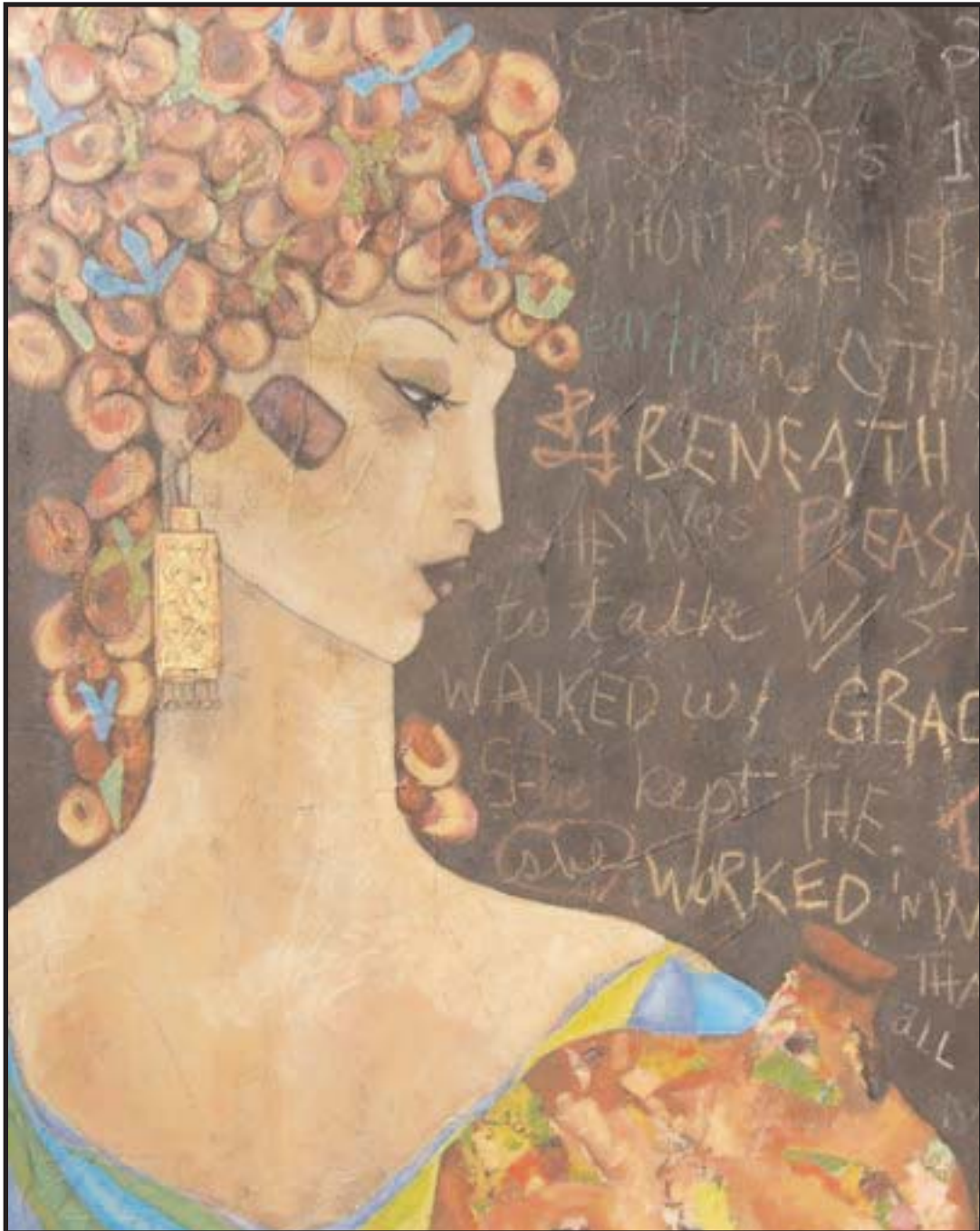


*In Springtime a man's thoughts turn to a story by Emma Aarnes; some art by Ebeth Scott-Sinclair;
a handful of poems by Arun Gaur, Barb Webb and Michael Frey;
and The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

APRIL 2008 MAGAZINE



THE SOUTH'S UNIQUE, FREE, INTERNATIONAL LITERATURE AND ARTS MAGAZINE

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Brace Boone III.....Director of
Development
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

Advertisers and Subscriptions Contact:

Martin K. Smith
M_K_Smith@yahoo.com
919.286.7760

Submissions and Editorial Business to:

Jenny Haniver
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Wouldn't wanna have a press release,
people would think that I was just good
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Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief
chief@blotterrag.com
919.933.4720 (business hours only!
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"Road Kill"

Outside the kitchen window a Red-shouldered Hawk clenches a barkless, broken cedar tree. The hawk is a big thing, as big as Gettysburg, my rascal housecat, who is also watching, and who drew my attention to the hawk in the first place. He (Gettysburg) wriggles in some ancient ineffable anticipation. It (the hawk) appears uncomfortable a mere four feet off of the terra firma. Clearly it is used to focusing its googlies from the clear blue of Chatham County, just a tad beneath the westbound heavy to O'Hare out of RDU. I (erstwhile birder) stare rudely, but for all I know, he is technically far-sighted and can't see a close up uselessness like me at all. Then I realize there's something afoot, or, in this case, a-wing. The raptor is actually watching the cute little birdbox my wife asked me to emplace in the back yard a few years back so that she could see it from the kitchen. Said box is bolted to a cedar pole, and has since become the crib for a bevy of nestlings to a faithful stay-at-home mommy and a her headstrong hubby Eastern Bluebird that occasionally insists there is something inside my kitchen he wants and no double-paned Armstrong is going to keep him out. His fluttery bumps in the morning have become my ersatz alarm clock. At this moment, however, his brilliant blue-feathered ass is in trouble - the Red-shoulder has belled up to the bar for a to-go order.

From the safety of my kitchen, I am amazed with the level of "rurality" I have found, so close to the five over four and a door Triangle 'burbia. Like that old nature show that came on every childhood Sunday right before *Disney*, I am alternately Marlon or Jim, presented with fauna of a variety that is, in some ways, off-putting. We sit with the light off, Gettysburg and I, peeking out the window. I hear the whine in G-cat's throat, his hunting instinct is revving at 88 miles per hour with the brakes on. I sip the dregs of last night's cold tea, afraid that opening the fridge to look for morning juice will disturb things. My daughters or my wife, may at any moment come into the room and flip on the kitchen fluorescents, sending the man-shy hawk highballing into the top end of the troposphere. Although I bear no ill will to the little Bluebird - I enjoy watching him hang from the Christmas lights on my rain gutter - I am nailed to my seat by this drama, like a combat photographer. The Bluebird scoots and shoots and the hawk's head swivels on its axis, fierce beak opening and closing in silent anger. Then, when my anthropomorphic imagination expects it least, the hawk unfolds and flaps its wings off into the deep woods, leaving the Bluebird to its family business.

Forget my earlier non-biased, *Wild Kingdom* position. I wonder...but who can read into what a hawk is thinking? Was my friend performing some sort of bluebird Tai-Chi that made the Hawk reconsider dinner plans? Or was the hawk merely getting a little pre-meal G-2? Assuming, you believe that birds have the intel with which to get intel.

One of the grisly measures of the onset of the vernal equinox we've all witnessed is the results of opossum attempts to cross the roads of central North Carolina. What Darwinian failure permits them only to get halfway across? I want to know.

Part of my retained childhood memory regarding *Our Close Friends The Mammals* understands that the natural behaviors of the opossum cause them to attempt to avoid danger by pretending to be dead. I once found a big daddy possum in the trash barrel where he had apparently shimmed under the lid and feasted on rinds and crusts and wrappers. When Dad took the top off the barrel, the possum hissed like a vaudeville heckler. Then the little beggar went stiff and toppled over, as if he had experienced the rigors of mortality. We left him in a race for his life, for it was garbage day. He revived before the cartage truck came, but it was a close call. So perhaps being zapped in the headlights of a Camry bearing down on them is too recent an evolutionary development. And the argument is moot when pretense of death becomes reality.

I'm aware that the once-verdant, slow-moving countryside is rapidly being replaced by fine suburban living. Possums (as well as squirrels, deer, and raccoons) can't handle the increased stress of road activity as the developments...develop. Like the Oliver Douglasses of yore, I look at each new intersection and traffic light and slowly shake my head.

You see, I've enjoyed buckling up on sunny Saturday mornings and riding around the back roads of the counties that encompass the Triangle. We load up on vital supplies (crackers, lemonade, Tootsie-Pops and such) and take it slow, looking left and right, letting folks with their scurrying ways pass us by. My girls revel in the joys of munching Barnum's Animals, listening to Blood, Sweat & Tears and gazing out the windows. We sing the same lyrics over and over, "And when I die, and when I'm gone, there'll be one child born in this world to carry on." We pass new corn in gentle rolls of fields, and cutover plots owned by the paper company. Then I see a strange vision, small raggedy peasants hunched over a fallen soldier. A small whitetail, having fulfilled its genetic requirement to stand in the road and stare at the twin lights of heaven, is already down to rump roast and drumsticks, prime cuts having been devoured by birds. Specifically, these are turkey buzzards, looking priestly in their black garb and prayerful attention to the dead. I don't stop, and neither do they seem troubled by my slow fossil-fueled passing. But I swear that they each look up at me, naked heads twisting, thoughtfully sizing me up for some future meeting.

A mile or so down the road, another dark discovery. A dead housecat as big as...no, wait. I depress the brakes and roll to a stop, reverse and back up. Bea is asleep, as she often becomes to the lulling of automobile motion, and Olivia can't quite see it

from her side, so I leave the music on and get out to look. A bobcat, strangely perfect and stiff and as beautiful as if she had been frozen in a Pleistocene glacier. I have arrived sometime between her death, and the onset of decomposition. She seems to suffer naught but a bit of tan roadside dust. I leave this mystery and get back in the car.

Isn't "Road Kill" an impolitic title for what happens when a critter is hit by a car or truck? It certainly has a lack of...that sympathy that Americans claim to have for, if you will forgive me, underdogs. Ah, but our outbursts of frustration with tragic events fade quickly and on the whole we tend to be a cynical and callous breed. I suspect our short-term memory is weak and ravaged by multiple disillusionments. On Monday we cluck at suburban sprawl, and by Friday we're adamantly against publicly-funded public transportation.

I knew a woman who had two young daughters, three and seven. She told a story about a night when she was driving home via the many back roads that criss-cross the Garden State between the apartment sprawl north of Princeton and the swampy 'burbs across the Delaware from Philly, (see how I've made you feel right at home?). The ground fog was that thick, musky stuff that makes visitors think that New Jersey is the world's toxic waste dump, and exacerbates the legends of Mafia-Don burials and the Jersey Devil. She slowed down and putting her wipers on slow, gave her seatbelt a cinch. Well, worse came to worst and a big doe jumped in front of her car and with a crump she knocked it down, braked, and skidded to a stop. The only sound was her panting and the irregular wisht-wisht of her wipers. Suddenly, the deer regained its feet. She screamed, and the deer bounded away. From the back seat, the seven year old said without missing a beat, "It's OK, Mommy, that kangaroo had no business being in the road." Admittedly, a very good point.

The rare one of us goes unscathed. And in case I ever choose to run for public office, I've attached my own summary list of animal-auto incidents, just for the record:

Date:	Car type:	Animal:	Notes:
1973	Chevy	Owl	Owl was late-night dining in road, and surprised by high school students (including myself, sitting in the back seat of the Malibomb with a girl sitting on my lap. Actually, each of us sitting in the back had a girl sitting in his lap. Appropriately, we were cruising home from "Friendly's Ice Cream Parlor." The bird extended its wings to take off, but an unfortunate combination of large body size and generally vertical take-off caused its ascent to be so delayed as to be traumatically mashed against the windshield, to the surprise of occupants of the car. Much pleasant screaming and hugging and saying of "Oooh, yuck!" Reported as accidental death by auto.
1982	Pontiac Bonneville	Deer, doe	Said deer waited until I approached, then dove off of an embankment at the edge of road against the grill, front right quarter panel and wheel of my car. Said car was but two days old (still had powerful odor of new car!) and mortally wounded. Deer was probably a yearling and dead as a hex-nut. Car never recovered from chronic case of bad tie-rods. Reported as suicide.
1984	Ford Tempo	Dog, beagle	Commuting to pick up a co-worker I encountered a Beagle. The dog ran out into road at car, headlong into the left front hubcap. I slowed down to see dog spinning in road. After I stopped and returned, the dog was already dead. There was a dog-head dent in the hubcap. Tried to find owner, but it was 6:30 in the blessed AM and after two people were outspoken in their annoyance at my knocking on their doors at such an hour. Once again, I reported it as suicide.
1987	Chevy Caprice Deer, buck	Early evening, driving between two corn fields, the buck ran out and tried to gore my two-door, but instead hit the Ford F-150 behind me that was (apparently) following too close. I'd seen such things happen before (on The History Channel's archival film-footage about dog-fights during the Battle of Britain.)	
1988	Chevy Caprice Pigeon	I came around a curve in a farm road in New Jersey (again!) and the bird flew into my closed driver's side window. I swerved and nearly wrecked from surprise, as did the driver behind me when all of the feathers were suddenly blown into his windshield. We both stopped to recover our composure at the incident. Until he saw my window, the other driver thought it was a prank. Instead we suggested that it was pigeon terrorism.	
2002	Volvo wagon	Deer, doe	10:00 PM, North Carolina. Both my wife and the deer became confused as to right-of-way on a country road in Apex, so the deer took the initiative and hit the Volvo left rear quarter-panel. We stopped (our girls were still asleep in their car-seats) and I went back to check things. The deer was still alive, lying on the road, its feet kicking out as if it were running. I called my friend Stuart, who helps me with things like this (fixing the attic vent fan, shingling a new roof, clearing a pine tree downed during ice storm) and told me not to try to touch the fallen animal, because deer hooves are sharp and dangerous. Before he got there, however, and although I was standing at the side of the road and the Volvo had its hazards on, the deer was hit again by no less than four subsequent drivers coming down the same road. Nobody slowed down, nobody missed re-running over the deer. Phenomenal aim, all things considered. By the time my buddy Stuart arrived, the deer was dead, and we pulled her to the side of the road.

Why, you may well ask, did I call Stuart to come rescue us from the wounded deer? Because Stu is an eagle scout. I can't even start my own chainsaw. There's a country-western song in there somewhere.

I know of a fellow who lives in Wake County with the remarkable avocation of roadkill custodian. I say with some reasonable certainty that there is no job description or civil service role with that title, but apparently he is paid for responding to phone calls asking him to retrieve sad Bambi's and Thumpers or the more frequent Pogo Possum from their bitter ends. I want to talk to him and get more detail, but no-go. Perhaps he requires a special privacy, a Boo Radley protection from the populace. I can't imagine he makes a living, a ten-spot per corpse, but it causes a windy fluttering in my brain. How many squirrels have I seen this morning, confused, darting, praying to their niblet-corn-sized-brain-created-God for direction, only to survive because some folks brake for mammals, even at the risk of forty five thousand dollars worth of German engineering?.

Well, that's enough for now. I feel like a squirrel on the yellow no-pass lines, trying to decide whether to go on or back. At the very least, I need to find closure with nature. As we pave and clear-cut Chatham County to make room for people next door in Wake County who tire of, I don't know, their three year old houses and five-foot-tall dogwood trees, there is one truth I see, as clear as a white-tail held in thrall by my high-beams. We're all running out of room. Time to fly, old hawk.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

Mom says I should stop fooling around in this space and just tell people the truth; that I'm a bad boy with a filthy mind, looking for love in all the wrong places.

"The Prince"

by Emma Aarnes

Her father mailed the mirror to the girl a month after her mother had died. It was her height and oval shaped with green and purple mosaic tiling around the edge in an ivy design, with improbable violets springing out of the vine. There was no note in the package, and the girl did not recognize the mirror, but she assumed it was her mother's so she mounted it carefully on the inside of her closet door. One night it fell—startling her from sleep among her many pillows. Awake, she had no idea that there had been any noise at all. She knew merely that her hand was clutched firmly around the necklace at her throat, tugging it against the back of her neck with enough force to leave a thin red line. In the morning she discovered the mirror and jumped back as if she'd seen a cockroach. Only the bottom half was broken and she gingerly carried it to the corner of her room with the bookcase and propped it up, careful not to knock any pieces out. She hadn't the time to deal with broken

glass that morning. No, instead she had to hurry into the office with wet hair and mascara applied blindly as the bus bounced the three stops to work. She was a receptionist at a finance firm that made gobs of money doing things her film degree had left her incapable of comprehending. She hated it, but the boring job meant she had the time to come home and think for hours.

Since the mirror had fallen, at the infrequent moments when she went to the bookcase she would observe parts of herself in motion, independent from her body. A severed hand would grasp the corner of a book and pull it forward, or a lopped off foot would appear as she held it up to the glass, toes wiggling.

Her roommate had seen it one day. The girl could not see what her roommate saw in the mirror, but the other girl gasped and clutched her hips. "Jesus. Get rid of that thing. Even broken it makes me look funny."

She knew that by "funny" the other girl meant "fat," but was afraid to

say so. They had met on an internet message board. The arrangement wasn't really working out, but neither of them would say so. Mostly, she stayed in her room, afraid to venture out and interrupt the never-ending stream of crime-dramas her roommate watched whenever she wasn't working as a sous chef. The girl ate granola bars hurriedly, over the sink and broiled small patties of ground turkey that she took into the living room and ate as her roommate stared at whatever murder suspect graced their screen.

Once, she had made a mistake. "He looks like someone I know," she said as she observed a youngish looking white man on trial for killing his victims by making them swallow sewing pins until their stomach lining perforated.

The other girl had stared at her in horror. Whether it was for knowing such a creature or daring to speak before the commercial break, the girl was unsure because she was only comfortable in scripted situations: "With whom am I speaking?" "He's not in right now." "Would you like to leave a message?" "Please hold."

That morning she was annoyed she hadn't bought another mirror when she knew she had a meeting with the department heads to discuss the new voice mail system. She had to be certain her stockings didn't have runs. So she stood in the center of her room and twisted her head over first one shoulder, then the other as she tried to see the backs of her legs. Her mind could not focus as she argued about the need for pantyhose with the version of her mother that lived in her head. Perhaps that's why it took her a minute to realize that she could see her own blinks. The amount of time her eyes were shut against the light was long enough to make the scraps of darkness noticeable. She stood straight up, abandoning the search for snags in

They told you that nobody likes a smart ass?



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the nylon, and told herself to blink faster. She was facing the wall now, vaguely aware of the memo board laden with postcards, but she could not change the speed of her blink. Instead, every ten seconds it was as if the power had gone out, only to flicker back to life just before panic set in. She thought about shaking her head to clear it, but her head didn't move. She focused on the phone on her desk and thought about calling her mother, before she remembered with a failed wince that her mother was dead. The dark periods behind her lids were becoming longer and she thought she might have fallen. The last time her eyes opened, she noted the odd orange spots on her ceiling and decided to call the super about mold.

When she woke up, the girl was frustrated. Her body felt strange and immobilized as though straps were holding her down, but she couldn't feel any straps. The only consolation was that her eyes were once again under her control. She could see the outline of her nose, strands of her hair off to the left, and a green ceiling, which she stared at just to be sure she could make herself not blink.

"So you're awake," said a voice to her right, which caused her to pull back startled, until she became more

startled that her recoil had not actually occurred. She hadn't felt the bed move, assuming she was lying on a bed. She was fairly certain her head was on a pillow. A shadow appeared above her in the periphery of her vision and then a face. It was an odd angle and the girl couldn't help staring up the stranger's nostrils, which were wide and oval, but relatively clean. Whoever he was, he owned a nose-hair trimmer. She tried to turn her head towards him but nothing happened.

"What's wrong with me?" she asked, except she didn't. Her mouth did not open and she heard no sound. All she seemed capable of was sliding her eyes all the way to the right in an effort to get a better view.

"You can't talk, can you?" The stranger's voice was calm, but not calming, and his disinterest unnerved her. He sighed. "Blink if you can hear me."

She blinked. "You probably want to know what happened." After pulling her gaze away from the man's nostrils, the girl noticed what she thought might be a white lab coat and was at once relieved and anxious. It was good to be in a hospital when one needs help, except for the fact that it meant she needed help.

She blinked. "Your roommate called 911," the man said—she could not see his

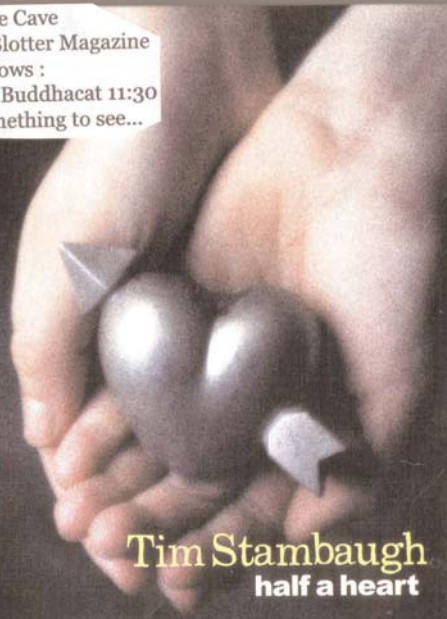
name tag. "Said you collapsed." She heard papers shuffle. "We don't know what's wrong with you, but now that you're awake we'll run some more tests. At this point we know there's been no damage to your spinal cord, so there's no physical reason for you to be paralyzed." He glanced at her as he said the word "paralyzed" as if expecting a reaction. "Now we'll do some brain scans."

She blinked. It was the only reaction available. Paralyzed? Christopher Reeves paralyzed? Talk through a tube paralyzed? The girl stopped listening to the doctor as wheelchairs rolled through her head and she tried to picture being forever four feet tall and unable to look up, only straight ahead. That was if her neck could hold her head up. She might need one of those braces.

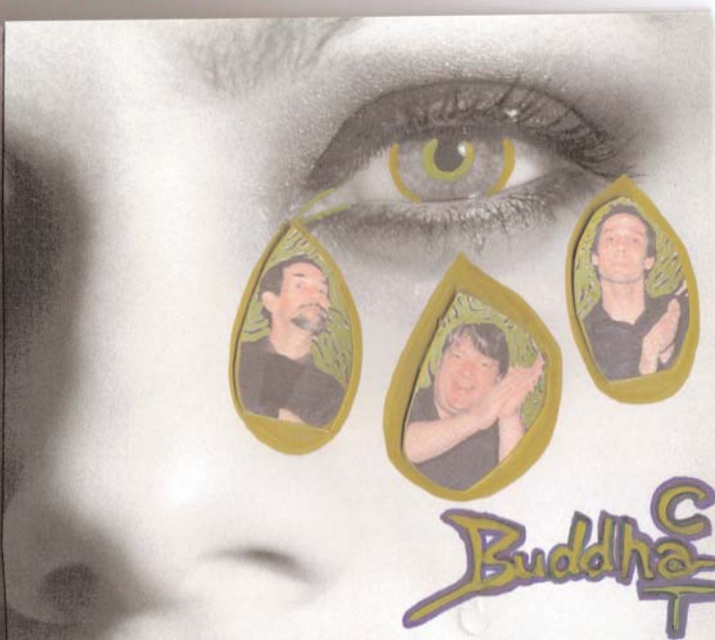
Suddenly, with a snap as he shut her chart, the doctor walked briskly away, leaving the girl to her ceiling and an assortment of hospital noises that she could only guess at. She worried that he might have told her something important, but couldn't imagine anything more important than the word "paralyzed." There were lots of rolling carts and gurneys, hushed whispers, shower curtains and beeps, most of them rhythmic. The loudest came from somewhere behind her, probably her own monitor. In an effort not to think she began to count her

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heartbeats.

* * *
The girl was surprised when she woke up on her right side with hair clogging her face. Tentatively she experimented and tried to raise her left hand to move her hair, watching as her hand did just that. Holding her appendage up to her face, she wiggled her fingers and made a fist. Her right hand was resting under her head, still frozen in the fetal position. She could feel her fingers move against her scalp and made to roll over so both hands would be free. Her torso jerked slightly to the left but she remained on her side. She tilted her newly mobile head to look down her body, reassuring herself that it was the same body she'd always had. She could see down to the edge of the bed where here feet were also turned sideways and pressed against the row of metal bars at the foot of her mattress. Intently, she tried to move her toes but no amount of staring could make her toes twitch.

"Now what?" she said aloud, happy to hear her own voice even if it was disused and hollow sounding. No one answered. She glanced guiltily at the curtain next to her (her own curtain remained open) which hid the bed next to hers. She snapped her mouth shut and grimaced. There was no call button on the side of the bed she was facing. She hoped it was on the other.

The girl began rocking her torso so she could gain enough leverage and turn over. But even her moving muscles felt depleted and stringy, causing a painful stitch of panic to tighten her chest as she wondered how long, exactly, it had been since she'd last been awake. Since she'd last moved. From her vantage point she could see no flowers or metallic balloons with exclamation points so she assumed either a long time—long enough for people to stop sending such things—or little time

at all.

After several more minutes she'd worked her right hand free from beneath her head, which felt too heavy to raise. She pushed against the side of the bed with her hands and twisted her ribs to the left, until she flopped over. Her arms were now limp at her sides, but she could still move her fingers. Intrigued by the new view, the girl craned her neck and even managed to lift her head off the pillow to look around the room. There was a second hidden person to the other side of her and she could not see the door, nor even hazard a guess as to which direction it was. Perhaps there were two and she was in a long hallway of illness. Privacy was apparently not something considered important for the semi-paralyzed. Despite the sounds of several other beeping machines, there was no other noise in the room. Whoever her suitemates were, they were quiet. No one watched the TVs mounted on the wall. Slowly, she ran her hands down her torso, pressing lightly into her stomach, which seemed neither more nor less concave than when she'd last encountered it. Her hands stopped when they reached a waist band and she was surprised to discover she wasn't cloaked in just a flimsy hospital gown, though the thin crinkled fabric covering her breasts had convinced her she was. Her hands could feel her skin and the fabric, but her skin felt no pressure at all. It was an odd, quietly terrifying sensation to feel her hip beneath her hand but remain unable to feel her hip as a part of herself. It was as if she was touching someone else's body and she poked and prodded the bone, imagining that this was what it felt like to other people. This is what it was like to touch her and not *be* the her. She continued to explore for another minute before shuddering and clasping her hands, desperate for a dual sensation,

the recognition of two parts of her body.

"Hello!" she tried to shout, but her voice cracked. She swallowed, working her throat muscles and swirling her tongue to produce saliva. It was wonderful to control her mouth, like learning to roll an 'r' for the first time, she felt everything. "Hello! Anyone there?"

Finally, she heard the whoosh of air as a door opened off to her right. "Hey!"

Steps moved toward her and a nurse, clad in purple scrubs dotted with Tweetie Bird, peered at her with a startled pigeon face before fluttering away and retreating back to the door.

"Hey! Come back!" She tried to sit up. She placed her hands on either side of her hips, pushed against her bed and tried to contract her stomach muscles. Her stomach lifted off the bed slightly but the weight of her head startled her and dropped backwards. Her chin tilted up to the ceiling, her back arched. She struggled a moment and gave up, allowing the small of her back to reconnect with the mattress. She crossed her arms and waited.

* * *
"...spontaneous verbalization is sometimes a symptom," came a man's voice. He was muffled, but she guessed he was standing outside the door. Then the squeak of footsteps sounded and she stared determinedly at the point at which the doctor should first enter her line of sight.

"I'm awake," she said, even though she couldn't see him yet. Whoever it was wasn't walking fast enough. "It's not 'spontaneous verbalization.'"

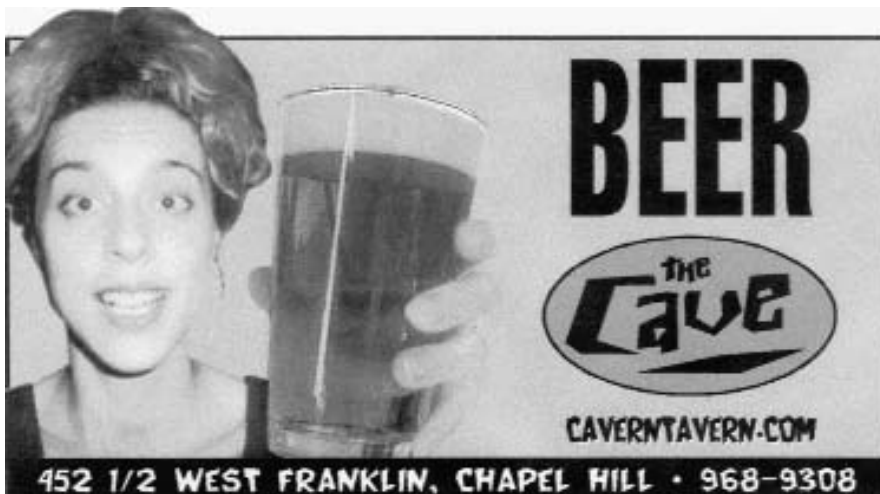
At last, he came into view and the girl recognized him. It was startling how dignified he appeared once she wasn't gazing up his nose. He did not respond to her statement, but moved to check her machine.

"It would be great if someone would talk to me," she said, trying her best to keep the whine out of her voice even though she wanted to grab this man by the stethoscope until he told her what had happened.

"Just a minute."
"Can you at least tell me what day it is?"

"August 17th."
"So I've been unconscious for a week." Again, he said nothing, just looked at her chart and made slight tsking noises against his teeth. "I remember you," she tried again.

"Oh?"
"You were here before. I blinked when you asked me to." The



doctor nodded. "You said I had some tests. How did those go?"

"Not very well, since we actually needed you to be awake for some of them." He pulled a pen from his pocket and began making notations. "We'll have to reschedule."

"Does that mean you still don't know what's wrong?"

He shook his head distractedly. "Oh no, we know what's wrong. We're relatively certain."

"And?"

"You have conversion disorder."

She blinked. "What does that mean?"

"You can move your arms and upper body, but are your legs still immobile?" He asked and reached out to pick up her foot, lifting her leg into the air as the girl felt nothing—only stillness where she thought her leg should be. If she closed her eyes she would have thought her leg was still lying on the bed.

"Yes, they are. What's conversion disorder?"

He put her foot down and clasped her chart against his chest with his eyes on the floor as if in deep contemplation. The girl waited and then listened as the doctor rambled in medical jargon for several minutes. It was hard to decipher but she caught "sublimation" and "psychogenic" and she certainly understood his phrase, "no physical cause."

"Wait," she interrupted, "You're saying there's nothing wrong with me?" Pinpricks of anger stung her body as if she were caught in a sharp rain blown sideways. "I'm not *pretending*. This isn't all in my head. I can't move my legs."

He raised his hand to quiet her. "Yes, I understand that. No one believes that there isn't a very real problem."

She wished she could pace. She always paced when she was worried. "What will the tests do? I mean, if it's not physical, how can they detect anything?"

"They'll tell us which parts of your brain activate when you tell your leg to move. Then we'll know what area of your brain is causing the problem."

"Then what?"

The doctor stood up quickly, his pen once again in his hand as he resumed his bustling, impenetrable manner. "Let's do the tests first and we'll go from there." He walked around her neighbor's curtain and out the door before she could say anything else.

* * *

The next day the girl woke up in her new room, complete with a roommate she could not see and a call button she could reach, to find her father asleep in the chair next to her. After the tests, which had left her so exhausted she'd barely stayed awake for the results, they'd figured out that instead of "activating her primary motor cortex" when she willed her leg to move, the girl "stimulated activity in her right orbitofrontal and right anterior cingulate cortex." She didn't know what that meant, but the doctor insisted it was typical of patients with conversion disorder. One or both of those places (she wasn't sure which) had something to do with emotions and that was what caused the paralysis.

Knowing this made her feel better; that there was, in a way, physical evidence of the problem, but everyone else focused on the emotional cause—that the girl was sublimating something.

Her father had fallen asleep sitting up, with his glasses pushed up to perch on the top of his completely bald head. In his sleep, his head had tilted forward till his chin met his chest and now his glasses stared straight at her, centered on the flat expanse of his scalp, still hooked to his ears. His freckled pate provided an impression of a Mr. Potato Head doll before he was given any features.

"Dad!" She poked his knee with her working arm. So far, the right one appeared to be sublimating. "Dad."

He jerked his head up, which caused his glasses to slide all the way off his head and clatter to the floor behind his chair. "What?" His circular eyes were the only symmetrical part of his pasty face. He blinked rapidly and felt the top of his head, searching for his specs.

"They're on the floor," she said, grateful that for once she didn't have to bend down and grab them.

"Oh." He made no move to look for them.

"What are you doing here?"

Her father clasped his hands together passively. He was used to sitting still for long periods of time. Sitting was all he did since he had retired. "What's wrong, exactly?" he asked.

"It's complicated, Dad."

"Will you be all right?" He was blinking avidly at her hands now, avoiding her eyes, and the girl was frustrated and charmed. For a moment, he seemed fatherly.

"You don't need to worry."

"But you can't walk, right? That sounds like something to worry about."

"I'll be fine. I just—I just need some time off, or something. It's like a body-enforced vacation. Or mind-enforced. It doesn't matter. Eventually, I'll be better." The assuredness of her tone made the girl feel calm.

Her father looked at her even though the girl knew that when he wasn't wearing his glasses she was one blob of brown hair to him.

"You should grab your specs before someone steps on them," she said.

Grunting, he turned in his seat and bent down to pick them up. "Okay." As he sat back up, she noticed a book resting on the arm of his chair. It was hardback and thick, at least three inches, and it looked as though it might tip off the chair at any moment.

"What's that?" Her father did not read.

"S from your roommate."

"Huh?" She had spoken to the other girl on the phone the day before, and arranged to be sure her rent was still paid.

"She brought it by earlier this morning," he answered. "She's a nice girl."

"I guess." She held out her moving hand for the book.

"It's fairy tales. The Grimm kind. She said you'd like them." Her father shook his head and the girl imagined the look he would give a grown up who read fairy tales. "I didn't ask."

She shrugged her working shoulder and flipped through the pages, enjoying the look of the translucent yellow paper and tiny words. "How are you?" she asked.

He ran a hand over his smooth skull. "I'd be better if I'd spoken to you in the last six months."

"I didn't have anything to say."

"I promised her. I promised that if she was ever like that, ever forgot who I was, who you were—"

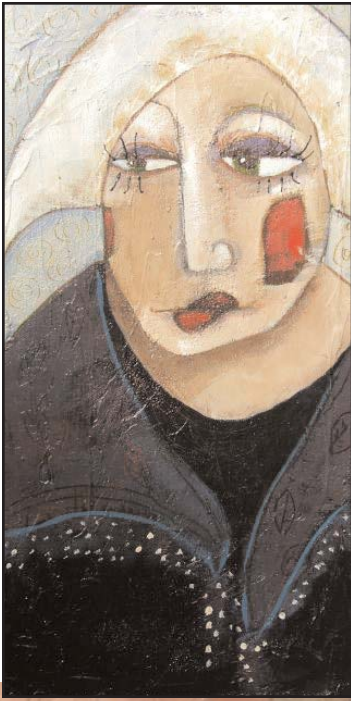
"I know Dad. I know."

Her father sighed and slumped into the chair as if he'd breathed out his bones and needed to hang his body on a new structure. "Did you get the package I sent you?"

"Was it Mom's?" She waited for him to nod. "It broke."

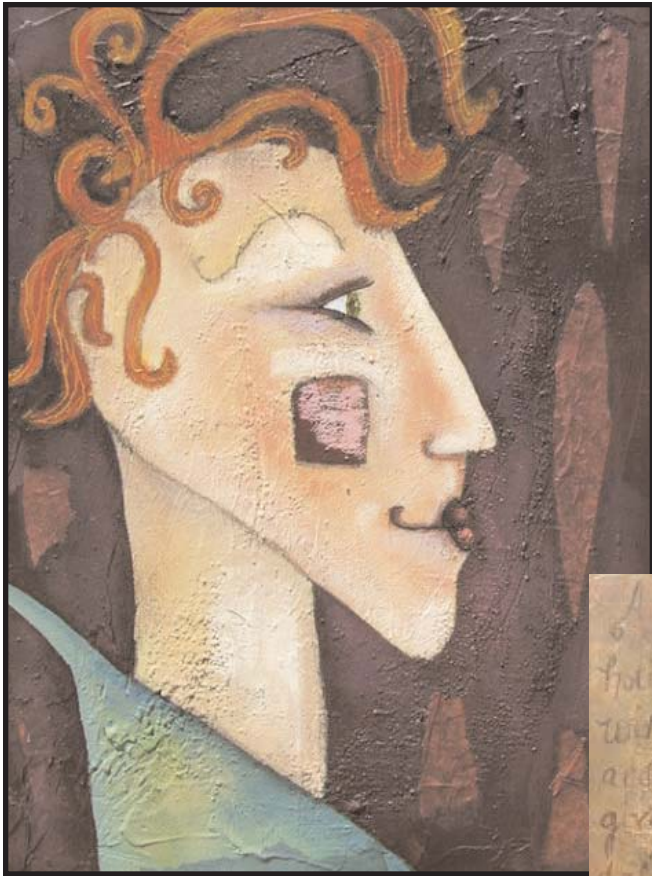
"She wanted you to have it."

The girl pictured the broken mirror. It could be fixed. The door to the room swung open, allowing the stifled smell of hospital air into the room. It was the doctor, but he wasn't there to see the girl and he walked by them. She and her father listened as he spoke to



Lower Left: "Doctor's Wife"
Left: "Matriarch"
Below: "Lady Derby"
Right: "Patrick's New Do "
Far Right: "Noble Woman"
Below Right: "Estelle"

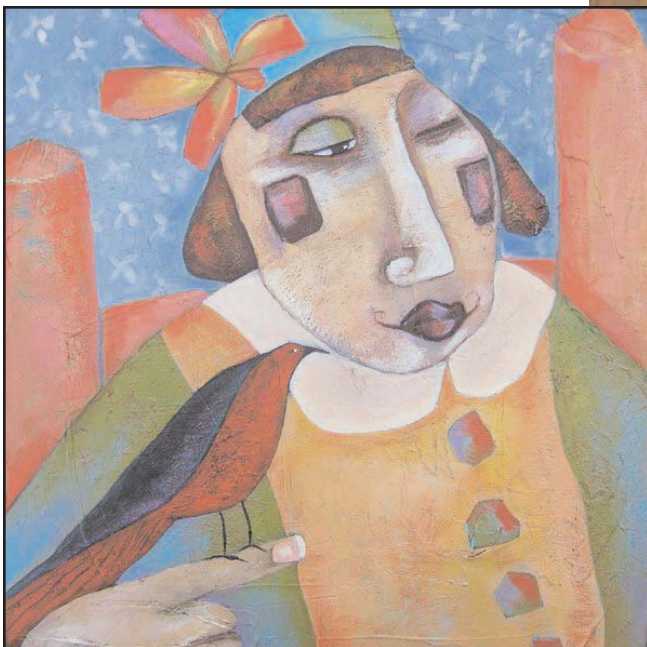




Ebeth Scott-Sinclair

Chapel Hill, NC

www.ebethscottsinclair.com



The Blotter

her neighbor.

"Good morning, George," the doctor said, sounding more cheerful than the girl could remember hearing.

"Morning."

"How'd you sleep?"

"Fine. Okay. I woke up when they brought her in."

The girl and her father tried to see through the curtain.

"Yes, well, you've had a room to yourself for a week. It couldn't last forever."

George breathed hard twice in an awkward approximation of a laugh that had no sound behind it. "How long do I have to do PT today?"

"At least an hour." More heavy breathing. "You'll be fine." They listened to papers shuffle and then the first, tentative squeak of the doctor's shoe before George called him back.

"Will you introduce us?"

"Who?" The doctor's softer tone was gone and he sounded like the man the girl knew.

"To my new neighbor."

Abruptly, George's curtain was thrust to the side and he and the girl tilted their heads at each other as the doctor made the introductions. George was thirty-one, three years older than the girl, and he'd done something magnificently awful to a ligament or a tendon that made his left leg quiver even when he sat still. It shook beneath his sheets as if electricity coursed through it. He seemed short, but it was difficult to tell and his sandy blond hair had already started to thin at the crown of his head. His nose was crooked in a way suggesting multiple breaks gone unset and it gave him cockeyed expression that didn't match the thin, serious line of his mouth. He looked like two faces patched together, but the effect was endearing rather than grotesque, as if he were an adolescent who only needed time to grow into his face.

The doctor left as soon as he could and the girl's father followed him. His arms hung at his sides and he let the door bang against his shoulder on his way out.

"That's your dad?" George asked. The doctor had just said the man was her father.

"Yeah."

"Nice of him to visit."

"How long have you been here?"

He leaned his head back against his pillow, exasperated with the very thought. "Six weeks."

The girl shuddered. "Wow."

"How long do you think you'll be here?"

"They don't know. I can't

walk."

"Me neither." The girl wondered if he would ask why, but he kept talking. "Well, I can sort of hop along, but it's not pretty."

She stayed quiet, shamed by his injury, which was so real and which he could combat physically. It was unfair that her own body had done this to her, voluntarily almost. She would never trust it again. What did it want from her? Her mother's brain had betrayed her, as had her grandmother's. It was their family legacy, but usually there was less physical fanfare. Her mother's mind had leached away. Every night it seemed something had come and stolen another year, another person. Once, even, the cat had been purged and her father had been forced to give Antigone away because her mother kept shooing her out of the house. A month later, she had been distraught at the animal's absence, forlornly insisting that they open cans of cat food at the same time every day, even though she was gone.

"God," George said and the room was silent until a nurse came in and closed his curtain. The girl fell asleep.

* * *

She woke up to a silent room. A nurse stood over her, and motioned at George's curtain, indicating that he was still asleep. After checking her chart, the woman retreated and the girl was left with her book and the five channels of television the hospital received. This room was in the front of the hospital, several floors above the emergency room, and all day she could hear sirens and sometimes shouts. She was in a "long-term care" ward, but everyone here was eventually expected to leave, and not in a euphemistic way. The nurses were busy, though, sometimes taking as much as fifteen minutes to answer her pages, so she knew she couldn't depend on one of them to come chat. The girl leafed through the book, noting that her roommate's name was printed in careful block letters on the inside cover in smudged pencil. Her own children's books had all been donated years ago, sent off in boxes to the Salvation Army or her mother's younger friends when they had children. Fairy tales had never really interested her.

Still, her roommate had placed a pink, heart-shaped sticky note on the book's front cover. In loopy handwriting she'd written: "p. 237 I thought of you." The girl was gripping the book with both hands now, having somehow awoken her sleeping arm. Dubious, she opened the book and flipped to the

recommended page. The story was called "Little Briar-Rose" but she soon realized it was "Sleeping Beauty."

The feast was held with all manner of splendor and when it came to an end the wise women bestowed their magic gifts upon the baby...

It shall not be death, but a deep sleep of a hundred years, into which the princess shall fall.

The picture showed only a coarsely drawn female face asleep and tangled in flowers, with her arms splayed awkwardly.

And, in the very moment when she felt the prick, she fell down upon the bed that stood there, and lay in a deep sleep.

There was a star next to this sentence and the girl shook her head. Her roommate had an odd sense of humor. She kept reading. A few paragraphs down the margins had been dotted with smiley faces.

Then the youth said, "I am not afraid, I will go and see the beautiful Briar-rose." The good old man might dissuade him as he would, he did not listen to his words.

But as soon as he kissed her, Briar-rose opened her eyes and awoke, and looked at him quite sweetly.

And then the marriage of the King's son with Briar-rose was celebrated with all splendor, and they lived contented to the end of their days.

The beeping took a minute to penetrate her mind. Nonetheless, she finally noticed how loud it was, how fast. George's monitor was getting louder and, though his curtain was pulled, she could see the glow of the red flashing light above his bed. Awkwardly, but with less effort than sometimes, she pushed herself up to a sitting position so she could lean forward and try to see around the curtain.

"George?" she asked, feeling like an idiot. She could hear a soft sibilant noise and her eyes jolted from his opaque curtain to the door in rhythm with the sound. "I'm sure they're coming," she said, loud enough so he could maybe hear her over the beeping. She could hear sirens on the street, high-pitched and shrieking down in the ambulance bay. Sometimes, since none of the patients were critical, their nurses got called downstairs.

She pushed her call button rapidly, and then managed to do it to the rhythm of SOS, adding her own beeps to the cacophony in the room. Again she focused on the door, willing it to open, to reveal the doctor, who

should have been here by now. No one came. The hissing noise stopped and after a moment's quiet pause, George's machine began issuing one long, steady beep. The girl knew what that meant. She turned to her right and lowered the bar on her bed, leering down at the floor. Leaning heavily, she grasped the left side to maneuver herself forward until her legs were bent in front of her. The wail of George's monitor continued, but no nurse came. Too slowly, she managed to throw her legs over the right side of the bed, until she was sitting on the edge towards the bottom, hanging onto the rail at the foot of the mattress and willing her toes to move. They didn't. She tried to breathe normally. Her legs showed no signs of responding, but using her arms she pushed forward slowly, watching for the moment when her feet touched the tile, even though she couldn't feel it. She waited until her soles were flat against the floor before letting go of the bed. If it was all in her head, maybe she could pretend her legs worked.

She collapsed almost immediately, but by grabbing the bed once more she slowed her fall. Her elbow banged against something and vibrated in that unpleasant way of funny bones, but she began to pull herself along the floor towards George's bed. She could not believe no one was here.

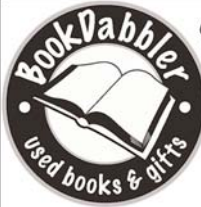
"George," she wheezed, the energy of movement making her pant. "George, I'm coming." She rounded the curtain, but kept her eyes on the floor. She needed to stay focused and if George was thrashing around, or worse yet, not thrashing around, she didn't want to know. She couldn't hear the rustle of any sheets, but by now she was so close to his monitor she couldn't hear her own breathing. When she reached the edge of his bed, her knees pulled up against the wheels, she finally looked up. She could see no part of him on the edge of the mattress. Lifting her arm, she groped along the top of the mattress, feeling for him. She couldn't find anything. Succumbing, she glanced at the monitor, and grimaced at the solid line below the zero where his heart beat should be. She was going to have to lift herself.

"George. Just a second." She huffed in a half laugh, knowing she sounded ridiculous. He wasn't waiting for her to get off the phone; he couldn't breathe. She glared at the edge of the bed, which she clung to with both hands, and heaved upwards, expecting little to happen. Suddenly, however, she was standing next to the bed, leaning on it, her hands braced in the cen-

ter of the mattress where no one lay. The noise of George's monitor continued to sound in her ear, but the girl could feel the adrenalin seeping out of her into the floor, which she was suddenly aware of as cold. She was standing, sort of. Her body bent at the waist as she leaned forward, hovering above the bed, supported in part by her hands. But her legs were braced against the floor, knees locked and trembling but present. George's bed covers were twisted into a pile at the bottom of the bed and the sheet beneath her hands was still slightly warm. The clothespin device that closed over his finger to measure his pulse and attached to his monitor was dangling by its chord. Distantly, the girl realized that her own must be doing the same, and that the reason his monitor seemed so loud was that her own had joined his in emergency mode. Some of her hair had fallen over her face, sticking to the sweat on her brow. The slick strip of sweat on her upper lip was slowly evaporating and she stuck out her tongue and licked it, enjoying the taste of her own salt.

She straightened her back, pushing her pelvis forward until it brushed lightly against the side of the bed and removing her hands from their braced position. She stood for several moments, staring at the empty bed as the monitor droned. The monitor was plugged in to the same outlet as her own, which was just above the floor in the space between their curtains. Deliberately, she took the few steps necessary and bent down to pull the two plugs, plaguing the room with silence. Even the sirens from outside were gone. Then, her legs still shaky, the girl backed away to return to her own curtained space where the nurse had placed the paper bag containing her shoes and the clothes she'd been wearing. It was under the chair her father had been sitting in. She squatted, enjoying the pull of tendons and ligaments and the warmth of her own hand on her knee. Hesitantly, she slid her stockings over her unshaven legs, adjusting the sagging nylon as it collected in bunches around her knees.





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I had a nightmare. It started out good but it went bad. Everything was fine, a sunny afternoon with golden skies, but then there was an explosion - in the distance so that I couldn't see the cause, nothing flaring or falling. The blast, which you never see in the old movies, but now special effects wizards portray as a monstrous wind, blows me and my wife out of our spring reverie and over the tops of the trees like kites snapped loose from their strings.
BCS - Cyberspace

CONTRIBUTORS

Emma Aarnes asks, "what does 'happily ever after' mean, anyway?" She's a Clemson, SC native currently working on her MFA at Columbia University and this is her first publication. Very cool.

Chapel Hill resident **Ebeth Scott-Sinclair's** distinctive style is a synthesis of visionary art and quasi-cubism. Her paintings, characterized by surface texture and vibrant color, conjure a world of juxtaposition. Her pieces are in collections throughout the United States. More information can be found on: www.ebethscottsinclair.com. And she's in Chapel Hill? This town rocks.

Arun Gaur lives in Panchkula (Haryana, India) and has taught British/American literature and the Critical Theory at the Department of English, Mizoram Central University, Aizawl, where he was the Senior Reader. He has authored one critical book—*I Stand Apart: Alienated Center in Walt Whitman's 'Song of Myself'* (2002), many book-review articles and illustrated travelogue pieces. Recently, his poems have appeared in *Gold Dust*, *The Pedestal Magazine*, *Skald*, *Cosmopsis Quarterly*, *Stellar Showcase Journal* and *Salzburg Review*.

Barb Webb of Salt Lick, Kentucky lives with her husband, three children, two cats, a dog and "an ornery Oscar fish", who all patiently endure her quirks and passion for writing. Someday, when her devotion pays enough to buy her family a boat and hire a maid, they may actually forgive her, too.

Michael Frey writes, "I am a doctor of medicine and an associate professor at Albert Einstein College of Medicine of Yeshiva University in New York City. I grew up on Long Island and graduated from Brandeis University where I was taught/ greatly influenced by Allen Ginsberg. My poetry is recently published or forthcoming in WestWard Quarterly, Foliate Oak, Illogical Muse, Chantarelle's Notebook, The Pink Chameleon, Right Hand Pointing, Haggard And Halloo, and Collected Poems From Ceremony Magazine. Thank you for your time and consideration."
Thanks backatcha, Doc.

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“Laughing Matters” by Arun Gaur

Some are too eager for that damned spot.
All the fragrance of Arabia
would not tarnish that damned black spot.

It is too glorious a centre for a retribution.
The quick spot. The dark spot.
The beloved spot. Your father comes laughing
for that damned spot.


Laughing, their boots smeared with mud,
brambles and leaves of balsam bushes stuck
into the laces, all gathered from the untrodden paths
they come.

I would like to hop from shoulder to shoulder
slither through hole to hole.
Over the thousands of shoulders in the crowd
that had gathered there
to hear the court verdict of their saint
who was to be sentenced for raping a minor.

Your daughter pants and your arms slung limp.
Lamps glow red overhead
with their oppressive noon time desert glow.
Are your hands strong enough
to take you swimming through this after-glow?
To the center or to the bank.

Are your hands strong enough to survive
this after-glow of the sun-set or the moon-set?
Is there no strain in your voice?
They move step in step.
A light stretches sky. It is a black light.
It is a white light.

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"Come Clean"

Alice pays homage
to Wimpies restaurant
on the corner of 5th and Main
serving raisin pie
to a pumpkin-carved grin.

Alice is all too familiar
with the oil-dim pocket
and the pungent odor
laced with coffee and grime
it chokes her
as she refills the cracked porcelain
careful to snatch her hand
from the dirt encrusted claws.

Nails that scraped her skin
outside the diner
with whiskey still fresh
upon stale breath
just one kiss, he begged
before she punched his stubble-jaw
fleeing to the confines
of her rusted Buick.

Alice bathed five times
in her leaky avocado bath
before climbing in bed
to wash tears against the empty pillow.

No amount of cleansing could be found.

by Barb Webb

"Broken Pie"

In the back of the restaurant
where the air hangs thick with grease
and unrecognizable charred remains,
Mary turns up the crust.

Pressing thumbprints to mold accordion
edges
wounding fruits and vegetables
preparing soup for eleven years
making a nickel over minimum wage
cashing her paycheck every Friday
to stab circular stains on printed paper
at the Knights of Columbus
on Tuesdays,
and the Legion on Thursday nights.

Mary exists in a secular level
where the thrum cessation pulls
sucking the void of existence
robed in gray
denying the truth of humanity
because she is eaten
into every swift forkful.

All that remains is a bitter stain,
and flesh motif crust.

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"The Slaughtered Lamb Is My Place"

Remember the summer before we went off to med school? We rented that little studio apartment on the upper eastside; the one with a kitchen and a fold out bed.

I like that we used to cook spaghetti with butter every single night and wash it down with ice cold beer we would buy at the deli down the block.

We took a break from the science stuff to read all those Ibsen plays. Why did we target him again? Then you wanted to show me downtown New York City.

And we found our way to The Slaughtered Lamb Bar in the west village. And I will tell you girl, though we were barely of drinking age, I felt like Jack Nicholson.

And we had one of the most fun nights of my life. That was my first subway ride. I was so worried someone would hurt you, so I watched closely.

Our sneakers and T-shirts were sadly unfashionable for the village, but I don't think we knew it. Who drank more? Probably me, but you kept up.

I can still see your smile widen then burst into laughter when we left the bar to check out the Pink Pussycat sex shop across the street.

Now, I will admit that since that night (14 years ago) I have taken other women to The Slaughtered Lamb. A girl named Jeni and another woman.

But that bar got its magic from you and nowadays when I drive past it, I sometimes recall just how great that

last summer with you was and how much I loved even that spot of dirt you didn't notice on your sweaty, sunburned forehead.

By Michael Frey

"Walking The Dog I"

Tonight, on 66th street, there is an Immenseness and twinkling which moves and unwinds so irreverently that the moon records our reflecting malady, as we it's milkglow. The sky howls in invisible electric ink as the lazy, pale MTA bus passes and champagne people dine across the street like Nazis marching in columns over menorah mountains finding novel ground which can only be birthed in big cities or soulless murderers. I hear a man on a cell phone saying we all have computer errors waiting for us when we get home.

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