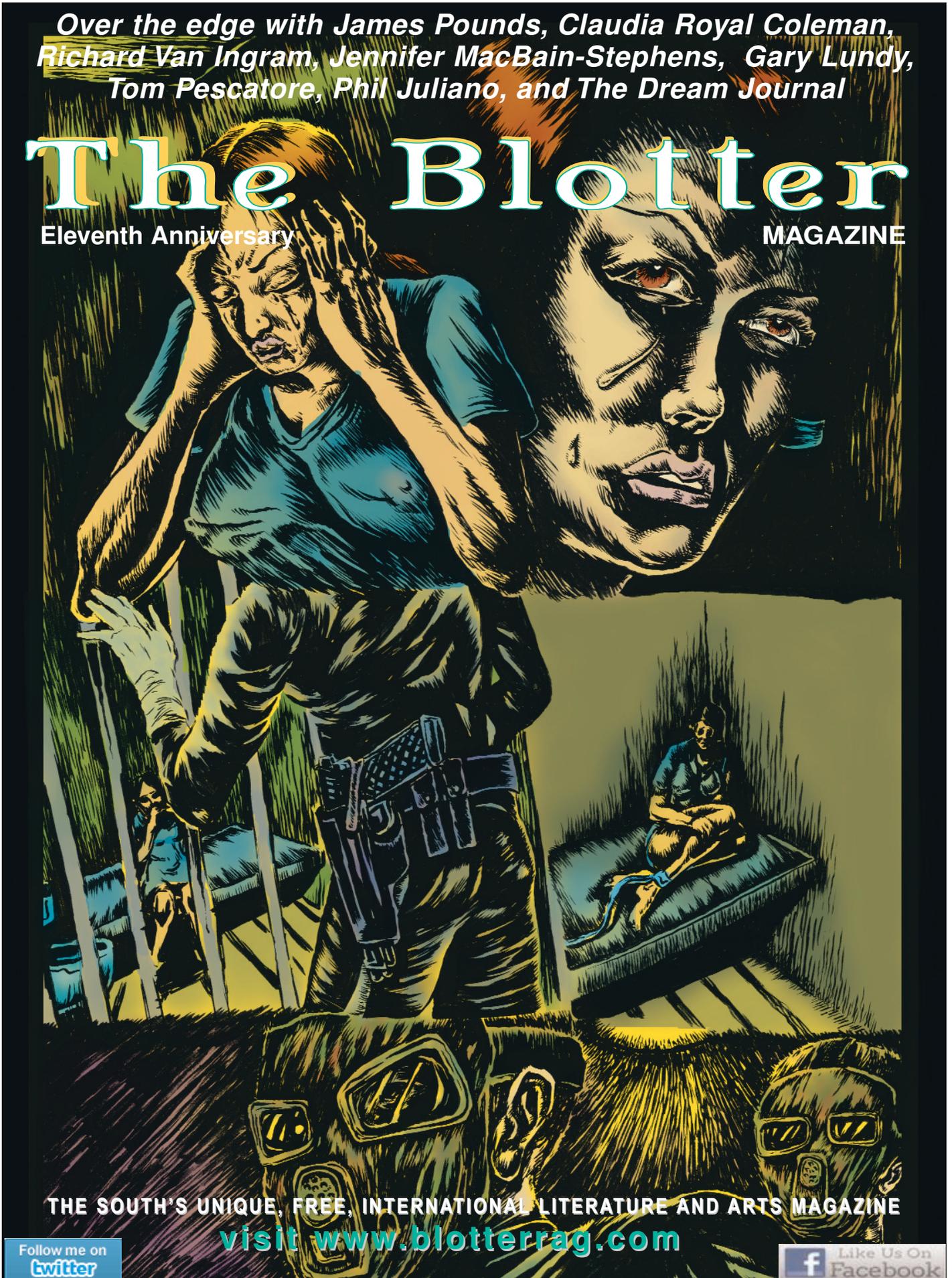


Over the edge with James Pounds, Claudia Royal Coleman,
Richard Van Ingram, Jennifer MacBain-Stephens, Gary Lundy,
Tom Pescatore, Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal

The Blotter

Eleventh Anniversary

MAGAZINE



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FRONT COVER "Sneak Peek" by Richard
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"Notes: Stay at home, Dad"

There are some things you don't question. For example, we've had a giraffe in our living room for over a year. Four and one-half feet tall, plush. For most of the time, it's worn a small car blanket. I assume it's to keep warm. The giraffe's existence is not a mystery (Santa). That it is in the living room, well, that's where it is. Let it go.

Then again, there are things you do question. Why am I buying a beer, a bottle of wine, a bottle of champagne, a bottle of malt liquor and some rum and seven oranges? And why do I need to weigh the oranges? (Experiments designed by fourteen year old scientists can be a bit tricky.) Oh, weigh them right now? They have a scale in the produce section of the grocery store. Let's go.

My life as a stay at home Dad has evolved. When I took the job, it had no place on a resume, no societal recognition, was a punchline in several stand-up acts. A decade later, I tell people I'm a SAHD and it's no big deal. *Oh*, they say. *Good for you. But what do you do now that the girls are older?*

I think about my revised place in the world; at first blush it seems smaller, less relevant. It is almost as if my value as a parent ten years ago has withered. Oh, I'm in the family wallet, but I'm not cash or credit. Instead, I'm more of a Blockbuster video-rental card. Once upon a time, I was diaper-changer, bottle-warmer, food-mixer, baby-bag carrier. Seriously, vomit wiper. I held the troubled sleeper in my arms until they safely returned to Nod. Not so long ago that was. Now I sit outside on the swing while they do homework. The daffodils I planted on quiet autumn mornings are blooming.

I do a lot of reading, crossword puzzles, writing, sucking on lemon-drops and checking my e-mail, as I sit in my car waiting to pick them up from school, chorus, girl scouts, karate, oboe lessons, youth group, church choir, gymnastics, student council, *a capella* group. Life is often about waiting patiently.

Truth is, they still need me, they just don't believe it. Just wait until we have to fill out FAFSA forms.

I had hoped that everything would get easier when the girls got older. And many things are easier. They can take care of themselves. They don't always want to – and I need to tell them what to do about the same amount as when they were little. The repetition is sometimes frustrating, sometimes humorous. *I'm not kidding, it's time for bed. The alarm is going to go off tomorrow at six AM and if you don't go to bed now you're not going to get enough sleep.* Mumbled under breath reply: *Really, Dad? Does that line of reasoning ever work?*

And my years of demonstrating impressive off-the-cuff knowledge watching Jeopardy has at least endeared me to them during homework time. I may be a nit-wit about what is in style at Abercrombie and Dipstick, but I'm the

go-to guy about Odysseus and the Cyclopes or how to construct a mobile or what a ribosome does. And I make pretty good glasses of chocolate milk and I'm always waiting in the car when they're done.

My girls have accumulated a fair amount of wise-guy. *Of course, we love you, Dad. We love that you still make our sandwich for lunch and wash our dirty laundry. No, no, you empty the dishwasher – you're terrific at it.* That is an excerpt from their new play "My Girls Feed Me a Long Line of Bull." All my doing.

So I hold the electronics hostage and make them empty the dishwasher. Then, load it back up again. Sweep the front porch. I tell them *if you leave the laundry on the floor, I'm going to bag it up and hide it in the woods.* I hear a lot of frustrated guff about "being unfair." I care, but I don't let on. Life is often unfair. This is low-impact unfair.

I make them read really good books. It only seems mean.

Old chestnut: kryptonite to Super-Dad is that first time your daughter says *drop me off over here, and turn down the radio.* What do I do? What choice is there? I carry on. And she's right, anyway. I'm not particularly cool. I riffle through the XM-radio channels and occasionally stop on the forties station. That's 1940's, as in Jo Stafford and Tommy Dorsey. I'm not sure why.

They're smart. They're beautiful. They eat their vegetables. I watch them with their mom doing hair, or, god help me, makeup. They shop, without me, of course. I get it, I really do. I am not a good shopper, except for groceries. Oh, I'm great with groceries. On the other hand, I was unaware of the time commitment required for going to the mall to find a pair of black pants. They're one expedition away from ditching me, I know it. But I can't be ditched, not really. Right now, they have no money. Not to say I didn't expect *anything*. I just didn't expect uselessness to kick in so quickly.

There were no books on it when I began, but I knew that a SAHD has to have a plan for when the kids become modestly self-sufficient. I'm considering the following options:

Even more daffodils. A people-pull-over-with-cameras amount. So you can see it on googlemaps.

A Masters in Liberal Arts. I have no idea what this really means, but it can't be all bad. Will there be snacks? Will I acquire an erudite-ness that heretofore eluded me? Will pretty co-eds sit next to me and ask me questions like, "did you know Jack Kerouac?"

Write an even longer novel than Proust. Use every letter in the alphabet a lot. I can do it.

Don't ask me what a ribosome does. I used to know but I forgot.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

We don't know how lucky we are.

Two short-shorts

by James Pounds

“Close Encounters”

“NO PICTURES! I said NO PICTURES!”

She was not unattractive, but those unearthly St. Thomas Caribbean blue eyes were boring into me with so much force I felt as if a huge invisible hand was pushing me back into the bus seat. She stood with her legs wide for balance against the bus sway, hands on her hips like some Jack Tar swashbuckler, flush with Prada booty and fire red nails.

My hand froze within the cave of

my book tote, my fingers gripping the latex protective cover of my new Nook reader. The way she was staring at me, I was afraid to withdraw my hand. I flashed a weak tea grin, which felt more like a grimace, like my skin had shrunken around my skull and was threatening to rip at the invisible seams. Stress does that to me. I could feel a solitary bead of sweat working its way down my left side from the armpit. Did I mention I perspire prodigiously?

“Have we met?” It was all I could manage under the circumstances.

“You paparazzi scumbags are perpetually following me. In my face, underfoot, in my bathroom, in my bedroom...”

“Ma’am, I’m an undertaker’s assistant. I don’t even own a cam-

era.” I slowly withdrew my hand to show her the latex-encased Nook. She looked at it, then back at me, seemingly annoyed.

The bus pulled to the curb at 5th Avenue and 82nd Street. She turned on her 3” heels and disappeared through the hydraulic doors. I watched her fade into the sidewalk lunch crowd. Later that afternoon, downtown, I saw her face peering down from a billboard. She was peddling high-class jewelry and was obviously somebody famous.

But me, I’m coming home from a long day of draining cadavers and filling them with formaldehyde. I can’t wait to get home and take a shower and get the smell of that junk off me.



“Exit Strategy”

Been working on this sailboat now for six months and pretty much have the keel laid. I'm a preacher by trade and never was that handy with tools. Saving souls and raising money is what I'm good at. But I've been hearing this small voice of God for the past year telling me to quit with the raising funds and start building this boat. He told me I've got two years. He said he's bringing another surprise.

Well, I told Him, you know I'm a man of the cloth, but that kind of talk scares me, Lord. I'm feeling a little like Moses here and want to ask why me? Your Son even asked you to take that cross he was

bearing. I'm not that strong, Lord. Believe me. I've done a lot of good, but I've also done some not-so-good things too. You know.

My neighbors have been scoffing at me for starting this project. Hell, we live in Albuquerque, and what kind of fool builds a forty-foot ketch in his yard in the high desert? I've been talking to Noah while I work. He's the only one who understands the ridicule. But because it's you asking, Lord, I'll get it done.

I'm also worried that if you bring another flood upon the Earth, I don't have a companion to take with me. You remember Edna left me last year don't you. Lord?

Well, I've had my eye on that little brunette that lives the next block over, and I'm just kind of wishing aloud, Lord. I'll leave it at that. I've got two years. A lot can happen in two years.



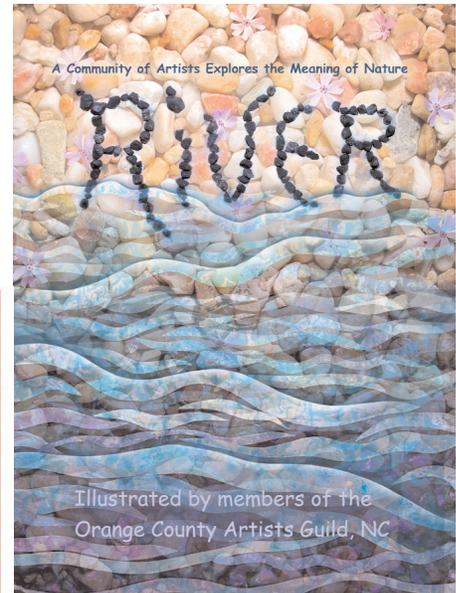
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“this makes me very uncomfortable.”

the thought of you looking at me. touching me. i take my glasses off so i can't see. play dumb. when i lie down. to sleep. words pour out of my open ear. it's like you're drowning. he says. then begins construction on another set of lies. our friends tell me. both have to pull their own weight. i never talk to any of them again. i wish i knew what you thought about all of this. defiance gathers in the back pockets of my jeans. sleep magnets pull at my eye lids. stand alone outside and wave west. a kindred pain in sympathy with the weather. a new friend dies. his beard blue. it has been ages since purple has graced my hair. power colors bead up and fly away with the wind. i practice being blind by turning all the lights off. then turning my computer on and off. the brief light deflects off my retinas. causes a momentary vision. like a common enough miracle. the power of suggestion deploys skepticism. i'm retooling my body for sudden impact. skin no longer feels like my friend. he would close his eyes before taking into me. the age old reply. surges of electricity power amps the wrong way sign. there are no connections with this and anything else. keep this abstract so you don't have to rely on subterfuge.

“Poem”

by Claudia Royal Coleman

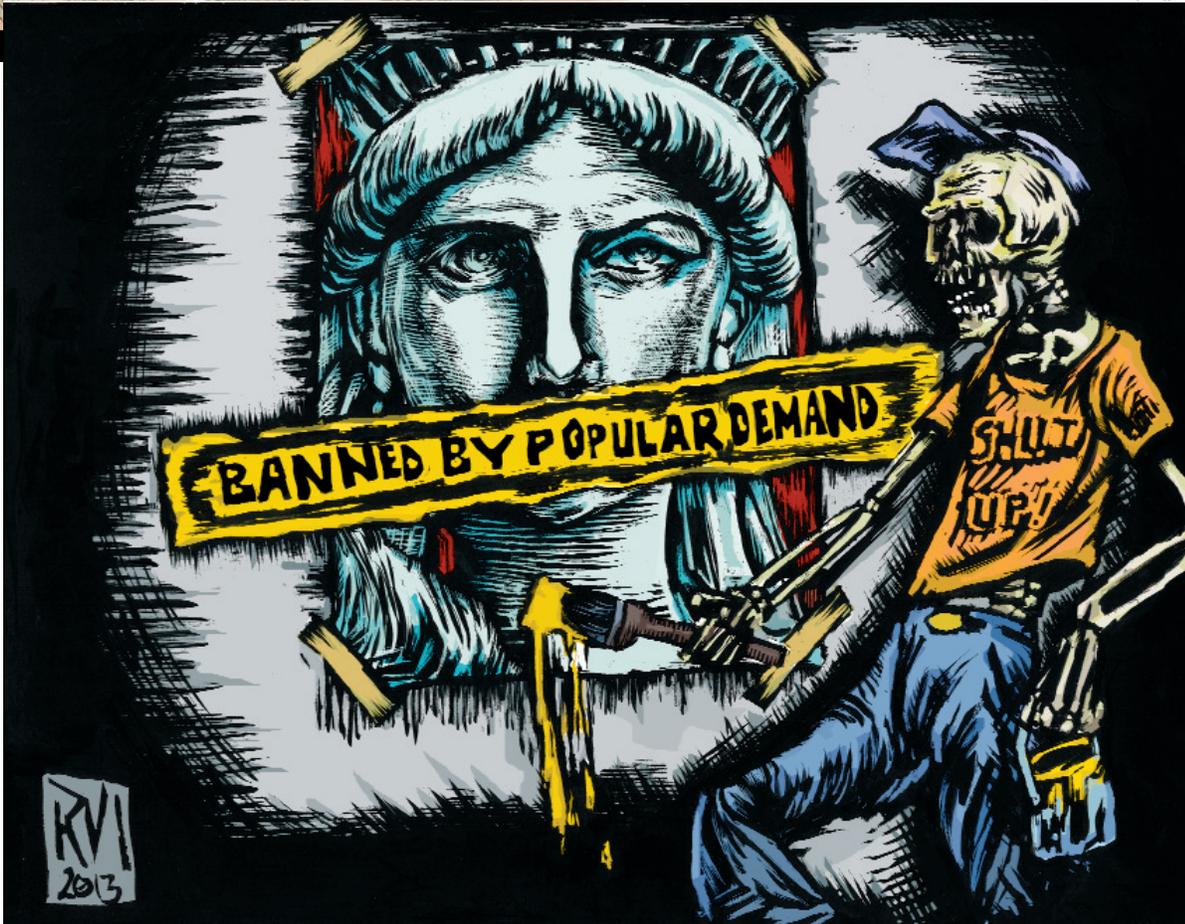
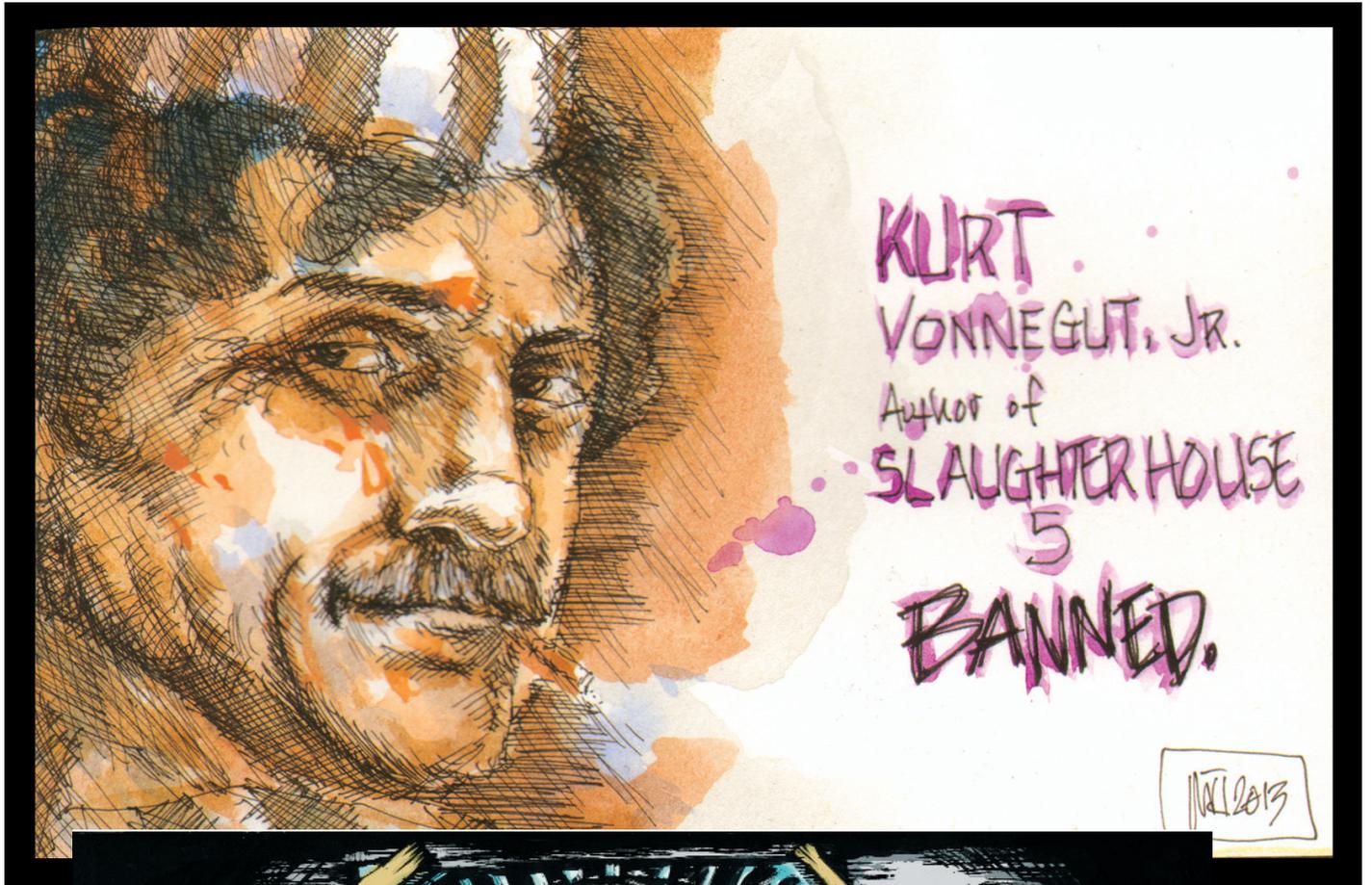
We're conceived in a shiver,
We're born in a shiver,
I suspect we die in a shiver.
A snake sheds its skin
In a dry crackling shiver
Of pale parchment left on the ground
For a child to find, to bring home
And treasure and marvel
At how fine and delicately marked
It is, so clearly imprinted by
The self it was.

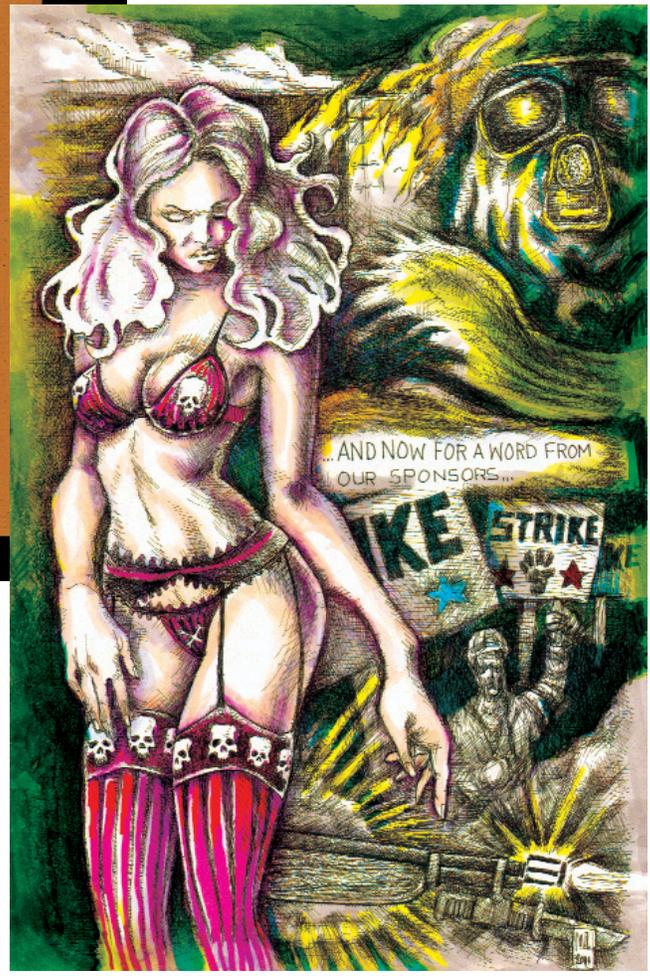
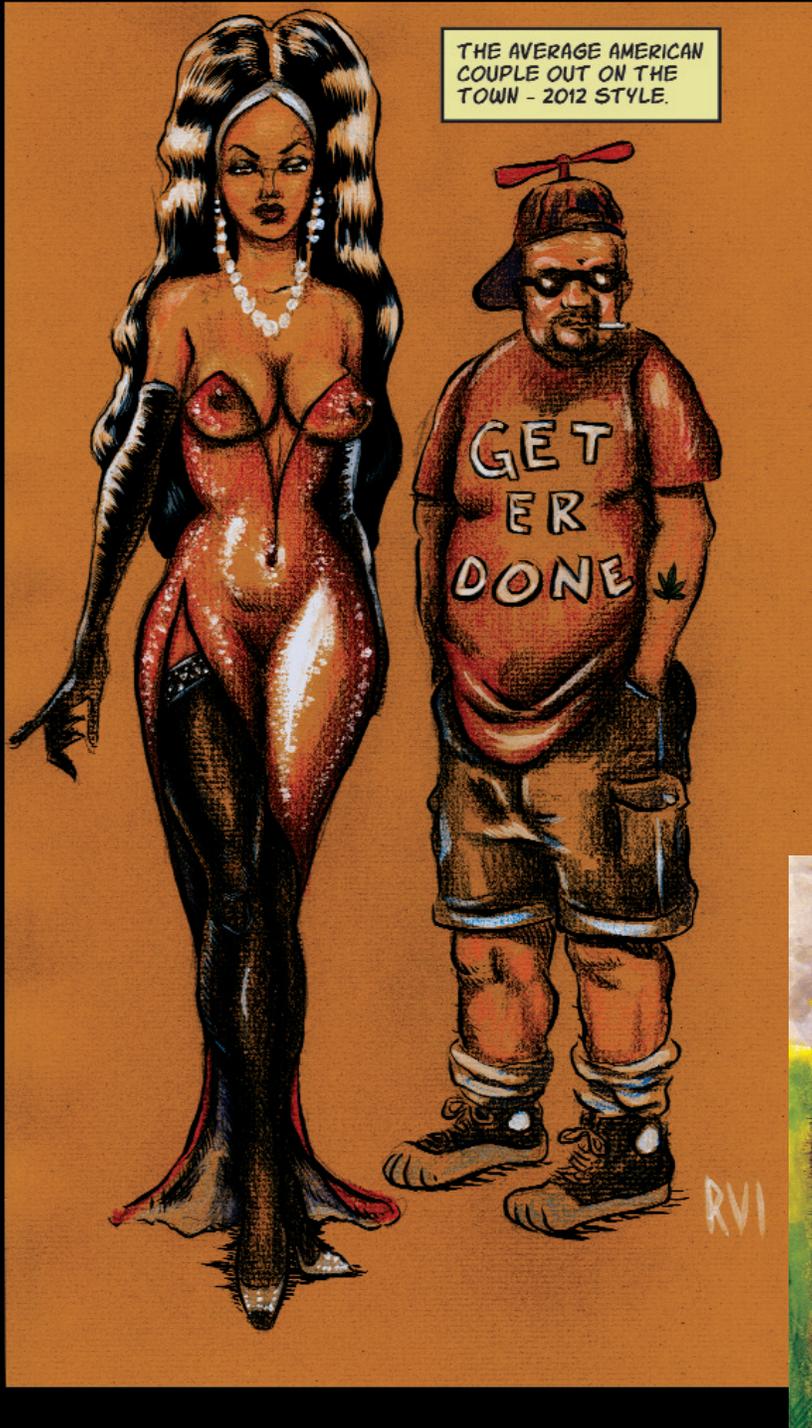
two by Gary Lundy

"i thought home was with you."

i remember saying. or writing. i feel like i'm finally home when i'm with you. i was wrong. after all. home feels like the absence of solace. engage the remarkable plot of the sea. i always forget to turn the radio off. studio fifty-four disco. history reinvented for nostalgia. you are closer to god than you were yesterday. solution accompanies doubt. the two men die alone years later. he laughs when i love you escapes my lips. late last night i listen to a poetry reading on the radio. one of the poets voices sounds like stevie nicks. suddenly i am swimming in cocaine dreams. i've never done cocaine. her voice has that take me to bed quality. but i don't. instead i scrub at the magic marker drawing you scribbled all over my body. the kind that wants to remake a person younger and sexier. definitely thinner. in the candle factory hot wax bleeds all over my chest. i writhe in the pleasure of your touch. even as you touch someone else. twenty years ago i couldn't have imagined this life. now i can't forget it. i never remember him with his clothes on. his midsection coming down on me. a love of fists. he remains angry at no one in particular. emaciated anger. so thinks it can pretend flattery. kindness.







Richard Van Ingram
- San Antonio, TX
www.losercomix.com

Artist's Statement - "Ice Station Zebra surfacing for a transmission"

by Richard Van Ingram

I'm obviously in a mood and have been in one for weeks, if one monitors my posts. My thoughts are still in creative flux as to what will emerge as a result. Matters such as this, for me, are weighty and, just as much, unpredictable. So, I am in a state of existential discomfort and dissatisfaction with many, many things in this world: the growing disdain for science; the developing hatred for democracy; the tensions between human rights and those who want an unregulated absolutist capitalism... or absolutist anything, without nuance, without any mind for history and circumstance, humanity, mercy.

There is a loss of anything akin to real ethics on a broad scale — decisions being made piecemeal, ad hoc, all for the sake of pure selfishness and desperation, a country of starving dogs fighting over scraps while pigs wallow in the excess of terrified canine

labor.

Jesus — and the man did teach things that are meaningful, even if you are not inclined toward the religion allegedly founded on his teachings — Jesus, when faced with overly legalistic people, once said something of immense value: "Man was not created for the Sabbath, the Sabbath was created for man." We create things of value or serve things of value because they benefit us — that is the spirit of the law or any cultural item or interpretation.

The letter of the law is of no use to us and tends to kill us, enslave us to it, and that is not the reason we invent these things or find them. The economy exists to benefit us, all of us, to some meaningful degree: it does not exist to be served as a false deity or as something more important than any one of the people who must live within its influence.

It does not exist to benefit just a few, but it is a tool, like a hammer, like a paintbrush, and it exists to benefit all. We have become slaves to the money, to the requirements of a barely regulated and out of control economic system that is seen as an end in itself. It is as if a carpenter saw herself as existing to allow the hammer to function and sacrificed most of the rest of her life in order to serve the needs of the hammer. And this is beyond insanity: it is actual evil, the destruction of the possibility of real creativity and a truly human life.

Hammers, economic systems, theories, even gold have no intrinsic value whatsoever. That's why we designate them "things" and not "people." People are the source of value and come equipped with it — no one makes you valuable: you simply are valuable. Hammers, economic systems, theories, gold, without us, are nothing meaningful. They have no value except as meaningful to and for us and our needs or desires or to expand our possibilities. Gold is a rock. Just a rock. No more valuable in itself than the rest of the rocks and common dirt out in your yard.

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We consider it valuable because of history and culture, because of beliefs we accepted without thinking about them. And that is all.

Dollars, paper dollars, function the same way. They have value for no other reason than because we have a belief, a faith, they have value. If we lost faith in them, they would be literally de-valued. In fact, dollars represent nothing except a bundle of ones and zeroes being shuffled around in the computers of banks. That's what you really have faith in: ones and zeroes. Which is no more or less meaningful in itself than having faith in moving around a bunch of shiny yellow rocks between bank vaults. It should only make sense to us to have faith in any of this and the system it supports IF it makes our lives more convenient, creative, fuller, and allows us to be better people — not de facto servants of the ones and zeroes and shiny rocks and people who lust after them as if they are more important than human beings.

Because such people, in their selfishness, truly have no self, no "I" to speak of — they are not creative, they do not create good lives for themselves, their communities, the future we are all implicitly entrusted with. They do not instantiate real values — justice, mercy, truthfulness, caring, courage, temperance, prudence and so forth — in this world through their actions and lives (which is the only way such

things enter the world at all). No, they fill the hole that is themselves with things, the things they serve, their false gods, and that black depth in them is unquenchable: there is never such a thing as "enough." And they will use anyone — and I employ the word "use" on purpose here — to achieve their singular goal to accumulate things to feed the emptiness and power to extend their ability to manipulate and more easily use.

Such people, in our country, have become the power money junkies that control every aspect of your life. In the world, their hands are in every mess, turning it to their favor. Not by some sort of conspiracy. No, not at all: because of bad ideas, upside-down interpretations of reality that spread through our culture long ago like a virus. And you can't kill a virus with a gun. It takes a revolution of belief, a new faith, something that expands the horizon for what humans can be and do, that allows us to have and live our private destinies while supporting and encouraging others in theirs and all cooperating to take care of common needs. The "isms" of the past, especially those of the 19th c., are dead — they took us as far as they could in their experimentation for better and, often, for worse. And this includes laissez-faire capitalism. Especially *that*.

No, I am unsure what ought to replace this, hence my consternation. My philosophical work is in

ethics and it is minor, very, very minor and nearly insignificant. It will take more people with better minds and hearts than my own to begin the work of real change in belief.. I'm just Johnny Appleseed or someone crying "make straight the ways" for a better belief than what holds the Earth in an iron grip at the moment. I am no one.

RVI 21 February 2014

Ice Station Zebra, signing off.



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Three by Jennifer MacBain-Stephens

“Nightie”

Notes on “Nightie:” 1) a “sleeping outfit” that Laurie gave me for my birthday. 2) colors: hot pink and black. 3) I have never worn it. 4) I hate the word “nightie” 5) everyone knows a piece of clothing like this is not bought for sleeping purposes. 6) It sits in the back of my top dresser drawer. 7) Being unworn, does this mean a) there is an absence of joy for my body? Or b) that I don’t like the color pink? Both of these things are not true, yet there lay the discarded nightie. To be descriptive, it is sleeveless (of course) with a ruffled edge, plunging V neck (because you would be shocked if I left out the word “plunging,”) and short, short. 8) Logistically, it is almost just a top. (One might even be confused if it is just a top or a top/bottom dress-like combo.) How do I get my head around this frilly landing pad? This Barbie winged hairdo dress, this Bette Midler saloon costume? Laurie is one of my best friends. Maybe she noted something I didn’t.



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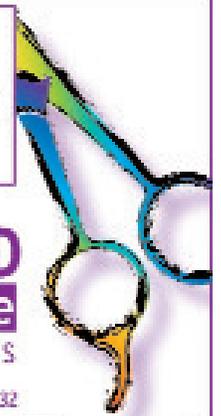
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“Nola”

Everyone needs a scarf they can waste away in. This long gray knit has an alligator face at one end. I dream of all the places I would go if I didn't have to buy a new furnace. A favorite alpha state escape is Crescent City. The wrought iron gates and flavor, pop. Vampire tours and frilly canopied beds hide above ground ghosts I want to meet. Drip my architecture, span my midnight wings and Spanish moss. My dog is deemed too “reactive” for puppy class. I will steal someone's vision board. When I've dug us out of these stacks of New York Times, there is a sleep number of warmth in the crook of my arm. There is actual reading in bed. In the Morning. My alligator hunkers down, patrols the territory of my most vulnerable part, my jugular vein, teasing out what to bite, what to avoid, what to kill. He travels light.

“Helen”

I remember carrying her-how my body didn't even know what was happening to it. But that didn't matter, wearing my grandma Helen's black elastic waist skirt. It must have been made out of some crazy synthetic material to last as long as it did. My skin stretched slowly, this cast off skirt snuggled my abdomen the entire time. Helen, who traveled all over the world before it was fashionable, could walk into a bar in Hamburg like she owned the place. I loved her like a mother. She died before my daughter's birth. We named our tiny screaming mite after her- but altered the name slightly. I could not steal my grandmother's spirit and give it to this squirmy little red stranger. I thought I would instantly know her, but that took some time. The skirt held up to the ninth month and then it was out of time. I kept it folded on a shelf in my closet, not letting it go, like we do with things we love unbearably.

"It's good"

by Tom Pescatore

Google schedules my day for me,
it's been years since I could
remember what I liked, see
the ads on the side-scroll totem,
say your prayer to the
Amazonian gods, I suggest you
read them used, it's cheaper
and there's minimal wear and tear,
just speak with the credit card
swipe and the tap of the modern
poet, finish up with the security code
stanza the signature so's the public
private public knows it's you
and can connect the heart of the
bank account blues, the scrawl on the html
wall, the mailbox and the waiting game,
the unwrapped potential, buying homogenized
fame, we aren't a cult of money
we just know what we want
and it's whatever we're told;
I'm good.

Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



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

I had this weird dream that I was at school and walking between classes and instead of books I was carrying a baby in my arms and the baby was made of blood and kept getting smaller as the blood dripped through my fingers onto the floor.

OB - cyberspace

CONTRIBUTORS:

James Pounds has had more than a few iterations: writer, green builder, designer, yoga teacher, karate sensei, and corporate sales exec. He holds an MFA in Writing from Vermont College of Fine Arts. He writes under the name Jim Pat Pounds when he wants to feel like a cowboy. His work has appeared in *New Literati*, *Sorin Oak Review*, *Santa Fe Sun*, and *The Hawaii Women's Journal*. Read more: <http://japounds.blogspot.com/>

Claudia Royal Coleman, poet, novelist, and translator, has published scholarly articles in English and French as well as book translations from French. She has recently completed her novel, **A Charmed Life**, and is writing a second. She teaches literature at Cal Poly State University in San Luis Obispo, California.

Gary Lundy of Missoula MT writes, "my poems have appeared recently in: *ginosko* (online); *my favorite bullet* (online); *indefinite space*; *prairie winds*; *the prague revue* (online); *assaracus*; *snow monkey* (online); *otoliths* (online); and *cirque* (online). my fourth chapbook, **when voices detach themselves**, was published this past september by is a rose press."

Richard Van Ingram lives, draws and writes out of San Antonio, TX. Check out his work at www.loser-comix.com.

Jennifer MacBain-Stephens is the author of the chapbook **EveryHerDies**, (ELJ Publications, forthcoming 2014.) She has poems published in *Emerge Literary Journal*, *Superstition Review*, *Foliage Oak Literary Magazine*, *Thirteen Myna Birds*, *Rufous City Review*, *Menacing Hedge*, *Stirring*, *Eunoia Review*, *Gravel Magazine*, *Star82Review*, *Burningwood Journal*, *Bitterzoet Magazine*, and other journals online and in print. She was recently nominated for Best of the Net. Jennifer's poem "Growths" recently won third place in the Midwest Writing Center's twenty-four hour writing extravaganza: The Iron Pen Contest. For a complete list of publications visit: <http://jennifermacbainstephens.wordpress.com/>

Tom Pescatore grew up outside Philadelphia dreaming of the endless road ahead, carrying the idea of the fabled West in his heart. His work has been published in literary magazines both nationally and internationally but he'd rather have them carved on the Walt Whitman bridge or on the sidewalks of Philadelphia's old Skid Row.

Phil Juliano has been cartooning for over twenty years. His comic strip, "Best In Show", is a visual interpretation of his daily life and struggle to find his place in society. He's a beer snob, baseball fan and avid outdoorsman, usually all at the same time. "Best In Show" is currently being featured in several newspapers and magazines and is syndicated by MCT Campus where it is distributed to college and university newspapers across the country. To see more of Phil's work go to www.bestinshowcomic.com

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**CAROLINA
ROLLERGIRLS**

2014
(HOME) **SEASON
SCHEDULE**

WHEELS FUN PARK
715 N. HOOVER RD. ✦ DURHAM

MAR 23 | **APR 27** | **JUL 27** | **NOV 30**

SUNDAYS ✦ Doors 6pm ✦ Bouts 6:30pm

ADVANCE TICKETS, GROUP
DISCOUNTS, AND MORE INFO

CAROLINAROLLERGIRLS.COM

Up To
\$2 OFF

ROLLER DERBY TICKETS

2 Ways to Save!

1. Redeem Online by entering **2014BLOT** in the promo code box at CarolinaRollergirls.com. \$1 OFF each adult ticket, up to two (2) tickets.
2. Bring this Coupon to the Box Office for \$2 OFF one (1) adult ticket on game day.

No substitutions or rain checks. Cannot be combined with other promotional offers. Limit one coupon per person. No cash value. No copies accepted. Expires 11/30/2014.



photo: Joshua R. Craig