ever heard. He started punching me and I felt nothing at first, then the punching and pounding and the high, hard sun over his shoulder



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went fuzzy and I was gone, knocked out, waking to a couple paramedics shaking my shoulders, flashing their pen light into my eyes.

I could hear the father: *Is the sonofabitch dead? He killed our cat, crushed it like it was nothing.* The girl was still crying. The mother was telling her it was going to be alright. I looked over and saw the cat there, under my front passenger side tire and I cried because of what I'd done, accident or not, and then the paramedics lifted me up onto a stretcher and pushed me into the ambulance and shut the door and the air conditioner was on high and it seemed like a good place to be for

a while, safe and cool and cared for. The sort of place where things would be okay, and I couldn't hurt anyone anymore.

### Dark, Almost Night

There was a boy, a girl, a dog and then nothing. It was dark, almost night when Ray drove up Courtland Street, a dusty pine tree-walled country road. This time he felt the bumps as he hit each one of them. He stopped and saw their tiny figures stand and disappear into the mist. Ray shuddered as he drove on to Tulsa, to Texarkana, to Toledo.

Ray drove because it was

what his job, hauling dead trees out of the forest. He drove them to a factory where they were turned into furniture. Not the furniture you see, but the underparts, the frames, the back of a dresser that faces nothing but the walls.

Ray drove because he was running and driving kept him running, kept him moving, kept it so he did not have to stop long enough to think about what he'd done.

The boy, the girl, and the dog, appeared from nowhere again and again he hit them as he would every night in his dreams for the rest of his life. Some nights he woke in a sweat, others he woke crying, and still others

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## The Blotter

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he woke with such a start that for a few moments he could not breathe.

He could say their names—Charlie, Kate, and Vincent—but he tried not to. It was better to think of them as the boy, the girl, and the dog. She said it wasn't his fault. There were no kids, no dog. It was all in his imagination. She said that once they married and settled in, he'd be better, but Ray wasn't so sure. He knew she was trying to help and he loved her, but she didn't know the things he knew. She didn't know the things he'd done on purpose and on accident, in the years before they met.

The screams, the bark, the thuds. She hadn't climbed out of the truck and looked back and saw them in the road. Their heads, bodies, they were there and then they were gone. It was, Ray thought, like they had been lifted to heaven instantly as if this world was too rotten for angels like them.

When he brought her back to the road, there was no sign anything had happened. He sat there in a lawn chair for two days straight, waiting for someone to come to him to ask what he was doing, if he knew anything about the accident, but no one came and no one asked him. And when he called the police and asked if anyone had reported a case of hit & run they told him no. Ray hung up when they asked his name.

So Ray took off, became a long hauler and covered more miles than anyone had a right to, [www.blotterrag.com](http://www.blotterrag.com)

but still in the dark, almost night he would see the boy, the girl, and the dog and he would feel the slightest bump. He would stop the truck and get out to check and he would be in some faraway city, on an interstate instead of a country road and cars would fly on by and he'd wipe the tears.

And then one August day traveling between Vegas and Phoenix on a stretch of highway, the old green station wagon passed him and he looked over and saw in the back seat that boy, that girl, and there on the seat between them was that same white dog.

Ray stared so long that he didn't see the curve, forgot about this cliff he'd traveled hundreds of times. And then he was flying and while he expected to hear the boy, the girl, and the dog for a few joyous minutes the only sound he heard was his blood thrumming there in his ears in the dark, almost night.

### The Date

It was their 18<sup>th</sup> date in six months. Hailey, Hailey, Hailey, her name ringing in his head all day at work. Roy pulled up to the corner of Adams & Courtland and she was there as promised. She climbed in his truck and smiled that sweet smile of hers and Roy's heart broke once again.

Some nights they went out to eat, but tonight they went straight to the hotel and when he asked about her family, her life,

she shook her head and said, Roy, you know the rules. And he knew the rules, so instead he told her about his week, about the famous baseball player who came by the baseball bat factory where he worked, about taking his granddaughter for ice cream, and about the Chow puppy one of his co-workers was trying to give away. She nodded and listened as she slowly removed the skirt, her halter-top, the see-through bra.

His stories, his talking, a sort of foreplay, and then they ended up where they always ended up, in bed, naked, him on top of her. When he tried to kiss her on the lips, she turned her head, said he knew the rules. Her chin, forehead, even her breast were fine, but not the lips.

And after, as they lay there, neither one saying anything, both catching their breath, reaching for the cigarettes and the bottled water, he breathed in her smell, that sweet, sweat scent he'd never encountered on a woman before. When they'd each finished their cigarettes, Hailey stood and started to get dressed and her tattoos—the heart with the arrow that covered her back and the winking Tinkerbell on her right butt cheek—disappeared from his view as she slid her clothes on.

She slapped him on the foot and said, "Time to go, Roy."

He stood then, dressed, listened to her in the bathroom, like he used to with Marge back before she passed away. The way she would spend forever in the bathroom, water running, toilet

flushing, showers, all sounds that had to do with water, with washing something away.

They drove back to Hailey's corner in silence. This is how it always ended, Roy a little sour, a little sad that the date was over. The money in a white envelope on the seat between them.

"You come see me again, Roy," she said and patted his knee. Her hand on his knee sent soft shocks through his body.

At the corner of Adams & Courtland she climbed out of the truck and smiled at him again. "Thank you," she said.

"Thank you," he said, but she had already turned away, walking over to her friends.

In the rearview mirror, Roy could see her for a moment or two and then she was gone and all he could see was the bright orange ember of a cigarette that may have been hers, but he couldn't be sure, and eventually even that disappeared.



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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@blotterraag.com](mailto:mermaid@blotterraag.com)

Myself and a chum were working for this detective doing grunt work. We were in an ancient college campus courtyard during the night, assigned to digging up window flower boxes for evidence. We had to watch our backs, too, because the enemy was supposed to be able to attack at any moment. It was rather hard work digging through the old window box soil with only a fork, it was old and more like the dirt of the ground than than that of potting soil. We finally dug up a couple small figurines, like toy soldiers. Some of them had strings. Very small toy soldiers like the two I have in my house that I found, except one of mine is a postman, the other a milkman. The detective came back to our side and was excited about our finds. I thought we would be looking for money or something harder than these little parachuting toy soldiers with strings and floral wire entangled in each other. The detective was all excited though, he asked how I was with records. I looked up at him expecting manila file folders, but saw him holding a stack of about 200 45rpm singles on the brick windowsill. I was speechless and excited, trying to find the words to express to him that I love old records and would like very much to do whatever he asked with them. I muttered out a reply to him and began quickly boxing them up as well as our evidence and moving toward the office inside. I had a sense of urgency about this, I needed to get up to the office before that ominous Russian lady started to whisper discouraging words to us again in her slithering salty tongue. I had to pause when I noticed the amber glow from a lone incandescent bulb in the basement window of our building. There was a basement library and workshop. It reminded me of the days of my youth burning candles, paper, plastic, aerosols and household materials in the garage in my 8-year-old pyromaniac experimentation days. I wondered at this moment if some of the mental block I suffered from was due to my young exposure to those chemicals, made me dumber, or led me otherwise to some sort of ingrained learning disability that caused my current life's problems. On my way back to the office I noticed a picnic table with casual twenty-somethings who sat and drank the kind of beer they had at the place where the bartender girl I fooled around with worked. I saw a sign that I would have told her meant I especially liked her.

J.T. - Cyberspace

# “A Witch-Link to Salem, Massachusetts”

by Patricia Crandall

---

I am acquainted with a witch. Not a witch dressed in a long black dress, flowing cape or pointed hat, nor does she flip a wand to zap me into a frog. Virginia Esmor is a present-day witch who dresses in elegant black slacks, vibrantly patterned, silk over-blouses and shapely clogs. Long, red-beaded earrings dangle from her ears to her shoulders. An assortment of twisty snake bracelets ringed by tiny silver stars and occult charms remind me that she is an ordained witch.

Virginia owns an eclectic craft emporium filled with exotic tapestries, jewelry, pottery, soy candles, luscious smelling creams and lotions, and sparkling crystals crafted by local artists. Many of those artists are cult friends. Amidst fountains washing waters over smooth rocks and pebbles, I am intrigued by the hand-waving conversations of Eugenie and her friends and associates concerning recent ‘witch-happenings’ attributed to The Pagan Resource and Network Council of Educators. P.R.A.N.C.E. has been instrumental in the reconstruction of the Witch Village in Salem, Massachusetts and has hosted the ‘Witches’ Hospitality Tent’ every year. Located on the Common during Salem’s Haunted Happenings, Prance gives Salem/Wiccan tourists informa-

tion and a warm welcome to the ‘Witch City’.

The Salem Witch Museum, the Witch Dungeon Museum, and the Witch History Museum take you back to 1692, yet, present-day popularization of the witchcraft hysteria does not reveal the large number of witches living in Salem today.

The goal of the Salem Witch Village is to promote religious tolerance and participation in a positive society that encourages growth and acceptance of all of its people.

Virginia and I vacation in Salem - not together! The link we have to each other is our discussions of our own particular interests in Salem, Massachusetts. Otherwise, we travel with our own entourage.

My family and I enjoy touring Chestnut Street, a registered National Historic Landmark, considered one of the most architecturally beautiful streets in America. It is a showcase of grand antique houses and part of Salem’s McIntyre Historic District.

Other points of interest are the schooner, Fame, at the Pickering Wharf Marina, a replica of the successful privateer from the War of 1812. Fame sails from Memorial Day through September - weather permitting. Forest River Park offers beaches

and picnic areas. Hamilton Hall, built between 1805 and 1807, and designed by Samuel McIntire, is a social center for Salem’s merchant families. This National Register historic landmark remains a unique setting for special functions and weddings.

My special destination in Salem is the House of the Seven Gables made famous by author, Nathaniel Hawthorne.

“God will give him blood to drink!” An evil house, cursed through the centuries by a man who was hanged for witchcraft, haunted by the ghosts of its sinful dead, wracked by the fear of its frightened living....

Four Pyncheons play a part inside the blighted house: Hepzibah, an elderly recluse; Clifford, her feeble-minded brother; Phoebe, their young country cousin...and Jaffrey, a devil incarnate whose greedy quest for secret wealth is marked by murder and terrible vengeance from a restless grave.

Nathaniel Hawthorne’s works are imbued with a mixture of the actual and the imaginary, and The House of the Seven Gables is an enduring example. The puritanical Colonel Pyncheon is the embodiment of Hawthorne’s own great grandfather, a judge at the Salem witch trials; the gloomy, gabled house

with a secret passage, typifies his own depressing home. It is this masterful blending of the spiritual and symbolic that allows Hawthorne's haunted house to stand firm where many a weaker one has fallen.\*

For academic interests and the pure enjoyment of "seeing sites New-Englandly," Salem gives me the opportunity to tour nearby areas made famous by Henry David Thoreau, the Cambridge of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow, Emily Dickenson's Amherst, and the Orchard House at Concord. Louisa M. Alcott wrote *Little Women* at The Wayside in Concord, and, of course, there is Boston – the place where powerful and original literary expression in America began.

Virginie revels in Dracula's Castle, Salem's haunted house. Eerie chambers filled with "live spirits" lead to Dracula's haunted crypt. The Peabody Essex Museum exhibits eerie memorabilia associated with Salem Witch trials, such as the "Witch Pins" used in the examination of witches and a small bottle supposed to contain the finger bones of victim George Jacobs. The bizarre, seemingly inexplicable behavior of two young girls, the daughter, Betty, and the niece, Abigail Williams, of the Salem Village minister, Reverend Samuel Parris, launched the hysteria which led to the trials.

In February 1692, Magistrates Jonathan Corwin

and John Hawthorne examined three accused women. Corwin's home, known as the Witch House, still stands at the corner of North and Essex Streets in Salem. This is the only structure still standing in Salem with direct ties to the 1692 Salem Witch Trials. Guided tours and tales of the first witchcraft trials are provided there. John Hawthorne is an ancestor of author Nathaniel Hawthorne.

Finally, back at Eugenie's Emporium - at times I feel uncomfortable in the aura of witches, particularly when Jimbo, a long-limbed Indian sits in a trance in a room furnished in surreal and Wiccan accessories, preparing to tell fortunes. It is my prerogative to leave. I am not a witch.

Other tours and points of interest in Salem:

Burying Point (1637), Charter Street – The oldest cemetery in Salem. Contains the graves of a Mayflower pilgrim and witchcraft trial judge John Hathorne.

Hollywood House of Wax, Museum Place Mall – Movie stars and monsters from supernatural Hollywood.

Nathaniel Bowditch House, 9 North Street – Home of Nathaniel Bowditch from 1811 to 1823. It is a National Historic Landmark, and is significant both architecturally and historically. The house is being restored.

New England Pirate Museum, 274 Derby Street – Piracy flourished in Salem post 1692. Notorious villains like Blackbeard and Kidd prowled the coast. Relive their adventures. Admission: Adults \$6; Seniors \$5; Under 14 \$4.

Old Town Hall, 32 Derby Square – built in 1816 after the land was donated to the City of Salem by John Derby III and Benjamin Pickman, Jr., it was the city headquarters until 1836/37 when the new City Hall was erected on Washington Street.

Salem Common, Washington Square – Nine-acre park which was the public land used to graze livestock and train local militia in the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries. Today it is used for concerts and community activities.

Spellbound Museum, 190 Essex Street – Authentic historical, cultural and religious artifacts pertaining to the supernatural world. Experience America's only "Ghost Gallery!" New England's only museum dedicated to the supernatural world and its mysteries.

Witch Mansion in 3D, 11 Pickering Way – Salem's only 3D Haunted House. Located at Pickering Wharf.

\*The House of the Seven Gables - New American Library 1961



### “Product”

by Scott William Woods

---

I bluetoothed my personal assistant to find out what time it was, and I could still rip my delts and get my legs waxed before working the mark over lunch.

Not that I did lunch with marks that often, but this particular one, felony complexion and all of twenty and busting out of her top, had declined to lie with me on the casting couch. That almost never happened. Could have been one of those bristly eyebrow hairs that kept invading since I turned fifty.

We were finishing the behind-the-neck presses at my gym in Santa Monica when the director of my Screenwriter Development Division walked in with some babe I didn't know. Rex nodded that they would wait.

Come to think of it, I'd seen this babe in some commercials a few years back. She was still looking good. She'd had some work done, and the surgeon had been really expensive.

Too bad though that Rex seemed to be sparking her. You don't poach on a guy who works for you.

“So, you really never heard of Chino Jarrett?” I heard Rex ask the babe.

My personal trainer had earmarked today for pure negatives. Two of his assistants helped

me push up about 30% more than my max, and then I let it down on my own, slowly.

“No, what's he done?” the babe said.

When I was 23, then talent agent and now uber producer Eliot Bernstein took me under his wing, getting me bit parts and advising that looks weren't enough and I should learn to act already. But I thought I knew better, and I signed against Eliot's advice to do a Brat Pack flick.

“As an actor,” Rex said, “he's probably best known for his role in St. Vitus' Dance.”

The fast lane to fame and fortune. Pretty good for Charlie Nobody Johnson from Armpit, Arkansas.

“Really? I dated the guy who wrote that,” the babe said. “Who'd Chino play?” I noticed in the wall mirror that this new thickening spray hair product held its own even when I worked up a sweat. One of the gym guys handed me a towel, and I said yes he could call me at Aladdin. They both wanted to direct.

“Rayce Dooley. Sidekick of Tad Younger's character.”

Of course there was a catch. A big catch. The catch was I had to go with Tad.

I was never that way, just wasn't me, and even then I knew I shouldn't do it. But I said to myself that pretending with Tad

was just another acting job. That it would get me the Vitus role, and the Vitus role would land me leads, and then it was say hello to Mr. Oscar. That after my handprints were set in concrete in the forecourt of Grauman's Chinese, it wouldn't matter how they got there.

Then Tad got bored after two weeks, of course, and most of my character's lines disappeared. Of course.

“Hmm,” the babe said. “Don't remember him. What's he next most famous for?”

“Next most famous?” Rex asked.

After Vitus, no one would give me any new parts. I guess if they think you're a fruit in this business, they won't pretend it's a secret unless you're already a star.

“If he's probably best known for St. Vitus' Dance,” she persisted, “then he's almost as well known for something else.”

Whoa. This bitch was way confrontational. Bet she played for the other team.

“He's probably next best known as president of Aladdin,” Rex said.

If Anne Bancroft hadn't done what Gloria Swanson could not and made the kept man a fashionable accessory for the fading skank with beaucoup bucks, it would have been back to roughnecking in the oil fields for

me. But I'd beat the system in the end—I wasn't stuck anymore in the role of victim. Now I got to portray the perp.

Time to find out what the dyke wanted. I tipped the gym guys a C-note each and walked over. Keep it businesslike: dykes were all about business.

"Hey, Rex."

"Hey, Chino. Got someone I want to introduce to you. Elizabeth Allison."

I knew that name. "New script agent with Holleran's?" So she must have some brains. She'd been a bimbo in the commercials. No lines.

Rex smiled at Elizabeth. "See? I told you he'd know. Chino knows everyone." He turned back to me.

Elizabeth was interested in helping with our next Hollywood Screenwriter's Conference and wanted to understand how it worked.

"We pay you \$5000 for attending a 2-hour pitch session," I said. "You listen to the prospective screenwriters' log-lines. You ask at least half of them to send you their scripts."

"Even if all of them bite

the big one?" she asked.

I glanced at Rex, who nodded pleasantly, agreeing she was a newbie and that I should consider treading carefully. "The writers pay a lot to attend, so we need to give them a little encouragement back. If it feels like too much work to receive all those submissions, you can ask some of them to put a label on the envelopes with REQUESTED MATERIAL—HSC."

Her eyebrows were up. "Then my assistant sends our form rejection in the SASE."

I nodded. "But it's better if you can personalize a few of the rejections. Just a coupla lines." To get repeat business at next year's conference you had to make nice with at least a few of them.

She was looking thoughtful. "And if against all odds and laws of nature a script is good, I can still sign them, right?"

Rex was smiling wider now. "Right," I said.

"So it's win-win for me either way, and I get to pocket the five grand."

Elizabeth was hooked. "Ten large if you want to give a seminar too. You pick the topic.

'Writing protagonists that chisel out your esophagus.' Like that."

#

If I was going to take a mark to lunch, I was going to do it right. Had to be The Ivy, the one in Beverly Hills, had to get seated out on the famous patio. Give her a thrill.

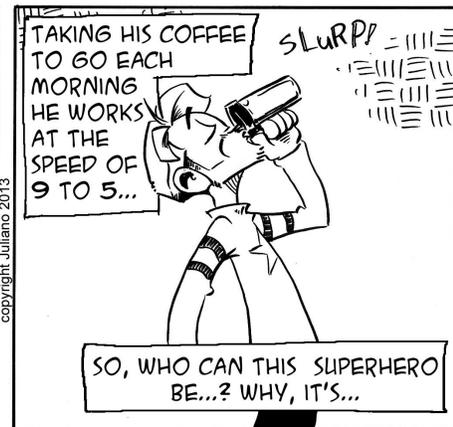
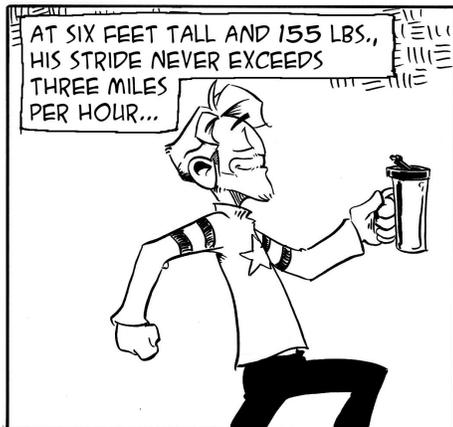
The Ivy valet parking guys seemed to appreciate the gullwing. One of them did stunts, and the other was an abs double. I fist-bumped the snooty maitre 'd and ordered us the signature gimlets.

The mark had on a little backless number in white that dropped all the way down to show her other cleavage. And her other dimples. Paparazzi beyond the picket fence flashed away, and everyone was whispering, trying to guess who she was.

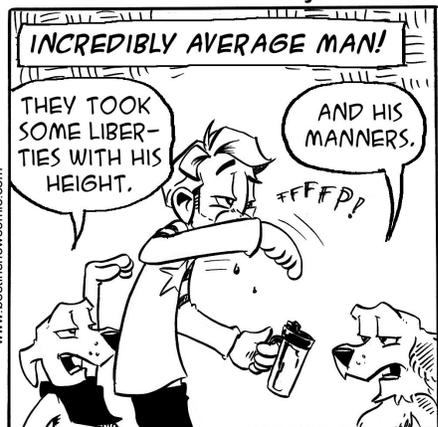
It was a shame about the casting couch. I didn't want to waste the Viagra, so I'd favored one of the new interns. I should know better by now. Gave them airs and caused friction in the office. This one seemed to think she had a chance of becoming the sixth Mrs. Chino Jarrett.

The mark was still pro-

Best In Show



by Phil Juliano



# The Blotter

jecting a dewy innocent persona as sculpted and pristine as a Jack Benny take. She couldn't be *that* good an actress. Had to be the real her. After all, she'd been living in Kansas until a week ago.

"So you said home was where?" I asked as I ordered refills on the gimlets.

"Independence, Kansas. Boyhood home of William Inge."

I must have looked blank,

not a good look for me, because she went on to explain. "He got a Pulitzer for the original *Picnic*? The play was based on his experiences there."

I guess every hick town produces one person who makes it. If live theater counts as making it. "Joshua Logan turned that into a great film. He studied with none less than Stanislavski himself." Looked like she knew he was the father of method acting. "Logan pulled some terrific performances from William Holden and Kim Novak. What was it like living there?"

"Typical small town. Devout, on the surface." She paused a second. "Abusive underneath."

So she was running away from something. Just like everyone out here. Probably her father couldn't keep his hands off her.

I was like, what else you got. My own dear Pappy used to get a little liquored up and whup the life breath out of me, when he could catch me. Before he finally run off.

"What about you, Mr. Jarrett? I'm trying to get into acting, and you gave it up. Kind of

like William Holden's *Picnic* character Hal. Why did you quit?"

I didn't *quit*. Everyone turned their backs on me. Even Eliot Bernstein. Eliot wouldn't see me or take my calls. After a while I stopped trying, and we never spoke again.

But marks weren't supposed to ask personal questions. They didn't deserve to. Marks weren't real people, not with their naked lusting for stardom or the New York Times best seller list.

So blow her off. "I felt it was more gratifying to help other people make it."

She made a little pout. A pretty good little pout, actually.

But what this girl really had going for her was a shelf that verged on continental. She'd come around, once she understood how you parlayed assets like that to realize your ambitions.

It was time to send her to a photographer for her "publicity stills." Pick a guy willing to start slow with bikini shots before graduating her to the porn. She was a natural. And Aladdin Literary and Talent Agency



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would get a thousand bucks finder's fee for every blue movie she made.

#

After lunch I got interrupted writing out my monthly anonymous donation to the Screen Actor's Guild Foundation when my personal assistant said my Novelist Development Division director wanted some

face time. I said sure, as long as it could be during my hot stone massage.

"Hey, Nick. What's the problem?"

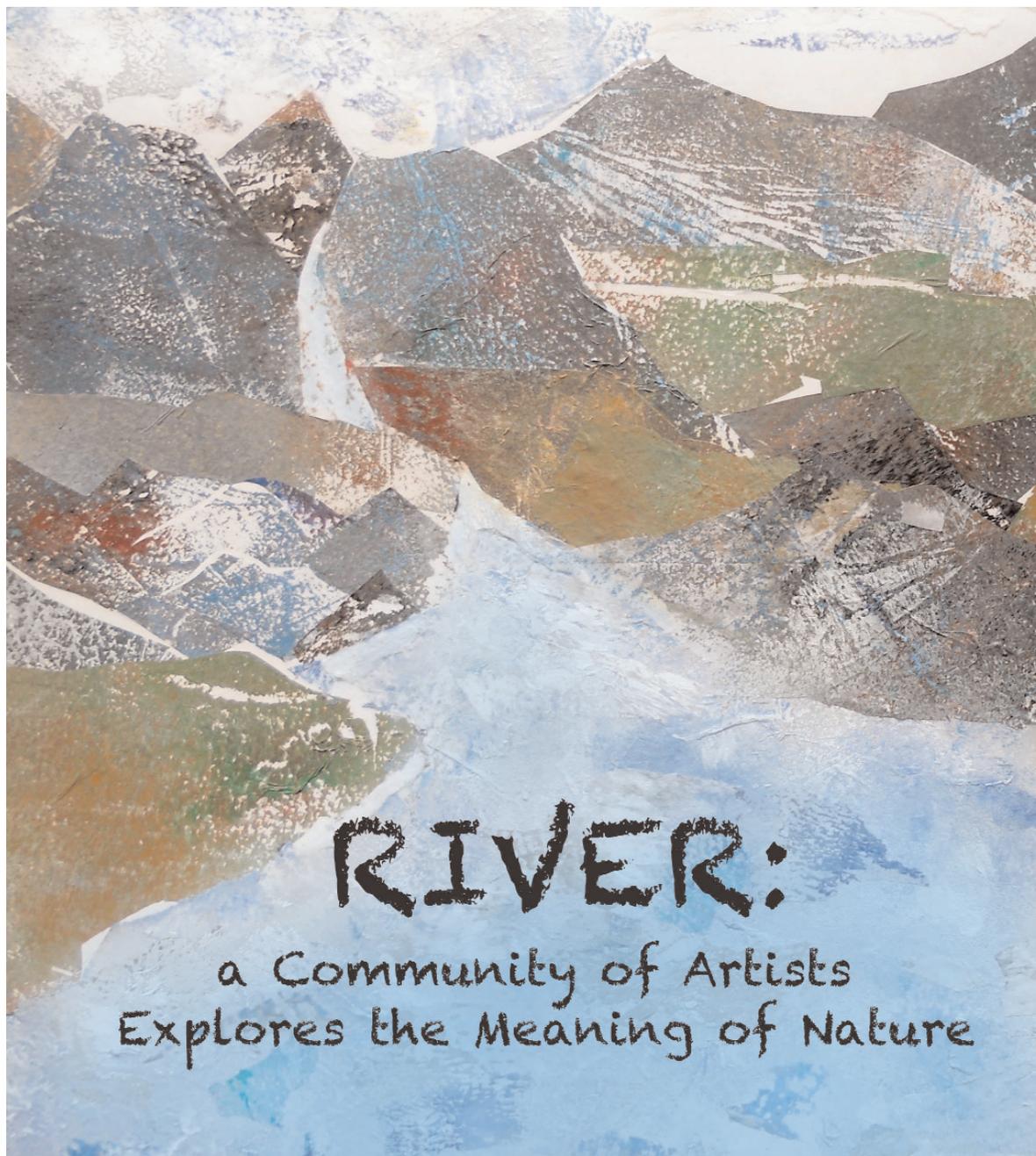
"It's The Old Drunk. He's complaining he's not getting enough."

"What does he think this is, an escort service? Just because he wrote a couple of best sellers

thirty years ago."

"Maybe," Nick said.

The masseur placed smooth heated stones on my chakra centers—brow, throat, chest, abdomen, and groin. "Let's see, why not ring up a couple of your comely wench clients. Say The Old Drunk loves their manuscripts. Wants to meet them in person. Might give them a blurb



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# The Blotter

for their covers.”

“OK, that’ll work,” Nick said, then hesitated. “And there’s something else. One of the marks. He’s done everything we asked him to do.”

“How much have we taken him for?”

“Fifty thousand.”

“So what’s the problem? Is he going to sue?” We had a law firm on retainer. Very expensive, very good. So good they were even more expensive for the plaintiffs. Most of them ran out of money long before they ever made it to court.

“No, nothing like that. The problem is I just don’t know what else to charge him for.”

I turned over so a different set of stones could be placed in parallel rows alongside my spine. “Really. He’s done the Book Doctor?”

“Yep, and the Writer’s Workshop, and the Novelist’s Retreat. The Virtual Critique Group. Story editing and line editing. Finding Your Voice, Conflict In Every Line, Setting It Right, Pacing Made Simple. He’s implemented every change we requested.”

“Set him up with The Old Drunk for mentoring?”

“Last year.”

“So, like I said, what’s the problem? We got our fifty grand.”

Nick eyed me. “Chino, the guy’s desperate. He’s some kind of hotshot ENT surgeon on Long Island, and you’d think that would be enough for him. But he’s not one of the stable ones. If there are any of those. This guy starts to feel like he’s not continuing to progress as a writer, and I’m not sure he’s gonna make it.”

One of our sister agencies had two clients off themselves last year. Things like that just weren’t good for business. “You ‘forwarded’ him contracts from the joint-venture houses?”

“Of course. He says that’s nothing more than vanity publishing. He wants to be a real author.”

I thought for a minute. Nick had been a client, fairly early after Aladdin got into the novelist business, the first client to realize we were making our money off him and just going through the motions trying to sell his novel. Eventually he’d

become philosophical about it—none of the other agents had even pretended they would try.

Plus they made him feel lousy about himself to boot. We were nice. In the end all Nick asked for was a piece of the action. “What’s the surgeon’s book about?”

“Formulaic. Noble doctor. Evil drug company. Boring dreck.”

Too bad. There was only one thing left to do. “Tell him the book stinks, and no one will buy it. You can’t edit a flawed premise. Tell him to write another one. Say lots of famous authors couldn’t sell their first novels. With all he’s learned the second one should be much better, and then we’ll see.”

Nick was staring at me now.

“What’s the matter?” I asked.

“That’s actually good advice. It’s not like you.”

“No?”

“No, you usually quote Fields—’never give a sucker an even break’—and tell me to think up a new scam.”

“Yeah well,” I said. Nick

## Best In Show



I'M GOING TO GET MY SPINE STRAIGHTENED... AND TWISTED...



## by Phil Juliano



might be thinking I was going soft, so I added, “This sucker could be good for another fifty.”

#

Late that afternoon I got a call from the photographer. Gilda Forester had refused even to take her top off. Plus she was on her way over. I told my personal assistant to say I was out.

I was leading an acting class of six young studlets through the ‘Contender’ scene from *On The Waterfront* when the door crashed open. That doll face could really do anger. And she was shaking all over.

“What do you mean, sending me to that scumbag?” Gilda said. Her bosom was pushed up by a studded bustier, and the trembling made little ripples in the flesh. “I came here to work in legitimate film! In good roles that would help people see the world differently, see themselves differently. This body is my ticket there, and I’m not going to defile it. I’m just not.”

She was smarter than she looked. But she was so naïve.

“Listen, Gilda, beautiful women may be a rare commodity in Independence, Kansas, but out here, you guys are a dime a dozen. You need to wise up or you’re going to starve to death. Or take up waitressing.”

“No, you listen.” She’d raised her voice a little higher. “I’ve been screwed over quite enough in this life, thank you.”

This sympathy gig wasn’t gonna play in Hollywood. “Just because your Daddy may have

diddled you don’t cut no cachet with me. Or anybody else out—”

“You’re still not hearing me, Charlie Johnson.” Her voice dropped down. “It wasn’t my father, okay? It was my mother.” Back up on the volume. “And I’ll be damned if I’ll ever let *anybody* screw me over ever again.”

She saved the zinger for last. “Especially not a bitter, old, has-been one-hit-wonder like you.”

And with that she pirouetted and was gone.

The guys in the acting class applauded.

What did they know, anyway. None of ‘em could take direction out of an elevator.

The only thing that really hurt was the part about ‘old.’

#

An hour later I asked my personal assistant to reach Eliot Bernstein’s personal assistant at Bernstein International Group.

“He says he’ll see what he can do, Chino. No promises.”

Another minute, and Eliot himself came on. “Charlie. Been a long time. Nearly 30 years.”

“Good to hear your voice, Eliot.”

“You broke my heart with that Younger twit.”

Eliot never beat around the bush. Just like the old days. “I broke my own, too,” I said. “I was just too dumb to know it.”

“You had talent. Gotta be some gray in your temples now—you could be playing the

President. Instead of bilking the innocent. Or preventing suicides. Whatever it is you do.”

“Yeah well,” I said.

Eliot was silent for a couple seconds, and so was I. Then he asked, “So what’s with the new dame—this Gilda?”

Whether the emotion was genuine or whether she was channeling, it didn’t really matter. Her performances were riveting. Even those no-hoper acting class bozos could see it. And the earlier dewy innocence gig was just as good.

“She can become a real actress, Eliot. She has guts. A young Meryl Streep.”

She didn’t just turn herself into the character. Lots of people could do that. She made the character into herself.

Eliot paused again. “OK, so maybe I’ll get someone to audition her. Don’t waste my time, Charlie—you know what I meant. What’s in it for you?”

The last thirty years came tumbling over me all jump-cut into an instant, and I couldn’t believe the epilogue, but there it was, tidy and irrefutable as a script doctor’s rewrite, and it had to be the truth.

“She’s my client,” I heard myself say. “I’m representing her.”

We’re going to make films. Good films that help people see the world differently, see themselves differently.



## “The Martian Mystique”

by Richard King Perkins, II

The antipodal mechanic stared  
at the tattoo placed high  
on her right ankle,  
symbol of Venus indelibly etched  
on a peninsula of delicate flesh.

He said-  
it's true,  
you don't need us men.  
You should kill us all.  
You'd do so much better by yourselves.

She laughed silently  
at the nearness of that potential

while he continued tinkering  
with the battery,  
quietly adding to her bill

fully confident in the invisible symbol  
of masculinity  
emblazoned from birth  
across his insensate, depleted chest.

# “American Nights”

by Darius Kay

“The stock exchange opened again today. People are already trading. Can you believe it?”

He swallowed and sighed. He blinked. “Everything will be back to normal soon.”

They were driving on the freeway headed to a restaurant before continuing to the symphony, and so it was a date. There was plenty of typical rush-hour traffic, but there was a unanimous feeling among the congregation of people and machinery on the road that made it difficult to be irritated with the slow progress. Purpose and hurry were just now beginning to regain their footing, which would take time.

He was tired of the bedlam, and tired of talking about it. He felt like offering his condolences to every person he saw or thought about, praying for their relatives and friends and fellow countrymen. But this personal obligation was heavy and strenuous to maintain. He knew that all of his apologies would never be fully respected or even casually reciprocated, much less sincerely. His name was Farid.

And hers was Rebecca. Rebecca was subject to a skewed, inappropriate persuasion of the whole event and its brutal aftermath. She held a covert fascination for the statistics and the real, raw testimonies that kept leaking

onto the TV and the radio and the internet. She wanted to absorb it all and spit up the most interesting particles imaginable to all her friends, who then would squint and mutter in agreement.

Many of these regurgitations were with Farid, who was losing patience with the reoccurring practice. “Do you know how many fire fighters were there when they collapsed? They’re saying four hundred. Just *incredible*.” Farid’s eyes would dart into his imagination, picturing the four hundred men and women. There they would stay fixed, while his head shook from side to side. “Incredible.” He had to adjust his mouth and eyelids to keep everything in.

Any time “God Bless the USA” came on the radio Rebecca switched to news, sinking deeper into the car seat, paying close attention. This never took away from her nationalistic devotion, however- her love for country had never been stronger. Yet the nostalgia that had infected the vast majority of the American population had somehow avoided Rebecca entirely, encouraging her to focus more on the new beginning that had eclipsed her shocked neighbors. Her discussions of relief efforts and fundraisers put her friends on edge, further confusing the people that simply wanted to hold

on to the ‘previous America.’ How much longer would they grab in the dark for their old, separate normalcies? She wondered.

Farid was anxious with anticipation, genuinely excited for a time of unhindered distraction. They had never been to the symphony together, as Farid had been with many women before. It was his favorite kind of date, where he could exhibit his knowledge as well as appreciate a new experience. His father was a violinist in a community orchestra back home, that had disbanded since his son’s departure. Farid valued the preservation of classical revelry and the romantic melodies of Schumann and Mendelssohn. They helped him during his rapid, jingoistic transition.

“Do you know what we’re seeing tonight?” he asked in his familiar nonchalance.

“No” came curtly and quickly after.

“I guess it’ll be a surprise.” Farid decided he would wait until Rebecca was in her seat, eager and positioned for an honestly fresh encounter. He didn’t want to reveal his expertise too early. He could sense her bridled patience and her respect and admiration for him, yet he could also sense other desires which he was unable to identify.

# The Blotter

The pickup truck hit them from the rear at a fairly substantial speed. The driver had just changed lanes and was approaching much too quickly. The impact launched the heads of Farid and Rebecca deep into the space between the front seats and the windshield. It sounded like a very enthusiastic punch to the back right bumper, and could be easily felt in the corresponding ribs of the victims. It resonated at length in the hollow of the cab, snatching saliva off of Farid's tongue and tossing it onto the steering wheel.

Farid's eyelids quivered and closed before his voice could react. "Shit," he said. He pulled over into the left shoulder carefully, making sure he wasn't leaving anything behind in the lane. The other driver did the same.

Farid parked but took his time turning off the engine. He stared into his windshield, observing the people that had eluded the accident and its inconvenient circumstances. A minute ago they had all shared so many qualities and experiences, and now they were strangers. Farid was alone. As a sympathet-

ic reminder, Rebecca put her hand on his rigid forearm. She squeezed him in reassurance, and opened her door.

Rebecca approached the middle divider and continued to the other driver's vehicle. He was getting out his insurance information when she arrived at his window. She kept her composure as well as she could.

"You could have killed us."

The driver looked up from his glove compartment and examined her. He had very pale eyes, which struck Rebecca as knowledgeable, but off-putting. He was Caucasian and sported a faded Atlanta Braves World Series shirt. "What did you say?" he probed in a jarringly articulate way.

"You hit us pretty hard. You could have hurt someone," Rebecca said. She spoke as if she were listing facts that in no way could be disputed, and her facial expressions echoed this mannerism. She expected total submission from the man.

He jumped out and slammed the door just hard enough to make Rebecca blink.

"What the hell are you talking about, you stopped short! I couldn't have stopped that fast!" His truck had sustained a good amount of injury, as had Farid's Impala. The man began to release his bottled anger as he explored the damage. His jaw moved back and forth as he ground his teeth. Light was diminishing.

"I wasn't driving, but we were going pretty slow. I don't know how you can think this is our fault!" Rebecca insisted. She was already frustrated at the driver's stubbornness, and her patience dwindled rapidly.

"Just... Shut up, you weren't even driving. I- Where is the driver?" He struggled with his words. An explosion was mounting, but both Rebecca and the driver knew this, and encouraged the situation. If they were to thrust their individual aggravations at each other they would do so with flourish and gusto. Neither of them, however, stopped to refine their futile retorts.

Rebecca answered his question with a stab. "He was shaken up. You really hit us hard, I don't think you really under-

## Best In Show



by Phil Juliano

stand. He could be hurt. It was a strong impact. How fast were you going anyway?"

The man uttered an "Oh my God" and snickered, running his fingertips through his pale brown, buzzed hair. "I can't believe you're blaming *me*."

It was at this moment that Farid opened his door and clumsily felt around with his foot for stable ground. He gingerly got out, still breathing heavily through his nose, still struggling to focus his eyes on something helpful that he could rely on to keep steady.

The man erupted upon sight of Farid. "Well wouldn't you know," he sneered. "The towers weren't enough were they? You have to bring your screwed-up ass to our country and rub it all over the fucking place. What more do you want?"

Farid wrestled to get out a "What are you talking about?" before Rebecca could stutter in shock.

"*What* did you say?"

The man shook his head with an off-kilter grin and punched again. "You heard me. Yep. You heard me."

Rebecca turned to Farid. "You have a mobile phone, right? Call the police." He reluctantly returned to the car, letting the storm pass. Again he was alone.

This left Rebecca to her own, brutal devices. "I don't care what you meant but I suggest you take it back right now," she spat, enraged. Her chin trembled and her eyebrows and lashes

came closer together in a convincing state of craze.

The man seemed to calm down after Farid settled back in his car. He said, "Okay. Let's talk. Patriot to patriot."

Rebecca sensed the wrongness in his tone and shook her head in disapproval. But she let him continue.

"You're a true American, right?"

She squinted and impatiently let loose "Mm-hm."

"Then how can you live with yourself knowing that you fuck a raghead? I mean... You should be ashamed of yourself." He snorted, as if in fleeting disbelief.

The silence that came after held violent implications, detected by both corners of the ring. The heavy traffic had subsided, and cars were now traveling at a decent speed. Rebecca focused on a single lane mark as it went in and out of view, flirting with her concentration. She reached to push back her hair in preparation for her reaction. It was a couple of impossibly heavy minutes before she decided on her next move, having fully studied through her shaken perspective the circumstances and possible consequences.

She breathed, "I feel very, very sorry for you." The words lingered and eventually thawed into engine noise and sirens.

"Oh yeah?" It seemed like the man had been expecting that very response.

"Yes. You don't know him.

And you think you know him. Do you listen to yourself? I feel sorry that you can't understand people like him. I mean that. I'm sorry." She walked back to Farid's car as a few police cruisers assembled around the two wounded vehicles. Red and white and blue revolved brilliantly and reflected on the scene.

Farid and Rebecca were back on their way thirty minutes later. They were very quiet until Farid gently spoke up.

"We're seeing *Scheherazade*. It's a symphonic suite based on *Arabian Nights*. Well, some of the stories anyway. It's about a King who marries virgins and then kills them after one night. But when he marries Scheherazade, she tells him a fantastical story that she never finishes, keeping him distracted from killing her. And this continues for one thousand nights, during which the King falls desperately in love with her. And when she is done with her story, he cannot kill her because he loves her, so she becomes queen of Persia. That is the story of Scheherazade."

Farid smiled. He looked over to Rebecca, who was unusually still, except for her hand covering her mouth. Her eyes and cheeks shone with oncoming headlights.

"Baby, what is wrong? Baby, why are you crying?"



## Five Minutes with Katharine Whalen



Marty and I pull around the cart-path to the back door. A gray cat wanders lazily over to us, looking for a backrub. The sun pours down, but the morning chill is stubborn. It's one of the last of a handful of days we'll look back on this July or September or in a few years when the heat wears us out so or the cold makes our bones ache a little more, slows us down some.

I have a shy grin on my face when Katharine comes out of her farmhouse with a tiny dog in her arms. She welcomes us, and carries the dog to a big sedan that's parked next to ours. The dog barks, she informs us, and it's better for her to be in the car. Small fry leaps into the front seat. Does she like the car? we inquire. Loves it. I wonder aloud if such things can be done with my fourteen year old without invoking the wrath of Social Services. then I remember what's on the back

seat of my car. Are you a vegetarian? I ask. She's not. I grab the carton with dozen eggs I gathered from my chickens this morning and give them to her. "My mom always said you don't visit without gifts." This inveigles a big Katharine smile, the kind I can imagine that comes at the beginning of a show, that makes audiences feel like they belong there, listening, watching. Then we're invited in, in that way that friendly people have of just leading the way inside, expecting you to follow them or not, but hopefully yes. *Come on!*

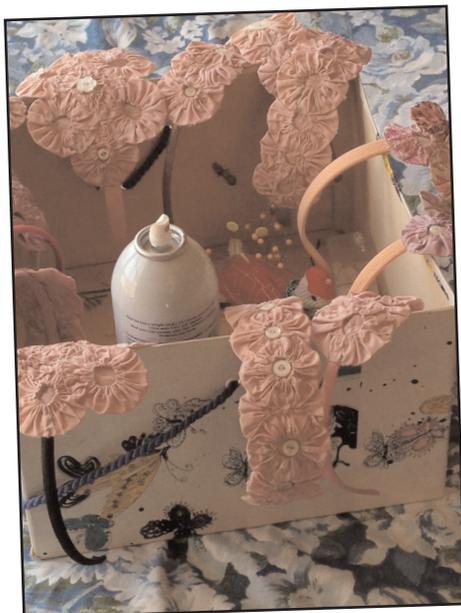
The living room has a glass-front gas stove for heating, with tile around the base. It's toasty here. Katharine sends us upstairs to her workshop. The hall doorway is old-farmhouse-low, and I duck and follow Marty up. I like old-fashioned a lot. I'm looking at a Captain Marvel comic displayed on a bookshelf. Behind are other books. Witlessly I have forgotten my



glasses, and cannot see all the titles. Relax, the farmhouse tells me. Make the best of it, say the sunshine and the Easter-egg trees in the yard. Katharine's manager, Jimmy, had tried to set up this interview for January. I'm glad we waited until Spring. It's a pretty nice day. I relax.

She joshes us about our drive out. Sometimes people end up in Mebane when they mean to come here. Marty smiles and tells a story about a lady in





chapel-veils and beads, ribbons and bows. Katharine lifts a 1920's style tiara.

"This is a rooster feather, as you may recognize. I'm going to get another one to go *this* way. I collect everything. I like feathers and I like antlers, a lot. Some of these pieces are from an art show I did this summer with Chance Murray, who's a local painter and collagist and we did...I kind of needed to cleanse my palate of making ladies hats and I wanted to make it a com-



"Some of these pieces, even like the one with the coral and this with the wisteria pods...they're all for wearing." The different pieces are sewn on, she explains, but not permanent. A hat can be made and re-made.

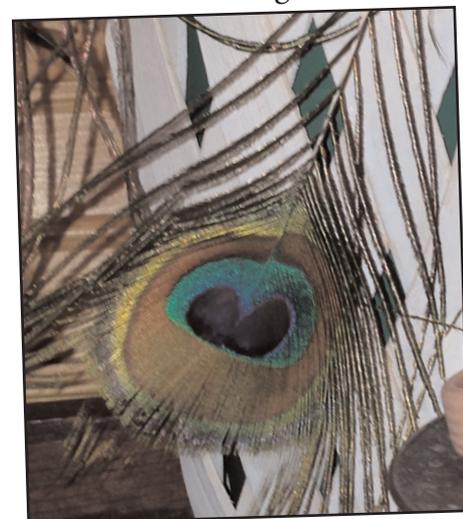
"Like this, for example. This is a buckram frame that I got and just trimmed it out. There's a certain kind of ribbon that will take a curve..." she shows how the hat now has a band inside for fitting the frame to a person's head..."

What is buckram? Marty queries. Katharine gives her answer – a type of cloth impregnated with stiffening in it. The



pletely artistic project where it was...nothing's going to sell in this bazaar and it's just art for art's sake."

Are they for setting on porcelain heads in a woman's...? I can't think of the word. A room where women go to get away from men, and just be women. There's no such place as a woman-cave, is there? I keep that question to myself, though.



Holland that set out to pick up a friend at the train station and ended up in Croatia. I chuckle. That's a lot of wrong turns and listening to books-on-tape. And good gas mileage.

In Katharine's workshop there is, aptly, a Singer tucked in one corner, a classy device with the elegant curves and gold-painted logo, and a well-polished hand-wheel (used for starting the motor, even on electric machines). Hats perch on roosts throughout the room, befeathered, flowered, with gauzy



## The Blotter

funny part here is that buckram is cotton cloth, sometimes linen, and it is also used for making books, something near and dear to our Blotter hearts.

She shows us some of the things she's saved from other uses, cloth from a chifforobe lining and lace from another time and place, all bits that can be turned into hat ornament.

"People used to save...everything. So part of what I do is to resuscitate textiles that are too fragile to be ever used again on a dress but you can completely use them in a hat. I spray them with gelatin and then they're stiff and they're..."

Flavored? Unflavored? I'm not trying to be stupid. Actually, I'm entranced with how she's totally become this person, this...un-mad hatter. I think if you let it, a person's affection and joy for their work can wash over you and give you a bit of that same joy.

"It's actually for milliners..." she says without chastening me. She lifts a small piece of headwear, "This is something someone would have done up for summer, would have done up for spring, if they had to go to a wedding they would have done something to it."

Easter! I exclaim. I love that some women still adorn themselves with Easter hats. Mostly big stylized pieces. I like little hats. My mom used to wear little hats, I say. "Like Jackie Kennedy." (I had no idea that mom didn't like wearing them, but did because it's how women

dressed. Ah, well.)

"Yes! Pillboxes. Fascinators, maybe." I like that – it's a type of hat, but it's also the name of her band. Katharine Whalen and Her Fascinators. Katharine lifts a delicate floral design. "These are little wrist-corsages I make for the Easter season." She laments that people don't dress up for Sunday church, either because they don't dress up



or they don't go to church. We dress up our little girls, I say, recalling when the girls were young enough to be attired like dolls. Then comes the time, Marty notes, when they don't want to be dressed like that. There're always drag-queens, he notes, and recounts about the best-dressed person at his church, who was always decked out like a 1950's southern lady with the dress, pearls, gloves and hat. Petticoats? I ask. No, not that kind of dress. More like a blouse and skirt deal, with a jacket. Ahh, we say, knowing that it must have been fun to attend Marty's church and wonder what the talk was about during coffee between services.

Do you think women

wear hats like they wear...jewelry? I ask.

"I think they used to..." Katharine noodles a little on that one. "It may fall more in the shoe realm, you know, because shoes are incredibly important." She explains her thinking: a fine piece of jewelry is something you might wear in nine-tenths of the situations you are in, but shoes are important for matching whatever it is you are wearing right then. "A hat is such a statement about what you are wearing, the same way shoes can be." We ruminates on the return of the hat, the retro styles and the appropriateness of headwear in all situations. Marty considers the old movies and how there was a time when a woman wouldn't be seen outside her house without hat and gloves.

"Yeah, it was dignified." But maybe there's no place for dignified anymore, she explains. Like cursive writing in schools. Her husband is a teacher, and he's said that there's no time to teach cursive anymore, and everything else that children have to know to live in our computerized world. That's too bad. What about the elegance? she concludes.

What eras do you favor? We ask.

"I think in collections, definitely – like in this collection there is the Russian and the 'Downton-going-to-tea' and then there is my weird collection. In the winter I got into the, sort of a flapper kind of look, and this 'Robin Hood' thing. I go in...chunks. So now it's Spring."

She shows her collection of head bands, the kind of pieces used to push hair back from the forehead – what we used to call “Alice bands.” She is ornamenting them with cloth florets from an old “yo-yo” quilt she found three years ago, back when she started. “It had a bunch of these just loose, and a bunch of strips of cloth and then the center was a bunch of these, probably made from the fabric of old dresses, flower sacks and old skirts. I took them and re-made them to put on head bands, like this.” She describes how they are made, and how well they’ve sold and how their success has been feeding her to keep trying new things, new styles.

“I love hats, making hats; taking them apart and putting them together.”

Seeing what makes them tick, Marty adds.

“Yes, definitely!”



Katharine says with enthusiasm. She picks up a beautiful old fur piece with a low crown and wide brim, and puts it on for me. A beaver hat? Possibly. It has the right...what is the word? Warp?

Woof? The fur lays in a particular way so that it catches light just so.

“It came with a stole, which I think is marabou, which I’ve been taking apart and making into these.” She shows the little head-pieces that look like ornaments for beautiful hair. The fur hat, though, it belongs on her. She has the eyes and cheekbones for it. Of course, she also needs to be carefully ascending the ramp of the S. S. United States for a bit of trans-oceanic gin-rickeying.

We look more, and talk about how she’s become engrossed in how things are made, how the details are done, over the past three years. She shows us how to sew a yo-yo. Like a flower-blossom.

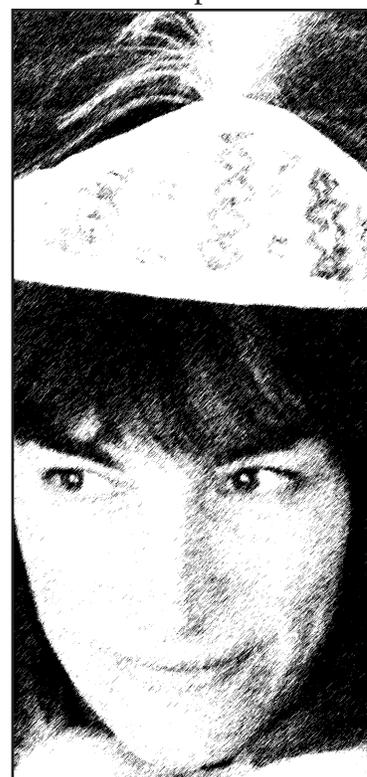
“This would have been a quilt, someone labored over it. We don’t know who made it, but what a work of art.”

Then I see the little label sewn into the marabou-bedecked piece. Tambourine. It’s a bit of fun that the brand name of her hats is a musical instrument, and the brand name of her music is a hat. It feels well-woven, her craft.

“Right now I’m making pocket books out of aprons, vintage aprons, another way to rescue these amazing textiles that don’t get their due anymore, because no one wears aprons. But people carry little bags.”

She invites us downstairs for coffee. The kitchen is warm, sunny. Welcoming. Out the window is

a little horse – not a Shetland pony, just a little horse – in a small fenced-in pasture. And a



billy-goat. We go outside to pay our respects while the coffee brews. It’s a great spot, this house – there’s a canted window upstairs where we’ve just been and I take a snapshot of it – and this yard with its magnolias and quiet and sweet old farm-cats wandering around and the comedic duo of goat and little horse. Katharine’s having a hat-show later and we know she needs to get back to work, but she calls us back in for a cuppa. We sit at her kitchen table and laugh and talk. Coffee made with hospitality on a still-cool sunny morning out in the country is a good thing, isn’t it?



Three by John Grey

## "The End of Whaling"

No whaling boats, stained with blood,  
dripping with oil, enter this harbor.  
The church still points its harpoon spire  
towards the belly of the clouds.  
But hands ring bells. They don't toss spears.  
Springs thaw the marinas, melt the hills.  
Winds invigorate the sails, free the motors.  
Leaves bud on tree branches,  
become schools of fish in the sea.

No flailed carcass on the fishery floor,  
no sheets of white blubber,  
no bones the size of coral isles.  
Leviathan returns to his Sunday sermon roots.  
A good catch deals in numbers not myth.  
The village resurrects blade of grass  
by flower by children running on the green.  
The plenty for all includes humpback as well.

The old ways are scratched in scrimshaw,  
tacked to the walls of seaman's missions.  
The even older cling to their Old Testament  
like a life-raft in rough seas.  
Good catch, throbbing nets, slapping docks.  
No whalers in the bars tonight,  
just those who trawl out on the banks.  
The town would rather raise a glass  
than lower the beast, the boom.



## Ten Years of “The Blotter” Magazine

(or,

“Somewhere in Heaven, Harold Ross<sup>1</sup> is Watching Us  
and Laughing His Ass Off”)

~~~~~

(Ten years?? Damn. How have we maintained this kind of crazy for that long?)

Hi, everyone. I’m Marty Smith, *The Blotter’s* Publisher-at-Large; or as a gangster in a Raymond Chandler novel might’ve phrased it, The Sap With The Money. And yes, ten years ago (actually more like eleven; it took until April ’03 for us to get our act together), my buddy Rick Ramirez, owner of Temple Ball Studios, a performance space / art gallery / head shop where the Milltown Restaurant is now, in Carrboro – Rick got me and our first editor Johnny Pence together and said “Hey, kids, let’s put on a magazine!”

What does a Publisher-at-Large do? (and am i truly Large? No; except after Thanksgiving dinner at my husband’s Mama’s house.) I keep the books; make sure our 501-c-3 status stays current and that we don’t do anything to disturb the IRS in its Smaug-like repose; update our membership in things like the Council of Literary Magazines & Presses and the N.C. Center for Nonprofits. I keep track of which ads go in what issues, and of which advertisers have, or haven’t, paid. I oversee our delivery people in the various cities; and for much of these ten years did the Durham and Raleigh routes myself. I intermittently call everyone together for something resembling a board meeting, and try to keep it in something resembling order. I occasionally get yelled at by total strangers, like the redneck steakhouse owner in a certain mountain town, who breathed threats and murder and lawyerin’ at us via long-distance, claiming we were “running off his customers.” (Traumatized me for a week. Haven’t a clue what his fecking problem was – did some klutz waiter put Worcestershire sauce in the A-1 bottles that morning? Anyway, I hope an Angry Cow steps on him.) I try to sell ads, and on rare occasions miraculously succeed. I schmooze people at parties, clubs, bus stops and other social situations, one ear always open for potential advertisers / supporters / distribution minions / eager young bright-eyed unpaid interns / etc.; handing out business cards to everyone hither and yon; even to small children (who usually eat them). Other than that, I sit back and enjoy the spectacle of Garry our editor Enjoying Himself Hugely as he creative-masterminds our rag.

Are we where I hoped we’d be in ten years? Heck; back then I wasn’t thinking that far ahead: more like month to month. If you’d asked me what I wanted *The Blotter* to be in 2013, all I probably would’ve said was “Self-sufficient.” Wish list for 2023? Again, “self-sufficient.” But also, I want us to be larger; like 32 pages. I want us to be in more cities, and more places in the cities we already reach. I want us to be able to pay more to the distribution folks who put us there. (And “ten years” is an arbitrary number: if it happened sooner, MUCH sooner, you’d hear no complaints from this province.) I want our book-publishing arm to be publishing books, like maybe the winners of the Laine Cunningham Fiction Contest. I want us to be surfing with ninja grace through social media, the Facebooks and Twitters and Google Pluses and whatever new whiz-kid things they cook up. However, I still want our center, the main Macguffin of all our MacGyvering efforts, to be *The Blotter Magazine* itself: a physical copy, that you can find – or leave – on the bus seat or steadying a wonky coffeehouse table or atop the toilet tank in a bar bathroom.

When I was a kid, we had pet gerbils. We fed them the usual little-rodent food, with sunflower seeds being their favorite. Every month or so I’d clean the cage, dumping the cedar shavings and asso-

ciated crud in a corner of the back yard; and one spring, out of that pile a ginormous sunflower sprang up, entirely of its own accord. We are a bit like that (though not entirely; i.e. our primary fertilizer is not gerbil poop. Venison chili and microbrews, more like). We sprang up unexpectedly and of our own accord, rather than being planned and planted in the formal gardens of Academe, in service of this or that lofty academic agenda. Lord knows none of us majored in Art Rag 101: I studied architecture, Garry worked for IBM, Marilyn was a small-town newspaper reporter. We're winging it – or should I say photosynthesizing it, to match the metaphor? – as we go. We're growing wild outside the cloister walls, in the same weed patch as the *Stagger* and the *Slammer* and the *Homegrown Music Network Catalog*. Our only agenda is to say “check out this author / painter / comic-strip artist / poet / roller-derby team / rock & roll band – we think they're cool!!!” Somehow, this kind of crazy suits me.

<sup>1</sup> If you don't get any of my pop-culture refs, go Google. We at The Blotter encourage self-education.

## CONTRIBUTORS:

**Pete Pawsey** was grown in the South Eastern corner of England and transplanted to North Carolina in 2005. In addition to the longer work-in-progress from which this excerpt is drawn, Pete has written extensively across genres ranging from experimental theater scripts to reviews and interviews with groundbreaking London singer-songwriter/Americana magazine Hearsay. He is the author of four albums of original songs, including the 2005 release *Difficult Third Album* and 2012's critically acclaimed *Radar's Clowns of Sedation*. He fronts the Orange County quintet of the same name. He also helps out with Carrboro's WCOM community radio station and books events for the Lilac Lounge, a realm of the imagination most often sighted in Hillsborough. The characters in this novel began telling him their stories in 2010, and have several important details still to reveal to him. **Steve Cushman** of Greensboro, NC has published two novels, *Portisville* and *Heart With Joy*, as well as the short story collection, *Fracture City*. His poetry chapbook, *Hospital Work*, will be published in 2013. For more information on Steve & his writing, please visit [www.stevecushman.net](http://www.stevecushman.net) \*\*\* **Darius Kay** is eighteen years old and currently a senior at Polytechnic High School in Long Beach, California. He has taken writing seriously for the better part of three years. Aside from writing, Darius is a cellist and pianist performing in numerous ensembles across southern California. He also enjoys sports and “quality” movies. *American Nights* is Darius's first published short story. \*\*\* **Scott William Woods** writes from the Connecticut shoreline. His short fiction has appeared in *The MacGuffin*, *Booth*, *Black Fox*, and elsewhere. \*\*\* Best known as a founding member of 1990's band *Squirrel Nut Zippers* (with whom she sold over 3 Million records), **Katharine Whalen's** work post-Zippers has ranged from her own musical take on Americana and indie-rock “Madly Love” to creating her own clothing line. The matriarch of Whalen's family, her grandmother, was a gentlewoman farmer and an actress. She opened her farmhouse to summer stock actors each year, and threw lavish dinner parties. Her grandmother and her grandmother's friends lived the lives they wanted to, and Whalen wanted to live them as well. At the age of eleven, Whalen began to wonder if she herself belonged to a different era, not the 1970's but the 1930's. She spent her teens rummaging through thrift stores and flea markets for 45 records and vintage clothes. When she turned 20, her grandmother offered to buy her a farmhouse or pay for college tuition, and she chose the farmhouse, filling it with her collections. Whalen is a chronic passionate creator, and the common thread winding its way through her creations – be it music, building dollhouses, Tambourine (her headwear line that turns vintage textiles into wearable art,) or her column on picnics in her North Carolina hometown paper – is a general contagious exuberance. With her creations, she offers up a raucous (yet, at times bittersweet) collage of news-clipping from the pages of her life; swinging and swaying, our heroic belter throws open the barn doors, and we can't help but join the party! \*\*\* **Patricia Crandall** writes, “I have published numerous articles and short stories in various magazines and newspapers. I have four books in print, *Melrose*, *Then And Now*, a historical volume, *I Passed This Way*, a poetry collection, *The Dog Men*, a thriller, and *Tales of an Upstate New York Bottle Miner*, non-fiction. I live with my husband, Art, at Babcock Lake in the Grafton Mountains near Petersburg, New York. Visit me at [authorpcrandall.blogspot.com](http://authorpcrandall.blogspot.com)” \*\*\* **John Grey** of Johnston, RI is an Australian born poet, works as financial systems analyst. He has been recently published in *International Poetry Review*, *Chrysalis* and the horror anthology, “What Fears Become” with work upcoming in *Potomac Review*, *Hurricane Review* and *Osiris*. \*\*\* Thank you to **Phil Juliano** for giving us a couple extra this month for our special celebration of all things Blottery.

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- Pet Friendly Resorts 

**OCEANA**  
RESORTS  
MYRTLE BEACH, SC

FREE Wild Water & Wheels Admission  
for all Oceana Resorts guests  
Available Memorial Day - Labor Day

