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magazine

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“Movie Review”

Watched *The Desk Set* recently. Sat in front of the “other TV” in our house – a 19 incher we keep upstairs for the poor sap who was outvoted that evening. Often that’s me, but OK. The truth is, a small screen is perfect for the playful banter between Kate Hepburn and Spencer Tracy. He, caught in the rain in his Tracy-fedora, so she invites him in to dry off. Earlier, she, freezing on the roof of a Manhattan office building because he thinks a picnic in, what...October? is a good idea? A ham & cheese sammy and plenty of hot coffee, kid. Hang in there.

Here’s where my brain took me: how fun was this, actually? It’s good-old 1957, the year of my creation, and people still take scheduled coffee-breaks and rotary-dial their telephones down to a department of sweater-gals with “freshly scrubbed faces” who answer fun questions about Astrology and the proper temperature for cooling Jello and the lyric poetry of *The Love Song of Hiawatha* and J. Alfred Prufrock. I don’t remember these sort of antics exactly, but there was just a little bit of it, the butt-end of the old-school loaf, say, when I was starting out. Suit and tie. Typewriters. Erasable bond paper! Inter-office memorandae. Company cafeterias.

Just in case you’re not familiar with the plot, Tracy is trying to install a “mechanical brain” in this office. That’s what they called computers (in Hollywood, because not everyone with a quarter for a movie ticket knew what a computer was, much less what the skyline of New York looked like). An oh-my-gosh, they’re taking over our jobs, plot. Very tongue-in-cheek, see, with Hepburn’s “Bunny” trying to land a man (Gig Young, who I cannot disconnect from his deep-into-the-disappointed-1970’s role as the head of the CIA-like organization that shot James Caan in *The Killer Elite*.) And the post-depression and War world is innocent – I mean we’re still three years from Jack Lemmon renting out his apartment so that married boss Fred MacMurray (heaven forbid, it’s My Three Sons’ Dad!) can boink sweet-drunk Shirley MacLaine someplace other than the back of a Yellow Cab or the Drake Hotel.

Why wasn’t that as deeply troubling as it ought to have been? Oh, yeah. Because like the Hepburn/Tracy film, we’re still coming to grips with certain beliefs: that women are smart but not quite as...important in the workplace as men. They get jobs, but those jobs are replaceable – by technology! Women need coffee breaks. They can do pretty good work (the men do annual reports, proofread by women.) And, anyhow, doesn’t plucky Shirley MacLaine pick herself up, dust herself off and start all over again? Win the guy in the end? And even if we reject this point out of hand, how quickly do we forgive the corporate world? Sure! By the fol-

lowing year, J. Pierpont Finch is already succeeding in business without really trying. Hey, it's OK, kids, in movies, using gender as a weapon is Fun! Right?

Right?

But here's where my thinking really wants to go. Fifty-odd years forward. New movie. Similar subject. In this particular flick, it's still the somewhat distant past, IBM is still trying to install a piece of big iron – and the workplace is still having “girl trouble.”

The chief characters are the so-called “computers” - the highly skilled and reliable African-American women who work on an assignment basis like contract employees – receiving those very inter-office memorandae to report to this or that department and do the NASA heavy-lifting of *mathe-matics*. Like secretaries keeping the drunken boss from falling out of his chair and hurting himself on the concrete floor, the computers are human mechanical brains who tote up the columns, double-check the measurements or even do the extraordinary trigonometry to ensure that these manned-missiles don't make, to quote a different space-race film, *spam in a can* out of anyone. Then the computers are placed back in the pool to await their next assignment. Career? No. Job security? Ha! (Remember that mainframe that IBM is installing?) That they are women, and deeply underappreciated for, well, a lifetime – *my* lifetime - is one point of the movie. That they are black women is...unexpected. And that this truth is unexpected is shameful. The additional nonsense they must endure at work is inexcusable. And that's not at all funny.

So we're here now, and some things have changed, and other things seem new, but they're not. I can easily imagine Katharine Hepburn's Bunny as the head of marketing, working for a successful internet firm founded by Octavia Spencer's Dorothy. A good place to work, with sensible child-care policies and flexible work-scheduling.

On the other hand, I'm kind of glad I got to work in a big company during a time when they thought equal-opportunity was not just a memo. That I had good managers who were women, or black, or black women. And that I got the hell out before I became disposable, and lived to tell about the tale.

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CAUTION

Freedom is just another word for no

“Three Women Walk Into a Bar”

by Annie Krabbenschmidt

Three educated women walk into a bar and sit down at a table – a future doctor of internal medicine, a future doctor of physical therapy, and a future person of unspecified employment (me). A little known variation on a classic. We were catching up after living as college graduates for at least two years. I remarked to myself how much more grounded we seemed, now that our worlds had grown beyond dorm rooms and frat parties.

This particular alcohol establishment serves excellent bar bites of various international descent. My roommate and I have, on more than one occasion, gotten sick from overindulging and mixing, not our alcohols, but our bar foods. Lamb sliders with chimichurri just don't quite sit with pate bánh mì.

Two men pulled up chairs next to us, almost in unison, implying a premeditated and strategic strike. They surrounded us from two sides. I was annoyed, resentful that they thought they could simply join our table without invitation. And I briefly, shamefully, lamented that

picking straight people up at a bar was about as easy as sitting down at a table with your back to the world.

These men were drunk, and not on German pretzels with Sriracha dipping sauce. They were drunk drunk. And they were big. Big big. The man to my left, the brains of the operation, as it would soon be apparent, wore army print pants, in uniform as a man ready for combat. He was also the bigger of these two men. When they initially tried to speak to us, I played deflector. As a gay woman, I have acquired a quick bar banter that cuts men loose before they can get my name. In response to their drunken prattling, I cut to the chase. “We're just here to hang out. Would you mind kindly leaving us in peace.” That this unapologetic rejection didn't deter them, that it didn't leave them mortified, marks a severe chasm between how we raise men and women.

These men were more determined than ever. My defenses were firing, “We're actually all gay.” I didn't ask my friends for their per-

mission before taking them under my protective gay wing, the safe space where a bar is just a place to buy alcohol, not a chessboard of drawn-out gamesmanship. “I don't care if you are lesbians,” he said. Maybe he meant that he just wanted to get to know us and enjoy our company. But I doubted it. To me the implication was that our sexual preferences mattered little to him, our desires an afterthought. Meanwhile, his companion, so good at following military direction, not so good at speaking in coherent sentences, was remarking on the cilantro garnishing my sesame udon noodle salad. He grabbed a handful and shoved it into his mouth, insightfully noting that, “this spinach tastes weird.” He chewed with his mouth open as little pieces lodged themselves in between his oversized teeth.

Within two or three more lines exchanged between the big man and me, my friends growing increasingly quiet and downcast, I was explicitly informing him that they had intruded and respectfully requested that



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they leave us alone. His answer was still no, and his friend still chomped on cilantro.

So here's the woman's dilemma, as portrayed in this emblematic microcosm of the feminine experience. Our choices were thus: Give in - let them sit at our table while we sat in silence. Fight them, which, despite my thorough dedication to exclusively watching women's sports on television in pointed appreciation for their athletic talent, I had to admit would end poorly. Or begin to hurl insults, preparing ourselves for a deluge of commentary about our unkindness. My preference would be none of those things. My preference would be to say, "I'll let you know if I'd like to talk to you."

At some point they finally walked away. We had settled for option A, in which we all sit in silence, and they had been uncomfortable enough to leave. But big man came back. "Sorry we bothered you, we're bad people. I apologize for my behavior." I thanked him. I

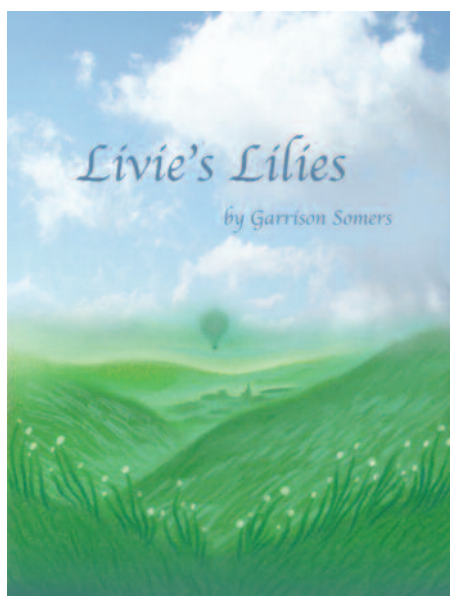
told him I appreciated his apology. "No you're not a bad person, but no, you're still not welcome at our table." I felt thankful that, as a gay woman, it wasn't so refreshing to find an apologetic and sincere male that I might have felt compelled to take my pants off on the spot.

But big man was mad again. He asked me what I did with my life. I said I was getting my PhD. This was not explicitly true, but at this time in my life I was tasting how that felt coming out of my mouth. Additionally, for this particular encounter, I wanted as much in my arsenal as possible. I felt compelled to add educational prestige to feel validated as an expert in what I wanted and could ask of this scenario.

He asked me if that was all. Thinking he meant one thing, I added a couple of hobbies to my list of occupations. He meant the other thing. He meant is that all I do with my *life*, that fragile thing between birth and death that we all risk wasting. He whipped his phone out. He

was a military man, he said, but I was seeing neither pictures of the military nor pictures of the man. Instead, I was seeing pictures of guns. He was letting me know just how dangerous he could be. He was showing me the violence he could enact. "I risk my life everyday for your freedom," he said, though clearly not my freedom to pick my tablemates, or, for that matter, my right to shove my own damn cilantro garnish into my own damn mouth. He fought for my freedom, but resented me for making a choice that didn't include him. My freedom was conditional.

I suppose he wanted my gratitude, but probably didn't understand that bravery and courage aren't supposed to be transactional, as that would undermine the words' very meanings. He was angry that I didn't treat him more reverently, despite the fact that my very first iteration of "get the fuck away from us," was firm, yet respectful. Which is why, when he implied that I lacked human decency, I was dumb-



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founded, for that was exactly what I had given him, approximately twenty minutes earlier in the evening. It's almost as if, and bear with me, he didn't care about having my respect at all, and was after something else.

He left again, performing the same ritual of grabbing cilantro Sam and saying, "come on, they clearly don't want us here," (It simply couldn't be more clear). But one more time he came back (despite how *clear* it was). "You're a real jerk," he told me. "We just got back, and my buddy is having a hard time." In an attempt to tap into my feminine duty, soothing the soul of a troubled man with an abundance of nurturing, big man had unwittingly summed up my role in a capitalistic, patriarchal society. He performed his role as the laser-focused, mission driven, self-sacrificing, army man, and I was supposed to comply, entrusted to provide care and comfort for his buddy's emotional

homecoming. The blunt subtext is that in exchange for using his body in combat, I *owed* him mine.

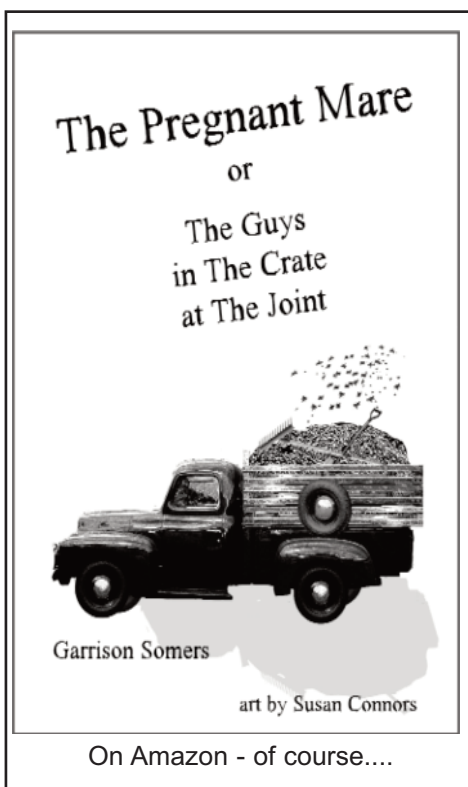
It was recognizing this subtext that allowed me to be firm in my response: no. Which inspired him to ask me one final question, "do you get off on shitting on veterans?" Naturally, if I wasn't sexually aroused by his very presence, I must be somehow sexually aroused in my refusal. Either way, his narrative sexualized me. I had attempted to diminish my role in this man's life. He, and only he, had decided to make me a person of interest - it was because of his persistence that I had become a source of anger.

I had to be assertive, but I couldn't be a jerk; I had to be kind, but I couldn't be seen as too inviting. I needed to state my case, but given his size, my size, his military training, my snarky mouth, I had to handle this situation calmly and carefully. If I ran, he might have followed, if I shouted, he might have struck. It was safest to stand still, making imperceptible movements toward my safety, using only an armament of deliberate vernacular. For all the rhetoric that women are too emotional to make level-headed decisions, I know that only a man could afford to blow up in rage at an unwanted visitor, a release I deeply craved, but knew I could never have.

He left one final time. Either because his larger group collected him and his fellow soldier, or because the bartender shoed him to the street outside, I don't recall. I watched intently as he loaded into the back of a truck, which he only conceded to after attempting to

declare himself the driver. I made sure his body got into the vehicle that was driving away from me, his threat dissipating with the emissions of his tail pipe. The bartender came up and offered a nonchalant apology. I asked him, facetiously yet pointedly, if he had seen our cries for help. I made no literal attempts to grab the bartender's attention, but I wanted to make it clear that this was a potentially dangerous situation, one that he should look out for in the future. He apologized again, offering us free drinks. Under other circumstances, I would have declined, hoping to seem easy going, rather than demanding. And yes, these drinks could have been seen as a payment to placate me or silence any complaints I could have about this bar. But I decided to say yes to a round on the house - partly because I didn't want to say the words, "It was no problem," and partly because I needed a reason to stay at this bar for another thirty minutes to make sure the white truck wasn't lurking nearby to follow us home.

So we sipped. My sour beer tasting extra sour as I took a reward for a race I never wanted to run. We tried to make light of what just happened. Grateful that we had a man with a mouthful of cilantro on whom we could focus our bewildered memories. We laughed because we had to, because we were at a bar with friends, because we weren't ready to discuss the tireless frustration of that encounter. And hey, at least we got free drinks out of it. ❖



“The Santa Paula Sunshine”

by Mark Tulin

Morrie’s mind didn’t work so well anymore. He couldn’t remember names, faces, appointments, and addresses as he once did. He used to be the strong and responsible one with a sharp mind, but now he just seemed worn-out like the brown-leather recliner by the window overlooking the Santa Paula sunshine and the garden full of pretty flowers.

Another sip of tea and he shakily placed the cup back on the saucer. A pleasant smile crept on his face as he slowly felt his bony shoulders against the back of the chair. *Now what?* That was the question for the last few years. He wasn’t sure what to do from one moment to the next. When Morrie was younger, he knew exactly what he had to do once he got out bed in the morning: he might fix a faulty heater, collect the rent from his tenants or do some yard work. Even younger still, he’d supervise a group of men to repave miles of interstate highway. As a teenager, he’d pick the oranges off the trees with a group of migrant workers and, if he weren’t tired, he’d go to the packing plant where he could earn a few extra dollars.

A car backfired in the street triggering a memory about the war. It came to him in bits in pieces like the popping sounds of gunfire. He remembered when he was a marine shooting a rifle, silver casings flying

out of the chamber, and the booming sound that it made. Loud noises always startled Morrie. They’d jerk him out of a daylong stupor and make him stand at attention.

Another sip of tea as the memories recede like waves moving back to the sea. Morrie couldn’t hold thoughts in his mind; couldn’t remember a damn thing that anyone told him. He could barely taste the lemon in the tea or the ginger in his ginger ale. Morrie wanted more tea but was too afraid to ask. He thought that the woman in the kitchen was much too old to do such things. *What’s her name?* he wondered. *She looks so familiar.*

He gazed out the window and noticed a blue jay land on the bird feeder, a sparrow and a dove followed along with a frenetic hummingbird who couldn’t get enough nectar from the petunias. He watched the sky change from a light blue with a swirl of white clouds to a foggy chilly gray. Time seemed to evaporate as he sat in his recliner with all his brothers, sisters and friends gone. He was the last remaining Reyes in his family.

In an instant, pins and needles took over his legs and arms and he rubbed them briskly to get the blood circulating again. Morrie had always been forceful with his words and his thin, limber body could be as strong as much bulkier men. A

hard worker with only a sixth-grade education, he valued doing a job the right way. He would always say: “Apply yourself, no matter how long it takes, no matter how difficult the job may be. Never quit.”

Today, he felt like quitting. There was a feeling of failure in his heart that he couldn’t shake. He was afraid of living; terrified of what the next moment might bring, fearful of disappointing others. He felt guilty about his longevity: *Why am I still here while the others are gone? What did I do that was so awful to deserve this?* He was scared of leaving the old woman behind. Her name was on the tip of his tongue. He saw her in the house every day, slowly pushing the walker around, and he had a vague sense that she was family, perhaps someone he knew intimately. Her smile was warm and pretty. It made him feel comfortable.

“Jaina, your wife!” she said again. “And you are Morrie Reyes, honey. We live in Santa Paula, California. And you just turned one-hundred last week. Don’t you remember the party?”

She handed him his medication. He carefully took one pill at a time, put each tablet at the bottom of his tongue with his bony fingers and washed it down with the warm tea. He didn’t know why he took the medications— just felt it was

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necessary. He was not one to argue or bicker about such things. He did what he was told.

The woman walked back to the kitchen and brought him out a container of sugar cookies. "Here Morrie, honey," she said, "these are from Mrs. Grace from across the street. Can I get you some more tea?" He wanted to say yes, but he didn't want to be a burden.

"I'm tired," said Morrie and he used his cane to walk to his bedroom.

After a short nap, he woke up believing that he was a young man again. He shuffled to the closet and put on his work clothes. His muscles ached, and toes cramped, but he pushed on. He wondered why his clothes were so baggy. He slipped them on anyway and tightened his belt to the last hole. It took him an hour to finish dressing when it usually took him a few minutes. He shuffled into the living room, and Jaina rolled her eyes the moment she saw him, "Where do you think you're going all dressed up?"

Morrie thought that was a strange comment. "Shouldn't you

know?" he said. "I always go to work at this time. I have a big project on the highway. We're pouring concrete today."

Morrie was a proud man. He built his own house, one for his brother and another to rent out. It was a cute bungalow with a big bay window and a separate garage. There was a beautiful little garden outside on the front lawn with big yellow flowers and other plants that he couldn't name.

"This isn't Arizona, Morrie," Jaina said. "This is Santa Paula, California. Now take off your jacket and have a seat. The nurse should be here soon to check on you. She'll be mad if she sees you walking around like a crazy man."

Morrie listened to the woman who called herself Jaina even if he disagreed with her. He didn't know why she spoke in scolding tones and kept him from going to work. But he knew that she cared about him.

Back on his favorite chair, he soon forgot about where he had to go. His memory slipped off the face of a cliff so quickly that he never realized that any of this confusion

was happening. He always ended up on the chair, the safe place, looking out the window at the beautiful garden that appeared to bloom no matter what time of year it was. "What beautiful yellow flowers," he said to the old woman sitting across from him.

"That's our garden, Morrie. We planted that. You built this house with your bare hands all by yourself. You built your brother's house next door, too."

"Are you sure? I don't remember building anything or even digging up the soil for those flowers. Those white roses and big yellow flowers must belong to someone else. They're certainly not mine." He scratched his thinning white hair. "What's those flowers called again?"

"Sunflowers."

Sunflowers, he kept muttering to himself so he wouldn't forget.

Jaina left Morrie alone for a few minutes so she could finish cleaning the dishes in the sink. While she was busy doing that, Martin pushed his old, stiff body off the chair, grabbed his cane, put on his tattered marine cap and headed



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outside. He was unsteady. His muscles were weak, his knees buckled, and he sank lower with each step. It took him many short steps to get to the garage which was only a few yards from the front door of the house.

He moved purely by instinct, not knowing where he was headed. He twisted the handle of the garage door, raised it a few feet and it automatically sprang up. He went over to the work desk which was dusty and cluttered with tools that haven't been used in years. He grabbed a pair of pliers, held it up to the light, opened and closed it. Then he banged a hammer on the wooden work table. Next, he marveled at how well the garage was organized: the screws were in little plastic boxes, different sized nails were in glass jars. In his mind, he heard the hum of a drill, the grinding teeth of a hand saw. He imagined cutting through a sheet of plywood. He saw himself installing a door frame, up on the roof hammering in shingles, painting the house with big brush strokes as the

paint dripped on newspapers below. He had sketchy memories of working with his younger brother, Antonio. He remembered going to Mexican parties in the park by a large oak tree with a piñata hanging from it while men in shiny suits played mariachi music. He could smell the steak sizzling on the grill, hear the children's laughter and the old people speaking in Spanish under the pale blue Santa Paula sky.

All the memories seemed to exhaust Morrie who became more unsteady and eventually fell back on his heels, resting his bottom on the ground. A wave of fear came over him again, and he began to cry with tears pouring down like clouds bursting. Once again, the woman whose name escaped him came into the garage. She saw Morrie sitting on the dirty floor with tears running down his cheeks and asked, "Did you fall? Are you hurt, honey?"

"No," Morrie said, "I was just looking for something?"

"Did you find it?"

Morrie smiled because he didn't know how to answer. He wished that whatever it was he was looking for he would find and not feel so upset. He knew that if he ever found it, it would clear up his mind so he could remember things. Maybe then he wouldn't be such a burden to everyone.

Jaina handed Morrie his cane to get up from the floor. He followed her back into the house, back to his familiar and safe brown-leather recliner by the window overlooking the garden and the bright Santa Paula sunshine.

"Who planted those flowers?" he asked once he got comfortable again. ❖

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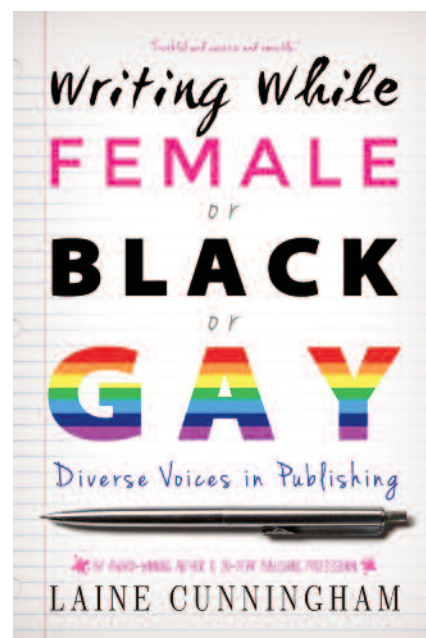
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by Marty Smith

(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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“Ten Secret Skills Passed On To My Daughters During My Stay-At-Home Dad Tenure.”

by Garry Somers

One: Know how to spit. Spitting is a vastly underrated talent – I mean if you can't do it, you're always the spastic one at the beach trying to get windblown sand out of your mouth or looking panic stricken enough for your friends to put you on snapchat that time you inhaled a gnat. There's more to it than puckering up and saying *ptooee*, too. There's inhaling without inadvertently swallowing, rolling up your tongue to create the projectile tube, and then puffing with authority, without making your head do that Hollywood spit-move (as if it would help somehow to get extra momentum from your neck. . .) And not looking after you've spit. And not wiping your mouth with your hand or shirt-sleeve. Just spitting, like you do it every day. I also taught them how to hock up a loogie, but we frown upon it, because it's showing off. And we don't show off, do we.

Two: Never hold a grudge. Things that are going wrong right now may turn out to be irrelevant in the future, but others aren't so. . .

inclined to forget clever/hateful things you say today. Sure, it's okay to be grumpy with someone for a little while, but then get on in there and tell them you're sorry. Don't burn a perfectly good mood daydreaming impotently about smacking someone upside the head. And most of the problems you will have as a young person will be totally silly when you go to your tenth or twentieth High School Reunion, so get it over with now. Apology is good for you, trying to keep track of your enemies is exhausting. Not to kick in to a song, but whatever it is, for crying out loud - let it go.

Three: There are many small life-hacks. When you find them, embrace them: Show up early to appointments and on time to parties. Pick up after yourself and other people. Learn to power nap without ruining your night's sleep. And if you can't sleep through the night, get up and get things done. Read when you go to the bathroom. Park in the first empty parking place you find and walk. Let your resting-face be a smile. Tip a little too much. If you have a few minutes, let other people go in front of you at the check-out line. Etcetera, etcetera. . . . Most of these are just a matter of acquiring “muscle memory” and will stick with you the rest of your life. And you'll be better for it.

Four: Cultivate new hobbies and pastimes, but don't throw old ones away. The more different things you enjoy doing the more you bring the creative part of you forward, the more interesting you will be, and the more you will have that you can do when you're older. Which you will be, someday, no matter how much you don't believe it right this moment.

Five: Help without worrying about return favors, ask for help without worrying about what you owe. Make others feel necessary. Help others accomplish what they cannot accomplish alone.

Six: Whistle while you work. It was just a song when I was little, but it made such sense. Rake leaves, clean toilets, answer the customer support calls, fold the laundry. Bus the tables. Unload the groceries from the car. At least be helpful. At most, understand the value of choosing to do the dirty job that no one else leaps up to volunteer for. No, you never get paid appropriately, but if you can do this one thing, you can do almost anything, cheerfully. And when you are doing the dirty job, no one looks over your shoulder to make sure you're working hard and doing it right. No one will shout at you to hurry up. Why not? Because they don't want to be told “you're so smart, here you go, you do it!”

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Weekdays 11 - 6 * Saturdays 10 - 5 * Sundays 12 - 5

Seven: Having already acquired skill two, remember to say what's on your mind early and often. Don't hold back until you feel life/school/job/relationship is unfair. And don't suddenly become someone else when your mood changes. Put the person you really are *up front*, opinionated, passionate, always honest and...now shut up and listen to the other person. Look them in the eye. Ask questions about what they're saying, so that they know you're listening and interested in what they have to say. And, if you should, apologize for talking too much.

Eight: Set and meet your goals, but not for rewards other than personal accomplishment or wisdom. Grades, ratings, salaries, recognition is all good, but not the *all-good*. Achieve because it is what you committed to do, and because learning is its own reward. And give yourself a pat on the back for emptying the dishwasher as often as you do for making your...quarterly sales goals.

Nine: It's not how you look, but how you feel about how you look. Take care of yourself, but don't let anything so ephemeral as personal beauty become an obsession.

Ten: Small victories and small joys. This one is not precisely how it sounds. One should strive for victories but also have/find satisfaction in the small steps of achievement. Learned something new? Good. Read and turned the page? Also very good. ❖

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

He's in his chair - it's been his chair forever, and looking at something in his lap: a book, but a big book, like the kind that sits on coffee tables and is rarely read but looks like something someone would collect. Or a magazine, one of the expensive ones that no longer are in business. Architectural Digest, maybe. I'm way over in the kitchen doorway, someplace that doesn't have a strong memory for me. I mean that I can remember the kitchen, what it looks like, can see into the kitchen from the dining room, but cannot see out of the kitchen into the dining room or living room quite as well. Perhaps this is because the kitchen is something to look into, or be inside, but once I am there it is not so important to see out or leave.

Anyhow, there he is, the light of his lamp yellow, the light from outside dim, because the windows face the east and day ends with them first. I cannot hear anything, but I know his music is on, or someone is talking on the radio, or perhaps the TV news is on, although I cannot see it from here. Maybe he is sleeping - he likes to nap in his chair. One moment reading, the next his eyes close and he's snoring happily away. No one taps him on the shoulder and says, "go lie down on your bed if you're tired," because that would interrupt him and he wouldn't go nap, but go one with reading or some other task

In the mean time, I stay where I am in the doorway and watch him. Later, maybe I can go back and heat up a cup of coffee, if I turn around. There's always some cool in the pot, and we're not snobs about that, he or I.

MS - cyberspace

Three by Lisa Brognano

“Tawny Satchel”

Pleased to announce her ability
to step up in a complicated world, she
lugged a bulging satchel, rosy apples
curved against buff leather,
the sum total of her life defined by the
distance a lonely red sphere
travelled toward the sky—as it crept
into the air, hurled delicately
from her fingers, she wondered about
life’s little complexities
and how a baker of apple pies fit into
a bigger plan; goods at the outdoor
market brought hungry crowds, folks
who sorted apples by color,
preferred spoons for pie-eating; she’d
baked hybrids this time—
peach-kiwi-apple, a farmhand favorite
and raspberry-apple-nut;
new flavors with old recipes turned
out unexpectedly well, which
got her thinking on the tawny satchel—
if she should carry it any longer

“Urbanite”

The prickles in a tight-fitting coat expanded her theory on annoyances of the twenty-first century, to which she would add hot dog relish on her shoe. It took two blocks of zig-zagging thru a thick crowd to reach the lime green door of her apartment, a color choice she'd never regretted. If one couldn't wow an entrance, then all was lost. She had several possibilities for the afternoon, including a singalong with her cat, a feisty creature who hid from her, spitefully. The good news was she'd secured that raise at work; her new office would be walled, windowed, and have a view. Of course being an analyst had its downsides but so did owning a cat who didn't seem to care for her taste in men.

“Ava’s Quandary”

Tied to logic
and methods of understanding,
hasty decisions unsettled her—
cut off oxygen to her brain,
wholeheartedly twisting a stellar
intellect’s framework;
rather quickly,
a pile of considerations emerged,
ones she wished
neither to brush off nor ponder;

Outthinking the opponent—
what she considered to be
the widest point of any obstacle—
took expert fixity;
going off on a tangent served no
purpose, precisely why
she never indulged in fruitless
efforts; for now, she must
unwrap the problem delicately

Two by Phil Huffy

"Down At The Store"

Our little town's got an IGA
Next store around is miles away
It might be small but we don't care;
there's an awful lot of stuff down there

The aisles are narrow, the shelves go high
and if you need a whoopee pie,
a hank of rope or box of bait,
you can come on in, no need to wait

You really should see it for yourself
'cause bourbon and ammo share a shelf
there's paperbacks, some old, some new
and nails and knives and axes too

Frankie and Tom, an old married set
come in to see what's good to get
Frankie'll wave her arms and say
"Hey Tommy, today's our lucky day."

Once Dad was parking the Chevrolet
and the picket fence got in his way
He said, "Don't worry, I'll saw some more
and they've got paint down at the store"

"At The Blarney Stone"

When I was a young man years ago
with a curly head and healthy glow,
my friends and I would take a drink
a bit more often than you might think

It was right down Nassau Street a way
a turn to the left and there she lay
We made that place our very own --
a tavern called "The Blarney Stone"

They had some food and it wasn't much,
some brisket, cabbage and spuds and such
You could have a plate or maybe stew
served at the bar if that would do

The barman there (he was simply "Jack")
could tap a keg with single whack
He didn't allow much rowdy talk
but had beer to go if you still could walk

I took my sweetie in one night,
she looked all around and turned in fright
She grabbed my sleeve saying, "Let's make haste."
(I guess there's no accounting for taste.)

Now all of this happened years before
and I don't go drinking anymore
Though I like my coffee and my tea,
The Blarney Stone is a part of me

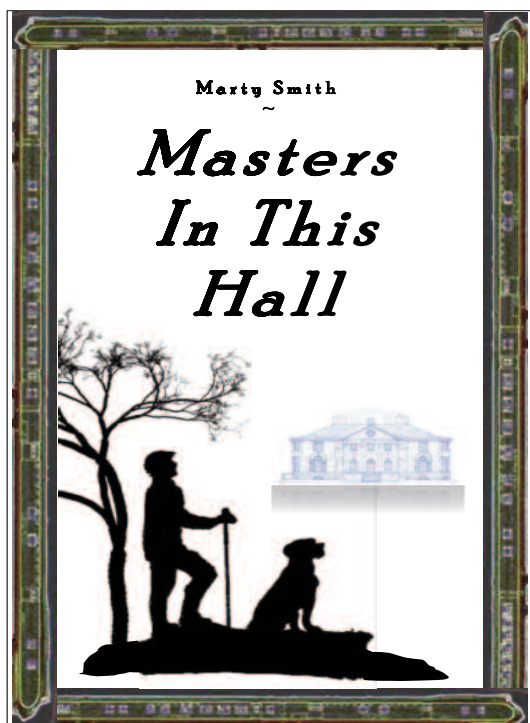
CONTRIBUTORS:

Annie Krabbenschmidt is a writer and cartoonist currently based in Durham, NC, and a recent graduate of Duke's Masters of Public Policy Program. Her favorite pastime is emphatically defending her feminist cause to a group of eye-rolling men, because it feels familiar - like coming home. Annie hopes to work in LGBTQ advocacy so that she can meet her wife, quit her job, and then write and draw full time. This is her first publication.

Mark Tulin of Santa Barbara, CA, is a retired Family Therapist from Philadelphia who now resides in Santa Barbara, California. Mark writes about off-beat topics, humorous characters, and often fictionalizes his childhood experiences. He has been featured in *Fiction on the Web*, *elephant journal*, *Friday Flash Fiction*, *Page and Spine*, and others. His website is crowonthewire.com, and his poetry chapbook is called *Magical Yogis*.

Lisa Brognano is the author of the novels, *In the Interest of Faye* (Golden Antelope Press, 2017) and *A Man for Prue* (Resplendence Publishing, 2017), as well as a book of poetry, *The Willow Howl* (Nixes Mate Books, 2017). Her poems and short fiction have appeared in national and international literary journals, including *The Emerson Review*, *Adelaide Magazine*, *Neologism Poetry Journal*, *The Wagon Magazine*, *Ibis Head Review*, *Stoneboat Journal*, *Nixes Mate Review* and elsewhere. Brognano holds a master's degrees in English and another in Fine Art. She lives in New York with her husband.

Phil Huffy writes at a kitchen table often cluttered with cereal bowls. For several years he hobbled as a songwriter and one man band, but kicked himself out and turned to poetry.



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