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The Blotter

magazine



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The Blotter

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"Talking With Young Writers"

Never miss an opportunity. If your grandpa is going to fry chicken after church – don't sleep in. Get out of bed and clip on that tie and go to service. Afterwards, grab yourself a thigh and an ear of corn and some butter-beans and dig in.

No, it's not new advice. We let things slip by us too often, I think. Imagine ourselves exhausted - just frazzled, worn down to the bone. I get it, I really do. You're tired of the grind, and the rancor that surrounds the grind like a clinging miasma. You just want to do what you must, and when it's done or over get back inside without getting too dirty, sit in your chair, watch your shows or flip through your postings and then sleep. Wake and do it all again. If opportunity knocks, maybe if you're quiet, it won't bother you. Some other time, perhaps. *Not right now.*

Opportunity isn't a robo-caller that will keep annoyingly dialing until you answer. It passes like a comet; once in a while, or not at all. Never often enough for us to lose our curiosity in what caused the moment – all possibility and flash with a valuable prize at the core. But sometimes curiosity and laziness, like a sad cocktail bordering on despair, are a tough scale to tip.

And just in case you're thinking that it's easy for me to say this, because I'm _____ (fill in the blank with whatever hyperbole you use as a measure of success) well, I know of what I speak. I am a notorious non-attender. And not just of things most of us don't like to do (like going to the DMV or grocery store or to get a haircut, but good things, too!) What they now generally name *social anxiety*, I have in double-handfuls. Would I like to go to a birthday party? I would. How about an extra concert ticket – would I like it? You bet. Meet up for dinner? Indeed.

But as time marches on between the invite and the event my eagerness wanes, passing like a pop-up thunder-boomer with sound and foolery but not much in the way of useful rain or cooling temps, so that the idea of actually tripping the light semi-fantastic percolates in my sad little brain into pre-regret, and any actual enthusiasm withers like honeysuckle in a drought. In the end, only guilt or a not-so-gentle nudge gets me out the door.

I volunteer at my local elementary school, where I am a judge for their annual Young Authors program. The elevator-pitch on this is that every student is invited to write a book in any genre, including short story and poetry collections. They have the entire fall to do so, and the teachers assist with helping understand the difference between "realistic fiction" and non-fiction, and how to write a bio-sketch.

The program has been going on for over 25 years – I swear! – and shows

no sign of age (and not just because new children arrive each to fill in the spaces left by everyone moving up one grade.) It is a very cool thing how much support the school has for writing and how enthusiastic the kids are to put their creative minds to paper. By the way, *The Blotter* gives a small award to the Young Author in the fifth grade who we think did a terrific job on their book.

And in the end, after everything is written and illustrated and covered and bound (and judged) there is a Young Authors Tea. Everyone attends. Awards are distributed. And who's hurt by a little Chex Mix, juice boxes and applause? No one, say I. It is a good thing.

This year, near the end of the awards ceremony, the head of the program had each student who had written a book but hadn't won an award stand up anyway to be recognized. More applause!

And then it was my turn to give the Blotter award. I took the mic and I spoke - social anxiety and all.

I told the kids, and the teachers and parents, that while it is a fine thing to be recognized, what happened this fall - writing a book - wasn't *participating*. That was the wrong word. What they did was "accomplish." And that there is a big difference. They got something done. They wrote a book. And if they can write a book, well, they can write another book. Because writing is not about winning or losing – it's all about telling a story – getting the tale out of your head and onto the page. Then I gave The Blotter award (a gift certificate to a local Indy bookstore, of course) to a girl who'd written a perfectly original, surprising and fresh, fable.

On my way back to my seat, one of the teachers whispered "Bravo!" to me as I passed.

In the end I like a good game of solitaire as much as the next person. I use the version that comes with the operating system on my computer when I am sitting and thinking about what is going to happen next in a story I am writing. It is perfectly fine white noise for the creative mind. But life is not solitaire. Not a productive life. Not a fine, fun life. You have to take your cards next door and see if your neighbor plays...I don't know, *cribbage*.

And so I (purport to) go. I know, or at least I think I know, the difference between diffidence and unwillingness to take the bull by the horns. That's way of the world.

In other words, no matter how grim and grimy life may seem from time to time, and in the gloomy months of a new year, it is its grimmest and grimdest, you need to get up and do what needs doing. Even if there is no fried chicken at the end. With butter-beans.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

Aint nothing but a thing...

“Freight Train:’ the journey of a song”

by Dr. Geoff Trodd

Freight train, freight train, run so fast
Freight train, freight train, run so fast
Please don't tell what train I'm on
They won't know what route I'm going
When I'm dead and in my grave
No more good times here I crave
Place the stones at my head and feet
And tell them all I've gone to sleep
When I die, oh bury me deep
Down at the end of old Chestnut Street
So I can hear old Number Nine
As she comes rolling by...

Some years ago I spent a few days in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. After visiting the University of North Carolina campus there, drinking hot apple cider in the Caffe Driade to the sounds of crickets in the woods and trying Brunswick stew, fried green tomatoes and pecan pie at Mama Dips Kitchen on Rosemary Street, I stood on the railway tracks behind the converted train carriages of the Southern Rail restaurant and bar on East Main

Street and had my photo taken, trying to look like a hobo about to jump a train. Unbidden, a few bars of Freight Train came into my head, the UK skiffle version by Chas McDevitt and Nancy Whisky as that was the only version I had heard at the time. What I didn't know at the time was that I was standing a few hundred yards from where the song had started life a century or so before somewhere on Lloyd Street.

Freight Train has become such a folk/blues standard that it is easy to suppose that it has always been around in the atmosphere somewhere, like Bobby Shafto or John Brown's Body. It is frequently presented as a piece for learning fingerstyle guitar techniques, it has been used as a children's song like The Wheels on the Bus, and it has recorded by dozens of artists from Peter,

Paul and Mary to Taj Mahal to Jerry Garcia. It has been skiffle, folk, country, blues, jazz, pop. It has also left very different legacies and associations in the USA and the UK.

The song came from Chapel Hill and dates to around 1906. The composer was a young African American girl, Elizabeth Nevill (later Cotten), who was 13 or so at the time and had already been playing her elder brother's banjo and guitar for some time, making up music as she did. She was left handed and taught herself to play left handed on right-handed instruments, developing an idiosyncratic 'upside down' technique of picking alternating bass with her index finger and melody with her thumb, a style that many years later became known as 'Cotten picking' (pun intended)

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and influenced, amongst others, the American fingerstyle guitarist John Fahey. The music she would have heard most at the time, from travelling musicians or brass bands going down the street, was ragtime and her early pieces like Wilson Rag clearly reflect this, blending ragtime, turn-of-the-century parlour songs and Baptist church music.

The melody of Freight Train was composed in the same vein, with lyrics also drawn from songs she would have been familiar with. Though perhaps surprising coming from a young teenage girl, the words are in the tradition of the 'When I Die' type of lyric common in country blues.

'When I die, bury me deep, tell all the gamblers I have gone to sleep', started one, "When I die don't bury me at all, preserve my bones in alcohol" was another. Living as her family did by the railway tracks, she also drew inspiration from the sounds of the trains she heard passing her house. "We used to watch the freight train. We knew the fireman and the brakeman...and the conductor, my mother used to

launder for him. They'd let us ride in the engine...put us in one of the coaches while they were backing up and changing...that was how I got my first train ride. We used to walk the trestle and put our ear to the track and listen for the train to come. My brother, he'd wait for this train to get real close and then he'd hang down from one of the ties and swing back up after the train had passed over him."

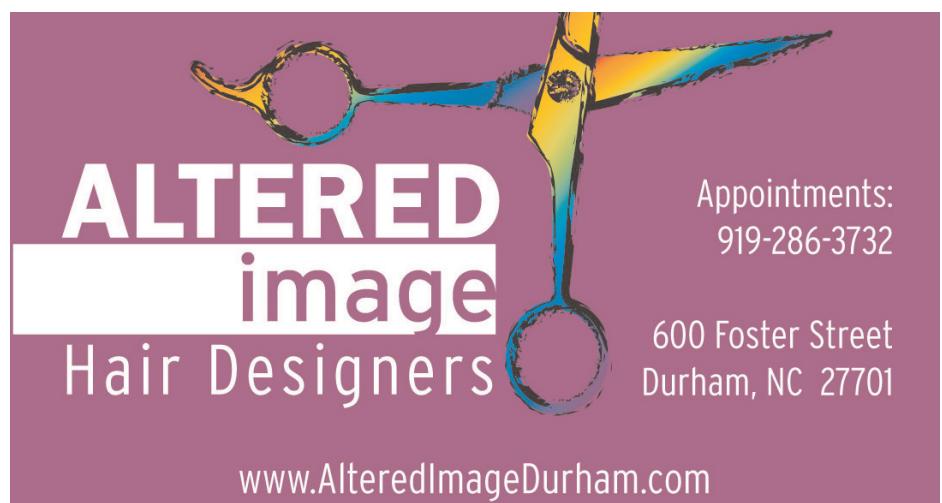
Trains carried a sense of excitement, of travelling to somewhere else, and maybe too there was a recollection of an old escape route for slaves: "Please don't tell what train I'm on." Elizabeth Cotten was born less than 30 years after the American Civil War and her grandparents had themselves been freed slaves.

There does remain one mystery about the lyrics. All printed versions name Chestnut Street as the place where the author wishes to be buried. However, there is no Chestnut Street in Chapel Hill nor was one listed there a century or so ago. Because Elizabeth Cotten wasn't 'discov-

ered' until she was in her 60's there are not many recordings of her singing Freight Train and in those that there are it is not entirely clear that she is actually saying 'Chestnut Street': sometimes it sounds more like 'Chesna' or 'Chester'. The 1957 version by Peggy Seeger, who was taught the song by Elizabeth Cotten, clearly says 'Chestnut' so that was likely to be have been right. Maybe she lifted the line from another song current at the time or maybe she just made the name up.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=43-UUeCa6Jw>

Whatever the case, the song itself may well have been lost to history altogether as Elizabeth Cotten got married at 17, had a daughter, became involved in the Baptist Church and gave up music, Freight Train just a memory of something she had been sung round the family home. However, 35 years or so later, in the mid-1940's, there was an event that proved to be so coincidental in its ramifications



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that it would seem far fetched if used in a film. Whilst then working as department store clerk in Washington, Elizabeth Cotten helped a lost child in the store find her mother. The child was future folk singer Peggy Seeger, sister of Pete and Mike Seeger, and the mother was Ruth Crawford Seeger, herself a composer and specialist in American folk music. Through this initial contact, Elizabeth Cotten subsequently went to work as a domestic help for the Seeger household, where over time the songs and guitar playing skills from her early years came to light and were taught to the Seegers.

It was at this point that the song started to take on a life of its own. In 1956 Peggy Seeger, then 21 and on a USA blacklist as a consequence of having visited China and Russia, went to travel round Europe with a banjo and collection of folk songs and subsequently came to London, playing in the folk clubs and pubs with a repertoire that included

Freight Train. At one of these venues, probably the Princess Louise pub in Holborn, the song caught the attention of Chas McDevitt, a former jazz band banjo player and now heading up his own skiffle group. Skiffle was a uniquely British musical phenomenon that lasted barely 2 years between 1956-58 but had longer-lasting ripples, with most major British musicians of the 1960's, the Beatles included, having started a musical life in a skiffle group. Like punk twenty years later, skiffle was a democratic music that broke down the barriers between artist and audience. You no longer needed a band or orchestra and professional song writers. All that was needed was access to a couple of cheap acoustic guitars, a washboard and set of thimbles, a primitive double bass made from a wooden tea chest, a broom handle and string, and some traditional folk or blues songs that you could change the words to and play in double time and you had a skiffle outfit.

Skiffle's commercial success was short-lived and relatively limited. The one major star to emerge was Lonnie Donegan, who broke through with Rock Island Line in 1956 and was quickly labelled King of Skiffle, though he was astute enough to move his career into broader musical waters. In that era between Elvis Presley and the Beatles emerging, 1956 – 1962, Donegan was absolutely huge on the British music scene, racking up around 30 hits, including 3 Number Ones. He also took songs by Woody Guthrie and Leadbelly and Lonnie Johnson into the charts years before Bob Dylan or the Rolling Stones. Yet his final Top Ten hit was the poignantly ironic The Party's Over in 1962 and after the Beatles' first hit he managed not a single chart entry ever again. It was as if a final curtain came down. If you saw Lonnie Donegan on the TV in 1965, it seemed as anachronistic as looking out of the window and seeing a boy in knickerbockers bowling a hoop down the street and as uncool as seeing your teacher doing The Shake at the school Christmas concert.

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However, amongst the other names from the skiffle era, Chas McDevitt is probably the most remembered now and it was Freight Train that gave him his meal ticket, provided by Peggy Seeger's performance. The liner notes to Elizabeth Cotten's Shake Sugaree album quotes

Peggy Seeger as remembering teaching Chas McDevitt Freight Train sometime in the autumn of 1956, though McDevitt's guitarist of the time, Dennis Carter, recollects that they watched Peggy Seeger singing and wrote down the chord shapes and lyrics at the time. Whatever the case, the song had become part of the Chas McDevitt repertoire by the end of 1956. It was common practice for songs that were out of copyright or seen as traditional to be given a new musical arrangement or new lyrics and the artist to claim arranger's or co-writer's credit. Lonnie Donegan's name often appeared on the record label alongside Woody Guthrie or Leadbelly and Alan Price later seriously aggravated the rest of the Animals by claiming arranging credit for House of the Rising Sun. It was also not uncommon for a song to emerge from the bones of an existing one sufficiently different to be seen as a new composition. Bob Dylan's Don't Think Twice, for example, bore more than a passing resemblance to Paul Clayton's Who's Gonna Buy You Ribbons When I'm Gone?. With Freight Train, however, Chas McDevitt and his manager, Bill Varley, went a stage further. They realised the song had no publishing deal so rewrote some of the lyrics and copyrighted it as Freight Train under the aliases of Paul James and Fred Williams as song writers. A later legal challenge instigated by Mike Seeger did result in Elizabeth Cotten's name being

added as a third writer but even today in 2017 some sources (including allmusic.com and Spotify) still list James-Williams as the sole composers of Freight Train.

With the revised work, McDevitt brought in a Scottish folk singer Nancy Whiskey (real name Anne Wilson) to sing lead, speeded up the tempo considerably, put in background whistling and recorded the Chas McDevitt Skiffle Group version of Freight Train, released in early 1957. It came out at the height of the skiffle boom and struck an immediate chord with a British audience, reaching number 5 in the UK charts. Not only did it ride the skiffle wave but fitted in with the boom in Westerns then popular in the UK in TV series, films and songs, with the reworked lyrics changing Freight Train into a cowboy type story of someone who had killed his friend in a fight and was escaping from a likely hanging by fleeing on a train. There was also perhaps an almost subliminal connection with Six -Five Special, British TV's first attempt at a rock and roll programme launched in February 1957 and with the opening credits featuring a steam train coming down the tracks to the tune of "Over the points, over the points.... The Six-Five Special's coming down the line, the Six-Five Special's right on time."

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_QoKkXDPGmw

?v=_QoKkXDPGmw

Unusual for skiffle, the song even made headway in the USA, boosted by an appearance by Chas McDevitt and Nancy Whiskey on the Ed Sullivan Show, and reached the Top Ten there in the summer of 1957. At this point, Freight Train took yet another turning. American country pop singer Rusty Draper rushed out a cover version but as his record company considered the revised McDevitt lyrics of a murder and likely hanging too shocking for American ears the words were rewritten yet again, this time to reflect a jilted lover going off on a train in lovelorn despair. "When my baby left my side, something deep inside me died. Got to keep a-moving on till the memory of her is gone". This also made the USA Top Ten, splitting sales with the McDevitt record, and it surfaced again twice more in later years. In 1963 country singing duo the Canadian Sweethearts (Lucille Starr & Bob Regan) took the Draper version into the Canadian charts and in 1971 Jim and Jesse had a minor US hit with a bluegrass take on the song.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BD6Vn6rb1yM>

In the UK, Freight Train more or less came to a halt with the end of skiffle. On the proceeds of his hit record Chas McDevitt opened a coffee bar in 1958

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called, of course, Freight Train, on the corner of Soho's Berwick Street. A decade later the site had become the record shop Musicland where, as the 60's turned into the 70's, the shop was a beacon of underground and psychedelic music, where you could listen to records in a booth with the smell of incense and patchouli in the air and pay extra (59/6 as opposed to 32/6) to get an early version of the latest American import by Tim Buckley or Ultimate Spinach whilst you picked up the latest copy of IT or Gandalf's Garden. Skiffle was barely remembered. Nancy Whiskey, the voice of Freight Train as far as the UK was concerned, had long departed from the Chas McDevitt group, leaving shortly after the success of the record saying she had never liked skiffle anyway. A replacement, Shirley Douglas, was recruited and Freight Train was re-recorded again in the UK in 1972 at the height of glam rock.

However, just as skiffle had swept Freight Train along in the UK so in the USA the folk boom of the late 1950's/early 1960's took the song off in yet another direction, with it gradually becoming an anthem of the folk movement. Mike Seeger got Elizabeth Cotten to record her work for the first time in 1958, in her mid-sixties, with a collection of tunes put together as the album Elizabeth Cotten: Negro Folk Songs and Tunes, (later

reissued as Freight Train and Other North Carolina Folk Songs), putting the original version of Freight Train into general circulation. By the early 1960's both Ramblin' Jack Elliot and Joan Baez had picked up on the song and released versions of it and then in 1962 Peter, Paul and Mary, already a big commercial name, recorded the song as part of the album In the Wind but with yet another change in lyrics, with mention of the old Blue Ridge mountains and Bleeker Street , in the heart of Greenwich Village. (The group, however, insisted that song writing credit remained solely with Elizabeth Cotten.)

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=968I3O6XdS4>

In their wake came a number of pop-folk versions from Peter and Gordon, the Overlanders and Esther and Abi Ofarim, amongst others, all reverting to the original words. In time, being able to play Freight Train became part of any aspiring folk singer's finger picking skills on the guitar.

However ,the song also continued to spin off in new directions as the decades went by. Blues proved a fruitful route. Taj Mahal recorded a version in 1976, the song kept in his live sets over the subsequent years with a spoken introduction that went "You probably wondering about what I'm talking right now. I'm talkin' about a lady

named Elizabeth Cotten. She wrote this song a long time ago when she was a young girl. She's still playin' guitar today and I'm gonna sing a few lines for you. We love you Elizabeth, love you Elizabeth". Sonny Terry and Brownie McGhee released a harmonica-heavy version with another total rewrite of lyrics in 1991.

As the musical ripples created by the song widened out, other types of interpretation appeared. American rock band Opal with Kendra Smith singing lead released a slowed down, atmospheric version in 1984, anticipating the Cowboy Junkies' take on Blue Moon a few years later. Singer songwriter Laura Gibson slowed the song down further to funeral pace in 2003, with an eerie backing from what sounds like a musical saw. Jerry Garcia released it as part of an album of children's songs in 1993. Perhaps the most effective version of all came in a joyful and rousing interpretation by Ani Difranco

"Who gave these idiots microphones?"

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and the Preservation Hall Jazz Band in 2010, over a century since the song first appeared. Before branching out into a whole range of musical genres Ani Difranco had started as a folk singer and had worked with Pete Seeger. In this collaboration with the Preservation Hall Jazz Band, time loops back on itself like a Möbius strip with the kind of performance that a Southern ragtime jazz band circa 1910 might have done if only they had then heard the composition that a teenage Elizabeth Cotten was playing in Chapel Hill.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=x6fGX8b8qc8>

Elizabeth Cotten died in 1987 so didn't get to hear this version herself. She was, however, still playing and touring into her nineties, having picked up a Grammy Award in 1985. Two years after her death she was

included in the book I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America alongside Rosa Parks and Angela Davis amongst others. Chas McDevitt was still performing in the UK in 2014 and still singing his version of Freight Train. One could fancifully imagine a deal being struck with the Devil, or maybe a Bad Fairy, in 1957 when the sharp practice around song writing credit was taking place. The Devil/Bad Fairy might have said: "Here's what it is. You can make a record that will be a big hit and provide the basis of a musical career that will last over 50 years. However, you will stay marooned as a time-traveller in 1957-58 and remain as the Skiffle Man. British beat, psychedelia, glam rock, progressive rock, heavy rock, heavy metal, thrash metal, punk, electronic music, soul, ska, reggae, hip-hop, indie music, grime, will all pass you by. Your hit record will be re-released every so often

but will be part of albums called *Essential Skiffle* or *When Skiffle was King* and be found among cut-price *Remembering The Fifties* CDs sold at Motorway Service stations alongside Eddie Calvert, Winifred Atwell and Alma Cogan. From time to time someone will say 'I thought Nancy Whiskey sang this. What happened to her?"'

In another musical universe, the original Freight Train rattles on after a hundred years and more, picking up passengers and changing direction every so often. It has been quite a journey for a song that originally had a mere 12 lines of words, put together by the railway tracks that ran through the dark woods of North Carolina.

Dr. Geoff Trodd
November 2017



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 Foward, whose attempt to help a friend in danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

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

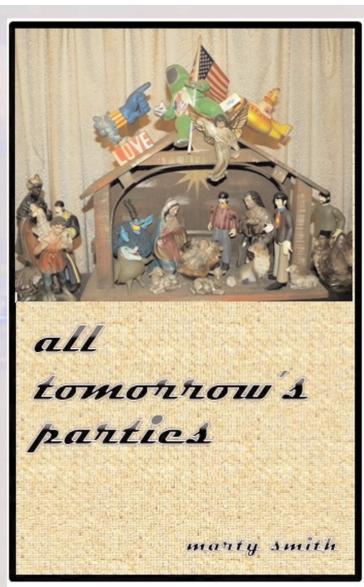
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All Tomorrow's Parties

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)

Available in print or e-reader at www.wileequixote.com



"Brendan's Swashbuckling Life in Bed"

by Donald Hubbard

Brenda Carver pulled up her green SUV to the shipping and receiving dock at Borders Bookstore. She pressed the back door buzzer like she was trying to ram her finger through Styrofoam.

An attendant stepped out, asking her about the source of her angst.

"Do you see all of those freaking books in my car? DO YOU!"

"What about them, this is a bookstore and while you may wish to sell them to us, unfortunately we have a distributor who services us in bulk."

"I am not trying to sell you books, I am returning them. My idiot son bought them all yesterday, nearly maxed out his one remaining credit card. Didn't you think anything was amiss when you had to load all those books and squeeze them into the car?"

"I wasn't here yesterday."

"Well someone was and they violated this restraining order that I obtained on his behalf as his conservator."

Mrs. Carver took out a crumpled court document from her purse, pulled it out of its envelope and slapped it to the attendant.

"I see, so your son is a bit of a book hoarder."

"He is not a book hoarder, he only buys books when the covers please him."

Mrs. Carver's Brendan experienced this disorder at least as early as high school. At Hale, (CT) Catholic High, Brother Laryngitis did not understand why Brendan did not want to read *Catcher in the Rye*, saying, "You'd love this book, it's about a mixed up adolescent like yourself."

"I can't read it, Brother."

"You cannot, or you will not?"

"I cannot Brother, the cover is all maroon except for yellow letters for the title and the author. I judge books solely by their cover, and this book has come up way short in the presentation department."

The situation did not improve after Hale Catholic expelled Brendan, who then matriculated at Hale High. The new school had a larger library and Brendan built a fortress of colorful covered books around him.

By adulthood, Brendan

only bought books whose covers pleased his aesthetic sense. He never read any of the books because he felt that he did not need to. If the cover did not please him he did not read the book and if he liked the cover, he did not need to read it because he already divined its innate goodness. Also, he did not wish to blemish the cover.

Reluctantly, the Borders' attendant assembled some co-workers and they removed all of the books from Mrs. Carver's SUV; only Brendan's business had staved off bankruptcy for Borders.

Back home, Brendan saw his mother alight from her empty SUV. Upon entering the house, she scowled at Brendan, before heading upstairs to take a bath. Brendan resumed his swashbuckling life in bed by heading to his room and his computer, a slave to his peculiar pornographic site, Amazon.com, where he downloaded one really hot book cover after another. ♦

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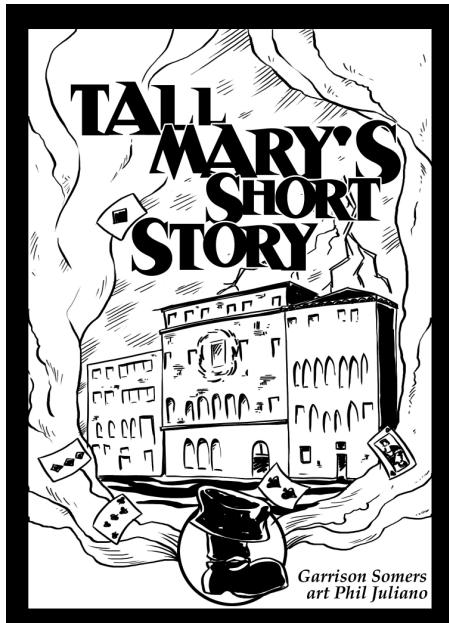
"Midday Sunday Dinner"

by Vincent Barry

Fanciful companions—scintillant reminders of a long gone but plainly unlapsed past. Close and palpitant are they, of a sudden, your mom and dad—so gracious, so welcoming, so like you—so unlike anything I ever knew. Cut-outs from the dim mists of encircling gloom....

The fiercely bright, frosty day is stretching into a shimmering amethystine twilight. . . . Time for a light supper after midday Sunday dinner—of blessing and breaking and sharing...Mom's bustling about—setting up the TV trays in the living room, the room where we curl up after a Hurricane Saturday night. . . . The

Cheap, good and available - a small miracle on Amazon



Hurricane, with its corny tropical storm effect and cheesy boy band....

Dad and I, we're talking... What's that? He always does what? "Butts in?"

"Well, not exactly butts in, but, you know—." I don't. "Monop— You're with *me*, not *him*!"

Ah! I get it.... But I don't, not really, but I say I do because I am green in judgment; but now I do, I say, get it, because now I am like a drunken man, full of sleep and truth, and see rightly with the heart what the eyes never see, I say....

Could it be!— I shall not pass ungraced, *puer aeternus*, with Fisher King wound unhealed and bleeding in silence?—still unversed in such things as between fathers and daughters? still deaf to the plaintive pleas of soft-voiced girls with perfect white pearls wanting the first time to be special?...

"Special?" I vent, with rattling and gurgling, which, rest assured, rites-besodded interlopers, leadening the room with your breath, is quite normal, as is the smell—Ah! you've

noticed—of nail polish remover. Not to worry, 's just the old metabolism shutting down. And should I yawn, 's for air, not of boredom. . . .

"How?... 'Like, on their bed?' But the sofa—," I lamely protest in my salad days best, of the love seat with the thready, bold boomerang pattern, "the sofa's special," as I'm fed the viaticum and act of contrition....

Contrite, contrite, who says? Why would I be con—? after a Hurricane Saturday night?... bodies locked together by the leaping ray of an eager fire?... Contrite? for the real flame of feeling? No, never!—only for

The Pregnant Mare or

The Guys
in The Crate
at The Joint



Garrison Somers

art by Susan Connors

On Amazon - of course....

The Blotter

founding in the bard's shallows
and miseries for not taking the
tide at the flood....

Oremus, indeed! Let us pray:

Deliver me, O Lord, in the song's "wee small hours of the morning," to moist lips—to a shiny damp street that shows with frightful clarity a blood-red blinking on a bleak brooding corner.... To a breath, deliver me, O Lord, that is like the sweet smell of summer wine.... Even unto, O Lord, the very last minute when, in *my canticle's* "hush of the night," I hold out my hand and see my heart in it, and bleat: "Is anyone there?" And as though from Echo, O Lord, let it be, "Is anyone there?" And from me, O Lord, lost and alone, the orison, "Let's come together," and from Echo the same,... but not, O Lord, please I pray, not from me, the stammer of an artless Narcissus, "See you tomorrow."... Instead, from me, a borderline bumptious, "*Fiat*,"—Let the parental bed be anointed with the healing balm of the holy lap....

If this, O Lord, be merely a Morpheus-induced, redemptive tale, listen still. Hear, O Lord, above the amphigory of saints spewing from the clueless curate in the jingle-jangle collar, the penitential prayer of a dry light soul swooning slowly at the final turning for midday Sunday dinner.



The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals. If nothing else, we'd love to read them. We won't publish your whole name.

mermaid@blotterrag.com

Dream: part one.

Everything was essentially normal. But apocolyps-esque...i was with my friend zak, we were just talking and living our lives with many other people around us and everyone was great. We were all in one house, living and working on the house which was on the beach. (i experienced about a year in my dream of me living and being and feeling "normal" here) Then it came to be understood that we were all to experience the explosion of a star or sun nearby, and what happened resembled that of a huge pulse. This star became a visible sphere to us and so mesmerizing. As we observed it, we all felt its power. Then it began to explode or implode (something like a solar flare pulse, there was one pulse that was easy and transparent for the most part, the second caused me to see partially white or blind and the third and final sound/light explosion caused everyone to see completely white and to in fact not be alive. I only saw bright white and nothing else was existing. I felt as if i was passing thru to the next plane of energy existence - as if my soul was traveling to meet my next form of life or lack of life. I want to express here that i felt dead, (it was understood to me that this previous form of life i had been living on this random ((I say random because it was not earth)) planet was void and never would me or any people around me experience the truth...) dead as in i was only existing as a form of awareness; then as we all awoke, one by one, we awoke with so much knowledge and power - close to having superpowers, although no one was flying or walking thru walls. We were awoken in the same place and it had been a day which had passed, everyone was waking up and throwing up from the experience (it was understood that what happened from the solar explosion should have killed us, and now that i realize, some of the people i was with did not survive the explosion and were not present in my dream as a result), everyone spoke of the newfound ethereal person they had become as a result of this explosion. We lived for a few hours and spoke to each other, but found that some of us would not be able to mingle or interact with others of us - this is what i now see as energy colliding/crashing - from this knowledge here, there was a woman, a girl who was my friend before we experienced the explosion. She and i were speaking amidst and amongst other friends around us (mind you, after we all had the knowledge that we all had a different genetic makeup because of this explosion which had caused a dna / genetic change in understanding), she and I were laughing about something and then my neck went stiff and hers did as well. My mouth spoke of evil and hated to cause her to hate me. But it was a possession over my mouth and body, i wanted so badly for whatever was being said, for it to stop but i had not control. It was like we were both electrocuted at the same time and evil energy / expression and words took me over. I tried to convey to her that i didn't mean anything that i had said and it wasn't me that had said it: she believed me but didn't trust me after that.

Christopher - cyberspace

GET THE FUCK INSIDE! IT'S FREEZING OUT HERE!

LIFE LESSONS FROM A METAL BUNNY

by Joe Buonfiglio

Today I got up off the toilet, pulled up my pants, and only then realized that I had not yet wiped my ass. While that is unquestionably gross to the point that I would not blame you if you immediately stopped reading this absurd little commentary, I use it to drive home a critically salient point of this story:

Either I am displaying the symptomatic signs of early-onset dementia, *OR* I still view a "snow day" with the wide-eyed wonder of a child; a youthful excitement that distracts me from all manner of grown-up responsibility to the point of acting as if a kitten with a shiny object dangled in front of it. And that brings me to this....

This is a picture of what my family affectionately refers to as "Mister Bunny."

Mister Bunny is a metal rabbit procured for some reason that escapes me to this day. It represents a tapestry of emotional joy and budgetary irresponsibility that embroiled my wife and I within a rapturous moment of atypical domesticity as we got caught up in the excitement of purchasing our current home many years ago. Over time, Mister Bunny has become my internal voice of rationality, a mechanism for a sort of grounding in a brain wired not just for notions of fantasy within a writer's imagination, but for surrealistic viewpoints of chaotic extremes. I am someone who makes absolutely no sense whatsoever in the "real world," but feels as if God within the absurd landscape of make-believe. And when I disappear into *Joeland*, it is often the voice in my head of a steel cottontail that brings me back to a place of societal normality; thus, I can again realize that I have to deal with



the fact that there is no food in the house (so it's probably a good idea to go to the grocery store), that I need to get off my backside and pay the electric bill (or they'll probably be shutting off the power soon), and that I should not endeavor to dine on fast food for my twenty-seventh lunch break in a row (lest I invite Type II Diabetes to become my life partner).

Mister Bunny speaks truth to psychosis.

So as I go out this day into the snow to play as if a schoolboy who has just been told the bus will not be able to make it to his stop today, as I dress inappropriately for the weather somehow believing that the ghost of my mother will be waiting for me inside with a cup of hot cocoa and mini-marshmallows just when I need it, it is the voice of Mister Bunny that screams out in my mind to reintroduce the concept of "adulthood" into my childishly self-indulgent pretend realm.

"Get the fuck inside!" he yells into my mind's ear. "It's freezing out here!"

I dutifully obey and drag myself through the wintery obstacles back to reality, for it is Mister Bunny who has commanded it be so. With sincere apologies to Tchaikovsky, any notion of Sugar Plum Fairies will have to wait.

So yes, today I shall write my blog. Later, I shall work on my book. Tomorrow, I will shovel my driveway.

My long, steep, oppressive driveway.

Thank you for being the voice of reason in my head, Mister Bunny. Thank you and fuck you. ♦

"Coming Clean"

We're looking for your honest words of redemption, telling us that thing from your past that you want to get off your chest. Anonymously, of course. mermaid@blotterrag.com

Episode 2 - The Vandal:

I'm troubled by a number of things, and these two are not even in the hot 100. But they're still there, (unhealed? itchy?) because I have a very good memory, and because my conscience is also still a functioning organ.

I stepped on a guy's car. It was a long time ago, and I was young and stupid – far more stupid than I am today. He had parked it arrogantly on the sidewalk so he didn't have to walk very far to the college beer bash that I and many others were attending and when I walked home to my apartment, it was there. On the sidewalk. In my way. I went up the front hood, over the top and down the back. Like it was funny that there was suddenly this hill on the way home that hadn't been there when I originally left....

Plate tectonics.

Of course I was an ass, and of course I had had beer, and of course I thought it was funny, even though there was no audience. I had always been a good audience for my own foolishness. Did I mention that from time to time I could be a real ass?

The car's owner came by my apartment the following morning – or maybe it was that same morning as I don't know exactly when I got home from the beer bash. I answered the knock at the door, and saw that there was a fellow student standing there that, suffice to say, was not a friend. One of those people you run into in your life from time to time with whom you have no rapport whatsoever. Maybe it's pheromones. Maybe it's non-compatible ass-ness. I don't know.

He was alone. I was alone. He said I damaged his car. I asked what in the world he was talking about. He said that people saw me coming home last night's beer bash and jumping up on the hood of his car.

I denied it. Quietly, like a practiced liar. Looked him square in the face and denied it. He repeated that people had seen me do it. I said he must be mistaken. Never asked where it had happened, never asked what happened to the car, or even what kind of car it was. Just told him it wasn't me. He made no threats, promised no retribution. He was frustrated with the outcome of the visit. I shrugged with fake real sympathy for his plight.

And that's when I had a moment of...real stupidity. Or genius, depending on how you see it. I actually recall this part of the conversation as if I had captured it in legal shorthand and printed it out and stored it in my wallet: I told this rather unpleasant, yet unfortunate young man that there was someone else at the college – perhaps a freshman, perhaps a transfer sophomore – that bore a real resemblance to me. Like a...and I hesitated while the word filtered out onto the tip of my tongue...a *doppelganger*. Maybe he knew what that meant, maybe he didn't. I even suggested which dormitory he might live in. Not too much help, like I was some sort of a crime scene investigator, but just try-

ing to help out a classmate. Which I wasn't trying to do at all.

He actually thanked me. Maybe he thought I was nuts. And I don't know if he was acting almost as well as I was, or was truly frustrated and grasping at any straw passing his way. In any case, he never asked me about it again. Our paths never really crossed, so there was that.

There are a lot more details to this story – like how much damage was actually done to the car, and how I found out about *that*, and the real loathing between him and his circle of friends and me and my friends. Those details change nothing, so let's ignore them.

Many years later I saw his name in the alumni magazine, with an address. I thought about sending him a check. I was in a position to do so. I didn't, though. After all....

anonymous, via e-mail

CONTRIBUTORS:

Dr. Geoff Trodd writes, "I live in Hertfordshire near London. I did a doctorate in British Labour history and have worked extensively in adult education and community learning in the UK. I am a lifelong music enthusiast and music historian and had a well-received blog [There Are Place I Remember-songsabout-places.blogspot.co.uk](http://ThereArePlacesIRemember-songsabout-places.blogspot.co.uk). This featured songs about particular places and attracted readers from around 80 countries and got comments from the likes of Fleetwood Mac, Dire Straits and Melanie Safka. I have just launched 2 others: Lost Souls: 10 Great Soul Records You Might Have missed - tellanothersoul.blogspot.co.uk; and The Many Voices of Minnie Riperton - momentsofminnie.blogspot.co.uk"

Donald Hubbard has written six books, one of which was profiled on Regis and Kelly and another that was a Boston Globe bestseller and Amazon (category) top ten. Two books have gone into a second edition and he was inducted into the New England Basketball Hall of Fame as an author in 2015. He has published two dozen stories in thirteen magazines and had a chapter from one of his books published in *Notre Dame Magazine*. He studied English at Georgetown University and the University of Kent.

After retiring from a career teaching philosophy, **Vincent Barry** returned to his first love, fiction. His stories have appeared in numerous publications in the U.S. and abroad, most recently (2017): *Dime Show Review*, *Mulberry Fork Review*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *The Bitchin' Kitsch*, *The Broken City*, *The Fem*, *Dual Coast*, *The Fiction Pool*, *Subtle Fiction*, *FictionWeek Literary Journal*, *Star 82*, *Abstract: Contemporary Expressions*, and *Ariel Chart*. Barry, whose work has been nominated for Best of the Net 2017, lives with his wife and daughter in Santa Barbara, California.

Writer, humorist & "Literary Absurdist" **Joe Buonfiglio** loves pangolins (quite literally) ... and Vieux-Boulogne cheese ... often at the same time. Oh, and his best friend is a blob of vulcanized rubber named Sasha. That's probably important to know about him. If you're weird enough to want to experience more of his locker-room intelligentsia laced with the tears of polite society, go to his Twitter page @JoeBuonfiglio (<https://twitter.com/joebuonfiglio>) and his often dark and always strange Absurdist-humor blog "Potpourri of the Damned" at JoeBuonfiglio.com. We now return you to the "Chalk-Painting by Numbers with Urinal Cakes" program.



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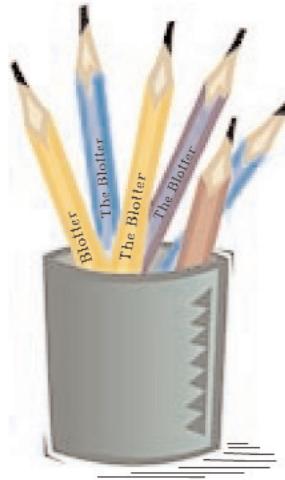
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