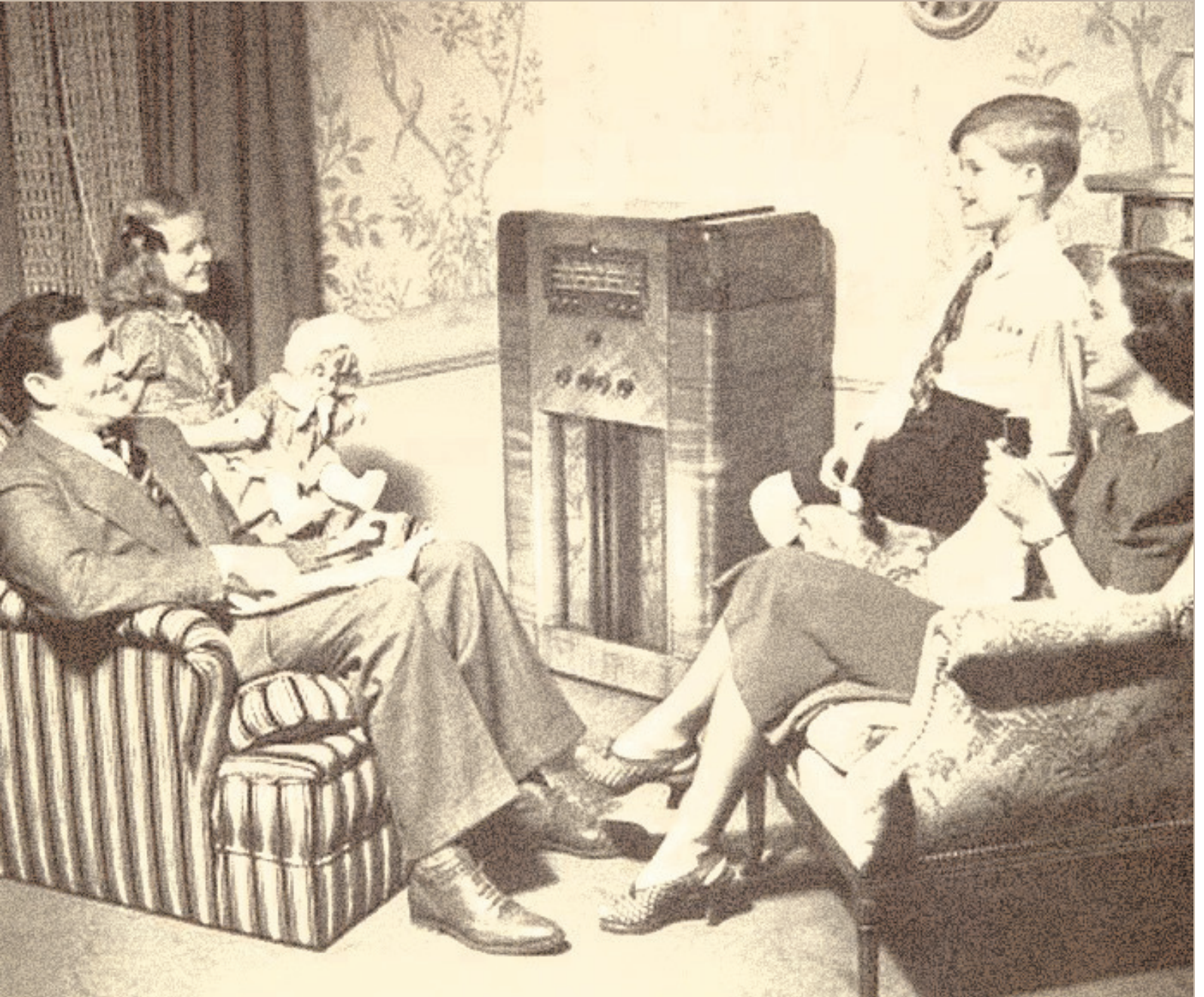


*The changes they are a timing! Ryan Rossi,  
Keith Nunes, Tom Millay, John Grey,  
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

# The Blotter

December 2014

MAGAZINE



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COVER: What's on tonight?

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[ c l m p ]

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## “Get a Grip, Hold On with Both Hands”

As I see it, the world is a silly place. It spins, and we spin around in it heedlessly, or nearly so, like loose grounds in the bottom of a cup of coffee. We seek joy or something like it, by ourselves or with those we choose as our own. We fuss our disapproval with the level of joy we receive out into the void, hoping – nay, expecting a recognizable response and, if not that, some satisfaction, as if we'd slapped God in the face with our clean silk glove.

Of course that last only applies to those of you who believe in any sort of higher presence. For those who don't, your fuss out into the void bounces around in the cosmos, perhaps popping back in your own face as reconstituted atoms, taking the form of an arbitrary branch bent by the fellow walking in front of you. At this painful affront to whatever calm and dignity you possess, you mutter a running commentary about karma, revenge, poor planning in the local shade-tree commission.

We may rely on the singular truth that everything does not go according to plan, at least, not one of ours. When you pour a perfect cup of coffee, carry it without spilling to the holder on your desk and take that first sip, a tickle in the back of your throat will indeed rise up and cause you to snort a spray of drip-roast Major Dickerson's Blend (with cream and sugar) onto your notes, keyboard and screen, displaying the first draft of chapter seventeen. You can get angry about the results, but to what end? This is the world and we're welcome to it.

You might plant deer-proof shrubbery in your garden, but here's the thing and there's no getting around it: deer don't read labels. That one bashful doe is going to take a bite, chew and spit the green-stuff into the cedar bark chips you've wrapped lovingly around your two-quart Arcadia Juniper. Then she's going to call over to her friend Myrtle in the *lingua franca* of *Odocoileus virginianus* (there; put paid to my two years of Latin in college) and Myrtle is going to take a big-ole nosh on your shrubbery, too. Awful, isn't it, Myrtle will say. You betcha, the first doe will reply. Let's get Josephine to try it. And each deer in the little herd is going to chew your prized shrub to flinders. Because that's how deer roll? Of course not. Maliciousness is reserved for humans. But deer are oblivious to you and your twenty-three-ninety-five plus sales tax spent on yard beautification. They know only hunger, fear, the tug of parenthood, the drive to procreate. Possibly some ruminant-level joy in being as fleet of foot as Miles Davis was lugubrious of lip. (And by ruminant I mean those animals that chew their cud, and will accept the serendipitous coincidence that it also is defined as “thoughtful.”) They aren't here to entertain you, or out to get you, or anything in the middle.

You can question the commute to your place of employment, wondering why when you leave earlier, you hit more competing traffic, making you later than if you had left for work closer to your expected arrival time. This is a textbook paradox, and not evidence of any plot either by a supreme being or other humans. In truth, you are supposed to smile at this, although we understand if you don't. Frustration builds with each light

turning red (seemingly arbitrarily, because none of the people pulling out in front – in front!! – of you is really going anywhere, but instead just appear to be wandering like The Driving Dead hither and thither and naturally thither is the same direction that you want to go.

I have found in the fullness of time that I can handle certain such pratfalls. Perhaps this is because I'm older and have had a fair (really, what is fair, actually?) amount of experience with banana-peel falls and ball-peen hammers to the *distal phalanx*. I am also lucky in that way that is not really luck but actually choice. I am more often in less of a rush than most folks and willing to be even less so (or is it more, as in "I would be willing to be in more less of a rush" – no, that just sounds silly...). If my line to the bank teller (this is a metaphor of course; there are no lines to the teller because there are so few tellers and I've noticed that almost nobody *goes* to the bank anymore) is always slowest, no matter which one I choose, I just don't care. I appreciate the break in my morning, and I daydream about things that interest me or I look out the window at the clouds in the sky or up at the holes in the ceiling like the lyrics of some Beatles tune. No, I am not serene, nor meditative and calm. Ask anyone. Rather, I am contemplative, or just drifty, depending on how often you see me.

I suppose what I'm trying to say, without collapsing into a homily, is that there is little you can rely on, and if you insist on reliance, well, you are bound to be disappointed.

But many of us, particularly as we age - gracefully or otherwise - want things to have rules, boundaries, a here-comes-the-Sun kind of predictability. When the world works thusly, we give it no credit. When it rejects our requirement, we ride off the rails and, at best, function poorly. Of course, the world doesn't actually reject our requirement, no matter how much we want it to be something we can rail at for our derailing. The set of things called "what went wrong" is a part of the greater set called "stuff that just happened." Our derailing is neither plan nor anomaly. Sorry about that. It just is. Click on *Help*. Nothing. Suggestions: none.

Wait, hang on a moment...

As I see it, the world is a complex set of environments with a handful of pretty good ideas making everything work. And that's good enough for me. For example: the other day my youngest let me know that she now understands that gravitation is a natural phenomenon by which all physical bodies attract each other. So I've heard, I told her. No, Dad. Even the smallest thing is attracted and attractive.

Can you improve on that? I can't.

Garry - [chief@blotterrag.com](mailto:chief@blotterrag.com)

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CAUTION

*I can can can-can, can't I?*

# “Hello My Name Is”

by Ryan Rossi

It was Halloween at O'Connor. I put on a black Jordan thermal with matching black kicks and my favorite jeans. I felt new wearing clean clothes. I was up late, but I got to sleep in. Basically, it was a free day for us. The school allowed the seniors to miss morning classes and put on a show during the first lunch period. The Asian Vice Principal, who looked like an anchor for NBC Nightly News, had a group sign-up sheet outside the cafeteria. She was new, too. We were both surprised how serious people were taking it, especially the girls. It was like they were getting ready for the Final Four: *Ok. So we've made the decision. 'Basketball Wives' it is. We need to get the jerseys and cut them so we can look just slutty enough. What song are we dancing to? Who's going to coordinate the routine? We can have the first practice at my house on Thursday. Come on; let's get it done.* I asked Lila what she was going to be but she said it was going to have to be a surprise.

Everyone was at Rodney's

last night in costume. I had no desire to go, if my girl wasn't there. She had some things to do with her Mom and then help Paola with her costume. I wasn't dressing up. It's not my thing. All my boys told me I had to dress up as the field hockey girls with them because it was going to be hilarious. Max got them all the skirts and V-neck jerseys the girls wore last year. He was dating Bethany, the captain of the team. I've watched her play a few times. I don't know shit about field hockey, but I know sports, and she's the type of player that a coach loves. She's this thick chick with a firm ass and a stiff body. We all say that she works Max and if he ever disobeys her, she gives him the business. I like her though. She's smart—got a full scholarship to Cornell—but, like me, she doesn't speak up much in class. I sit across from her in Modern Lit. She sits so straight and so tense it's gotta hurt. She pays attention and I don't.

It's bullshit, but every week I need to prepare and pres-

ent an “academic outline” to one of the assistant coaches. Sometimes Coach Q checks it himself which means I need to get it done every week in case he actually calls for it. He has a lot of power at this school. Like he definitely pulled a few strings to get me in. It's not that I don't try in school; I just don't really give a shit. My grades at Mount were never good and they never had to be. Here, all of a sudden, it's like you need to serve the teacher to get a good grade. Make them feel good about themselves and shit. This whole showing my agenda to prove I'm doing my homework thing started over nothing. We were learning about the *Scarlet Letter* in Mrs. Foster's Lit class. I know it's a popular book and all but I feel like she doesn't even get the characters herself. She gives us these pop-quizzes that ask us questions about minor-ass details in the reading we were supposed to do. *Did Goodie Proctor have three kids, or two?* Me knowing that, betters my future—how? And when I

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actually do speak up in class, she won't even look at me. She emailed Coach Q one day, telling him that I was "staring" at her during class. She didn't say I wasn't paying attention. She didn't say I wasn't participating, she just said I was staring. He told me it was best to "roll with the punches that adjusting brings."

I stopped by Coach's Q's office to check in with him. I wanted to let him know that I was focused, because I was, and that I was doing good, or, *well*, as he always corrected me. Even though his office was on the second floor, I took the elevator up. I was feeling clean and cool so why not. If the opportunity is there, take it. He wasn't in his office and neither was anyone else in the Athletic Department, except for Mr. Mahoney. His door was open and he was looking at something on his computer. Everything from his fingernails to his forehead looked polished.

"Mr. Perez." He said without moving his eyes from the screen. "Let me guess. NCAA Student-Athlete of the year? NBA All-Star? You aren't fooling anyone with that disguise."

"Not trying to fool any-

one. Just myself today, sir." I liked Mahoney.

"Keep those grades up, twenty-two."

"I will, sir. You take care now." They loved it when I talked like that.

As I walked back through the dark hallway on my way to the courtyard, some dude in a lion costume tried to scare me. He came at me on all fours. It had to be someone I knew. He popped out of the guidance counselor's office, beat his chest and pretended to roar, spreading his jaws without a sound.

"Who is that?"

He kept making the motions.

"Take off that mask, weirdo. Let me see who that is!"

It was just him and me in the hallway without the fluorescent lights. He beat his chest again, but he didn't say anything. If I heard a voice, I bet I would have known who it was. I looked back to make sure the lion wasn't following me.

In the courtyard, everyone was watching the show, taking pictures and throwing candy at their favorite performances. I looked for Lila but couldn't pick her out in the hive

of Ninja Turtles, rappers, Smurfs, and all the other clichéd costumes. Whatever, I was certain that she was sexy. As soon as this bullshit was over, I planned on getting in her car, going to her house, and taking everything off her no matter what costume she was wearing.

"Who dressed up as a cock sucker?" I asked.

Berto's hairy ass legs were pale and jiggled around like slabs of ham. He would call me out while he was cross-dressing as a female athlete.

"Oh, shit. Yo! It's Queen Latifah!" he said.

"Shut up, bitch. I wish ya covered up that ugly mug!"

Berto is a clown every day and it's always good to see him. He helped me get used to this place.

"You see your girl?" he asked.


"Na."

"Better yet, you see Weinstein?"

"Na, why?"

"Ah, oh. Looks like you got some competition, big dog."

His crew looked at me. Max touched his lips like he was some gossipy teen that just heard a secret. I felt my face go on fire.



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## The Blotter

Berto hooked me with his arm as he cocked back to launch another insult at the preppy kids that dressed up like Eurotrash. “You guys look like a bunch of homos!” he called out. They were dancing on each other like they were at some gay bar with fancy drinks.

“Doesn’t take much practice to make you guys look like you suck dick!” he kept at it.

“My man, you’re Ru Paul’s twin right now. I wouldn’t be talking shit in that get-up, dude.”

“Who cares? They’re a bunch of fags. I actually get pussy, baby.”

“Takes a bitch to know a bitch.” I said.

“Ah, well, looks like your bitch got scooped!”

“Ok, so what’s this all about? Were is Lila at?”

“Your boy, Weinstein, is going for the trick-lick-and-treat.”

Of course. I couldn’t stand that motherfucker. It’s bad enough I have to keep a close guard on my girl when we go out, but now I need to stick up in front of teachers? I knew he was trying to get it in. I could sense it from the second he passed us when we were holding hands near the locker rooms. He called her, *The Lovely Ms. Lila*, every chance he got. I had about enough of that shit.

“What do you mean?”

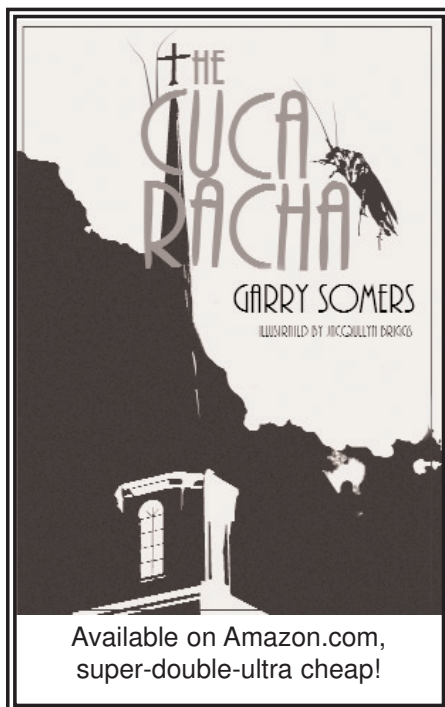
“Peep his costume bro. He’s right over there.”

I didn’t even need to look at the “Hello My Name Is” tag to clarify whom he was impersonating. Mr. Weinstein was the only teacher I’ve ever had that made the class call him *Professor* and he was the only adult I knew of that wouldn’t let kids go to the bathroom other than my Pop way back when.

Weinstein wore this purple, tight Nike Golf shirt. Fruitier than the produce section, if you ask me. He hooked it with checkered black and white pants that hugged the shit out of his scrawny legs. *Hit the weight room*

*before you go that tight, man.* He had a purple belt on with these white wingtip shoes. Just in case you couldn’t tell he was a golf pro, he brought in his very own putter. He clearly planned for this harder than the Blonde Brigade planned theirs. But what really flipped my switch was that nametag. I looked at it just long enough so I could get the full-blown insult-me-in-front-of-my-woman feeling. *Hello My Name Is – Joe Sterns* in big green ink. Two puked I’d like to pummel in one package. I could look at this like Halloween—or Christmas.

I tried to cancel out my first thought by telling myself, *Na. Can’t be. That would just be wrong on so many levels.* But then it actually set in. He took it that far. Even though Lila is an even bigger freak than I am in bed, she hasn’t been with that many dudes. She’s a *good* girl. When she told me I was the only the third person she’s been with, I was about to call the press. You’d never know, because she’s like a pro. She’s a *one-dude-and-one-dude-only* type of girl. So when she starts taking about her ex-boyfriend—Joe Sterns—I’m not



flying with it.

I'd smack that dude if I could. Sterns dated her for something crazy like two and a half years. Kind of creepy, if you ask me. She was a sophomore when he was a senior. He's still a big deal around here. Now he plays golf at Arizona and apparently, he's pretty damn good. He'll be chilling next to Tiger on the PGA one day and all that.

Personally, I think golf is for spoiled rich kids and babies that can't play anything else. Lila gets mad when I say that. I don't understand though. I listened to her cry a few times about how bad he treated her during the end of their relationship. She told me he'd never let her go out and he didn't want anyone to spend time with her when he came back from school. Only him. When I asked her why she put up with it, she said that she didn't know any better and she was only attracted to him because he was older and had it together, not like the rest of the O'Connor boys. Lila calls me "babe" now. I'll teach that little boy Joe Sterns a thing or two if he ever wants to get ballsy with me. Joe Sterns. That's a name I won't forget.

The Catholic league in the city was so much tougher than this. Even their cheerleaders were mean as fuck. You had to earn your respect on the court on that day during that game no matter what your reputation was, no matter what accolades you had, no matter what colleges were looking at you. It was all what you did with everyone watching. That's what I hate

about these teachers, man, especially Weinstein. He talk all this shit about how he was nationally acclaimed and how the *New York Times* did a spread on him. He called himself an *elite intellectual*. I heard him before. Maybe he didn't say flat out, "I'm an elite intellectual" but he made it known that he was on a higher level. He made it clear that I couldn't grasp what he was teaching.

Vice Principal Chung looked out of place behind the plastic table. There was a Walmart jack-o-lantern full of Snickers and Milky Ways and Butterfingers next to a Polaroid camera. She stuck her hand into the plastic pumpkin and pulled out a mini 3 Musketeers as she looked down at the table that was covered by those instant pictures. They looked like marble tiles with masked faces caught in the squares. I kidded her as she was unwrapping. Even though I was

heated, I could mess around with Chung. Dominican girls in Dalmatian outfits were dancing to *Who Let the Dogs Out* behind us.

"Ms. Chung. You said ten pounds by Thanksgiving." We helped each other adjust so we were cool.

"Ya got me, Perez. What can I say? I need some chocolate."

"Everything good?"

"I'm not a fan of Halloween."

"Me neither."

"I can tell. You didn't even dress up."

"I'm not a costume kind of guy. I just li--"

The picture on the far right of the table caught my eye. Lila, with her cleavage, ready to serve. She had on a tennis shirt and skirt that cupped her body perfectly. She looked sexy except for the serpent she had on her arm.

"Is this a fucking joke?" I



## The Blotter

said out loud.

I picked up the picture. Chung started saying something, but I was already mid-way into my turn towards Lila's voice.

"Baby!" She did this cute little hop without her feet leaving the ground. I dropped the picture. Lila pecked my lips, almost putting her tits in my palms. I was ready to ring his neck and tell her what the real deal was but she looked so fucking hot.

"Baby, are you for real? Like, you got to be kidding me," I said.

"What?" She looked genuinely confused like nothing was wrong, her lips moist as usual.

"Pick that up." I pointed to the picture.

I picked it up.

"What the fuck is this?"

"Babe, come on. He's just a friend."

"Friend that you fuck?"

"No. The only one I want is you." She tugged at the bottom of my shirt and let it go. She really knew how to shift the class discussion.

"You think I'm cool with this? The teacher that talks to you like he's trying to bring you home, dresses up and prances

around as your *ex-boyfriend*—you think that's perfectly straight?"

"Babe. Calm down. Him and Joe were golf buddies. They had *respect* for each other."

"You wanna fuck that little golfer pussy, you go right ahead. I'm a man. I don't play that shit."

"You wouldn't dress up and he asked me!"

"I like being myself!"

"Do you?"

My first class at O'Connor was with Weinstein himself. I was ready to head back to the city after day one. The lecture he gave was about Shakespeare, but I didn't listen to that shit. If he wasn't a superior, I would have raised my hand and said, "Bro, this is 2012. Shakespeare been gone for like a hundred years!" Coach brought me here and I need to do what he says so I sit low, keep quiet. But when Weinstein started talking about interpreting true beauty, I listened up.

"I'm sure you've all heard the phrase, '...beauty, real beauty ends where an intellectual expres-

sion begins.' Anyone? Going once, twice? Hint. *The Picture of Dor...* Ok. So I guess it's Professor Weinstein talking to a sea of blank faces today."

Just because I'm from the city doesn't mean I don't like to learn. If I had the bread I would have went out, bought that fucking book and read the shit out it. Man, I would have brought Dorian Gray in himself. Me and my man, Dorian, would break down our interpretation of what we thought of Weinstein to the class. Now that would be classic.

I'm the new kid so I had my picking of chicks when I first got here. Can't blame them. And let's be honest, the fact that I can play ball helped. I knew the role I had to play. Exotic, sorta foreign to them, mysterious, talented. That's what they wanted. They've spent the past three years with the same dudes. By now, they know all their moves. But they didn't have time to game plan for me so I went for the hottest one. Lila. We've been hooking up since orientation. They told me about her.

"Tony, you an ass man or a tit man?" Berto asked within five minutes of introducing himself.

"I'm all about that ass, dog."

"That a boy! I go for the fat assess, too. But hey, if she's got some big ol' titties you know big Berto is first in line!"

The kid was never serious. Not when he was driving or in



class or on the court. He was always a clown and never acted like anything else. I could chill with him.

During my first week, Berto boisterously announced, "We need to get you laid, bro. Hey Maxi-pad. Don't be a soggy pussy for once in your life and have a party tonight. I'm sending out the Berto signal and letting the ladies know we have some new meat on the market!"

After he introduced me to everyone, he told me that he had the perfect one for me.

Lila bit the left side of her lip with her front teeth and looked down at her waist. She had snakebite piercings and was dressed like a cold killer. Fish net stockings, tight black dress, black patent leather heels and red nails. I could get used to seeing that. I stared right at her. She walked right over.

"So you're the new kid."

"I am."

"Your hot."

"I'm Tony."

I put my hand out and she dropped her palm in mine. She took me back to a place she called her "fortress."

Hitting that from behind was like heaven. She said she couldn't bruise so I smacked it as hard as I could. Red palm prints, nothing else. She told me that no one hit it like me. She said that I fucked her like a man. Not like her ex-boyfriend, Joe Sterns, who could golf his way into any hole, but couldn't make her cum. I let her know that I ball, I don't golf.

I tried to put a hickey on

her almost every time we were at the fortress or in her 2001 Escalade. I bit her so hard I could feel the veins press together. I heard blood vessels pop, but no marks. One day she grabbed me near the lockers and I went straight in for the kill. But something came undone. There was sediment or some shit in my mouth.

"Yo. What's on your neck, Li?"

She looked at me like she was the one asking the question. She wiped her neck and looked at her hands.

"Oh. It's cover-up."

"For real?"

"Yeah. You must have ended my old streak."

"For real?"

She wiped a few more times, taking it all off. Black and blue. A mark of *real beauty*...

We were all over each other. We hardly argued either. Come to think of it, the only thing we ever argued about was Weinstein. We were in her bed instead of eighth period lab, dissecting each other. We weren't saying anything. I was drained and couldn't reload for at least

another couple of minutes. Much more endurance than old Joe.

"Say something," she said.

"Like what, babe?"

"Stimulate me."

"Stimulate you? I can do that." I reached below.

"Intellectually."

"Intellectually?"

"Yes. Stimulate me. Intellectually."

"I've never heard you say that."

"There's a lot you don't know, Mr. Tony."

"So teach me something."

"I'll leave the teaching to Judd. Now that's someone we can both learn from."

"Judd? The fuck is Judd?"

"Judd Weinstein."

"You call him, Judd?"

"Fine. I'll call him Mr. Weinstein, if that makes you feel better."

"It would make me feel better if you didn't say that tool's name at all. He's bullshitting everyone. All that talk about how smart he is, man. I don't buy that shit."

"A little insecure number twenty-two?"

"Na. I just see past that

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shit.”

“Do you?”

“Fuck yeah, I do.”

“Well don’t trip up. He’s a smart guy. He is ver-y intelligent.”

“He’s a snake and I’ll fuck him up if he gets out of line.”

“Judd says, ‘violence is ignorance.’”

“Tell Judd he can suck my dick. That cool?”

“OK. I’ll relay the message. But for now it’s my job.”

My stillness comes to me in the mornings. When all is quiet, and no one is around, I’m Tony. There are no questions concerning what I have to do. So when my jump shot wasn’t looking the way it should, there was no question. I wasn’t putting enough touch on the rock. It didn’t have that immaculate arch followed by my signature gorgeous follow through. I was trying so hard to score that I forget about everything that it takes to actually create points. It doesn’t just come. It isn’t just luck. It takes real work and I work best in stillness.

On the Thursday before our November Tip-Off tourna-

ment, I got my ass up and walked to school. I thought about putting my shit in my locker to save myself the hustle of doing it in the overcrowded halls, but I wanted to get right into it. No music, no distractions, just buckets. Every swish would bring me closer to that scholarship. Darning threes, it’s like it’s what I get paid to do.

It clicked and it made me feel like myself again. After I put up about 300 hundred and stopped, I hit the shower and got into some fresh clothes. I was feeling so good that I wanted to build on the mood. I thought about going to Lila’s after class and fucking her until I felt satisfied. I thought about eating dinner with her Mom and talking about the schools I was thinking of going to. Then I thought about my grades. Damn, I got to get on those. I realized that if I did better in Weinstein’s class, then places like Pepperdine and Gonzaga would kill to have me. If I’m just real with this dude, maybe he’ll help me out. Things do change, right?

I clapped my hands and looped my bag around my shoulder. It was seven twenty-five and

I figured Weinstein would be in his classroom getting ready for a little Dorian. Lila told me he does that kind of shit. *Preparation.*

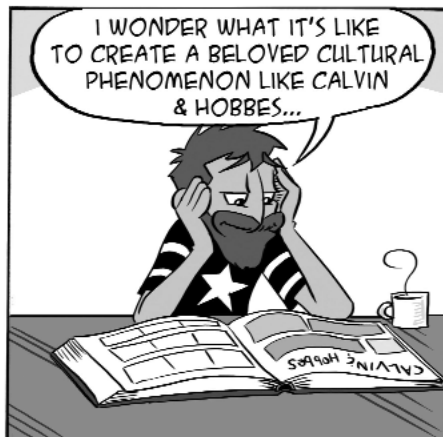
I walked down the hallway, passed the beige colored lockers. Schools all smelled the same. Kind of like shit. For a few hot minutes, for the first time in weeks, I was overwhelmed with pride. Fuck it, I was proud of myself. Adjusting to a new school was hard, really hard. It took some time to realize I was doing a pretty damn good job *adjusting.*

The atmosphere wasn’t normal though. The environment didn’t even compare to anything I’ve been in. I mean, dick-head, arrogant teachers, all those sexy chicks prancing around, not to mention basketball or anything. And look what happened, at my lowest moment here. I could finally see it. It was all going to be just right.

My shot finally felt the way it should. I got one of the finest girls at this school. And, I was about to squash the bull with that teacher, even if it meant masking up the way I really felt about him. All I needed to do

## Best In Show

by Phil Juliano



was to find out how I could make my grade pretty enough to please Coach and Mom happy and get me into college. My hatchet was buried. Got to survive, right?

I moved on. Talking to this dude was going to be harder than I dreamed up. When I tried to spin him in my head in a positive light, I came right back down into wishing I could have dished and served him a backhand, followed by five fingers across the face. *Put on that friendly smile they all love to see, Tony.* That's what I told myself.

Imagine this. I'm dead serious.

I walked into the classroom. His homeroom. The door was closed, but I could see through the thick glass window, the ones that look like they have an argyle pattern inside of their making. Before I even saw her face, I knew who it was by her legs. Thick thighs. Anyone who saw them in the light, or no light, could not deny pure temptation.

The way Lila was sitting...it just cut me. She was wearing what we called my favorite "fuck me" dress. So tight that it looked like a black shell. She pulled it down to cover up some of that skin but when she crossed her legs even more got revealed. Not your typical tutoring session. Weinstein was sitting at the desk with his legs crossed as well. One hand rested on the side of his face as he continued to explain something to her. She was laughing and even though she made everything from my eyes down sour, I still thought she looked cute. Some sick

attraction I had to her.

I should have left the school to save myself from how fucked up this thing was. But I stayed, and kept watching until I found my cue.

Her legs were slightly open. The flowery pink of her panties was exposed. I knew they had been off in front of him by the way she was perched up and how he was kicked back. It doesn't take a literary genius to know when there is sex in the air.

Weinstein straightened up and I thought he was going in for a quick peck, but instead, he pretended to pound on his chest. He opened his mouth and without sound, he began to roar. His familiar impersonation of a lion lasted long enough for me to enter the room as he continued to motion his fists through the air to his body.

If I could have taken a Polaroid of their faces, I would have kept it forever. Classic astonishment even Weinstein didn't know he was capable of.

She turned to me from her desk perch.

"Ha, ba...baby!

Wha...What's up?"

She brushed the hair that looked like cashmere from her face and clicked her heels on the ground.

Come on now. Heels?

I didn't say a word on my way over to the desk.

"Baby?"

"Mr. Perez. Good morning. What brings you in so early?"

I looked at Lila and explained by the new energy in my eyes the way I would see her from now on.

"Baby. Come on. Be rational. Baby?"

"It's Tony."

I turned to Weinstein. My eyes showed him something else. They showed him a bargain. He was caught and I had the winning hand. I had his secret, which meant, I had my A.

Lila was only sixteen.

"Mr. Weinstein, you wanna talk about my grade real quick?"



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## “The Lake House”

by Keith Nunes

There’s a madman across the water wrecking my house. The lake is small – the house is big; the interior is teal. I see it from here – standing outside my blue car with binoculars.

He takes to the windows with a shiny axe – splinters his face; rocks away and falls to the ground. I ring an ambulance, climb into my sedan and head home.

I beat the ambulance by 60 seconds. JT is sitting on the front-door step, bleeding. The medic pushes by me on a narrow path and crashes into JT’s right side. He opens his box; speaks quickly and quietly and starts his business. JT swears at me.

I walk around to the back door and go in. My wife is anxiously sitting at the dining room table drinking red wine. We look at each other and hold it for a second or two. “So now what ...

honey?” she says, slurring.

I go to the fridge and crack open a can of bourbon and coke – lean against the sink and swallow deeply. “It’s time for all this to go away,” I say to her.

Now I have to come clean. She’s tearful, telling me she loves me. “For God’s sake Ruben, tell me what’s going on,” she says.

“JT loves me,” I say. “He’s been in love with me since we left college. We slept together once but it wasn’t for me – he laid his life on it.”

“Jesus! I thought you were having an affair with his wife,” she says breaking into laughter, spluttering between sobs.

“He pushed me about it again yesterday and I said definitely no. He doesn’t like my attitude,” I say.

One of the ambulance officers comes into the house and says they have to take JT to hospital to have some glass removed from his neck and face. JT sneers at us as we stand on the front-door step where blood soaks into the wooden step.

“He fired me,” I say to Jenny, “says he doesn’t want to see me again.”

“What about his wife, does she

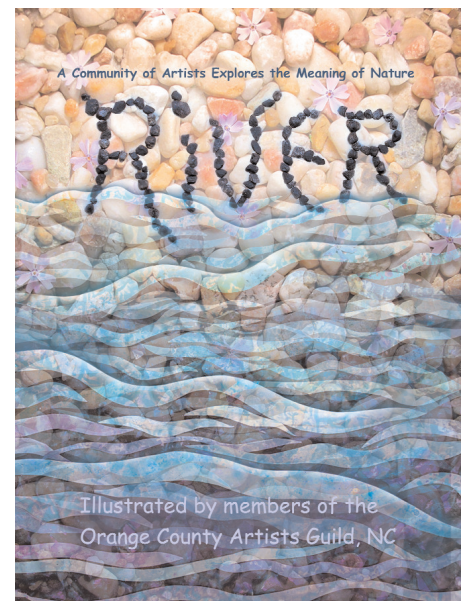
know about you two?”

“He’s never told her anything,” I say. I’m standing at the sink again and she sits back behind her wine. “What now?” she asks.

“I won’t go back to work. I won’t see him again. I want to leave town. Where do you stand?”

“Give me a chance to catch my breath,” she says wiping away tears. “This is a bit of a shock. Can we sit on this for a day or two – for the weekend?”

“Of course,” I say, swigging again. “I’m not going anywhere without you.”



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# “The Porch Below”

by Tom Millay

I had been sitting out on the porch for some time when she came out. A third of the way through a good philosophy book, I needed the refreshment of a breeze. And so there I was, sipping coffee from a green mug, appreciating the play of the warm sun with the cool fall wind, when she arrived and disturbed my wakeful slumber.

You see, I couldn't let her know that I was there. That would be creepy. I would be—watching her. Through the slats of the porch, which were there, so this was possible. But I wasn't, I mean, I didn't mean to be doing that.

Well, maybe I should have announced my presence right away, scraped my mug on the table or something. That way I could have established my right to be there. I was there first, she was the intruder—maybe she was even the one who was creepy!

It was too late for that. I didn't think of that till too late. Now every sign of my presence would point toward intentional conceal-

ment, thus creepy. Would she call the police?

I must confess, I wasn't being *that* careful at this point. I knew I was being a little delusional. My leg was still bouncing up and down from the coffee drinking, and I had turned a couple of pages with gusto.

Then she started singing, and I completely froze, leg and all. It was some type of cultic song—for some reason I could tell. She beat a jubilant rhythm on what must have been a repurposed material, certainly not percussive, and softly lifted her voice into the late morning sun.

I was *definitely* not supposed to be here for this. I stopped reading my book and focused all my attention on not being detected.

For a while this worked; I was completely still. But coffee has a way of demanding that you drink it. I fought hard, then lifted the cup to my lips while minimizing any slurping effects.

What came next was the most difficult moment. My entire being became focused on the still small point where I aimed to set this coffee cup down. My eyes took on a laser-like quality. It was a moment of ecstasy as the cup fused with the table in silent triumph. Victory.

Then she set down her book that had served as a drum, stood, and left, exiting with grace and confidence into the secure privacy of her second floor apartment.

I was proud of myself. The guy on the porch below her, who's always smoking, would have never been so conscientious.



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## "A Sense of the City"

The squeal of metal subway brakes... check.  
Horns of cars stuck in traffic...  
the great cacophonous symphony...check.  
A baby crying.  
Another baby crying because the first baby's crying.  
Check and double check.  
Briefcase slapping against businessman's thigh.  
Long, loud whistle through a scrawny kid's gapped teeth.  
Rumble of stomachs in a greasy diner.  
Raindrops on windows, roofs.  
Boom-box, sidewalk argument, ambulance siren.  
All accounted for.

And now the next capsule.  
Frosty breath.  
Scattered Styrofoam coffee cups.  
Brown river mist.  
Gang graffiti. Broken window.  
Billboard advertising soap.  
Abandoned trailer.  
Dumpster. Drainage ditch. Oil drums.  
This one matches the manifest.

The container with pitch odor, sulfur fumes,  
has been verified.  
And likewise that other with the feel of  
brick and steel.  
And the first authenticated:  
donuts, Rueben sandwiches,  
as ordered.

So it is I'm in the city.  
I have all my senses with me.

## The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them.  
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[mermaid@blotterrag.com](mailto:mermaid@blotterrag.com)

The room is stuffy, and burning a candle in it changes nothing in that regard. It is like something has passed away in a lonely corner beneath some neglected piece of furniture. I would look for it, but I want to turn on some lights first. The first switch does nothing. I flick it off and on a few times in that way we all do when we expect something different to eventually happen. The second switch starts the ceiling fan, which ripples the candle-flame and threatens to blow it out. I have a sudden memory of the old Police tune "Canary in a Coal Mine," although I don't know exactly why.

PF cyberspace

## Two by John Grey

### "Shift Change"

I'm home from work, going on twilight,  
take my child to the stream

to show her that mine is not the only shift change.  
See how the minnows congregate in the stillness of shadows.

And in the nearby brush, the woodchuck, raccoon,  
even the flighty rabbit clock in for that in-between time,

the zenith of seeing and not being seen.  
The blue sky is closing. Birds fly to nests or roosts.

The black is emerging. A bat scouts the treetops.  
And look —fireflies — bright and, to my point.

the day has no work for them.

### CONTRIBUTORS:

**Ryan Rossi** of Rye, NY writes, "I'm a recent graduate of Susquehanna University's creative writing program and studied non-fiction with Gary Fincke. I also studied with Tom Bailey, author of *The Grace That Keeps the World* (soon to be a major motion picture). As a sophomore I co-founded the street wear company, *Paradigm Wear*. Currently, I am working for Under Armor in Baltimore. My non-fiction has appeared in *The Rye Record* newspaper in Rye, New York. I also wrote a weekly football blog for *The Journal News* in Westchester County. My fiction was featured at the *Sixth Annual Undergraduate Literature and Creative Writing Conference: Literature, Education and the Creative Mind* at Susquehanna University. \*\*\* **Keith Nunes** lives in rural Bay of Plenty (New Zealand) with a retinue of crackpots. His work has been published widely Down Under. He's a former newspaper sub-editor but has been granted divine forgiveness. \*\*\* **Tom Millay**, from Chapel Hill, NC writes, "I am a research assistant at Duke University. I have not yet published any fiction, but I have written several academic pieces on the Danish philosopher-theologian Søren Kierkegaard." \*\*\* **John Grey** of Johnston, RI, is an Australian born poet. Recently published in *The Lyric*, *Vallum* and the science fiction anthology, "The Kennedy Curse" with work upcoming in *Bryant Literary Magazine*, *Natural Bridge*, *Southern California Review* and the *Oyez Review*. \*\*\* **Phil Juliano** (Minneapolis, MN) has been cartooning for over twenty years. "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](http://www.bestinshowcomic.com)

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