

*Loving life with Monica Zarazua, Nathaniel Alvarez,
the art of Ainhoa Bilbao Canup, our fabulous comics
and The Dream Journal.*

The Blotter

March 2011

MAGAZINE



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Front cover, "Embrace," and facing
page "Cello," by Ainhoa Bilbao
Canup. See centerfold for even more.

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Ha?

We have a new intern on board here at TB, as we have taken to calling the magazine in our frequent terse, instant-messaging staff conversations. We met over coffee and discussed direction, mission and *raison d'être*, because that's what editors like to talk about. She is enthusiastic and I want her to remain so, so I'm going to release the metaphorical muscles in my clasping, clinging hands and have her make real editorial decisions. I didn't do that so much with previous young clever interns, and they took their youth and intelligence elsewhere, to my dismay and temporary confusion.

One of the topics we covered in the "interview process" was what we (that is, I) think is funny and what I, *ahem*, we, do not. It's an interesting Venn diagram, inasmuch as such things are ever interesting. Humor, we've all heard a hundred times, is serious stuff, and frankly, one man's meat is another man's *wanker*. But, if you have a mission and a direction, you should be able to explain to a new employee how something as important to a magazine as humor fits into the overall plan. Unfortunately, most of the time all we seem to be able to do is say "I know it when I hear it," or "I like what I like."

I'm blaming the rest of the world for the current humor situation. (It's easy to do, and usually appropriate.) In my opinion, it's really not funny when you can't wrap your head around what's funny anymore; when it feels like your funny-bone hurts more than makes you laugh. And the political/social/financial mess of the world has everyone so tight you couldn't pull a phonograph needle out of their collective ass. And you're not allowed to ask what song they're playing, either.

(Suggestion: you might illustrate your argument with personal observations!) OK, case in point. The other night on Comedy Central, a comic told a joke that I first heard in the mid-1970's when I was still in the Navy. It was only passably funny then. It has not done well over the years. I wondered what she was thinking using such *schtick*, in public, on TV. Isn't there a comedy Gestapo that immediately knocks on your door at four in the morning to bludgeon you with truncheons for stealing someone else's jokes, or for using ancient public-domain junk? And if not, why not? (Danger - it's not funny to mention anything to do with the Nazis. Not even if you're Mel Brooks. Or particularly if you're Mel Brooks, I forget which. He goes in and out of style faster than...(insert the name of the host of the Golden Globes or Academy Awards.)

I must also admit that late night talk-show humor has long lost its appeal to me. Bitter, solipsistic and smarmy sarcasm, even with a dollop of self-effacing one-shot mugging at the camera, no longer moves me to smile. But, as my mom says, it's not *for* me. (She actually does say that, because for years she told us how she hated "rap music" We always reminded her that it's not *for* her. Mom's a good sport, and has now turned this punch line around on us.) But, sticking to my guns, has anyone else noticed that our society - our culture, (or those religious, political and social monkey-poo-flingers that seem to think that they speak for everyone) seems to have placed a corral

around comics with the intent of defining for them what is funny and what is over the line, out of bounds and offensive? When was the last time we tried to do such surgical parsing of words? Eisenhower's administration? And wasn't *that* a high point in American free speech. I can't figure out if funny just isn't funny anymore, or if it's being constrained to the point where...it just isn't funny anymore. Has the American political scene made it so that even Saturday Night Live can't buy a laugh? Come on! Isn't John Boehner funny? Michelle Bachman?

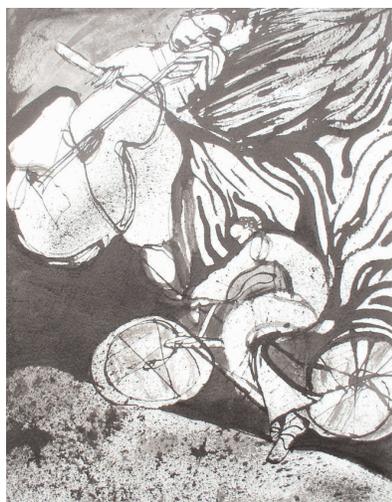
Question: Why isn't late night comedy for me? Because I have to get up at 6 in the blessed morning and make oatmeal and English muffins and put together gourmet lunches, pal.

So comedians are occasionally reduced to reading stale jokes off the Parthenon bathroom-wall, to the audience's screams. Not laughter, mind you. Screams of mindless schtick-recognition, idiotic pleasure at hearing what they've heard before. And the folks holding the mic's smell the sour stink in their armpits because they know they don't kill. They're not killing at all.

And one more thing. Why aren't there any old comics? Have we become so youth-oriented that we don't care what's funny to older people? I suppose that part-and-parcel of this trend is the fad of looking back at a decade and slamming it as if we weren't just living that decade and participating in that embarrassing dance or music or clothing style or toy or sport or event. Yes you were wearing those pants and thought you were *cool*. So we've lost our sense of nostalgia. Or perhaps we've finally chosen to interpret the word correctly - nostalgia actually means "to look back in pain." Be proud of your "I love Lady Gaga" tattoo. You're on a mighty slippery slope to being laughed at, dude.

Ah, well. This appears to have digressed into a pointless rant. All questions and no answers. So sorry. Dear, Mr. O'Connor, please make me laugh.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com



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CAUTION

No guarantees, no money back refund, no gentle pat on the back, no awards ceremony where everyone takes home a trophy, no hopelessness, helplessness or kiss on the forehead. Not on my watch.

“Curios”

by Monica Zarazua

Shiloh is changing and this is why it's important to have codes of dress and codes of behavior, otherwise, we get someone like the woman who lives—lived in 402. Even after we convinced her not to paint her house kiwi green, she committed more behavior code violations. She lived alone, worked as a bartender, wore mini skirts, smoked cigarettes in the front yard, and had been seen leaving with different men on numerous occasions. We surmised that she might be working as an escort, so we tailed her. It turns out she was on a date. But, dating like that at her age? We all agree that dating is more trouble than it's worth, but some people don't have hobbies other than—well, no, that's wrong. It turns out Ms. Georgia Saipan Jackson did have a hobby besides dating. She was a collector, but we'll get to that.

This story begins when the García family in the house to the left of her, and Ed and Veronica to the right, noticed they hadn't seen her leaving the house for a good three days, not even to go on one of her dates. We really started suspecting something was wrong when a coworker of hers came to the neighborhood. Nobody around here drives a car like that, with those spinning wheels, so naturally we approached him right away. We were friendly, of course. We always are. It's not about being antagonistic. It's about being open, knowing

what and who is going on, so we introduced ourselves as representatives of the Good Neighbors Association. The young man seemed nice enough, too much cologne, but he was polite, saying that Ms. Georgia hadn't been to work the last two days, and hadn't called in either. Not that we assumed anything about her, but it was good to know that at least she was a responsible and punctual worker, even if “work” meant wearing a low cut shirt and passing out beer and glasses of whiskey to already intoxicated patrons. We accompanied the young man to the front door, rang the doorbell, and peered into the windows, but the glass was thick and blurry. We couldn't see anything through them but vague shapes and shadows. There weren't any funny smells or pitiful cries of a trapped or injured woman. Really, the place was a hair past serene. We went around back, but the only things out there were some slippers, a rocker, a rickety table, and another locked door.

Well, we were just about to give up, but it turns out the young man had a spare key. We didn't want to offend him, but we weren't born yesterday. Why he couldn't have been older than twenty, and Ms. Georgia was well into her 40's, maybe even older. With women like that you can't always tell their real age. Usually they aren't forthcoming about it either. It seemed more than

a little curious to us that he hadn't told us about the key right away, so we told him go on ahead and use it, just to see if he'd bite and show us the way in. We gathered around the door, knocked one more time and listened to the knock fall flat. We rang the doorbell one more time and listened to its hollow ring. Then we gathered tightly together as one behind the young man as he unlocked the door.

Ms. Georgia lay on her tiled kitchen floor beside a shattered glass bottle. She was on her stomach with her palms pressed to the floor as if she had attempted to catch herself but failed. Her eyes were open, turned towards us as if she had heard us standing out there and had been trying to pull us in by the string of her dead gaze. A single shard of glass stuck out from the white of her left eye. Clear liquid, most likely from the broken bottle, puddled around her cheek. Blood trickled from the corner of her mouth, and it made a thin red line until it touched the floor and dispersed into the puddle. Her faded lipstick told us she had been on her way in rather than on her way out. Her nails and toenails were painted bright orange (tacky, but a suitable color for her). She was barefoot and wore a clingy wraparound dress that exposed her neckline (not surprising) and revealed how gravity was pulling eagerly on her skin and breasts.

We decided not to call the police yet. At first the young man protested. He tried to wrestle his cell phone back from us when we plucked it away from him, but we

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calmed him down by pressing our hands down on his shoulders. We pointed out that there was more going on in there than just Ms. Georgia's body lying on the floor. The house was filled with hundreds, thousands of bottles on every windowsill, shelf, countertop, and all along the floor boards. Even more disturbing was that inside of each bottle was a doll that looked just like her, same black mole above the lip, same tight, loud wardrobe, same mass of wild hair. We looked in every direction and there she was over and over again: Ms. Georgia reflected off the bottles, Ms. Georgia shrunken and divided into hundreds of tiny, plastic dolls, Ms. Georgia dead on the floor with her eyes open.

*

My life wasn't spectacular. Nobody will understand it completely. I barely understand it at all, but I can see it a little better now that it's gone. I can step back, hem and haw, and study it if I want to, but I was never one for studying. I'm just here to pass my hand through it one last time, hold it up to the light, let it fall between my fingers. People will forget me, as is natural to do. Eventually, I'll be nothing but a lipstick stain on glass.

On summer nights I used to sit out on the back porch with candles burning sweetly, a silk robe wrapped around my body. I liked to breathe the thick, humid air of Illinois summers with a cup of tea in my hand, a shot of whisky stirred in, a final thought. I'd sit with my slippered feet resting lightly on the wooden planks of the porch, and sip and rock while staring contentedly at the trees shifting shape in the deepening darkness. For a good half hour that's all I would do, so that

the tension from my body could escape and become lightning bugs weaving above the blades of grass. Then I would lean down and pull out my bottles from a basket beneath the table. Inside those bottles is where I kept my memories of Reginald. Peering inside of the bottles where my memories were safe, I could relive my happiest times with him. I could keep the best parts of my life close to me...

Bottle #1 The Richmond Pier

It's a regular old dirty day today. The tips have been shit and after four months of living in Oakland, it still hasn't gotten to be any more like home. Being stared at by strangers while I dance doesn't count as companionship. I drive to the Richmond Pier. Nobody ever talks about going there even though they do, so I figure if nobody talks about it then there has to be something special to it—everyone trying to keep it such a damn secret. I drive up the gravelly road towards the water. It's so windy out that my hair is a mess as soon as I step out of the car. Low lying waves race over the water. There's only one person out here, sitting in a foldout chair, floating a toy boat on a rope, fishing pole upright. A cap is pulled low over his eyes. There's a hazel glint when he glances up. There's tranquility in the salty air that encourages me to sit on a bench near him. We barely speak, except for a few comments on his part about how the weather affects the movement of fish. Somewhere in that sparseness of conversation I nod off, my mouth falling open, still

conscious of the wind coming off the ocean and down from the hills. The wind curls up inside my mouth then leaves again, touching the surface of my teeth on its way out. His boots scrape against the wooden boards, and his ring clinks against a bottle as he lifts it to his lips. He touches my arm with a beer. I don't take it right away, but then, why the hell not? It's alright to drink a cold one while sitting with another soul watching the wind make waves.

Bottle #87 Easter Sunday

Reginald rarely comes to church with me, but today he sits beside me in a back pew and flips through the pages in a songbook. We drive with the windows down to my house. My place is small. The bed is small, so is the window. Through it we hear the sounds of cars driving past and shopping carts crashing into brick walls. We're too far inland to hear the water. I used to be thirsty for that sound every day, but now, such liquid things are tongues and thighs, such heat floating and rising.

Bottle #172 The Oakland Pier

It stretches on for a mile. We take our time walking it. This night is the best of Oakland nights with the warm air, a light breeze carrying the sounds of dinner parties in the hills and barbeques in the flatlands. The pier stretches on for two miles, but we take our time walking and listening to the clop, clop of water against the legs of the pier, the tap of our dress shoes on the wood-

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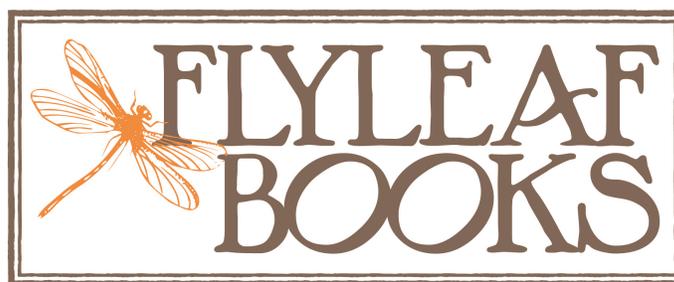
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en planks. At that hour, and on this night, there are few fishermen and women, even fewer fisherchildren who like pulling their hoods over their heads and wearing fingerless gloves so that they can pick up their books and drop their spades. The pier moseys on for three miles and we talk over dream matters like driving the Thunderbird across the continent from West Coast to East. We talk about easy going matters: the cocoa in the chocolate cake, the berries in the wine, the first draft picks. The ocean laps against the bottom of the pier, while the fisherpeople wind their lines up tightly, then toss them back out again.

The pier curves up slowly, then glides down towards its end, which is boarded up with wooden beams. We put our faces in the gaps between them and look out at the mass of water that moves continuously in search of the Pacific. The sky is black with silver punched in it. Turning, we see that behind us are thousands of golden points dancing on the hills and along the shores. The pier goes on for light years.

*

Ms. Georgia surely must've been crazy.

Some of us, thinking to get more light, pushed back the curtains and lifted up the shades. The sun struck every single bottle and rays of light shot out. We blinked, shuffled and tried to shield ourselves. We were like a mess of pigs in a pen blundering about, knocking up against each other, and in our blindness Ms. Georgia's body on the floor filled our minds. The weight

of her death pulled us down with her; it pulled us against her, pressed us into the folds of her dress and into the dampness of her lines. Those of us who were by the windows, quickly pulled the shades back down and shut the curtains.

We could see again and we didn't like what we saw, none of it.

The dolls inside the bottles were like toys from a gumball machine. They had plastic nubs for noses, ears, and mouths, and slight indentations where the eyes should have been. Each bottle had two dolls in it, one that was clearly Ms. Georgia with her orange fingernails and flipped out hair, and the other one that was an unidentified male doll. A chill went through all of us. What man had she bottled herself up with? What man had she replicated herself with over and over again? We couldn't help ourselves. We couldn't control our reaction.

"Is that you?"

All of us turned to the young man who claimed to be her coworker.

"You have a spare key. Is that you supposed to be in the bottles with her?"

We avoided looking at Ms. Georgia's body on the floor and thinking about the antics she must surely have engaged in with this young man half her age. Oh, the fright in his eyes when we surrounded him. We were driven by confusion, by the oddity of those dolls, and maybe even by whatever strange liquid was puddled on the floor around Ms. Georgia's face. We surmised that whatever had killed Ms. Georgia was potentially still in the

air, slowly corrupting our systems as we tried to get to the bottom of her death.

"Did you make her do this?"

"Not me." And he pointed to the skin on his arm. It was true. He had a fair complexion compared to the male doll in the bottle. He pointed to his facial hair and earlobes. It was true. The doll didn't have his helmet of gelled hair or his fake diamond earrings. We surmised that the man in the bottle was an older, more conservative gentleman.

"You don't know who he is?"

"No idea. Maybe there's some pictures lying around?" The young man had hit upon something. Surely there were clues around the house. We were about ready to call the police, but we knew that once they arrived we would be shooed away, the house closed off, and then we might never understand what killed Ms. Georgia. The young man was right. There had to be some picture lying around of Ms. Georgia and the unidentified man. We stepped back, gave the poor kid a little space. He didn't know a thing. We posted him close to Ms. Georgia's body. He couldn't stop looking at her. Poor kid. Probably hadn't ever seen a dead body before, especially not of someone he cared about, someone whom he maybe even believed he loved. A few of us sat with him and kept vigil. We began to pray tentatively. It wasn't our job to make sure she got into heaven, but still, we could show our respects to the dead.

The rest of us spread out, examining the bottles and exploring the house. We found everything but photographs. In the stand beside her bed were a mess of prophylactics. On her dresser were bottles of massage oil, scented candles, and glitter spray. There were bags and bags of make up. In her closet hung more low cut dresses, high heels and thigh-high go boots.

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But none of these personal items prepared us for what we found in the bathroom. Inside of the medicine cabinet, behind the mirror, where there should have been cold creams and Tylenol, were more bottles. There were more Ms. Georgia's and more unidentified men, over and over again only—and really this shouldn't have come as a surprise to us, given what we knew of her—all the dolls were naked and in the most pornographic of positions. Doll faces pushed into doll crotches. Doll lips glued to doll mounds. Doll legs spread doll eagle. Dolls bent over. Doll hands on doll mouths and between doll legs. Doll feet clutching doll heads. Doll behinds on doll faces. We shut the bathroom cabinet. There are some things we just shouldn't know about each other.

*

It was a slow day for bartending. Thunderstorms kept people at home, busying themselves with fixing things, gluing model airplanes, painting toenails, and piercing noses. I wasn't surprised that it was a slow shift. Shiloh wasn't like Oakland where you might have one or two days of bad weather in a row, but that's it. I liked the quiet and the calm that went on inside while the rain droned on outside. I busied myself in the rhythm of wiping water spots off the glasses, shining them up, and stacking them in two parallel towers. The man in the suit who walked in and asked for a Crown on the rocks didn't catch my attention right off. Once I really looked at him, though, I couldn't

stop. I stared at him a little bit too long, and he caught me looking. He looked so much like Reginald in the face and body, though not in his flashy style of dress or in the way he held his glass with his fingertips, swirling the liquid around, clearing his throat between sips, loosening his tie. Still, I'd always heard that everyone has a twin out there in the world, and it seemed that Reginald's was sitting at the bar in front of me.

I asked him what team he was going for. It took him forever to pull his eyes off of ESPN, but when he did, he ran his gaze down the front of my cleavage, took in my nice pair of legs, and probably wondered if my skin was as soft and good smelling as it looked.

"Broncos," he said.

I kept on shining the glasses. The more he looked, the more he must've liked. Little by little, he spent more time talking to me than he did watching the game. My shift was coming to an end.

"Let me buy you a drink, beautiful."

I stood at the sink behind the bar and watched the suds slide off my hands under the fluorescent light. Beautiful. Now that was a nice word to be called. I moved on around to the other side of the bar. I sat on the stool next to him and we toasted to thunderstorms and to touchdowns made in the final seconds of a game. Alcohol had its old magic again. The lights danced again, and the few people in the bar looked elegant and interesting instead of drunk and sweaty. The rain was coming down harder in a

steady beat, and when I squinted it was Reginald there beside me. Sure, his voice was a little higher, but that was a minor detail, one that, the more I drank, the less I noticed. He even wore a cologne that was almost the same as what Reginald used to wear. I toasted to this.

This was what I wanted: to burrow myself deep inside of his warm body and curl up, a tiny worm laying and hatching eggs. Me and my hatchlings, we'd be a family and he would be the universe. Wouldn't that then be love? What else could it be? Dozens of bodies pressed into one. His was the body, and I was the one curled up in his stomach, liver and heart. He sat down at my bar. No coincidence, him there like Reginald, and me there ready to enter and multiply. A hundred me's burrowed inside of him nibbling at his organs with our microscopic mouths, so small that he would feel only wave after wave of a million gentle lips moving inside of him. Would this not then be love?

I set down the shot glass and tried opening my eyes. The magic of alcohol carried me from the bar, to his car, to the Motel Six, and I tried opening my eyes, tried squinting them, and tried wiggling into the chant of Reginald inside my head. But none of it worked to turn me into a hairless, sliding invertebrate. He became impatient. "If you can't come baby, you can't. Try again next time."

I rolled off of him, out of breath, naked, looking up at the ceiling. Well, yes, there was always next time. I turned my head and smiled at him. He smiled back and rolled out of bed. He pulled on one sock, which got me thinking how most folks put their underwear on first, but why not the sock first? Why not the hat, then one sock, then the shirt? Why not the shoes and then the underwear?

"Gotta' go pick up this couch early tomorrow morning."

This was all I wanted: for him to knock me down then wipe his hand off, even if there was nothing on it but the touch of my skin and pressure of my bones. Already, I could see my bulging eye, my split lip, my stomach shoved into my

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Upper Left: 5

Far Left: Hope

Lower Left: Throw a Stone

Right: Wind

Lower Right: Seduction

Page 12: Willow Limb



The Blotter

spine, my twisted ankle, my purple forearms. I saw a ripped earlobe, an unfocused eye, a crooked finger, a neck with welts, a rib snapped in two. That's all I ever wanted, to know the body inside and out. If it couldn't be his, maybe it could be my own.

I got him, just by asking, to give me one good one, right in the jaw. It knocked me back and the wine I'd been holding splashed on my face. It was jarring, but not painful. The second molar on the top right side of my mouth fell from my gums. I spat it out, kicked it away, cupped my hand under my mouth to catch the blood, and when I looked up, he was staring at me with his belt hanging open.

"My tooth," I cried like it hurt even though truthfully it was a relief to have gotten rid of that rotting thing. For all he knew and needed to know, that tooth had been knocked loose by his hand. It disgusted him and so did I, naked with blood and wine all over my chin, neck, and breasts. My body was a dirty pulse.

"Get up off the floor."

He commanded, but I crawled around, whimpering for my molar. A small dribble of blood continued to run out of my mouth. I didn't look at him, but heard him grunting as he put on his shoes. I felt his warmth as he crouched near me. He brought his face almost level to mine.

"Would you get up, please?"

What sudden softness. I looked up at that empty face that should never have reminded me of Reginald. I turned my head and spat more blood on the rug. The molar was nestled in the carpet beside the bed. I reached out to pick it up and

cupped it in my hand, but kept crawling around until I heard the door click shut, announcing his departure. The gavel hit the block. The jury had already chewed up a verdict behind closed doors. In two weeks, if my soft skin and smooth legs still held appeal for him then maybe he would call, but not to invite me to the movies or dinner. He might take me for a bite to eat, but not to dinner because the two are not the same. Dinner means spending money and dressing up. Dinner is a restaurant by the pier. A bite to eat is curly fries and a shake from Rally's. It's the #2 chicken special. I knew this. I'd been through it a dozen times before. Oh, I didn't hold on to bad memories. I let them go their way. I didn't cling. I didn't toss them around in my mind or roll them around in my mouth. They weren't the precious memories, so I didn't keep them bottled up. I let them all go like a flock of pigeons, like a brood of worms.

The last time I went to knock on Reginald's door, there was none to knock on, just an old sheet nailed to the doorway. This was the first time I noticed my molar give a little wiggle when I pressed my tongue against it, feeling a sense of foreboding. All the glass in the windows, all the hinges and nails had been removed. How quickly a home becomes the bare scraps of a house. Then again, by Reginald's own words, that place was never his home. I can't lie and say his leaving was a surprise. He'd told me he needed to go back to her to see if things could be worked out. I waited anyways because I couldn't do anything against the knowledge that, for me, it was no coincidence that we had sat on that pier together.

er. Even when I moved back across the country, I left a note so that when he was ready to make his real home, he would know where I was. For three years I waited for him to come, sit down at my bar, and buy me a drink. What did I get but his twin and a knocked out tooth.

"It didn't go as planned," I told the molar and finished off the wine and the night by myself.

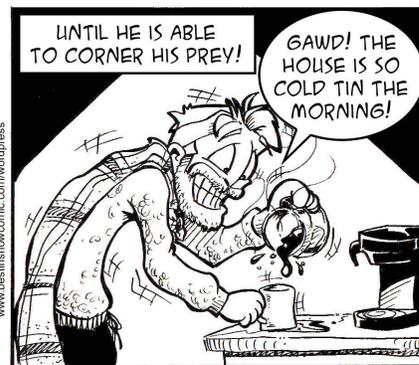
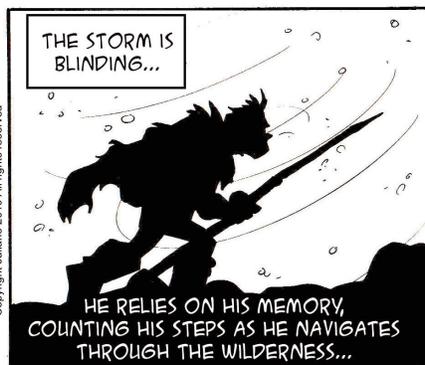
Ms. Georgia's death, like all deaths, was a wake up call. We went home that night and lectured our families, especially our young daughters. We weren't sure of the cause of death, but we let our families know that a woman in the neighborhood had come to a wrong end. Her death was a lesson, one example of how a woman who violated behavior codes left and right would most probably end up dying under questionable circumstances.

There were three possibilities: natural causes, murder, or suicide.

Maybe she'd had a heart attack. If this was the case, then her death was a wake up call to cut down on our red meat, take our vitamins, and increase the amount of time we spent at the gym and walking our Chihuahuas.

If it was murder (our prime suspect being the man her coworker said she had left the bar with two nights prior), then we needed to triple lock our doors. We needed to get a profile of the man and staple his face in every supermarket, on every corner, until we caught the S.O.B. As for the women, we needed to be conscious about our dress, and about whom we went home with (not that we would ever go home with a stranger).

Best In Show



by Phil Juliano

Many of us thought she had committed suicide. We surmised that she stood in her kitchen, depressed at the state of her wicked life, and drank from one of the bottles. We guessed that inside the bottle was some sort of liquid poison (once we had public access to the coroner and police reports we'd know for sure). As we imagined it, she gulped down everything, including the dolls and whatever objects might have been in that bottle (a miniature boat, a velvet ribbon). All the items in the bottle were lethal fragments moving down her throat, one after the other, festive and deadly. She drank until she heard carnival music throbbing in her veins and saw a sky ripped open with silver. The poison entered her bloodstream. She dropped the bottle, then fell. Her cheekbone shattered when it struck the floor.

If it was suicide, then we needed to make sure there were no copycat suicides, especially among bachelorettes of that age, of which we only had a handful: Mrs. Breyer on Magnolia Avenue, who was a widower; Beatriz who lived with her sister's family and helped take care of the kids; and Rebecca Jones, who was planning, in May, to go on a cruise for singles.

All of us attended the funeral. The Good Neighbors Association watches over all, welcomes in the new, and waves to the departing. Ms. Georgia was a part of us, even if only for a short time, even if she violated the codes. We still felt to go. Her coworkers were there, including the young man with the fancy car. They seemed to have loved her well enough. They each brought a rose to throw on her coffin, a gesture they must have

picked up from the movies. Standing beside her coffin, we noticed that she was shorter than she appeared to be when she was alive and in her high heels. We could almost forgive her indiscretions, seeing how pretty she looked with her hair fanned out across the pillow.

*

I put the molar on the nightstand for awhile, but it looked funny sitting there all by itself. What tooth wants to be all alone? Even the first one growing out in a baby's mouth knows it's being followed by half a dozen more, ready to push out through the gums, out into the new world. Well, I sure couldn't shove the molar back in my mouth. For years, it had been on its way out. I wasn't going to leave it with the empty wine bottles and the twisted up bed sheets of the motel. I could just see a handful of fates for it, none of them good. It might get sucked up by a vacuum, or be picked up by the next person in the room and strung on a necklace, or it might stay nestled in the dusty carpet for years, undetected. No, I couldn't do that to my molar. Even though it was rotted now, it had once sprouted clean and well-formed inside my mouth. I cleaned it off in the bathroom that was small and stained, like most bathrooms in these types of establishments. Then I showered. The soap was about as soft as sandpaper and so was the water, but they did just what they needed to, and I stepped out of there glistening.

After getting home, I changed into a bikini top, shorts, and roller skates. After the night I'd had I normally would have felt dehydrated, guilty and reduced.

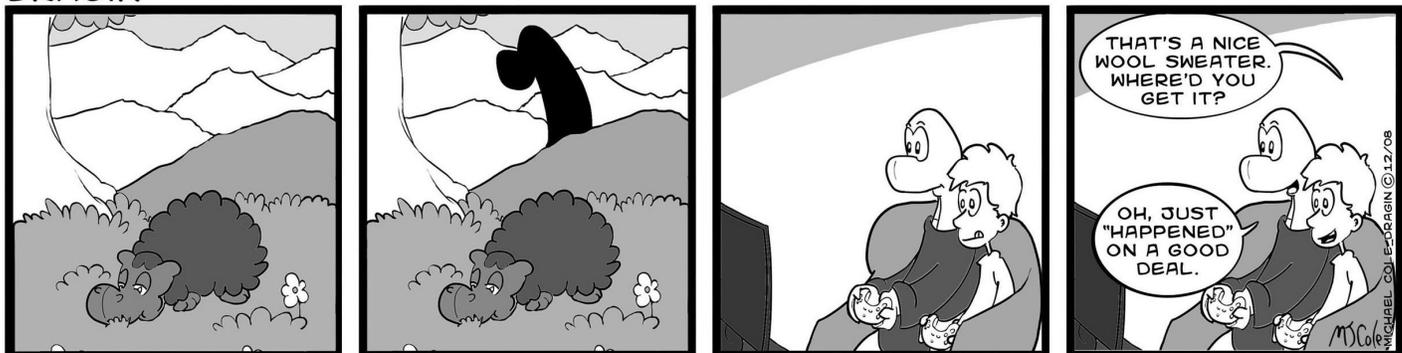
Normal, I decided wasn't always good, nor was normal always normal and this conundrum, I decided, was the reason why women my age didn't roller skate. But what needed to be, needed to be. A fallen tooth, a body washed, I rolled through the streets. I stopped and had a beer with Thomas who works the counter over there at Chocolate Mexicano. A fine man. The type of person who makes me glad to be back here in this cow dung town. He's the sort who doesn't take your existence for granted. He's the sort who if you came in with one tit hanging down and bleeding, he wouldn't drop his jaw but would wrap a blanket around you. Then I wandered over to Lily's. I've known her since high school. She was watching her grandbabies crawl around in the dirt. Little pumpkins with cherry noses. Another granddaughter was soon on her way to being born. I ate a second blueberry tart then helped Lily hang up her laundry of cloth diapers and burp cloths.

After leaving Lily's, I rolled on through the cemetery. The sun filtered down through the leaves of the trees. Blossoms floated to the ground. While I wove between the headstones, I left whiskey for my mother, cologne for my father, a string of chocolates for my sister. Somewhere in between, I dropped my molar in the grass.

I skated on over to the community college, not that I was ever one for studying, but something like mechanics might be good. Since I'd moved back to Shiloh, it was pick either house or vehicle but not both, so I opted for the house, but I figured if I took this class I could maintain my own car, and that way

DRAGIN

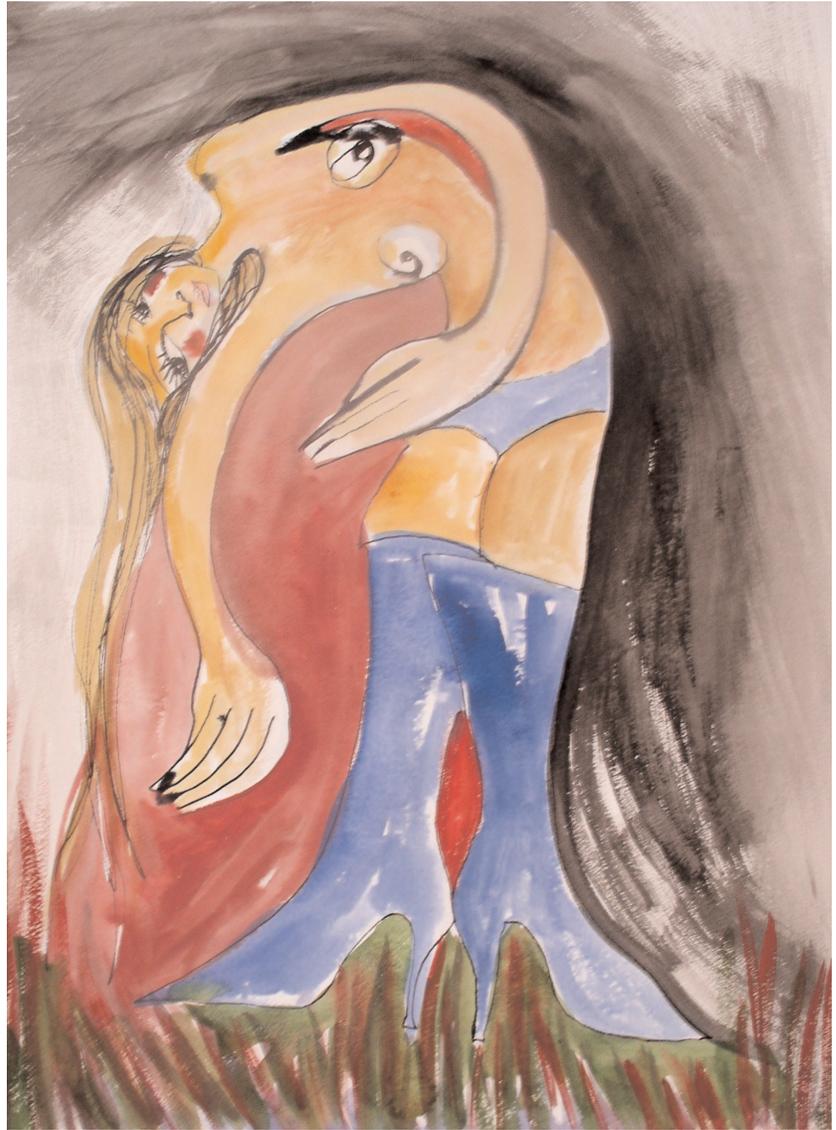
by Michael Cole



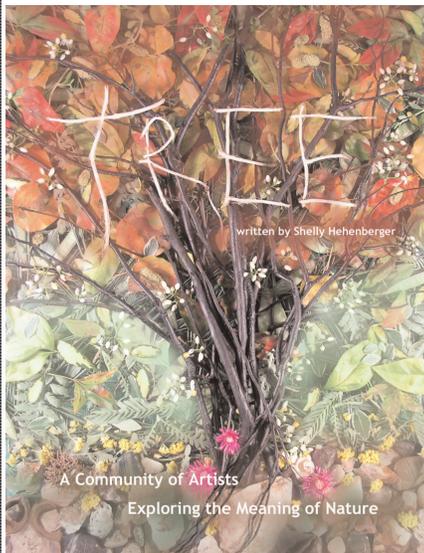
The Blotter

save some money. Martin, my coworker was selling his car. It was a sleek ride. I'd even leave the rims on...or better than a car would be a bike. Reginald and I had talked about hitting the highway. We never did it but it had always been something I wanted to do. I could see myself with some boots and a leather miniskirt, riding up and down the streets then off onto the open road. Oh the neighbors would be scandalized then!

The hole in my gums was finally done throbbing, and the other teeth had settled nicely around the new gap. As I roller skated home, my mind whirled with thoughts of silver wrenches in my pockets and a leather seat under my butt. It was time to clean all those bottles out, time to sweep and mop the floor, wipe down the shelves and repaint them a lemon yellow or electric blue. I would need space for my riding gloves and high heeled boots, plus that house had just gotten too darn dark and moldy.



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THURSTON MOORE, SONIC BACHELOR IN: "HOLIDAY DREAM NATION"

BY CHRIS FOX

IN A BIZARRE ALTERNATE WORLD WHERE THURSTON MOORE AND KIM GORDON NEVER MET, OUR SONIC BACHELOR CONTEMPLATES HIS HOLIDAY PLANS...

"LET'S SEE WHAT SURPRISES THE 'OL SONIC FREEZER HAS IN STORE FOR ME THIS THANKSGIVING!"



"PARTY PIZZA?? HELL TO THE YEAH!"



"AND YOU KNOW WHO'S NOT INVITED TO THIS PARTY?"



"MR. DIGNITY AND MRS. MY PANTS!!"



"FEEDBACK SOLO!!"

WOMEN'S FLAT TRACK ROLLER DERBY



Photo: Joshua Craig

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"Sheer Miss"

Sorrow the little man inside, with owl eyes and tender ambition.
The whore reckons with his hollow impression.
Cheerful in his step, but dumb in his mind,
his words barely reach the ears of the minds intention.
Salt be so far from his Spirit, yet the little man is humble beyond
the superstition,
kept his Heart in simple measure,
so that his earthly walk would be lighter than the man of pleasure.

"Black Dust"

Grain by grain fall from glass globe to iris of watching observer,
the phantasmagoric suit the pale women grins and taps her skeletal hand on,
a hollow vessel but for the act raping its dim sound.
Grain by grain of black pyramid in jungle of bloody festering heat.
Our heart quenched by the sound of our own giggles makes it seem senti-
mental.
Near to edge the beast crawls wringing his hands in desolation,
each finger plots its grasp and clenches fleeting sand floating dust.
Wincing cheek chalked with red mud and arrows poison kissed ears of
the times chosen.
Remedy seeks its ill and the call beckons his caller finally and soon
each black grain will fill our mouth,
Leaving only our words to become like black dust.

"High Call"

Arrows lost in the water below our ship,
the sails catch the wind, telling sounds of whips.
Hardened stares avert from the memories kept,
yellow markings strike their minds with healing.
Cold hands warmed by the hands of lovers feeling.
Beast dance with beast and incense calls to dead gods of ole' reckoning.
Scrape of sword bending knee follows in a whisper.
The fresh whisper births space into the callers lungs.
Guns rusted. Skulls painted. Blue legs dancing. Naked joy.

CONTRIBUTORS

Monica Zarazua of Oakland, CA writes, "If accepted, this will be my second publication, the first being "The Turn" published by The Collagist in June 2010." *Monica, we're proud to be part of the beginning of your success.*

Ainhoa Bilbao Canup writes, "Born in Spain, I migrated to the United States at the age of six and have long since pursued art as a means of self-expression and reflection. I am challenged and inspired daily in finding different ways of expressing my life through art. I enjoy stretching my imagination in this roller coaster called life and live for those spontaneous moments that paint new wonders on my canvas. The world of emotion, daydreams and the unspoken become alive to me through the use of colors, gestures and line as I continue to look inward and translate it into something tangible. I also dabble in spontaneous poetry sensitively connecting to the moment's inspiration. Thank you kindly for taking time to check out my art! Take care and let nothing get in the way of being true to yourself and others!

Nathaniel Alvarez writes, "I'd say that my journey in life or rather the question of 'Who am I?' began around the same time I began writing poetry. The process for me was rather organic in that I never sought it in a way that I thought would have much result, but rather a cathartic expression. I started experimenting with word-play originally to make girls giggle and to scare teachers, ultimately to try and mimic the duality found in poets like William Blake and Poe; observing both the Holy and the darkness of my soul, and explored my shadow self as C.G. Jung would put it. I love their depth and I owe it to them as well as my English teacher, who in a way initiated me into their works in a school that seemed to fiercely oppose the unknown. The fact that the school I attended was a conservative Christian School, run by a generation who imposed Victorian ethics on 14 year olds, I found myself having affinity with writers like Blake because of their mysticism and often times challenging grit. After I left such a school I learned that Blake found a solace in the works of the Bible in a different way as in his, "Marriage of Heaven and Hell", that was incredibly unorthodox, yet liberating. I started working on wood block projects in art, carving away at whole pieces of wood to create forms, trying to find within myself what Blake had found. It was rather a surprise to find that it was an inverted form of drawing, removing rather than adding to a medium. I believe I found in these early stages a path that I would not and have not given up. That is the pursuit of the unknown and to always turn to paths of expression as well as pursuits that encourage that sense of adventure. Currently I'm working on my B.A. in Psychology at UNCG which has brought many new insights and challenges to my life. I have also entered the gates of Freemasonry recently to explore what its teachings have to stimulate that part of my mind that enjoys symbols and words, a sort of living poetic magic I have found to be necessary to my life. And of course looking back on my life I have always sought to ask my and surround myself with old books and the antiquarian romanticism of metaphysics, this I believe poetry is that ultimate and natural form of expression that both feeds my soul and hopefully others enjoy. "

Chris Fox is a stand-up comedian who lives in Chapel Hill. His poetry and short fiction have appeared in numerous publications.

Phil Juliano lives and loves in Asheville, NC.

Michael Cole does too.

The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.. If nothing else, we'd love to read them We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterraag.com

A New York Minute: I must have wrapped up in the old quilt that was a wedding present or caught my foot in an untucked corner of the sheet, because I want to walk, I want to keep up with the busy pedestrian traffic, but I cannot. I feel like a tourist - the worst sin for a New Yorker - looking around at the faces that make only fleeting eye-contact but then snub on. Can you assist me? I seem to have a leg that fell asleep during the last meeting of the day, or I've taken a blow-dart to the back of my thigh and the poison is rushing through my body, deadening my nerves and soon I'll be flopping on the ground like a carp. But the street noise covers any requests for assistance, the blue-tooth jabbering, the Madison Avenue chatter, the Wall-Street corporate insight one-upsmanship ensure that no one sees or hears my problem. There's my subway entrance, and I have a sinking feeling (NPI! - no pun intended!) that if I go in, I'm never coming out again. But I am jostled along with the crowd. I huff in resignation, but there's no whiff of the underground stale burnt ozone and brimstone. If I fall, who will pick me back up? Who will keep me from missing my stop?

Pam - cyberspace

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Final Tidbits: We've been selling books and paintings and prints for our first release "Tree" for a couple of months but I still haven't seen your pre-order. We're going to print before the first crocuses come up here in North Carolina. Lots of fine people are helping with the project and we want you to do your part. Talk it up, think about who you like giving gifts to, and go on over to paintbrushforest.com or pencilpointmountain.com and do it. While you're mulling that over, consider a donation to The Blotter (www.blotterraag.com) as your good deed for the year! And visit your local independent bookstore, they have hot cocoa! I don't want to hear any of you saying, "I'm bored." Got it? Good!



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