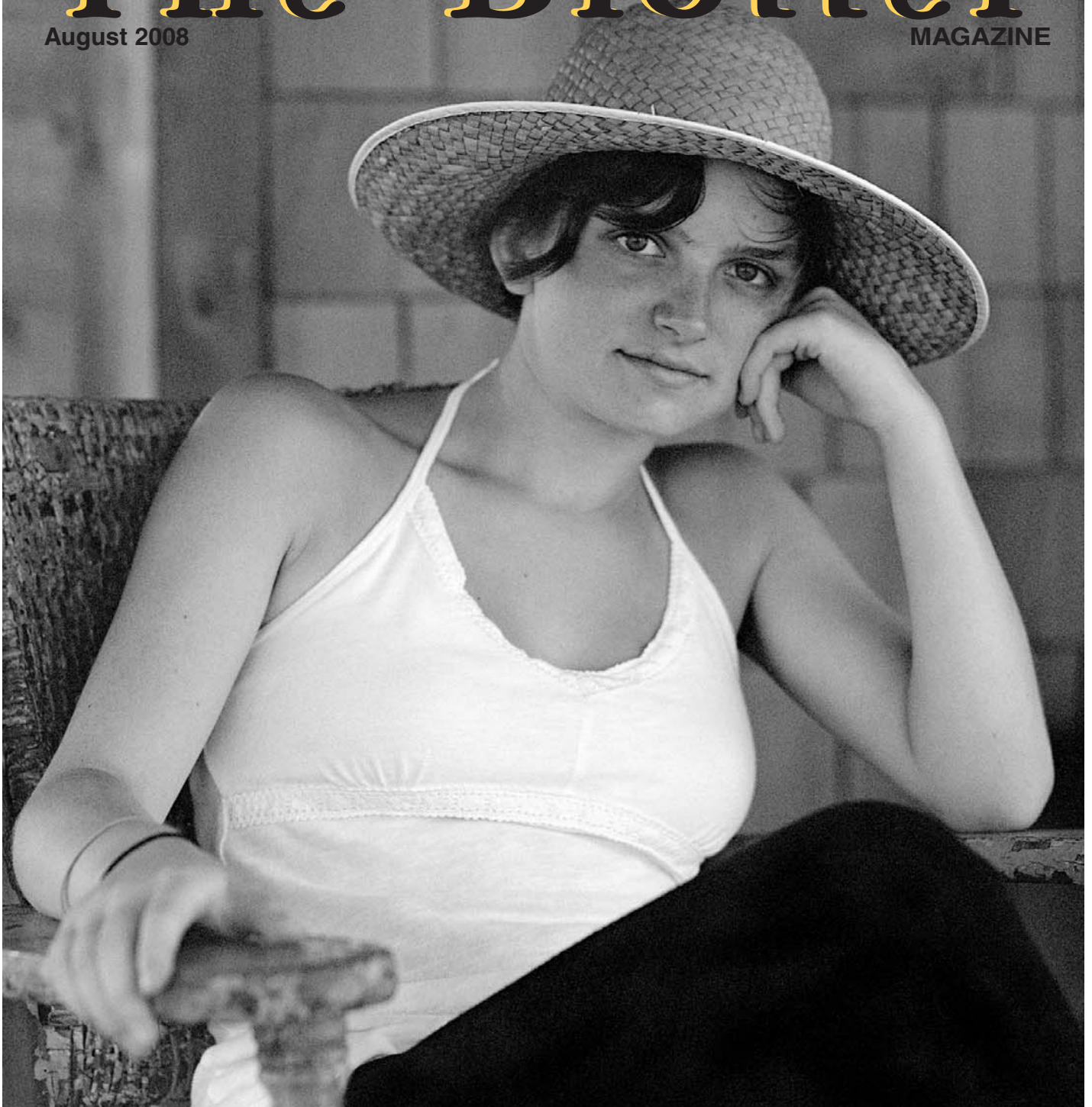


Chillin' with my homies; Joy Setton in the house; Amanda McQuade and Chris Fuqua rockin' out front; Marc Banka takin it all in; A new PaperCuts and The Dream Journal.

The Blotter

August 2008

MAGAZINE



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OMG, As if!

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"List" (Could be a collection of some sort, accumulated things. Could just as well be a tilt caused by intake of water through a hole made by a torpedo.)

A recent film addressed the silliness of two characters trying accomplish those items they had listed as to do's before they "kicked the bucket." This is not a new idea, but it is now Hollywood-reactively popular to create such a list. Hike the Appalachian Trail. Learn to play Canasta. Eat a Buxton's Ice Cream Parlor "Big Bux" containing a gallon of your favorite flavor, four bananas, nuts, cherries, chocolate sauce and whipped cream in one glorious sitting. Alrighty then. Go for it, say I.

But we are also a frequently sad and occasionally pathetic species, whose fears of commitment tend to outweigh our gumption. Challenged by old men in a screenplay to do something, anything, more with our lives than we ritually perform on our pitiful stage, we become bewitched, then bothered by clever cohorts in the foodchain who've acquired skills that we cannot fathom. How can he saw away at the violin like that, and compose sublimely as well? And who taught her to play soccer and ballroom dance?

Ask any realtor how to sell property and I believe she will invariably tell you location, location, realistic mortgage. Ask someone who can play chess (or whittle chess pieces); paint frescoes or run the hills of San Francisco, swim with the dolphins or coach the Dolphins (not as unrealistic as you might imagine) and their answers can be synopsisized into attention span, attention span, attention span. We, however, are lost at *at*. Or spa...wha?

So telling me that you plan to climb El Capitan makes me laugh. It's three thousand feet of vertically aligned granite. The truth is that you must start training for it today. Whatever day today is, get started. Then keep going until you can hold your own body weight all day. Hurry!

But isn't that the way things go? Life is just so much work. Golly, I've already done my job, and now you want me to do even more? But my time is money. And you have to be kidding. For a hobby? For a list that I was mostly just fooling around about? *Exactly that*. If you want to wallop the axe like Clapton, get working on those scales. If you want to be a poet, start reading and writing. And in your spare time, get that garret, and begin starving. Look up metaphor. Practice random acts of irony. Let your friends look it over, give you some advice. The bad news is your poetry stinks. The good news is your poetry is better than everyone who hasn't begun to write any yet. Keep it up, and good luck.

Most people's bucket lists are just that. Buckets, that they take out to use at some point, then can't remember how. A while back, nature and all of her laws took over. Like gravity, pressing down on our heads and hearts, we finally concede that Arthur C. Clarke to the contrary, we're not going to go to the moon in a luxury rocket-liner. The way things are going, we're more likely to end up there in a trash-can liner.

But I'm not going to let them catch me, no, I'm not going to let them catch the midnight writer. I mean that in light of all this, it seems more logical to compile my anti-bucket list. A list of things that I will never do again. *That's stupid*, one friend tells me. *There are a ton of things you aren't going to do again*. Well, certainly, I expect to never wear a diaper again. But you never know. Let us hope that I am not *there*-there for that shenanigan, should it ever come to pass. And odds are I'm never going to feel the cool curve of an eighteen year old breast

again, or feel the warm zing! of a first kiss. Nor, truly, would I want to. My wife and I are in the mid-summer of our relationship; that comfortable place in our lives where the utter satisfaction of knowing each other well and warmly and wanting nothing more than to be with each other as often as possible - without the desperate hunger of youthful lust or the terrible pain that such passion often entails - evaporates any regrets over such things past as effectively as July sunshine.

Only a fool wants a do-over, and only a boy would want to play boys' games his whole life.

So my list is a boiling-down of an ocean of opportunities made or missed over my life, and letting the steam of frustration drift up and out of my life, and if it is not an accounting of Saturdays yet to come, it is at least a recognition that there are a finite number of them, and a reminder for me to look up every time I go outside, and read every book recommended to me by my smart friends, and keep some basic rules handy. For example:

I will never again apply for a job I don't want to do. I got the ever-loving tee-shirt on this one, which is why my resume really sucks, bt I don't care anymore. (Note to all recent grads out there – don't don't *don't* go to work just to make money. Find something you A: really like to do, or, B: think you may very well like to do but aren't sure yet.)

Garry's Anti-Bucket List:

I will never wear *business-casual* again. Certainly not as a command passed down via internal memorandum. Not at a company-sponsored golf tourney, with my manager in a foursome (she was as pretty as a speckle-pup and mean as a snake and had a 4 handicap). Never-never, Peter Pan.

I will never again let an employer scream at me. It's just bad form. Unless the Chinese government makes us a really phat offer on The Blotter, and I won't understand a thing that is being shouted at me anyway, and hence I can smile and think about how well the St. Louis Cards are doing this summer.

I will never drink coffee from a machine again. (good grief, I'm sure I've already taken ten years off of my life drinking machine coffee, and I damn well hope it's the nineteen-seventies).

No more haircuts I don't want, or shaving when I don't want to. (Ha! Kristin laughs...) Never put on yesterday's clothes, unless I choose to. Never half-unbutton my shirt to re-dose myself with deodorant. (It is a personal proclivity of mine that whatever else is going down, there's always time to bathe.)

I'll never eat generic peanut-butter again. Come now - there'll always be an England, and there'll always be a Jif.

I will never smoke again, unless I am on fire, (which I also hope is something I am not there-there for.) Never eat airline food again. Never argue with my boss (right Marty?). Never drive home after having cocktails. Never talk about the economy with co-workers. Never sit through a quarterly report speech. Never choose my company over the environment. Hopefully, never eat crow. Never choose work over a family vacation. Hell, never choose work over anything about my daughters. Never choose taking a telephone call over holding my wife's hand while we sit on the couch. Never choose watching a TV show over tucking in my youngest. Never miss an opportunity to tickle, snuggle, brush our teeth well, and read to me, Daddy, read to me.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

There is nothing untoward in this month's issue. Nothing unprepos-ing, nothing remotely S to the nizzle. And if you can't trust your friends at The Blotter, who can you trust. No, I swear.

The Blotter

"Villa 1B"

by Joy Setton

First, two rust-colored rectangular grids that move away from you when you push a button- the two smaller sides vertically opposite from each other remain in their axis while the rectangular grids move forwards.

Then, on the horizontal plane, a large solid green circle surrounded with striated grey and infringed upon by thick black lines whose conjunction form a parallelepipedic checkered pattern. Then a large flat surface with cutout squares and rectangles lined with grey and rust-color. If you lift your eyes from that plane, at a right angle from it -on the vertical then- is another, of blue. Two blues separated by a sharp line: deep saturated blue below and light, airy blue above.

Then you descend, pass through white and exit into brown. Turn to the right, and be faced with this: a rust-colored frame of some five meters wide and two meters high, containing a rectangle then, with a surface of about ten square meters,

but which *in reality* spans hundreds of miles of distance and contains millions of metric cubes of matter.

This rectangle is separated into three stripes. The lower is bright green - with pinpoints of black in the morning- the middle is a saturated and scintillating blue, and the upper is a very pale blue -with a hint of pale yellow, in the morning, where this third stripe parts from the second, and which becomes gradually darker the higher one looks. Three transversal stripes then; bright green, dark blue and pale blue -the third and upper one being wider.

But this, of course, is an extreme simplification, because these stripes are *actually* full of things; and they are modulated, not solid. Each stripe is swarming with internal modulations. Besides, their separation is not as clear as I first made it out to be. The delimitations are not perfect parallel lines, not even perfectly straight -except to the left of the image, between the dark and the pale blue stripes, a straight, sharp line. Between the green and the pale blue stripes the delimitation is rather sloped, and green spheres which are mainly part of the inferior stripe impede however upon the superior one. And between the dark and the pale blue stripes, some sloping occurs, on the right side, which is tinted pale purple in the mornings.

This frame that I mentioned, of five meters by two, can be walked into. You can walk into the image of the three stripes and onto the bright green

bottom stripe; and as you wander, to the left you will reach a very large

azure circle floating in blue, and to the right a very large green circle spoked by lines of grey.

This green circle can be discerned from the green that surrounds it by its texture, its internal modulations of color; and the azure circle is most strikingly set out against the deep saturated blue -and the pale airy blue, and the bright green too, depending on the angle of view; and depending on the time of view, the pale airy blue can be brilliant blinding white, and the deep saturated blue too; both brilliant blinding white and no separation between the two. It all depends on the hour of viewing, really, and the angle.

Now, returning to the previous position, in front of the frame, rather than inside of it, looking at the three stripes, rather than walking inside the green: the colors and textures are here also very much subject to change, throughout the day, and, conceivably, throughout the months and years. But the separation between the stripes is immutable because it is: land, sea and sky. This is a "view" you see, extended before the terrace of a house. The whole set of things, all the shapes and colors listed above, form a house, a summerhouse on the coast of Sardinia.

The grids are grates, which are a gate: two grates of rust-colored metal that, in the past, covered the underground gardens. The whole house, in the past, was a lot more grated and grilled because it was built in the Seventies when the *brigate rosse*¹ were raging across Italy, but the new owner has turned them into the front gate.

(¹ Italian leftist terrorist group, credited with 150 deaths between the seventies and eighties though kidnappings and bombings.)



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So first, a rust-colored gate that -when functioning- opens at the touch of a button. Then grass; a large circle of grass surrounded by striated concrete: a large circular driveway. One side of this driveway is reserved for parking cars under an awning -new from this summer- whose structure is of rust-colored metal -corten- which throws thick black shadow lines over the grass and concrete: the parallelepipedic checkered pattern. Such a thick black shadow that it seems like it was painted on. Then, the flat cutout surface, which is the roof of the house. Because it is built into a hill, you see, this house, so that when you walk to it from the driveway at the top of the incline, you are level with its roof. You walk straight onto its grassy roof and see in front the sea and the sky.

So, the large flat surface is a roof and the cutouts are a patio and a set of bizarre underground gardens: plant-filled, rectangular-shaped excavations that you can peer down into, and which used to be covered by a grate. You descend into the house, and if you use the kitchen entrance, which I usually do, you enter white- the kitchen is all white-, until you walk out to the patio, which is brown: wood. The patio is decked and wood-lined, and covered half by a mesh awning and half by a roof of wood-patterned grey concrete; and from here, sitting where I sit when the owner is absent, you see the view, the three stripes: green, dark blue, pale blue -lawned land, horizoned sea and very wide sky.

The straight sharp separation that I mentioned between the dark and pale blue, that is the horizon: sea below and sky above. The green is a lawn that slopes down to the sea. The green spheres are large trimmed bushes. The pale purple sloping is the cape across the bay on which Porto Rotondo is built. Pale purple in the morning that is, it all depends on the hour of viewing. It is all immutably the same -land and sea and sky- yet constantly changing. The tones are all continually mutating so that you cannot but be transfixed by them. The paleness perhaps, is most impressive, very early in the morning, when a long low strip of the palest blue is drawn across the whole horizon and behind Porto Rotondo's thin spit - which is now a slightly hazy anthracite silhouette- only the top of the hump of Capo Ferro emerges, pale pale grey with a hint of violet and the heavy length of cloud below and the

pale water pulsates around the rocks and currents in the sea form strips of texture, swarming if you look only at that. The sun makes the sea white in parts. A certain area to the left, directly under the sun has no texture at all, just purely bright and blinding, like the sky, which is hugely pale but now pinking behind Porto Rotondo. Shafts make the grass heavily pricked with black and slant into the three-sided patio. The round bushes have their backs nearly black and rims of yellow and gold.

And the boats- this is a little later, when the boats leave port for the day- you can see them cross the expanse of the sea but they are noiseless, the distance makes them noiseless. You can see them but absolutely not hear them as they noiselessly advance -and it is a pure pleasure when that occurs. Then the late afternoon, of course, is also impressive, when the sea is swarming with purple and black, and the sky is pink and the rocks are red, all highly saturated; and later, when the saturation ebbs and it turns pale again in the early evening and the lawn is a gentle cup of green containing the grey sea and the soft lavender sky; and then the very brightness departs. It all gradually darkens, so that at one stage, it is all dark blue and though you can see the difference between the sea and the sky, you cannot see where it occurs because it is gradual; and then there is no difference anymore, it all darkens to black and kills the horizon. In the morning pure white and at night pure black, and no more horizon -pure color. At these times, your eyes must really think *to understand what they are seeing*. Your eyes at these times do not know what to make of the view, which is pure shape and color; but also, across from it, of the house, which also at times is pure shape and color and terrifyingly new and strange-shaped.

It must be thought of. Then perhaps you are told, or perhaps you begin to realize, for instance, that this immense azure circle floating in bright green and dark saturated blue is a swimming pool -that different angles of view appose to sea or sky or lawn. And that the very large green circle spoked by lines of grey that is set-off from the green that surrounds it by variations in texture, is the *orto* - the kitchen garden. And that these dots, these white shapes, like a flock of seagulls with their wings wrapped around their round bodies, are dining-table chairs. And that this half-

circle, like a bow -steel-grey for the curve of the bow and a line of black for the bow-string- forlorn on the rooftop, is also a chair, a *chaise-longue* on which to lie.

And again chairs: two bright white rectangles set-off against green, also to lie on. Oh, and this sliding, melting egg, white in a wood and sisal corridor, also a chair- *The Chair*, by Charles and Ray. And these ghosts tacked to walls, these are lamps. And if you step out from under the covered area of the patio, where the sky becomes an immense sphere, an immense spherical wash of blue, and you about-face, turn and face: a brown beheaded pyramid, a rust colored frame, planes of brown, plates of glass, a curve of green: that is a house, this house.

To the left are the public spaces: the dining and living rooms: a headless pyramid and a large plate of glass slashed by a thin ramp of grass. And to the right, private: the bedrooms. The nice ones are tip-less teepees, point-less pyramids, with inside, cream-colored concrete walls that tend towards one another, but never meet, so that it is not oppressive, it is wide, and the possible coldness of the concrete is softened with wood -the bed, low on a pontoon of wood, the wardrobe, two upright rectangular boxes of wood- and full of soft light and shadowless. But the lesser bedrooms -children, staff, unimportant guests- at the far end of the patio, opposite from the view but with no windows to it, pressed between the patio and the small underground gardens, can be monk's cells but without the reposing simplicity, just shut-in airlessness, sick-making like a boat's cabin.

And in the middle is the patio, where, sitting in the owner's seat -because he is not here, I wouldn't if he were here- at the head of the outside dining



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table facing the view, I see on my right the glass door to the dining room. If you open that door, you will see a flaw: the inside, where the catch is -the spine that hides in the door-frame when the door is shut- is warped and torn. Shards have been smoothed down and puttied over, but still, the damage is visible. And in the living room, another such small flaw is apparent: a water stain on the sisal carpet caused by drops of water dripping from the skylight above. Both of these slight defects are mainly made apparent by the complete orderliness of what surrounds them.

The skylight from which the water has dropped, is thin and long and spans the length of the living room. It is like a long dorsal fin, because the ceiling is not flat but convex and the space is longer than it is wide, so that it is like being inside the light-filled remains of a prehistoric mastodon with a skylight for a spine.

Among the few objects in the room, there is the model of a sailboat that the owner designed and which is like a slash of black China-ink, these pictograms formed in a single stroke. It is on a ledge opposite from the sea-facing side of the room, which is all glass and at the foot of which, on the horizontal plane, hard shadows of leaves are lightly dancing on the sisal. Farther inside, the shadows are very soft, it is all softly diluted light. The sea-facing glass wall gives a slightly different aspect of the view seen from the patio, the same elements but in slightly different proportions: more land and less sea and sky- which is more pleasant-, and contained within the frame of the window, not like the whole threatening breadth of it that you see from the patio.

On the other side of the living room, the land side, to the left of the front door is a large plate of glass like an

aquarium displaying the wonderful surprise of a sloping expanse of tumbling plumbago flowers, light blue.

In the kitchen, there is a similar though smaller such window or underground aquarium, terrarium rather, as it is plant, not water-filled. But this one is quite dead: like the rest of the kitchen, not enough light gets to it, so that it is dreary and prison-like, this aquarium-garden. It is like a sad little museum exhibit of life, life wilting in a box of glass, nature boxed, beat by the house. Outside, of course, nature is an immense sphere, beating the house hands-down.

The garden though, is not part of nature, its very harmony separates it from nature. The sea and the sky, above and around, are part of nature, but not the garden. The main part of the garden is a lawn, whose dips and rises to the sea are formed by the bright green skin of the grass over the armature of the terrain. Its construction required tons of earth to be displaced to create green hollows to wallow in, green craters and crests reaching to the scrub and the rocks and the sea and dotted with the big green spheres of the bushes. Lying in a deck chair in one of the hollows, the sea in front seems to be higher than one's mouth and nose; an unusual and slightly asphyxiating effect. And from each declivity and each promontory, there is a different way of seeing, which, *I think*, has been carefully thought out, by Paolo Pejrone, the famous landscape architect. He also must be the one who thought to put the pool where it is, on a slight eminence apposed to sea and sky and lawn; and to make it a large and perfect azure circle with water right up to its edge and steps like an amphitheater all around, so that you can walk

around it at different levels of submersion, and walking inside or around it, you seem to be walking against the sea: your whole body, seen by a bystander, is set standing or moving against the sea. Also, he thought of the *orto*, an even larger circle than the pool's and opposite to it along the seashore, with three concentric inner-circles and nine spokes of striated grey concrete -which are paths slicing through fractions of brown, earth that is, which sprouts forth velvety green and pale-grey, polished curving green and red and purple, and matte green and grey: cucumbers, basil, rosemary, thyme, onions, garlic, tomatoes, figs, pears, the dark purple stems and leaves and fruit of the eggplant and the furry flower which bursts into zucchinis- so that everything that we eat here is very good-, and dahlias and roses too, cut into vases in the bedrooms.

The shadows outside are often very hard so that the trees and the grass are seldom just green, but green and black from the little hard shadows of the leaves and blades -which are trenchant and tough. The copse in front of Bedroom Number Three- which I sometimes sleep in- seems particularly dark and *animated* -containing a soul- even when there is no wind. At dusk, its silhouette is darkly and aggressively crenellated, and it is dark and animated even when there is no wind. And when there is wind it sways and hisses, and for days, how tiring to see the sea upset -miles and miles of restlessness before your eyes so that you cannot possibly be calm- and all the dark green swaying and hissing. Nobody is calm and everybody talks about the wind: if it is *maestrale*, how long will it last, three or six or nine days, and if *scirocco*, it is coming from Africa, blowing hot sand from Africa. The little restless white crests on the sea and the wind dully humming; and these things, the salted sea and salted wind and stinging sun, are of course quite hurtful to the house.

To fight these things there are people: the old gardener to slake the bright green's constant thirst and keep it from turning back to dusty grey and scorched yellow -which are the natural, aboriginal colors here, still visible at the edge of all the bright green in the scrub that separates the garden from the rocks and the sea, with a thin path passing though it where skin gets scratched and loose clothes get torn on thorns. Because of the rises and falls of the bright green lawn, the old gardener's be-hatted



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head can often be seen ambling about, just his be-hatted head and his body hidden by a slope. And his young assistant: *il giardinero marocchino, the Moroccan gardener, can often be seen, because of all the glass in the house, in reflection or in transparency: in the mornings his brown torso contained in the dining-room window, the reflection of it that is, from the back or three-quarters, brown torso and jet of water reflected in the dining room window; and in the afternoons, his brown eyes seen through the window of a room I might be sleeping in. And maintaining the great azure circle of the pool, is a very young pool boy who comes twice a week. From behind the owner's desk at the far end of the living room -where I would never sit if he were here- I can see this young pool boy, with his net at the end of a long pole, his whole body standing against the sea.*

So, tending to the house: the gardener, his assistant, the pool boy, and also -seen through the bushes as I walk down to the sea- the captain and his assistant rinsing the salt off the boats when the owner comes back from a sail- and the two maids chattering in the laundry and the kitchen -heard even more than seen.

So the house, during the day, is always humming with activity, constantly striving and humming: the gardeners sprinkling their jets of water and the maids clearing the windows of the drops that spot it from the gardener's sprinkling, and various trades-people coming and going to fix things: the wood which is warping, the stains on the sisal- little things, such minor little flaws, but because they are constantly being striven against, one notices them. Even when there is no one in it, you can feel the house striving, always straining so that it might break.

That is a movement imprinted by the new owner. Before it was just a slightly the worst for wear Italian summer house. Well designed, of course -how the Italians like their design, and how beautifully he thought, the architect, Ferdinando Fagnola- but slightly the worst for wear. But he saw it and bought it, the new owner, in one day, and *nobody* had really *seen* it for years, and *nobody* would have bought in Portisco anyhow. But he bought it and now people see it again, streams of people, guests from Cala di Volpe, Porto Cervo, Corsica too, going out of their usual circuit to see it, pouring through to admire it. And of course it is quite admirable: the place itself, the location -at the tip of a spit of land,

so that you don't see, can never see, another house-, the view -tip of spit of land, seemingly ceaseless sea to horizon then ceaseless sky above- and the house -the design of the house- bravo Mr. Fagnola! -, and how the new owner has treated it, changing things, little things here and there, but to effect. So the matter is admirable, and so is its treatment, which is to say, the thinking minds and abetting wills that conceived of it and constructed it, and also the mind and will that appreciates it, and maintains it, to a level that surpasses. For it is not easy to do things here in Sardinia, but for the last two years, the new owner has done things, to maintain and surpass. So that the house which was slightly the worst for wear is now *practically* flawless. And you may not have noticed that anything was wrong with it, but certainly you notice now that it is better, and everything was a battle. But things were done: the winter things, noiseless, papers pushed through offices to obtain permits, and envelopes pushed into hands so that the papers would be pushed and the permits obtained with greater speed; and the summer, noisome things: the new owner seen screaming a lot, seen and heard, on the beach, either screaming, or ingratiating himself to the regulars; to find out, for instance, who it was who had untied his buoys, or to get them to accept the new fence. For always it had been the habit for people to cross the property on the way to the beaches, and the old owners didn't mind, the neighbors either, *lascia stare*, it cannot be changed and besides it doesn't matter -young boys, middle-aged couples, across the lawn with colorful beach towels and parasols, staining the green with garish and quite spoiling the sense of being far far removed, from such things. Which is why it does matter, to the new owner -for if that doesn't matter, what does?-, and it has been fought against and controlled, by a wooden fence hidden by the scrub, which, at first, sent the neighbors in an uproar. It is actions of that nature that he undertook, aggressive worldly actions that involve talking to others and imposing one's will upon them, whether by fighting or going to dinner with them, so that later, one might cease to have to sully oneself with such things. And then the thoughtful quiet things: with Fagnola, to conceptualize and construct the new awning, and with his

(2 let it be)

wife, to find the furniture, what little of it there is, strange-shaped things against the wood and glass and sisal, carefully chosen to suit their function.

Every time the owner buys or builds a new house, which is quite often -and accelerating as he gets older- almost every object in it is new, virgin, and so, absolutely and irremediably his. Few things are needed in this house, but of those, everything is terrifyingly new and most beautifully strange-shaped. Not just modern, but new, just-bought, each pan and fork and dishtowel in the kitchen, each bend and curve of molded plastic.

Really, there is only one very old thing in the house, in the patio, in the middle: a marble sculpture from the eighteenth century, a headless, breastless beauty -her head cut-off at the neck and her missing left breast, and where, above the surface, her breast should be, which is also where, below the surface, her heart should beat, the area of unpolished marble is shaped like the heart that should be beating there.

Because always you come back to the patio, and in front the view: the patio with its boxed plants, thickly green, so shining and thick and green that they seem artificial, and the statue shining whitely at night, and behind the headless beauty, plants on the wall like thick spiders; and the furniture: anthracite table, white seagull-chairs, stark sofa -square and not soft-, everything terrifyingly new and beautifully strange-shaped but for the white marble headless breastless beauty eerily shining - and the *breathhtaking view*.

But who ever wanted such a beautiful expansive view before him at all times! How terribly tiring to have such a view. Not boring, exhausting. Do you know that it is quite draining to have such a view, possess such a view, be faced always with such a view. One wants to shut it off, to pull a curtain across it and fold oneself in, to crouch under the curtain and look at small pretty things not distant from the eyes. The eyes do not always want to have to travel across such immense distances- exhausting! - such an immense depth: the frightful sea with its span and depth and millions of creatures living or dead. The eye, or the mind, do not want constantly to contemplate infinity, and the body does not want to constantly be reminded that it is going to die: the poor naked flesh of the wood and the people offered up to the immense sphere of the sky. It is the scene of an amphitheater if you are the spectator

Marc Banka - Chapel Hill, NC
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I love machines, especially the old ones. I love them for their straight forward design, their simple elegance. I had worked for many years as a mechanic, which I suppose was natural given my childhood fondness for disassembling every toy given to me, most of which eventually went back together (with only a few, insignificant parts left out). Some things never change.

The portraits shown here were taken with my favorite portrait camera; a truly wonderful contraption built by the long gone Graflex Corporation, maker of the Speed Graphic which was not only the camera of choice for any press photographer worth his salt till the 1960s, but also the camera that made the famous WWII photo of the marines raising the American flag at Iwo Jima.

But this is not a Speed Graphic. This was known as a 4x5 RB Auto Graflex, which was, and still is one of few large format cameras that allows the photographer to view his subject, right up to the point of releasing the shutter.

In reality, it's big and heavy. Although it was designed and advertised as being a "hand held" machine, the inertia of the moving mirror is enough to blur all but the fastest of exposures. Aside from that it has cams, levers, tension springs and multi-shot film magazines, all of which must be dealt with properly, carefully and in order. In order to make a proper exposure, a would be photographer needs to study and be as one with this contraption.

I'm not sure why I find this notion so liberating. Maybe because it's such a departure from our "user friendly society", or perhaps it's just my love for gadgets, either way, it's a good fit.

I've noticed that people who otherwise feel uneasy having their photo taken enjoy the experience with the "Graflex". Maybe because it looks like it was built in 1920, but also because it doesn't make the familiar "click", but instead kind of a "thump woosh".

I always use black & white film with this camera and process it in my darkroom. Most of the time, I print the negatives in the old style, silver coated paper in the darkroom, but I've also scanned the developed film for digital printing.

"Lauren" - This photograph was made at an old cottage at Nags Head, North Carolina on one of the hottest afternoons ever recorded at that beach. Lauren is my niece as well as a gifted young artist. She will be attending one of the premier art schools in the fall.

"T-ball player" - A co-worker asked if I would take a portrait of his son. This was his first year playing organized sports, so he and his wife wanted to mark the occasion.

We met at the ball field 45 minutes before practice. He brought his son, I had my Graflex. I figured the best way to get a good expression on the young ball player was to have his dad to act as pitcher, but not actually throw the ball.

Old cameras tend not to have long zoom lenses, so in order to get the shot I wanted, I would have to be close, so I was about 7 feet away, but perpendicular to the



path of the ball. A safe spot.

After several fake pitches and film exposures I realized our plan was flawed. Fake pitches bring about fake poses. So I told him to really throw it. "Are you sure?" "Sure I'm sure." What could go wrong? So he pitched the ball. The pitch was high. The boy looked up at the ball with enthusiasm and great intent. I took the picture. He swung the bat. I heard the sound. One of the peculiarities of this camera is that you look down with your face pressed against a leather chimney. Before taking the picture you can see what's in front of the camera, but when you press the shutter release, everything goes black.

Once the ball came to rest, behind me, my friend asked if I felt the breeze. It seems the boy reached for the high pitch and tipped the ball, sending it to within an inch of my head.

I had my shot; we called it a day.

"Ervin Hester" - Mr. Hester, now retired, was a radio broadcaster in North Carolina in the early 60s. In 1971 he became the first regu-

larly scheduled African-American television news anchor in the Southeastern United States. He has many other accomplishments to his name and many firsts for the African-American community.

I was asked to make a portrait of Ervin, which I agreed to before having met the man. He arrived at my home studio dressed impeccably, as you see him here. We chatted long enough to get comfortable, shot some photos and chatted some more.

When he returned to look at proofs, the visit lasted several hours; 10 minutes of which was spent looking at photos. We spent the rest of the time talking about Jazz music and life. Being a lover of classic jazz (Satchmo, Ella, Sarah Vaughan and so on), I was thrilled to meet a man who not only knew most of my musical idols, but had been friend to many of them.

I am very fortunate to have met, photographed and become friends with Ervin.

M.B.

The Blotter

looking at the view, but sometimes it becomes the audience and you the scene (the *seen*, haha). And oh god, the sound of it, the ceaseless to-and-fro of the sea. The ceaseless to-and-fro of the sea, and the ceaseless straining of the house set in motion by the will of its owner. Quite admirable, but also utterly exhausting. And how utterly sad it makes me feel for him at times. Because he seems to think that he can reach it -an immutable and flawless state that he will not be bored with to boot! One must think that one can reach it, mustn't one? Only it seems to make him so restless and wretched. The house is almost perfect, so why is he striving so, or is it perfect because he is striving so, or would it be perfect if only he were not striving so? And its astonishing order and harmony -which may be the very thing that is killing: this disquieting and fixed harmony formed from countless curves and angles, and the repetition of concrete, grass, sisal, wood, corten -grey, green, brown, and rust-color- and oh, the blues! the azure circle of the swimming pool, the ceaselessly changing sea and sky; and everything that you look at is beautiful and *has been thought of*. But tense as a bow about to strike and never releasing its arrow. So tense, so abominably geometric, and restlessly windy, so ceaselessly sea-noisy and *everything you look at must be thought of!* Nothing is immediately recognizable, and everything requires such work, such thought just to be able to discern and to give a name. But also the physical work: to put away, to clean, to maintain -because if a beach towel or a book is lying about, already the image is altered and the effect is shattered. So, the new owner is always striving to maintain, and to surpass, in the objects, *in the matter*. Oh, at times it simply exhausts me, such a silly reaction really: it makes me want to be quite still, which of course is no better than the ceaseless striving.



Paper-Cuts: Books You Might Not Have Read

by Martin K. Smith

Babbitt (Sinclair Lewis / Harcourt, Brace & World, Inc., 1922)

Snarking the bourgeoisie is a classic American pastime. ("How many yuppies does it take to change a light bulb?" "None - they hire a Mexican to do it.") The name-calling has varied with generations: "yuppies" to today's coffeehouse-hipster crowd; "squares" to the beatniks of Kerouac's day. H. L. Mencken termed the species "Boobus americanus". But in the decades between the World Wars, the word was "Babbitts", courtesy of this book. The term has even come to roost in dictionaries, cf. Webster's 1981 New Collegiate: "a business or professional man who conforms unthinkingly to prevailing middle-class standards." Social critics saw the Babbitts, with their unthinking conformity, as obstacles to America's aesthetic and intellectual progress, clogging the flow of Truth and Beauty and Art and Literature the way well-fed cholesterol clogs an artery.

So for the past thirty years I'd heard the Babbitt term and its attendant bad rep, before reading the book and meeting Babbitt the person: George F-for-Follansbee Babbitt; realtor, and all-American citizen of the all-American city of Zenith, somewhere in the all-American Midwest. I was surprised. I expected a monster of arrogantly complacent cluelessness, with cigar and conde-

scension. What I got was a hapless, middle-aged, not unsympathetic creampuff.

He uses expressions like "how's tricks, old socks" and "gosh all fishhooks" and "by heckalorum", right out of an Andy Hardy movie. The worst cussword he ever speaks - or that Lewis quotes him as speaking - is "Damn"; and even that leaves his wife Myra shocked and appalled. "Why Georgie, what's come over you? You never used to say such things." He's like an overgrown boy. He guffaws and bellows with his fellow businessmen (overgrown boys themselves) even when they're only three feet apart. He makes speeches to the Zenith realtors' association and booster clubs about the Model Sane Citizen, a He-man with Zip and Bang and Pep, by heckalorum. (Were we really that innocent in 1920? The boiler-room gang from *Glengarry Glen Ross* would eat him for breakfast.) When he does think of Art, he figures it should be pursued with the same vigor and profit motive that all-Americans like himself use in their dealings. "In other countries, art and literature are left to a lot of shabby bums living in attics and feeding on booze and spaghetti, but in America the successful writer or picture-painter is indistinguishable from any other decent business man." He lets loose his own creative juices in the writing of prospectuses "diligently imitative of the best literary models of

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SAY, OLD MAN! – I just want you to know can I do you a whaleuva favor? Honest! No kidding! I know you're interested in getting a house, not merely a place where you hang up the old bonnet but a love-nest for the wife and kiddies...

He may be “nimble in the calling of selling houses for more than people could afford to pay,” but he’s at heart a follower, not a leader.

Just as he was an Elk, a Booster, and a member of the Chamber of Commerce, just as the priests of the Presbyterian Church determined his every religious belief and the senators who controlled the Republican Party decided in little smoky rooms in Washington what he should think about disarmament, tariff and Germany, so did the large national advertisers fix the surface of his life, fix what he believed to be his individuality. These standard advertised wares – toothpastes, socks, tires, cameras, instantaneous hot-water heaters – were his symbols and proofs of excellence; at first he signs, then the substitutes, for joy and passion and wisdom.

During the course of an eventful year, he starts to wonder if where he’s been led is where he really wants to be.

His one close friend is his old college roommate, Paul Riesling. Back in college Paul dreamed of studying violin in Europe, just as George dreamed of being a great lawyer and arguing noble causes *pro bono*. Paul ended up in the family business, selling tar roofing; but George “strenuously believed and

lengthily announced to the world of Good Fellows that Paul could have been a great violinist or painter or writer.” To Paul alone he can confide:

Here I've pretty much done all the things I ought to; supported my family, and got a good house and a six-cylinder car, and built up a nice little business, and I haven't any vices 'specially...And I belong to the church, and play enough golf to keep in trim, and I only associate with good decent fellows. And yet, even so, I don't know that I'm entirely satisfied!"

– and have his doubts mirrored by Paul’s own. They temporarily cure the dissatisfaction with a week’s fishing in the Maine woods. But on a business trip to Chicago, George spots Paul fraternizing with a lady who is possibly not a Lady and definitely not Paul’s wife, Zilla, a harridan bitch-from-hell. Finally, after one bitch-fest too many, Paul shoots Zilla – not fatally, but enough to earn a three-year jail sentence and basically a ruined life.

George is so discomfited by this loss that he starts wandering off the straight and narrow. He’s troubled by dreams of a “fairy child”, a mystical girl who sees his true self – “gay and valiant”, “gallant and wise and well-beloved.” He attempts clumsy flirtations with stenographers and manicure girls that end in embarrassing failure. He almost has an affair with Tanis Judique, an attractive middle-aged widow who can talk (superficially) about intelligent things; but she runs with a fast hard-drinking younger crowd whose constant partying exhausts him. He even begins to doubt, in public, the Good

Fellows’ socio-political dogmas. He speaks timid defense of Seneca Doane, another college classmate, a progressive lawyer who defends Socialists and striking workers. And when a strike comes to Zenith, he questions his fellow businessmen’s assertions that the strikers should have the crap beaten out of them. “Course I was as anxious to have those beggars licked to a standstill as anyone else, but gosh, no reason for not seeing their side. For a fellow’s own sake, he’s got to be broad-minded and liberal, don’t you think so?”

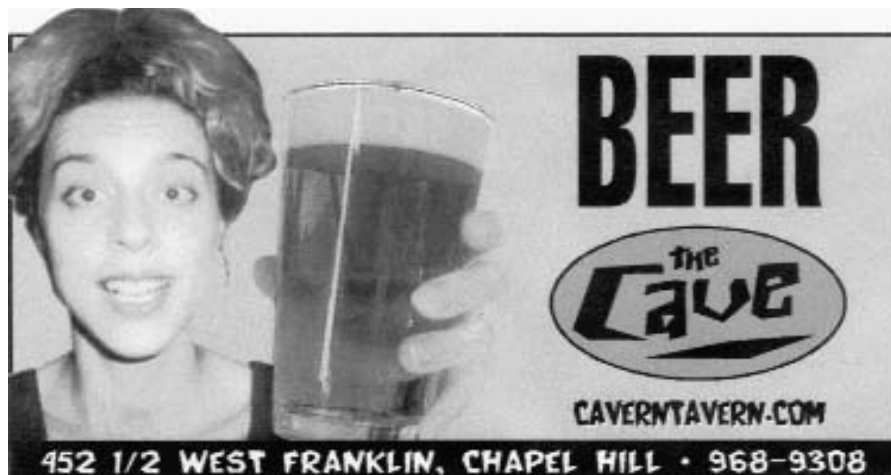
The Good Fellows don’t like this at all. They’ve started up a watchdog group called the Good Citizens’ League, which aims to “put the kibosh” on the “Undesirable Element...especially a lot of these parlor socialists,” and they ask George to join. He hesitates. A few days later, “three men shouldered into Babbitt’s office with the air of a Vigilante committee in frontier day,” and all but order him to join. He objects to being bullied.

“We’re not bullying anybody,” Dr. Dilling began, but Colonel Snow thrust him aside with, “Certainly we are! We don’t mind a little bullying, if it’s necessary. Babbitt, the G.C.L. has been talking about you a good deal. You’re supposed to be a sensible, clean, responsible man; you always have been; but here lately, for God knows what reason...you’ve actually been advocating and supporting some of the most dangerous elements in town, like this fellow Doane.”

“Colonel, that strikes me as my private business.”
“Possibly, but we want you to have an understanding...You can’t expect the decent citizens to go on aiding you if you intend to side with precisely the people who are trying to undermine us...And you have entirely the wrong idea about ‘thinking over joining.’ We’re not begging you to join the G.C.L. – we’re permitting you to join. I’m not sure, my boy, but what if you put it off it’ll be too late.”

(I nominate these god-damned sons-of-bitches for the book’s true villains. Lewis once said that if Fascism ever came to this country it’d come wrapped in the flag and carrying a cross. Don’t even get me started on how right he was.)

George refuses; and is shunned. The colleagues he used to



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guffaw and bellow with ignore him on the street. He is no longer asked to speak at their booster luncheons, play in their poker games, join in their under-the-table business opportunities. Even his stenographer leaves to work for a competitor. It gets to him, as it would to anyone. He starts to imagine that wherever he goes, people are whispering against him. "He could not stand the strain. Before long he admitted that he would like to flee back to the security of conformity, provided there was a decent and creditable way to return...The independence seeped out of him and he walked the streets alone, afraid of men's cynical eyes and the incessant hiss of whispering."

A *deus ex machina* intervenes; or rather, a *deus ex Myra*: she gets appendicitis and spends half a month in hospital. All those who shunned him now rally round, asking daily about her progress, bringing flowers and gifts and jokes to her hospital room. A colleague takes him aside. "George, old scout, you were sore-headed about something, here a while back. I don't know why, and it's none of my business. But you seem to be feeling all hunky-dory again, and why don't you come join us in the Good Citizens' League, old man? We have some corking times together, and we need your advice." He accepts with immense relief, but still with a little seed of doubt deep down, about the whole boosterism-business all-American zip-bang-pep worldview. When his son Ted, a college freshman, elopes with the girl next door, a high-school senior, George alone takes their side.

"I've never done a single thing I've wanted to in my whole life!...But I do get a kind of sneaking pleasure out of the fact that you knew what you wanted to do and did it. Well, those folks in there will try to bully you, and tame you down. Tell 'em to go to the devil! I'll back you. Take your factory job, if you want to. Don't be scared of the family. No, nor all of Zenith. Nor of yourself, the way I've been."

(A sidebar: Lewis wrote the book as a picture not just of Babbitt's type but of his world, so it's now a time capsule of 1920s America. Socialism is the big political boogeyman. There are burlesque shows and Theosophist lectures. Cars are hand-cranked. All long trips are by train.

Movie theatres have orchestras "which played Arrangements from the Operas and suites portraying a Day on the Farm, or a Four-Alarm Fire," since the movies they show are silents. Gas is 31 cents a gallon, and businessmen are indignant when a big-city hotel charges the exorbitant rate of \$7 a night. There are numerous remarks about Prohibition, newly enacted in 1920, which nationwide was turning even virtuous babbitts like Babbitt into lawbreakers. George doesn't own a cocktail shaker – "proof of dissipation, the symbol of a Drinker" – but makes sure there are cocktails at his parties. The offer of said drinks makes the men even more loud and jocular – "Providin' there ain't any enforcement officers hiding in the waste-basket" and "Oh, maaaaan, this hits me right where I live!" They all agree that while Prohibition is good for the poor and working classes, who have no self-control, for Sane Citizens like them it's quite the infringement of civil liberties. Another sidebar: I get the feeling Lewis enjoyed writing this book, enjoyed caricaturing the crazy Roaring '20s culture around him, kicking its extremes up just a notch to satire level. There's a sense of sarcastic fun in his deadpan descriptions of the extravagant gadgets and architecture and prospectuses and opinions. "In the [movie theatre's] stone rotunda, decorated with crown-embroidered velvet chairs and almost medieval tapestries, parakeets sat on gilded lotos columns.")


So in my humble opinion, George F. Babbitt, boobus americanus, is a threat to Art and Literature and coffeehouse-hipster ideals the way Wile E. Coyote (*Famishus vulgaris*) is a threat to the Roadrunner. He's a bit of a tragic figure, even. If he'd had a little more courage and more support, more Paul Rieslings boosting him, he might could have stood his ground against unthink and conformity.

Meanwhile, calling the bourgeoisie

names, such as "Babbitt!", has not noticeably caused them to cease existing. I went last month to a business breakfast in Chapel Hill. When door prizes were given, everybody guffawed and bellowed even though none of us were more than three feet apart. One man donated American flags for prizes because, he said, he made a point of encouraging Patriotism for this Great Country. Another attributed his success in both business and marriage to having contracted with Jesus Christ for his personal-savior needs. I felt like an alien in their midst, perilously ill-disguised. (I was there trying to sell ads for the magazine.) But I reflected that old George would've been right at home.



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Scrap From an Old Notebook

This is what I found:

*These are the empty times,
reaching ever deeper
for gifts and giving,
knowing that each act
is as worthless as a word
hissed on desert wind,
borne without sound
to no one.*

That's it. Nothing more.
Nothing.

It's hot today.
Are you listening?
I said, it's hot.
The Oddest Moments
Your words
float into mind
at the oddest moments—
in the pasta aisle,
in the car at dusk,
in the library on cold mornings,
in the kitchen with dirty dishes—
as though you're whispering,
like that day
in the marsh grove
when promises were
as bold
as the blood
that reddened
our cheeks
under touches
that took our breath,
as exciting
and comforting
as lies.

by Chris Fuqua

Strains

The yard proved too much,
but not that first day when the weeds
were tackled,
trees trimmed, grass mowed,
and everything else cut to its place,
good, proper, neat,
with time left for cleaning the garage and
more.

It was two days later,
a simple twist, and he nearly collapsed.
Age, his friend laughed. *Next, you'll be fit
for a box.*

In this small step,
this annoying pain,
the end.

by Amanda McQuade

Planting

violet morning glory twisted
while on its' back
bugs bored holes.
i splattered them
against the spike
poking out
of the blue flower pot.
eggs cracked
and babies splayed
into the sun.
i heard them crying;
white blooms vindicated
next year, I'll plant
mandrakes
for the grubs
my prosecuting
rake ready to gut –
split their cucumber
insides.
i'll eat them and they will curl.

Oven

If I told you that truth
Existed in your oven
Would you go there?
Could you open that hot mouth
And pour yourself inside?
Dip toe and leg into that gray blanket?
Truth at the end of a cave
Heating and sparkling
Like the assurance of a nipple.
Would you want to go beneath
That lip of trust and bang
Your head on greasy glass?
Because that's where truth lives-
Our ovens; seeping and stinking
All we hunger for and heat up.

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real dreams, real weird

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mermaid@blotterrag.com

Lightning crackles the transformers high on the old poles outside; can't put them underground because the island is only four feet of sand above sea-level at its highest point, and to leave them on poles running along the street that splits the island lengthwise is to invite lightning. Ah, well. It sounds like bacon on the stove, then the cannon fire at Austerlitz. I'm lying in my bed, I know this, but I dream about lying on the old couch that is under the downstairs window facing the ocean. I'd like to go swimming - I always like swimming in the ocean during rain, but it is as dark as charcoal outside and I can see the surf rising so high above the dunes that the phosphorescence glitters. On the beach, my feet shift in the wet sand, and the slightest breeze will push me into the impossibly cold, sharky water. Because I'm actually in my bed, I don't shiver.

Surfer - IOP , SC

CONTRIBUTORS

Joy Setton was born in New York in 1980 and raised in Paris and Geneva. She currently resides in N.Y. I teased her about her writing's resemblance to Nicholson Baker and she said she had to look him up in Wikipedia. I love it when the joke's on me.

Marc Banka tells us a lot about himself in his photo-notes on page 9. Don't you dare skip past it.

Martin K. Smith publishes this little shindig, and is what we like to call a patron of the arts. We'd refer to him as "Don Martin" except that Don Martin was a cartoonist for Mad Magazine.

Amanda McQuade neither confirms nor denies anything. Her work has recently appeared, or is forthcoming, in *Aquapolis*, *Lethe*, *Pregnant Moon Review*, and *silent actor*. Currently, she resides in Los Angeles with her husband, Matt.

Chris Fuqua's published books include *Big Daddy's Gadgets* (novel), *Divorced Dads: Real Stories of Facing the Challenge*, *Notes to My Becca: A Father's Thoughts on Welcoming His Long-Awaited Child*, *Music Fell on Alabama*, and *Deadlines*, a four-novel audio series. His work has also appeared in such publications as *The Christian Science Monitor*, *Haight Ashbury Literary Journal*, *Year's Best Horror Stories XIX, XX and XXI*, *The Old Farmer's Almanac* and *Honolulu Magazine*.

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