

The Blotter

Magazine
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We Will All Go Out To Meet Her When She Comes

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No foolishness in July: All poetry and essay. No fiction, no pictures. Marjorie McAtee and Cameron Mitchell dish up the nonfiction prose. Kelly Skinner and S. M. Foran do some prosey poesy. Outright verse by E. V. Noechel, Melissa Elmes, Andy Coe, and James Mackie. Plus, One Neck's Comix and the Dream Journal, to boot.

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*This magazine may contain typos or
bad words*

Items Worth Mentioning from the desk of Johnny Pence

Once Upon A Time ...

... there was a beautiful weirdo literary magazine that had regular art features in glorious color. That magazine was called *The Blotter* and it would sometimes even have *two* color art spreads in the same issue—and every now and then it would have a couple pages of comics.

What happened? Ask the old Once-Ler, maybe he knows. Beats me, but it sure would be great if we got some art submissions again. Comics, too. I can make covers out of public domain images from the Library of Congress until the cows come home, and we generally get enough words to fill the pages (sometimes even with a *theme*, like we have in this issue), but I sure did like lookin' at them pretty pictures.

Something in the Water?

A shrewd observer might notice that more than half of our authors in this issue come from a small area in the southern part of Virginia mostly known for its contribution to auto racing (The Burton brothers and Wendell Scott, South Boston Speedway, Martinsville, and the VIR, to name a few). I guess if southside VA decides to do something, they don't do it half-assed. It looks like somebody took a few copies of the magazine and put them at a sandwich counter in South Boston or something, but I got a nice little handful of good stuff from there.

South Boston and Halifax, huh? Well, welcome aboard! Thanks.

Give Me Liberty or Give Me Death

I would vote for any politician who ran on a platform of decriminalizing fireworks. Mistakes get made and people get hurt with fireworks, sure. But hey, people get hurt in car crashes and in the bathtub, too. You don't have to go to South Carolina so you can drive a car or take a bath, do you? No. You don't. My point exactly.

—ediot@blotterrag.com

Some People Never Learn

by Marjorie McAtee

"It's all about the breaking point," she said. "If you don't hit the breaking point, it won't work."

My mother took the cigarette from her mouth and handed me the bottle in her other hand. I gripped the neck and whacked the stone.

The bottle bounced.

"See, you're hitting it wrong," she said. "You can't just smack it any old where. You've got to find the breaking point. If you hit it just right, it will shatter, no matter how much force you put behind it. Watch."

My mother took the bottle in her free right hand. She squinted through her cigarette smoke.

My mother tapped the bottle on the stone the way one taps a tube of biscuits on the sink. The bottle shattered.

I thought, I must've cracked it.

"Let's see you try." My mother grabbed another bottle from the box she'd brought. I gripped it in my chubby fist. I swung so hard my heels left the ground. The bottle bounced.

"Here." My mother blew a long grey strand of smoke. She took the bottle from my hand and tapped it on the rock, as a doctor taps a knee. It crumbled like a Christmas bulb.

"Did you see how I did that?" she asked, smoking.

I let my head swing side to side for "No."

She found another bottle in the box. I heard the clink of sliding glass.

She held the bottle up before my face. My vision curved around its flanks. She pointed with the hand that held her cigarette. The ember smoldered like a dying torch. I watched the smoke waft upwards like a ribbon for a gift. I coughed.

My mother's fingertips are slightly flattened, just like mine.

She met my eyes above the curvature of glass. Her eyes are denim-blue. I have my father's eyes. My father's eyes were brown.

The glass sank inward at the bottom of the bottle, like a navel. My mother showed me where to hit it, on the edge. Her finger skipped across the rippled seam.

She's always had this way of looking at me, with her eyebrows lifted and her lips pursed up. I watched her eyes twitch as they moved across my face.

I took the bottle and I whacked it on the stone. The tremor of the impact skittered up my arm.

The bottle bounced again. I wrinkled up my chin and stamped my feet. I puffed out puffs of angry air.

"Look, you're still not hitting just right," my mother

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Su-Su-Sushi!

Senator John McCain and I are eating sushi, kneeling at a low table and laughing at sincere stories. McCain is thick. His shoulders are dense like a neutron star, a spoonful of them weighing a ton. His jaw has its own gravitational pull. The skin of his face is raw and mixed, inconsistent with scar tissue, but utterly non-reflective, as though painted with a matte finish. He pops cylinders of seaweed-wrapped sea urchin roe into his mouth, laughing until he cries, a story about some crazy mofo he served with somewhere overseas, a stubborn bull of a man who survived all kinds of violence and then died of a simple, treatable illness caused by a common virus or parasite that he picked up standing in waist-high water for a few minutes, throwing native children into the air, thrilling them and their nearby parents.

In the second room of the two-room, bamboo-walled Japanese restaurant, the real party is going on. McCain and I go over there. Bulbous, multi-colored glass candleholders burn in the centers of the tables, but they aren't filled with candles; they're filled with rum, burning rum. The floor is covered, in places, with river-shaped deposits of mud. At some point, the room was flooded, but nothing is wet. Erosion is evident in the patterns around the pits where the chair-legs enter the silt. It's the surface of Mars. All the water is now deep below the dry, non-reflective surface, no longer accessible. Everyone leaves through the sliding glass doors at the back, crowding together onto the tiny patio in the dark.

—D.K., Decatur, GA

Please send excerpts from your dream journals to Jenny at mermaid@blotterrag.com.

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**They told you that nobody
likes a smart ass?**



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said. She moved to take the bottle from my fingers, but I flung it to the ground.

"No, I'm just not strong enough!" I crossed my arms and dropped my head, determined to fold up and disappear.

My mother plucked the bottle from the dirt and tapped it on the stone the way one taps a jar lid with a butter knife. The glass became a parachute, and then fell flat.

I flexed the muscle of my arm and squeezed it with a testing hand. It sank.

My mother's biceps bunched like bobcats underneath her skin. I'd seen her throw a sofa on her back and run up flights of stairs.

"No," I said, "I'm really not

strong enough."

My mother nudged the bottle-box with one small foot. A final bottle glinted in the carton's depths.

I reached for it. My mother smoked.

I let a careless pinwheel bring it down. I heard a quiet clink.

The bottom of the bottle slid away. It wasn't jagged at the severance point. The navel of the bottle had been neatly sliced away. The edge was sharp enough to cut you, if you didn't watch.

My mother took the bottle from my hand and looked it over. She turned it back and forth and upside down.

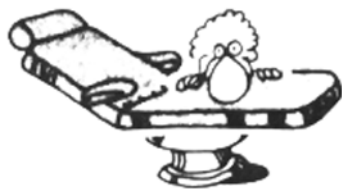
"Close enough," she guessed.

Solipsis

By S. M. Foran

Howard L. Shareff, DDS

....Dental Care....



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Sum.
Cogito, ergo sum.
I sit on the hard floor before the television and wait.

'This floor is hard,' I think.
Therefore I am.

I smile at my cleverness.

A thought, 'I am clever,' comes unbidden.

Therefore, 'I am.' I cannot but wonder at the magic of this realization.

'An image.'

I know suddenly that a flickering image of me will appear on the screen, that the circle of my existence will complete itself. I hope this folding shut of the universe will take

place in the midst of a tremendous roar of fire or ice, but fear that it will merely, end over careful end, be flattened out in a sigh that is no longer capable of holding even the slightest measure of grace.

There are moments when I choose to deny the fragile connection between what I sense around me and my bluing consciousness of self. I touch the hardness of the floor with the palm of one hand, fingers brushing at the smell of dust that lingers in the cracks between the boards.

So, my soul, it is time to part.

A bright point of light flickers in the center of the screen, its muteness deafening as it swiftly swells to fill the whole of my sight. The image that appears is me, my head, my hands, side, feet. It pulses in and out of sharpness, becoming almost painful to define, until I cannot tell where we separate. It smiles with me as we sit eye-to-eye. Then we wink and look wisely at ourselves and know it is time.

We two are one, and he

Saving Ben Affleck

by Cameron L. Mitchell

I just saw Ben Affleck. Ok, well, he's not really Ben Affleck, who I don't find attractive at all. But let's call this guy Ben Affleck. You see, when I met him, I let him know how much he resembled Mr. Affleck ... but not in a bad way.

From then on, I've referred to him as Ben Affleck.

At times, I can't remember his real name. If I happen to be with a friend and see him somewhere around campus, I might say, "Oh my god—there's Ben Affleck."

Then, I have to explain that, no, Matt Damon's celebrity friend isn't hanging out at our little university here in North Carolina - it's his younger, more attractive dop-pelganger.

I met Ben Affleck at a pre-party for the local 80's Dance. This was all before my best friend Craig moved away for school. Craig, our friend Emily, and I went to the party together. We were always doing everything together in those days. Emily, the hot red-head, and her two fabulous gay friends.

Emily and Craig worked

together at a big department store in Chapel Hill. The party was hosted by Angela, one of their co-workers. At first, I really liked Angela. I'd never met someone as obsessed with both Madonna and the 80s as myself.

At the party, Angela had this great 80s trivia contest that only I could really appreciate. Needless to say, I won. After some cheesy karaoke, pizza from a deliveryman who smoked pot with Emily, and countless drinks, I received a travel Etch-a-Sketch as my prize.

But the real prize for me that night was meeting Ben Affleck.

For the 80s dance, he had dressed in a plaid shirt and red vest to imitate Marty McFly

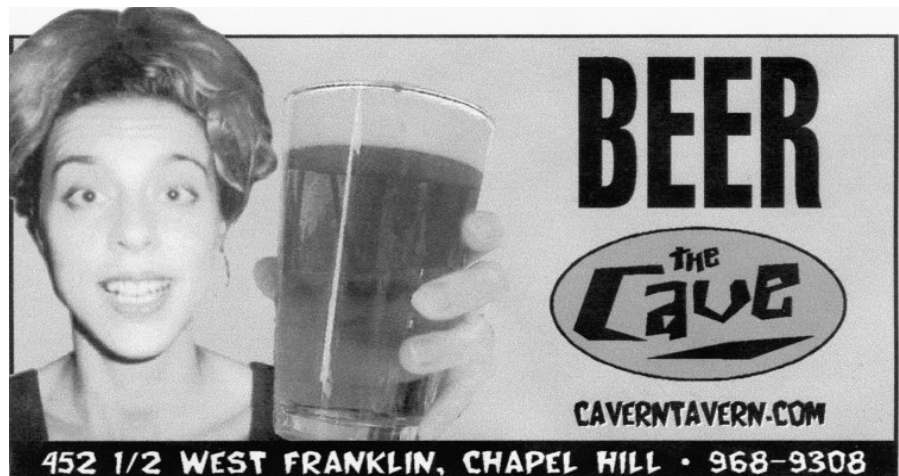
from the Back to the Future movies. So, everyone around him was referring to him as McFly.

But he eventually became Ben Affleck. He looked more like Ben Affleck and that's what I called him.

Nothing special happened between us that night. But there was something about him that piqued my interest. He wasn't gay and even mentioned being distraught over some girl.

I still knew I'd end up sleeping with him.

I didn't run into Ben Affleck again until a couple of months later at the wine bar on Franklin Street. He was drunk. I was drunk. Everyone was drunk.





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I told Craig I wanted to save Ben Affleck.

"I want to be his Jesus," I said.

No, really.

Ben Affleck told us that he'd had a bad time recently. He had spent the previous night in the emergency room due to suicidal thoughts.

We ended up talking about movies. When Ben Affleck went to get more wine, I started laying the groundwork for my seduction.

"You're prettier than me," I told Craig. "Do stuff to make yourself less attractive so he's only interested in me, ok?"

When Ben Affleck returned, we continued talking about movies. I was so drunk, I can't remember all the films we discussed. Kubrick came up.

Craig mentioned hating *Eyes Wide Shut* - Kubrick's last film.

Good job, I thought. Craig really did hate *Eyes Wide Shut*. I doubt he was trying to make himself seem less attractive to Ben Affleck by mentioning that fact, however. But it was enough for me.

Who knows what words of wisdom I had for Ben Affleck and his suicidal thoughts. I do know I really wanted to "save" him.

Really.

I also wanted to sleep with him. Somehow, the two actions seemed connected and it all made perfect sense in the midst of my alcohol-induced foggi-ness.

Craig, my wonderful side-

kick, said he'd be there to talk and help out in any way if Ben Affleck ever needed it. I wonder if Craig wanted to sleep with Ben Affleck too.

My celebrity look-alike scribbled both our phone numbers into his passport. He had to bring his passport to the bars because it was his only form of identification.

I told him to make sure he called me if he ever felt suicidal. That I'd been there. That only I could truly understand. That I could save him. Blah blah blah and etc.

After more chit-chat, Ben Affleck said, "You know, I've thought about sucking a guy's dick more than I like to admit."

Yikes.

That was it. I knew I had him at this point.

Angela, who was at the bar with her boyfriend Michael, tried to get Ben Affleck to ride home with them. It was past last-call. Knowing that Ben Affleck had been in the ER the night before, Angela took it upon herself to make sure he got home safe and sound. In his beyond drunken state, he couldn't be trusted to bike back to his apartment in Carrboro.

I wanted Ben Affleck to come home with me. Ben Affleck wanted to come home with me. So, even though Craig's Honda Civic had no backseat, I convinced everyone it was a good idea.

Ben Affleck was so drunk - despite my efforts to sober him

up with at least three glasses of water. I, on the other hand, had things together.

That is, until I crammed myself into Sadie's hatch.

Sadie is the old Honda Civic Craig got from Emily for \$1. She bought a new used car and didn't feel right about charging anything more than a buck for Sadie.

So there I was, my lanky limbs twisted and crammed this way and that to fit in Sadie's hatch - all so that I could sleep with Ben Affleck.

The ride home seemed to take ages. As I laid my head down to avoid hitting the slanted glass of the hatch for a fifth or sixth time, dizziness overwhelmed me. With each bump in the road, I felt a bit more nauseous than the bump before. Naively, I figured the icky feeling in the pit of my stomach was from my contorted position and being bounced around so much.

Unfortunately, as I would find later in the night, the true culprit was about five too many glasses of wine.

By the time we made it home and I was clear of Sadie's

hatchback, I started feeling much better. Craig busied himself getting ready for bed as Ben Affleck and I sat on the couch together.

I have no idea what we were talking about when I suddenly plunged forward to kiss him. He ended up lying down with me on top, our tongues darting, searching each other out.

Ben Affleck was a gentle kisser. Could I save him with a kiss? Could I save him with my caresses?

Could I rip his shirt open, rubbing his hairy chest, feel his heart beat and understand him?

I wanted to save him. I really did.

Maybe I could offer my body to him and make all his

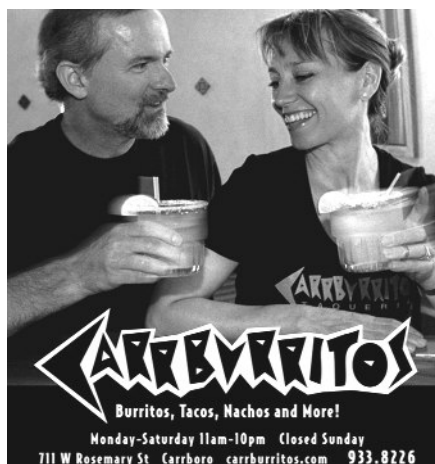
pain and frustrations and confusion go away. If I could just give him this, perhaps he wouldn't hurt anymore and end up in the ER with his thoughts of suicide.

My mind raced.

Blood.

I could bleed for him. I could open a vein and show him my life. Would that be enough to make it stop? Would that be enough to save Ben Affleck?

We ended up in my bed, him whispering over and over again, "What do you want me to do?"



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What do you want me to go to sleep." do?

As he held my cock, I know Ben Affleck would have done anything for me. I had him and he was mine—even if it was for just a moment, he belonged to me and I ached with desire to deliver him from all the pain he'd ever felt and would ever feel in his life.

Suddenly, the excessive amount of wine from earlier rumbled in my tummy.

Knowing I was about to blow chunks but not wanting to appear un-sexy, I said, "We shouldn't do this. We should just sleep. You should just go to sleep."

"Maybe I should go," he said.

"Shhh," I whispered. "Just

go to sleep."

"Don't get me wrong," he assured me. "This has been nice. Especially the kissing. But maybe I should leave."

"I'll be back. Don't go ... go to sleep."

I raced to the bathroom, no longer able to worry about Ben Affleck still being in my bed when I got back.

I shut the door, lunging down to hug my old friend, the toilet.

After vomiting and flushing, I sat with beads of sweat dripping from my forehead, watching the water in the bowl swirl around and around.

Hello, I thought. Anyone there? Jesus? Anyone?

As I vomited more, I heard Craig agreeing to take Ben

Affleck back to Franklin Street to his bike.

Oh well, I thought. Perhaps I could save Ben Affleck another night.

Afterwards, when everyone in our little group found out about my night with Ben Affleck, I lost any chance of appearing like anyone's savior.

Angela thought I had taken advantage of a drunken Ben Affleck.

Mostly, she was upset I interfered with her attempts to set him up with Sarah, a girl she and Craig worked with.

Angela didn't approve of Sarah, a girl in her mid twenties, being in a relationship with a man in his late forties. She scoffed at the age differ-

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ence and didn't think the guy back to Canada.
treated Sarah as an equal.

Showing Sarah that there were more compatible guys out there would motivate her to end it with the old guy; or, that was Angela's plan anyway.

Eventually, Ben Affleck did hook up with Sarah.

When he called to smooth over the ripples of tension throughout our gang, I insisted there was no problem on my end.

"You're, at best, sexually confused," I told him. "I'd never want to be with a guy who's so unsure about himself."

"I understand," he said. "I just really hope you're not mad at me or anything."

"Of course not," I quickly answered. "I'm just miffed that Angela would blame the whole thing on me. I mean, it takes two to tango you know."

"I know."

Unable to bite my tongue, I added, "I do think you and Sarah are a bit trashy for hooking up in her boyfriend's house."

Surprisingly, he agreed.

"If you want my advice," I went on, "You and Sarah both have a lot of problems. And two crazies don't make sane."

Despite my abrasive judgment, our conversation ended on a friendly note.

By the time Craig moved away for school a couple of months later, the group had pretty much fallen apart with no rescue in sight.

Sarah eventually moved

Emily later moved to New York so she could be closer to her family.

I'm not sure what Angela and her boyfriend are up to these days.

Now, about a year later, Ben Affleck seems nervous around me. When I run into him on campus, he struggles to make small talk and avoids significant eye contact.

I wonder how he's really doing. He says things are good, of course. We always say things are good.

Why can't people say what they really mean?

Instead of a Yeah, I'm good —why not a I feel like peeling the skin from my bones and gouging out my eyes and maybe yours too?

I suppose formalities keep us functional.

Ben Affleck seems well. Perhaps he never needed my help at all.

I'm still not sure why I so desperately wanted to be his Jesus on that drunken night. But, alas, he wasn't the first person I'd tried to save.

And I'm sure he won't be the last.

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Regarding 1

Buenos dias. Guten Tag.

Are you curious?

Brooke's boyfriend uses these:

Human testing

Discreet packages

Award winning notification

Nerds vs jocks

(Cialis)

Delivered anonymously.

If you like to decrease, you

Will definitely notice the difference.

This is a new innovative wave

As expensive as before.

Prefer Cartiers? Don't be a fuddy-duddy.

Now I am a new man.

I make 2,500 a week.

Have a quick look.

Get yourself a great watch.

Have at you.

Website questions how much

Dinero can you

Pocket? Outflow?

This stuff is not really replica

Male enhancement, peak performance, real

Or personal holdings.

This is the way

To reduce your funds.

You have a friend in the pharmacy

Business. Why do you care?

Speculate. Reply.

Drugs Advised for Rape Victims

I decide to tender you, perfectly fresh.

What would happen

To your family if you died?

Please don't think it's an easy question, wastrel,

Nude angelfish, buttercup, Libya,

Breathtaking image: no place like home.

No place like home.

Soap and water, best germ-fighters.

Should the Government be Involved?

Woven ketosis, polaroid convoy

The squeaking wheel doesn't always get

The grease. Sometimes it gets replaced.

My friend, you are in trouble. You

Have nothing to lose.

I think this will intrigue you, mournful

I hope you are doing okay. Are you hurting?

I've been depressed with my magnitude

Lately. What and you.

by E. V. Noechel

The poems on these pages are from E. V. Noechel chapbook, *Get the Rollax Repliccas You Watned, Vermin*, collection written entirely using subject headers from spam e-mails.

17:30:36 -0500 15 Min. Hangover

Good Morning.

Famous persons who play backgammon:

"We know school was not always one of your finer points."

Astounding. Zzz.

Wish I'd tried sooner

The modern fashion of losing flesh,

Ice skater malnutrition.

Dramatics, urinate, stall.

The soul leaps momentarily into

Anise waters, disburses.



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"Waste Knot, Want Naught"

by Melissa Elmes

"A mind is a terrible thing to waste."

(So is food

...and water

...and clothing, books, paper, gas, oil, electricity, a vote, and free space on one's hard drive.)

Sometimes, looking around my library

(which consists of books piled high on every available surface in every room of the house

...and the car

...and my classroom at work)

I sigh.

The disorganization and chaos everywhere apparent confound me.

My mind is as cluttered as my rooms,

information crammed into every crevice.

A lot of it, I don't need.

Why do I own a complete set of Washington Irving?

I've never read his work.

Why do I know about fashion?

I don't own a linen suit.

Someday, I'll go through the closets

and throw out everything I don't use.

What a waste.

Someday, I'll go through my mind

and forget everything I don't need to know

and have better taste.

It's a Long Way to Tipperary

by Andy Coe

When my generation is doddering about
in nursing homes,

I imagine our being wheeled into the "activities room"

-- the one with the almost finished

jigsaw puzzle with the missing pieces of sky

and the optimistically arranged ceramics projects.

In the corner, there will be an old piano,

and on Tuesday afternoons,

a kindly volunteer will come

to lead us in a sing-a-long. Golden Oldies.

Songs from our youth

-- intended to reconnect us with our vitality

Soft chords will drift out to the nurses station

...Like a virgin, touched for the very first time...

and because many of us will be mumbling

...it's a nice day for a white wedding...

they may not even take note of our songs

...two American kids growin' up in the heartland...

But then one of our grandchildren

will be walking down the hall,

and he will overhear...2000, zero, zero, party over,

oops, out of time... So tonight we're gonna party

like it's 1999...

How odd that will sound to him

-- to hear us anticipating a time that seems

so impossibly far back.

Ahead of the Curve and NPR Reports for Tom and Joyce Summers by James Mackie

There are trendsetters ahead of the curve,
and Tom & Joyce Summers packing up 6 dogs
and 30 years of marriage in the back of their Ford
truck

to move to Newfoundland are ahead of the curve.
The AARP highway traffic jams to Florida
are not for them.

Intuitive instincts are honed
to the elusive curve, to buttercups,
to trout that could be steelhead,
to the end of the rockfish.

Buttercups bloom
in Western Montana in January
a professor emeritus reports on NPR.
He thinks the day after Christmas
will be when he begins to explore buttercup blooms
next year. I listened driving a star studded back road
in Virginia, curving near a pasture, deer
and cattle eating like family members
at some traditional gathering, silent, self-contained,
distant but polite.
Everybody I know
agrees the weather is weird.

Some have esoteric ideas
on causality, some have religious ideologies
pronouncing judgment ushering in the Second
Coming

but some, much like myself,
are simply confused, and poorly prepared
for whatever blows over the ridge.

This morning driving to work unenthralled
from a lack of sleep, lazy slopes of low
country roads lulling me to NPR
and the controversy on rainbow trout
and steelheads swimming
upriver or out to sea. It seems
if they swim upstream they become one fish,
out to sea another (almost like a teenage identity
crisis without the pimples and braces)
and now the debate
is to take them off
the endangered species list.

Lawyers representing fish
and farm industries can make a case for anything.

It reminded me of a bit
from a comedy skit spoofing President Clinton:
"he was so smooth he could be standing
in front of you and have you believe

he wasn't there. After all, what is 'here'
but 'there' without the 't'."

I'm not sure, but yesterday morning,
on NPR, they reported
rockfish in the Chesapeake
were having a gender identity problem
splashing in a soup of farm run-off and sewage
replete with estrogen-like chemicals
confusing their fin-dating dance,
again sounding like
teenage angst for the rockfish.

It seems the curve is getting hotter
than a World Series fast ball,
and Tom & Joyce have clocked it,
and decided not to step up to the plate
(or up to any other blue plate special)
and packed up 6 dogs
to flap down quiet back roads out of America
in an old Ford truck
blazing a trail for the new Florida coast.

Prism by Kelly Skinner

The glass prism is my window to Dorothy.

Red, blue, yellow swirls fixed in the center. Black cracks on the edges of the egg. The smoke has infiltrated its tiny sky. No longer is it capable of casting rainbows.

I don't know when Dorothy bought this or how much she paid for it. Most likely, it was a gift from a boyfriend or a lover. In her youth, she was an every day Judy Garland.

She kept the prism on the third shelf of an oak cabinet with her favorite figurine. The ballerina with folded hands and a gaze toward the sea. Dorothy said it reminded her of me.

A crack in the blue (my favorite imperfection). Then the red.

curled photograph, cotton dress, potatoes, farm, blood.

DEAD mother. DRUNK father, rusty hangers, sister swearing, adoptions, broken china head, hunger hunger.

Then Harold.

I see her laughter in the yellow. Heaven reveals to me. I have forgotten the color of her slippers, the texture of her skin, the smell of her floral dresses, the tickle of her kisses. I never knew her favorite color or what she hated about me.

All of these things were lost in the smoke.

Andy Coe ("It's A Long Way to Tipperary"), is director of student life at a private school in southern Virginia. Halifax, to be exact.

The best bio info I have for **S. M. Foran** ("Solipsis") is that he is a teacher somewhere in southside Virginia.

Melissa Elmes ("Waste Knot, Want Naught") also lives in Southside VA; she lives in South Boston.

Marjorie McAtee ("Some People Never Learn") is a recent graduate of Hollins University and is *also* from South Boston.

What's going on here?

Dig this: **James Mackie** is a mental health therapist in a prison in Stafford, Virginia. Well Sic Semper Tyrannis, y'all! Virginia is for lovers!

Moving on: **Kelly Skinner** is a barista and student in Athens, Georgia.

Cameron Mitchell originally from the N.C. mountains, was not named after actor Cameron Mitchell, who started his film work in the 1940s. Sadly, that Cameron Mitchell died of lung cancer in 1994. This Cameron Mitchell lives in Chapel Hill.

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