

*Welcome to the dark, moist underbelly of summer,
with Jesse R. Stowe, Dustin Hyman, KC Snow,
Phil Juliano, and The Dream Journal*

The Blotter

August 2017

MAGAZINE



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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

[c l m p]

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"The Head Librarian"

Not a big boy, not a bully because he was larger or older or stronger than other boys. Dark hair, untrimmed. Underwashed, but not grimy. Rather, dusty. like a child gets when playing in the attic. Deep-set eyes, bruised looking. A bully - thick of mind, surly and bored - that used to choose me out of all of the classrooms full of boys to be the target of his ire. I was the teacher's kid. So, of course.

I was running home from school. I remember that I used to time myself, out the back door from school, across the yard and down the hill path through the woods. If I left early, I could be first to the crossing guard and then run all the way home. But sometimes I was behind, and then he and his...minions would be in front of me.

It wasn't always a problem every day, I guess, because they liked to stop at the pizza place. Mary's. I'd stayed after school for something, and was way behind the school crowd going home. Everything seemed OK. You know how you sometimes just have a feeling in your gut that things are alright, and you can relax, while other times there's a sense of something just beyond the horizon, looming? It was that kind of day, a sunny afternoon with nothing but promise ahead, so I was just walking, looking around, on my own. I was so into my own world that I didn't even suspect any trouble when I reached the pizza place, only thinking that it smelled terrific and how great it would have been to just open the door and stand in line and buy a slice to eat the rest of the walk home.

I should have known better than to glance in the front window of the pizzeria. I'd made it my practice never to do it, because there were other people there sometimes, older boys in middle school who hung out in the afternoon who sometimes picked on younger kids because no matter what they were doing a little kid was the most interesting thing to mess with in. I didn't catch him looking at me, making a decision to stop whatever he was doing and come outside. I was past the pizza place when they pushed open the door and swaggered outside, behind me.

And I don't know why they chose to say something first, call me a name, announce themselves, rather than just grabbing me and thumping. I turned and felt the blood rush from my head, a whistling in my ears, my legs going wobbly. This was before I ever learned to curse or I would probably have said something - holy shit! - and then wasted time looking for a reaction from them. I hadn't yet learned the words "run like hell."

Instead I rabbited. Like something was on fire behind me. They took up the chase, immediately and so close I swear I could smell

the sour of their bad breath. All these years later, I have a picture in my head of them, with dirty blue jeans and worn out work boots and tee shirts with the necks pulled out. Short hair sticking up, not lying flat against their heads. But I can't see their faces in my mind. Only frowns. Always frowning. It must have been lousy to always be frowning when you're a kid.

At the playing fields right next to the pizza place, I turned, all tactics and no strategy, skidding in the dirt and gravel, and scampering down into the grass in order to give myself the most space to run. A bad idea. They fanned out behind me, like Zeroes chasing a P-40. I thought I was fast enough to get away. I thought that fear, being afraid of being beaten up, gave me an edge.

I look in the mirror every morning. Older and heavier than that whipcord-thin ten or eleven year old boy who ran from bullies, my face scuffed with a weekend's growth of beard, but he's still there; threads in the fabric and weave of me. I am...fortunate that I can look back on such things without remorse or regret, able see them as they were, moments in the past and not nightmares that repeated and reopened old scars. Frankly, it is amazing that thinking about it now, as a story to share and not as a scar is *my thing*.

And then what happened?

He caught up to me, and tried to punch me. I didn't see it, but I knew it was coming. He couldn't be patient and wait for me to do something wrong so he could catch me, hold me down. We were running full tilt towards the middle school gymnasium across the playing fields. Maybe because of that it just wasn't a good punch; a roundhouse thrown wild, his fist grazing along my scalp and tugging the hair on the back of my head. It jostled me forward. For a moment, I was afraid, certain I was going to fall down, and if I know these many years later that if I had they would be on me, not troubled that I was already hurt from the fall.

Falling, it would be like one of those nature programs on TV where the lions or hyenas are stalking wildebeest, and they close in and then the narrator begins to warn the viewer that, sorry, folks, it sure looks bad for the wildebeest but hey, after all, that's nature - the great big ellipse of life. And then the claws reach out or the teeth chomp and the cameras prudently cut away to a commercial.

But actually getting hit, well, it made me mad (along with afraid and tired and, and and...) Somehow, I got my feet under me again, without stumbling, without slowing down. And in the back of my mind, which was still thinking - as opposed to everything else about me which was trying to run, fast, and keep breathing and balance

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Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re. same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

Days are gone, forever

"Glass Eyes"

by Jesse R. Stowe

Hey, it's me. I just got off the train.

My feet are heavy, more than they have ever been. I look at my boots and my imagination makes them look like cartoon anvils. Each stride is drawn out and forced. I struggle to accept that each step leads me further away from her.

The path leads down a dry mountain trail of mostly rocks and dirt. I try to name the few types of flowers scattered about haphazardly. But I do not recognize any of them. I seek something common, flixweed, sowthistle, horseweed but the plant life is alien. I look around at the landscape. This is no path I have taken before. I realize I am the stranger.

I am the exotic life. A hibiscus in the tundra. A mango tree in a deciduous forest. I am displaced. A seed floating on the wind seeking a proper home.

And I am wondering. Should

I turn around?

I am walking to the west where the path trails off. The sun was overhead, but it is creeping into my sight. I hope I reach a destination point before nightfall but I follow this path blindly, through the dry bush. I don't know where it leads. And honestly, I don't really care.

No great drama.

The morning started this way. But Jaslene and I had been there many times before. This time, it carried over from the night before when we were both frustrated from dinner on. That's what I said as we sat down in our breakfast nook. I was upset that we didn't go out to eat. I wanted to try that new whole foods bistro. I had been talking about it for weeks. Jaslene just wanted to stay home. She had a long day of dealing with assholes and the last thing she wanted to do was be at an opening of a restau-

rant. I said it could be fun. We could make fun of the other people the way we used to. She said, "I don't want to go out." She had a tone, or so I thought. I shut down, or so she thought. **Message coming in. The oh-so-smug.**

We have carried this burden for years. The connection between our wants was broken. The willingness to feed each other's desires had perished. We were no longer partners but luncheon friends, afraid to sit alone at the diner counter while our contemporaries arrived in packs, sat in pairs, and filled up booths. The security in seeing each other was there but frustration lied within the core. Our relationship did not have the layers it once did. She needed a lover who devoured her flesh, a romantic who savored every bite, and a playmate who reminded her there was more to the meal than just eating. I needed her to see me as more than a bowl of unseasoned,

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...

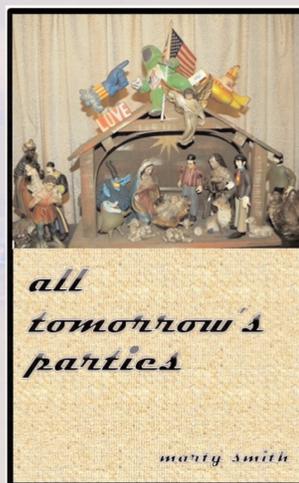
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All Tomorrow's Parties

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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naked noodles. I was a potential dish of many flavors but our burden was a disconnection of effort. She said that she couldn't remember the last time we weren't carrying it.

"Happiness is an individual state," I said before I took a bite of my toast.

"But marriage is a shared experience," she said, warming her hands with her coffee mug. "It is its own entity and if it is struggling at its essence something has to be done. The happiness of one does not equal happiness within the union."

I don't believe she understood what I was getting at. "Each of us has to find our own happiness. That is what we bring to the marriage. You can't love unless you love yourself."

"That's the problem. You love yourself and you want more than anything else."

I hated that she thought that. "I'm trying to find that confident, dreaming man you once loved and I need to be secure in myself. If I have to do for my own to get him back . . ." I rubbed my forehead and had trouble focusing my eyes on anything. I knew that wasn't what I meant as soon as it came out.

I caught glimpse of her watching me. She looked like a judge on her bench and I felt guilty, of all charges, although I did not know what I was accused of.

She brought her cup to her lips. She did not drink from it but held it near her mouth. "That's the problem. We need to move forward and not seek what was once there." She took a satisfying sip.

I looked out the window to the backyard. We were lucky. Our yard was beautiful. She and I both shared love for it. We cared for it like others cared for their children. We watched our trees and flowers grow. She taught me to love annuals and appreciate their lifecycle, so brief. She loved the chance to begin anew each year.

"I can stay with what I love, or I can reinvent the wheel," Jaslene explained to me one spring morning as she dug in her flower bed.

I said, "That's not typically meant to be a good thing."

"It's better than saying 'test the waters.' That sounds like I don't appreciate what I have. I love my flowers, but sometimes I need change. And that urge is satisfied through landscaping."

I shared my love of trees with her. "If the situation is ideal, they can root down for a very long time. My Japanese Maples can live up to a hundred years. My Northern Red Oak, up to four hundred years," I said. "Imagine if we could see hundreds of years of history. The way we viewed life would be so different."

She said, "Trees are easy to care for. Once they have a footing, or rooting, they can survive almost anything."

"No. You have to prune trees and feed them and the peach trees are sensitive. The weather, bugs, pollution, and any number of other things can affect them. If you want good production you have to help them. I trim them every year, and protect them from frost. I work with them so they work with me."

"You are so fucking cute," she said. **I feel this love to the core.**

I turned from the window and looked at her. But her eyes no longer said I was so fucking cute. I couldn't remember the last time our eyes spoke sweetly to each other.

She took a sip of her coffee. I knew she had something to say and

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was figuring out how to say it. The lines in her face told me so. I turned back towards the window, not to look outside but to reflect on a memory I had found myself clinging to lately.

We had a friend, named HF. Jaslene always said, "Give him another name. People can't understand it. All you have to do is call him Tim." But Tim never sounded right. I tried Eric, Tom, Dick, Hef, but I never liked any. HF was his own individual. He was unique, an original thought. It was the only name that fit.

We met HF when we first moved to The City. He was transient but we repeatedly saw him when we went to Sunset Park near our new house. Jaslene spoke to him first. I stood at a distance watching, pretending to stretch. She laughed easily and reminded me why I love her. Life was simple and she feared very little. She sought growth from experience and it showed. On the other hand, HF stood like a poorly planned statue with one heavy, unbalanced side. I thought he was going to collapse at any given moment.

Jaslene finished her conversa-

tion, placed a hand on his shoulder and turned to look in my direction. I pretended not to see.

"He said he is living discarded art, thrown away by bourgeois America. The disposable middle-class," she said with excitement while walking home.

"Wow. Really?" I could not have been less interested.

She knew I was slightly jealous but she continued. "People used him like a razor. His words. The company he worked for. His wife. He knew when he was dull they planned on discarding him. But he left first. He gave up the life that he had become part of. Just left."

"Maybe it wasn't his choice," I suggested.

"You're so skeptical of people," she continued at dinner while playing with the cheesy broccoli rice neither of us liked. "He saw the injustices in the world and he did not want to be part of it."

"Or maybe he's a pedophile," I said before I took another bite. I was tired of hearing about HF and I hated the rice.

Eventually I found myself part of Jaslene and HF's conversations. He seemed to be a smart man. I could tell he knew I was skeptical,

but I think he appreciated me for it. "Protective," he blurted one time when no one was speaking. Jaslene laughed.

"Where did that come from?" she asked as we stood near the edge of the small woods on the east side of the park. HF and I looked at each other. He knew I understood.

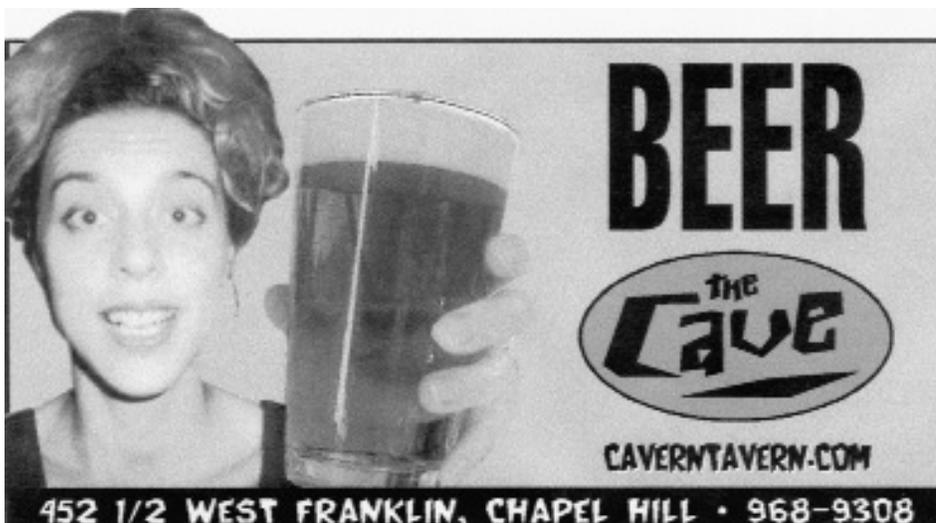
We invited him for dinner one night after a rainy week. Jaslene made soup beans and cornbread. Although when she tells the story, we served Brenebon and rice. We ate, drank beer and got high. I was on board with our HF friendship.

I was buzzed when HF and I stood outside on the front porch smoking cigarettes. He had just finished mentioning how the rain is more difficult to deal with than the cold.

"You just can't get out of it. Once your things are wet, it takes a sunny day to dry them out," he told me.

"We have a dryer," I said. "And if you ever need a place to squat for a second, we have a big backyard. You would be more than welcome to use it."

Jaslene had just stepped outside when the words came out of my mouth. She couldn't believe I said them out loud. She knew I had been thinking it because she could read me, but she never thought I would say anything. But I was in a new city, living a new life; I wanted to do something that



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was out of character for me. It just so happened I picked the wrong moment, during the **glassy eyed light of day**.

HF moved into our backyard and soon two months had passed. He had completely settled in, building a little nest with a cover and storage system that seemed to have different items in it weekly. The worst part was that he had created his own toilet area. Most of the time he was discreet but one day, Jaslene looked out and saw him shitting. "He needs to fucking move out of our backyard," she said to me as soon as I got home. I agreed but I laughed to myself at the thought of Jaslene seeing him.

"HF," I said that night. "You've been here for a little bit now."

"You and Jaslene are good people," he said.

He and I had a nightly pot smoking ritual. I rolled two small joints and we stood on the front porch and talked about whatever was on our mind. That night, I lit my joint, leaned on the porch ban-

ister and looked up at the stars.

"Do you have plans on moving on?" I asked without looking at him.

"You guys getting tired of me?"

"Well, you know. This is our first house and we would like to get in the backyard and do some work. It is hard to do that when you are living back there."

"I don't mind helping you. I know a little about landscaping."

"That's not exactly what I mean HF. We are a young couple and we would like to have our space." I took a pull off of the joint.

HF took an aggressive hit of his joint. His exaggerated exhale was loud and clear. "So what are you saying?"

"I'm trying to be sensitive," I said.

"You're being vague," he said.

"I think it's obvious what I'm saying."

"No. I don't think it is. Are you asking me to fuck off?"

I was set back because that was absolutely not what I was doing. I liked HF. "No, dude. I'm just asking you to find a new place to squat."

"What's wrong? Am I making

you look bad?"

"Dude, seriously. It has nothing to do with you making us look bad. We just want our yard back. You don't pay any rent and we've never asked anything else of you."

"I see," he said.

"You see what?" I took a hard hit of my joint. I was starting to get pissed.

"You are so generous to me and I do nothing for you. I take up that useless corner of your large lot. I've never even seen you or Jaslene out back."

"It's because you're back there."

"I try to spend the least amount of time back there as possible."

"And you shit back there, HF. Jaslene saw you today. Maybe you could try shitting somewhere else."

"So you're telling me to fuck off?"

"No." My voice was getting louder.

"Just tell me to fuck off and I'll move on."

"Why does it have to be this way? We like you HF. We consider you a friend."

"Well then just tell me to fuck off."

"Is that what it's going to

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take?"

"Yes."

"Ok. HF, fuck off." I took one more big draw from my joint and walked in the house. He was gone the next morning and his collection of items disappeared within a couple of days.

I turned back to the breakfast table. I looked at Jaslene's coffee cup. I had given it to her on our first anniversary in our house. It said, "Some bunny loves you," and had a picture of a lop eared rabbit next to a daffodil. I always imagined I was the bunny and she, the flower.

I looked up at her face. Her eyes looked deep into me. I knew she didn't want me to "fuck off," but I wondered if I was forcing her into saying it.

"Lately, I've been asking myself what life is all about. Why are we here? Not just you and me within our relationship but our place in the community. What's the importance of our story?"

"You were always the philoso-

pher," I said looking away from her. "You have always been the smarter one."

"This has nothing to do with smarts," she said to me.

I did not have a response, but I could tell she was waiting for one. I played with my coffee mug, the light sky blue one she used to calm her mind after a night of heavy dream activity. She took a sip from her coffee and continued. "This has nothing to do with one of us being smarter than the other. You know that. Don't play the dumb game. Get here with me."

She looked at me but I could not focus on her. She reached across the table and touched my ring hand. I started to pull back but she gripped my hand and did not let me. **I feel this love to the core.**

"We'll be fine. We've always found our way and I have no doubt this will be any different."

That was the meat of our conversation as we drank our morning coffee and ate our toast.

Message coming in.

Conversation was sparse after that. Time distorted. Muscle

memory and involuntary reflexes took over and I found myself on a train.

I wish I knew where I was going. A destination point would have helped, but I was on a train to the center of the city. Maybe the plan was to get lost amongst the crowd but maybe I was trying to start new. I had to do something. So I left before either of us had to say "Fuck off." At least I had that success.

The train stopped and the soundtrack of my moment began.

Hey, it's me. I just got off the train.

Entered the watery piano. Rainfall dropped as notes, soft and tearful. Strings were attached to people — puppets dancing around me as I stood, motionless.

A frightening place. The faces are concrete grey.

I was the concrete grey. **The panic is coming on strong.**

Author's note: All bold and enlarged words are lyrics pulled from Radiohead song of same name. ❖



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“Fistfight at the Special Olympics”

by Dustin Hyman

I was a volunteer big buddy and little Arnold was my responsibility. He needed me to help him navigate the various booths, tents and events. I also applied sunscreen and made sure he ate his lunch: bruised red apple, potato chips, juice-box, PB&J (hardly any J). Arnold’s first race was the fifty yard dash. He was grouped with seven others. One of them was Jonathon. Jonathon was stretching like a convict, slapping himself in the face, trying to get all adrenalinized or something.

The referee blew her whistle and Jonathon made no effort to conceal his normalcy. He shot from the starting line with unbridled determination. He was the only person that stayed in their lane. Jonathon’s time of 5.8 seconds broke a long standing record. I waited for Jonathon to finish his distasteful celebration dance (hip thrusts and fist pumps) prior to confronting him.

“What’s your disability?” I asked.

“What’s yours?”

“I’m a volunteer.”

“That figures,” he said.

“Why?”

“You don’t look like an athlete.”

Needless to say, I was shocked by Jonathon’s lucidity and hostility.

“This your buddy?” he asked. Jonathon snatched Arnold’s laminated card that athletes are given to wear as necklaces and began reading:

Arnold is only allowed one juice-box.

Arnold needs to wear his sunscreen and drink plenty of water.

Arnold can hug girls only after asking.

Opening ceremony 10:30

50 yard dash 11:30

Lunch 12:15

Obstacle course 2:30

Arnold tried to hug Jonathon

but Jonathon used both arms to prevent an embrace.

Jonathon shook his head in disgust, as if Arnold were contagious.

“See you boys at 2:30,” he said.

. . .

I saw Jonathon exit San Gabriel Elementary School parking lot in a red truck at lunchtime. He returned twenty minutes later with a bag of food from McDonalds. Jonathon walked to the bleachers and shared his food with a guy in a crew-cut who also looked dangerous. After lunch, they smoked cigarettes. I wasn’t sure if leaving the premises was allowed, but smoking on campus was clearly a violation of both school and Special Olympics protocol.

The information booth acknowledged that Jonathon was not allowed to smoke on campus, but they were unwilling to strip him of his medals. They refused to remove him from the premises, or even disqualify him from forthcoming races. In other words, they were letting Jonathon do whatever the fuck he wanted. When I asked what his disability was, they said Jonathon suffered from Post Traumatic Stress Disorder. Who doesn’t?

After smoking cigarettes like a thug, Jonathon competed in three separate wheelchair events. He won each race. At that time, I had no idea who the wheelchair belonged to. I wanted to believe Jonathon bought it at the Salvation



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Army, but my gut told me he took it from another athlete.

At 2:20 we signed in and waited at the *Hydration Station* for the obstacle course race to begin. Jonathon was there. After finishing his big-gulp-soda, Jonathon began doing pushups. He was wearing a Lakers jersey and his arms were very very strong—he was obviously strength-training (and likely using performance enhancing drugs).

Ours was the last heat and there were only five athletes: Arnold, Jonathon, a boy with metal canes attached to his arms, a chubby girl with Down syndrome, and a kid that breathed through a hole in his neck. The whistle blew and Jonathon moved through the obstacle course with the speed and agility of a Jack Russell Terrier. He expertly navigated the cones, flew above the tires, and made short work of the sandpit.

After crossing the finish line (another record) Jonathon began his overtly sexual celebration dance. Gross. It was absurd watching other athletes congratulate him. If they knew Jonathon was a cheater, they would *not* have danced with him.

“Proud of yourself?” I asked.
“Six races. Six Golds. Six

records. Not a bad day at the track!”

Arnold was excited by Jonathon’s enthusiasm and went in for another hug. Jonathon put his hand on Arnold’s face and pushed him to the ground. For whatever reason, Arnold found the assault amusing, like it was a game or something.

“What are you laughing at?” Jonathon asked. “I got your retard snot on my hand.”

This is when I proceeded to fight Jonathon. We each threw a punch or two, and then we were on the grass, grappling for a dominant position. The moment I had Jonathon pinned, Arnold jumped onto *my* back. When the heavy girl wiggled into the fight, the two remaining athletes piled on. It was mayhem but one thing was certain: all of them were siding with Jonathon, doing whatever they could to hurt me. At least two of them were biters.

When they finally separated us, Jonathon’s jersey was torn so he removed it completely. He had a gold chain and “Army Rangers” was inked onto his chest. Jonathon was bleeding from the lip. I kept waiting for somebody to help me up, but the athletes were too busy

attending to Jonathon. Jonathon was their champion.

I had to file an incident report at the information booth. They kept apologizing to Jonathon. They excused him first, and I watched him park the wheelchair beside the bleachers. He lifted the man he ate lunch with and set him into the chair. The guy leaned forward and Jonathon draped the gold medals around his neck. Jonathon rested his forehead against the other guy’s forehead and said something.

Arnold and I found his group beside the little school bus. Everyone from Special Helpers wore purple T-shirts. I said goodbye to Arnold and apologized for the fight. He hugged me and climbed into the bus. Arnold found a seat beside a window and put his face against the glass. He saw me and smiled.

Jonathon was helping his friend into the passenger’s seat on the opposite end of the parking lot. The guy was sitting on Jonathon’s lap when they drove away. He was steering while Jonathon worked the pedals. They were smiling too. ❖



“Chubbies”

by KC Snow

I'm the 'O' in AWESOME. Our family acronym. Anne, William, Elliott, Sean, Otto, Mary, and Erin. Each of our names are also acronyms. Dad made me OEM, he's a machine salesman. Most people think it's strange that my parents bred out a word.

Dad was out of town, again. We were on our way home from the post office, all five of us in the back seat in order with Elliott, the oldest, behind Mom. Her left arm rested on the door with a cigarette dangling from it. Her right hand loosely steered the wheel of our new 1985 Buick Electra. She loved that car, it was like driving a cloud she said. We never noticed comfort, but we did enjoy the electric windows. Up, down, up, down. Mom sang along to Led Zeppelin's "Ramble On" while taking swigs

from her iced beverage.

Most trips, we paid little attention to Mom, instead we focused on terrorizing each other. Mom never lost her temper with us. If we weren't trying to hurt each other, we were trying to annoy each other. The goal was to cause just enough physical or emotional pain to force retribution. It never stopped. We never stopped. But she was always glazed, placid. Nothing *we* did seemed to phase her.

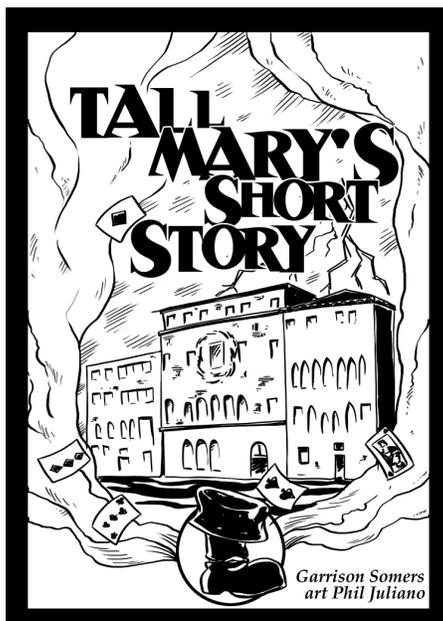
Mom lifted her drink to us and announced she was taking the long way. Instantly, our tempers turned from vicious to peaceful. We gave each other high-fives and danced in our seats. *The long way* meant we would ride the roller-coaster home.

When we were one turn away from the fun. Mom cranked up the radio until the bass crackled. She

returned her drink to the cupholder, snatched a cigarette in her lips, and grabbed the wheel with both hands as we rounded the turn. We approached the top of the giant slide. For cars. Three large humps on the way down. Anticipation silenced us.

Mom floored it. "Sixty! Sixty-five!" she yelled. We crested the first hump. Elliot and Sean braced themselves with their hands on the ceiling, but my sisters and I lifted into the air and landed on top of each other. We scrambled to ready for the next hump. Mom bopped her head to the music. She declared "Seventy-seven!" at the second hump. The whole car flew like a tank and landed just as light. When we returned to Earth, the tires squeaked and Erin was on the floorboard laughing hysterically. We screamed in unison "We're AWESOME!" Mom steadied the

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The Blotter

car back on our side of the road. "Eighty-three!" We hit the third hump. We were weightless. We shrieked. We landed hard. The cherry from mom's cigarette flew into the back seat, she righted the car and growled, "Shit!" She broke hard. She told us to "Get in your seats, there's a fucking cop." We heard the siren, adjusted ourselves, and sat up straight. Mom swore to herself and calmly pulled over. We all tightened up. Best behavior.

The authority figure crept up to the car, stared at us over his sunglasses and counted us, twice. "Ma'am, do you have any idea how fast you were going?" He was all cop.

"It was for the kids," Mom

said coolly as she took a drag of her cigarette, nodding her curly blonde hair back at us.

"Ma'am, ninety-four miles per hour, with fo-five kids in the back seat." He squared himself with mom's door.

She pulled her sunglasses down her nose and looked up at him, "You gotta go fast to give 'em chubbies."

"Excuse me ma'am?"

"You go fast enough down them hills, you give 'em chubbies."

"Ma'am, these are kids."

"Uh, yeah, they're *my* kids."

She spurted out in a laugh or was it a slur?

"Ma'am, you can't give kids, I mean, you can't do *that* for, er,

with, uh, kids."

"What do you mean? They love it! It's not like I give 'em chubbies all the time." She was so cool. So calm. So convincing.

Elliot bit his own arm to avoid laughter. A year ago he told us chubbies weren't what Mom thought they were. Mary and Erin didn't get it. But us boys did. We all tried to make eye contact with the cop to show him *we* knew what he was talking about.

"Ma'am," he whispered, moving in closer but eyeing us.

Mom interrupted him.

"They're just kids. We're just having some fun. No one else was even on the road."

"Ma'am, do you, uh, do you

CONTRIBUTORS:

Jesse R. Stowe writes, "I am from Athens, Ohio. I am a bartender at Jackie O's and an amateur triathlete. I am also a graduate student in the MFA Creative Writing Program at Goddard College. I have seen copies of *The Blotter* near the entrance of our bar and finally decided it is time to submit, especially after the last cover 'Get The Hell Out of My Garden.' (I love rabbits.) Hopefully you will find my story to be a good fit."

Dustin Hyman tried freelance writing and journalism. Now, he teaches at the University of Louisiana, where he's working toward a PhD in English. Hyman's fiction has appeared in shady places and his first novel, *Island Folks*, was published in 2014 by Black Rose Writing.

KC Snow, of Beverly Hills, FL, would like to remind you, dear reader, that capital offenses have no statute of limitations. Since the memoir will remain unwritten, instead, you'll have to live with Snow's fiction; shattered people with cracked lenses navigating a broken world. ("Chubbies" is the least dire and obtuse, some would say "approachable.") Previous creative writing has appeared in numerous police reports, real books you can hold, and has also been used as toilet paper while squatting in a vacant building on Chicago's Southside. Real talk, and not necessarily in that order.

Phil Juliano of Bloomington, MN, just informed us via Facebook that Spence the dog is now 14. Happy Birthday Spence!!! Follow Peej and Spence on philjulianoillustration.com and purchase their new book at <http://bestinshowcomics.bigcartel.com/>.

know what chubbies are?" He leaned onto the car.

Mom eyed us, her sunglasses still drooped down her nose, head shaking, smiling "well, duh, yeah, it's weightlessness, what you've never had a chubby?"

We fought off laughter as hard as we normally fought each other. The cop heard Sean let out a little spurt. The officer smiled and stood up.

"How far away do you live, Ma'am?" He leaned back in, close to Mom's face.

Mom, suddenly nervous, moved away from him and considered her drink in the cupholder dangling from the glove box.

"We're almost home." Her voice had changed.

"Ma'am, I'm gonna let you go with a warning today. Slow down, there's other ways, uh," he spurted out a little laugh and looked at us boys, "to give 'em chubbies."

The officer patted the roof of the car twice and walked away.

"Thanks." Mom said as she keenly watched him. "Kids, that was a close one." She grabbed her drink, guzzled it. She turned to us and wavered as she held her pointer finger to her lips and said "Our little secret," and sped home. ❖

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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A person's face is sometimes such a normal thing, to see someone familiar to you is almost not to see them at all. A family dinner, or even better, a family outing to the...museum (it doesn't matter which, because the dream will morph it and twist it so that what seems the American Museum of Natural History will end up the Hermitage, anyhow,) or the zoo, or just to an old, reliable joint where you've gone for years.

Yep, there it goes, the stuffed mastodons are now waiters carrying plates of penne rigata and pitchers of iced tea. And you go along with it, because it's still a family outing and those are pretty much always a good thing. And you're hungry anyway.

But who's there with you? Who's sitting at the head of the table? You know it's Grandpa or Dad, but it could just as well be your English professor or the minister from your church. Or, just when you really want it to be your dad, because you haven't spoken to him in a while, it is your driving instructor or the father of an old girlfriend. You know, the man who didn't like you very much because he assumed the worst with you and rightly so.

And you don't even need to look past the mashed potatoes to see that it's him, too. Your dream just makes it so. And what might have been a pleasant event-dream turns into a B movie, at best.

Longview - cyberspace

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myself so I wouldn't fall flat on my face and be eaten by the hyenas - I decided to turn back towards the sidewalk, out of the field. He went right by me when I juke.

Remember Gale Sayers? In my mind's eye, I can see an old piece of black and white Wide World of Sports stock footage where the Bears running back is galloping full speed towards a defensive back, waiting with open arms, and then changes direction without giving any sign that he is going to do so, not slowing down or putting out his arms to balance himself. Then he just...turns and the defender is suddenly alone, as if in a vacuum, right up until the person chasing after Sayers collides with him, because he, too, just didn't *see* the juke.

Amazing. I was...amazing.

It was a hell of a thing. I ran out into the street. I was getting so tired, and I knew that he would stop chasing me soon, but then one of his minions, laying back, resting, would take over. How hyenas do it, they hand off the chase to another member in the pack. Wild dogs do it that way, too. So I ran right out into the street, with all the cars and after-school traffic and everything. Drivers were slamming on their brakes and honking at me, but I kept on going, right down the middle of the street, along the white lines. I knew that it was a crazy thing to do - I did - but it was the only answer in my mind. And I guess I imagined they would be too surprised to follow me. Maybe my brain was starved for oxygen. I don't know.

But you know what? They didn't follow me, not into the road. I didn't look back, either, to see if they were trailing along the sidewalk. And I couldn't hear them shouting taunts, because of the street noise, people rolling down their windows, shouting at me to get out of the road, was I out of my mind, where were my parents? I didn't care about that, either. I had just a little gas left in me, and with it I lit out for home. Down the middle of the street. Right down the dashes of the white lines, cars on both sides like...like a police escort.

But what I didn't know was that he must have decided that today they weren't going to give up so easily. I don't know why. Maybe I made him madder by galloping out in the road. Maybe he really wanted someone to beat up that day, and having been so close to getting me whetted his appetite. But he kept going, right along the sidewalk, keeping pace with me. I wasn't looking over I was busy enough - but I ran panting all the way past the middle school and past a dozen homes with Moms inside them or grandparents, maybe even sitting outside on lawn chairs wondering at the child in the street but not knowing, and he just watched me running and ran along himself. I can imagine that he didn't worry that someone in a car would see him prowling along, stalking me in the road. He knew that the grown-ups were too busy watching me, hauling down the middle of the street like a lunatic. Sometimes - most of the time - grown-ups don't see the things they're supposed to be looking for, the dangerous things that haven't yet happened, the smoke preceding real flames.

He knew where I lived, knew my house, and that's the side of the street he was on. I think he was giving a thought to catching me right in the front yard, and pummeling me on my own lawn. Who would have stopped them? Mom didn't get home from work until six; Dad was still at school. I couldn't keep going forever, past our house and around the turn in the road and on down into the center of town, out the other side, east towards the ocean and on to, where, Normandy? But that would lead past his house - the house with the vegetable stand out front. I remember we used to buy tomatoes and pole beans from there. Maybe we stopped when he got older and started punch-

ing kids, beating up on other children.

In the history of a thing, the analysis that comes with years passing between a moment and surviving it to go on with your life, it is strange what sometimes is a necessary fact. Sandwich tomatoes and pole beans. And zucchini and summer squash that Mom would put in a hot frying pan to wilt and taste good with just a little salt on it. Sweet Jersey corn, too. Instead, we went to the stand near church instead - out of the way except on Sunday afternoons. His family's stand got more ram-shackle, didn't it? Not newly painted each spring, and the screens replaced when they were torn by wind or winter ice? Or is my imagination repairing holes in my memory?

The car traffic from the junior-high petered out in front of our house. Not one adult stopped his car and got out to see what the problem was. Now, I thought. Now I could sprint across and get to the front door. Suddenly, out of the corner of my eye, I saw him charging at me, like a bull buffalo, sweating and grimacing, his teeth showing as he panted. Split-second: I might make it, but what if I slipped on the gravel at the side of the road? What if he was only pretending he was tired? What if...?

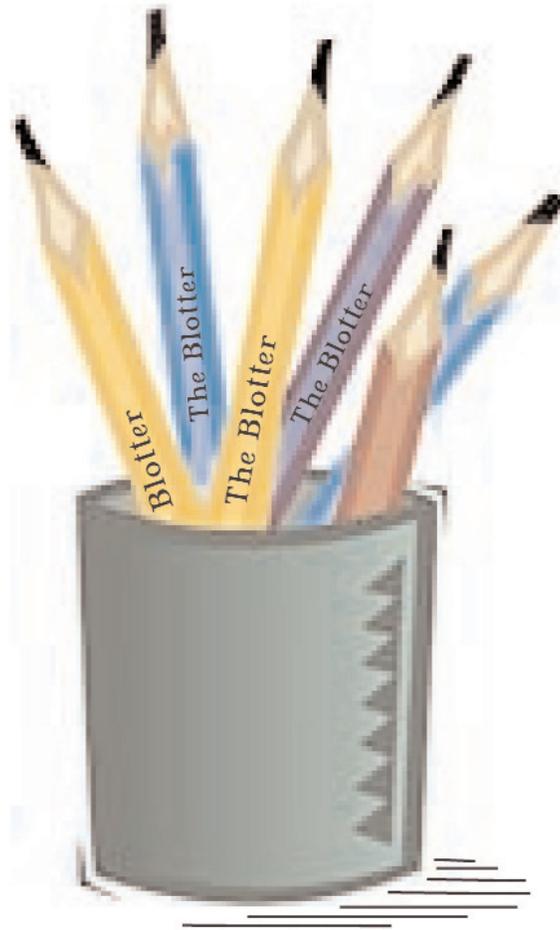
So I turned right instead of left when I reached our house. Away from the safety of our front porch, away from any traps or plans he might have been forming. Right up the walkway to the library, to the front door of the grown-up section. I hit that long bar-handle on the front door - you know the kind, when you push it too hard it makes a ridiculous banging noise. Well, it must have gone off like a gunshot, because Mrs. Yamashita, the head librarian, snapped around the corner from her desk when I roared into the room, frowning at me with her hands on her hips. She opened her mouth to scold me - probably in her softest whisper - but something about me, the way I looked, the jackrabbit fear in my eyes, stopped her. She waved me over. Are you thirsty? she asked me. I gulped. I couldn't even catch my breath to say Yes, Ma'am. I just nodded. Come, she said, as if other grown-ups were seeing us and listening. I don't want you to spill on the floor. She pointed at the stool next to hers behind the check-out counter. Sit here and I will get you a cup of water. I couldn't tell if she was being stern with me. Her glasses were on - sometimes she wore them and other times no.

Then she walked away, left me on the stool behind the counter. It was library-quiet again. I could smell my own sour-sweat, and wiped my face with my shirt sleeve. It came away soaked. There were piles of books in front of me on the linoleum-topped counter being sorted, like sandbags blocking the view in and out. No one could see me, and I couldn't see them. I cocked my ear to listen for that bar on the library front door to slam again. Would he follow me in? I didn't put it past him - he'd thumped little kids before right in the school hallway or in front of the pizza place without a hint of hesitation that some adult might stop them. They seemed to have no fear of punishment.

The handle on the door mashed open with a bang, and it was him. I could hear him, or maybe now them, some or all, scuffling on the carpeted floor, breathing hard, mumbling. Mrs. Yamashita walked over like it was nothing. You boys need to take it outside. This isn't a playground. One of them, maybe it was him but I couldn't be sure, started to grouse at her; you know? That she wasn't the boss of him and he could do what he wanted. I was afraid even to peek around the book-wall where I was hiding. But Mrs. Yamashita was having none of it. I said out, now, please, she insisted, her whisper as sharp as a blade. And they left.

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