

December 2021

The Blotter

magazine

The South's Unique, FREE, International Literature and Arts Magazine

www.blotterrag.com

G. M. SomersEditor-in-Chief
Martin K. Smith..Publisher-at-Large, Treasurer
Marilyn Fontenot.....Director of Development
Laine Cunningham.....Publishing Consultant
Brace Boone III.....Marketing Advisor
Richard Hess.....Programs Director
Olivia Somers..Social Media and Art Director
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Subscriptions Contact:
Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Advertisers Contact:
Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:
Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com

919.869.7110 (business hours only! – call for
information about snail-mail submissions)

Marketing & Public Relations Contact:
Marilyn Fontenot
marilyngfontenot@gmail.com

COVER: Book Cover, from our archive
Unless otherwise noted, all content copyright
2021 by the artist, not the magazine.

The Blotter is a production of
MAGAZINE
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com



Council of Literary Magazines & Presses
www.c l m p . o r g

“Production”

When I was very young, my parents bought me a rock tumbler. If you are not familiar with this, it is a device that you fill with pebbles, sand and water and as it rotates the action rubs the sand and water against the pebbles and makes them smooth. If you start out with the right kinds of pebbles, and the right type of sand, with enough polishing you can end up with something quite beautiful. My tumbler came with little packets of sand in different “grits,” and excellent instructions for how to successfully polish rocks.

What the kit didn’t come with was rocks. This was not a mistake, or an oversight on their part. I imagine that they assumed you had rocks already, or why would you bother to decide to polish them? And nowhere in those excellent instructions was there any assistance with regards to finding rocks. Again, it was implicit that you either already knew or that they imagined it was so elementary a concept that it didn’t need further explanation: “Have rocks.” Or, “get rocks.”

But in not providing this directive, an important detail was missing. What sort of rocks work best in a rock tumbler? I didn’t know, and there was no easy way to find out – in this pre-internet world. I gathered some gravel from the gutter by the street in front of my house, because I was in a hurry to get started, to start the process, to hear that tumbler...tumbling.

Adding the packet of grit and the water – both in appropriate measure, to my literal pounds of gray gravel, I tightened down the lid, set it on the rotation mechanism sitting on the desk in my bedroom, checked the pullies for tension, and plugged it in. And the motor hummed, the device turned, and the gravel tumbled in the sandy water.

Loudly. Constantly.

Somehow, my parents let this continue to happen. Although they wanted me to turn it off at night, I insisted that it was necessary for the tumbling to be incessant in order for it to work. OK, they said. Three weeks. Then it must stop.

I didn’t tell them what I’d already learned, having read the instructions. That it would be three weeks with the coarsest grit sand,

then I would need to rinse everything and start the second stage with the middle-grit sand. Two weeks of that. Then the fine sand, for two more weeks! Yes, best to keep that information to myself. Never light a bridge on fire before you're standing in the middle of it, looking down at the raging water and... crocodiles.

I let the tumbler do its job. I could smell the electric motor heat of it, constantly turning night and day. I fell asleep to the grumbling purr, woke to the crashing ocean wave sound. Then it became the regular background, and I could ignore it.

My friends, on the other hand, were fascinated. Can we open it and look? No. Can we just peek? No. Why not? It will make a mess. We can clean it up? Ha! No. When will it be done. I checked the milkman's courtesy calendar hanging on a tack on my wall. August.

Are you kidding me? No...

What my friends lacked was patience. One had taken apart his magic eight-ball to see how it knew that he was never going to kiss Camille who lived down the street. The other had broken open his older brother's lava lamp because it did look like bubble gum. It didn't, however, taste like bubble gum. And his brother thumped him pretty hard, which made it all the more disappointing. And I wasn't that much better. I was desperate for Christmas around the middle of October. I couldn't get my Valentine's candy to last until Easter. Who could?

But I let the tumbler tumble, without trying to push it to spin *faster*, or picking it up and shaking it, or cracking it open under cover of Saturday afternoon boredom. And then it was three weeks and I unplugged the motor. One by one, I unscrewed the wingnuts that secured the lid. Peeled the rubber gasket and looked.

Muddy water. Slightly smooth gray stones. I rinsed one in the bathroom sink. Very little improvement. Slightly smooth, *clean* gray stone. I'd hoped for something else. Something... lovely, as a reward for my mighty endurance.

Or a lesson learned. I didn't even have that. When I asked if I could start the second stage of tumbling (I don't know why – the

continued on page 15

We often use Bobco fonts, copyrighted shareware from the Church of the Subgenius. Prabob. We also use Mary Jane Antique and other free-ware fonts from Apostrophic Labs and other fonts from other sources.



in the Great State of Georgia!



The Blotter Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is an education concern. Our primary interest is the furthering of creative writing and fine arts, with the magazine being a means to that end. We publish in the first half of each month and enjoy a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Magazine Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re. same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

Aab, that's true...

“For the Little People”

by David Rudd

“What you doin’, Da?”

John looked up to see his son on the stairs. John had been unpacking his bag when he heard the boy’s voice. It made the silver bowl leap from his grip. He chased it hand over hand.

“I’m certainly not juggling!” chortled John. He turned to his son, Arthur. “And what do you think you’re doing, this time of night?” He gestured for his son to join him.

Arthur explained how he’d heard noises and thought he’d discovered a burglar, then noticed how “things were coming *out* of that bag, not going *in*.” He chuckled. “And then the burglar stood up, and it was you!”

John winced at the word “burglar”. Clearly, the lad needed some explanation.

“Now, you mustn’t tell anyone but,” John paused as if scanning the room for eavesdroppers, “it’s the Little People.” Arthur looked up, puzzled. “You’ve heard of the Little People, Art’ur?” He said it the Irish way, despite his wife’s disapproval.

“Well, there are stories in my books about elves and fairies and . . .,” he struggled over the next word, “not peppercorns but . . .”

“Leprechauns?” John suggested.

“Yes, leppercorns,” Arthur echoed.

“Well,” continued John, “them little folks had just recovered their treasure from a wicked baron, an

English fellah, who’d kept it locked away in a cellar, where only his idle friends could gawp at it.”

“So, it’s the Little People’s treasure, really?” asked Arthur, his hands reaching out to touch the silver plates and serving dishes.

“Indeed, it is. Hadn’t they mined the ore, smelted it, cast it, hammered and engraved it? Hadn’t they burnished it and polished it till you could see your face in it?” John held up the bowl he’d been unconsciously caressing, the one he’d nearly dropped earlier.

“Coo!” said Arthur. Perhaps his son didn’t understand all of what he’d been told, but he had the gist.

“The Little People were worried that the baron and his flat-footed bully boys would try and steal it back again,” continued John, lowering his voice. “So, being from the Emerald Isle, I was one of the few who could be trusted to guard the treasure.” As John spoke, Arthur watched his father remove the final items from his bag.

“Where are you going to store them?” asked Arthur.

John, his hand on the rug, realised he’d been about to reveal his hiding place. But Arthur had already spotted the movement.

“Is it under that creaky floorboard?” exclaimed Arthur, helping his father haul back the rug and remove a short length of floorboard. “But,” began the boy, peer-

ing into the dark hole, “why put it down there?”

“Ah!” said John. “Fairy stuff, see. Has to be stored underground to stop it . . . turning into old tat.”

With his son’s help, they stored the silverware beneath the floorboards. Once everything was back in place, John carried Arthur upstairs, tucked him in bed and gave him a kiss. “Remember,” he tapped the side of his nose. “It’s between ourselves and the Little People.”

#

At teatime, the following day, John was nonplussed to hear Arthur ask for more information about the Little People. John looked daggers at his son, before Mary piped up: “Don’t fret yourself, John. He’s been on about them all afternoon.” She was dishing up their bubble and squeak. “And, in case you’re wondering,” she added, popping back into the kitchen, “he told me about that fairy hoard, too.”

John was speechless, watching Arthur tuck into his tea. From the kitchen, amidst the banging of pots, he caught Mary’s sarcastic comment: “Going straight, indeed!”

That night, father and son lay side by side on Arthur’s narrow bed, John on top, trapping Arthur like a snared rabbit. John was annoyed with his son but realised he himself had little moral high ground to stand on. His anger was also mitigated by the fact that, for the first time, Arthur had requested a bedtime story from him, his Da, rather than from Mary, who read Arthur ready-made stories from books and magazines. John felt honoured. He had always fan-

ced himself as a raconteur. Clearly, the boy had been impressed with his Da's account of the Little People.

Lying there, next to his son, John was carried back to his own childhood in Galway, in a lonely cottage with his brother and gran. The three of them had survived, as he now told Arthur, on spuds and stories, "and there was more nourishment in the tales than the taties," laughed John.

As he began to describe that old bothy, John recalled how he used to gaze into the open fire — there was only the one room — while his gran spun tales. John would watch the characters emerge from the flames and dance up the shadowy walls. As he now talked, he could see his son's eyes light up.

Over the following weeks, John concocted a rich fictional stew for the two of them to share. Arthur was always eager for another helping, making bedtime a treat, especially when the Little People were on the menu.

While Arthur was full of praise for his father's tales of stolen treasure, Mary was less happy with them. "Doesn't it worry you that Arthur's boasting about his Da looking after the Little People's treasure while, in the papers, it's full of this silver-service robbery?"

"It's just a story, Mary," protested John.

"About trickery and thieving, not honest, hard work."

"You want me to become a lackey of the English," he began.

"Some of us have to be!" Mary interrupted. "You don't object to me slaving in Tibby's Flower Shop six days a week."

John was never a match for

Mary's arguments, especially when she made him feel so guilty. How many times since Arthur's birth had he promised to go straight? And now, as Mary pointed out, he'd involved their son in handling hot property.

"I'm off to my brother's," John announced, falling back on his usual ploy when Mary got started. So it was late afternoon before John next saw his son, on his way home from school.

"What you got there, Da?"

"Joe's cart," said his father, lifting him up for a ride. "He lent it me to see how I'd get on."

"What do you do with it?"

"You play the Irish tinker and hope people will throw their valuables at you." Arthur looked puzzled. "Never mind son." John came to a halt outside their house. "Just help me shift this priceless load." Arthur looked even more perplexed. All he could see were three solitary objects.

"Bric-a-brac," said John, handing Arthur a cracked bowl with a broken handle. "Nick-knack," he added, passing his son a stained, wooden serving spoon. "And Paddy tat." His father hefted an old mantle clock that clanged as he moved it. "As some might call this stuff," he added, winking at Arthur.

They took the objects into the front room and placed them on the table. His father made them some tea.

"But," said John, after they'd made themselves comfortable, "each of these pieces has its tale to tell." John caressed the items. "Remember what I said about that other treasure?" His father's eyes flickered in the direction of the loose floorboard. Arthur nodded.

"How it could turn into something ordinary if left above ground?" Arthur nodded again. "Well, each of these old things has suffered just such a fate."

His father held out the serving spoon. "This was once a gold ladle. Whatever it stirred turned instantly hot. It went with this bowl here," he said, picking up the second object. "An ancient porringer made of elfinwood. You made a nettle soup in it and, as you stirred it with this ladle, you could look into its depths and read your future."

Just then, Mary returned from Tibby's. She looked with bemusement at the two heads peering into the cracked bowl. "More valuable goods, I see?" she said.

"Exactly, Mary." John kept his eyes focused on the bowl. "It's just what I was telling young Art'ur here. Look below the surface and you see the potential in things."

"It's a magic soup bowl, Ma," said Arthur, getting up to greet her.

"Course it is, son." Mary went through to the kitchen with a bag of groceries. "But will it feed us tonight?"

John joined her and tried to give her a hug, but she resisted his advances. He brought some crumpled pound notes out of his pocket and passed them to her. "These'll keep the wolf from the door awhile," he said.

"Aye," she replied, "but will it keep away the boys in blue?"

John knew she was not fooled. She knew he'd not made the money tating, that it was from fencing the fairy hoard.

At teatime the atmosphere was tense until the question of

The Blotter

Arthur's sixth birthday, now imminent, was raised. Arthur announced that he wanted a party with a Punch & Judy man, having seen one at someone else's do. Both John and Mary promised him the best party ever, no expense spared, and the two exchanged a shy smile over his head.

That evening, in bed, Arthur asked his father to tell him about the "Paddy tat." The boy meant the mantle clock, but the way he phrased it, John imagined an Irish feline that crept into people's houses at night, "hunting for delicacies, such as," John chuckled as he said, in his poshest voice, "Paddy de frwah grah." Though he managed to leaven his tale with such humour, he realised that the story was a little too close for comfort.

Arthur assured his dad he'd enjoyed the tale, "but it's not one of my favourites," he admitted. "Not like the ones about the fairy hoard and the Little People." John groaned and kissed the lad good-night.

With a heavy heart he went downstairs and, over the course of the evening, opened up to Mary. He told her how embarrassed he'd been when Arthur had caught him red-handed; how, since then, he'd struggled to go straight, but how difficult it was "walking past all them rich folks' gaffs, bulging with heirlooms. It was like," he added, "being an alcoholic passing a brewery."

John also told Mary how desperate he was that Arthur saw him as an honest, upright man, like the heroes of the old tales. He didn't want his son to think him a tinker, a culchie pushing a hand-

cart. He just wanted the two of them well provided for, with the things he never had.

Finally, John managed to proclaim his love for Mary, his tongue-tied declaration convincing her, for once, of his sincerity.

He promised her that, after Arthur's birthday, once their nest egg was exhausted, he would definitely find something better to do. #

Arthur's classmates and a few of the neighbours' children were invited to his sixth birthday party. The weather was good, so they played out in the street, where Mary and John had set out some trestle-tables for the sandwiches, jellies and cake.

Unfortunately, at the last minute they received a message that the Punch & Judy man couldn't come. He'd swallowed his swizzle and wasn't feeling at all well. (A swizzle, as John learned, was a device that made the squawky Punch voice.)

After the groans of disappointment had subsided, Mary stepped forward to say that, most fortunately, they had an excellent storyteller on hand: Arthur's very own Daddy. Before John could protest, Arthur stood on his chair and proclaimed his Da's prowess. The children then trooped into their front room, highly expectant.

Arthur's commendation was not in vain: John went down a storm. He watched in delight as, by turns, they smiled, gritted their teeth, whimpered, and dropped their jaws in amazement.

John lost track of time — as, indeed, did his audience — which included an increasing number of adults, arriving to collect their progeny. He had them in the palm

of his hand. He was an enchanter, invincible!

Until, that is, he heard a gruff voice beside him: "PC Grimshaw," said the large man who'd come to collect his son, Peter. John wondered why anyone would introduce themselves with their job title, especially if he was a flatfoot. But perhaps he'd misheard, thought John, mischievously; perhaps it was "Percy Grimshaw".

PC Grimshaw went on to express a particular interest in John's description of the "fairy hoard," as it had become all-too-well known in his stories. John recalled that his description of the treasure had been more precise than usual, detailing the intricate patterns on the plates and bowls. Grimshaw went on to mention a recent crime: the theft of some valuable silverware, which had "remarkably similar patterns," he said.

"Remarkable coincidence," he concluded, as John mumbled that he must have read a description of the stuff in the papers.

"And what do *you* do for a living, if I may enquire?" asked Grimshaw.

"Me?" replied John, realising that he was being properly interrogated. "I'm a storyteller." He said it without so much as a flicker. "At children's parties . . . as you've just heard." This was not another porky-pie, John reassured himself. Several parents had already asked how much he charged.

In fact, John found the outlines of another story forming in his head as he stood there, wearing a paper hat, listening to Grimshaw drone on. Grimshaw, who was not wearing a paper hat,

was flexing his legs menacingly, like a boxer straining at the ropes. John was aware that Grimshaw was standing on the very bit of rug beneath which the noisy, creaking board lay. And each time Grimshaw bent his knees, the board groaned as though being tortured by the policeman's big, flat feet: "I'll come clean," John imagined the poor board saying. "Just get those clodhoppers off me!" And then John imagined the silver bowl, the last of the swag, joining in, announcing its presence to the PC: "I'm down here! You were right, PC Grimshaw, it was the storyteller wot done it!"

Unfortunately, John's imagination was too vivid, and he now found himself sweating, realising that this was just the sort of sign that Grimshaw was on the lookout for. The PC, he noticed, was also keeping an eye on the room, waiting for other parents and children to depart. It suddenly dawned on John that he might not be able to take up his storytelling vocation after all. He might, instead, find himself detained at His Majesty's pleasure.

Prodding at the loose board with his right foot, Grimshaw now seized the moment. "Seem to have a bit of a problem here," he said. With one swift move, he stooped and pulled the rug aside. "Fortunately, I used to be a joiner. Might be able to help."

Before John could say another thing, Grimshaw had the board up and was peering into the cavity. "Hallo, what we got here?" he said. "Excuse me, missus," he addressed Mary, who'd just come through from the kitchen with Arthur. "Could you light me one of those candles, stuck in the

cake?"

Mary reluctantly obliged and Grimshaw swiftly retrieved three items from the footings: a cracked bowl with a broken handle, a stained wooden ladle, and a mantle clock. John could see the disappointment on Grimshaw's face, though it was nothing compared to John's feeling of relief. Despite Grimshaw poking around more desperately, he seemed to realise that there was nothing else but cobwebs and dust to uncover.

"I thought you said you were going to fix our board," said John, more buoyant again. "Do you fix clocks, too?"

"Very droll, sir," said Grimshaw, as he quickly replaced the board and rug then dusted himself down. "I'll get me tools sometime and, er, well. . . . We'll say no more, shall we?" The PC grabbed his son's arm and yanked him out the door. Arthur gave Peter a parting wave, as though aware that his friend was going to suffer.

As John and Mary cleared up, they exchanged smiles. All three were heady with the success of the day, but John was particularly animated. It was as though his own birthday had been celebrated.

His vocation, he realised, had finally come into focus. No more thieving property. He'd discovered a far more valuable treasure: a hoard of stories, from which he could borrow with impunity. And, unlike property, it made everyone the richer.

Of course, John would not forsake the Little People — the children, the workers, and all those downtrodden by the rich and their lackeys (like that flatfoot,

Grimshaw). Best of all, he'd be paid for the pleasure of exposing them, the rich and powerful.

#

Later that evening, John and Arthur once again found themselves lying on Arthur's bed, gazing up into the darkness. Mary was leaning on the door jamb.

"So, six-year-old," began John, "how did those objects come to be down in that hidey-hole?"

"I thought they might need to be underground," confessed Arthur, "so they could turn back into their magic form."

"Good job they weren't turned, eh?" laughed John. Arthur joined in, somewhat over-zealously.

There was silence again for a while.

"And I suppose the Little People had already removed that other item?"

"Sorry, Da," whispered Arthur, "that was me."

"Don't apologise, son! You saved the bacon!"

"I wondered," proffered Arthur, "if I moved it above ground, the bowl might turn into something else."

"And has it?"

"I don't know Dad. It's under the bed."

"Well let's see," said John. Fishing with his hand under the bed, his father brought out the chamber pot. "You're right. It has!"

Arthur's uncontrolled laughter was infectious. Even Mary, usually an onlooker, was seized with a fit of giggles, and joined the spontaneous rumpus on Arthur's bed.

❖

“Didavwiski”

by Ben Umayam

What more can you say. Your wife of 35 years, dead from Covid. You are anesthetized by the numbers that stagger, over half a million. Corinna had bad diabetes and heart problems. When first diagnosed, it wasn't a big shock.

You were prepared for the worst. You were just happy it happened so fast. You can't say much to the suffering. But she suffered less. You and the kids aren't devastated. There is a certain amount of guilt about this all around. Corinna, you loved her with all your heart. But your heart knew that Corinna, Corinna was not long for this earth once diagnosed.

You are a mutt, blood of slaves, some white plus Native American blood pulsing around. You remember how your mom's dad, Gramps, prepared you at an early age. He taught you death was an ongoing cycle of life. He talked of shamans, but you don't like that word anymore. You prefer to use the Cherokee name, *didavwiski*, two souls in one body, male and female, who have immense healing powers that help navigate the ongoing cycle.

You handle it well. You keep thinking about how the kids are holding well too. All flown the nest, they return, they cry, they go through her things, take what they want and go back to their homes, families.

Yes, there is that emptiness, loneli-

ness not easy to get used to, the church ladies remind you. But it is not as difficult as they say. At age 65, there is a niceness to not putting the toilet seat down, leaving glasses in the sink, not emptying the dishwasher, and bringing out the trash whenever, and not on certain days.

Everyone is nice. Anything I can do? We are here for you. They say you have your memories to hang on to even though Corinna may not be here anymore. At some point, you find that your smile is glued to your face.

It's always the ladies who underline; if you need help, just call. The guys, they just hang around and nod. Eat the food and drink, gathering to laugh to make you forget. It feels more like they are trying to make you laugh as if to say it didn't happen.

It is good of Charlie to offer something concrete, to come over and cook dinner. He went to cooking school and became a chef, and recently retired. The two of you worked together so many years ago. At that polling place. You were the financial officer. He was the director of polling.

He was good with people. He was good people as well. You thought he was really good until they busted him for writing fake checks to ghost telephone pollsters. He confessed to you he had a coke problem. Everyone had a coke

problem in the '80s, especially the disco gays like Charlie. He cut bad checks for his nightly bag of goodies.

You keep in touch after the firing. You quit the firm soon after, wish you had embezzled money from the bums too. He hires you as his financial manager. Things sour when he sees you wrote a check for yourself to pay a bill. You put the money back in right away, but he fires you anyway, apologizing. He could not trust you. Still, he hooks you up with his older brother. The brother and his in-laws have bought an apartment near yours, in Spanish Harlem, which he rents out.

You are property manager for Charlie's brother all those years, until he sold the place, just in time. After Covid, an apartment in Manhattan, not much of an investment.

Charlie shows up for dinner with everything. And the food, fancy. You are not used to two courses much less three. French, Italian, then French again. He brings the pot for the fondue app. The smell of three cheeses and kirsch permeate, the smell of dead flowers brought back from a funeral home, gone. The pan-seared steak replaces that odor of Obsession, your wife's favorite. The vanilla pod he scrapes when he makes the custard dessert, that aroma hangs everywhere. He cooks so fast. And he cleans the whole time he is cooking. The kitchen is spotless when all is done. He brings wine but does not drink. He says he is an alcoholic. He has one drink; he does not stop until he blacks out. He quit on his 60th

birthday because he blacked out.

You talk about those old days way into the night. Whatever happened to the bosses? One was Hilary Clinton's pollster until she lost the first time around. The other is a Democratic commentator on Fox News. That young kid is a millionaire now in Silicon Valley. That guy who ran the email company before email existed, he works for The Times now, the research department.

It gets late. You invite Charlie to crash. You ask him to share your big empty bed.

You remember Gramps saying *didavwiski* are healers, two souls, male and female, in one body. You feel you could use some healing.

He lies next to you, not sleeping. He turns around and looks you in the eye. You embrace him, close your eyes and kiss, deeply, languidly. You grab his hardening cock. You lie face down on the bed, guiding him into you. It is tender, slow, no fierce humping. It does not seem sexy; you both are flabby, old. It is steamy and soothing, mending. When it is over, he turns you over, engulfs your member with his lips. You come fiercely, ultimately. Together drained, you attempt to sleep.

Before you drop off, you remember thinking Charlie will go back to his husband, and tomorrow he will say nothing. You wonder if you will ask him again, to come over, stay the night.

You drop off thinking this *didavwiski*, he is one with much power, healing power. ❖

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.

This afternoon I can run. I haven't run in years. Maybe I still can, but I never do. There is nothing I have run from (or towards) in so long that I question my ability to do it. But in this movie, this interactive collection of snippets of film with me having point-of-view that we call a dream, I am running along the street, my leather-soled shoes clip-clopping on the pavement. It is exhilarating, because I know where I am going and I feel that I will get there without becoming side-tracked or actually lost, and that confidence in my ability is...exhilarating.

It is not the only thing that dreams still permit which reality prevents, either. I love the sensation of looking down in a stream and seeing a trout in the water, and having my fishing gear close at hand. That has been many years since the last time as well. Not that I actually catch fish in my dreams – I think that is too far-fetched even for my subconscious to believe. It is more likely for me to have a dream-cup of coffee with Jennifer Lawrence on the set of an upcoming film than to feel the snap of a strike and the living, thumping weight of a rainbow trout on the end of my line.

I wonder if I will lose this capacity to dream as I get older – begin to walk, slowly from place to place, stop driving, no more bicycles racing downhill, no more jumping from walls or sliding down banisters. Will my dreams become idle chit-chat with strangers in cafes until even that seems so desperately implausible that my dreams are repetitions of taking warm milk in a saucer and sitting in front of the snow-filled television screen.

IK - cyberspace

Two by Tina Bethea Ray

“Winter Mistress”

Insects disappear into the dark light
where crickets are silent
and lightning bugs have lost their glow
knees creak from barometric pressure
they hide beneath boots made from snakeskin
in winter, the sun forgets to be friendly
and, like a neighbor who closes the blinds at night,
doesn't come out to play

I move from caramel macchiato to pumpkin spice because I crave something a little seasonal
I move from fresh summer salads of tomatoes, peppers, and cucumber
to crockpots filled with rice, beans, and bone meats
Winter is a jealous mistress I don't need
but She keeps me
in bed at night

“Cladwell”

My Great-Grandfather's name was Cladwell
unusual, different
it didn't come through the years
like James or Josh or Tom or John but it suited him
the one who clad our family well
in wellness, in love
in as much wealth as
19th century sharecropping would allow
his height, more than 6'6, a monument to the sky
to our family
watching over us like oak trees that sway but do not break
trees that lend shade to us
protecting us from the unknowing of
those who grow up without a patriarch
he shielded us from growing up without someone to look up to
centered us closer to Africa, to the Benin people
to the Water People or the Nigerians
Were we Yoruba/Hausa/Igbo
his towering strength centered us close to God
straight-away
He towered his children, grandchildren and their children onward
He clads us well so that even when he died, he did not leave us overly exposed
to the elements of this world
we will see him again
our patriarch, our Root, our Route
forward
we will look upon him, look over him, look up to him
in the next life

two by Yuan Changming

“Here”

Few really enjoy staying within the territory
Of *here*. It is the other side of dream, poetry
Yonder, or the ideal. While most cannot wait
To escape, there is a great beauty with here:
It is always right in the moment of being

At this spot of meeting between time & space
Why not put your heart at the very center of
This circle of life? Where you can build a paradise
Upon your synapses, cultivating your fields with-
In the borderlines of your daily surroundings

Where you can even measure your feel point
By point, inch by inch, up & down, from left
To right, from front to back, clockwise or
Counter clockwise, over & over & over again
The other way around, around & further around

To fill in each & every blank left in your inner
Or outer spaces. Where you remain becoming

“Naming Game”

Call me Chinaman; call me Kung Flu
Call me Chinese Virus; Call me the
Spy; Call me model minority; Call me
Yellow Peril; Call me Disease Vector;
Call me Ching Chong, Chinee, Chink
Chinky, Chonky, or whatever else you
Like or whatever else you love to invent

If only you would forever remain superior
Continuing to dominate the planet, main-
T(r)aining your order; If only all your true
Troubles would vanish before God wakes
Up in his heaven!

After all, it must take

A name to make me as visible or invisible
As you wish me to be, while me remains
I with all these & countless other names

“Thought in Levy Flight”

by Yuan Changming

Where's Allen going? Pacific. Today is Wed. My old
Flame is sleeping, waiting to have her GGN removed
From her lungs to stamp out cancer. Poetry. Something
Good to pop up down the road? No luck is good luck
Choices Market where to work soon until 10:13 pm
A little dark cloud drifting beyond the horizon. Crows
Pandemic. Delta plus plus plus keeps chasing us all
China has closed its doors behind the bamboo curtain
Big paranoid. I cannot to go back to Jinzhou to see
Mom, let alone join Qi Hong & elope with her! Bid-
Den vs Trump in so many ways. The apolitical is way
More politics. Wife is cooking fish again, um, smells
Good. Blue & white & pink noises. Any dark ones?
Tinnitus makes me mad. Whistling. Ah, ppppanda!
Three trillion cells in my body, just as many stars
In the cosmos. Ants, rats, silverfish. Floaters darting
So evasive like hopes. Catch one. Paradise lost

continued from page 3

gravel was never going to look like jewelry, like fanciful precious stones in a crown) I was denied. Too noisy. It's done enough. Maybe one of your friends could put it in their bedroom for the second stage. I sulked at the waste of time, my valuable ten-year-old time. I moped at the idea of sharing this project with anyone else, even if it meant moving forward with it. I asked if I could plug it in somewhere else – the basement, the kitchen. The living room! No, no, and no.

I would like to tell you, in a wrapped-up-in-a-bow conclusion that this made me the writer I am today – slightly stoic, able to keep on tumbling day after day, week by week, even when the going gets rough. Or am I finally wise enough to see that if you start with gravel, no amount of polishing is going to make them precious gems. I wish.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

Contributors

Dr David Rudd, 70+, is an emeritus professor of literature who turned out academic prose for some 40 years, but always had a yearning to let his imagination take him to different places. His stories have appeared in *Horla*, *TigerShark*, *Erotic Review*, *Black Cat Mystery Magazine*, *Bandit Fiction*, *Literally Stories*, *The Creative Webzine* and a Didcot Writers anthology, "First Contact". He also enjoys playing folk and blues music, but this pastime is far more derivative.

Ben Umayam moved to NYC to write the Great American Filipino Gay Short Story. He worked for political pollsters, then became a fancy hotel chef and then retired. He is working that short story again. Recently, he has been published by *Metaworker*, *Ligeia*, *EthelZine*, *Lotus-eaters*, *34th Parallel*, *Digging Through The Fat*, *Anak Sastra*, *Corvus Review*, and two of Insignia's Southeast Asian Drabble Anthologies.

Tina Bethea Ray is a poet whose work is forthcoming in *The Good Life Review* and *Wingless Dreamer*. Her poetry is under review at *Barely South Review*, *Right Angle Publishing*, *Lost Pilots Lit*, and other creative outlets. Ray does not send simultaneous submissions. She is a former teacher and journalist who earned an English degree from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University and a Journalism degree from the University of North Carolina at Pembroke. Ray lives in North Carolina with her husband, sons, and dog. She is differently abled, but swims currents.

Yuan Changming hails with Allen Yuan from poetrypacific.blogspot.ca. Credits include Pushcart nominations besides appearances in Best of the Best Canadian Poetry (2008-17) & BestNewPoemsOnline, among others. Recently, Yuan published his eleventh chapbook *Limerence*, and served on the jury for Canada's 44th National Magazine Awards (poetry category).

THE LEGEND OF WIPE-ONCE WALLY

AND HIS 13 RULES FOR HOW TO SURVIVE A GLOBAL PANDEMIC
IN A NATION THAT'S GONE COMPLETELY BATSHIT CRAZY



Joe Buonfiglio

Does living through
a global pandemic seem
WEIRD?

Well, hold on.
Things are about to get a lot
WEIRDER!

The Legend of
WIPE-ONCE WALLY

And His 13 Rules for How to Survive a Global
Pandemic in a Nation That's Gone Completely
Batshit Crazy

**BUY IT NOW ON
AMAZON.com**



Imagine, if you can, James Thurber and E. B. White sharing a taxi to the airport with Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

They're stuck in traffic, will most certainly miss their flights, but are spinning their yarns to each other while sharing a flask of good whiskey and some snacks they purloined from the hotel mini-refrigerator. The cabby, listening intently to the raucous tales regaling from the back seat, has turned off the meter, because why not?

Now you have some idea of the stories of Victor Pogostin, PhD, in his collection *Russian Roulette*.

These...personal papers...from a cold-war - and beyond - intellectual in an occasionally warm world are insightful, funny, and poignant.

And all true.

Buy it now on Amazon

RUSSIAN ROULETTE



Victor Pogostin



Blotter Books