

*Everything is as cool as can be, with Steve Slavin,
Jack D. Harvey, Wren Tuatha,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

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MAGAZINE

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"Sheets, Loots, and Eaves"

Lately, I've been watching movies, just to get my mind off reality. It's nice work if you can get it. But still I have so many questions. To wit: Cary Grant got twenty five years-to-life of Hollywood leading-manhood. Grace Kelly, maybe four summers of being the most beautiful actress in the world, then bolted, albeit for a castle in the Mediterranean. But my question is *how come it works like that?* Women are smarter than men. So how did Mr. Grant pull off such a feat (and fete) that he could make some of us believe that he was a cat burglar by vocation and Miss Kelly's object of vacation affection in *To Catch A Thief*? Does anyone still (and did anyone at the time) really think that he was a cool, only slightly past his prime athletic so and so and Allied something-or-other in France during the war (and what is *prime* for these occupations, no pun intended)? So do they actually believe that Cary Grant was young and desirable, and beddable (not a word, I know, I know...) of Young Miss Kelly when he was fifty? Really? Or is there some other equation taking effect? My theory is that Grant was actually going after Jessie Royce Landis, who was only a handful of years older than he. But no, Hitchcock would never have let her play his mother in North by Northwest (still pretty silly, Grant going after the Kelly-wannabe (she didn't wannabe, but Hitchcock sure did) Eva Marie Saint. And, of course, art is life and life is art, so even if the actual age of the actors is irrelevant, the ages of actresses are written on the tablets toted down by Moses (Charlton Heston, of course) from Mount Sinai. Was it possible that Grace Kelly, being smarter than your average fella, or even an extraordinary fella, left while the going was good (to become a princess, mind,) not because her movie career was at its peak and all downhill from that point onward, but because it *was* at its peak and that is a good place to stop. *Leave 'em wanting more*, in other words. Lots more. But don't look back. I believe in the latter answer, that Miss Kelly, she of the next-door-oh-how-I-wish-neighbor girl purr-voice and the hair so soft it was beyond touch, beyond part of the human fabric, made her handful of films and hit the road, I suppose not totally unlike James Dean. No ugly jest meant there, just comprehending the idea of being a film star for only the best of those films passing your way, then only doing your best. Then leaving. Never complaining and never explaining.

Sidebar questions: Do really pretty, really famous people (and, I suppose, really wealthy as well) actively consider driving their cars around curves in the hopes that they will stay young and beautiful and famous? Do they get that bored? Can you only eat so many fine steaks, and drink champagne until it isn't special at all, but because it is so casually your normal

diet, that it no longer tastes so good? There is an old chestnut that goes something like it's not the years in the living, it's the living in the years. I'm not totally sure I buy that. How much of living is in the thinking about it?

Anyhow, back to my point, sort of. It is difficult not to feel sorry for Brigitte Auber, the 1928 import that Grant dumps for the 1929 filly from Philly. Oh, Auber has to be the bad guy (I mean, girl) doing all the cat burgling, and then must be rescued from falling off the roof by Grant (at this point, more of a father figure than we're comfortable with), foreshadowing the way he rescues NXNW's (that's North by Northwest in cool-shorthand) Saint (who was actually born in 1924 in my own hometown, Newark, NJ) from toppling off of George Washington. How else can Grant win the girl? No, I mean the other girl. And how much of this is Hitchcock's wishful thinking, and how much of it just manifest itself around Cary Grant because he was...Cary Grant, for god's sake.

I suppose if we can believe you are able to bed beautiful young women (fireworks!), you can be a wealthy ex-pat, ex-cat burglar (always wanted to type that), and can rescue other beautiful woman one handed from toppling from the villa rooftops, well then, (to quote The Who's Townsend – coincidental stolen namesake of Grant's nemesis in NXNW) it's just another tricky day for you. Well, let's see more of those tricky days!! Ahem. Roll film!

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CAUTION

The hole whirled is watching.

"The Last of the Great Lovers"

by Steve Slavin

Gene is possibly the smartest person I know – and, in some ways, the dumbest. He can be unethical, and yet he'd do almost anything for someone he truly cares about. He is a perfectionist and is sometimes hypercritical. Gene is impulsive, calculating, but sometimes quite endearing. Most of all, he always has something going on, something that really excites him.

Gene and I became friends as teenagers. We went to parties together, tried to meet girls, and played ball in the park after school

and on weekends. While I was on track to go to college and then graduate school, Gene was, at best a little better-than-average student.

Then, almost out of the blue, Gene's father threw him out of the house. He was in his senior year in high school, not yet seventeen.

Gene moved into the Sloan House YMCA on West 34th Street near Ninth Ave. He found a low-paying office job, managed to get his high school equivalency diploma, and then joined the Army.

You would think that he would have been unhappy and resentful, but Gene confided that his father had actually done him a great favor. Now the Army would pay for his college education, provide him with valuable training, and at the same time he'd get his military obligation out the way. Back in late 1950s, we still had the draft, so most guys would eventually have had to deal with it one way or another.

Six years later, Gene was back in Brooklyn with little to show for his time in the Service. He had about two years' college credit, and had learned some German. He enrolled in Brooklyn College as a twenty-four-year-old junior, using the G.I. Bill of Rights to pay his living expenses. In those days, the four-year public colleges in New York were still free.

Now he knew what he wanted to do with his life. He became a philosophy major, specializing in the existentialists. The college had an excellent philosophy department, and Gene's dedication, enthusiasm, and scholarship were

greatly appreciated. He was truly home at last!

Early one morning during his senior year, Gene did something that his professors would talk about for years. He had been writing his honors thesis on Kierkegaard, his favorite philosopher. But, perfectionist that he was, Gene begged for extension after extension. Finally, his advisor laid down the law. The paper must be delivered to the department office by Friday morning at eight a.m.

Gene knew that, in the words of another idol, Jean-Paul Sartre, "the game was up." He worked virtually non-stop for the next 72 hours, fueled by an entire bottle of "NoDoz." He laughingly recalled the Army training films he had watched about the torture American soldiers would endure if captured by the enemy. That, by comparison to what he was now putting himself through, would be a walk in the country.

On the third night, he caught himself nodding off. He had mental images of himself acting in an old black and white Army training movie. He was an American prisoner of war being yelled at by the "Aggressors" who were wearing helmets, each topped with a long strip of wood, making it look like a helmet with a Mohawk haircut. His laughter stopped him from falling into a deeper sleep.

On Friday at 7:40 a.m. Gene finished typing. There was no time to proof the paper one last time. He walked over to the college, and made his way to the Philosophy Department office. The lights were on, and when he opened the door, he saw several professors standing around. They stared at him. He was unshaven, disheveled, and there were dark semicircles under his eyes. And he was visibly shaking.



New book project from Phil Juliano!!
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The department secretary asked, "Gene, how can I help you?" He didn't answer. The professors standing nearby began to grow concerned. But luckily, Gene then snapped out of it. In a very matter of fact voice he answered, "Yes. When Professor Kierkegaard gets in, could you please give him this paper?"

Despite Gene's devotion to his studies, he always checked out his classes for pretty women. To his surprise, one of them approached *him* after a sociology class. She said that she really appreciated his seriousness and his intelligence.

Gene could not believe his luck. Marlene was an education major and would begin teaching third and fourth graders in the fall. They began making out on the third date, and took it from there. Then he completely caught her off guard by proposing.

She didn't answer at first. But when she did, it was *his* turn to be caught off guard.

"I don't see a ring."

"OK, Marlene. You will see a ring next week."

Exactly one week later he kneeled down on one knee and asked, "Marlene, will you marry me?"

Marlene took a deep breath. "Yes, Gene, I will!"

He handed her a tiny box.

Marlene opened it, and put the ring on her finger, while Gene got up and then sat next to her. She was smiling as she admired the ring. This went on for a couple of minutes. It was one of the happiest moments of her life, and she let it stretch out.

Then she threw her arms around Gene and kissed him. She had picked herself a real winner! In just a short span of time she will

have earned *two* degrees – a BA and an MRS!

In the middle of his last semester Gene received the greatest news of his life: Cornell offered him a full scholarship. If things went according to plan, he would earn his PhD in four or five years. He would then be set for life.

Marlene was the first person he called. He was so excited that he didn't pick up on her lack of enthusiasm. But they would celebrate that night.

When he got to her house that evening, Marlene looked very sad. "Gene, we need to talk."

What was going on? Was she *mad* at him?

"Gene, this is very hard for me to say. I still love you, but this engagement isn't working out. We want different things in life."

"I thought we wanted a life together."

"So did I! But you'll be going to Cornell, and I'll be working for the Board of Education. I already know which school I'll be assigned to."

"You could get a job in Ithaca!"

"I don't *want* to be in Ithaca! I want to stay in New York. This is where I grew up. This is where my friends are."

He realized that there was nothing he could say that would change her mind. He stood, looked at her one last time, and then walked out of her house. When he had gone a few blocks, he began to realize that it was probably for the best. If a woman could not help him realize his dream, then she was not the woman for *him*!

Gene called me when he got home. He had called earlier about Cornell, and now this.

"So how do you feel, Gene?"

"Actually, pretty good."

"No regrets?"

"Well, Steve, maybe this was the best thing that could have happened to me – *besides* the scholarship."

"I don't know. Let me ask you a question. How did you feel when she gave you back the ring?"

"She didn't give it back."

"*Really? Shit!* That ring must have set you back quite a few bucks. What was it, three-quarters of a karat?"

"It was almost a karat."

"So you're not mad?"

"Not at all. Especially since I paid just fifty bucks for it."

"That's *impossible!*"

"Well, I'm not going to go into details, but if you took that ring to several jewelry stores, you wouldn't get more than sixty or seventy dollars. So I got a big bargain."

"You certainly did! And I'd love to see Marlene's face when *she* goes to get it appraised."

In late August, Gene left for Ithaca, determined to keep his nose to the grindstone. And *did* he! He got all A's, his professors loved him, and he already had the rest of his life carefully mapped out. He would earn his PhD, and find a teaching position at another Ivy League school. He would publish, become an academic star, and

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along the way, marry the most fantastic woman.

When Gene returned in June, he rented a furnished room in Brooklyn Heights, not far from where I was living. We hung out a little, but he was very busy preparing for the fall semester. Then something happened: Irene.

No superlative could do justice to this woman. Although a natural born skeptic, even *I* was convinced that just maybe, she was “the One.”

I didn’t get to meet her until a few weeks later – at their engagement party. When Gene gave me the news and invited me to the party, I asked what the rush was. He babbled something about striking while the iron was hot. Then he showed his practical side. Look, if I didn’t propose, some other guy would grab her. This way, even though I’ll be more than 200 miles away, I can still keep her out of circulation.

What *is* she, I thought to myself – a library book?

When I got to the party and met Irene I was completely underwhelmed. She was mildly attractive – I’d give her maybe a seven – but the real problem was that she was a secretary, and to put it bluntly, no Einstein.

The party was in Irene’s fami-

ly’s apartment. Her parents were very friendly, and obviously extremely proud of their daughter. And I thought: She’s marrying a really smart guy who may someday be a prominent philosopher. But what about *her*? Not only was she doing almost nothing with her life, she didn’t exactly appear to be Ivy League faculty wife material.

Irene’s mother consoled me, “Don’t worry, Steve. I’m sure you’re next.”

Then her father added, “Don’t worry, Steve. There’s no rush.” He winked at me as his wife gave his arm a playful push.

Irene kept reminding everyone that she was engaged to a Cornell PhD candidate. Not a very accurate statement, since you don’t attain that lofty status until you’ve got at least another couple of years under your belt. But why tell her this and spoil the fun?

Gene took me into the kitchen. “Isn’t she *great*?”

“Do you want my frank analysis?”

“You don’t like her?”

“Gene, she seems very sweet. But all she talks about is being engaged to a Cornell PhD candidate.”

“Yeah, it *is* pretty embarrassing.”

“Look, if you really love her,

then none of that matters.”

Just then, Irene rushed in and dragged Gene into the living room to help her open their presents. I remember how she pretended to be modelling a negligee as everyone oooooooohhed and ahhhhhhhhhed. Gene whispered to me, “Am I obligated to get an erection?”

I knew then that this might be just a summer engagement. But still, it was *his* choice.

A couple of days later, Gene called.

“Still engaged?”

“Of course, you idiot! Look, I want to fix you up with someone.”

“Forget it! I *hate* blind dates.”

“*Trust* me! Wendy is beautiful! A perfect ten!”

“Really? How do you know her?”

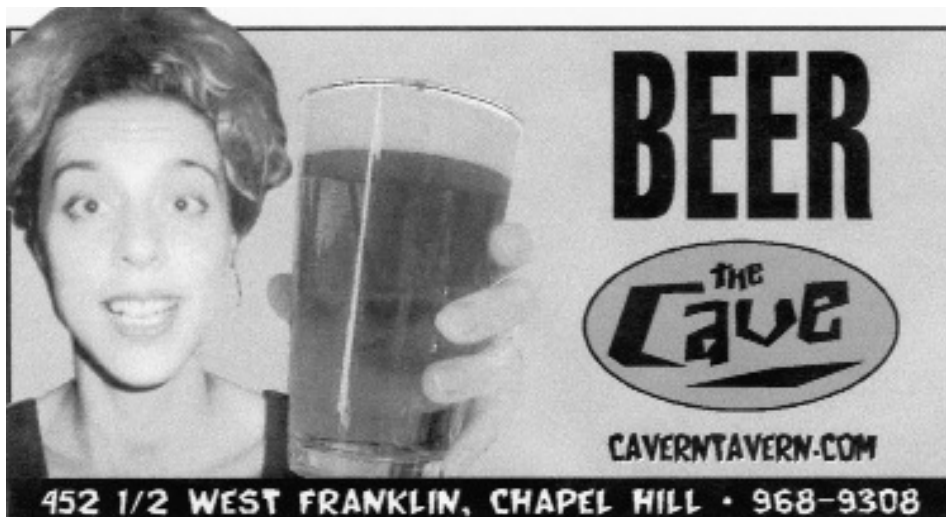
“She’s Irene’s closest friend.”

“So I must have seen her at the party.”

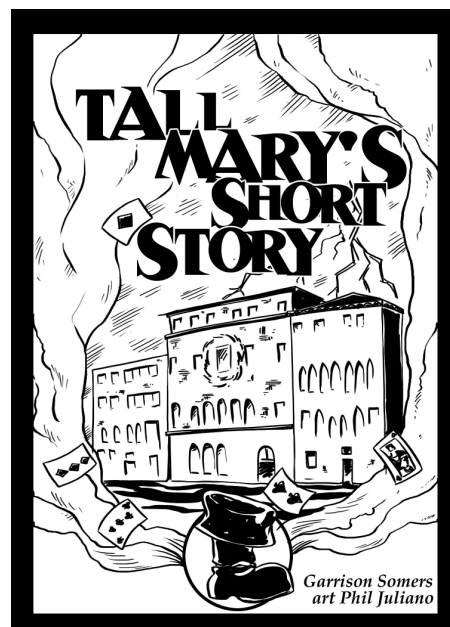
“She couldn’t be there. Her mother was in the hospital. But she’s better now.”

“Look, thanks for thinking of me, but I just don’t do blind dates.”

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"Steve, I promise that you will really, really like her. She's beautiful. She's very intelligent. She's funny."

"Gene, maybe you should be engaged to *her*."

"I think that's not an existential possibility."

"Ha!"

"Just call her. If she sounds nice, then make a date. If not, then no harm done."

"OK, why *not*?"

The next evening, I called Wendy. Minutes into our conversation I was smitten. She was my soul mate! And, who knows: maybe I was hers. Two hours later, we finally hung up. I would meet her after work the next evening. We would take the subway back to Brooklyn, and go to a restaurant near her house.

The minute we hung up, my phone rang. Before I could pick it up, I panicked. What if she were calling back to cancel?

"Hello?"

"Steve, I've been trying to reach you for hours! You must have been talking to Wendy! So, how

do you like her?"

"Gene, calm down. Take a deep breath."

"How long were you talking to her?"

"About two hours."

"What did you talk about?"

"You know, this and that."

"Be more specific."

"Take it easy, Gene. She sounded great. We're going out tomorrow evening."

"What are you doing? Where are you going?"

"Look Gene, it's late. I'll tell you what. I'll answer all your questions after I see her."

"OK, call me as soon as you can."

I knew Gene sometimes wandered pretty close to the edge, but this was really strange. Here he's engaged to one woman, but possibly obsessing over her friend. Unless maybe he was just so happy that he wanted *me* to be happy too. Yeah, right!

The next evening, Wendy met me in front of her building at 5 pm. She was tall, had long blonde hair, and was fairly pretty. As we

walked toward the subway, she took my arm, which made me feel very proud. We didn't say much until we got downstairs to the platform.

"Steve, can I ask you for a really big favor?"

Sure, I thought. *Anything!*

"Do you think we can take the local instead of the express?"

"Wendy, I want to tell you something. I am really happy to be with you. You could have asked me for a much bigger favor."

She squeezed my arm slightly, which made me feel still better. She was just so nice to be with. I began to understand Gene's seeming obsession.

Then she explained. "I have a tremendous fear of bridges. So I always take the local through the tunnel, even though it takes ten minutes longer."

"You know, I used take the local too, but that was because I got a seat."


She laughed, and I almost tried to kiss her. Then the train came and we got to sit together. We chatted until the train entered the tunnel. She began to shake. I put my arm around her. Soon she was shaking even harder. I thought some people were looking at us.

"Are you OK?"

"No-o-o, not real-l-l-y."

"OK, don't worry. I'm just going to hold you, and you're going to be fine. I promise, I won't let anything happen to you."

I was getting very confused. It was really nice to hold her, but her behavior was becoming increasingly



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strange.

When we finally got out of the tunnel, she began to relax.

"Wendy, you told me you were afraid of bridges, but it looks as though you're *really* afraid of tunnels."

"Bridges are *much* worse!"

I didn't know what to say.

Were these just phobias, or was she nuts?

Me? I'm really afraid of heights. I can't climb a step ladder without shaking. So I *do* have a degree of empathy. But this bridge and tunnel thing? Maybe it was just the tip of the iceberg.

We continued riding till we got to her stop, and as we walked to the restaurant, she was almost back to her old self. But something had changed. And then she said, "Steve, you know, I really don't feel like eating. Do you think we can just call it an evening?"

I didn't know what to say. So I just played it safe. "OK, would you like me to walk you home?"

"No, that's alright. I'm just a few blocks from here."

She leaned over, kissed me on the cheek, and then walked off.

As I watched her walk away, I

still felt very conflicted. Should I rush after her? As she rounded the corner, I turned and headed off the other way.

When I got home, my phone was ringing. It had to be Gene.

"So how did it go with Wendy? Tell me *everything*!"

Gene broke off his engagement to Irene a week later. I felt kind of sorry for her. She had probably lost her one big chance. The next day he called Wendy. When he asked her out, she hung up on him.

A few days before going back to school, he bought a used Chevy Impala convertible, which he loved. Everything was still going very well for him. He called me when he got home for winter break to tell me that he had met another woman and was in love.

Gene had placed some signs around school offering rides to students who would share expenses. Doreen was one of the students who responded. She looked like Elizabeth Taylor.

But a day later, he went out on a blind date that had been arranged before he left Ithaca. Since he wanted to pick up a book from me, he brought his date with him. They stayed for a little while, and then went off to dinner. Susanne was quite attractive. I liked the way she smiled at me, but maybe she was just being friendly.

The next day Gene called to ask me what I thought of Susanne. I said she's as good as it gets. He said that he agreed with me. In fact, he liked her so much, that he was going to dump "Elizabeth Taylor."

Things did not work out quite as planned. When he called Susanne to ask her out again, she thanked him, but said she just was-

n't that into him. I thought of asking him for her number, but sometimes it's best to just let things lie.

In late March, Gene called me from Ithaca. He had some great news! He had indeed taken my relationship advice to heart, and had vowed not to make the same mistake again.

"So, Gene, if I understand you correctly, you're calling to tell me about a woman."

"*Bingo!*"

"But this time you're not rushing into another engagement."

"Steve, you're a mind-reader!"

"Hey, it doesn't take a mind-reader to figure out *your* problem."

"When you're right, you're *right*! So I can promise you — not another engagement. Remember the woman I gave a ride to during winter break?"

"Sure. Elizabeth Taylor, aka Doreen."

"Well, congratulations are in order! We got married last week!"

A couple of months later, Gene slipped in the bathtub, badly injuring his back. He ended up in New York Hospital, which is affiliated with Cornell. When I went to see him, he was in traction. Doreen, who was in her last semester, had stayed behind.

It would be several months until Gene could return to school. When he was finally able to make the trip, I went along him to help with the driving. I would be staying with them for just a day or so. On the way, somewhere near Scranton, he casually mentioned that his wife was eight months pregnant.

When we arrived, Doreen was overjoyed to see him, but he seemed distracted. It turned out what was bothering him was that the workmen were still there, put-



ting the finishing touches on a new kitchen floor.

The next morning at breakfast, Gene asked Doreen to reheat his coffee for another six seconds. Then he held up a piece of toast, which was slightly burned in one corner. After that, he asked her to re-reheat the coffee for another four seconds.

"For Christ's *sake*, Gene!" I yelled. "You ate Army chow for six *years*! How many times did you send *that* back to the chef?" I stood up, grabbed my bag, hugged Doreen, and was on the next bus to New York.

Gene Junior was born just one month later. According to the announcement, he weighed in at six pounds, fourteen ounces. Good luck, kid! You're gonna need it!

Gene senior was making up two incompletes. His professors, who fully understood his circumstances, cut him a lot of slack. But I had a feeling that something bad was about to happen.

I'm not sure which came first, his difficulties with the department chairman or the breakup of his marriage, but five months after his return to Ithaca, Gene was back in Brooklyn. He stayed with me for a few weeks until he found a small apartment nearby. He never spoke again about Cornell, his study of philosophy, or even Doreen and Gene junior. Perhaps his only reference – and this came a few years later – was the scorn he felt for his ex-wife. She had remarried. "Would you believe that the guy's a *plumber*?"

Somehow, Gene got involved with real estate, and within only a few years, he was making tons of money converting rental buildings into condos. The whole trick, he explained, was financing each project almost entirely with borrowed

money.

Gene rarely went to see his son, especially since he had a new father. Still, he voluntarily doubled his child support payments and set up a trust fund that would pay for his education all the way through graduate school. But he and Gene junior would remain virtual strangers.

We drifted apart soon after Gene sold his business and moved away from Brooklyn Heights. A few years later I heard that he had gotten married again — this time to a woman with a young daughter. They were living somewhere out on Long Island.

For a few years, we completely lost touch. Still, when the phone rang and I heard his voice, I was not at all surprised when he began talking about his marriage, which had recently ended. He said that while their relationship had been very rocky, he and Krista managed an amiable divorce. They still loved each other, but their differences were irreconcilable.

"You know, Steve, it's really a big shame! Krista was the only woman I truly loved."

I later heard that their irreconcilable differences were manifested by screaming arguments, a few police interventions, and one very suspicious three alarm fire.

I also learned that before he met her, Krista and her daughter were living on Public Assistance. "I'd like to think that I left them a lot better off than they were before I met them."

I realized that he said this without rancor or irony, and I felt a new respect for him. He had helped them out of love.

Again, he disappeared, leaving me to wonder if I would ever see him again. A year later, he called. He was in California, and was liv-

ing with a woman named Theresa, who had just left her husband. They were in love.

Did I mention that Gene could sometimes be hyper-critical, especially with the women he became involved with? Theresa happened to be a personal trainer. Gene, who at the time weighed over 300 pounds, was constantly criticizing her appearance.

Well, she threw him out. That proved to be a major wake-up call. He knew he had to make a big change. He needed to lose weight and begin working out, so he could win her back. It took him more than a year, but he got into the best shape of his life. But by then, he had lost track of her.

He began noticing that women sometimes smiled at him. One day he saw Theresa in the supermarket. He waited until she spotted him.

"Gene, is that *you*? Is that *really* you?"

He waited a few seconds before just nodding.

"You look *amazing*! I never would have guessed in a million years that you could have done this."

Gene was gloating. He could see how badly she wanted him back. But he'd play it cool.

"How *are* you, Theresa?" he asked.

"Never better! My ex and I got back together."

Apparently, there wasn't enough room for the two of them in the entire state of California, so Gene decided to get a fresh start in South Florida. And it was there that he soon met a truly wonderful woman named Betty, who had come there from Jamaica a few years earlier with her husband and two children. She and her husband had been childhood sweethearts,

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but after they arrived in Florida, he began to “fool around.”

When she realized what was going on, she took the children and moved in with her sister. He came around and begged her to take him back. And then, maybe a few months later, he began staying out late one or two nights a week.

That’s when she decided to leave him for good. He agreed to a divorce, and since then, he saw the children every Sunday. Then Gene moved in next door.

At first they just chatted, and then, there was a little flirting. Gene wondered about the ex-husband, but Betty assured him that there was no going back. The man was incorrigible.

Soon she and Gene were living together, along with Betty’s two children. Gene loved Betty and both children. He told me that for the first time in his life, he was truly happy. Perhaps it didn’t hurt that Betty was at least twenty years younger, and made Gene believe that he did indeed walk on water.

One Saturday afternoon, when Betty and the children were visiting relatives, Gene saw her ex-husband pull up in front of the house. A minute later he rang the bell. This was pretty strange, because the only time Gene saw him was on Sunday.

“Hi, Michael. Betty and the kids are visiting her sister.”

“Gene, actually I came to see *you*.”

“OK, let’s go inside.”

They sat down next to each other on the couch in the living room. For a minute, neither said a word. Then Michael began his story.

He told Gene how he and Betty had known each other since they were four or five, and how much he still loved her and their children. He knew he had fucked up, and that even if he and Betty

got back together, he might still go back to his old ways.

Gene felt a grudging admiration for Michael’s honesty, but he was puzzled. Why was Michael telling all this to *him*? He must *want* something. But *what*?

He decided to let Michael keep talking, hoping that he would explain what he wanted.

But then Michael began to grow agitated. Gene wasn’t sure what to do. He was tempted to put his arm around the man to comfort him.

Finally, Michael said, “Gene, I want to show you something, but don’t be afraid.”

He pulled out a hand gun and held it pointed at the floor. He didn’t do this in a threatening way. It was more like show and tell.

Gene waited and after several seconds, Michael put the gun back in his jacket.

Neither of them spoke for maybe a couple of minutes.

“Look, man, I even don’t know what made me buy this gun. I’m so afraid I’m going to use it. If that woman don’t take me back, I don’t know *what* I’m going to do.”

Gene didn’t say anything. He knew there wasn’t anything he *could* say. The two of them just sat there.

“Michael, I’m going to tell you something that I never really told anyone before. Maybe because it’s too painful — or because I could never admit it to myself.

“I have a son — a son I’ve rarely seen since he was a baby. I walked out on him and his mother a very long time ago. Yeah, I sent child support every month, but I wasn’t there to see my son grow up. My wife remarried, and her husband is my son’s *real* father.”

The two of them sat there in silence for several minutes.

Then Michael stood. And

Gene stood. They stared at each other for a while, and then they hugged.

As Michael left the house, Gene called after him. “We will do our best to work this out. I promise.”

Michael stopped and turned around. He was smiling, but it was a sad smile.

“Gene, I promise I will not do anything stupid.”

When Betty got back with the kids, she lingered in the living room for a couple of minutes, and then headed into the kitchen to fix dinner. When Gene joined her she said, “So Michael was here.”

“How do you know?”

“I could smell that cologne. He always puts on too much of it.”

They would talk after dinner when the kids were watching TV. The talk continued after the children went to bed.

Betty suggested that there might still be something unresolved between Michael and herself, but mostly she was alarmed about the gun. Clearly, Michael was trying to send a message, though even *he* probably wasn’t sure what it was.

Gene said that maybe *he* was a big part of the problem: “I know that your problems with him go way back, but then this rich old white guy arrived on the scene and stole his family away from him. No, he never said any of that, but it’s not an unreasonable view — at least from Michael’s perspective. And yet he freely admitted how badly he had treated you.”

“Gene, what are you trying to say?”

“Well, let me put it *this* way. If something happened, if Michael used that gun, then a lot of that would be on me. Deep, deep down, you and I know that if I had not been with you, it never would

have come to this."

"Are you breaking up with me?"

"Look, Betty. What we have is great! I've never been happier in my life. But Michael's visit has kind of rearranged things. If I stay, we could no longer be the way we were."

"Gene, you know that my children are the most important thing to me."

"Of course."

"If anything happened"

"I know, honey. I know." He embraced her. They were both crying.

"Could you just keep holding me?"

He did.

A few hours later, after the kids left for school, she picked up the phone and called Michael.

Two months later, Gene and I had dinner at one of our favorite restaurants in Brooklyn Heights. We mostly reminisced about old times. Then he abruptly changed the subject.

"Steve, have you ever tried Internet dating?"

"No, I like to meet women face-to-face."

"You should try it! There's this woman I've been e-mailing. We've fallen in love with each other."

"And you've never actually met?"

"No, but I've booked a flight and I'm going to meet her in two weeks."

"Gene, where does she live? China?"

"Yes, as a matter of fact!" ❖

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.

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I'm not a big fan of nightmares, I don't know anyone who, if confronted with the truth would admit that they love that feeling of being in the middle of something out of their control and surreal at the same time. But I have many of them, enough to keep me on my toes with regards to food and entertainment habits in the hours before going to bed. I don't watch television in the bedroom, and I don't munch out before I go to bed, even if I'm peckish. Still, be it the patterns of the traversing moon or something in my personal DNA, I get a lot of wake-up calls in the middle of the night. It has affected my dating habits - I rarely sleep over, if you know what I mean. Nothing says "don't date this fella" like a sweating, whimpering person next to you to whom you haven't yet made a commitment. "What's the matter(with you)?" is the least of the questions you get over your last morning coffee together. Worse is "What in the hell were you dreaming about?" isn't much better, especially if your partner in crime the night before developed tentacles and a single flaming eye in the middle of their forehead and you didn't bring your elven blade with which to subdue them. No good can come from stammering through some alternative creative fiction to cover your tracks. And, frankly, if you do dream about a person you don't know terribly well, it makes it suck for you, too. You don't want to wake up next to them. Take my word for it.

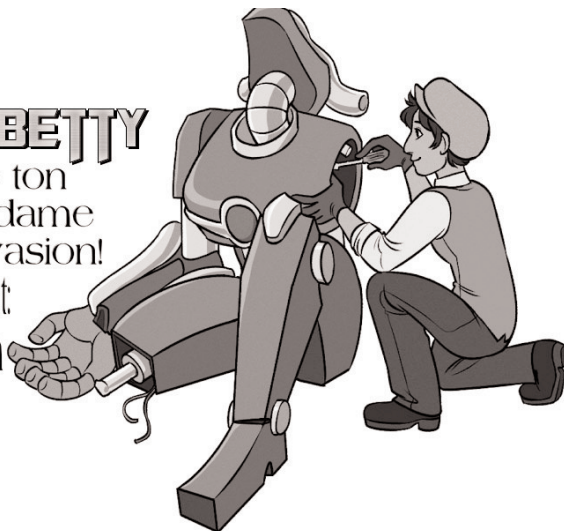
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Two by Jack D. Harvey

"Ann"

Come to me, Ann,
put on your old brown shoes
button up your coat
close up the house
and come to me, Ann.

Suns can rise and set
Catullus said;
that same old wonderful line
comes back
one way or another,
time after time;
we know it to
be true and don't care,
don't pay it no mind,
share and share alike
that wretched wisdom.

The weather changes,
the king dies, the tyrant deposed,
revolution, fire, burning,
the comings and goings,
but we don't care,
not for a moment, not nohow,
for now is our only island,
our rock, our well of hope.

Come to me, Ann;
you may as well
leave it all behind,
let it all go and
take your chance;
we can love, can lose,
will lose it all
to the brigand time,
lose it all in the end,
our lives, too,
but for now
take my hand, my heart;
forget the final pitiful loss
of everything and let us
kiss the sacred crown
of flowering May,
make our vows,
and be here now

"Lovely C"

Lovely C,
if you knew my heart,
the condition of my love,
if you knew how
tenderly I consider you
even in my indecent dreams.

If you knew,
small and petite,
delicate and complete,
how beautiful you appear

if beauty were struck
from your face what then?

Lovely C,
if you knew,
I would love you forever,
love you
when your gold
turns to grey,
when your grey
beyond the grave
fades away to bare bone,

if you knew.

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"Turning Bowls"

He only takes fallen trees.
Anything can take them down,
gypsy moths, hurricane, the will
to rest at last.

Ash and oak, knotty maple, interiors
noodled by insects.
He eyes each body as a reverent,
restless monk.

His chainsaw is a drumroll
in the tight improv of perennial birds
and chords of a highway.

He cures the logs.
Marks the months.
His brother helps.
He lathes in the sun.

His lathe sustains its note as he calls
out the bowls, one layer at a time, spiral
chips arching to his feet.

He invites you to watch.
Children wander over.
He shares at dinner.
A bowl to hold your keys,
chips for the garden path.

Two by Wren Tuatha

He digs with tempered lust against
the grain to show the grain,
the proof of wood, rings like
annual medals for soldiers left standing.

Come his will to rest at last, where are the rings
to mark a man whose hands
translate the sacred text of wood?

A bench. A shelf. A box
full of bowls. The quiet, giddy
need of the creator.



"Leaping Cotton"

He is cotton on the stalk, all slicing
armor outside, talking politics,
rubbing you wrong. Inside,
he's nothing but a downy bed.
He made it to lay you there
while discussing dogs
and enchiladas, deciding
to hide away for the day.

Our cotton rabbit in the warren
who warns the others of dogs,
owls and black snakes. Why
listen to the old guy...

He's a mouser cat that will always watch
you and never follow you home
because you never
ask.

Shopping lists and spreadsheets.
A call from Kenya. Send cash.
Cotton boils quinoa while cursing
his web host and mumbling that humanity
has been a disappointment.

He's leaping purple in loose cotton
at the dance, interpreting ice
skating moves, beading
every eye in the room
into one necklace, ribboning.

He might as well,
not that anyone would ever
give him credit.

CONTRIBUTORS:

A recovering economics professor, **Steve Slavin** of Brooklyn, NY, earns a living writing math and economics books. His short story collection, "To the City, with Love," was recently published by Martin Sisters Publishing.

Jack D. Harvey's poetry has appeared in *Scrivener*, *Mind In Motion*, *Slow Dancer*, *The Antioch Review*, *Bay Area Poets' Coalition*, *The University of Texas Review*, *The Beloit Poetry Journal*, *The Piedmont Journal of Poetry* and a number of other on-line and in print poetry magazines over the years, many of which are probably kaput by now, given the high mortality rate of poetry magazines. He has been writing poetry since he was sixteen and lives in a small town near Albany, N.Y. He was born and worked in upstate New York. He is retired from doing whatever he was doing before he retired. He once owned a cat that could whistle Sweet Adeline, use a knife and fork and killed a postman.

Wren Tuatha's poetry has appeared in *The Baltimore Review*, *Pirene's Fountain*, *Loch Raven Review*, *Clover a Literary Rag*, *Driftwood Press*, *Five 2 One Magazine*, *Autumn Sky Poetry Daily* and the anthology *Grease and Tears*. A Kentucky native, Wren and her partner, author C.T. Lawrence Butler, herd goats on a mountain in California.

Phil Juliano of Bloomington, MN, is a good Blotterfriend. Follow his adventures on philjulianoillustration.com (and check out his current project on page 4).

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long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student,
who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't
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danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

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