

*Cruisin' on fumes with Vance Alexander, Holly Day, Kayla Spilman,
James Butcher, Danny Earl Simmons, Larry D. Thacker,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

July 2016

MAGAZINE

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COVER: "Diamond in the Rough" by
Kayla Spilman. See centerfold for more.

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"A short course in Mansplanation"

There are, as this spring wanes and summer looms on the not-so-distant horizon, a great number of things I no longer understand (to add to the encyclopedic quantity of knowledge for which I have always been clueless.) Call it, if you wish, the theory of large numbers times chaos. And trust me, this discovery is no *Eureka* moment. I can't even ask for that, not with a straight face. Nor is the lateness in the day a point of shame.

What I'm talking about are teenaged daughters. Oh, and my wife. Put them together, at the dinner table, for example, I am Custer wandering around in the tall grass on a blind horse near a river named after a sheep. Hey! What are we talking about? I ask. At first, no answer. If I repeat myself, hoping to be part of the conversation, I get the rolled eyes. If I insist on interrupting by helping to answer questions or, worse, explaining anything more clearly, I get the hand. Not the hand! Oh yes, the hand. But wait, I oft say. I know the answer to the problem. I can help. *Please! You're a man. We're not looking for answers. We're validating.*

Ahh...

In almost no time at all (by my reckoning) I've gone from being a fairly useful ape-man (who can navigate from home to school and back again, assembling lunches and suppers and keeping the laundry from mutating into a savage dirty-clothes-creature that swamps the house. And I know how to use the TV channel changer, too. Dad is great, let us thank him for our food) to someone only necessary at rare moments, like going out in the rain to fetch something, or the person who walks ahead in the dark house, switching on lights and protecting folks from - I don't know - big bugs.

Dad - don't speak unless you are spoken to.

Wait, what? What happened? Time and life happened. So why didn't I know? It was in all the papers.

And just in case you think I'm making fun of this situation, like I actually know better and that this is a bit of male superiority satire, trust me...that's not what I'm doing. I am truly admitting that I no longer know what's going on, and may never have.

Oh, in my day I could watch Jeopardy and answer the tricky trivia of little import like I was a beta version of Google Search, but I was fooling myself. Facts are a dime a dozen. What people (my girls) want is relevance, comprehension, perspective, context and, yes, validation. Problems need to be seen clearly by the group, worked by the group, and resolved. Which is something I apparently (not condescendingly) do not completely understand.

Yet.

I need my daughters to assist me with this.

It would be helpful in the extremis if I knew what is a question that needs an answer (from me) and which is a question out into the ether that needs talking about but no solution (because one isn't necessary, because one has already availed itself.) I am fully aware of the concept of rhetorical questions, but this other breed of inquiry is new to me. They tend to be asked in my presence, but not directly to me - as if I should be paying attention, but not close attention. Often, subject matter has to do with something their mother has already negated and now another parent is required to be aware of this injustice, but his opinion is not wanted. In other words, I need to know what just happened, but shut-up, especially if I plan to agree with Mom.

Wow. Okay. I can do that. Maybe.

And sometimes I need to be aware that things to which I want to react mustn't be reacted to. Ahem. Like the onset of boys (not early, not late.) Sure I was a boy, once, but I know absolutely nothing about them, is the current platform I have to sign on to. *Yeah, Dad. Boys have changed.* That may be true, which is a little tricky (you know, like nitro-glycerin is tricky), but I think I should be able to handle talking about boys, right? No. it would appear that over the years I used up my allotted word-count on the opposite sex. It seems it's like dental insurance; there's a lifetime maximum coverage. And all of the joking discourse back in fourth grade about how boys *are* smelly and boys *are indeed* dumb used up my allotment. And, male person - it isn't always about boys. Well, *damn*.

And so now I want to help my daughters understand that my role is not over, that there is a need for a father's perspective on their nascent dating, that I understand the confusion and excitement and, yes, apprehension and regret, but all I can do is toss a copy of *Little Women* on the bed and stalk off to watch a baseball game?

Yes. says the new little voice in my head. That's best. Sit down, shut up shutting up (as we say in my family) and be ready with a clean handkerchief. No, you can't prevent everything (although I never said I could; I just want to prevent the worst disasters.) Preventing is not your job anymore.

So, here's the (new) thing. It's not about me, either. It's not about my sudden lack of self worth (*call a wambulance!*) or my sense that something is missing. It's about, perhaps, my forgetting what an adventure life is, and how not everyone needs nor wants some Lewis & Clark dad to wander the wastelands before them and coming back with a detailed map of the pot-holes. My daughters especially.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

Things are closer than they appear

“The Road Cut Through”

by Vance Alexander

Across the dirt road from our small farm were the properties of two large farms. The house, out-buildings and barns of each were approximately a quarter mile away, North and South. I could observe, outside my bedroom window, the vista beyond a perfectly placed elm tree. Every spring it held the basket-like nest of a Baltimore oriole. The view was a sea of green in the

spring and summer, the color of a tawny lion’s mane in the fall and a vast arctic whiteness when covered in winter snow.

The fields were divided by an ancient stone wall. It cut through those fields like a long grey snake with lichen covered scales. Growing from the wall were hazelnut bushes. They gave up their bounty at the cost of yellow stained fingers and lips, but it was definitely worth it.

When I was not trekking through the woods behind our land, I was in the fields, waist high in grass that was to be cut and baled in the fall. Alternative years, I would be miniaturized by corn stalks; the alternate crop. Some seasons the dairy cows were allowed to graze on the tender grasses. Each season held its own surprise.

Summer was the best season of all, when the fields were allowed to become grassland. That was the time to run through the green ocean, flop down and stare up at the billowing clouds that used to be

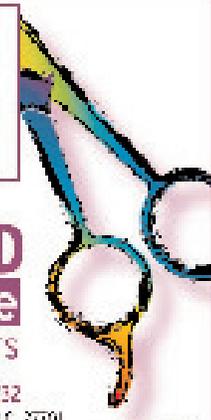
so prevalent when I was young. Laying there my world changed to an entomological fantasy. Bugs, bees and beetles of every color and description could be seen during those warm summer months. Carapaces of metallic gold, green and blue would reflect the sunlight like jewels. Insects with striped orange and black wings would climb to the top of a grass stalk, precariously balance, open and close its wings then soar in a lazy fashion to another plant. Beetles bumped their way through a forest of stalks close to the ground. There were ants always on the march to somewhere. Piss ants, red ants and black ones were ever present. I would watch with fascination as they would milk aphids, gently stroking the tiny insects with their antenna.

Butterflies and moths added interest and color to the setting. Monarchs, Viceroy, Swallowtails floated above the grass, while the dainty Spring Azure, Eastern Tailed-Blue and Skippers landed close by.

The rustling of grass snakes was often heard, but it was only on a rare occasion I would be able to



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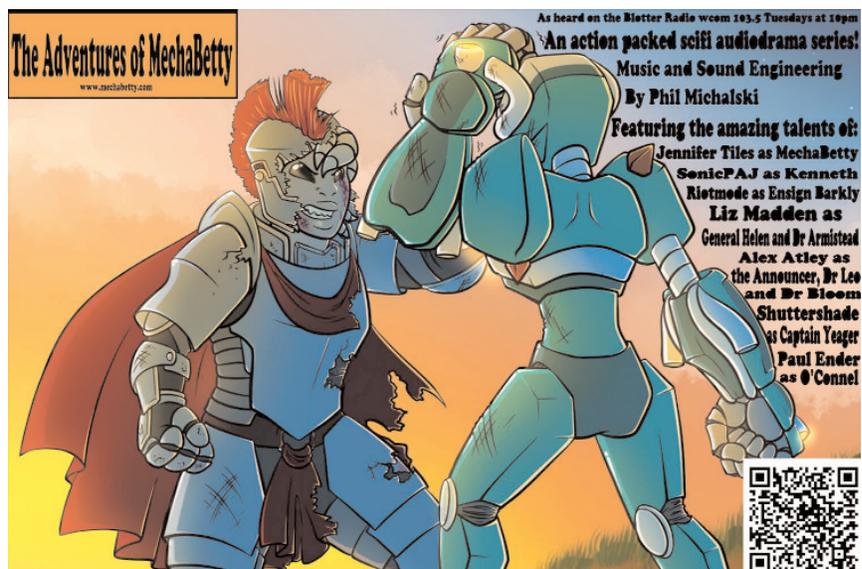
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catch one. Their emerald color blended so perfectly with the vegetation.

Rising from my grass bed and walking again would cause the nesting birds to leave their eggs or hatchlings, and try to distract me. I would stand as quietly as possible and watch the meadowlark return to its brood. Sometimes I would try to get as close as I could without alarming the mother bird to see the contents of the nest and watch the progress of life from egg to fledgling.

Martins and swifts were always on the move. Their aerial acrobatics were an endless source of pleasure. They would hurl themselves through the air diving and lifting as they caught the insects in their path.

In the far corner of the field was a turnstile that allowed access to the next pasture. Close to the stile sat a trough carved from a single block of stone. It was supplied with water from a natural spring that always ran clear, clean and cold. The landscape here was entirely different. The vegetation was thick and dense. Unlike the grass field, this area was littered with stones and boulders left from

the Ice Age. Among the rocks massive amounts of Queen Anne's lace, mulleins and burdock grew. There were patches of shrubs, sumacs, multi-flora rose, shadbush and sweet-fern growing in profusion. And the ever present pioneer of the fields, the red cedar. This was one of the prime pasture areas for the cows. In the summer the canes of blackberries were heavy with fruit. Often while picking the berries I would be eye-to-eye with a black racer sunning itself on the topmost canes. Afraid of me, it would slip quickly and quietly away in a black metallic blur.

Forty years ago, the farm fields held great adventure for a ten year old boy. Then with the sale of the farms, changes began to happen.

In the meadows, the striped caterpillars no longer delicately ate the grasses – a new, larger yellow version, voraciously devoured the earth. Monstrous beetle like machines push the topsoil into a huge mountain at one end of the pasture. The ground was laid bare to clay, producing a putrid odor of death and decay. A huge scar was cut through the land. A road. On each side, holes were dug which would become the foundations of

human nests. Surprisingly, the stone wall was left – but not much more. The woodchucks that lived in the wall and fields have moved on. The meadowlarks, swifts and swallows cannot live on manicured lawns. The insects are not welcomed on the poison sprayed property of the new owners of the land.

The house, barns and outbuildings of the old farms were razed to make room for new houses. The swallows can no longer build on the barn beams and the family of owls have left the hay shed.

During that trying time, the days were filled with roaring machinery and endless noise. At night, when the ignitions were switched off and the workers had gone, the tortured cries of all the creatures without homes could be heard. ❖



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"From The Garden"

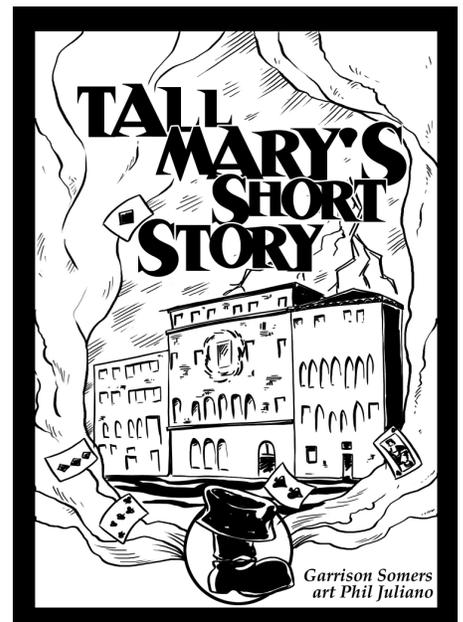
I come in from the garden and I'm covered
in slugs. Tiny slabs of snot with antennae waving
slowly moving over my sandaled
feet, pausing in confusion at trying to pass
a particularly thick black ankle hair
navigating the rough etched surface
of a heavy Tibetan silver bracelet.
I don't touch my hair because
I don't want to know they're there, wrapped in tangles
dreadlocks with chewy centers.

I pull my clothes off by the washing machine
and start the hot rinse cycle immediately, reconciling
my guilt at running the washing machine
with only two items of clothing in it
with images of hordes of horrible soft bodies
tumbling through the soapy water with my clothes
hopefully boiled alive.



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Two by Holly Day

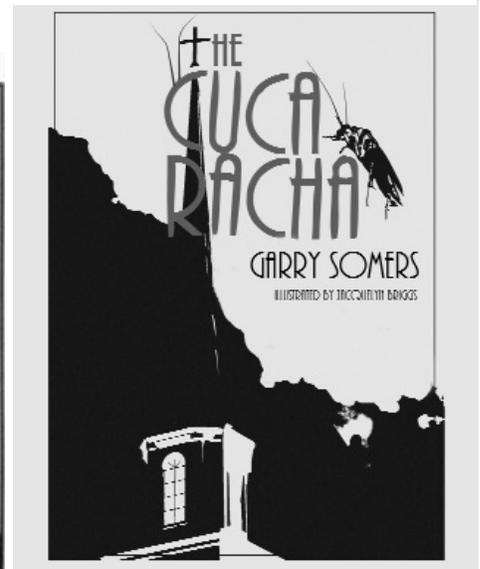
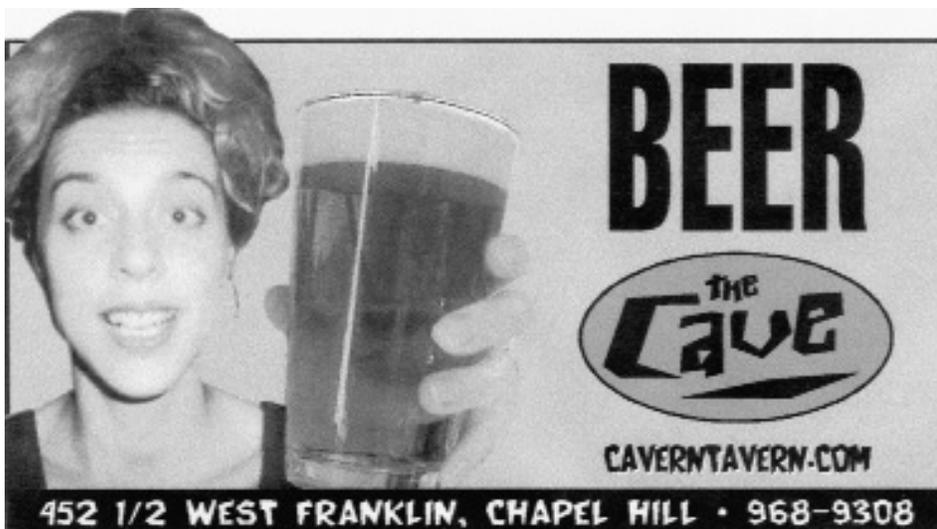
"I Search the Mirror for Tragedy"

flesh moves toward you as if summoned, and here, far from
fairy tale castles and big screen love
I am waiting by the telephone, in the dark—
one last pastel-colored cocktail and she is yours

she will be. she glides through the walls of
thinking, lying here, rotting from hollow places
I am begging for just one last bite from
ever, or just tonight, whatever you decide my role will be
in the days before I become a rotting corpse
plow me under.

waiting by the telephone, in the dark, in
far away, I know exactly what you are
in our bed, I am always waiting for you
you've finally caught her, across the room, promises
I am in our bed, always waiting for you.

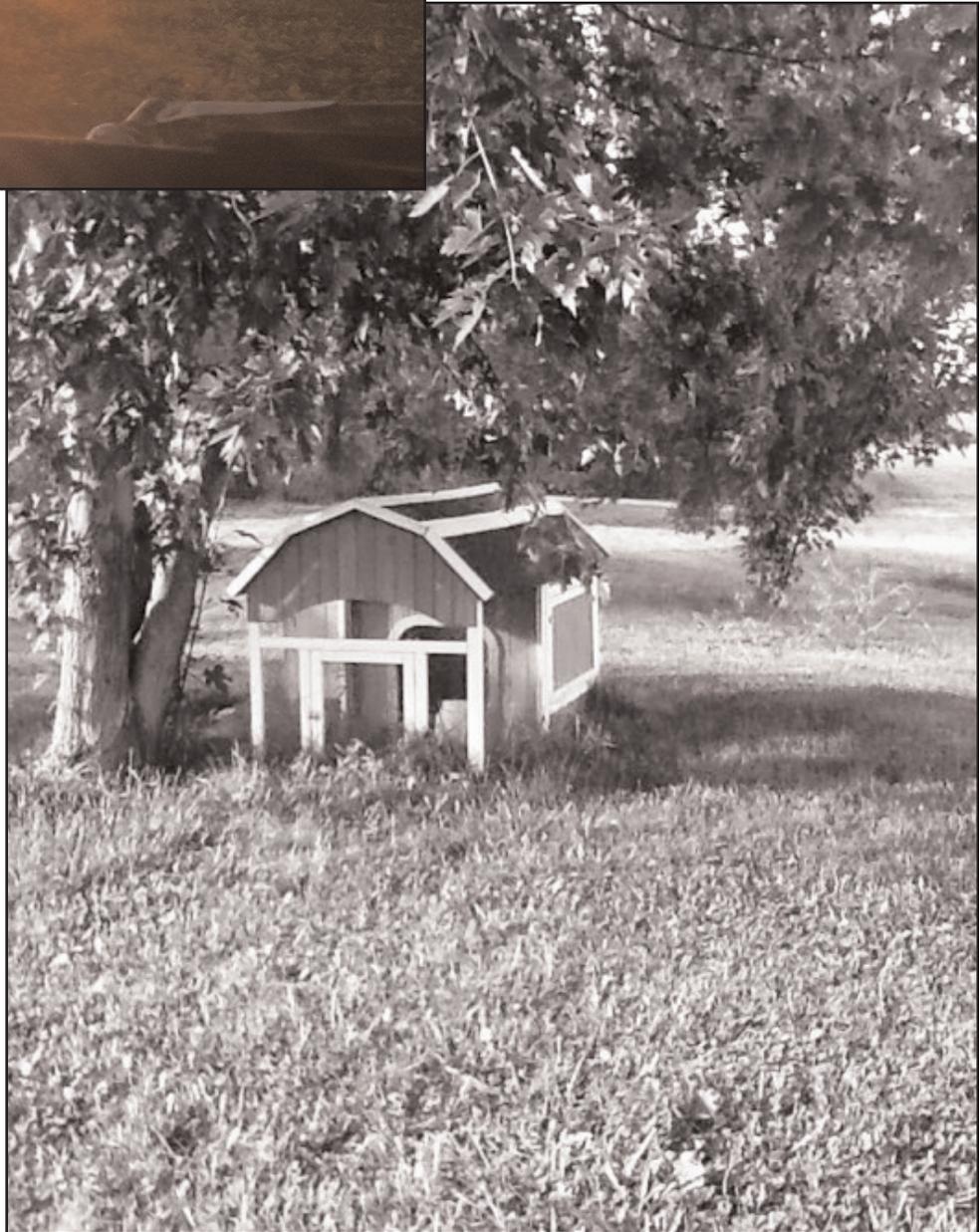
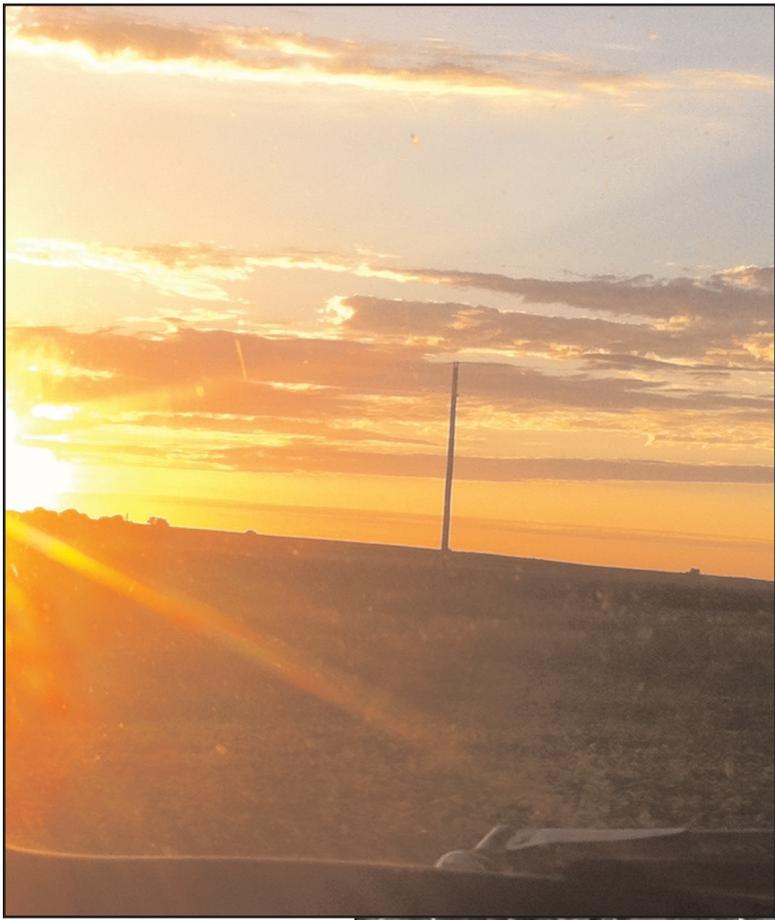
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Kayla Spilman
Atchison, KS





“encryption”

it's only dialogue remember when the i went
before the e and we don't need to worry anymore
because our language is encrypted but the code
breakers are clever chameleons so only speak
in whispers until this line is secured or there is no
other way to say our silence is golden the way
it was meant to sound on wet tongues and dry lips

is that what it means to use proper grammar
or are our manners gone and why did we spend
so much time teaching the children to have minds
of their own if the waves are higher than the
quarterdeck we are not lost at sea we are mourning
the passing of discovery tell them that tell them that

“casita”

i want to be honest but the confessional
booth is thirty miles of desert scrub from here

“there are sinners everywhere”

this isn't a cabana it is a casita with no electricity
but there is a hole in the earth to shit in
and the desert cacti are still in bloom

“we are hermits without a proper education”

i read that too but the doctrine of maybe says
we should reserve judgement because this arroyo
is dry now but the monsoons come in october

“does maybe keeps us from lying?”

nothing keeps us from lying
there is too much dirt in desert air
the winds start at 10:00 am
that is the last we see of the mountain

“neptune”

the walls are not blue but the windows
are color wheel yellow which is at 60 degrees
on the HV color wheel also known as the
RGB color wheel it's complimentary color
is blue that is all the detail i can give you
for the sun is not shining today so we'll
have to talk in stuttering whispers to hide
the meaning of where we came from

how far is neptune let me look it up
it is 2.77 billion miles from earth when both
neptune and earth line up on the same side
of the sun it was first spotted by galileo in
1612 so we cannot get there before we die
but we can talk of space exploration or where
we go from here now that the children are grown

the doctor told me this ache in my side is related
a lifetime of thinking too hard can that be true
i asked the commander at arms he said no but
my therapist said yes and so that leaves me
wondering if there is a right or wrong or if
religion is just another way for us to paint the town
and i happen to have a extra can of international
klein blue which was first mixed by yves klein
who was a pioneer in the development of
performance art which is the same as talking
and loving and crying tears of rage or sorrow

Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



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“Now I Know”

Found out about an hour ago.
Google.
No more waking up

wondering. It happened
last year, day after Christmas.
Leukemia. Your girlfriend
still cries. A girlfriend!
At 69! Way to go, Dad.

You never could stand
to be alone, could you? No.
That was for the rest of us.

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Two by Danny Earl Simmons

“As She Nurses Her Youngest Son”

Wooden blocks, all A-B-C’ed, clutter
the living room floor alongside a scattered
library of thin cardboard books. Rain thumps

on the canvas awning and runs like rivers
into a hundred tiny Niagaras that splash
the nearness of summer’s end. The house

is growing dark and she begins to fret
about dinner, the sink full of dishes, her need
for a nap of her own. The baby is sleeping,

lightly latched, one hand on her soft white breast.
She breathes the sweetness of rain on freshly cut grass.
Everything is gray and, somehow, feels like tomorrow.



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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

If the definition of a "dream" as far as my dear friend Merriam-Webster is concerned is merely:

(n) a conception or image created by the imagination with no objective reality

perhaps my vision would be better described as a "nightmare". Dinosaurs were once in fact real and among the living, correct? And fear is undoubtedly a personified part of reality. So I'm convinced this reoccurring imagery that either visits me in my sleep (or is otherwise altogether a product of my overactive REM Cycle) MUST have some sort of objective indeed.

A house; A group of people; A giant T-rex trying to get in the house; I want to save everyone, and I can't. Those factors do not change. Each time this nightmare visits the only difference is the individuals surrounding me in the house. The house does not belong to any of us, nor do any of us seem to know why we are there. Sometimes I know the faces, sometimes I do not. There is a cornucopia of age, race, and gender among us with seemingly no correlation. Interestingly to me, what remains the same is that the people are different each time.

Some of the inhabitants fight; Some flee; Some try to formulate a plan to escape; I want to save everyone, and I can't.

As different as we all are, for a fraction of a wrinkle in time we all share the same fear: Survival. Perhaps this is the message. This vision seems to visit me when I want more than anything just to give up. When surviving no longer means living, but rather, simply existing. When I feel dead inside, and my body is no longer a temple but instead a corpse inhabited by what remains of my soul from another life. That is when the nightmare occurs. For whatever reason I release my inhibitions and keep fighting for the faces. The faces that surround me in the house that are looking to me for advice, a leader, a way out. Why me?

As the beast pulls the roof off of the building, I lead the mob out into the wilderness toward freedom and presumably salvation. A helicopter with an extended rope appears. Logic would dictate we could not all fit on the flying contraption. It must have been a game or a test from the very beginning. If it all was in fact a gameshow, I would not disappoint the spectators, my team, or myself. I kept running and they followed.

We have the choice to live; to exist; or to give up; I want to abandon giving up, forego merely existing, and thrive in a world where I love the life I live. I want to save myself so I can save others, and I can.

Priscilla P. - cyberspace

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"Optimism"

by Larry D. Thacker

I watch the old zombie and new zombie shows
with a special glee all my own, knowing
my rucksack rests stuffed and ready in my trunk
in the drive, and my wife's camo bug-out bag
is at the ready since she opened it last Christmas Eve,
the .410 with four-ball splatter shot leaning
in the corner at arm's length where we can reach it,
the porch decorated for Devil's Night a month early,
all of it in optimistic welcome of what we'd gladly
have visit upon our shitty neighborhood
rather than the normal oddities we endure.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Our short-story author writes, "My pen name is **Vance Alexander**. I have been writing for the last ten years and have had approximately 30 articles published in: newspapers, literary journals, anthologizes, and magazines. I have authored two historical novels, *Oratory* and *Expectant Journey*, available on Amazon."

Holly Day has taught writing classes at the Loft Literary Center in Minnesota since 2000. Her published books include *Music Theory for Dummies*, *Music Composition for Dummies*, *Guitar All-in-One for Dummies*, *Piano All-in-One for Dummies*, *Walking Twin Cities*, *Insider's Guide to the Twin Cities*, *Northeast Minneapolis: A History*, and *The Book Of*, while her poetry has recently appeared in *New Ohio Review*, *SLAB*, and *Gargoyle*. Her newest poetry book, *Ugly Girl*, just came out from Shoe Music Press.

Kayla Spilman, 13, Atchison, Kansas, spends her time taking pictures and reading, spending time with her family and her beloved 1966 Thunderbird. She's headed to 9th grade in the fall.

James Butcher of Brainerd, MN writes, "I live in central MN and enjoy reading, writing, and outdoor activities."

Danny Earl Simmons is an Oregonian and a proud graduate of Corvallis High School. He is a friend of the Linn-Benton Community College Poetry Club and currently serves on its Poetry Advisory Committee. His poems have appeared in a variety of journals such as *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Little Patuxent Review*, *IthacaLit*, *San Pedro River Review*, and *Off the Coast* where he now assists as a member of the editorial staff.

Larry D. Thacker of Johnson City, TN, is an Appalachian writer and artist. His poetry can be found in past issues of *The Still Journal*, *Kudzu Literary Magazine*, *The Southern Poetry Anthology, Volume VI: Tennessee*, *Unbroken Journal*, *Mojave River Review*, *Broad River Review*, *Harpoon Review*, *Rappahannock Review*, *Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel*, *Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, *Vandalia and Appalachian Heritage*, among others. He is the author of *Mountain Mysteries: The Mystic Traditions of Appalachia* and the poetry chapbooks, *Voice Hunting* and *Memory Train*. A student services higher education professional for 15 years, he is now engaged full-time in his poetry MFA from West Virginia Wesleyan College.

Phil Juliano of Minneapolis, MN, is a good Blotterfriend. Follow his adventures on philjulianoillustration.com

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A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...



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