

*A rich harvest of J.H. Herring, Bart Tomlin, Kevin Speidell,  
Leo Vanderpot, Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

# The Blotter

October 2014

MAGAZINE

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## "Tell me that you love me, Judy Blume"

Today at our house the last of the young-reader books went the way of all such things, or rather the way we would hope such things would go. In our case it was set on top of a brown grocery bag full of clothes. The clothes are too small for our youngest, or will be when they come back in season this November. The book, lovingly dog-eared, is too small for her as well. The bag will go to friends of ours, who will get the clothes (and book) to the right-sized children.

She had already pulled two sacks of books from her shelves a month ago, paperbacks from different series, light, breezy reads that entertained her in her last days at elementary school. Books about children having the same kind of life as her, struggling to understand what it means to grow up and work hard in school (or not) and make friends and lose them, and win them back again. Books about teachers that turn into (or start out as) monsters, or super-heroes in their underpants. Books about dogs, and cats, and lions and sharks. She sorted these out into "books I don't mind giving away" and "books I want to save to read again, someday, when I'm in kind of a nostalgic mood." Some of those pages had been turned many times. The characters were old friends: Ramona and Beezus; Junie B. Jones; "Fudge" Farley; Big Nate; Greg Hefley. The sum of fifty trips to the bookstore – to a dozen bookstores, over ten years. More, even. She has always been voracious, head-down in paper and ink universes.

I felt mean asking her if, now that all of the books were packed, we might make our donation even bigger and not try and store the second, nostalgia, bag? She hesitated. I pressed, explaining to her the benefits of moving books "you've grown out of" into the hands of kids that would doubly enjoy them. Can't they go to the library? Not always, but you can. Don't they go get their own books? Yes, and this is how that happens.

I'm an inveterate book-collector. Many's the volume I'll never crack the spine of again, but which sits in point of pride on my shelf. Why did I tell my daughter something like that? I want her to love books as much as I do – to demonstrate that love in the caretaking of her own collection. Because we are only allowed to collect grown-up books? Because we don't have enough room for two pack-rats in our house?

I told her the truth, as I saw it. That she would be able to make room for the new books she is reading, the bigger books. The ones that might also need more than one pass. The titles are hard to resist: *Catching Fire*. *Insurgent*. *The Wolf Tree*. *The Maze Runner*.

In the end – it really isn't difficult for her to understand the right things to do - she gave all of her books to the "book round-up" for a

local reading council. And her book shelf began filling with her new collection.

Recently, NPR reported about a Johns Hopkins study completed over 30 years in urban Baltimore that showed the key ingredients to the recipe for maintaining the same old-same old. There were no surprises. Keep the money situation the same. Keep the families broken. Don't fix these two factors and by and large the poor will remain poor. The commentators reviewed the report and jostled about the usual suspects: drugs, the slippery slope of crime, the oppressive complexities of the economy, physical and mental health, politics. All I could think was "read." Just get them to, and let them, read. That's how you change your own stars. You read until you like it, then read more, Read until reading almost feels like breathing feels; natural, effortless. Nothing else can overcome the group problems like the individual solution of knowledge. We can argue the nuance, pick the nit, but no matter how pitiful a system you believe Public Education to be, it is still free to the student, and reading remains something we know we can teach. It is a sharp arrow in our quiver. Have the children read. *Help children read.*

I know it's not that easy; nothing ever is. As I get older, I find myself trying to come to grips with the truth about facts. They don't always help and sometimes get in the way of taking the first (or next) step.

In the film *Enemy At The Gates*, a Soviet political commissar has a moment of enlightenment when he states, "We tried so hard to create a society that was equal, where there'd be nothing to envy your neighbor. But there's always something to envy. A smile, a friendship, something you don't have and want to appropriate. In this world...there will always be rich and poor. Rich in gifts, poor in gifts. Rich in love, poor in love."

If there is to be a war, this is the one I want my daughters to fight. It is a war they can wage with love alone, for they are rich in love. The war I speak of is against the lack of gifts, the fight that pits us as light tilting against darkness. Share your books, I tell them. Tell your friends about a story you just read, then hand them the story.

Tonight our youngest asked me if I thought she could read "To Kill A Mockingbird." There are approximately three weeks before school starts and she believes she might be able to finish it before classes begin. My first reaction is to recommend something else, something that she might actually finish. But now, long after she has gone to bed – me turning off her light, placing the cardboard mark and setting the book she is reading on the table next to her – I know what I must do. I must hurry and go and get her her own copy of Miss Lee's novel.

Garry - [chief@blotterrag.com](mailto:chief@blotterrag.com)

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CAUTION

*A Toulouse Goose can live for thirty years...*

## "No Fear Shakespeare, or, How You Too Can Learn To Hate Romeo and Juliet"

by J. H. Herring

A friend told me the other day his teenage daughter is reading the "No Fear Shakespeare" edition of Romeo and Juliet for school. He wasn't trying to provoke me (not any more than usual), but he probably didn't know that I have a certain amount of experience, unfortunately, with the No Fear Shakespeare books, including their Romeo and Juliet.

The creators of these books may in fact be well intentioned, sort of, but their "translations" often miss the point. If all you really want is to know the plot of the play, you can just read a straightforward textual synopsis. There are many available. And students *should* read a synopsis, just to get the main plot down. But the play itself is more than that, and therein lies the rub.

If you want modern,

"comprehensible" English, the No Fear books may be what you're looking for. Reading them will certainly tell you who's who, who says what to whom, and what the plot is. Tackling Shakespeare this way will also deprive you of the poetry. Does this matter? Emphatically yes.

Let's look at the climactic scene of Romeo and Juliet, when Juliet wakes in the tomb and discovers the freshly dead Romeo. In her inconsolable grief, she kills herself with Romeo's dagger. But just before she takes her own life, she addresses the dagger itself, in one of the great lines of the play: "O happy dagger!" This is rendered, in No Fear parlance, as "Oh, good, a knife!"

This is not merely a weak, bloodless prose rendering, it's *wrong*. It misses the whole idea of the dagger, personified, having a destiny of its own, to say nothing

of Juliet choosing to fulfill that destiny — and her own — all at once.

Here's the original:

O happy dagger!  
This is thy sheath. There  
rust and let me die.

And here's the No Fear version:

Oh, good, a knife!  
My body will be your  
sheath.  
Rust inside my body and  
let me die.

The artificially imposed line-endings here may indicate that the speech is in verse, rather than prose, but why bother? The lines aren't even metrical. Throughout the No Fear editions, Shakespeare's meters are unceremoniously junked, with

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no explanation.

I do understand, really, what the creators are trying to do (I was an English teacher once), and to a certain extent, they succeed — this version does get the main points across, in a watered-down, dumbed-down way. But so much is missed that I truly wonder what the goal is. Why not just read the synopsis? If you're not going to read Shakespeare for the poetry, why read it at all?

A little more, from the same scene. The original has:

A cup, closed in my true love's hand?  
Poison, I see, hath been his timeless end.

O churl, drunk all, and left no friendly drop  
To help me after? I will kiss thy lips.  
Haply some poison yet doth hang on them.

and the No Fear version reads:

It's a cup, closed in my true love's hand? Poison, I see, has been the cause of his death. How rude! He drank it all, and didn't leave any to help me afterward. I will kiss your lips. Perhaps there's still some poison on them.

We'll ignore, for now, the damage sustained in reducing the original to prose. But this "trans-

lation" gives no indication of how soft, how affectionate, how gentle, how loving, how sad, how ironic, how pathetic is Juliet's chiding epithet, "churl" — all we see is "How rude!" The student who reads only the modern version cannot tell that Juliet is not really angry with Romeo; there's no slightest hint of this in the prose. There's also no discussion of "friendly" or "help me after" — what does "help" mean here? Is it just "assist," or is there more? Does "after" mean simply "afterward," or is there more? Spoiler alert: there's more.

The prose version, of course, abolishes the meter, which matters just as much as word choice does. The natural stress is on "yet" in "yet doth

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hang on them” — the impact of the line would have been weakened, had Shakespeare foolishly written the unmetrical “doth yet” instead. You can’t learn this kind of thing reading the prose version.

Yes, teachers can require students to read the original text, and test them on it. But the fact is that most students will read the “plain-English version” instead, to the extent they can get away with it, so as to do the least amount of work possible and still get a good grade. They’ll never experience the real reason for reading Shakespeare, alas. And they’ll tell others, and themselves, all their lives, that they really did read Romeo and Juliet. Except that they didn’t, not really.

English teachers and students both will go through the motions of tests that seek to determine whether the student knows that (a) Romeo dies first, having drunk poison, believing that Juliet is dead, and (b) Juliet dies second, having stabbed herself . . . and will *never* explore the

poetry.

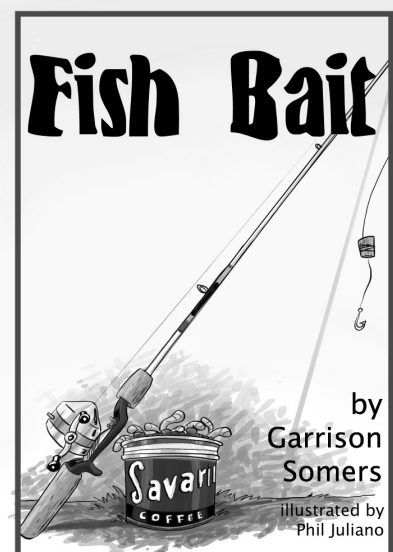
Do you remember this scene we’re looking at, in the wonderful “Shakespeare in Love”? Gwyneth Paltrow, playing Juliet at this point, not yet realizing that Romeo is right there, dead, asks “Where is my Romeo?” The distraught woman in the crowd, unable to bear the dramatic tension, involuntarily yells out “Dead!” And we quite properly don’t resent her helpless reaction — because the *plot doesn’t matter*, not nearly as much as the poetry does. We are, after all, told in the very first lines of the play that the lovers kill themselves. (And let’s not forget that Shakespeare’s audiences usually knew the plots in advance. They went to the plays anyway, and enjoyed them anyway.) No real harm is done, nothing is spoiled, even for newcomers, to tell them in advance that Romeo and Juliet kill themselves at the end. Even when we know the ending in advance, the drama loses none of its power.

It’s not the plot, people.

It’s the poetry. The tragedy may arise from the plot, but the reason the tragedy grips us, makes us feel it in our marrow, is because of the poetry.

One last example. The original has Romeo saying, to the Juliet he believes to be dead:

Death, that hath sucked  
the honey of thy breath,  
Hath had no power yet  
upon thy beauty.  
Thou art not conquered.  
Beauty’s ensign yet  
Is crimson in thy lips and  
in thy cheeks,  
And death’s pale flag is



Our intent behind “little books” like this one is to sell enough e-versions to do a print run. The print copies we will distribute in hospital waiting rooms, where often there is nothing useful for keeping a parent, partner or patient’s mind off of their current concerns. Our thought was that having something close to hand, free, to pick up and read for a few minutes just might help. Now available on Amazon.com - help support the little-book cause!

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not advanced there.

...

Why art thou yet so fair?  
Shall I believe

That unsubstantial death  
is amorous,

And that the lean abhor-  
red monster keeps

Thee here in dark to be  
his paramour?

...

And shake the yoke of  
inauspicious stars

From this world-wearied  
flesh.

...

... seal with a righteous  
kiss

A dateless bargain to  
engrossing death.

...

Come, bitter conduct,  
come, unsavoury guide.

Thou desperate pilot,  
now at once run on

The dashing rocks thy  
seasick, weary bark.

honey from your breath,  
but it has not yet ruined  
your beauty. You haven't  
been conquered. There is  
still red in your lips and in  
your cheeks. Death has  
not yet turned them pale .

. . why are you still so  
beautiful? Should I  
believe that death is in  
love with you, and that  
the awful monster keeps  
you here to be his mis-  
tress? . . . I'll forget about  
all the bad luck that has  
troubled me. . . Seal with  
a righteous kiss the deal I  
have made with death for-  
ever . . . Come, bitter poi-  
son, come, unsavory  
guide! You desperate  
pilot, let's crash this sea-  
weary ship into the rocks!

There's no discussion of  
Shakespeare's ensigns and flags,  
or why Death's flag is pale, or the  
"lean" monster (when did  
"awful" become a synonym for  
"lean"?), or the "yoke of inauspi-  
cious stars" ("all the bad luck that  
has troubled me" — seriously?

are you kidding?). The student  
reading this version will never ask  
how a 15-year-old could feel  
"world-wearied," what "dateless"  
means (here's a hint, guys — it's  
more than just "forever"), what  
"engrossing" implies, and what's  
meant by "conduct" and "desper-  
ate," and even "pilot" and "sea-  
sick" (as used here). The new  
"translations" don't even use these  
words, for the most part — the  
editors and translators don't seem  
to feel the need.

I understand what they're  
doing. I'm not sure they can say  
the same.



These immortal lines are ren-  
dered thus:

Death has sucked the

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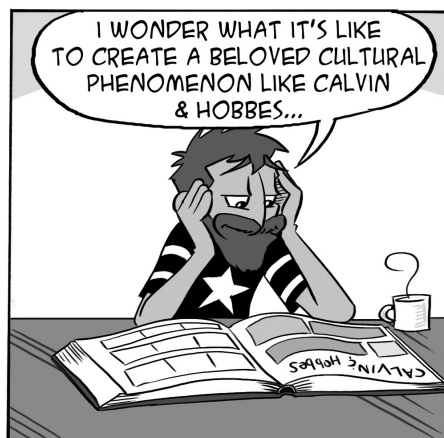
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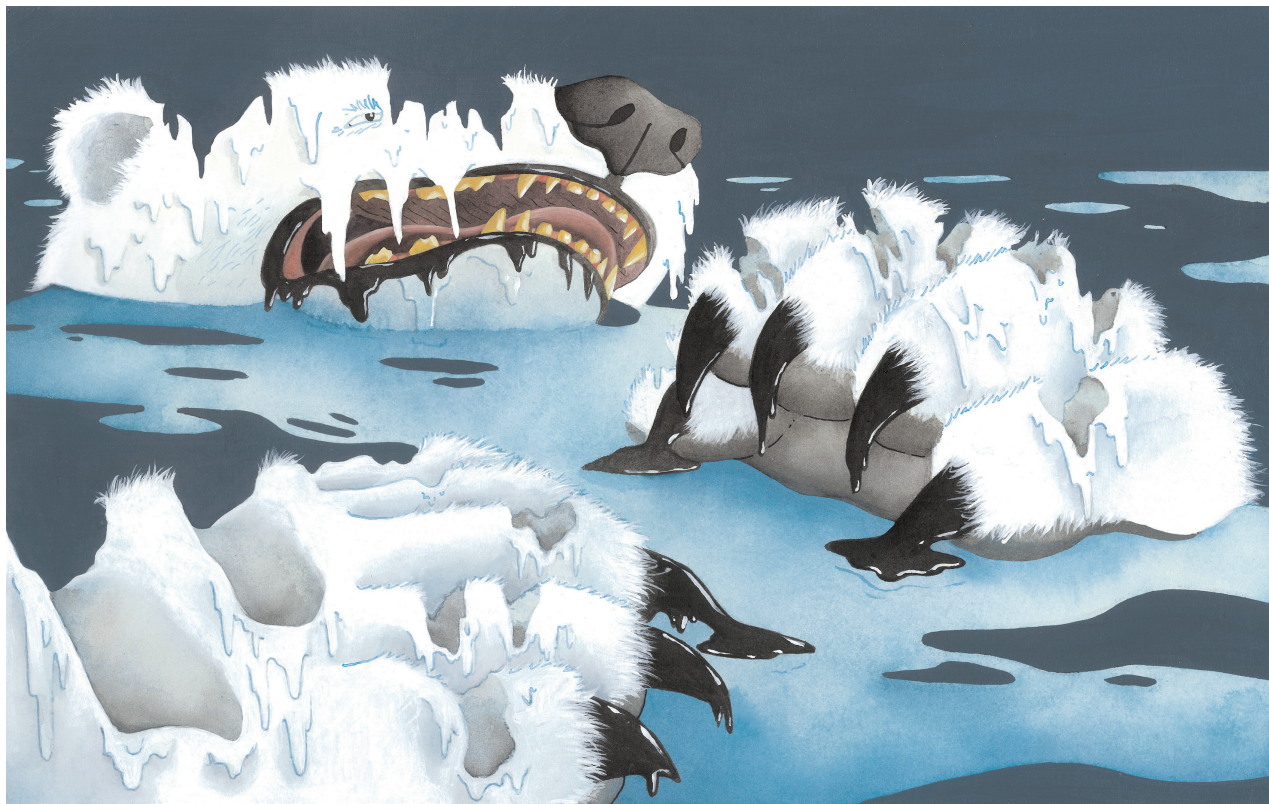
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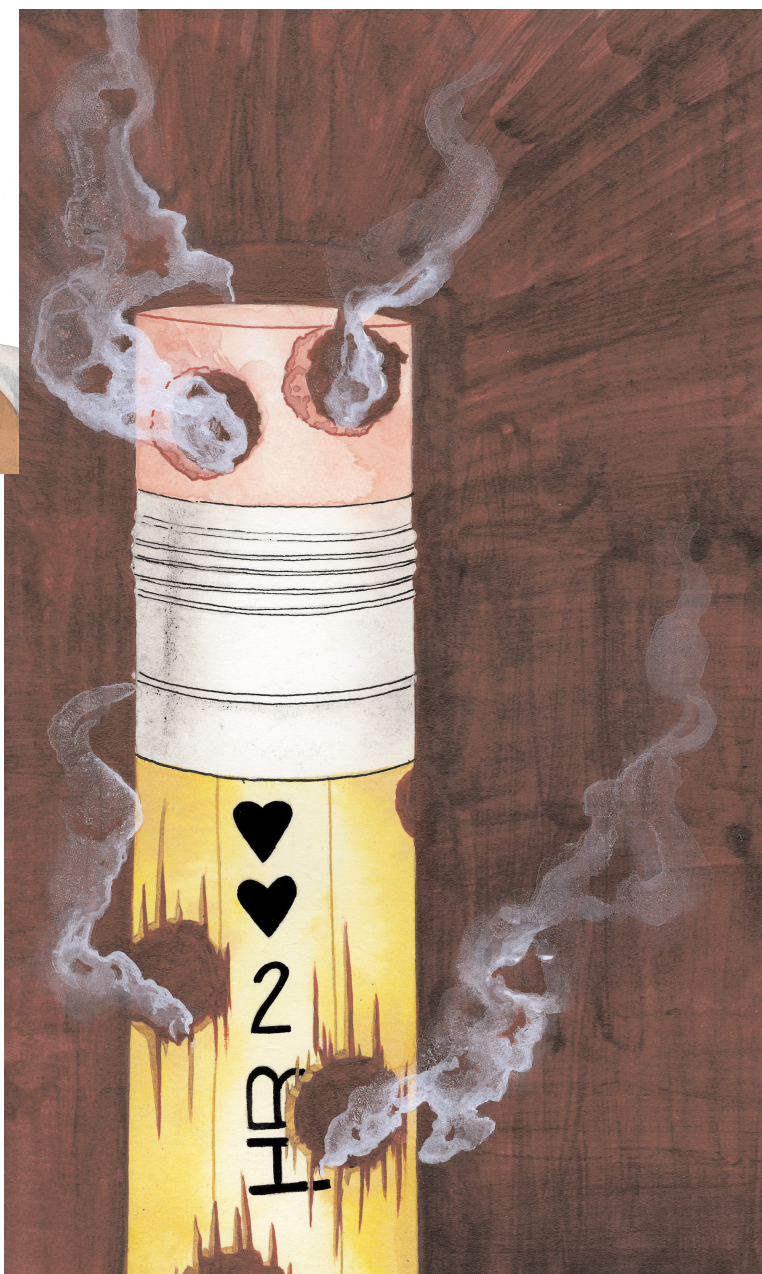
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As an illustrator, It is my duty to create some sort of clarity within my work, and I always feel the need to solve a problem. Whether from a conceptual standpoint, or through my materials, there is always an underlying issue which has to be solved. At times, this may be a representation of deeper meanings within myself such as the battle to live a meaningful existence. Throughout my life, drawing has always been the answer to life's problems, and illustration has given me the reason to solve my own difficulties as well as the issues of others.

Personal metaphor and symbolism tend to be continual subjects in my illustration. By using objects and situations which matter to me, I can further give the viewer a sense of my own personal voice and my solution to the issues given to me.



Through wet media such as watercolor, I have found that my work becomes as honest as it can be and close to the free form drawing we all have done as children. Due to the unpredictable nature of watercolor I can continue to work through the issues the media gives me and form a crafted and unique product. In short, I strive to show the viewer who I am through my work and provide a looking glass into my world.

## “John’s Lunch”

by Bart Tomlin

John paced back and forth among the café tables at the McAdam Street Market. Although there were many empty ones—booths too, he continued his patrol until a table by the window became available. He sat down as if afraid to make an impression on the cushion of the chair. He set his small paper bag (the result of 45 minutes of shopping) on the satin-scratched red Formica worn white at the edges. He reached in, void of any eagerness at all, and pulled out a muffin. He inspected the surface from all angles until he found the tail of the cling wrap. With his middle fingernail he gently prodded the wrapper until he could grab it between his finger and thumb. He pulled carefully and then began picking at other parts of the plastic that were matted down. After a minute and a half he was almost through. The underside of the muffin was completely exposed and he was

just straightening the wrap to its original quadrilateral. A stubborn little fold on one edge refused to come free of itself and he made a miniscule tear trying to persuade it. John knew then that it would be a difficult lunch.

John peeled the paper from the muffin successfully, laid it inside down in the center of the cling wrap and smoothed it back into a circle. He decided it was okay, today, if he didn’t flatten all the ridges with the back of his thumbnail. The smell of the banana muffin was actually making him a little hungry.

He held the muffin upright and peered down onto the top of it. He turned it on its side and rotated it slowly, inspecting the surface meticulously. There were nuts. He liked the taste of walnuts, especially with banana, but they required a grueling strategy that he just wasn’t in the mood for. He inspected the bottom. He then held it

upright again and rotated it sideways, settled on a spot and bit tentatively just where the top overhung the side. His objective was not to cleave any of the pieces of nut with his front teeth but rather get them encased in cake and crush them and the cake simultaneously in his molars. He bit slowly in case a hidden nut wound up between his teeth, in which case he would bite a little deeper hoping that another one wasn’t waiting beyond. He thought how much better having x-ray vision would make this endeavor.

After four bites, one of which was rather large due to a double redirection, he decided he’d done rather well so far and didn’t want to lose his appetite thinking about his teeth slicing through a piece of walnut. He placed the muffin in the center of the wrapper and reached in the bag to extract a fruity electrolyte-and-vitamin-fortified concoction in a clear cylindrical bottle with a 60’s mod-looking label. The fluid was pink and translucent. He twisted in his chair and lifted the bottle to the window from which the late afternoon light was pouring in. he held it high, checking for sediment in the bottom. There was a little. He gave the drink eight vigorous shakes, checked it in the light again and although the sediment was gone

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he gave it another eight shakes. He lifted the drink again and waited for all the bubbles to subside. He twisted the drink open slowly and deliberately, his fingers turning white with the pressure against the white metal lid. He didn't want the vacuum to suck the the air in all at once lest it create more bubbles. He set the lid on the table face up with its center exactly the distance from the cling wrap as from the edge of the wrap to the center of the muffin. He looked at the cap for a couple of seconds. His brow furrowed as he clenched his jaw. He looked into the bag and then stood and walked to the napkin dispenser in the corner where the plasticware and the condiments were made available. He snatched out one napkin, crumpled it and threw it in the compost receptacle. He grabbed another, wiped his fingers with it, disposed of it and took two more. He returned to the table and, before sitting down, he set one napkin down, picked up the cap, wiped away a slight ring of juice and, realizing that the seal was in fact stained by the contents of the bottle, returned the cap to its position on the table and covered it up with the clean napkin. He threw the dirty napkin in the bin and returned to the table, sat down and considered his drink.

"Is it going to do a trick?" sang a voice that sounded snide to John until he looked up and recognized its owner.

"Ha ha funny," he droned sarcastically. "I was thinking about this math thing I've been

working on," he lied, knowing that Jennifer would never ask him to embellish on any subject involving the relationship of numbers that didn't directly relate to ounces and milligrams.

"Oh yeah, Mathy McGhee. Maybe you could balance my bank account. You might have to use some 'imaginary numbers,'" Jennifer said, making quote marks with her fingers and altering her voice in admittance of corny-ness.

"That's not what imaginary—"

"I'm just making a bad joke, baby. Lighten up a little." She tousled his hair. "Your hair looks good that length— and I like that shirt. I tried to get Drew to buy some nice clothes, but he just has no style."

"I thought you weren't—"

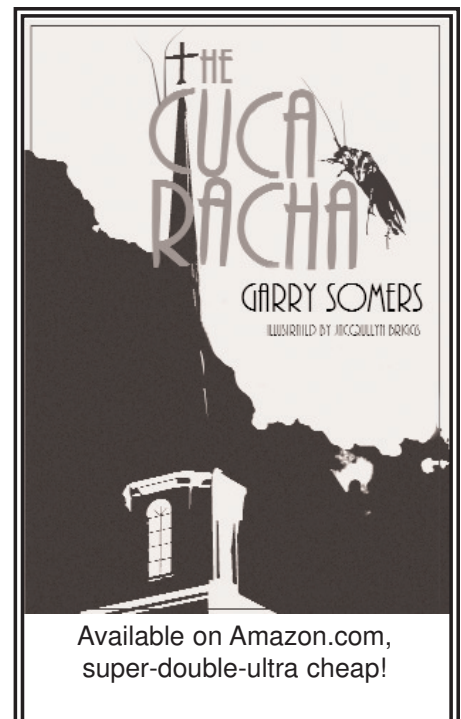
"Oh, honey, I'm done with all that...but I hope he's not so pissed that he won't let me come over and fuck him once in a while. Is that terrible?" She grinned mischievously as she half covered her mouth with a manicured hand. "Anyways, there's this new guy. He works at the Swan— dark and mysterious. He totally laid this line of bullshit on me, but it was so hot. I think there's a party for him on Friday. Birthday? I guess? It's supposed to be really big. You should come. Haaarmony might be there." She winked and twisted her middle knuckle into his skinny bicep

"Whatever. I said she was pretty. I didn't say I wanted—"

"It's a party, silly. No

harm in flirting. I know you like those cuuurvy girls. You just wanna dive in that cleavage." John looked around embarrassed. Jennifer was not a soft speaker. "Anyways, I'm late to pick up Millie. I'm going to try and smoke her up and talk her out of going to yoga and getting a pizza instead. I'll see ya at the party, yes?" She didn't wait for an answer— just waved, pivoted and glided out the door.

Through the window John could see Jennifer waving and blowing kisses at someone she knew in the parking lot. He made a mental note not to mention girls that he liked to Jennifer. He tried to think of excuses not to go to the party while he half-heartedly checked his email on his phone and waited to see if his appetite would return.



## "Four Roberts" by Leo Vanderpot

### 1. The Late Robert Springstone

He  
had  
ideas,  
original,  
but not often  
do-able: The energy  
crisis, he said, could be  
relieved by altering the earth's  
relationship to the sun; poverty  
could be eliminated by using all  
the writings of Karl Marx; athletes  
could be used to sell ideas as well  
as products; and he thought that  
Congress should write a law

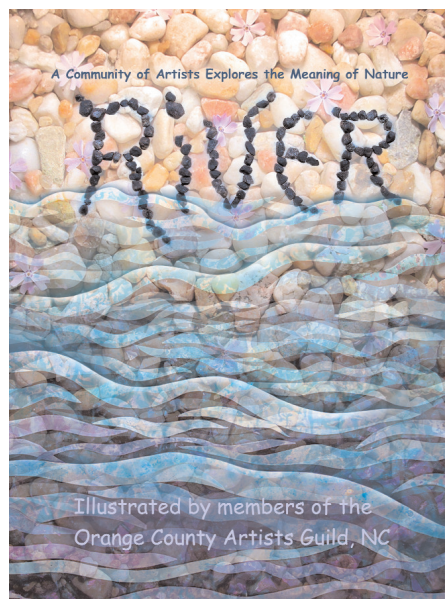
that would make honesty,  
courage and compassion  
part of the formula the  
IRS uses to compute  
each citizen's income  
tax. As it turned out  
he was too short  
for his own good:  
computer down  
he carried a ladder up  
to the public library late  
one night — broke a window —  
because he had to know at once the  
population density of China. Arrested  
and awaiting bail he was killed by a man  
in the holding cell during a brief unrestrained  
argument about his right to freedom of speech.

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## 2. Robert Visits Williamstown

The perfectness-way  
the white paint presented itself  
to the white world yesterday,  
visiting richness pigmented,  
showing how white  
clapboard can frame  
a symbol of the real  
living on the same  
street as the ideal,  
hell in heaven.

Today, home, a beer can  
on the front yard, used, empty.  
May they, please The Gods,  
pass in the night  
unseen, unheard, unharmed,  
thanked for their savoring  
the balance of life,  
enjoyment and movement,  
careless and safe,  
never less than blessed  
on their homeward bound  
trip to what is.

## 3. Robert's Consolation

"...disencumbering oneself of  
rubbish always lifts the heart."

—Alan Bennett, *Untold Stories*

What if it's a little less than seven salts  
in seven wounds for seven days,  
if when you settle in you can sit away  
from the heat for a few minutes each  
morning and afternoon with people like  
yourself you can talk to even if they don't  
know what you're talking about and  
you can't hear what they say to you?  
Is that so bad?

Away from everyone, sure, no control of  
the thermostat, little chance of a shower and  
clean clothes, a drop of a hat from any  
recognition of who you were and no  
becoming always going, all that waste of  
energy, which is part of the assignment,  
your last and only way to pay for what you  
did and then if its always too late, like not making  
it to the bus on time, the train of hope and the  
plane of life — but maybe, you know, people are  
not allowed to say "you know" there — and if it's  
not like that damned train ride from Poughkeepsie,  
trapped near four belly-button-show-er-off-ers  
punishing the language with adenoidal hysteria —  
then there will be no need to fret: There, there.



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4.

Robert's Frost

"That's the town down there," he says,  
"You can walk it in an hour."

His mountain is his and he wants Robert off it.  
Robert wants to take his hint, not stay and tease him  
Into conversation: too much work for too little gain.  
He gives it one try to prove himself an equal.

"Come down with me," Robert says.

"Not today." (A word away from one-word sentences.)

"When, do you suppose? "

"When? When there's someone in  
Town willing to help me back up with  
All the things I need up here and haven't got."

"You could go down with me  
And find a traveler heading back.  
Where one won't do opens up a chance for two."

"Well," he says, "My need for twos are few."

## CONTRIBUTORS:

**J.H. Herring** graced our pages back in 2008, but we've known him much longer than that. He's very smart about a lot of different things, but will only admit to knowing his J.S. Bach, red wines and proper grammar. Not a bad subset of the entire universe, if you ask us.

**Bart Tomlin** likes to make music, ride bicycles, paint paintings, write, practice Tai Chi and study Taoism and Austrian Economics. He works in bars and makes chocolate for a living. He was the Head of Production and part owner of *The Raleigh Hatchet* magazine years ago. This is his first published work of fiction.

**Kevin Speidell** hails from New York City; see his artist's statement for more about him!

**Leo Vanderpot** of Red Hook, NY writes, "Paul Zimmer was my guide in writing a series of poems around one name, a way to say I've been writing for quite a few years. Some of my screeds appeared on [nycbigcitylit.com](http://nycbigcitylit.com), when the late Maureen Holm was editor, and my poem 'Gerald' appeared in the first issue of *Anon*, published in Edinburgh, Scotland, and now also a fond memory. 'Fear,' a memory-piece about growing up in the Boston area, saw light at a journal called *Snowbound*. Two more look-backs were published in *The Revere Journal*. Other fiction and poetry have appeared in *Palo Alto Review*, *Lynx Eye*, *Seattle Review*, *Mid-American Poetry Review*, *Kit-Cat Review*, *On the Page*, *California Quarterly* and *South Dakota Review*."

**Phil Juliano** has been cartooning for over twenty years. "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. To see more of Phil's work go to [www.bestinshowcomic.com](http://www.bestinshowcomic.com)



# 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](mailto:mermaid@blotterrag.com)

My oldest daughter was there, plenty old enough to be in a magazine by her own discretion... but hey, How did I get a daughter old enough to use her own discretion?!? It's a dream, right? Let it roll...

Suddenly I was greeted by three brunette Playmate types, one at a time but quite, quickly and successively. There we were standing in a circle, the four of us. That they were brunette is of utmost importance, particularly that it was their natural color. I simply have never been a big fan of the whole bleach blonde thing. Plus, not one of them had altered their breast size. That these beauties shown up with each her natural hair color, and natural breast size was prominent. Actually, come to think of it, one of the three had hair of a deep, red; not auburn, but deep, red. So, I listened to what they had to say. My daughter had not quite shown up.

I had somehow entered a contest submitting a painting and a short written piece. I can't remember what it was about, but in the painting I remember you could supposedly see the Grand Canyon "from there". "From there", I don't know where it was, or is, but you could definitely see the Grand Canyon "from there".

Anyway, in some round about way we got sidetracked and separated until I was wandering about on the lawn behind a mansion. All of a sudden, one of the girls comes running out the back door and down the slope where I was standing shouting, "You won! Come on!" I believe her name was Kaylee, or Casey, or something like that.

Regardless, she took me by the arm and showed me the way inside. I awakened for a moment, just a few seconds I guess, and immediately drifted back into the dream just where it had left off. She showed me into a small room where the rest of them, and my daughter were already sitting there waiting with pizza boxes opened with fresh pizza.

My daughter said, "It just tastes like pizza". I rebutted, "No... it tastes like Mama's love". The girls all laughed out loud at once, yet cautiously.

Gabe N. - Athens, GA (see more at <http://gabenewmanblahgs.blogspot.com>)



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