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The Blotter

magazine



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“More Idle Thoughts...”

February. We’re in the doldrums of winter (not a real thing) but I’m typ-
ing these words back in the shank of the holidays so it could be said that
it’s really not quite fair to label the whole month like that, however history
shows us that February does tend to bite, so, even though I cannot see
into the future, an educated guess goes a long way.

On the other hand, seen and pronounced in a particular way, February
has the word “brewery” built into it, so you see it cannot be all bad.

I think that the words “doldrums” and “shank” will go the way of the
buggy-whip, sooner rather than later. Auto-correct will assist with their
demise.

And for what it’s worth, even when I’m really in February I’ll probably be
nowhere near consistently remembering to change to 2019 when I write
dates. I’ll bet I’m not alone here. Is this because of the dark and cold that
our brains don’t do this very well? Or do people enjoying summertime in
southern Africa and Australia and South America have this same problem?
Or has everyone else on the planet already moved to electronic checks
and such?

I keep a diary. On paper. In a little book, with an ink pen. I’m such a
luddite. Do technically astute people even use that word? What do they
call folks who can’t program the date on their VCRs? And, oh by the way,
when the last VCR dies, some Thursday this year or the next, how will we
explain technical incompetence in a way that we all understand?

I keep a lot of paperwork in an old leather briefcase. Bic pens, too. And
half-read books, just in case. Because when you’re stuck somewhere (I
don’t know – the rest-stop off I-95 outside Santee near the big lakes) and
waiting to be rescued (by a tow-truck, or the cavalry, or Parsifal the seeker
of the holy grail) you don’t want to have nothing to do, or only electronic
things to do. You need something that you’ve already begun – time-tested
and reliable. Like a book. One in which you have a pretty good, but not
complete, idea of what’s going on. Marked with a piece of cardboard.

Batteries suck. Actually.

I keep getting emails for e-harmony. Suggestions. If analytics for data-
mining are so advanced, and we’re so worried that the big brothers are
stealing our private data for nefarious uses, why aren’t we all relieved that
they have this particular aspect of everything me so very, very wrong? And
what is it that we are so worried about, electronic privacy-wise? That we’ll
get a recommendation that reveals our inner dimwit self? That they’ll steal
our souls? Personal revelation: I’m not troubled that someone thinks I

need to get out of the house and talk to people, have a meal, maybe do some dancing. I probably do.

My wife agrees.

Occasionally, I feel like slugging a programmer in a coffee shop, for their part in the creation of auto-correct. Only my inability to differentiate programmers from soccer moms or gym teachers or goatherders in the coffee shops I frequent keeps this thought-crime from really happening. But, like an astronaut trapped alone on Mars, I'm working the problem, so trust me when I tell you: they're on borrowed time. Insert complex pipe-organ crescendo here.

If I could actually borrow time, I'd like to have back the spring of 1975. There were a few mistakes I made that I would like to have back. When we're teenagers, we tend to think that the world is mostly about us, and that other people – even other teenagers (in fact, particularly them) - are just bit-parts and supporting players in our drama. It's not arrogance, entitlement, electronics or stupidity, though. It's that teenager's brains aren't fully formed. They're like marshmallows when you put them in the microwave oven, and then press start, and they heat and expand and then explode.

At least that's how it was for me. We could blame electronics, too – they'd just invented Pong and my friend had the game and we all went to his house and played for a whole afternoon. Then we got bored and talked to each other. (Three years later, they invented Asteroids and it used up an entire week of afternoons of my life. I never did learn to do the hustle.)

Anyhow, in my youth I couldn't do the right thing if my life depended on it. And I was slow on the uptake as well. I finally figured some things out... well, last August. So here's my sage advice. Apologize early and often. Edit your work. Ask friends for help. Talk to each other. Read the directions. Eat less and exercise. Smile more. Wash your hands. Put stuff away. Play fair. Don't interrupt.

I have a friend that I like to eat lunch with and have long talks. He is putting off retiring, because he's worried about money. At least that's what he tells me. I'm afraid it's that he is worried about being bored, not having his days planned out for him. I tell him that there is much to do, outside the workplace. Coffee to be drunk. Chess to be played. Walks around the town that need to be strolled. Libraries are full of information that needs to be absorbed. A band somewhere needs a bassist with access to a van.

He says he believes me but is reticent to make the leap of faith. I'm working on him, though. I'll keep you posted.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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CAUTION

In the fields and in the streets...

“Sahara’s Law”

by Alan Good

Part 1: I’m Queso — You’re Queso

I saw a billboard with the word queso on it and decided to move to Texas. Texas is a fucked up, reactionary helltopia but you can put queso on whatever you want down here.

I didn’t know a single person in Texas, which made it all the more appealing. There’s only two reasons anyone would choose to live in Texas: because you’re running away from someone—and queso. I read on the internet, meaning I made this up, that men think about sex more than six thousand times per day. I am a man for queso. I knew I would be safe in Texas because no one who was mad at me would be mad enough or care enough to look for me in Texas.

I figured I would feel at home in Amarillo because I’ve also mispronounced my own name. It was when I met Brad, dreamy, jut-jawed, abtastic Brad, the first time and he said, “Hey. I’m Brad.” And I did a pathetic little wave and said, “Sarah,” but because I was choking on my own nervousness it sounded more like “Sahara.” For eight months, all through our courtship and engagement, up until that last day when I snapped and said, “Actually, Brad, it’s ‘Sarah.’ Not ‘Sahara,’ just ‘Sarah.’ Sair. Uh.,” he called me Sahara. I even changed my voicemail to “Hey this is Sahara

leave a message at the bleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep.” I thought it was funny to say “bleeeeeeeeeeeeeeeep” like my voicemail was me swearing on the radio, but he was always saying I needed to change it so I’d sound more professional. Maybe, I always wanted to say, I could just say my real name. That would sound more professional.

I got a second-floor apartment with a balcony that looked over the Arbor Trail into the parking lot of a Red Roof Inn and beyond that was the big road, I-40, which runs all the way from wherever it starts out to Barstow, California. The apartment wasn’t great, but it had pool access and was a tenth of New York rent and I didn’t have to share it with the guy from *American Psycho*. Amarillo’s water tastes like if you find a half-empty bottle of water in your backpack and when you take a sip you remember that you bought it like nine months ago, drank half of it, dunked a half-smoked cigarette in it because Brad was about to catch you smoking, put the lid back on, shoved it in the darkest depths of your backpack, and forgot about it. I discovered by accident that it didn’t taste quite as foul if I brushed my teeth before taking a drink and now my teeth are shiny.

I didn’t socialize much, but that didn’t stop all the white women in Texas from asking me

why I wasn’t married and pregnant. I would have run away again, but I didn’t want to break my lease. I wondered for a minute why only white women wanted me to get pregnant, and then I asked myself this question: if you weren’t white, would you give a shit if white people were having babies? The answer was I wouldn’t want very many of them to have babies. I don’t want babies and I don’t understand why anyone wants to have babies or why anyone wants other people, especially white people, to have babies. They’re cute, sure, but have you seen what happens to them? There’s too many humans on this planet anyway, and a third of all American babies born today are going to grow up thinking that whoever the future version of Tim Allen is is funny.

I got a job working in the shoe department of the local outlet of a regional sporting goods retailer called The Jock’s Trap. I was completely unqualified because I hate shoes, feet, and humans, but the manager hired me anyway because her daughter had just gone off to college and she wanted a lost victim to mother. She was always looking after me, checking in on me, calling me hon, saying what I really needed was a good man and unfortunately there just weren’t none to be had.

People would ask me about shoes, questions like what’s the dif-

ference between whatever shoes they were holding up as if trying to balance the scales of justice, and I would say, “Iunno” or “Them ones’re cheaper” in my offensive approximation of Texas dialect. Occasionally I’d give a bullshit answer like “These Adoodas got the patented turbo leather injected maxipad foam jumpstart soles,” which usually impressed the customers. I was always supposed to promote the add-ons. Cleaning foam. Some wand thing that’s supposed to erase dirt and scuffmarks from the sides of the soles. This stupid protective waterproofing spray. They called these after-sales and I sucked at them and every day Claire, my boss, would remind me to push the add-ons, you’ve got to push the add-ons, but I never did, and I never got fired or disciplined, which I wouldn’t have minded because it would have at least mixed up my routine. After every shift I went to this fast-food Tex-Mex joint in the food court called the Americantina and ate queso like it was soup.

I was wrong. Someone was looking for me. I opened the balcony door and when I stepped outside a snake landed on my head. Welcome to Texas, home of table-sized steaks, putting creationist museums next to important paleontological sites, and snakes that fly but aren’t very good at it. I’m sure there’s a rational explanation for how a snake fell on my face but my version fits my motif. The lucky thing for me insofar as one is able to use the word “lucky” in relation to being snaked on from above is that it wasn’t a Western diamond-

back rattlesnake and if it had been it probably would have still been too discombobulated to bite me. Maybe not, since when I googled “rattlesnakes of texas” to find out what kinds of rattlesnakes live in Texas I found a story about the decapitated head of a Western diamondback rattlesnake that bit a man and nearly killed him, so clearly for rattlesnakes there’s no such thing as being too discombobulated to bite a stupid human. (I typed “rattlesnack” instead of “rattlesnake” just now, which is definitely a sign from the universe.) A man said my name. As if flailing on my balcony while trying to fling off a snake that had already bounced off my face, landed on my ratty lawn chair, and hurled itself to freedom in the landscaping rocks below wasn’t discombobulating enough, a strange man was calling my name.

“Ms. Tassell?” he said.

I stopped flailing and looked at him, blankly, trying to decide whether I should run inside and barricade the door or fling myself to my death.

“Are you Ms. Sarah Tassell?”

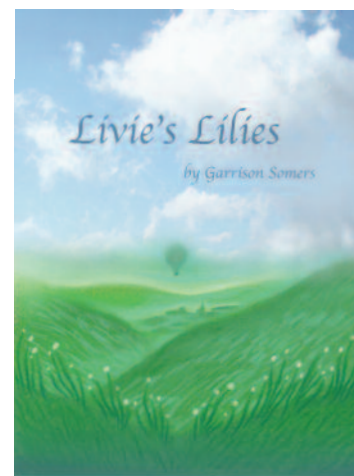
He checked the paper on his clipboard. He looked like a used-car salesman, dressed in an ill-fitting suit with a giant red tie, all Texaned up in cowboy boots and a black Stetson. I don’t really know if it was a Stetson; Stetson is just the only brand of cowboy hat I know. I believe the term for that is metonymy or something but I got a C in lit crit so I wouldn’t listen to me. Statistics were on the side of him being a used-car salesman, since aside from working in oil

and/or gas all the jobs in Amarillo are mainly retail, food service, or being a used-car salesman, but there was something about him that suggested he wasn’t really a used-car salesman. Whatever he did for a living, whoever had sent him there looking for me, I didn’t want to talk to him.

“I just want to ask you a few questions,” he said. “I won’t take up much of your time,” he said.

When he went around the corner to walk up the stairs that led to my door I climbed over the railing and, mad snake in the rocks be damned, jumped into the juniper bush outside my downstairs neighbors’ balcony. I didn’t die or even break anything. I ran as fast and as far as I could, which was to a restaurant that used to be a gas station up on Wolflin, the nearest road to my apartment. To be fair, it’s a wonky road and it jogs away from my building so it wasn’t like I just ran for a hundred feet and stopped. More like a hundred yards.

And that’s when I discovered gravy. At a dirty-looking restaurant called Restaurant in West Amarillo. I



Find it on Amazon.com

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said to the nine-hundred-year-old waitress, "What is chicken-fried steak? Is it chicken or steak?" She grabbed a plate of it off the neighboring table and showed me what it looks like.

"It's cow meat," she said.

"Chicken-fried."

"OK," I said. "Can I get that with queso?"

"Don't got no queso," she said, very unTexanlike, "but it come with gravy."

"Oh," I said. "Does gravy have cheese in it?"

"You a vegetarian?" she said.

"I just ordered the chicken-fried cow meat."

"Just checking. You coulda been a vegan. Vegans don't consume anything that come from a animal."

Not much time passed before she plopped a plate on the table before me. There on the plate were some disintegrating green beans, a turdpile-covered-in-snow-esque mound of mashed potatoes, and the aforementioned chicken-fried cow meat. She set down a bowl of gravy.

"I put your gravy on the side, case you was a vegan."

"So it does have cheese," I said excitedly.

"Nah."

Humans are overrated, but gravy is not. Gravy is a gift from the

gods. How had I lived my whole life without gravy? For the first time in my life I felt resentment toward my parents. They loved me, they cared for me, they read to me, sent me to good schools and didn't burden me with a sibling, but I'll never forgive them for depriving me of gravy.

I have a love-hate relationship with food: I love food and I hate myself and everyone else and pretty much everything except food.

I was vegetarian for about nine years, until I realized no one else really cares about animals or the planet or their bodies or anything, no one else is trying to be a good person, so why should I deny myself bacon? At any minute I might get shot dead in the street or the mall or at work or a party or a picnic or a school or a movie theatre or a gas station or a bank or a fair or a restaurant or a concert or a sidewalk or a church or a parking lot or a public restroom or my home. At any minute I might get run down by a van or blown up at a community event or crushed by an out-of-control satellite, or something more mundane might happen like I could get strangled or beaten or trampled or stabbed or macheteed or raped and murdered, raped and murdered and raped again, or raped and decapitated like a discombobulated snake. I take the long view: I'll be a vegetarian for trillions of years when I'm dead.

Even today, even with my new yen for gravy and queso, I could definitely be a vegan if cheese had never been invented. But cheese has been invented and if the gov-

ernment ever banned cheese, and there's really no telling what the government's going to do anymore, I would become a cheese outlaw, engaging in gruyère warfare, milking cows and goats in underground dairies, learning secret knocks and handshakes as I bootleg brie to the oppressed cheese lovers of America. Brad and I were just back from a five-mile run when I decided to leave him. He wanted to make us a smoothie using something called kefir.

"What's kefir?"

"It's the champagne of yogurt. It's drinkable yogurt. It's super good for you. Loads of probiotics."

I almost started crying. Instead I just said, "It's bullshit that kefir is good for you and ice cream isn't."

He had us on this keto diet so we would look good for our wedding photos and his sperm would be super healthy and strong. You're not allowed to eat bread because the keto diet was created by the devil. Keto. Kefir. Motherfucking quinoa. He said he wanted to live forever. Have you not heard anyone talking about what this stupid world is going to look like in eighty years? You live forever and put up with the mega hurricanes and the desertification and the killer drones, and I'll eat bread and die young. We'll both be happy.

I'm not happy. Happiness is bullshit. Every day is a nightmare. I want to live forever.

I thought the strange man was an emissary of Brad's, but when I got home I saw, from the flyer he left on my door, that he just wanted to invite me to join his cult. I was

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relieved but also hurt. I can never want to see Brad again, want him to never try to look for or contact me, but also be upset that he's not trying to look for or contact me. It's not a contradiction; it's just human. Fuck that bastard.

The second-most-common question the white women of Texas asked me was what church I went to and then how come I didn't go to church. Usually I gave a noncommittal answer like I just don't hrmpfh fjlk;lkj fsjlk;a eeee, but once I revealed myself as a formidable theologian. "I don't mean to upend your whole worldview or anything," I said to Anna Lee Lee, who lived in my apartment complex and always seemed to check the mail at the same time as me even though I always looked to make sure she wasn't anywhere in sight before I ventured out to the mailbox, "but if God is all-powerful and all-loving, why aren't nachos a superfood?" She's an atheist now.

If you don't wear sunscreen the sun will turn you into ash like a vampire, but if you buy the wrong sunscreen your skin will poison you or a coral reef, probably both. If you drive a car you're polluting the air and accelerating global warming, and if you fly on a plane you might as well buy five F150s and let their engines idle during an ozone alert until they run out of gas. The air outside will make you sick. The air inside will make you sick because we like the organic compounds used in our paints and household cleaners like we like the personalities of our former child stars: volatile. Everything is destroying the planet and everything gives

you cancer. The last time I went to California I almost turned around because the welcome sign said "WARNING: The state of California contains chemicals known to the state of California to cause cancer." Sometimes I feel like saying fuck it I'm just going to live inside one of those bubbles but I know the bubble would be made out of BPA plastic. I went to Texas because I wanted to not care anymore and it just seemed like a place where you could ignore all the ethical dilemmas that make modern life an unnavigable labyrinth of monstrousness and still feel like you're a good person. I know that sounds like a dig at Texas, but I also mean that any place is like that, just a little more in Texas, because everything's a little more in Texas.

I always thought of Texas as a wasteland and it is but it's also incredibly beautiful if you can see past the oil rigs and used car lots and the billboards for oil rigs and used car lots. Just thinking of the time I saw a longhorn standing in a sea of bluebonnets makes me cry.

One thing I liked to do with Brad was replace the word far with fart, as in "No, Brad, not tonight because I had to walk really fart today and I'm tired." Or "Hey I wonder how fart it is from Earth to Uranus." He never reacted. I could never tell if he wasn't paying attention or he was too confused or offended to say anything. I'm saying fart every time I mean far and it doesn't bother you? It doesn't annoy you or make you laugh or want to grab me and shake me and say why the fart I mean why the fuck do you keep saying fart instead

of far? Have a fucking reaction, Brad.

Part 2: The Queso the Expostulating Flashturbator

We're past the point of the story where something is supposed to happen. Something did happen. I was organizing the shoe wall one night before close and Claire came over to me and said, "Hon, I just wanted to warn you to be on the lookout for perverts cuz I heard there was a flashturbator on the loose." I didn't say what in the name of Christmas is a flashturbator because even though I'd never heard the word before I knew exactly what it meant. So what? Dudes jerk off in public all the time. I've seen more men jerking off in public in my life than I've read Margaret Atwood novels and I double-majored in Women's Studies and English at Hunter College. One time I leant forward to drink from a public water fountain and saw a pool of fresh cum blobbing around the drain. A giggling teenage boy giggled maniacally and ran from his hiding spot behind the section of books about Nazis at the main branch of the New York Public Library. I've never understood the women who complained about guys not giving up their seats or men spreading out on the subway to take up more than one seat. Why would you even think about sitting down on the subway? Do you have any idea how much semen is coating the subway seats? That's not laquer, it's gallons and gallons of jizz that's hardened in the summer heat and fused with the plastic of

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the seats. Even Brad, my very respectable fiancée, ex-fiancée, Brad the born-again-successful lawyer slash future senator, was on a mission to masturbate in public in all fifty U.S. states and on all seven continents and even, fingers crossed, on Mars if he can get in good with Elon Musk. That's my big fear, that he'll find me by accident, that I'll turn the corner and there he'll be pumping his pecker next to the giant rolling cow outside The Big Texan, scratching another state off his cumbucket list. Claire was the first boss I had who didn't try to masturbate in front of me, although one time I walked in to the break room and she was vigorously scratching her buttock. Even then I was able to back away and I don't think she knew I saw her. Men jerking off in public was as common in New York as almost stepping on dog poop and I didn't expect Amarillo to be any different. But it was. It was organized.

People think I'm crazy. Brad was a catch, is what everyone told me. They didn't know him like I did. He didn't abuse me, physically

or emotionally, aside from the fact that thinking about having his children made me want to kill myself and yet he continued to tell me how much he wanted to put a baby in me. He would say it like that, "God, Sahara, I want to put a baby in you. Oh Sahara, Sahara," while trying to kiss me, and I'd say something like, "Hey, did you know you can get on the train and be in Delaware in like an hour? I'm pretty sure you've never masturbated in Delaware. Oh man my boss just texted and so-and-so called in sick gotta go sorry."

As you might have guessed, I encountered a flashturbator. It's all probability. If a flashturbator is active in your area and you have tits and/or a vagina and are under fifty, the odds of encountering said flashturbator are very much in your favor. Especially if your town is plagued with an epidemic of flashturbators, as mine was.

I had just finished my shift and was heading for my queso fix when this guy jumped out from behind one of those food court trash cans and started jerking off at me. Not in

front of me, at me. "Your hair is so," he said, and paused, "red."

I did something then out of context. I confronted him. I don't like confrontation, but I also don't like walking around wondering if someone is about to shove a dick in my face.

I wanted to cringe and run to the security kiosk. Instead I said, "Excuse me, but what the fuck are you doing?"

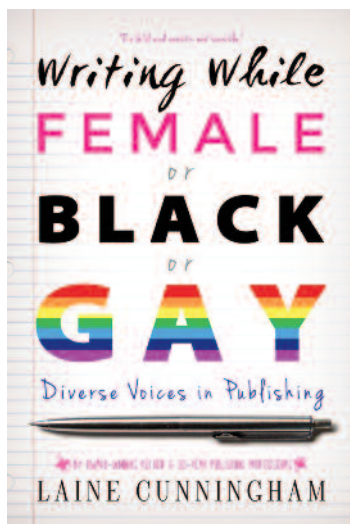
Masturbating creepy dude gets confronted in food court. What happens next will shock you!

He goes, "I am praising my personal Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ."

"Uh," I said, and I'm fully aware you're not supposed to include uhs in dialogue, but that's what I said, "what the fuck does that mean?"

"What the fuck?" could replace the five Ws. Ninety percent of crime could be solved by just flat-out asking people what the fuck are you doing.

I asked. He answered. "Name's Jake," he said. "I belong to an ancient sect of Christianity called



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the Gnosdicks and we celebrate our faith through communing with our members.”

“Your members? You mean you jerk off for Jesus.”

“That’s a rather,” pausing as his eyes rolled in the back of his head and he pulled a face like someone had just shoved a whole peeled lemon covered with cayenne pepper in his mouth, “crude way to put it.”

“How many people are in your sect?”

“We are a small group of true believers. Small but growing. Small but powerful.”

“So it’s just you?”

“Twenty-six. There’s twenty-six of us, OK. I’m worshipping right now, so if you could stay where you are because I have a thing for flat-chested redheads but also be quiet that would be oooooom great thanks.”

“That’s bullshit. This isn’t a thing. You dummies made this up to give yourselves an excuse to jerk off in public.”

“That’s not true,” he said, looking like it definitely was true. “Anyway, if women can breastfeed in public men should be allowed to tug our dicks in public, too. That’s what equal rights means!”

“That’s not true at all.”

“Listen,” he said, “God made man in His image, in *His* image, and he made woman from man. That means woman is subservient to man. If God made men in His image that means God has a dick. So we celebrate that aspect of God that has been ignored due to PC censorship. We honor the Lord by celebrating the thing that men alone share with him, the sacred phallus.”

Then he closed his eyes, lifted his face toward the sky, that is, the food court ceiling, and quoted the Bible at me while still jerking off at me. “This is from 2 Samuel,” he said, “book six, verses twenty to twenty-two:

As soon as David returned home to bless his own household, Saul’s daughter Michal came out to meet him. “How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today!” she said. “He has uncovered himself today in the sight of the maidservants of his subjects, like a vulgar person would do.” But David said to Michal, “I was dancing before the LORD who chose me over your father and all his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD’s people Israel. I will celebrate before the LORD,

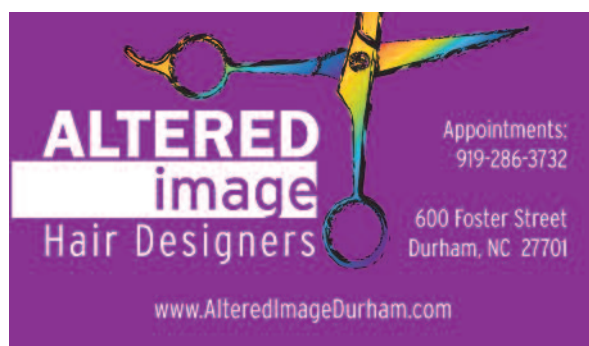
and I will humiliate and humble myself even more than this. Yet I will be honored by the maidservants of whom you have spoken.”

“Like King David, I will celebrate before the Lord,” Jake said. “By the way, do you know what happens to Michal? That bitch is barren. For her impiousness she is cursed with childlessness. ‘And Michal the daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.’ So watch out, cunt.”

I had one of those stupid cleaning wands in my pocket and I pulled it out halfway hoping he would think it was pepper spray and said, “What a bunch of shit. Isn’t the Bible against masturbation? Spilling your seed and unclean discharge and stuff like that?”

“That line has historically been willfully and maliciously misinterpreted by heretics and radical feminists, of which I can see you is both.”

“Whatever,” I said, and I took a picture of him with my phone and jogged off to the security kiosk, where I was told to call the police if I wanted to report a crime but mall security was not about to interfere with the free expression of an individual’s religion.



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When a cop finally showed up the jerkoff in the food court was gone. I told the cop what happened and explained about the Gnosdicks and he said, "Oh them, they harmless. They just expressing their religious freedom."

I jammed my phone with the evidentiary dick pic up in his face and that's when I noticed that Jake and the cop were both wearing the same lapel pin, which had a design on it that looked like this:



Part 3: Sahara's Law: A Queso Study

Like an evil entity from a Japanese horror movie that gets remade, but really badly, for an English-speaking audience, the Gnosdicks started out on the internet and moved into the real world when they felt brave and powerful enough, thanks to the rise of neofascism, to pull their dicks out in the mall. The image on the cop's lapel pin was the official Gnosdick symbol, according to the official Gnosdick website, which is the only place on the entire internet with any mention of the Gnosdicks, which I guess makes me optimistic. Their website was pretty thin, a few rants written by an anonymous poster who was probably Jake, but mostly just links to Jordan Peterson videos, which made me feel better about my decision to leave Brad without a word or a note or a forwarding address. When he came home with *12 Rules for Life* I knew I only had six weeks, which is how

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long it takes him to read a book, before he tried to kill me. I also read on the internet, I'm not making this up, either, about a boy in Texas who found a rattlesnake wriggling out of a toilet in his house, and then two more rattlesnakes wriggled out behind the first one, and it turned out there were more than twenty rattlesnakes under the house. I already had a phobia about sitting on the toilet before I read that story. Just think, the same God who made us and claims to love us also made rattlesnakes and showed them the secret entrance to our houses.

From my experience, everyone in Texas is crazy. Like that *Midnight in the Garden of Good and Evil* kind of crazy. My neighbor lady, for instance, thought she was on a diet if she only ate breakfast at The Donut Stop every *other* morning. And even as he was speaking words that would have only made sense if they were part of a parody of men's rights activists, that Gnosdickhead Jake I think really believed his own malarkey. And I thought if you ate right and exercised and voted for the right people everything would be OK somehow. I guess that's not

so much crazy as stupid. Before you judge, you have to consider the psychological pressures acting on every Texan. You might be sitting in one of those beautiful lethargic brown rivers one minute, afraid to get your nose in the water because that's how the brain-infecting amoebas get to your brain in order to infect it, on a summer day featuring Venuslike temperatures, just enjoying the shit out of your life, and the next minute a swirling death cloud can descend from the sky and suck you right out of your swimsuit. You don't exist in tornado country without doing real damage to your psyche. I want to buy one of those annoying loud pickup trucks and a trailer just so I can haul around a tornado shelter everywhere I go.

Being a woman anywhere is a lot like living in tornado country. This law doesn't apply quite as broadly to men, but for women, especially those of us who live in America and other "underdeveloped" countries, it's almost universal: spend enough time on this planet and you will be raped, murdered, and/or abducted. Quite possibly all three. It happened to me, the abduction part, though for a while there I did expect to hit the trifecta. One minute I was following Claire out to the loading dock because she wanted to show me a bird's nest she found because she knew I liked animals, only it was a mythical bird's nest that turned out to be just a device to get me out to the loading dock so some Bible-quoting cocktivist could throw a burlap sack over my head and shove me into a metal dog kennel



Cheap, good and available - a small miracle on Amazon

that was welded onto a flatbed truck, and the next minute I was all sack-headed and pretzeled up in the back of a hot metal dog kennel. To me, that kind of truck is a major red flag and anyone driving one should be pulled over and searched, the decision to purchase a rolling abduction machine being probable cause enough, but I'm told they're popular among sportsmen, who take their bird dogs out to the wilderness or canned hunt ranches to hunt birds and shit.

As it turned out, Jake and his weird band of phallophiles were just men's rights extremists and duplicitous Claire was in on it. They had this grand scheme to kidnap wayward women and deprogram us from the feminist propaganda they say dominates American culture and reprogram us to respect men again, and by respect they mean worship and make ourselves subservient to men. Claire was a "getter." She hired vulnerable women to be deprogrammed, reprogrammed, and repopulated, a process they termed ReWomanizing.

"How could you do this?" I said to traitorous Claire when I saw her in the basement of Jake's

mom's house where I and three other young women, a brunette and two blondes, were being held. All of us were white because in addition to being stupid and misogynistic our captors were also white supremacists, only interested in "saving" white women, with whom they thought they were going to rebuild and repopulate Western (aka white) civilization.

"I thought we were friends," I said to Claire, even though I never thought that. "I thought you liked me."

"Not really. You're rude and selfish and all you talk about is queso and you're a terrible worker. Easily the worst employee I ever had. I knowed you'd be a terrible worker when I hired you but I also knowed you was an obvious candidate for ReWomanizing. I don't like you the way you are now, a childless, godless, manophobic hussy," she said with a frown, "but I'm sure we'll be friends soon," she said with a smile.

"Can I still use you as a reference?"

"God no."

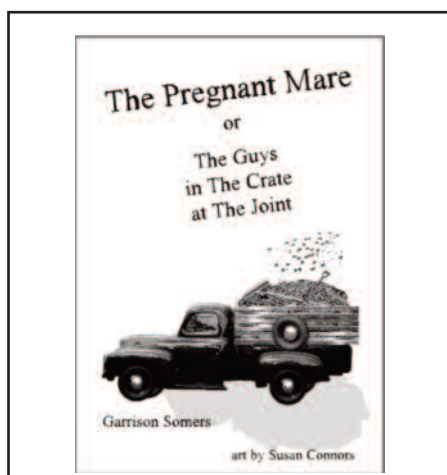
"You evil fucking bitch."

"Oh my, that's a good sign. Already using misogynistic epithets. That's a hopeful sign, hon. I think if we can scrub the f-word out your filthy mouth, hon, we can have you debugged and rebooted and back on the street faster 'n you can say 'God bless the patriarchy.'"

Which gave me an idea.

There was no point in screaming, the other ladies told me. The basement was soundproofed for Jake's podcast about religious-themed video games, his favorite being this one called *Glory's Sword* where you are the angel of death cutting down the sinners at the apocalypse. That's all there is, no strategy, no challenge, no levels, you're just walking around with fancy wings and a bigass sword chopping off the heads of heretics and radical feminists. Jake was really good at it.

They read us a lot of Bible verses about how penises are good and women are the property of their husbands and if a man rapes a virgin woman he just has to pay off the girl's dad and he's all set. We were blasted with country music, told to love Jesus and Kenny



On Amazon - of course....

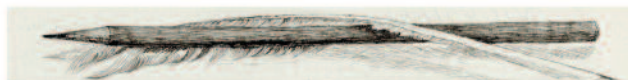
West Moss

Editor, Story Doctor, Manuscript Consultant

West is an award-winning writer. Her work has appeared in *The New York Times*, *McSweeney's*, *Salon*, *The Saturday Evening Post*, *The Blotter*, and elsewhere. She teaches writing at Gotham in NYC, and at the university level.

"West is genuinely interested in people and writing, and is willing to share her experience and dedication to the craft of writing." — Robin Caine

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The Blotter

Chesney. Taught to be grateful for compliments about our tits and asses. Encouraged to pursue careers in nursing, elementary education, and “homekeeping.” They read to us descriptions of women by dickblessed (Gnosdickian for male) writers of thrillers and mysteries, mainly James Patterson. Women who were cool and sensuous and eminently fuckable in the direst of straits. The heroine is dangling from a water tower, underneath her is a pit of vipers and alligators, but her flowing red hair still radiates like a supernova, leaving the reader to wonder not whether or how she will escape her deadly predicament but whether her pubes are red, too. In case you’re wondering about my pubes, by the way, fuck off. We had to become such women, held captive by fanatic men who viewed all sex initiated by themselves as consensual, yet maintaining our poise, or in my case faking a poise I had never poessed. All I wanted to do was poop my pants but I had to play sexy.

We had to smile, act coy, and bat our eyes or our eyelashes or whichever it is, at wolf whistles and catcalls. I remember this guy came into the store, he was walking by but he stopped and walked backward and came in the store just to

say to me, “Ooh, honey, your hair’s so red it could run for governor as a Republican and have my vote. *Lord.*” And I guess, according to the teachings of Gnosdickism, instead of pretending like I didn’t hear him I should have said, “Thank you, sir, would you like to yank it or rub your nose all in it?”

My idea was I just went along with everything. I submitted, or pretended to submit, to all their stupid brainwashing. This section would have been a lot longer, but I can’t describe in detail the full horror of our experience because the ReWomaning Process is trademarked and I really don’t want to get sued. I’m already worried I’ve described too much. The first thing I had to do after the burlap sack came off my head was sign a non-disclosure agreement. The point is it was creepy and scary and we were terrified but we acted nice and ignorant and interested and laughed at their shitty jokes in the hope that they wouldn’t cut our tits and heads off.

Through it all I submitted. I asked no questions. Did everything they asked. They were so proud of me. When, after five terrifying days of submission and smiling and oh God you’re right, Jakes, I was deemed “fit for decent society,” they let me go, set me up with a

job as a secretary at a used car place.

I went straight to the police, of course, making sure to avoid the cop from the mall. They finally let me talk to a detective, who said, “Oh, we know them people. They harmless. You sure you want to press charges? It’s a lotta hassle.”

“Yes, goddamnit.”

“Hey now, let’s keep it civil, hon.”

If I sound sort of blasé about all this, it’s just my way, but I was pretty pissed off and fucked up over it. Even though the Gnosdicks were all idiots and completely incompetent and their reprogramming program was halfassed horse-shit it was a horrific experience and we all thought we were going to be murdered. For the record, all of us survived without being raped or murdered, although we still live in one of the rapiest, murderiest countries on Earth so we’ll never really be safe. I probably still am fucked up over it. For instance, I’m opposed to the death penalty, but I was also disappointed, on the verge of outrage, when Claire and Jake and a couple of their cohorts were sentenced not to hanging or castra-

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tion but to just a few years in minimum security. Castration would have been good for the guys not just because of the irony of their dick worship causing their dicks to get chopped off but also because the Bible says, in Neuteronomy 23:1, "If a man's testicles are crushed or his penis is cut off, he may not be admitted to the assembly of the LORD," which is pretty harsh of the Bible. Just when a man needs the LORD the most he is cut off not only from his junk but from his church.

You could say something good came out of this experience, aside from me shutting down a disgusting kidnapping ring and getting no credit for it, because after Claire went to prison I got rehired at The Jock's Trap and promoted to her position as manager, except I didn't want the responsibility so I quit.

Sometimes I stare out at the Red Roof Inn listening to the drone of the interstate and I think about taking it all the way to California, only I'd need a car for that and I don't want the responsibility and I sure as hell ain't going to hitchhike. Not gonna push my luck any farther. I could take the bus, of course, but Texas really isn't that bad. Texans seem ridiculously proud of their state, like in an almost phony way, but I guess it's normal for people to be over-proud of things they like that other people think are put here by Satan to remind us that Earth could have been awesome if

the people who lived on it had been nicer. Whatever you might think of Texas, it is the American capital of queso and gravy, and that's something to be proud of. And where else am I going to get

an apartment with pool access for this price? Nowhere, that's where. ❖

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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My feet are cold. My back is cold, but my front is warm. I would like to stand up and open my eyes more, see everything more clearly, but when I try to, I squint and look down at the ground - unmown grass and scrub. I cannot run very well, but I think that is normal. Can I run fast anymore? Perhaps not.

My mouth tastes bitter, like I've drunk too much coffee, or had a cigarette a while back. I think I haven't had a cigarette in quite some time, so there's that, but anything is possible, I suppose. I look to my left and right, and there are people there, walking, mumbling to one another, but I don't see any faces. It is real work to recognize people in a crowd, and most of us aren't very good at it. Only when we are actually close - confronted with someone - do we tend to go "ah-ha" at them and their being there. (Yes - a very strange sentence.)

I keep walking, but when I actually think about it, I feel that I'm not getting anywhere, not well, not quickly. If this is a problem, I don't feel it, but then where am I going and why? Who am I going to? Where are they, and why don't I know? My feet feel colder, and heavier now. It seems that I might actually be losing ground - moving backwards feels easier than forward. If I turned around, I could back up in the direction I am trying to go, but I can't see where I'm going anymore, because I can't keep my eyes open when I stand straight, or turn my head. Like I'm too shy to see, or something.

Chloe - cyberspace



Two by Ron Riecki

“I Call My Father”

and ask to speak to my mother
but he says she can't speak.
Why?
Her legs.
Her mouth is on her legs?
No, she can't walk.
So take the phone over to her.
She needs to sleep.
Is she sleeping now?
No.
Then she can sleep after we talk.
I hear my father walking.
I hear my mother's voice.
She sounds like her mouth is on her legs.
She says she can't talk.
She says this with her mouth.
I ask if she has ears.
She has ears.
I ask her to just listen, not to speak.
She says she can do that.
Before I can speak, I hear her sleeping.
My father picks up the phone.
What's wrong with her legs?
My father says nothing.
He asks what I want with my mother.
I want the past.
Before everything.

“In the Prison Where I Taught in Alabama,”

they would brag that they spend the least amount of money per prisoner out of any prison in the state. It was winter. No heat. I said, But we work here. We freeze too.

They said I could go home and warm up. The inmates can't. I went home. I had no heat at home either. I couldn't afford it. I went to bed and went back to the prison. The chapel

had a large wooden Jesus. I'd go stare at it sometimes. I was amazed at his jaw, the square of it, the precision, how much it must have cost.

CONTRIBUTORS:

Alan Good of Denver, CO, is an underground writer who is so underground you usually need a geology degree to find him. He received his B.A. in English from the University of Colorado and M.A. in English (Literature) from The City College of New York. His writing has appeared in *Timothy McSweeney's Internet Tendency*, *Bookslut*, *Atticus Review*, *Perversion Magazine*, *Memoir Mixtapes*, *The East Bay Review*, *Red Fez*, *The Legendary*, *Points in Case*, *Robot Butt*, *Soft Cartel*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, and *Word Riot*. He is the author of a novel called *Barn Again: A Memoir* and a collection of stories called *The War on Xmas*, and is an editor at malarkeyweb.com, a website of fiction and humor. His Twitter thing is @TheAlanGood.

Ron Riecki's books include *And Here: 100 Years of Upper Peninsula Writing, 1917-2017* (Michigan State University Press), *Here: Women Writing on Michigan's Upper Peninsula* (Independent Publisher Book Award), *The Way North: Collected Upper Peninsula New Works* (Michigan Notable Book), and *U.P.: a novel* (Ghost Road Press). Books upcoming in 2019: *Posttraumatic: a memoir—essays & flash non-fiction on the military, prison, iggy pop, the devil, & writing* (Hoot 'n' Waddle), *The Many Lives of The Evil Dead: Essays on the Cult Film Franchise* (McFarland, w/Jeff Sartain), *Undocumented: Great Lakes Poets Laureate on Social Justice* (Michigan State University Press, w/Andrea Scarpino).



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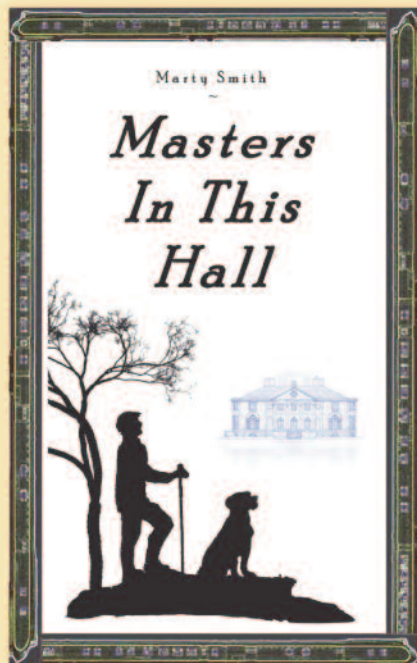
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