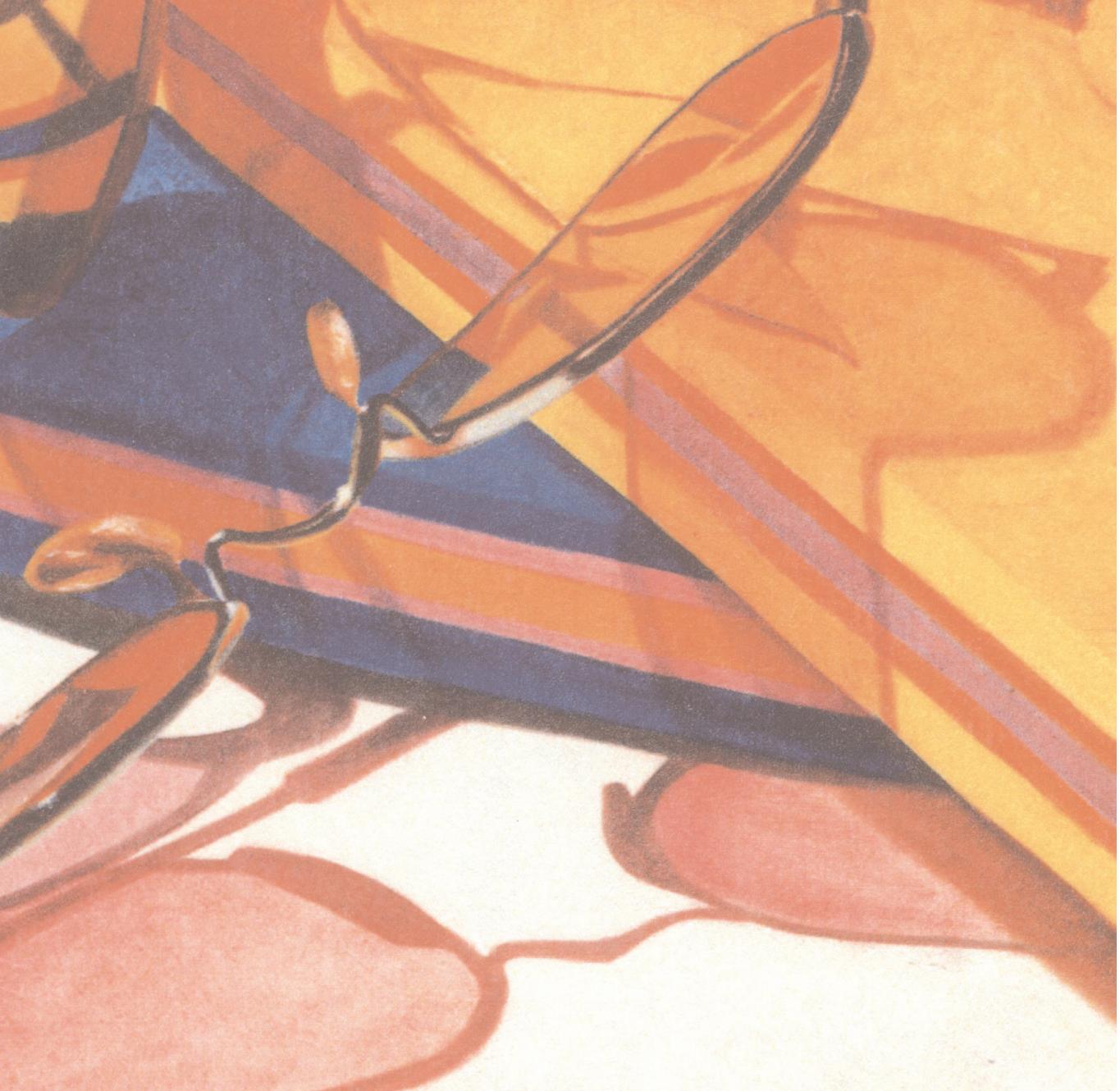


*More than before! Scott Rooker, Sonny Rag, Emily W. Recchia,
George Kierspe, Kelly Ann Jacobson, Mitchell Krochmalnik Grabois,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

October 2013

MAGAZINE



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FRONT COVER, detail of "Sun Fun Two" by George Kierspe. See center-fold for more.

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

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"Guarding Bathrooms at *The Pita Pil'*"

There's not much interaction with adults in my line of work. If I don't count Blotter contributors; we are on e-street, without Springsteen wailing in the background. Single lane threads of, "Here's my stuff," and "Oh, thank you for letting me read your stuff," followed by, "Oh, no, no, I insist. Thank *you*," and so on. Typed conversations like mine are like opposite side of the street parking laws in Manhattan; if it's done correctly, no one gets mad, and very little contact between parties is required.

So I guess I'm kind of on my own. I may go out and shout at the occasional deer nibbling azaleas in the garden. They're good about running when I come near, not so much because they're afraid of me, but out of respect. I did, of course, plant the tasty shrubbery and they must appreciate that I would like to see them flower in the spring, if only with a tenth of the potential blooms. I am sure, however, that they deer-giggle amongst themselves as they scamper away. But I must bear in mind that these deer are the age-equivalent to the preschoolers I see when I am called in as Mr. Garry, the substitute teacher who plays guitar! And the deer are older than my chickens, which are older than the ducks and geese. Mere children, conversationally. The chickens, after three years, still only squawk for food. The ducks and geese holler for water, and lots of it. Not much give-and-take here. I go to the coffee shop. Speak for a moment to the barista making my beverage. How is she doing? Does the day look like a good one to a young woman feverishly constructing Chai lattes? She has no time for such foolish prattle – I can see that she has the capacity to go from being friendly to hoping customers will move on. It's like an on/off switch. Or maybe all women have this. Or maybe all people do, and I've just never noticed. It's in their eyes. I've never been good at looking people in the eye when they talk. It's a skill, I know; one that needs practice. I've probably played more chess than looked people in the eye. Not good, I know. On the other hand, soon you will have played more Candy Crush Saga than you've looked people in the eye, so think about that a while.

Anyhow, if I'm really fancying a parlay, I can toddle over to the grocery store and stand still in the cereal lane for a few minutes. There must be some kind of security camera that looks at the immobile customer, measuring their confusion with some retail-store metric causing a service reaction that sends someone with a name-tag to come out and ask if they might help me with something. Do I need decision-making assistance? Am I lost? I let them find things for me – that toilet paper with the blue wrapper, dried apricots, the variety pack of granola bars. It makes people feel good to help, and makes me feel

good to let them.

I could talk with my wife, but when would that happen? Sometimes she comes home so frazzled by the workplace that she holds her arms out in front of her, fending off all childrens' chatter and husband's hogwash. Eyes red, mouth lax, some aspect both powerful and terrible about the day has worn her to the core. On these days we call her *Mombie*. You – if you were here – would see it in her eyes, they wobble with that too-much-electronics shiver, one of the rewards of our email/IM world. With a random hunger, she eats whatever I've made, mumbles in response to my queries, carries her plate to the sink, and shuffles to the bedroom to load up on flannel, that reassuring, comforting, deflecting fabric of our lives. I get the girls protestingly to bed. Mombie buries her face in Fitness magazine (something I can only guess is escapist – I mean, who *reads* about *exercising*?)

Leaving me alone once again in the living room, wondering if American Idol can actually be the low-water mark in our culture, or if there's a deeper, Dantean level of misery awaiting us – strapped to a barber's chair, our eyes propped open Droogie-like, while film footage rolls of teenagers pushing the elderly down flights of stairs or seven by twenty-four reruns of Republican candidate debates with Ce-Lo rapping "Four-Q" in endless loop in the background. Perhaps this is all there is...

In fact I have dreams about talking with people about their writing, how ideas flourish or extinguish, perhaps sitting in a coffee shop leaning back in a comfortable chair chortling about the trials of shoehorning a double-McGuffin into a subplot, or inculcating the history behind the Scottish Play into the minds of tenth graders. Yes, I'd prefer boredom over what I have. I'm somewhat deprived of that thing called discourse, conversation, critical discussion. Yahoo News is easily a double portion of yahoo to each news, and I've found over the years that there's only so much to be gained from arguing with nine year olds (or seven, or twelve, or, or, or). Better by far to, in the following order, instruct, inform, repeat, remind, cajole and cave.

More difficult for me to wrap my head around is that this may well be my own high-water mark. Helping the girls with long division and the Pythagorean Theorem. Feeding the chickens, trying to not get spurred by the damned flogging rooster. Sitting in the comfy chair writing a novel long-hand just to have the experience of doing it. Making turkey-sliders in an iron frying pan to go with a tomato-basil-mozzarella salad for supper. Sipping cold coffee as I type late at night. I've been searching for a sign to explain my life. Who enjoys *alone* as much as I? What manner of writer writes purely for his own entertainment? Is there a French word for it – something sexy-sounding that means contented to pour thoughts out solely for personal satisfac-

Continued on page 15

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CAUTION

*Win if you can,
lose if you must...*

"The Opera Singer"

By: Scott Rooker

Dr. Robert Hammond arrived home from the hospital just as the sun was fading into orange twilight. He got out of his work clothes and into his jogging clothes. He laced his running shoes and stretched his legs on the steps in his garage. He set out jogging down the street. He jogged down the hill and turned left into the Shelley Lake greenway trail. He made another left and ran towards Sanderson High School. His heart rate was pumping. As a physician he knew the importance of exercise. He loved to jog. He also loved to sing opera. The only time he could really sing opera was when he was cutting the grass, and even then neighbors could still hear it.

He continued under North Hills Drive. The trail became more steep. The sky had grown darker now. It was darkest blue. He passed a woman speed walking on the right. The trail

began to curve. An owl flew out of the sky and landed with its talons in the doctor's scalp. The owl's wings flapped. The doctor crouched down, shocked. The doctor felt pure adrenaline. The owl flew off his head and onto the power lines which sagged above the trail. The doctor grabbed the keys from his shorts' pocket and clutched them between his knuckles, raising his fist to the owl. The owl turned its head around backwards to look at the doctor. "Come on!!" said Dr. Hammond, "Come on, owl!" The owl flew off into the night.

The doctor turned and looked at the woman speed walker he had just passed. "Did you see that? Did you see that?" he said. "Did you see that?"

The woman had her hand over her mouth, covering her laughter. She was just about crying. She was trying hard not to

let the man know she was laughing.

"Man!" he said putting his keys back in his pocket. He continued his jog. Dr. Hammond knew the woman was laughing at him. He didn't mind so much. He was just glad someone had witnessed what had happened. He figured it was less likely that he were insane, as long as someone else had indeed seen what he had seen.

When he had completed his jog, he entered through the kitchen. He embraced his wife a little tighter than normal that night. She looked at him. "Honey, you're bleeding!" she said. She touched his bald head. There were several scratches.

"Honey you'll never guess what happened to me.." he said. He told her the story. She didn't believe him. She was sure he was having an affair.



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"That Other Day"

by Sonny Rag

When Nicky waited for the satellite TV guy, they'd promised he'd be there between eight and noon, which is a hell of a time-window. This annoyed him because it tied up his day like a hostage, pushing all mundanities and foolishness into the afternoon. On a Tuesday perhaps such things are understandable if not acceptable, but on a Friday it slips over into the realm of damnable. The satellite TV guy showed up at nine, though, and it turned out he was *Degar* – indigenous to the highlands of central Vietnam. Nicky found this particularly interesting, because he had a certain affection for peoples that fight back against absurd odds, like the IRA and the Basque separatists who only want to live in the Pyrenees and why would anyone want to deny them that? Also, Chechen rebels, who didn't want to be part of the ex-Soviet Union back

when the Russians were already pretty tired of everyone leaving the bloc-party and had told them no, opening a kettle of hornets if ever there was one. He also liked the Cheyenne, although he'd never met anyone Cheyenne that he knew of. Perhaps he just liked the word Cheyenne, or maybe it was a David and Goliath thing. That had Nicky reminiscing with a quiet, crooked smile about the old Lutheran cartoon with the clay kid and his dog. Anyway, he had a good feeling about the satellite TV guy now that he was there, so he first showed him the old dish, which was not attached to the roof of the house but rather down the hill and around the corner, because the house was in the woods and couldn't get a clear view of the Southern sky.

"You get optimal response up to about 200 feet," the satellite TV guy said. Nicky could picture him with a Czech-made

Kalashnikov slung nonchalantly over his shoulder.

"Yeah, we're about forty yards more than that," he grinned sheepishly.

"I think I have enough cable," said the satellite TV guy with an odd shrug that seemed to say to Nicky *well, if I do, good; if I don't, also not too bad*. Like he might steal what he needed from someone else's house. That tickled Nicky, the idea of making a midnight raid on his neighbor's dish with a Montagnard armed to the teeth with wire-cutters. Duct-taping the yellow-lab's mouth shut so she couldn't give them away. Perhaps being shot at by his neighbor, rock-salt from an old double-barrel. How he would struggle away with half a hand gone, cable wrapped around his shoulder. Oh, the pain of being mortal!

"No, no, it's OK," the satellite TV guy patted his shoul-

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der as they walked in the door. "We can use cable that's already in place. You know, from your previous provider." He was looking at Nicky oddly, because Nicky had burst into tears, a byproduct of weird shit he'd downed the night previous, when he'd kicked out the TV stand's footing like Bruce Lee or maybe Willis and sent the set crashing to the carpet where implosion sparks started a little campfire he'd doused with a can of Pepsi Free.



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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@blotterrag.com

Feeling put upon, I mope in bed after the alarm has already gone off. The dawn has not yet broken, and I let the shapes and colors that form when my eyes are closed follow whatever path they choose. It has recently been the anniversary of Dorothy Parker's birth, and that keeps looping around in my head – Mrs. Parker was quite the character in American Letters in her time and in our particular but not peculiar time she has gained a resurgence in popularity.

Born in 1893 in my home state of New Jersey (perhaps that gave her wit its caustic quality) she was first published by the middle of the First World War, and just about done publishing by the end of the Second. That's how it goes, sometimes.

I've always thought that I would have liked to have known her. To sit quietly at the table in the Algonquin, nursing a gin-and-tonic, for the chance to hear her speak. I would have suffered her arrows bravely, if not happily, just to hear them, would have blushed or grinned sheepishly, and given up my chair to anyone she offered it to in my stead.

I like her not because she was clever, but because she was clever even though she was afraid. Afraid of being alone, afraid of criticism, afraid of being dismissed, afraid of being unloved, afraid of growing old. Her armor and shield was a tongue so brilliant and quick; what so many of us wish for and never have, what some believe that they actually possess and remain so pale in her sparkling light. Mrs. Parker's was the definitive wit, the peak of the pyramid. As children's books all wish they could be Seuss, repartees all wish they'd been spoken by Dorothy Parker. We are each and all less clever than she, because she was not always cynical, not always biting, not always mean, never quite misanthropic. She knew exactly how much of anything to be, in the same way that a master baker knows how to...master bake.

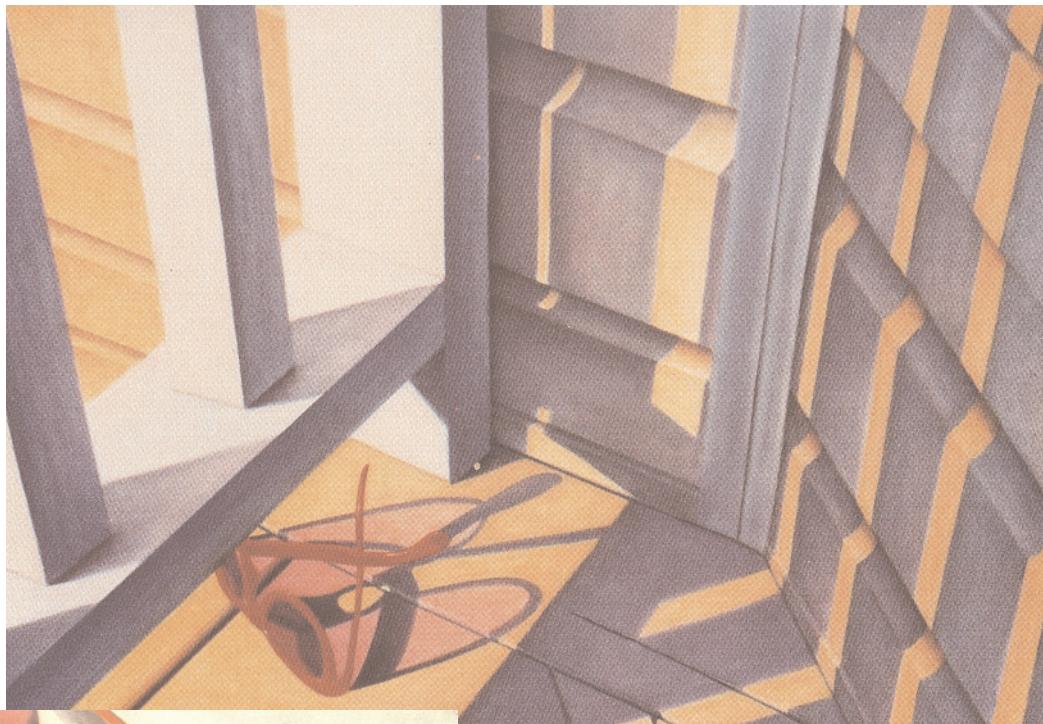
When she died, Mrs. Parker left her estate to the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Foundation. She knew how people can be, and how they should be..

Well, it's time to get up. Here is what has formed in my mind, thinking about Mrs. Parker in the dark. Two homages, if you, and she, will forgive me:

“Crimea River”
Such hue and cry
When six-hundred die,
Wait ‘til they see
Gallipoli.

“Union Blues”
Pay them enough
To afford a Ford
Now they cannot
Cover room and board.

GMS - Chapel Hill



Above:Porch & Patterns No. 3

Top Right: Sharp Shades

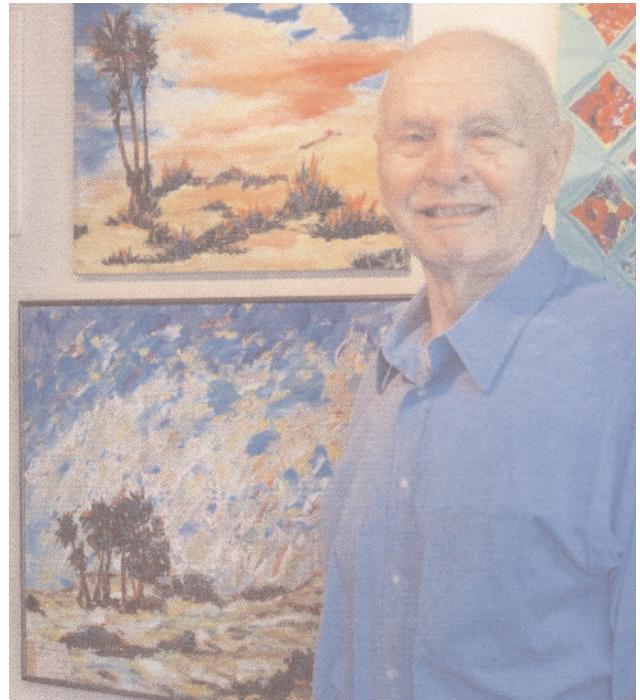
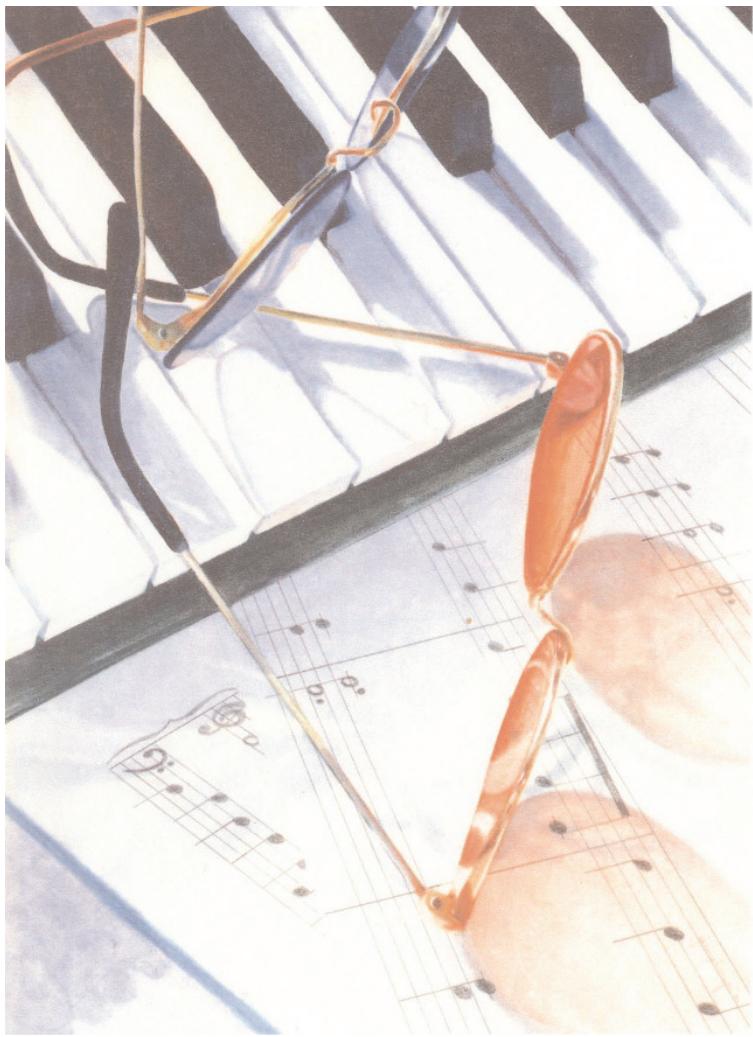
Right: Sun Fun Two

Bottom Right: Pop Appropriation No. 5; The
'Mod' Russian"

Below: Sun Fun One

Left: Lavender's Blue

Far Right - Mr. George Kierspe



George Kierspe -
Aiken SC / Summerville SC



"To My Dearest Uncle in All but Blood: Breathe"

by Emily W. Recchia

Please remember to taste
the air
today.

Second-hand smoke
is guaranteed to taunt you;
you will choke on the
occasional fresh
plaster's stillborn delivery. But

I promise you it's worth it.

And I swear to God –
whatever that is or
is not –
on my marauder's
honor
that you will live.

Sometimes you won't want to live.
I can't say that I
understand;
I can't say that I
have suffered;
I can't say that you'll
be happy.

Sometimes I don't want to live, either.
My girlish flesh has
been pulled back
and snapped shut
like a slinky –
God's own trademark
cellulite.

Growing pains are real.

The only myth
about growing up
is the “up,” so
let’s

grow down. Let’s crawl
backwards into tunnels,
into cupboards,
into out-dated games of
hide-and-go-seek.

We will revel in the
morning mud’s glory
and cast plump
childish fists about
the sandbox, and although
I cried at first, I might
even laugh when
my sister
feeds me a shovel-full
of
drywetrainy
sand.

Let’s grow down so
low that we meet
Pangea at its wildest
state,

France sharing her cows as Italy shares her jackals as Northern Russia shares her puffins;

they howl at their
cheese-lit moon
in an eerie fit of
conspiracy.

If we grow down

far enough,
perhaps we could
summon both
Malachi Constant
and
Hermione Granger
to feast on ambrosia,
and we could all live –
Malachi and Hermione,
you and me,
and everyone who is dear
to our hearts and theirs –

we could all live forever
in the fireflies’ palace,
complete with
mushroom turrets
and beehive cotton.

"A Long Day's Work"

by Kelly Ann Jacobson

I spent the morning yesterday
at work beneath the summer sun,
wallflowers lifeless in the heat
and aster wilted, every one
as bent as Hudson reeds beneath
the weight of heavy summer rain
but dry and brittle to the touch
like olden queen after her wane.
I fought their thirst with water jug,
I planted mint to fight the ants,
poured beer into a Petri dish
to stop the slugs eating the plants.
A long day's work, my hands were cut,
my knees were brown and greened with grass
and then I realized, weeds in hand,
if death's decided, let it pass.



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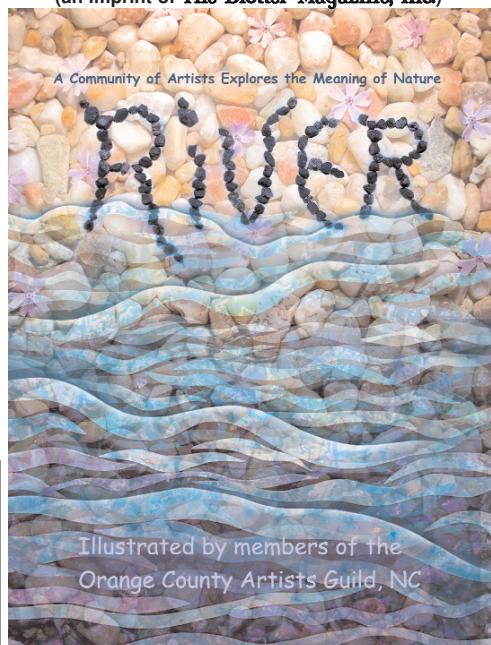
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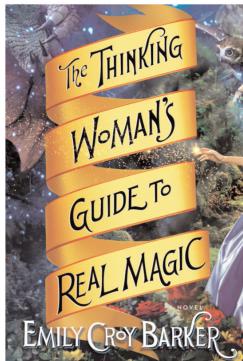
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GUIDE TO LOCAL EVENTS

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SEPTEMBER 4 (Wed) Quail Ridge Books hosts **Susan Cooper**, the Newbury Medal winning author of *The Dark is Rising*, for her new book *Ghost Hawk*. 7 pm.

SEPTEMBER 18 (Wed) The Regulator Bookshop hosts **Emily Croy Barker** for *The Thinking Woman's Guide to Real Magic*. 7 pm.

SEPTEMBER 27 (Fri) Flyleaf Books hosts **Robin Sloan** for *Mr. Penumbra's 24-Hour Bookstore*. 7 pm.

OCTOBER 2 (Wed) Flyleaf Books hosts **Steven Brust**, the author of the Vlad Taltos series, for his new novel *The Incrementalists*. 7 pm.

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"Welder"

by Mitchell Krochmalnik Grabois

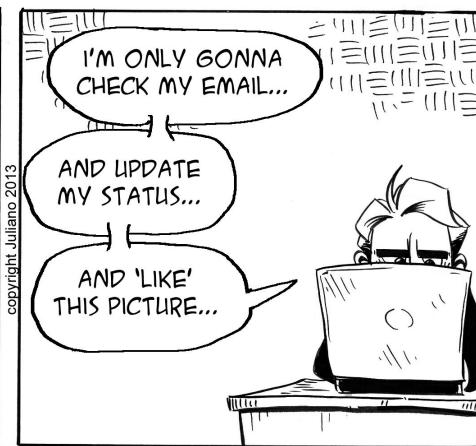
The welder looks through his mask
and sees the world coming together
in a shower of sparks

He finishes work
takes off his mask
turns and sees the world coming apart

He hears the heartbreaking sound
of women screaming
children crying
It is like the sound of metal tearing
This is no tragic event that will be reported on the telly
It's just everyday life

In the morning he goes back to work
puts on his mask
fires up his torch

Best In Show



by Phil Juliano

Continued from page 3

tion? I doubt it.

Somewhere out in the world there are people arguing. Having an argument. Invoking rhetoric with intention, exercising the debate, making moral stands, crowd-sourcing concepts. Somewhere lines are being drawn in the bloody sand, tears are being fraught-with whatever discussion point is being considered. And all without me, without knowing or caring that it is without me that they converse. There are also people wandering into restaurants with the sole purpose of using the bathroom, having no intention of buying anything, not even a veggie-pita and a glass of water, and who can't fathom why the person behind the counter is denying them this pee-entitlement which they think is inalienable. Odds are these folks are not discernible from the others just by looking at them. Maybe a little drunker, maybe not.

My wife calls me a hermit. At this point, I may very well be one. And this may or may not be my actual intent. There is a lot to love about being Pa in a Little House in the Woods, albeit with reliable air-conditioning and indoor plumbing, less than a mile from the supermarket. I can sit out of sight of my house on a canvas chair and read a story or do a cross-word puzzle, throw food to geese that fuss-and-feather at me for opening my mouth to say hello. *Be quiet!* they say in goose-chatter. And why not? Sometimes quiet is better.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

CONTRIBUTORS:

Scott Rooker is an artist, musician, and writer in North Carolina. He has played bass in A Rooster For The Masses and now plays in a new band called Coyta. He has drawn many concert posters as well as cartoons for *NewRaleigh* and *The Daily Tarheel*.

Sonny Rag is an opinionated pest and he has the cool, clear eyes of a seeker of wisdom and doughnuts.

Emily W. Recchia writes, "I am currently working on a BA in Creative Writing at Western Michigan University. I have been published in WMU's undergraduate literary magazine called *The Laureate* and the Spring 2012 edition of *The Poems That Ate Our Ears*. I am also a reading intern for WMU's graduate literary journal, *Third Coast*. I was announced as an undergraduate poetry finalist for the *Gwen Frostic Creative Writing Awards*."

When **George Kierspe** was a young chief engineer on a Lykes Lines ship, a passenger interested him in art. Later, after 30 years with Dupont, he retired early to pursue an art career and studied in numerous workshops and at USC-Aiken. He was originally recognized for his colorful, high energy work depicting a unique viewpoint of common scenes and objects, such as buildings, porches, and sunglasses.

Kelly Ann Jacobson is currently pursuing her MA in Fiction at Johns Hopkins University, and she is the Poetry Editor for *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine*. Currently, her novella is a finalist in the *Iron Horse Literary Review* novella contest. Kelly has had or will have poems published in *Wooden Teeth* magazine, *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine*, *Coldnoon*, and *Poetry Pacific*. Her work can be found at www.kellyannjacobson.com.

Mitchell Krochmalnik Grabois was born in the Bronx and now splits his time between Denver and a one-hundred-and-twenty-year-old, one room schoolhouse in Riverton Township, Michigan. His short fiction and poetry appears in close to two hundred literary magazines, most recently *The Dr. T.J. Eckleberg Review*, *Memoir Journal*, and *The Blue Hour*. He has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize, most recently for his story "Purple Heart" published in *The Examined Life* in 2012. His novel, *Two-Headed Dog*, published by Xavier Vargas E-ditions, is available for all e-readers for 99 cents. A print edition is available through Amazon.

Phil Juliano is recently married, and lives in Minnesota. He also flyfishes in Montana, that lucky duck.

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