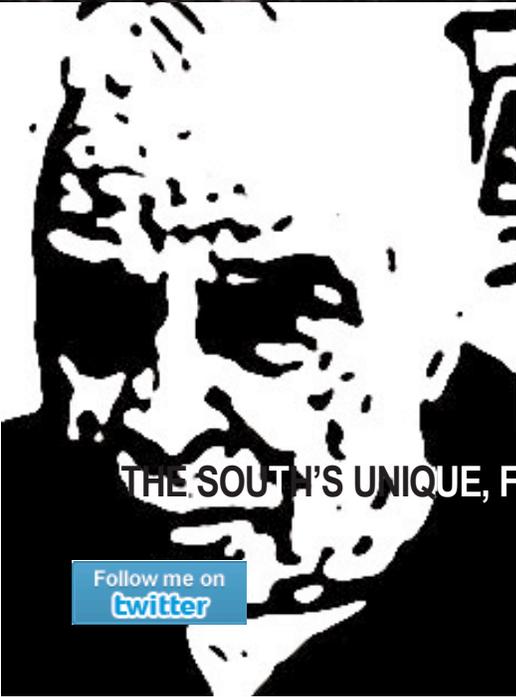


*A little bit of this, a little bit of that:
Corinna Gilley, Jane McAdams,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

April 2015

MAGAZINE



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"Logorrhea"

You don't have to tell me, I already know: I talk too much. Or rather, when I talk I say too much, and often with the wrong words. Not intentionally, of course, but in the course of speaking: I self-edit on the fly, make leaps in logic, ignore pertinent details, and jump ahead in the conversation - any conversation - in the hopes of...what? I can't say. Getting to the end expediently? Being both participants of a dialogue? Breaking the code in the Gordian knot of human communication? I don't know. Frankly, I'm asking questions that don't yet belong in the essay but are more appropriate further down, perhaps paragraph four or so. And this is what I do when I talk to other adults. I make them cringe, or chuckle, in equal measure, when I open my mouth. That's a nice way of saying - and isn't that generous of me - that I'm not particularly fun to talk with. I don't know how I got like this - with a little bit of time and effort I could probably Venn diagram my theories on this, but I won't - and recently I've noticed that it's doing me no good to talk with other people. And it's doing them not much good, either.

Oh come now, you might say - you might just as well not - it can't be all that bad, can it? Surely. In my defense, it is not quite the same problem as someone who always says the wrong thing in any circumstance - the stumbler over their tongue, the foot-in-mouth disordered. And it is not quite the same thing as the always popular in polite society "know-it-all," although I think, ironically, that they are genetically in the same species. We all know one or two of those types, and they come in two flavors: the person who answers all questions whether or not they are asked of them, and the person who asks thoughtful questions whether or not they are necessary in order to lead to answering said question themselves. Lovely folks, those, but not quite the same thing, although saying such certainly implies that I'm just a bubble off plumb having such personality quirks.

Mine is more of a compulsion to clarify, an urgency to be correct, a need to render my thoughts into tightly parsed components, all the while already speaking - phrases falling from my lips and being recovered to be re-spilled. I must admit that I feel rather like an elite member of a political party - I'm not - who does themselves and the party harm whenever a microphone is leaned their way. I simultaneously envy and sympathize with the drunks and clueless who jabber incessantly and confusedly to the discomfort and/or amusement of their listeners accidental and captive. No more annoying, no more troubling, to the listener or myself. What they seem to lack that I have is an internal alarm that chimes a warning that I am - not just becoming - a curmudgeon, a grumpy old man, a bore. Or maybe they don't. Perhaps this is why they drink. I don't know.

Back to my issue: being in a near-constant state of self-consciousness does no one any good. Like the man concentrating on carrying a too-

full cup of soup from the urn to the table, I cannot help but spill every trip. The simplest sentence needs evaluation; the most banal of comments, review. Rather than make mistakes, I want to understand, so I ask. What did you mean by that question? What is the response you actually seek, if not the correct answer? I know that things are not what they seem, because discussions derail and arguments escalate. So I try to read the pursed lip, the raised eyebrow.

Recently listening to the radio, a show about mental illness, I hear an expert lamenting the stigma attached to any kind of cerebral disorder, if you will. That we need to better understand the ailments is the general message. Problems exist, and through no fault of their own, people suffer. I get this, but I don't completely agree. I don't want to jump head-and-shoulders into a long-standing catfight, but I think that society is part of the problem. It bathes us in an ocean of information, about other poor slob, about ourselves, about celebrities who suffer the same symptoms that we do. Oh Kanye! Oh, Taylor! Peel back the layers of humanity and you find doctors trying to clarify and quantify every little nuance and quirk of being human. Internal alarm! We are each victims of something newly unearthed, newly parsed. The stigma we heft hither and thither has a name! Thank goodness, now let's get on with fixing it. And that means getting everyone else to acknowledge our problems, and to make room for us in the low self-esteem slash high occupancy vehicle lane of whatever path we're on as we drive towards the oblivion we all share.

We needn't be in a constant search for a reason to explain our unhappiness. Chronic Fatigue? I won't dismiss that there are neurological or biological explanations for weariness, but let's begin with bad sleep/work/eating/exercise habits and work our way out of those first. Gluten intolerance. Maybe all of us have this - pasty carbohydrates are a feature of the last 100 or so years - but perhaps not eating ourselves into a coma at every meal is more than a reasonable suggestion. Attention deficit? It's comes with the territory of two hundred television channels, a thousand-thousand video games.

None of this is news, none of this is particularly funny. And lest we subsume into an NPR essay, with pithy examples and a solution, I will not digress...frankly I have too much to say to listen to your problems. If social media teaches us nothing else it is that we let what others think about us get under their skin. Whether we must or mustn't is moot. I say to you, why bother, when everything and anything can be tweaked with the ball-peen hammer of marketing? In point of fact, I don't have a disorder, I have a new brand. *Logorrhea.com*. So what if I talk too much, I worry you to death (apologies to Reg Hall, bro-in-law of Fats Domino). And in the end, aren't we just glad I'm not talking to myself?

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

What's the matter with Flintstone? He's alright.

“Camp Coyote”

By Corinna Gilley

Hunting packs of *Canis latrans* communicate with yips, howls, barks, and yowls to coordinate the hunt of large prey and call to their cubs.

From *D.C. Gordon's Guide to Animal Behavior*

Our place is on the far end of the campground, the tip of a triangle of sites engulfed by spotted birches and flaking pine trees. I'm about to dig into my backpack for my Power Rangers binoculars and the brand-new copy of *D.C. Gordon's Guide to Animal Behavior* (which lists wild animals in Maine and was a bribe from my Dad, D.C. Gordon but I have forgotten what for), when Mom hands me my baby sister Lilly and leaves to help Dad get the tents from the car in the parking lot.

I don't like Lilly's hot and sticky rolls of fat so I put her on the ground. She can't sit up by herself yet, and resin and pine needles stick to her skin where the shirt has ridden up. I sit on the picnic table, squinting at the trees and dragging my feet over the splintery bench to

the rhythm of Lilly's wails. I think right after she was born she opened her little pucker of a mouth and it mostly has stayed open since. Even when she's asleep she makes these little whiney sounds.

“See the boys over there?” Dad asks as he stomps into camp, balancing a large duffel bag on his back.

“No?” I say, and glance over my shoulder and raise my eyebrows. Four unblinking eyes stare at me from the campsite across the trail. Dad dumps the bag on the ground and picks up Lilly.

“Go say hi” he says and then, “Damn it. Look at your sister.” He starts to pick pine needles off Lilly's belly. Just then Mom arrives with a wheel barrow loaded with our tents. For the first time, I get a tent all to myself. At night, the food has to go in with me, too, so the animals can't get at it. Potentially, sleeping next to the ice chest increases the likelihood that a bear or rabid raccoon will attack me, but Dad said that there are very few bears left in Maine.

When we have put all our stuff into the tents, Mom

whispers, “Are those boys staring at Lilly?” and disappears into the tent with her. I turn and almost jump: the two unblinking kids are still there, watching from the trail now. The little boy is maybe six, but the big kid looks about twelve, like me. When he catches my eye, he crosses his arms so that his hands push up his biceps and cocks his head. I'm not impressed because I know that trick.

“Hi,” Dad says.

“Hi. That's our tent,” the older boy says to me, yanking his chin over his shoulder.

In the campsite across the trail stands a small woman with very short hair. She nods curtly when my Dad waves, then sits down in a camp chair with her back to us.

“Yeah,” I say.

Mom returns with the diaper bag, and she and Dad leave to change Lilly in the washhouse. I swat at a mosquito on my neck. They are all over me, smelling our cheesy sweat.

The boys march into my camp and firmly plant themselves on wide legs in front of me.

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“So you are the babysitter?” the older one says.

“Nope.” My glasses slide down my nose, and I push them back up with a flick of my finger.

“I’m Jebediah,” the younger boy offers in a high voice, and then nods at his brother. “That’s Wyatt. We were named after Cowboys.” They break into a sudden grin, as if this information bonded us somehow.

“I’m Lys.”

“Like a girl?” Jebediah asks, genuine interest in his voice.

“Like Lysander,” I reply. “He was a general.”

We sit down at the picnic table.

“So what do we do?” Jeb wants to know, spreading his hands expectantly on the table. I shrug my shoulders, thinking of the Power Rangers binoculars in my tent.

“We need some girls,” Wyatt decides.

“Are there girls here?” I ask.

“There’s one that moved in near the parking lot this morning,” Jebediah chirps up. “Wyatt went to look and he says she’s cute.”

Wyatt nods earnestly. I can hear my parents returning from the washhouse, because of Lilly. It’s her time to nurse and I want to be off because Mom might not go inside the tent for that.

“Let’s go then,” I say, and we hop off the bench and march toward the campsites near the parking lot.

It doesn’t take us long to find the girl. She is curled into a sagging camp chair, flipping through a magazine and twisting honey-colored curls around her fingers. Her mom snores into a grimy air mattress. They haven’t set up their tent yet, and there are bags all over the site.

“Go talk to her,” Wyatt orders me. I squint at the girl through the branches of the pine tree that hides us.

“What, you afraid?” Wyatt asks and pushes me a bit with his shoulder. Jebediah giggles, so I roll my eyes and step out from behind the trees.

“Hi,” I say firmly and flick my glasses up. “Nice to meet you.”

The girl uncurls to look at me.

“Hi,” she says and sounds surprised, but then she smiles so wide that I can see her green gum.

Before I can think of anything else to say, Wyatt and Jebediah sidle up next to me.

“I’m Wyatt,” says Wyatt. He points at us. “They’re Jebediah and Lys.”

“I’m Penny,” the girl replies. Her voice sounds nice and a bit raspy, as if she’s just heading

into a sore throat.

“You want to hang with us?” Jebediah breaks in excitedly.

“Sure.” Penny chews her gum to think. “What are you doing?”

Wyatt shrugs and pushes his muscles again.

“We can go to the seawall and figure something out,” I say quickly.

“Okay.” Penny jumps up. “Let’s go.”

Wyatt holds out his hand, and Penny takes it. Jebediah grins. I wish I had held out my hand, but now it’s too late and we start running toward the seawall.

The seawall rises behind a belt of pine trees on the other side of the road that leads into the campground. Wide, flat rocks run into the sea, covered with flaccid algae where the water reaches during high tide, and bleached to a shell-speckled white where it doesn’t. Shallow pools house mollusks and juvenile shrimp. We sit down, and because the rocks are uneven, Wyatt has to let go of Penny.

“Lys has a baby sister,” Wyatt announces when we are settled. “He’s the babysitter.”

I crack the brittle shell of a mussel between my fingers.

“I’m not.”

“I wished I had a sister,” Penny says. “I like babysitting.”



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"But his sister is loud," Jebediah cuts her off. "Like, all the time."

"Yeah," Wyatt agrees and laughs a little bit.

"Just because the drive was too long," I lie. "We've come all way from New Jersey. Took forever."

"We're from New York," Jeb says. "My mom used to live in the City. My dad's a dentist. We've got lots of money."

"I'm from Maine," Penny says. "From Skowhegan. It's boring." She rolls her eyes up and sticks her tongue out. It is pink and leaves a moist trace on her lips.

"If you want, we can hit cars with sticks," Jebediah offers hopefully, and Penny giggles. Jeb looks proud. "I'm almost seven," he adds, and Penny says,

"I'm nine," and flashes her gum.

"Hitting cars with sticks is for babies." Wyatt yawns. "Let's steal something."

It's a dumb idea, but Penny claps her hands.

"Like what?" I ask loudly.

"I don't know. Stuff. People have all their stuff in their tents."

"I don't want stuff."

"Well then," Wyatt says lazily, "we'll just have to find stuff we want."

"Okay then. Let's figure out something we want, and then we'll steal it." I jump up and reach for Penny, but Wyatt is quicker and grabs her hand out of mid-air. They walk in front of us, their locked hands swinging between them. By the time we get back to the campground, it is getting dark. Penny gives us a quick wave and runs to her site, where her mom sits smoking in the twilight, tapping the ground with a tent pole. We wave back and jog to our own sites.

"We were just about to go look for you," my mom says, wiggling Lilly on her lap. "How about some Spaghetti?"

"Okay," I say and sit on the table.

My dad ladles pasta into plastic bowls and puts them on the table.

"Damned mosquitoes," he says and swats at his arm. "Don't know why anybody would work with them. Guess how Marilyn feeds her mosquitoes?" he asks my mom.

"Cow blood?"

"Nope. Every two weeks she sticks her arm into the cage and lets them sting her. Twohundredsomething stings, one arm. All in the name of research. Hope she gets something published soon." He grins, and then it is quiet because Lilly gums a noodle. A bird sings above us, and I think it sounds like a silver flute.

"What's that, dad?"

"A hermit thrush. Nice, hu?"

Lilly gums and we listen. But then she has had enough and Mom has to go nurse her to sleep in the car while Dad catches the break to work on his manuscript.

Despite having my own tent I cannot fall asleep for a long time. I press my ear against the ice chest and give it a little shove, listening to the melted water sloshing inside.

Suddenly, a dog starts to bark. It's a mean, fighting bark and I don't like it. I prop myself up on my elbows, waiting for the owner to calm the dog. Instead, another dog joins in viciously, and another one starts to scream like it has been hurt. I stare into the dark. The entire campground seems to vibrate.

Something taps the floppy nylon of my tent and I catch my breath.



"You awake, Lys?" my Dad whispers.

"Yeah," I say, my voice hoarse.

"Those are hunting coyotes. They're not that close, it just sounds a bit scary. They'll quiet down soon."

"I know. I'm okay."

"I know, big guy. See you in the morning."

Wyatt and Jebediah join us before the coffee is done.

"Oh," my dad murmurs, not taking his eyes off the percolator. "Good morning, boys."

He is the designated parent in the morning, because mom has to nurse at night and is too tired to deal. Dad sometimes jokes that his years of observing hyenas in the wee hours of the African morning was his best training for raising kids.

Wyatt and Jebediah stare at Lilly, who is wailing on a blanket next to Dad.

"We couldn't sleep," Jebediah says and yawns. "She's really loud."

"Sorry." Dad sounds sincere. "When we made the reservation it looked like the other sites were farther away, but they must've not drawn the map to scale."

"Why is she so loud all the time?" Wyatt asks.

"She's got colic," Dad explains. "She's uncomfortable."

"Can't you give her medicine or something?"

"Nobody knows what causes baby colic, so there's no medicine. She will outgrow it sometime, but until then, we just have to do our best to help her feel a bit better." He picks up Lilly and kisses her puffy face. "Poor little thing."

Wyatt watches them with a

blank expression. Then he turns to me. "Coming?"

I look at mom slumped at the table and she shrugs and pushes a bagel with cream cheese toward me.

"Back for lunch," she says.

Penny's tent is still zipped shut, so we go over to sit on the seawall. Gray foam crawls over the rocks where the water recedes, and it smells like wet tang.

"We should do something about the baby," Wyatt says after a while.

"There's nothing we can do. My dad told you."

"Mom and Dad fight when they are tired," Jeb says and shivers in his Spiderman T-shirt. "I'm cold."

"Maybe we have to scare her, like with the hiccups," Wyatt says thoughtfully.

"Yeah. My hiccups go away when Wyatt scares me." Jeb's face lights up. I snort.

"You think my parent's haven't tried everything? Think again."

"Parents don't scare their kids on purpose," Wyatt says. "Not like *that*. She has to be *really* scared or it doesn't work."

"Did you hear the coyotes last night?" I say because I don't

like it when he talks about Lilly.

"The wolves?" Jeb nods earnestly.

"They aren't wolves," I explain. "They are coyotes."

"Says you and what army?" Wyatt wants to know. I roll my eyes.

"Wolves are almost extinct here and coyotes are all over the place, and also, my dad is a wildlife biologist and he can tell."

"There are a lot of them," Jeb says and cracks his knuckles. "I've heard them before you got here, too."

"Are they, like, hunting in packs or something?" Wyatt asks, poking a twig of dried seaweed into a snail house.

"Sometimes," I say. "They can hunt down deer and things like that."

"Are they dangerous?" Jeb asks.

"Not for humans," I say. Penny skips over the faded rocks to meet us.

"Hi," she says and sits down, her knees stretching the holes in her torn jeans. She smiles at us and bites into the slice of bread she brought.

"Is that good?" Jeb asks. "There's nothing on it."

Penny shrugs and chews.

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“There were coyotes in the forest last night,” Wyatt brings her up to speed.

“The howling?” Penny asks and shakes her honey curls. “That was really scary.”

“They don’t do anything to people,” Wyatt reassures her and puts his arm around her shoulders.

“Oh, okay.” Penny takes another bite and I fidget, unable to trump my stolen line. “That baby was loud, too,” Penny says after she has swallowed. “I didn’t sleep so well.”

“That’s his sister,” Wyatt says and jerks his thumb at me.

“Her name is Lilly,” I say angrily and I’m not sure who annoys me more, Lilly or Wyatt.

“She’s got colic,” Jebediah explains. “We’ve got to scare her, like with the hiccups.”

“Coyotes are scary,” Wyatt says, crunching up the seaweed in

his fist.

“Lilly is a pretty name, though,” Penny says and yawns widely.

“So what do we do today?” I demand and flick up my glasses.

“Why don’t you tell us?” Wyatt pulls Penny closer to him and I stupidly blurt out the first thing that pops into in my head.

“We can observe animals.”

They laugh.

“What, like starfish in a tide pool? Sounds good. Not.” Wyatt laughs again.

“Better than stealing something we don’t even want, just so we can be bad-ass,” I say. “That’s dumb.”

“We could maybe think of something we want,” Penny says quietly.

“I want pop tarts,” Jeb says, rubbing his goose-pimplly arms, but we ignore him.

“Let’s go and have a look.” Wyatt leaps up and jumps across the rocks, and we follow.

By now the sun has cracked the clouds and at the campground people are up; zipping shut tents and gathering sunscreen and crackers to spend the day at the beach or the Ocenarium, or hike the trails. We sneak around, seizing up their tents, but we don’t see anything promising.

Penny’s mom pokes at her camp stove as we pass and asks us if we know how to work this, but we don’t. Wyatt’s and Jeb’s parents, the dentist and his wife, meet us on their way to the store to buy tokens for a shower. They take Jeb to clean him up.

Penny, Wyatt, and I go to the dentist’s site and sit in the folding chairs. Across the trail, my parents do the dishes.

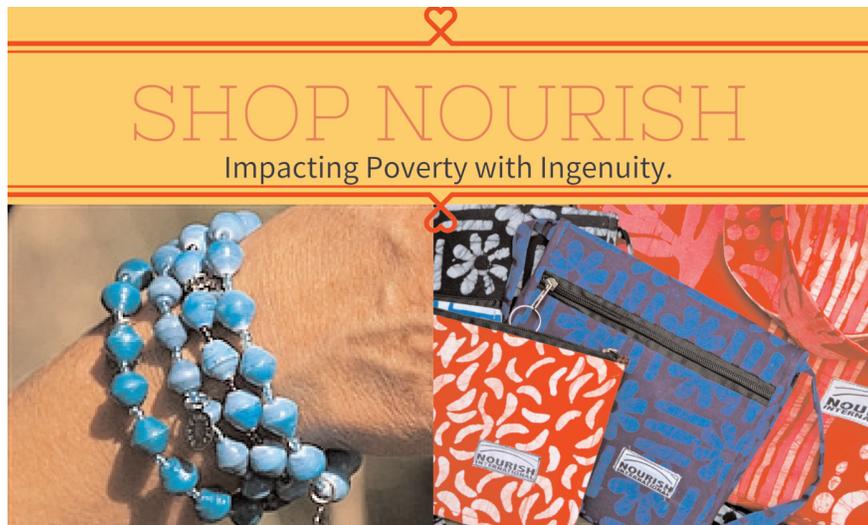
“Your dad is a teacher?” Wyatt wants to know, watching my parents.

“He’s a wildlife biologist,” I say, annoyed. Anyone can be a teacher.

“What about it?” Wyatt asks and rolls his eyes.

“He was in Africa and worked with hyenas.” That gets Wyatt and he has to think a bit. I decided to go full Monty.

“He’s got a gun and all.



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One time, a hyena poked her head into his tent and just stared at him. He's had a gun ever since. Always brings it."

"Wow," Penny says, and even Wyatt looks at me. My parents are done with the dishes and Dad pulls a backpack out of the tent.

"You want to come to the beach?" he calls out to me and I shake my head. "Back for lunch then!" mom calls, and they wave and start down the path toward the sea.

"Let's go get it." Wyatt says, when they have disappeared.

"Get what?"

"The gun, if he really has one."

"Of course he does. It's in the car."

"Can we see it?" Penny asks, I hesitate. I am not allowed to take the gun, of course, and I don't want to either. But it wouldn't hurt to establish a few things between me and Wyatt. And Penny.

"Just looking, though." I leave to get the car keys. My hand is a bit sweaty when I fish them out of the nylon pouch that hangs on the pole over Dad's air mattress, because I know I would be in big trouble if he would know about this.

We run to the car. There is nobody in the lot and we all cram into the car, me in the driver's seat. I open the glove compartment. Before I can do anything, Wyatt, who sits right in front of it, grabs it.

"Are you crazy? Put it back!" I hiss.

"Forget it." Wyatt hastily tucks the bag into the waistband of his shorts and grabs the small box of ammo next to it. He jumps out of the car, and Penny and I follow. I am wet all over now, and mad. Then we hear Lillie's cry.

"I think I can see your parents through the trees!" Penny yells, and we slam the car doors shut and just manage to get back and throw ourselves into the dentist's chairs before my dad comes down the path, carrying my sister and a gallon of milk.

"Too hot for Lilly today!" he calls over and waves with the milk jug. Penny giggles, jumps out of her chair and runs off. I don't know what to do about the gun in Wyatt's waistband, so I go over to our site and just stand there.

"You having a good time, Lys?" Mom asks, sitting down next to Dad at the picnic table, and now they all look at me, even Lilly.

"Yeah," I say slowly. There is no good way of telling them.

"Just hanging out with the other kids. Fun, fun."

Mom clears her throat and nudges my dad.

"You want to take a trip into the woods this afternoon?" he asks. "Just the two of us? We can go see if we find any animals."

"Suuuure..." I say, not at all sure that I can leave Wyatt. My parents exchange a look.

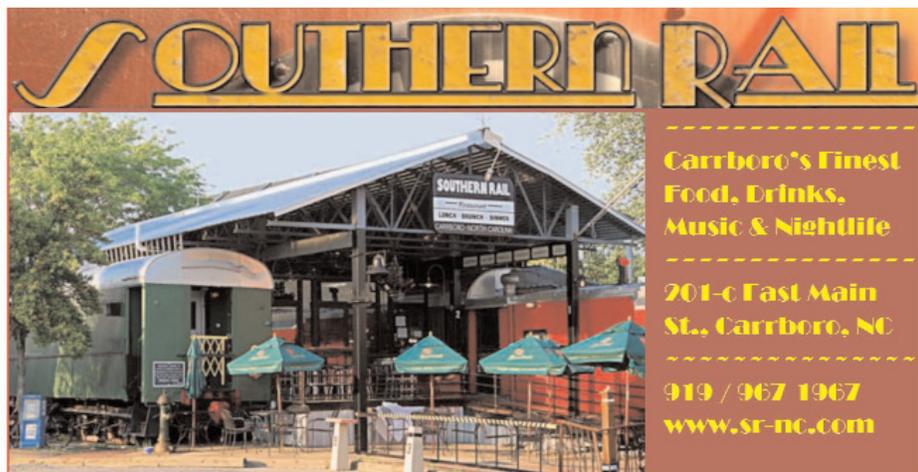
"Like the coyotes last night," Dad adds.

"Do you think we can find them?"

"At least we might find traces of their hunt," my dad says. "They must've been pretty close, to judge from all that noise they were making. Mind you, it might get gory." He grins at me and we go get our binoculars and notebooks. When I come out of my tent after changing into jeans, the dentist has returned. I can hear Jeb excitedly going on about the lobster and mussels they are going to cook. The veteran's site is empty, his ice chest quietly sitting in the sun.

For a couple of hours, Dad and I disappear into the forest. Pine needles hide our tracks and above us thrushes weave their songs through the canopy. I spot a tick on my sneaker and show it to Dad.

"Dog tick," he says and flicks it into the bushes. "Deer ticks



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are the bad ones.” I’ve known all about ticks since forever, and I know he knows it, so I grin at him. He grins back and puts his hand on my shoulder. There is still the gun though.

After half an hour, my dad points out some crushed twigs and dug up pine needles, and a few feet along we find a carcass on the ground. Brown sticky fur and a hooped leg that straggles toward us give it away as deer.

“Coyotes,” my dad says. “Those were hunting calls all right. Not a pretty sight, huh?”

“I don’t mind.” I know that animals have to eat just like people, and I like coyotes better than deer because they are smarter. I don’t like what I see there on the ground, but I make sure to look as long as Dad does.

“They’ll probably be back to finish this off,” my dad says and swats at a fly. “Unless they come across another easy kill first.” He elbows my side. “See? They don’t need our food. You can safely snuggle up to the ice chest.” I roll my eyes but then I have to laugh and we brush the dog ticks off of us and go back. I just have to talk Wyatt into giving the gun back.

When we arrive, Wyatt,

Jeb, and Penny are sitting at our picnic table, paper cups with lemonade in front of them. Jeb has a red foam-sword strapped to his belt.

“There you are,” Mom says. “Your friends are waiting for you.” She slides Lilly into Dad’s arms.

“Yeah,” Wyatt says. “Because we thought of something.”

I quickly change back into my shorts, and we leave. Wyatt leads us along the path to the wooden stage of the campground. Rangers use it for presentations at night, but now it is deserted, left to the sun and mosquitoes.

“Where’s the gun?” I ask after we sit down on the warm planks.

“I got it,” Wyatt says.

“I need it back,” I say. “Before my Dad notices.”

“We have to take care of something first.” Wyatt grins at me.

“What?”

Jeb laughs out. “We are going to scare Lilly!” he squeaks.

“What?” I say again, heat rising in my face.

Wyatt holds up a hand to silence Jeb.

“We’ll get the coyotes to scare Lilly. You said they don’t do anything, right?”

Penny twirls her hair in her fingers and smiles. I slump back on the floor.

“What the *hell* are you talking about? They won’t come to the campground.”

“We’ll take her to them. At night.”

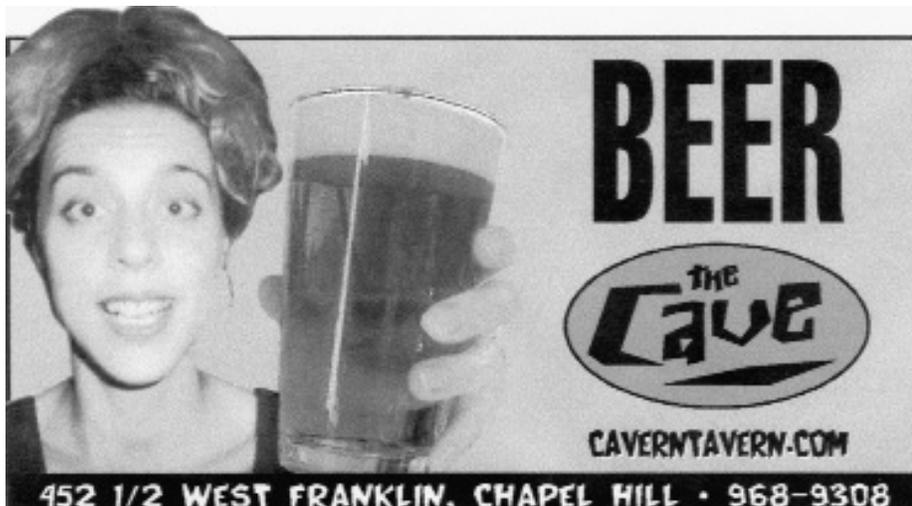
“Oh come *on*.”

Wyatt shrugs. “We’ll take it step by step. It’s a project.”

“Trust me,” I assure him. “You don’t want my mom catch you kidnapping Lilly.” Nobody responds. I try to laugh. “Fine, why don’t you first figure out where the coyotes are, then.”

“I don’t really want to go that much into the forest at night, though.” Penny takes the gum out of her mouth and rolls it between the tips of her fingers into a tiny marble. I scoot over and even though I feel all funny inside from the plan, I put my arm around her shoulder.

“It’s not that bad, actually.



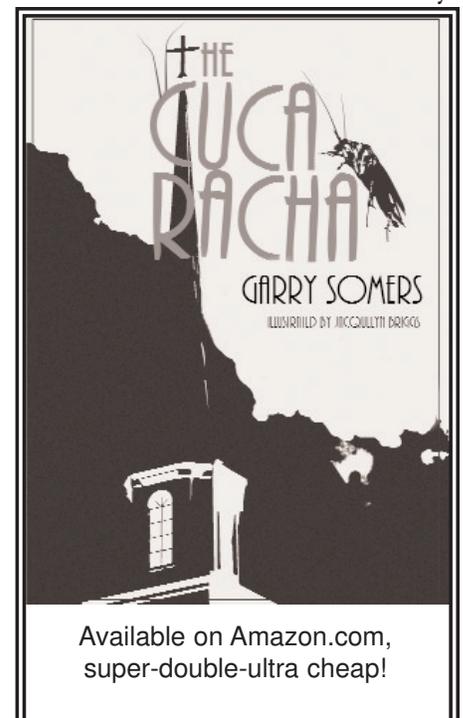
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I've done it loads of times. If you want I'll take care of you."

"Really?" She flicks the gum into the bushes. "That's good. Because I don't like the dark."

"Listen," I say and my voice is much louder than I meant it to be: "I know where we can find the coyotes." Penny snuggles up to me and shivers a bit, and I think of holding her hands as I lead her through the dark. Plus, the carcass would shut Wyatt up for good.

"Tomorrow night," Wyatt says approvingly. "I keep the gun till then for protection." Jeb beams and fingers his sword.

"Why not tonight?" I want to know, because suddenly I can't wait. All the bad funny feeling has suddenly turned into excited funny and I really want to take them out at night as their leader, showing them the deer in the dark. "And after I get the gun back," I add.

"Fine. Get up Jeb, we have to get back."

Penny and I follow them, arm in arm. "It's not that scary," I promise again. "Just put on jeans for the ticks."

We make a quick detour to the parking lot to check whether the veteran is back yet, but his car is still gone. Then we agree to meet at 11 pm between Wyatt's tent and mine, and to each bring a flashlight.

At 11 pm my parents are fast asleep, and I am ready with my flashlight and compass, my note-

book hidden under my sweater. Wyatt and Jeb are already waiting on the trail, their faces pale in the moonlight. They wear matching PJ pants and Ninja Turtle T-shirts. Wyatt's hand cradles a bulge under his shirt.

"Let's go," he whispers nervously.

"Penny's not here," I say. Jeb nods and Wyatt mutters something, and I am relieved to see a light bounce down the trail after only a few seconds.

"Let's go!" Wyatt starts walking toward the forest before Penny is all the way here. Jeb turns after him and we all switch on our lights and plunge into the darkness.

The beams of our flashlights are thin in the dark, weaving over trunks and undergrowth. I take the front, followed by Penny, followed by Wyatt, and Jeb brings up the rear. Every now and then I stop to correct our course, consulting my compass like Dad showed me. We are quiet; it's not really practical to take her hand, but sometimes Penny puts her hand on my back to steady herself. When I turn around to check on her, I see the gun gleam in Wyatt's hand. I want to take it from him, but it might be dangerous. Never struggle over a gun, I guess. I don't think he would just give it to me, especially when I am the leader in the front.

"You sure the safety is on, Wyatt?" I ask. "In case you fall or something."

"Sure," Wyatt grunts, but when he thinks I'm not looking anymore he holds the gun up to his eyes, letting the beam of his flashlight glide over it.

"It's that little lever by the trigger, that has to be up," I say

casually as we climb through a patch of bramble. There is no answer.

Suddenly, a howl rends the air. We stagger to a stop, almost tumbling over each other. More and more coyotes start to cry. They sound clearer and even more vicious out here than from inside the tent, like dogs that attack each other in earnest before their owners can separate them. We all crouch down, but then Wyatt lifts the gun and points it into the forest. I can see it quiver at the end of his too-outstretched arm. The coyotes yap and howl and snap and run around, out there, not visible but way too close.

"What are they doing?" Penny hisses into my ear. Her fingers dig deep into my arm, hurting me.

"I think they are hunting," I say reluctantly.

"They don't eat people, right?"

"Uhm," I say, because I'm not so sure anymore and because all the coyotes howl together now which makes it really hard to think over the din.

Penny turns, circling her light around.

"Where's Jeb?" she says loudly. I turn too. Jeb's not there.

"Jeb!" Wyatt yells now, swiveling around on his heels, pointing the gun at the dark trees. "Jeb!" Wyatt's light hits us and the trees as he weaves it around, but there is nothing and nobody else.

"Maybe he went back?" I yell to be heard over the coyotes. We are almost a half hour into the forest, and I hope that if Jeb turned back, it was much earlier.

"Did the coyotes get him?" Penny screams at us, and her

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scream makes the howling stop, replacing it with the sounds of bodies crushing through brush. Instinctively we back into each other, our lights gliding over the dark patches between the trees.

“Lys!” Wyatt starts to pant. “Why are they everywhere?”

“I don’t know,” I whisper and feel dizzy for a moment, but I do know why. They are herding us. That’s why.

Penny starts to shake really badly and that makes us break apart and face each other.

“We have to go back,” Wyatt says and flashes light into my eyes. “We have to find Jeb before the coyotes get him.”

I clear my throat. “We have to find the deer first. So I know where we are and can find the way back.”

“What? Are you saying you

got us lost?” Wyatt pushes Penny aside and thrusts his face into mine. Penny’s light hits us and I can see that Wyatt’s pupils are dilated.

“No,” I have to raise my voice so they can hear me over the barks of the coyotes that have started up again. I just can’t remember right now, with the coyotes all around. But if I could find the deer, I could find the way back. “But I need to start at the deer.”

“Here.” Wyatt presses the gun into my hand. “You know how to use it, don’t you?” The gun is hot from his hands. Penny stares as my fingers close grab it.

“Let’s move!” Wyatt gives me a push, and he is right. We have to move to get away from the coyotes and the dead deer and Jeb.

We stumble forward. The coyotes have started to scream again and I know that if they are herding us, they will attack now. I release the safety on the gun and hold it in front of me and because it is hard to think at all now, I can only hope that this is what I should be doing.

I am wrong. I know we are not going to get away when suddenly my light falls on a gray mass seething right in front of us.

Endless pairs of yellow eyes reflect the beams of our flashlights, and I shoot. The force of the shot sends me stumbling, and as I fall, the gray mass evaporates into the dark, fast, and without a sound, like smoke. Only one coyote is left behind, its head slamming into the ground next to me, over and over, its forelegs wildly thrashing up pine needles and blood.

Penny screams and covers her face with her hands. Wyatt doesn’t move, frozen to a spot behind me. I get up and I’m all cold inside, but then I force myself to aim at the coyote. I pinch my eyes shut and shoot again. I’m lucky, I hit the head and the terrible head stops slamming the ground, and the feet fall into the dirt. I drop the gun and suddenly my knees are weak and I fall down on them with a thud that I don’t feel.

“Killer,” Wyatt whispers. “You killed one.”

I can’t look anywhere else but the coyote, the pine needles that cover the downy gray hair, and the oversized paws.

“It’s a cub,” I say and my voice sounds soft and cottony after the blast of the gun. “It’s a baby.” My hands start to shake and I can’t feel them.

“You killed it.” Wyatt’s voice sounds hollow in my ear, and then he says something more that I don’t understand, and suddenly both he and Penny start shouting and waving their flashlights.

My dad is calling for us, and then I hear Jeb, and then my mom, and then all the other people that are searching for us in the dark.



An advertisement for 'ALTERED image Hair Designers'. It features a pair of colorful, abstract glasses. The text includes a '20% off Your first haircut at the new salon with selected stylists' offer. The business name 'ALTERED image Hair Designers' is prominently displayed. Contact information includes 'Appointments: 919-286-3132', '600 Foster Street, Durham, NC 27701', and the website 'www.alteredimageDurham.com'. A 'NEW LOCATION!!' banner is at the bottom right.



“Pedestrian”

by Jane McAdams

“I only like the kind of shorts they sell at Custo,” Julian said. “They don’t have that thing—that, like, waistband thing.” He pulled at the waist of his plaid shorts and looked at Rhonda. “You know that thing? It’s like plastic, or something. You know what I mean.”

A woman rushed past them on the sidewalk, catching her purse strap on Rhonda’s belt.

“Excuse me,” Rhonda said. She smoothed her hands over her belt. “These people. What’s the rush?” She looked after the woman accusingly. “This is calfskin.” Rhonda rubbed her belt again.

“I never shop on Saturdays, though,” Julian continued. “Remember that one time? I went to that trunk show and to the outlet stores? I got so sick. It’s all those people.” He pulled at the waistband of his shorts again. “Maybe it’s not plastic. It’s like a kind of metal.”

Another woman pushed

past them, talking into a cell phone. “Elm Street,” she said. “No, Elm... Elm Street... Fourteen forty-two.”

Rhonda looked at the woman. “What calling plan did you end up getting?” She gazed unseeingly up the street. “I start to think they’re all the same.”

“Yeah, you know? The one I got—it doesn’t have international.” Julian watched a man run past. He pointed at him. “See? That’s the kind of pants I’m talking about—not like double-knit, but like that kind that doesn’t have pockets.” He kept watching the man’s pants.

“What do you mean...?” Rhonda started to say. She waited as a siren went past, covering her ears when the sound was the loudest. “Why would you need international? You only know people in the city.”

“No, I don’t,” said Julian. “Remember Imelda and her boyfriend? They were from Spain, or somewhere. I know them.”

“But it’s not like you’d call them,” Rhonda said. “They’re like those vanity people you put in your contacts.” A young woman shouted, and Rhonda winced. “You don’t even need international.”

“Yeah, well, I know other international people,” Julian said. He looked away from Rhonda. “Hey, look. Everyone has those shoes now.” He pointed at a group of five young men pounding past them down the sidewalk. The young men all wore similar running shoes, and several had their cell phones to their ears.

“I didn’t see it. I didn’t see it happen,” one of the young men shouted. “I called, though. I called when they told me.”

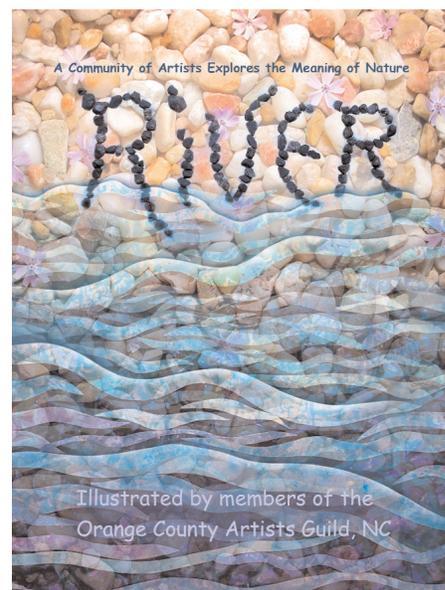
“Yeah, but you got your shoes first,” Rhonda said, still look-



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ing at the running men. “You got them before all those guys. See? Those are knock-offs. You can tell by the red dot on the heel.”

Julian looked around at the shoes of the other people on the sidewalk. There were suddenly more people walking toward Julian and Rhonda. “You wonder why people want to wear knock-offs,” he said. “Where’s the dignity?”

Rhonda said something, but another siren went past; she had to stop before finishing. When the street was quiet again, she said, “Well, I’d wear a knock-off of some things. I mean, not like shoes, but, like, a belt or a bracelet.”

Julian and Rhonda shoved their way between a building and a crowd clustered at the curb. “What are they looking at?” mumbled Julian, examining the back of one man’s head. “See? That’s how Shirley was doing my hair. It’s too long.” He touched the back of his own hair. “I’m so glad I switched to that other guy—the one I told you about.”

“Yeah, you were looking too eighties for a while,” Rhonda said. “What are all these people doing, anyway?” She walked on her toes to look over the shoulders of the people lined up along the curb.

“Who knows,” said Julian. “It’s always one thing or another—immigration protest or some kind of a parade, or something. There’s a new political group every time you turn around.”

“I saw him. I think he had a heart attack!” someone yelled from the crowd. Rhonda seemed to listen for a moment, but then, she said, “Do I look fatter to you? When I saw Tina the other day, you know what she said? She said, ‘Oh, packing on the pounds, eh?’ Can you believe it? And she’s like a truck driver.”

“Is he OK? That’s my brother!” someone else yelled. The crowd pulsed with the new information.

“The city’s so loud,” said Julian. “If I didn’t have my meditation class, I don’t know what I’d do. Did you know that stress is aging?”

“I heard it can kill you,” Rhonda said. She brushed a speck of dust from the front of her blouse.

“Let him through!” yelled a man somewhere behind them. The crowds muffled the sound of a siren.

“This is the place,” said Julian. “They make the best tiramisu.” He held open the door

for a moment, as though he would let Rhonda walk in before him. Then, he walked in first himself. Rhonda followed, and the door closed softly behind them, shutting out the sounds of the street.



Dear Readers: We’d like you to go back up to the cover - a picture of Dad, repeated via various Photoshop filters - and tell us what you think the name of this work is called. We have an idea and we want validation. Send your suggestions to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrag.com, and the one we think is either better than, or closest to our own name for it will win a year’s subscription to The Blotter Magazine. We’ll tell you the answer in our July 2015 issue, and reveal the winner then, too. Family and friends who we’ve already revealed our little ply to cannot play. I mean, that’s just silly...

Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.

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A few weeks ago I had a funny dream that I do not want to forget. I wish my father was alive because he would enjoy this one:

A comedian is doing a standup act for a group of old World War II veterans. The comedian says, "So, I go to the clinic and the doctor tells me that I gotta get a G.I. procedure. I say, 'No problem, Doc. I was in the army so I know all about G.I. procedure.' So I go to the G.I. Department. This nurse tells me that they're gonna stick a long tube up my butt and I say, 'The hell you are! That ain't no G.I. procedure. I mean it might be in France or someplace but it ain't a G.I. procedure in America.'"

All of the old guys in the audience get it and laugh.

I wake up laughing along with all of the other old guys.

M. Owens - cyberspace

CONTRIBUTORS:

Corinna Gilley lives with her husband and two young daughters in New Jersey, where she researches the behavior of bees, teaches biology, and writes stories that faintly feature animals.

Jane McAdams of Chicago, IL, writes, "I have published stories in Ladybug magazine ("The Shark Kite," March 2009), Inkwell ("Sleeping," Spring 2010), Foliate Oak ("Psychic Hotline," March 2012), Forge ("Terra Firma," April 2012), Whisperings magazine ("Unknown Cities: A photo essay," Volume 2, Issue 2) and Perceptions ("Drowning," May 2014).

Phil Juliano (Minneapolis, MN) 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



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