

*What's up, with N. J. Burns, Rehan Qayoom,
Dan Wiencek, Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

April 2017

MAGAZINE

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COVER: "Get The Hell Out of My
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The Blotter MAGAZINE is a production of
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.
A 501 (c)3 non-profit
ISSN 1549-0351
www.blotterrag.com

[clmp]

Council of Literary Magazines & Presses
w w w . c l m p . o r g

"Reading Allowed"

I must admit: I'm lucky. This is a pretty sweet gig. All the stories and books I can read, and sometimes coffee goes on sale and I get a couple of pouches of the good stuff to brew at home. There are few things nicer than a morning of sipping coffee while reading with nothing else out on the horizon, no appointments or parties or deadlines or due-dates. Stay at home dad? The girls are – have been for a while – self-starting. They could make their own lunches, but I still like knowing that they can sit in the cafeteria and be the envy of their pals. "What is that? Homemade banana bread? My mom doesn't make that. Can I have a bite?"

I could go back to work, or as it's called in my house "real work." (No, I cannot explain that sentence.) Perhaps I should go. It will not be easy. Among other things, in recent years they've sort of changed the way one applies for a job. You have to fill out online applications and then forget that you did, so you don't get anxious about them, while your CV descends into job-search purgatory and is only seen by Human Resources goblins, who laugh at it. And let's get this out of the way: I'm older – not so ancient that I don't know what's going on, but mature enough to probably scare any co-workers. "God, I can't believe he doesn't know how to use *jobcraparama-dot-whatevs!* I'm so not helping him this time." And I don't do well under new management. I like to tell the truth, call it like I see it. No employer really wants that. Also, I enjoy working from home, getting things done that need doing, and leaving those tasks that aren't obviously on fire until...tomorrow. And reading. I love reading. Trust me, reading is very good.

So, for the time being, here I am. I sit on the front porch in the morning, where the sun shines down on my pages, and then I move to the back porch in the afternoon. In between, I do the morning dishes, run a load or two of laundry, sweep the floor and take out the trash. I type (I'm polishing a novel for submission, ever hopeful) and I ride the stationary bike while watching the weather channel, or take a walk around the neighborhood and say hello to neighbors I know.

What am I reading? Oh, this and that. Many very good things. I recently finished a collection of short stories sent to me by a friend, N. West Moss. She wanted me to take a look at them, see what I thought. Her book is called "The Subway Stops at Bryant Park," and it'll be released late this spring by Leapfrog Press. Pop quiz: did

you ever read something aloud, a poem or a story or part of a novel, because you couldn't help yourself? Chase down someone else in your family and say "Hey, got a minute? Check this out." Maybe we don't do this as much anymore, not like we used to. There are so many memes and vines and tiny snippets of emotion that can be passed from one of us to another without actually impacting our time that this is what we imagine counts as communicating nowadays. It's desperately insufficient, but all we know. We think we're busy, impatient and full, but we're actually looking for that ineffable device to make us feel satisfied again. Well, you're not going to find it on *snipchat* or *snaphit* or inga-natz or any other desperate-to-be-meaningful blip on the technical horizon. Sorry, folks. You have to look at the painting or the sculpture. You have to look in a book, read all the words. Like this one. Try reading it aloud. Share it.

When I was little, we kids had no control over the music in our house. There were no CDs or downloads or music streaming services. Dad and Mom turned on the hi-fi in the morning before school, and it was either tuned to WNCN or WQXR, the two classical stations broadcasting out of New York City all the way to the bedroom community of my youth. Same again when we returned home. Mellifluous male voices introduced J S Bach's Motet *Jesu, Meine Freude* or *Le Tombeau de Couperin* by Ravel or, or, or. In spite of ourselves and the Beatles (or perhaps because of them) my sisters and I became...competent in our knowledge of orchestral music. Sure, sure, we preferred Saint-Saen's *Carnival of the Animals* or however you pronounce the name of the guy who composed *Peter and the Wolf*, but we knew Faure's *Requiem* when we heard it and we also knew *Also Sprach Zarathustra* and *Eine Kleine Nachtmusik*. They stuck with us. And so my longwinded point is that I was stunned and pleased to have this visceral connection with West Moss. Her dad, you see, was one of those voices on our classical radio. It was her dad introducing me to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. Or even better, to the Leningrad Philharmonic Orchestra's version of his *Festival Overture*, or, as we like to call it in our house, the "fireworks song." As the son of a teacher, I love "I remember your dad" moments.

Some of Moss's stories find strong purchase in the bedrock of her own childhood, which feels like it was in a place much like my own, only a city instead of a 'burb. Funny how you can think that the height of buildings or the mode of travel make the difference in your lifestyle. It's actually about time, and the neighborhood, and *who are your people, and what did you do together?* Moss sees things we're sup-

continued on page 14

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CAUTION

Consider yourself ad hominem

"ZOOM"

by N. J. Burns

Thirty two year old organic chemist, Robert Zander, better known as Bobby, was pulling a late at his newly rented garage lock-up; it was actually two garages and Bobby has plans to knock them into one singular space. Bobby had paid the lock-up owner a fair price: eight thousand dollars for a year's rental. Once the owner, a fat schmuck named Joe saw the green bills coming up for air, he spat-tered, "Sss...su...surre, thing, buddy. Wow!" He could not contain his voluble excitement, "A whole eight gees!" He looked at Bobby swiftly and then back to the thick-wad, "Yeah buddy, the garages are yours! Just put them back the way you found them." He walked away through the lot combing through the leaf of bills happily dizzy - as ephemeral as this feeling would last - that he had gotten lucky that night, and later he would get lucky too, down at Madam Ming's Little Whore House on Seven and Third with that little whore, Elena. The twenty year old

Eastern European with thighs as tight and supple as the skin on God damn fresh American peaches; as Joe often fantasized about her during days of stagnation, he thrut his bango and played his pulsating meat song. Although the thing about Joe Schmuck was that he drank too much beer at McRafferty's bar and was known by the hookers at Madam Ming's as 'Soft-as-a-Rope Joe,' and how they tittered together in sisterhood and mirth when they talked about their regulars during their morning coffee, before the midday stragglers started to appear in the lobby with half-nervous incongruity and red-blooded anticipated excitement. Elena with her little angel-soft-as-sin, puckered, cute virgin mouth, laughed too, she hated Joe Schmuck who was a stranger to daily bathing, but he paid upfront which was the most important thing in such a business transaction: to the whores, money talked, paying men mattered, men with wood or men without wood.

During these morning meetings, Elena laughed nervously and her little bee-stung tits sat, for the time being, unmolested by Joe Schmuck's wandering grope, in her coral-pink crop-top, denim-blue hot pants and tired looking leopard print flats; the flats would be changed for something with a heel on it which would give Elena some height which she so badly needed.

*

Bobby Zander set to work later that first night at the lockup wearing a C.S.I.-inspired boiler-suit, his breathing apparatus consisting of a solitary dusk-mask; and he began by sledging down the internal concrete blocks wall between the two garages; luckily he had the one on the end so any homeless guy(s) residing in another lockup wouldn't be disturbed by tumbling blocks. He sweated profusely as clouds of thick dust curled sluggishly through the night air up through his suit and through to his mask and filled his nostrils with a harsh tang. After an hour of hard work he went coughing and spluttering outside to the warm Californian night to wash his mouth out with cherry Kool-Aid. He looked down far below at the roaring beams of light, how they strayed along



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Pasadena as Friday night kidults raced along the interstate towards their hedonistic adventure(s). This was the energy-drink generation, he thought, and the live-all, don't give a damn-all generation.

America was quickly becoming a Western bucket of Krunk-juice with no rationality; this was the era of endless choice and no meat and potatoes: the twenty first century where anything goes and morality a swinging saloon-door of irrationality. Swirling the last of the tart Kool-Aid he tipped the bottle to his mouth and again trying to catch any rogue dust motes in his mouth, rinsing again and, gathering the wet-glob into a nebulous sphere, sent a jet out between his teeth which hit the dust of a curb-side and curled up into a wetted dust-ball and no more represented its former liquid state.

*

Bobby was making space for his new chemistry lab where he would begin a secret project which he had privately incubated for a few years; it was a secret idea and one which would raise all sorts of moral questions. He was going to design and build a vehicle, an automobile, but not just *any* automobile, oh no. *His* creation was going to be made

entirely out of organic material and here is the crutch of the matter: it would be a conscious entity, a living thing. Often in bed at night his synapses quickly zipped along their neuron pathways due to the pluses of excited thoughts of the endless possibilities - this really was a new era of scientific endeavor, more important than the Mars landings. The car would be made-up of organic semi-conductor parts which work together in a symbiotic relationship and become one; he would name it the Arius I. Around seven am, with the sun a shifting furnace rising in the skyline, Bobby left the lockup and went home, had a shower and latterly strimmed the edges of his shaded cool lawn; and how the grass gurgled into the strimmer's whipping plastic-line and sprayed out a thick green loaming juice; the strimmer throbbed pleasingly in his hand. Bobby was very precious of his lawn, he tended it neatly as the local minister, a Father Fitzpatrick, tended to his flock of old dears who were rich and whom resided at the Sea of Tranquility Retirement Home in Sun Valley. Father Fitzpatrick, a balding fifty something, was a very vain man and was constantly in the secret hope that

one old dear would leave him her squirreled away millions and he could live a life in endless ecstasy, travelling the world and squander his, their heart-felt dollars, on banal items and on piffling sexual adventures with whomever he could assail with hard, easy cash.

*

Bobby owned a keen-eye for detail and he was known by his nosey neighbors to be on his lawn very early in the morning, walking up and down it and shooting quick, furtive glances at anything which resembled an unruly encroachment of stray weeds. If he discovered any, he blasted those mothers with an assortment of chemical sprays; latterly they withered to pathetic looking ganglia. Thereafter with his nature-encouraging reverence, and dedication, his lawn was verdant, lush and rolled-out like a spiky lavish tongue of horticultural decadence in Hydrangea Heights, Riverdale California. His home. Bobby Zander had a knack of taking nature and turning it up to eleven and further until nature pulsed, rocked it and writhed in a controlled, delightful wildness.

*

Bobby picked up his Dictaphone, checking to see if the lithium cell-

**"Who gave these idiots
microphones?"**
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pack was in correctly; he switched it on, a green LED became illuminated which indicated it was working. He cleared his throat, "One, two one two, testing. Testing." Rewound and played back, his voice sounded strange to him, he smiled to himself coyly. He coughed and continued, "It is Monday the 23rd of June 2024, and I, Dr Robert Zander, am currently standing in my new laboratory at the first stage of growing organic material for my project." He stopped a moment to consider the enormity of what he was saying; he breathed and continued, bringing the Dictaphone closer to his mouth to be as clear and concise as possible, "one may find this one day and comprehend that this kind of *new* scientific engineering could be very important for the future of the planet and for the future of the human race. My project will see the non-proliferation of harmful engine emissions reduce to a minimum. My project, the Arius 1, is the first of its kind, it is an Organic Mobile Autonomous Vehicle and here is the crux: it is a living, conscious entity." He waited a second before continuing, "think of this – interacting with your vehicle as you do with any of your

friends, family, partners, and they will respond in a loving, enthusiastic manner as is the want of your kith and kin. Electric style cars are fine but they are still in the hands of man, what if your vehicle is alive and has your best interests at heart? These are exciting times. Things in the auto-industry will never be the same again."

Bobby Zander then returned to his work.

*

"If I grow the cornea in this nutrient bath I can grown a large enough film, for a sheet to use as a window and, yes, and as there are no blood vessels in the mammalian cornea, this will be a clean, efficient process – hopefully." He said this out loud as he recorded his data-logs onto the video-log he'd set up to record himself at work. Two weeks later he recorded this entry, "The wind-screen is a thin-membrane of eye and the 'seeing-eye' of the OMAV." After a week the thin-membrane grew encouragingly; he worked quickly. He tapered the end of the large, now blinking cornea with a scalpel; he was going to be sure that the car could see, but see a restrictive 180 degrees.

*

He worked in his lock-up and grew

tissue far into the night for months. He grew cartilage and human organs for his car the technology had moved on from Stem Cell research to something more tangible - Bobby had created a structure, a scaffold to grow Collagen fiber bone cells, called Osteblast which would form into fully formed bone. The engine was a consciousness which Bobby developed on the computer at work and he had invented a stomach-like engine which he would fill with vitamins, nutriment and it looked like a pinky-purple looking slurry which would keep the Arius I alive.

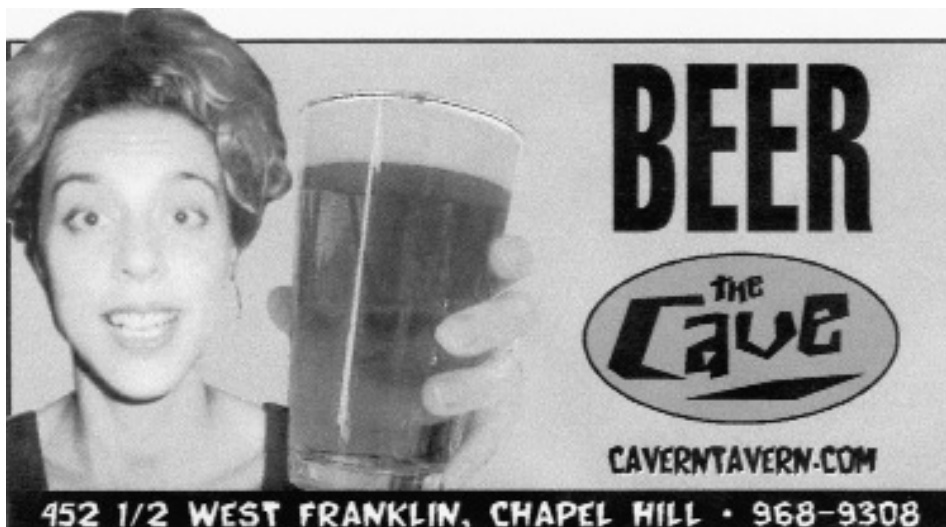
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Finally, after eight months of laborious hard work, with many trials and errors, the Arius I was born.

*

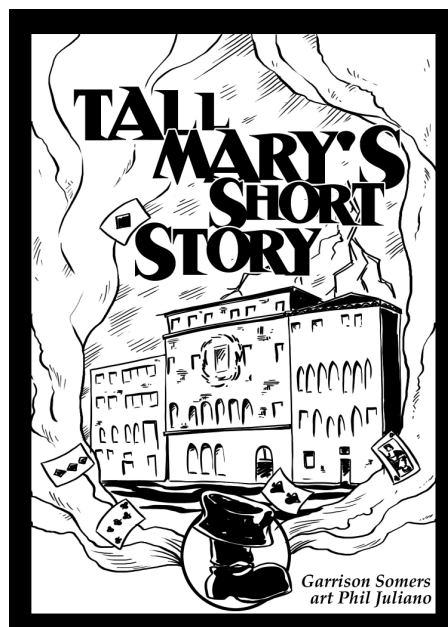
Soon thereafter, as he was driving home his cell-phone rang; it was Mike McCall, a former heart surgeon originally from Virginia, now retired and living in Bakersfield California. "Hey, Bobby," he said, "Yo Mike," Bobby replied. "Bobby! I am having a gathering of peo-

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ple for a night of defilement up at my place - interested?" Bobby thought that he could do with one night out and knew Mike rather well from the time when he was a young student and Mike was his mentor at Medical College. "What the hell, Mike, I need some R&R, why the heck not?" Mike whistled, "Woo-wee, what night I will lay on, Bob, booze, drugs and women of loose morality: any course you wish, amuse-bouche, main course or dessert, you decide."

*

Later in the evening at the party who should arrive, but Father Fitzpatrick with three lusty young whores in tow and a large bag of Ket and proceeded to draw-up lines of powder along the edge of McCall's fifty thousand dollar cooker and began drawing up the crystal powder and how it twinkled under the kitchen lights. His nose was daubed with the remnants of the crush-line he had snorted. He blinked after the white nodules of the Ketamine started to dissolve into his blood-stream and enamoured him to a drug-induced, psychosis whereupon he frothed at the mouth, laughed maniacally and chased the three giggling women around the kitchen. He gradually sat down to collect his randy thoughts and looked at Bobby; as he did he lifted a small baggy out of his trouser pocket, more Ket. "Dr Zander, I presume?" Father Fitzpatrick's eyes were roving spheres of entrenched madness. He continued, "Why not have a little line?" Bobby slowly agreed by nodding his head; he had never done Ket before and this was a party and he was privately celebrating anyway. Why the hell not? Father Fitzpatrick prepared a thin

little crystal-hedge of unconformity and Bobby stood over his quarry and hoovered it up and after a minute he felt his heart beat faster, and he and the priest chatted excitedly about the possibilities of the future and their lives over the next few hours as people came and went and music pulsated out into the Californian night. McCall was in and out of the kitchen intermittently but latterly found himself on his couch looking down the top of one of the young hookers called Kristi Robertson, a bubbly blonde with low self-esteem but with rather big tits which left McCall effervescent - mammary love to his egregious Freudian tastes.

*

Later Mike stumbled into the kitchen so drunk he poured his beer over himself and asked Bobby to help him light "A big God damn bonfire so they can see for miles around," his outdoor coat ripped and flaying as was his alcohol-addled mind. Bobby said, "Where's the gasoline?" Mike whooped, "Woo-wee, right here in the God damn garage," and waved Bobby on through the side-door which led to the garage where a beautiful yellow Corvette sat unloved for some inconsiderable amount of time; Bobby did not say a word but ran his hand along the form of the car's body. The lines, they did something to him. It, the car, was smooth, silkily sexy and he grew an erection but did not let on to McCall who was swaying drunkenly in the flickering garage light with a Zippo lighter in his hand. Soon an orange flame wavered on crinkled paper and a bonfire took hold and they danced around it like the deranged cavemen they had reverted back to.

*

Bobby left the party at five o'clock in the morning high on ketamine, went home and took out Ari, and they drove together like young lovers through the developing morning light, past Owens Lake, descending down towards Death Valley; soon he was hitting sixty, then eighty and humming her up to a clean, ever quickening, one hundred miles an hour. 'Smooth,' Bobby said as he caressed the steer wheeling, his penis was erect and throbbing, the car responded and she moaned in unrelenting pleasure. "Mmmmmm," she purred. Bobby said, "Ari?" She responded soothingly, "Yesss, Bobbyyy?" He said, "Ari, I'd like you to tune into Cali-Digital 106 FM." She responded immediately and he was happy to hear Guns 'n' Roses' *Paradise City* beginning, he pressed the volume control all the way up. The Californian night started to slip away and there were pinks, oranges, blues and weak flushes of purples which began to break into the morning presentation. This was going to be another scorcher; Axel Rose's voice trebled and Slash's frenetic guitar playing reverberated and escaped through Ari's now open window. Bobby flew along the interstate and headed towards Death Valley. Putting his foot upon the accelerator he pressed down and the car moved forward easily. He gunned the, her, the Arius I, car and it, she, moaned in gratifica-

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tion in response to his direction; he just knew he had to call her "Ari," from now on. Changing the gears the car's pleasure increased with each daub of the pedal "Ohhh, mmmmmmm," she purred as Bobby headed her out of Los Angeles and down the coast to Anaheim.

*

He drove her deep into the desert and past an old US Army facility which was once used as a training location for chemical weapon attack and fallout techniques but that was in the 1950s and the place had long since fell into crumbling disrepair and prongs of rusted metal barbed various concrete pillars. One concrete bunker sat low, sunk into the dry-bed and just then Bobby's right foot slipped and he pushed the accelerator harder with his left foot and the car hit one side of the barrier and was sent spinning round and round and crashed into a decimated concrete bunker where it came to rest. The sun just about managed to flicker and beat intensely down upon the mangled wreck of crushed bone and twisted

cartilage. The car, *her*, Ari; she wept and wept and the crying, as unsettling as it was, was heard by a solitary eagle which, swooping low over the oxyacetylene lamp of heat that was the valley now as the sun was high in the morning sky, heard this wailing and it, the eagle, swept up and away into the panop-

tic. And she latterly died with Bobby; his body, still at the wheel, the two of them, finally merged together in the severe heat of the Californian sun. ❖

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@blotterra.com

In addition to stealthily tracking your exercise habits, how much you traverse the planet in your daily awake-state, a fit-bit - one of those expensive first-world tech-toys that also passes as a watch - will track your sleep habits. This is somewhat intriguing to me, because I am a restless sleeper in the extreme. I toss and turn like a dervish on crack and frankly it is only slightly short of miraculous that I accumulate enough time in one position while unconscious to enter REM state and dream at all. And we actually spend time talking about sleep-restlessness: myself and those people that I still have idle chit-chat with. "Oh, I had fourteen minutes of restless sleep last night - that's why I'm a little under the weather today." Really? That's terrifying!

The fit-bit permits the peeling back of one more layer of one's personal life to friends and acquaintances. Bags under the eyes are now validated by technology. We don't have to talk about the dreams, or the feelings we have about ourselves, just the actual mechanics of it. Or if you want, you can tweet this directly to the twitterverse, further eliminating the need for conversation. Not sure this is our goal, but there it is, if you want. What was I doing last night that made sleep so difficult? What did I dream about? Not part of the equation. And would that I could have fit-bit capture the images behind my eyelids for posterity, post them to Facebook for me.

Ah, bliss.

Total Recall - cyberspace



OK. We were sitting around with some time on our hands (not always a good idea) when we came up with:

The New Blotter Dictionary

And, yes, we're a little ashamed...

Telescopic – A sketch by an artist listening to a drunk describing *them* instead of the suspect.

Discussion – Talking for a whole hour with your grandmother without using a single bad word.

Cliches – All those hipster tee-shirts with the beret-wearing revolutionary on them.

Inevitable – The odds that Juan Peron's wife was also corrupt.

Exuberance – When the cabbie is so glad he actually found your destination.

Electricity – The sneaky code word that mayoral candidates use.

Persuasive – How cats get us to feed them but never do anything for us.

Utilities - Devices that seem to work for everyone except me.

Indigent – An elderly man in a suit panhandling for train fare.

Embarrassed – When you're propped on a stool sipping a beer and flashing plumber butt.

Wizard – One of those reptiles that pees on your hand when you pick it up.

Midwifery - The study of second strikes.

Einstein – How to correctly order beer in Germany.

Versatile – Rhyming graffiti on a bathroom wall.

Outrage – Being especially frustrated when your friend tells your parents that you are gay.

Expensive – When you think a lot about your old girlfriend.

Jello – That famous singer's nickname, in Australia.

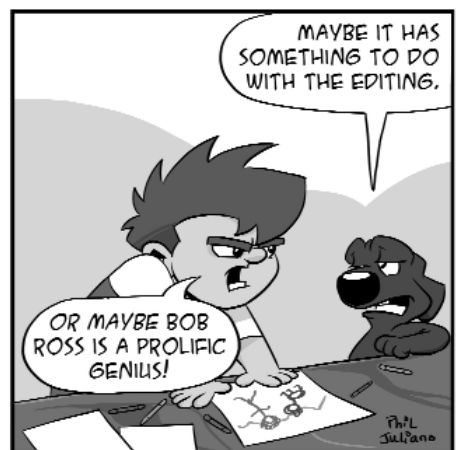
Authoritarian – The writer who insists he's allowed to put two spaces after a period, no matter what.

"A Man Walking Towards a Tree is Also Walking Back in Time"

In different places also we meet with venerable oaks, that have seen some centuries pass over their heads, and yet flourish in a green old age. It would be easy to point out some of extraordinary dimensions and beauty, which are perfectly sound, while the fantastic forms and umbrageous tops of others, with their hearts quite decayed, read many a moral and impressive lesson, which the mind of sensibility may easily apply.

William Fordyce Mayor. New Description of Blenheim, (1789).

These oaks would yet unhide
The moon from its veil of cloud
May easily bind
To relate the all too much they seem to know
Of astrological data to the mind
of sensibility and find, suddenly there
A girl, sitting beneath the shade
Of an oak tree
As old as a rose's stare
Eating an apple and reading



two by Rehan Qayoom

"The Path of Memory"

After Faiz.

If the path of memory on which you've been walking
For an age at the same pace comes to an end
Walk on a few steps further till you reach
The crossroads of the wastes of negligence
Beyond which there is neither an I nor you
And the field of vision holds its breath for who knows when
You might retreat, transcend, or turn around to look

Though the eyes know this is all a lie
If ever again we do see eye to eye
Some other path will branch out from that point on
And hand in hand we will begin the journey
In the shadows of your tresses to the movement of your arms

The other thing is also sorcery for the heart knows
There is no turning no desert no spell
Veiled in which my months can pass
If the path of life runs with your thoughts - All is well
If you do not turn round to look it doesn't matter

"Demonstration"

Ten thousand people wearing
bright green lampshades
conga across the brownbrick face
of Pioneer Square

One is building the Iron Man suit
out of sustainable parts, another
raising funds to buy sweaters
for dogs in need

A man with a beard and megaphone
asks, What's our superpower?!

a bus squeaks by, people
with doughnut breath aim their phones

and then, as though by
unspoken signal, they all
throw their lampshades into the sky
and the lampshades turn into birds,

son of a gun
if they don't for real
turn into birds

and scatter to the bright green winds

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"Walking the Path"

Night has risen around a heavy opal moon
kicked from the earth's flank forty
eons ago yesterday,
give or take

Walking under a tunnel of branches,
my feet sink into spongelike
ground that answers in murmurs
of the bodies in which it
once dwelt - this step formerly

a Domino's pizza, that a discarded
draft of Origin of Species and
the third crumbling footprint

beside the hollow tree
back there an authentic ball

from Custer's hip

Friendship, loyalty, nostalgia; and the joy and healing power of music...

A Southern college town and its thriving local music scene,
where the music's neither "sacred" nor "profane" so long as it's
good...

A lost tape of a beloved band's legendary show...

A record label, poised to break big, which certain people want
to be part of - by any means necessary...

Two visitors, whose own music has been muted by regrets over
long-ago bad decisions: Chuck McDonough, former grad student,
who skipped town after learning things about himself he couldn't
face; and Penny Froward, whose attempt to help a friend in
danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

A mysterious will by an unknown hand; and murder...

Blotter Books presents:

All Tomorrow's Parties

by Marty Smith

(publisher & book reviewer, "The Blotter Magazine;" contributor to the "Urban
Hiker;" former host of "New Frontiers" and "Laugh Tracks" on WXDU - FM,
Duke University Radio)

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posed to see, I think, and she has the gift (of course a gift well-honed, as sharp as a teenager's tongue) of being able to gently and softly describe to you what she's witnessing without making you feel foolish that you didn't see it yourself. Even though we might, if we were together in the same room eating bowls of chili and drinking port wine out of jelly glasses get loud about that very thing.

Remember when it was like this? Remember? God, that was crazy.... But it's not all pastel-shaded memory about candy flavors you can't find anymore, even with all the powers inherent in the smart phones of our lives. There are also the moments where we shiver just a little to see ourselves in a future not as comfortable as we've planned. But I guess we all know that, don't we? Of course, we've all grown up now, the world we loved as children (and hated, but the hate is a cloud that steadily dissipates if we're lucky, while the love is a polished bauble on our mantel) is no longer there. That in itself can be sad, might precariously sink into maudlin. But, somehow, Moss avoids those pitfalls. She can tell us about growing old without pushing us into that rut we reserve for despair. Or she can reveal the sting of youth that we've (lucky, lucky) forgotten.

I find that many New York yarns get caught up in the *New Yorkiness* of their existence. It's hard not to – I mean, it's a helluva town, the Bronx is up and so on. How do you avoid that? Like if I hadn't worked and lived in the City I wouldn't be able to tell you what I think. You have to understand how the traffic runs and how the subways smell, and *what about those rats?* and the frankly incredible height of buildings and how mean everyone is. Oh, crap on that. People are mostly the same, everywhere, and New Yorkers no more or less. (Except the New York firemen. They're pretty incredible. Just saying.) What I mean is I don't know the answer to this one. I guess you keep your stories about people, not so much the places or events. True people.

But is it factual? Actual non-fiction? Oh, for god's sake, give me a break. Whether you like it or not – whether you believe it or not - truth is that thing that, when you see it, it sees you right back. So my answer is I don't know and I don't care. The people in Moss's stories have one thing in common: they have her as their observer, with her penchant for finding the almost whispery goodness in the weaving of the yarn. There is no unsolicited fanfare, no parade with a brass band, no narcissism of narrative. Just competent word-choice, her eyes looking in the right direction at the correct moment. It doesn't hurt to have acute peripheral vision as Moss does, for the image, the detail we would miss without her there as our guide. But mostly it's about folks. Just people. Could be anywhere, but happens to be about downtown, the stop just after this one.

Here's what I know: I like to daydream that I am that man who wakes up every day to go and sweep up the loose sycamore leaves from the walkways in a New York park, to watch over the shoulders of the speed-chess aficionados, to eat a leftover half of a Reuben and drink a Dr. Brown's Cream Soda and listen to a pretty good string quartet playing Mozart's *night music*. Such longing feels the same way to me that "working" a salt water farm in Maine did (oh, hell, was that thirty-five years ago?) when I read about E. B. White's life after penning at The New Yorker and Harpers magazines. How do you get that gig? I ask myself, not quite realizing that sitting here right now and typing to you is,

sort of, *that gig*. Is West Moss sitting at her desk thinking that very thing? I don't know. But her stories smack of the calm review of a life, a satisfied fondness for everything in her memory - even for the vaguely painful, the cracked-but-not-shattered. We all wish we could look back like that.

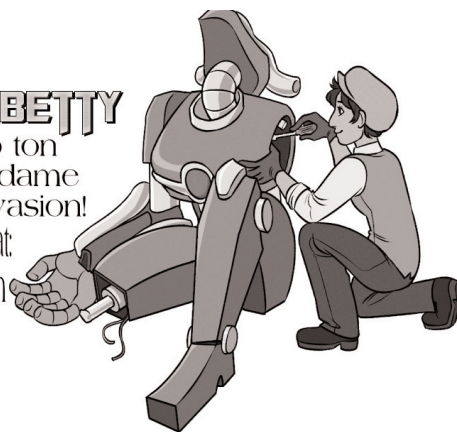
By the by, my oldest has stolen my ARC of West's book, and is reading it herself. This on top of all her schoolwork, her AP Lit reading, her daily descending into the morass of news for her Government class. That's got to be a good sign, right?

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CONTRIBUTORS:

N. J. Burns writes, "I am a thirty seven year old Irishman living in Scotland, and I am a big fan of the work of J.G.Ballard (*Empire of the Sun*, *Crash* and *The Drought*). I have been published in *The London Magazine*, *The Rialto* and *The North* magazines (all based in England)."

Rehan Qayoom is a poet of English and Urdu, editor, translator and archivist, educated at Birkbeck College, University of London. He has featured in numerous literary publications and performed his work internationally. He is the author of *About Time* and other books.

Dan Wiencek of Portland, OR writes, "I studied writing at Purdue University and publish reviews and short essays online as well as poetry; my work has recently appeared in *Hypertrophic Literary* and *Crack the Spine*. For the last decade I have made my living writing for a luxury travel company. I have walked in the same pair of shoes on the pyramids, the Taj Mahal, the Serengeti and the Great Wall of China. There is probably a poem in that, come to think of it. The past year has found me rediscovering my love of poetry and the attached work is the partial result."

Phil Juliano of Bloomington, MN, is a good Blotterfriend. Follow his adventures on philjulianoillustration.com and purchase his new book at <http://bestinshowcomics.bigcartel.com/>.

The Blotter Magazine thanks all you
salty ~~bastards~~ for supporting us over the
years. OK, get back to work!

