

Working up the courage to attend your party
Edward Ahern, Optimism One, George Sparling,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE



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FRONT COVER, "...make it a double"
by Phil Juliano.

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"Thirty-three Chickens, a love story"

The call came at six in the blessed morning, and if it were anything else, I would wake with that kind of instant anger first stirred up in boot-camp, when the company commander throws a trashcan down the passageway for reveille. Such anger has a place and time, however, and it is that anger which allows youth to rise from sleep's stupor prepared to revolt in the streets and take to the hills.

It had no place, however, on a pretend farm of little chickens. Chickens do not know anger or frustration or resentment. Chickens know nothing of our passion for tracking time, just their own need to eat and drink and scratch and comment about things in their scatter-brained language. Oh, and crap. Chickens are big into crap. It's one of their best things. It took me a fair while to figure this out – a couple of pairs of low-top Chucks' worth - before I finally made an investment in good English wellies. Can't get mad about that, right? The call? It was the post-office. "You've got a package of birds." Well, that's enough information for that early in the morning, isn't it? A package of birds. Baby chicks. I had them home, in out of the cold, in a carton with a heat lamp, water and food. Peeping up a storm. Sat on a stool watching them until the girls had to get up. Chickens know nothing of time. They are creatures of food, water, sunlight and scratching.

They named them, as little girls will. Made friends with them, inasmuch as a pea-brained chicken can be friendly. Chickens don't do what you want them to; in all fairness, they don't do what they want, either.

I drove places, the girls to school, myself to the grocery or coffee shop or to a meeting about some such thing and I thought about chickens. What might happen if I talked to the folks at the seafood joint across the street – do you think that they might save me a bag of fries too old to sell? Or the salad makings that just don't have one more evening in the fridge? The hens would go nuts for that stuff.

No one had time for foolishness of that sort. No problem; I captured all of our own leftovers and gave them up. Chickens eat and eat and eat, and then they lay eggs. Good eggs, a full 10 days fresher than anything we could purchase at the grocery. Great sunburst yolks. Eggs to make you want to sit outside on a porch with your plate and set a spell. Eggs that made you believe it was a while back, some time ago you can't quite recall, but which makes you smile when you think about it.

As the chicks grew, I gave away the roosters. It is an unfortunate truth that roosters are beautiful and annoying in equal measure. Friends of ours, an extended family of resettled refugees, took them off our

hands. Call it partial payback to them from us for helping build the very coop the chickens lived in. The Family, it seemed, had experience building chicken coops.

Anyhow, what I might have cringed at doing myself, they did not. Practical, wise people do not look the gift chicken in the mouth, and can do necessary things. The roosters became good meals for them. I also sold a few hens – my amateurish mix of breeds was fun, but unworkable. Chickens will pick on one another if that is what they are motivated to do. I used the proceeds to buy more feed. I gave away eggs freely, to anyone who would give me an egg carton. See my generosity! Thank me!

Still, for many things in life, a person has to be vigilant. You can't take your eye off the ball, or it'll thump you painfully in the temple. I lost hens to dogs, circling the coop with tenacity until they can no longer stand the standoff and must tear at the wire. Opossums, climbing atop the netting and waiting for a foolish bird to roost within paw's reach. This is the nature of such things. They are difficult lessons. But I made the pretend-farmer's first mistake - you should not fall in love with your flock. You mustn't make friends with a pretty bird. And so, the final straw for me came this fall, a pack of raccoons greedy and ready for blood.

Nothing quite prepares you for an attack on your coop. The wind spills out of your sails when you walk down the hill for morning feed. All of those things you planned to do and those things that you thought might also fit around your plan are dashed. A single raccoon will seek an entry. Finding one, it will take its chicken and eat it, then leave. Frustrating, yes, but as such things go honorable. Almost chivalrous. A family of raccoons, on the other hand, behave more like the Barrow gang. They will make an entry point, tearing open a weak spot until they all can enter. I think raccoons inspire each other into more mischief, like teenagers and militias will. The pack that got into my coop took down seven hens. Only two of them showed signs of being eaten. The others were...sport, of a raccoon nature.

I shuffled back up the hill, at a loss for what to do. One sad, mangled hen I could bag and bury, with appropriate solemnity. Seven threw me for a loop. Explaining it to the girls, as I tried to get them to school without meltdown. Not being sure what to do next – wherever the break-in point was needed to be found and repaired. Everything needed repair, strengthening. Armed guards. Disheartened, I wanted the whole problem to go away, quickly.

Let's call the Family, my wife suggested. Have them come and take the remaining hens. Yes, better that they become a few good meals, rather than torn up tonight by returning raccoons. Called, they came. I stayed up the hill. My friends even cleaned up the torn, dead hens.

Continued on page 15

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CAUTION

If I only had a brain, a heart, a home, the nerve.

"The Busted Watch"

by Edward Ahern

We'd spent our years together in guy-talk banalities, beneath which I think both Pete and I knew that it would end badly. The awareness of the ending started with a phone call.

"No, George," I said. "I haven't talked to Pete in at least three weeks, so I don't know what he's up to."

"Look Mike, I've tried calling and e-mailing him for over a week with no response. His voice mail is full. Something's wrong. I'm trapped into appointments until next week and can't get up there. He's your friend. Could you go up and check on him?"

"I squirmed for a few seconds. "Well, hell. All right, George, walk over and drop off the keys. I'll try to get hold of Pete and if I can't reach him I'll make the run up tomorrow."

I hung up and called Pete's number. The message box regurgitated on me. I fired off an e-mail that disappeared into the ether. George dropped off the key to what had been his child-

hood home.

The next morning I waited until the morning traffic congestion dwindled down. I had four hours to weave my way around trucks from southern Connecticut to Fall River, Massachusetts. Lots of time to think. Pete Harding and I had been get-drunk-together buddies, which meant we didn't have to believe each other, just back stop fantasies. We were unattached Caucasians living in Japan. Our limited Japanese made it hard to say anything significant to our neighbors, and we'd defaulted into closeness.

After three years we both bailed out and took corporate jobs stateside. Once I'd dried out and Pete hadn't we saw each other less frequently. Pete's fabrications had grated a lot more without the lubrication of booze.

Over the next ten years Pete spiraled down through increasingly menial jobs and spent what little money he had.

"They're throw away jobs, Mike," he'd said. "But once I get something decent the first thing I'm going to do is take my Rolex out of the safe deposit box and get it fixed."

He'd sold or pawned everything else of value. The watch was the only thing left he could brag about. And even that was suspect. I'd never actually seen it. When Pete had been threatened with eviction from his two room apartment I'd arranged for Pete to take care of George's vacant family home in Fall River. I hadn't been there since I'd helped Pete move in.

Pete's car was in the driveway. I rang and knocked at the front door but there was no answer.

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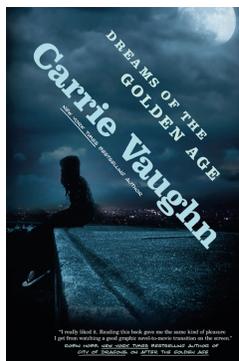
GUIDE TO LOCAL EVENTS

JANUARY 10-12 (Fri-Sun) Local sf convention **illogiCon** at the Raleigh-Durham Embassy Suites with guests of honor Mary Robinette Kowal and Lawrence M. Schoen, authors Laura Anne Gilman, John Kessel, Gail Z. Martin, James Maxey, and more.

JANUARY 17 (Fri) Raleigh's Quail Ridge Books hosts **Carrie Vaughn**, bestselling author of the Kitty Norville urban fantasy series, for her new superhero novel *Dreams of the Golden Age*. 7:30 pm.

FEBRUARY 1 (Sat) Chapel Hill's Flyleaf Books hosts **Wendy Webb** for her ghost/occult novel *The Vanishing*. 11 am.

FEBRUARY 21-23 (Fi-Sun) **MystiCon** in Roanoke, VA with author guests Todd McCaffery and A.J. Hartley, and media guest John de Lancie ("Q" from *Star Trek: The Next Generation*).



The mail box overflowed with letters and circulars. I unlocked the front door, but it was bolted from the inside. I walked through the snow covered yard to the back door. The key worked.

The smell ballooned out and pushed me back, a wave of throat rasping decay. I held my breath and stuck my head into the kitchen. It was full of flies, alive and dead. Even without breathing, the sweet/sour cloy oozed into my nostrils.

I slammed the door shut and dialed 911. A long five minutes later the squad car pulled up, followed by an ambulance and a fire truck. I wondered what the firemen would do. I explained to the cops who I was and what I'd done. One of the cops took the keys and reopened the back door. He backed away a lot faster than I had, but had the experience to leave the door open so the concentrated rot could dissipate. He turned to the other cop. "Jesus, I hate these." Then he called over the EMTs. "You'll need respirators and suits."

Four of them suited up and went in. A gust of wind reminded me how cold the day was, maybe five degrees below freezing. I went back to my car, put on my winter coat, and called

George. "George, hi. Listen, I think Pete might have died in the house."

"Are you sure it's not just the refrigerator that's crapped out?"

"No, Pete's car is here, and the smell is awful, something's dead in there. I called the cops. They're in the house now. That's all I know, but I'll call you back once they come back out."

The EMTs came out first and starting getting out of their hazmat suits. I gave one of them a questioning look.

"Mr. Marteau, there's a body on the sofa in the TV room. Been dead a long time. There's maggots and flies all over and decomposition fluids have seeped through the sofa and into the carpet."

The two cops came back out, pulled off their respirators but left the overalls on. The cop I'd talked to, Royce Burrows, called the medical examiner's office. We organized coffee from a nearby diner while we waited. When the guy from the ME's office showed up he and the two cops dressed up and walked into the house.

The Medical examiner and first cop came out empty handed. The second cop

came out carrying a body bag in one hand without leaning over from the weight. Once they'd stripped out of their suits I went over to Burrows.

"Is it Pete?"

"Dunno. The body's badly decomposed. The remains go to the ME's office for identification and a cause of death, although determining that will be tough. The heat in the house had been set high, around 75, which accelerated things. I turned the thermostat down to 60.

"We have all your contact information, Mr. Marteau.. Is there a next of kin?"

"Sort of. He has a bitter ex-wife in Oregon, and a sister he hasn't talked to in eight or nine years."

"We'll need their information. Once we've authorized entry the owner can go in and clean up. Whoever goes in there should get respirators and hazmat suits."

The second cop relocked the door and put warning tape on it. The vehicles cleared out of the yard and I was left alone in the snow. I called George.

"George, listen, they found a body in the TV room. Yeah,

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pretty sure it's Pete. The cops and Medical Examiner have been and gone. The place is locked up again and we can't get in until they give their okay. Do you have insurance for this? The cop said that the place would have to be stripped and decontaminated."

"Mike, is the house all right?"

"No, listen, shit, I don't know. The heat's still on, so there shouldn't be a problem with the pipes. Nothing else I can do here, so I'm coming back."

Fewer trucks clogged the road on the way back, but I missed them, they would have kept me busy maneuvering. Random thoughts fired off. How much Pete aggravated me. How I hated his constant lying about important people he knew and the important things he'd done. How I could be doing more for him. It was only when I wondered about the cause of his death that I realized I'd been thinking of Pete in the present tense.

I remembered the last fishing camp we stayed at. It was as close as I ever came to bracing Pete about his lies and as Pete

ever got to being honest with me. The dead dark of Canadian forest swallowed the dim cabin lighting just outside the windows. We were both drunk.

"And after I came back from Japan I picked up an MBA while I was working out of Hartford."

"Bullshit Pete. I think you got an MBA just like I think you really met Henry Kissinger. Tell me the truth, for Christ's sake."

Pete stared at me, eyes bleared. "What do you know? You don't know what it's like to be completely broke, to have nothing, to be able to do nothing. You've got a wife, a job, money."

We'd stood on the threshold of his purgatory, me looking in and him looking out, but went back into hiding, talking about the next day's fishing.

I had to stop in at George's place before I went home. He'd grown up in the Fall River house that now was uninhabitable. He deserved a face to face apology from me for recommending Pete as a lodger.

"What the hell happened, Mike? Pete sounded drunk a couple times when I called. Was he

an alcoholic?"

"Could be. He hadn't had anything good happen to him in a long time. His wife divorced him within a month of his losing his best job. He had gout and terrible eyesight, and was at least seventy pounds overweight. He'd lost his last job as a jitney driver about a month ago."

"He was broke? He always paid me."

"Flat. The only times Pete went out to eat was when I took him. He talked about a safe deposit box that had an expensive watch in it but I never saw it. Probably just another of his lies. Look, George, I want to help you with this. Pete was my friend and not yours. I recommended him to you. We'll take care of things once the cops let us in."

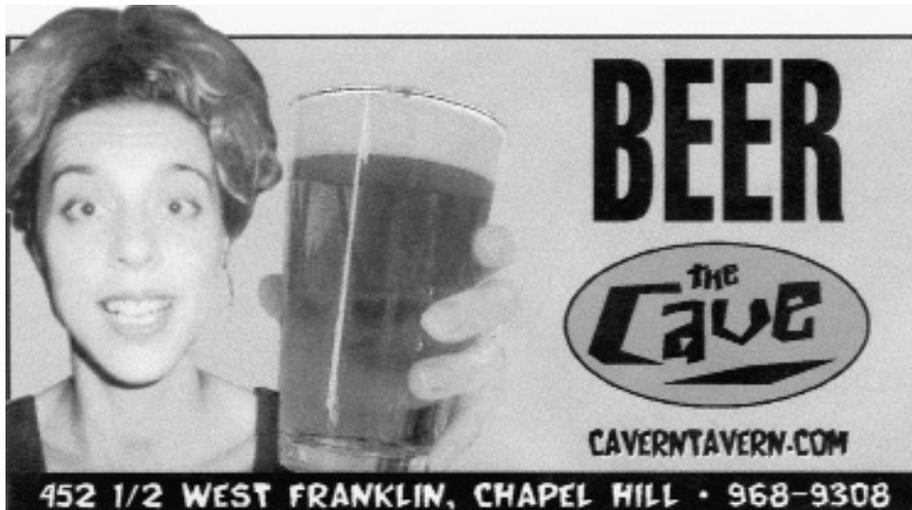
The next day I dug up Pete's wife's telephone number and the name and location of Pete's sister. I called officer Burrows and the ME's office in Boston and passed along the information.

The ME's office called back a few days later. "Mr. Marteau, this is Jennifer Carson of the Medical Examiner's office in Boston."

"Yes?"

"I've contacted Mr. Harding's former wife and sister. Unfortunately neither one wishes to become involved with the disposition of Mr. Harding's remains. His sister was, um, quite firm that she would decline to have anything to do with his affairs. This means we have no next of kin to work through."

"I'm not surprised. They hadn't spoken in years."



“Mr. Marteau, we need someone to assume responsibility for Mr. Harding’s burial once identification is confirmed.”

“But I’m not his executor...”

“I understand, Mr. Marteau, and it would be impossible for you to act as administrator of his affairs, since you reside out of state.”

“Pete had no money. Doesn’t the state just bury him?”

“The state may provide burial assistance, but we need a person to take responsibility for his burial. You don’t have to be related to Mr. Harding to do this.”

“Oh. Ah, there’s no one else I know of, so I guess I’m it.”

“Thank you Mr. Marteau, I’ll e-mail you the forms. Based on our initial examination I believe the police will let you have entry to the house shortly. One thing though...”

“Yes?”

“We haven’t been able to identify the body yet, because of its deteriorated condition. His dentures were missing. It would expedite matters if you could locate the dentures and forward them to us.”

“How does that help identify him?”

“We match the contours of the dentures to the bone structure of his jaw.”

“Dentures. Jesus. All right I guess.”

I called Burrows and got his okay to go into the house. George and I drove to Home Depot. They had hazmat suits but no respirators, so we had to settle for masks with filters. The next day we drove up from

Connecticut to Fall River.

I anticipated the stench, which made it worse. The mask and filters kept the flies from our faces, but did little to keep out the odor. Thousands of dead flies littered the floor and furniture. The latest generation of living flies was listless. There was nothing left for them to feed on. Soiled clothes and food remnants were strewn about the rooms. The garbage disposal in the kitchen was clogged with clam shells. We opened up doors and windows to the winter air.

The smell was worst in the TV room where Pete had died. An empty scotch bottle lay next to the couch, which was soaked in body fluids and retained the shape of his body. Pete had died while lying on his side. I held my breath three times to enter and reenter the room and shove open the windows. On my way out on the third trip I noticed Pete’s car keys and wallet neatly placed on a yellow legal pad with some numbers written on it. I scooped them up as I left.

George started gathering family items while I bagged up Pete’s personal effects from the bedroom and a desk in the living

room. Pete had organized nothing. Bills, diplomas, photos were all jumbled into drawers. I scooped handfuls of material from the drawers and threw them into a trash bag. I noticed two little envelopes for deposit box keys in the bottom of one drawer. There really was a safe deposit box. I loaded another trash bag with four weeks of mail from the front porch. I found the dentures tossed loose into a drawer in the bathroom and added them to the trash bag.

George was ominously silent, but compulsively reacted to the violation of his family kitchen. He spent two hours cleaning rotten food from the refrigerator and sink, and fly infested boxes from the cabinets. When we walked out just before dark the kitchen was the only room in the house that looked remotely habitable.

George blew up on the drive back to Connecticut. “How could he treat my house like that! Not his dying, the way he was living. Rooms filthy, food left to rot on the stove. The bathtub was filled with dirty underwear!”

“I know. And I recommended him. But God help me,



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he was my friend, George. He was a broke drunk with no job, and bad health problems. The last time I saw him he could barely walk. His sister and ex wife hated him. Maybe he just gave up.”

But George deserved to be let in a little more. “As his life got worse he compensated by fabricating stories about what he’d accomplished and who he knew. It got so I didn’t believe anything he told me. I liked him in spite of it all, by osmosis maybe, or because of who he once was. And God help me I still like him, for all that he did to you and the money he borrowed from me that I’ll never see again.”

After I dropped George off I was too tense to vegetate. I spent the evening going through Pete’s effects. He’d jettisoned

most of the records of his life. There was only one picture of his parents, two of his ex-wife., and none of his sister. There was no will or instructions on what he wanted done after his death. He had a few dollars in a savings account, and one dollar bill in his wallet. He owed about \$30,000 to credit unions, banks, doctors and hospitals. He was the most improved student in the third grade of St. Margaret’s school. He graduated with an MBA from a well known business school. *One for you, Pete, you did tell the truth sometimes.*

There was a severance letter from his last company advising that he was being fired from his minimum wage job because, for the third time, he had hit a parked car with his service truck. I realized that Pete must have

concealed the loss of sight in his right eye.

A yellow legal pad had handwritten numbers listing his income and expenses for the coming month. Without his check from the livery company he was below water by \$350. I called a recommended undertaker in Fall River the next day. He was nicer than he had to be, given that Pete would be buried with \$1200 in state assistance in an unmarked pauper’s grave. The death certificate arrived a week later in the mail. The cause of death was listed as heart failure, which I assumed was their wild assed guess.

After I’d talked again to the undertaker I called Camille, Pete’s sister. “Camille, I appreciate your talking with me. I know you and Pete weren’t close.”

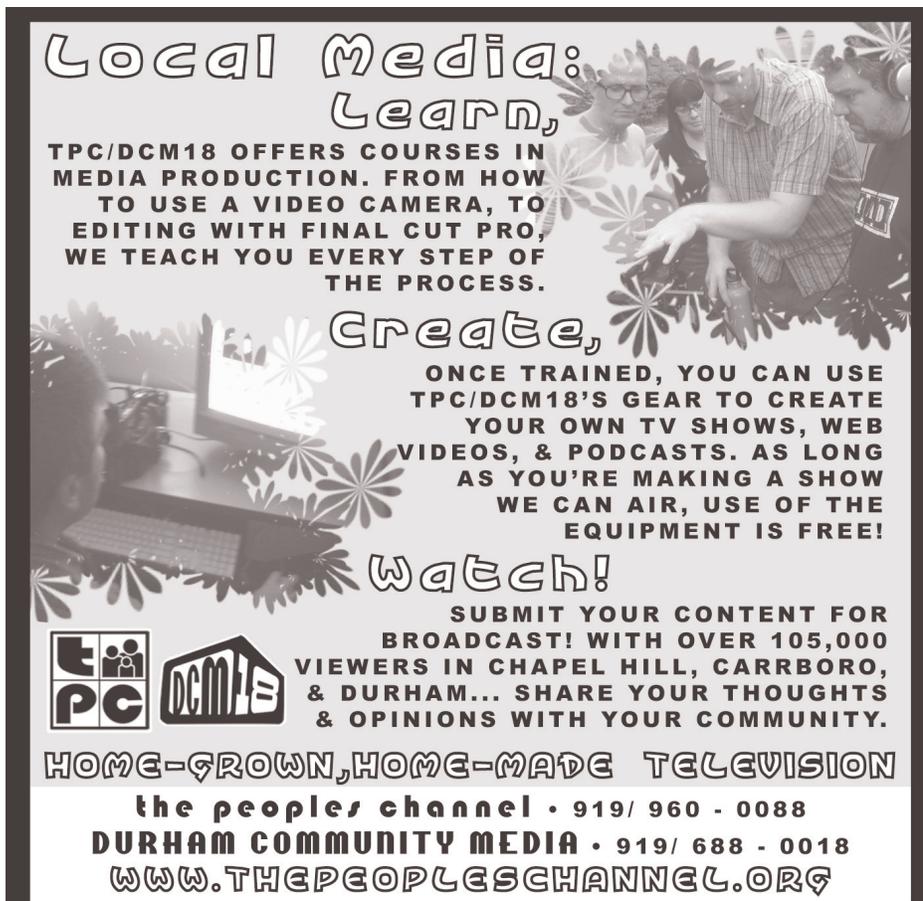
“He was dead to me a long time before he died. I don’t want anything to do with him, alive or dead. Just send me a copy of the death certificate.”

“Pete could be hard to put up with.”

Camille’s voice broke. “He was a thief and an ingrate. I took care of our dad and mom when they got sick and died and he never helped out, never sent money or came to visit. And then after they were dead he went to the house and took stuff. How can you be his friend?”

“I sometimes ask myself that, Camille. When we were drinking buddies we were okay with each other. Later on he was, I don’t know, part of me that wasn’t surviving, that needed protection.”

Pete’s ex-wife Rose was



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also scarred over. “Mike, I never told you, but Pete lost his job in Hartford because of his drinking. And he got worse. Pete was nice around you, but he was abusive when he drank. Even after we got divorced he would get drunk, call me and make threats. I can send you a little money to help with the burial but leave me out of it.”

“Do you want me to send his papers? There isn’t much.”

“No, don’t. There’s nothing I want. Mike, for what it’s worth, Pete seemed to be happiest when you and he were fishing together. It was like he could take some time out from a bad life.”

I scraped together some money from Pete’s acquaintances and another \$300 of my own and got him buried. I mailed copies of the death certificate to the creditors, telling them that Pete had died broke and not to contact me. Three of them tried to reach me anyway. I told the car loan company where to collect the car and keys. And that left just the safe deposit box.

Carol Groves was in charge of the safe deposit boxes at the bank. “Mr. Marteau,, Mr. Harding was the only signatory with access to the box. Although you have the keys you’re not the administrator of his estate, so you have no access. If, as you say he has a sister she can petition for access to the box.”

“She wants nothing to do with his affairs. What happens once the rent isn’t paid on the box?”

“We open it and turn the contents over to the state.”

“I’ll call you back.”

I called Rose first. “Listen, Pete apparently has a safe deposit box. The only thing that’s maybe in it is a busted watch. I can’t get into it, and from out in Oregon I don’t know that you can or want to get involved, but I wanted to tell you about it.”

“Safe deposit box?”

“Yeah. I’ve got the keys but only Pete could have used them. His sister could spend some money and get the right to open the box, but I don’t think she wants to go anywhere near it.”

“Pete had money our first few years together, but after all he’s been through I can’t believe there’s anything left. Do what you need to do, Mike.”

Camille didn’t hesitate. “Nothing, I want nothing to do with him Mike. Least of all going through the legal expense and aggravation of trying to get into a bank box.”

“I don’t know what’s in there Camille, maybe his will, maybe an old Rolex, maybe nothing. If you’re sure I’ll just turn the keys back in to the bank.”

“Do it.” Camille hesitated. “You’ve were a good friend to him Mike. Too good. He always thought he was better than me, smarter, better educated. Look at him now.”

“Yeah.”

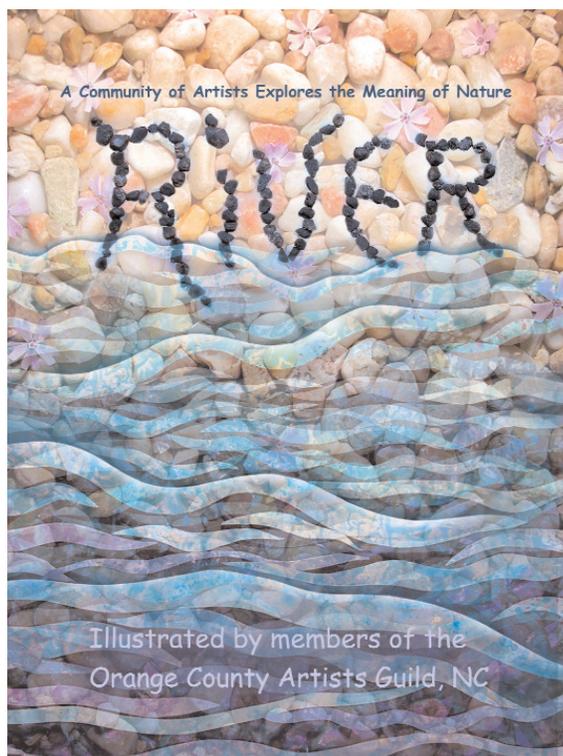
I called Carol Groves back at the bank. “Carol, I’m going to send you a letter with the keys and a copy of the death certificate. A favor to ask though.”

“As I said, Mr. Marteau, you have no access to the box.”

“I understand, but we should know what was in the box, just to settle things. Could you give me a call back and let me know?”

“I guess so.”

George and I spent three days stripping his family home of



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its furnishings, most of which were consigned to a dumpster. We bricked up the experience, and never mention how and where Pete died.

It took two more months for Carol Groves to call back.

“Mr. Marteau?”

“Yes?”

“Carol Groves from the bank. We opened the box. The only thing in the box was a watch.”

“No will?”

“No. the watch apparently is an 18kt solid gold Rolex. It'll get turned over to the state.” I smiled. Busted Pete and his busted Rolex were both being taken care of by the state. Better care than maybe I'd been able to give him. I waited a year, but no one contacted me, so I burnt his photos and papers. I couldn't bring myself to just throw them out. I keep his wallet in the center drawer of my desk, where I see it fairly often. I left the lone dollar bill inside it. A leather keepsake from a good friend with no grave stone.



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Call for Entries!

“The 2014 Laine Cunningham Novel Award” The Blotter's *fifth* Annual Long Form Fiction Contest for Novella and Novel length works

As always, 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 winners 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.)

Our pre-reader judges are handsome, upright citizens. Our final judge is smart, and can break a board with her foot.

Transparency is very important to us, and we make every effort to remove 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 November 1, 2013 and February 28, 2014 (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 addresses, 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!)

And we have way bigger prizes!! \$1750 in cash divided proportionally over first, second and third place. How cool is that? 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 – the clock is ticking and you should be typing!

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

Part One: It's been said, there's a world going on underground. A constant searching on the underside of us. Seeking new remedies, newer, sleeker plastic coatings for the truth. The newer, the sleeker, the more plasticky, the more choking the smoke becomes. Burning paradise beside the smoke and fire that chokes out the truth. Beside the fire we wait, paralyzed by the still water we are composed of. Forging on, the hammer beats our hearts, forces beyond our control hammer the shape of who we already are, who we've been, what we've become. No change, made of change, made of motion, we are still. Continuing the only way we have known. Smoke-soaked habit marinating our meat, our marrow, mixing dank juices in Liverpool. Liverpudlian liver pudding pate', cakes and coffees and green fruit gelatin, coagulating the blood into solid food. Drink in the black-blooded ink in which we write the book. Stamping out page after page of the same, typesetting or splattering unique mixes like a Pollack. Hacking apart the frame, feeling the pain. You are useless, I feel your guts coalesce. You are in recovery, i feel your every twitch and flow from your bones and colon to the nerve in your eyeball telling you this is real, this is your true story. Pinpoint piercing the fruit to the core sample, unable to eat. Cannot, cannot get to the bottom of it. Answers come in and rush through you too fast to pick up a pen and creating winds that blow away your paper and seem to whisper in a windy scream that only you can hear this once. A different wad of shit, incomprehensible to any combination of senses like the shit you took last time. Do you remember? Did you look? You already tasted it once.

What a wonderful base, what a majestic court filled with wonders that we've built up. Will you hate me when all I offer up is that it was worth nothing anyway after you watch it crumble away, yourself included, mangling in the mess of things we thought were all so neat? I am a fool to say anyway, as I am one of you, no clean cell, not independent, not rolling away in my neat capsule, still entrenched in my trail of waste with you. The strings connecting us when not embraced can be felt in the form of discomfort at times. All the ugly parts and giz-zards and scraps entwined, we've chosen to block out. And as I hold my full bladder I try to write more, but it's been said.

Joel T - cyberspace

“An Open and Shut Case”

by Optimism One

Evidence Item 1.0: In March 2013, Optimism One, hereafter referred to as The Plaintiff, travelled from Modesto, California, to Hot Springs, Arkansas, to visit Bruce Reeves Nelson, his father, hereafter referred to as The Defendant, for five days. On this visit, The Defendant acted like a child (1.1) and insulted his son (1.2).

Evidence Item 1.1: When The Defendant’s common-law wife playfully commented about having to “pry” the remote control from The Defendant’s “death grip” when he fell asleep in his recliner, The Defendant threw down the remote control and said, “Fine! You watch whatever you want.”

Evidence Item 1.2: The Defendant said to The Plaintiff, “You’re a vegan when it’s convenient,” after The Plaintiff had posted a picture on FB of a meal he ate that included french fries, the potato apparently not being a vegetable according to The Defendant. Note: The Plaintiff has been a strict vegan for twenty-two years.

Evidence Item 2.0: On The Plaintiff’s birthday, April 17, 2013, The Defendant’s common-law wife called to wish The Plaintiff a happy birthday, saying, “Your dad is in too much pain to talk on the phone.” That is, The Defendant was somehow able to communicate that he couldn’t talk to his son on his son’s birthday but was unable to utter four fucking syllables directly to his son.

Evidence Item 2.1: The Defendant WAS NOT in too much pain to hit the ‘like’ button on The Plaintiff’s posting of a picture of himself and his girlfriend, Cortney Webb, Witness #1, on Facebook.

Evidence Item 2.2: The Defendant never followed up with a phone call to explain what was so goddamn wrong on The Plaintiff’s birthday.

Evidence Item 3.0: On The Defendant’s birthday, May 10, 2013, The Plaintiff, with a sore back from playing golf every day, fought through the pain to call The Defendant, who did not answer the phone. The Plaintiff left a message, singing the birthday song with perfect pitch. Note: The Plaintiff’s two brothers, Brian and Kevin Nelson, also called The Defendant and got his machine.



Evidence Item 3.1: The Defendant never called The Plaintiff back, nor did he respond to his other sons.

Evidence Item 4.0: The Defendant sent a message to The Plaintiff on Facebook on May 21, 2013. It reads:

Son

I just read your interview with ms robins.i have a question about one of your answers you gave. When you have Time ,call me. Plus I haven't talk with you in almost a month. Would like to know what's going on in your life. Other than what little I pick up on this thing. Give your lady a hug from your old man.

Love ya

Dad

The Plaintiff replied on the same day: "You got it. Talk to you soon."

Evidence Item 4.1: The Plaintiff, waiting a week to make the call while continually wondering if The Defendant was simply in too much pain to dial the eleven numbers it requires to reach The Plaintiff and ask these mystery questions, called The Defendant and got his answering machine, leaving a cordial message that ended with "I love you."

Evidence Item 4.2: The Defendant never called back.

Evidence Item 5.0: On Father's Day, June 16, 2013, The Plaintiff read all the thank you's and miss you's and you're the best's on Facebook, a celebration of all the great dads out there, the best friends, the inspirations, and the supporters, wondering why the fuck he got the short end of the stick in the dad department, saying to himself, "Why bother?"



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“The Wall With Rothko’s Multiform Print”

by George Sparling

is broken only by his *Violet, Green and Red, 1951*, the vertical longer than the horizontal, I like its looming presence. The pristine white border accentuates wavering, separate colored lines, how it disperses what bears down on me; not solitude, that too intellectual a word for how my gut feels. It is closer to loneliness, being alone in a strange town though I have lived here for decades, but not so long as Mark’s life of sixty-six years.

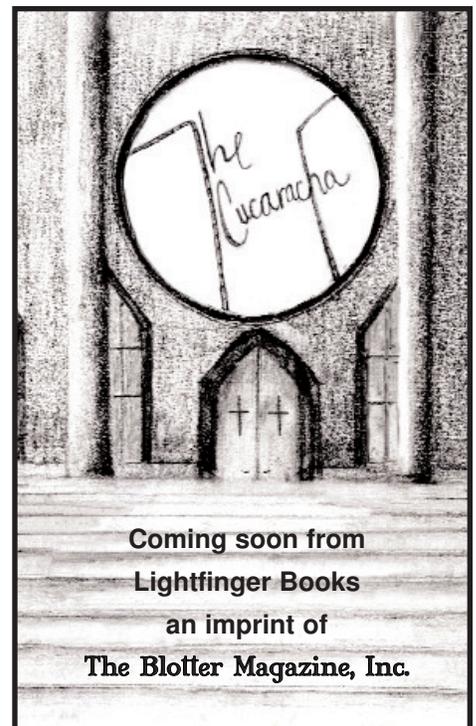
I have disposed of clutter in my life, the print the singular feature on an otherwise naked-walled apartment. Pleasure builds whenever I watch, yes, watch the print, connoting vigilance and keen attentiveness. I keep an eye on the loneliness factor, how it shifts surrounded as I am with blank walls except for the distinguished

one, colors inflating my courage to get through another day.

Rising with the sun, sitting in a rocker, I say, gotcha, and point my forefinger at the Rothko. I drink strong black tea; my ascending consciousness jerked up by the caffeine high lifts away loneliness. How focused the print is as it directs attention to me as I to it, both it and I no longer alone, observer and observed, out of which emerges connection, the living and the dead. How we need one another, how we inhabit shared spaces of color, wounds bleeding into both singular and diverse minds.

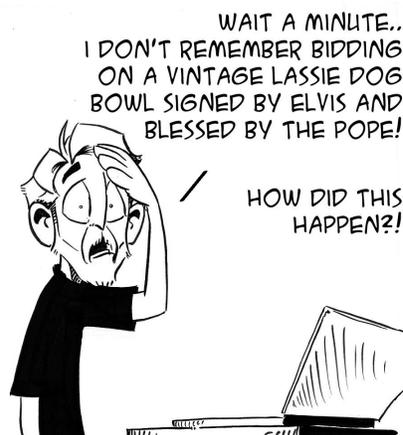
What else but to arise another morning and watch the static unfurl, avoiding dread that lurks behind the print, a barren wall. How claustrophobic I am. Yet, I

abound in Mark’s words about his work being “tragedy, ecstasy, and doom.” The art-wall is not one to resist, but to yield to possibilities, and dream.



Coming soon from
Lightfinger Books
an imprint of
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Best In Show



by Phil Juliano

Continued from page 3

My wife came up when things were done. And she told me what happened.

My friends, the family of resettled refugees from the country once known as Burma, took my remaining hens. Gently tied their legs with bits of twine so they couldn't run around. Placed them in the back of their old SUV and drove them home. They took them home because one member of their family used to care for chickens when they were all in the refugee camps in the jungle of Thailand. My friends were there, in those camps, in those huts in the jungle, for ten years. Back then, it had been her job to feed their chickens, get them to lay and brood, take care of the eggs. And for the ten years since she'd been living in the US, she'd suffered from daily migraine headaches; PTSD, probably. They had kept her from getting a job, getting out and about. Now the family quickly built her a coop for her chickens, my chickens. She helped. Got the bedraggled birds...resettled.

Each day since, she has awakened to the task of taking care of our, her, birds. It is something productive that she can do. Maybe it's even rehabilitative. I haven't asked if her headaches are gone – that is a fairy tale ending and irrelevant. The story is not about miracles, or even karma. Instead, I've asked how her chickens are doing. The chickens are good, she says. Yes they are. Very good.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

CONTRIBUTORS:

Ed Ahern resumed writing after forty odd years in foreign intelligence and international sales. He has his original wife, but advises that after forty five years they are both out of warranty. Ed has had thirty six stories accepted thus far.

Optimism One writes, "My work has been published by *Sassafras Literary Magazine*, *The Matador Network*, *I-Magazine*, *In the Grove: California Poets and Writers*, and *June Jordan's Poetry for the People in a Season of Love*."

George Sparling of Arcata, CA sent this little piece to us, and we thank him.

Phil Juliano has been cartooning for over twenty years. His comic strip, "Best In Show", is a visual interpretation of his daily life and struggle to find his place in society. He's a beer snob, baseball fan and avid outdoorsman, usually all at the same time. "Best In Show" is currently being featured in several newspapers and magazines and is syndicated by MCT Campus where it is distributed to college and university newspapers across the country. Along with his comic strip, Phil creates humorous illustrations for magazines and books as well as custom Matchbox car designs. He is an active member of the National Cartoonists Society and lives in Minneapolis with his wife Rachael and their two dogs, Spencer and Sierra. Tony and his zombie friends live next door. To see more of Phil's work go to www.bestinshowcomic.com



The Blotter Magazine thanks all you salty ~~blotter~~ for supporting us over the years. OK, get back to work!



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