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The Blotter

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“Personal”

A couple of things. I’ve noticed that my oldest daughter has become something of a conscience for me. She is aware that I have a checkered past of mansplaining, being rather knee-jerk judgmental, and never quite current with social trends. She, on the other hand, is young and also tough and erudite and forgiving and verbose, and her arguments spill out of her filled with logic and heart and plenty of new information that has not necessarily crossed my radar. She doesn’t shrink from engaging with me both barrels blazing. She is a teacher. And I welcome that.

We recently discussed (actually I asked her to explain) the proper use of personal pronouns in conversation, and how folks (particularly in social media) present theirs in much the same way we used to hand over business cards back in the ‘80s. And lest that remark be seen as semi-snarky and become hardened like enamel to my already sketchy reputation, I did at the time already understand why in a society that is no longer thoughtlessly binary we should and do pay attention to how we are referred and how we communicate with others. Identity is important and relevant. And having a part of that very identity missed or dismissed in conversations between us can be just as damaging and hurtful as actively saying something mean.

And I might have used the adverb “unintentionally,” rather than actively, but it’s not really that way at all, is it? Because the first definition I find for that particular word is “not done on purpose,” which is a vague and idiomatic phrase we can hide behind if we must. What does “on purpose” mean, anyhow? Does it mean “with purpose?” Or is it more closely aligned with “I wasn’t thinking of that result when I did that?” Or, perhaps, it is “I wasn’t thinking at all of the possible results when I did that?” Because one of the bits I’ve picked up on in social media is the rash of passive-aggressive commentary.

And while we’re here, I am tired of the term “my bad,” which sounds intentionally childish and petulant, and not at all like an apology. In my opinion, it shouldn’t be accepted as one.

Anyhow, what I have concluded in my conversations with my daughter is that we are often creatures of mere habit, or more accurately, people, comfortable or not, in our own personal ruts. We tend to do what we are used to doing, say what is most often said by or to us. We think, behave, respond as if we haven’t learned a thing since we were twelve. All of the dumb in us is coagulated in our pipes and doesn’t permit anything fresh inside.

The reason I bring it up at all, is because I am curious. Is it possible, I

posed to my daughter, that our conversational habits and norms are the problem, and not just the grammatical and social exactitude of personal pronouns? I mean, probably it's not the front burner problem with humanity, but is it part of it?

You see, I think that when we speak to each other, we just don't listen enough. We don't speak enough in the second person. That is, we don't say "you" enough. How are you? What are you up to? How's your day been? It tends to be more of "what is up with her?" and "Why is he like that?" Perhaps we have a proclivity for gossip. Or we've become defensive about ourselves. Afraid that we will be judged.

I had a friend a while back who might have been the best salesperson ever. Always asked for the order. Consistently made her sales numbers. But it wasn't just her sales patter, nor her product knowledge, or even magic beans which made her a success. What she brought to the table was that she was a natural *listener*, someone who looked at you while you were talking, smiled, attended to your words, nodded when she liked or agreed with something you said. When you took a breath, she would repeat some of what you had just said back to you, as in "I think that what you say about conversations makes sense, Garry. Why do you think that is?" And that leading question she posed – the *why* question - would nudge the conversation forward, gently and in a way that made you feel...worthy of talking and being talked with. Her interest in what you had to say was genuine, no matter the topic. And the icing on the cake for both of you was that she asked and learned about you. She knew what you were doing, how it was going, what was coming next for you. As a customer, you felt necessary and your needs understood. As a co-worker, you felt a real partnership. I may be oversimplifying, but this way of conversing made her good at creating friends from strangers and customers and colleagues. And in my opinion, we're just not very good at this anymore.

I don't have all the answers. I'm just suggesting that it might be time to listen, to ask leading questions, and to be truly interested in the person with whom you're talking, and not just some of the words coming out of their mouth. Put down the phone, turn off the TV, shift in your chair so you are facing one another. Get the conversation rolling, and if it slides into a rut in which you find yourself talking/judging/gossiping about a third person – he, she, they – bring it back to *you*. That is, don't let the conversation drift into the weeds, return it to the person at whom you are looking, their face, the subject at hand.

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CAUTION

your Peter Pan advice

“The Fourth of Lamentation”

by Robert Kinerk

This is the Fourth of Lamentation. I've renamed the months. Next month is Rue. After that, Exasperation. But Lamentation is the month of fire, and I am back in Boon to burn the city down.

Why not?

I'm stretched out on my hotel bed wearing my shit-brown travel suit and my funeral shoes. Beside me, I've spread out my ex-wife's panties and tan bra. She doesn't know I have them. I called before I left and said, “You missed my birthday.” She said, “You lying turd.” She knows my birthday's in the month of Cockroach Dance. And this is Lamentation. It is almost Rue.

My name is Marrow, like the inside of a bone. When I'm the male Marrow, my first name is Tom. As the female Marrow I take different names. Sometimes Deborah. Sometimes Lorraine. I try to be both beautiful and modest, as if I didn't know beauty casts a spell. Here's what I must do to make my magic. First I shave my legs and arms; I double shave the shadows on my chin and jaws; then I do my face with first a liquid make-up base and over that a scented powder; around my eyes I do a faint mascara; I attach the artificial lashes; I color my lips; I put the ash-blond wig on. The one I've chosen for this trip is the one with the chignon. By the time I do that, I'll be wearing the panties and the bra. The dress comes next. It's one-piece, shirt-

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waist style, belted, with plain sleeves. I will push the sleeves up. The dress has a poet's collar tailored so it stands to frame my neck. The collar opens in front but not far enough to show cleavage, which I do not have. The dress has a pattern of blue on blue waves, and the blue is closer in the spectrum to violet than green. With it I wear silver. I have a silver flask as well. I keep it in the purse I carry. It holds the right amount of gasoline to fill a saucer, with just enough left over for a helpful splash-around.

I smoke when I'm a woman. I don't smoke as a man. A woman who smokes has something to do when she's in a restaurant or a bar. She goes through her purse to find her cigarettes. She crumples the package after it's empty. She looks for her lighter. She moves the ash-tray to the place she thinks is right. Such industry.

I re-examine, in the bathroom's cruel light, the perfection of my transformation—the eyes, the lips, the covering of make-up on my shaved chest. Stage fright fastens on my gut as I step out in the hall. I will make an omen of my first encounter, which I see from the carpeted stairs will be with the desk clerk below. He fusses with his shirt cuffs when he doesn't know I see him. French cuffs immaculate and stiff with starch. He looks starched himself, as if to keep from being creased or dented by what he has

to do to make his living. Which is—among other things—to flash a smile in my direction and arch his eyebrows in a way that lets me know he wants to be of service if I need him.

I give him a sad smile and say, “Rain.”

His face crumples to a mask of sympathy.

Enough has been said. I'll be the woman disappointed at the damage rain can do to hair and he'll be the man who understands and offers sympathy. Those are the roles of the moment. Later on he'll look at all his listings to try to find a name that he can match to me. Curiosity will rule till the sirens start to scream and the street outside his door bursts into flames.

I begin my fire-bug evening by stepping through the archway to the bar. I stand a second in the rectangular room's aqueous light. The plate-glass window on the street end is covered by dull-looking drapes. Between the window and the other end, which is the bar with its background of bottles in their greenish glow, eight round tables wait for the drinking crowd. It's too early for most drinkers. The room's sole occupants, other than me, are the willowy blonde bartender, who makes a show when I come in of wiping a wet cloth across her polished wood counter, and her manish friend, with close-clipped gray hair and slacks that would approxi-

mate the slacks of someone male if the material had been a bit less clingy. Both of them are smoking and after they've appraised me for the requisite two seconds they suddenly remember they need to tap their cigarettes, and they do that in a little ceremony of closeness over an ashtray which, even as I watch, the bartender empties with a practiced flourish into a receptacle mercifully out of sight.

"Be right there," she calls out as I pick my way to a table where I can sit and watch the room. While I wait I unsnap my purse and take my cigarettes out. I also take out my lighter, and from my wallet I extract a five-dollar bill which I smooth out on the table in front of me. When the bartender saunters over I pat the money and say in a voice I hope is cheerful, "I'm spending this and no more. What can you give me?"

She says, "A vodka Collins and change," and I tell her, "That will be perfect."

I love to be chipper and polite and to demonstrate that although I am in charge I will not be fussy or demanding. If she had said a gimlet or a martini I would have answered her exactly as I did. I do not drink a lot. I plan to sip at my vodka Collins as long as I can. Outside, the rain is heavy. This is the southeast part of Alaska, and the rain is always heavy. Eventually I'll want to eat and I will have to dart down the block to the restaurant I've decided on. I've brought my London Fog. I've brought a plastic scarf to protect my hair. I'll arrive at the restaurant looking like a refugee. But I'll laugh about that as I shake the wet-

ness off my scarf. I'll be someone undefeated by the weather.

I am picturing myself as cheerful and upbeat when the street door opens and the man who enters does exactly as I plan to do; he brushes wetness off his shoulders. He also takes the time to run his hand through his thick hair and send more dampness flying.

I am appropriately nervous when he notices me sitting, apparently a woman and obviously alone. He is appropriately polite, immediately turning his gaze to the green-lit bar and moving past me to reach it. He gives the bartender quiet instructions on what he wants to drink. He sips at the whiskey she gives him and spends a minute appreciating the bottles she has lined up in curatorial splendor on the shelves behind her. When he turns he half lifts his glass in a salute to me. "Are you waiting for someone?" he says. I have anticipated his question and plotted my response. I lift my coat, which I have placed on the seat of my table's other chair, and shift it to the chair of a table not in use. The gesture says, 'You're welcome if you'd like to join me.' He threads his way past other tables and before he sits he says, "My name is Omero. That's not my real name. It's one I made up. What do I do? I tell fortunes." He scrapes back the chair and when he's seated he says, "Show me your hand so I can tell you what's in store."

He has a dark complexion. He might be Egyptian or he might be a Native American from right here in Boon. We don't have to let our imaginations go running to exotic

locations merely because a stranger's complexion makes us think about Cairo.

I hesitate before I extend my hand because, of course, he'll know it's a man's. He notices I hesitate. "Won't cost a thing," he says.

I say, "Look at my hands." I raise them so they're on a level with my face. I twist them at the wrist to show the back and front.

"You're not a real woman, are you." His look is frank, but it is also amused.

I turn toward him. I spread my legs. He understands the gesture. "Are you a real man?" I say. I often have to gamble in this manner.

He twirls the stir-stick in his emptied glass. "I find transvestites sad."

"Unlike real men?"

He smiles just enough to let me know I've scored. Then, to catch the bartender's attention, he lifts a hand. "Another," he tells her, lifting his glass, rattling his ice cubes. "And another for the lady, please."

When the bartender nods, he turns to me. "Everything's sad," he says.

I say, "Tell my fortune," and I extend my hand.

For a few seconds, he pretends to read its little map of lines. Without looking up, he says, "Stinkweed. Bitterweed. Burdock. Nettles."

I try to pull my hand back, but he holds tight.

"Scorpions. Maggots. Fleas. The Cabbage looper."

I succeed in pulling loose my hand. I stand. I gather up my ciga-

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rettes and lighter. I drape my coat across my arm.

“Slime. Mold. Barnacles. Rats.”

As I am exiting through the arched door to the lobby, he sings out, “Sadness. All sadness.”

When I am back where the desk clerk can turn a startled look my way, the fortune-teller shouts, “Cockroaches.”

The desk clerk’s eyebrows arch a fraction up.

As luck would have it, back in my room, I startle a cockroach into scuttling up my moss-colored wall and disappearing into a crack near the ceiling. I think, ‘Brother Cockroach,’ and I stretch out on my bed.

It’s true about sadness. I mean if the future is all nettles and fleas. If that’s all there is. And cockroaches. Cockroaches are always with us. I am thinking ‘cockroach’ when I fall asleep.

Hours later, a couple quarrelling in the hall, pull me back awake. A blitz of words. All wounding. Rancorous in the extreme. The quarrel lasting only long enough to spur me to the work that lies ahead. As I hurry toward the bathroom, I hear the venom trailing down the stairs. The quarrelling couple’s sounds, sharp as hatchet blows, trail off while I refresh myself. My hair. My eyes. My painted lips. I pull on my London Fog and belt it tight around my waist. I tie my plastic rain scarf. I’ll wolf a dinner down, then start setting fires.

I am out in the rain with just a nod of greeting toward the desk clerk. I dart a half a block to the

restaurant fixed on my mental map. I’ve seen it throw its yellow light on the wet sidewalk. Inside, while I’m briskly shaking rainwater off my scarf I ask if there’s another dining room. The brightly lighted one I’m in has booths along one wall and a long, drug-store style counter. A waitress in back of the counter is filling a sugar container and she doesn’t answer until she has screwed its silver top back on. “You can sit in the bar,” she says. “We can serve you in there.”

She’s wiping her hands on her uniform skirt when she comes my way. I fall in step behind her, down the long length of the restaurant, attracting stares from a family of five squeezed into a booth, then through a curtained doorway into a darker, smaller room where tables have been pushed against the walls to clear the floor for dancing and, to the music of a gypsy tune, a solitary man is slowly turning. He holds his arms outstretched. His face is tilted toward a light above. Filters on a tinted wheel make the light change color, so one moment the face he’s lifted is the same red shade as blood, then it’s piss colored, and then the color of some sort of consommé, a very pale shade of nothing. Then it turns ocean blue.

“This okay?” the waitress says.

I say it’s fine and ask if there’s a restroom.

She has a working woman’s face. You look at it and know she’s tired in the morning as soon as she gets up. Feeling sluggish, almost ill, she sees her children off to school... She writes them weary

notes about the dinner she’s prepared and what they have to do to heat it up. She slogs to work.

“That way,” she says, and she points to an opening in back of the bandstand, an opening not quite finished enough to be a doorway, more like where the doorway’s going to be.

The bandstand is not the source of the music. A drum set sits on it, but draped across the drums are electric cables. The music is piped through a system unseen. Not that that bothers the man revolving in the turning light. He’s drunk, of course, but he looks hypnotized. He looks like he’s been drugged into a private ecstasy that has more elements of religion in it—an eastern, exotic religion—than alcoholic, barroom revelry.

There is no light behind the bandstand. I have to step with care because construction debris, like sacks of nails and the sawed-off ends of two-by-fours, impedes my steps. I feel the wall to find a door, and when one finally opens at my push I find myself facing the expectable conveniences, a bone-colored porcelain sink; above it a mottled mirror. On the floor by the toilet, which is in the room’s single stall, I make an unsettling discovery – a float ball and trip lever, both shiny new. Replacement parts, apparently. But does that mean the toilet doesn’t work? I rattle the handle, which responds as it should. I wonder why replacement parts were left so near at hand. In my imagination a workman’s called away to a more urgent duty. Or his routine was interrupted by a lady’s

need to use the room. Or his dinner break interfered with what he'd begun. I lift the tank lid just enough to assure myself no vital parts are missing. The standard discoloration offends my eye. I cringe and lower the lid again. I tell myself to risk it, and I am sitting in what I hope is the least unsanitary way when a mumbling voice reaches me from the other side of the partition. Someone has entered and, sure enough, almost at once a knock comes at my stall door and a woman says, "Can you hurry up? He has to go so bad he can barely hold it."

This information baffles me. Who is *'he'*? I am in a woman's lavatory and although I am a man myself I have established through disguise my right to be there. The mystery is solved after I successfully flush and open the stall door. A woman with a string-bean build stands anxiously outside. Before I've even cleared the door she's pushing a child past me. This is the *'he'* who has to go so badly he can barely hold it. I do not intrude on his privacy once he's standing at the bowl, but from the glimpse I get of him I would guess he's seven; too old, it seems to me to need his mother's supervision in a lavatory.

She hovers in between the stall and sink while the boy relieves himself. She has rodent front teeth and she's apparently afraid there might be lipstick on them because even while I am washing my hands she's peering over my shoulder at her reflection in the mirror.

"He never even spoke a word till he was four," she says. She has

satisfied herself her teeth are free of lipstick stain and now she snaps her gaze back to her boy. "Don't pee on the seat," she tells him.

He turns to leave, having finished his business, and I can tell from just a glance that he really is her child. Both he and she have the same embittered look. They are sharp-featured people, but she bears the burden of her years, and her unhappiness seems earned. Whereas it was a shock for me to see a boy that young look soured on existence.

"Did you flush?" his mother asks him.

"It's broken," he tells her, and he heads for the door so swiftly she has to dart to catch his hand.

Back in the bar, the same sad-looking man continues his meditative dancing, his eyes on the filtered light. He dances in a trance, as if his religion requires him to worship this ceiling fixture with its low-watt bulb and its revolving tray of colored filters. A melancholy music plays. I circle the floor's twilight edge to reach the seat I've taken at the bar, careful not to intrude on the space for devotion, if devotion is what I am seeing.

At the bar, when I have made myself at home on my high stool, the bartender approaches and in the way he arches his eyebrows I know he expects me to tell him my choice for a drink.

"May I see the menu?" I say in a voice I hope will discourage familiarity.

He gives the ancient bar a swipe with his damp cleaning rag and then saunters off to the rack of menus near his cash register,

and places one before me. He leans close to say, in a confidential voice, "If he bothers you I can get rid of him," and nods toward the dancing man to tell me whom he means.

The bartender looks Nordic. I mean by that he has the requisite blond hair. But even at his young age his pink scalp shows through its thinning, yellow strands.

"He doesn't bother me," I say with my eyes on the list of offerings.

The bartender hovers, but if he hopes to hear me tell him more he's disappointed. I don't raise my eyes from the specked plastic protecting the single-sheet menu. Eventually, the bartender drifts away.

I order salmon. The bartender barks my order to a kitchen boy who wears a tee-shirt so large it flaps loose on his bony frame. While I wait, I watch the mesmerized man on the dance floor croon his hymn to the cheap, revolving light. A door opens, the bar's door to the street, and two couples dash in from the rain. While they brush the wet off, three of them jabber. The fourth, rough-looking, stares at the hypnotized chanter. When the foursome moves toward a table, they stagger. This is not their evening's first stop at a bar.

The kitchen boy brings my salmon, which is adequate, a fillet with sear marks on one side. With it comes a glob of mashed potatoes so obviously reconstructed from a package of dried flakes I don't touch them. Also green beans, from a can. We are not in the heart of farm country here in Boon. The

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nearest beanstalk is six-hundred miles away. I sample the beans. One or two. After that, I stick with the salmon. Which is fresh. We are in salmon country here.

While I am separating the fresh from the processed on my plate, the rough-looking man who had gawked at the crooner stumbles to the floor to dance himself. He does it in the spirit of mockery, but he is not sober enough to entertainingly mock. He lifts his arms and shoulders in the leaden way of drunks. The women he is with call him Danny and tell him to come back.

His hair is shaggy. He's got a bulky build. If he was sober enough to shut his mouth, he might be good looking, but liquor has dulled his eyes and slackened the muscles that keep a face alert. He attempts to follow the man dancing spell-bound underneath the colored light, but his clumsy feet in their bulky shoes won't cooperate. After a few circles of the floor, he weaves his way back to his seated friends. When he drops into the chair he'd left, the women start at once to snip at him.

"How's the salmon?" The bartender calls his question from his post beside the cash register. As he does, he yawns.

"How's the salmon?" I hear like an echo from the other side of the tiny dance floor. The speaker is Danny, being a nuisance again. The music stops almost as he speaks, and the light behind the wheel of color goes off. The kitchen boy, brisk and purposeful, steps out of the blackness of construction near the stage. He takes the elbow of the

enchanted drunk and guides him out the door. He does it gently, and the drunk responds obediently. He babbles something to the boy, who gravely nods.

The sobriety of the skinny boy and the man he's taken charge of stands in contrast to the clamor and unpleasantness of the four at the dance-floor table. Danny, who is the one who yelled about my salmon, sits solemn while the two women yammer at him and the other male gathers coats. That group is going. With the decorative light off, and the music ended, what little promise the bar held for revelry has disappeared. The more sober man helps the women into their heavy coats. While they button, he attempts to lift Danny from his chair.

Danny bats at the man's helping hands. He refuses to rise. He shouts again, in my direction, "How's the salmon?"

The others wash their hands of him. They leave the bar with the sad dignity of those who've had too much to drink. They'll take their revels elsewhere, such as their revels are. When the door has closed behind them, Danny lurches to his feet. "Closing time," he bellows.

I am not looking his way. I am purposely not looking his way, but I'm not surprised when he bangs against the bar right at my side. He steadies the stool he's rocked on its chrome legs before he elaborately seats himself aboard it.

"Leave her alone," the bartender grunts, but Danny, reeking, insinuates himself as close to me as he can get. "Good fish?" he asks. In

his swimming eyes I see a hint he doesn't wish to be annoying. He wishes to be nice. "Let me make you happy," he mutters. He drops a big hand on my knee.

I debate allowing that. This is the funny thing. For just a second, I debate allowing that.

Then, all sorts of things erupt. The kitchen boy returns from out of doors. He sings out, "We're closing now," in a voice of authority, a surprising voice. At the same time the bartender slides my tab across the bar. He does it without comment. His expectation is that I will pay and go. I turn so I can fumble my wallet from my purse. I do not move my leg enough to dislodge the drunk man's hand, but he understands my gesture. He lifts his heavy hand and is tapping the warm, polished wood of the long bar when the music suddenly begins again. Seconds later, the light behind the colored wheel blinks back on. The wheel starts its slow-motion turn.

In the mirror behind the bar, I catch the look the bartender and kitchen boy exchange. It is a look of astonishment. They are still questioning the reason for this reversal of the night's routine, the turning-off and shutting-down, when a bumping noise from the construction dark draws their attention. The solitary dancer threads his way out to the floor. He returns to where the colored light can paint him. He lifts his face. He lifts his hands. He slowly sways and shuffles in his poor imitation of a dance. He's like a worshipper in some forgotten ritual so old and

out-of-favor he's vague on all its steps.

The drunk beside me rises. He crosses to the solitary dancer. With the single punch he throws, he knocks that poor man to the floor. In the next instant, both the kitchen boy and the bartender are on the drunk. They struggle, fiercely, in silence.

I pull a twenty from my wallet. It is way too much. I leave it by my plate. I pull on my coat. I grab my purse. The struggle on the dance floor blocks my route to the outside door. I exit through the restaurant. I rush back to the street. In my purse, the flask of flammable, the stub of candle. The rain is like a kiss of welcome. I will burn this city to the ground. ❖

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.

You didn't ask, but I will tell you anyway that what I want to know is – what I would ask a dream interpreter – what does it mean with all of my dreams about things coming undone. Tears in fabric. Clothing threads unstitched, in situations like meetings, dates, long flights. Hair falling out of place, or worse, falling out in clumps in my fingers. My horror more along the lines of “oh, god, not here,” rather than “holy smokes, what's happening to me.” That seems strange in itself.

I've dreamt of having my teeth becoming loose when I chew something, or a fingernail coming out like a zombie falling apart. Oddly, I try to wrap the tooth in a napkin and get myself to a dentist. Maybe I read this somewhere, and that's why it pierces my subconscious that this is a necessity. But still, the tooth falling out at all is strange. Is this a fear coming to the fore – am I afraid of getting old and beginning to come apart? Or is unstitching, loosening and falling out a metaphor for something – an inability to be what? Well put together? A rag-doll of a person, always losing stuffing like the Scarecrow in The Wizard of Oz?

It goes along with not being able to find my wallet, my keys, my identification. I've stood in lines, I suppose they are security lines, only to reach the front and have dropped my ID. I cannot look anyone in the face – I'm holding up the line, I'm negligent or possibly a danger to others. I know that I am not, but I am concerned about how I look to others.

Perhaps that is the answer in a nutshell – how I am perceived. That I am worried about how others see me, so much so that it invades my dreams, is troubling.

Also, why do I dream about smoking when I never have? I never found it elegant or cool or anything like that, but in dreams I have opened a gold case and taken out a cigarette and held it up for someone to light for me. I would like someone to explain that one to me.

— Geri - cyberspace

two by Holly Day

“God is Spying on Mankind”

No matter how well-dressed you are, you will not know the contents of a book by balancing it on your head. Nor will trepanning your skull allow the wind to carry the knowledge of scattered pages and burning Bibles into any part of your brain that will recognize the ash as words.

In the shadows of derelict trains, four old men sit around a table in pews rescued from abandoned churches. They, too, have tried balancing books on their heads for the delight of passersby, tried learning open-heart surgery and dentistry from medical encyclopedias bought at library close-out sales, but Christ eludes

even them and their attempts. The suits you wear have to be new. God can tell if you bought them at a thrift store, or pulled them from the fresh bodies of a recently-dead suicide victim or career alcoholic. If there's anything I've learned about Heaven, you have to bathe an awful lot to get in.

“The Ship of Fools”

If you see a bird in a tree, don't bother shooting at it. Sometimes, birds shed their feathers of their own accord, willingly, before letting their head fall to the ground and releasing all their organs. If you're patient enough, the sun will cook the meat right up there, where the bird sits and waits, roasts it to a fine golden perfection, until the tips of the naked

wings sizzle and turn black. Only then will it make sense to climb up the thin, quaking branches to release the bird, cut it down from the rubber bands binding it to the tree, surrounded by sprigs of flowering sage and Spanish thyme. The men sitting around the table below you are too busy chasing the bread loaves hanging from the lower branches

to notice you have a roast pheasant under your arm. Their songs are all about the starving naked, about boats moored in dry meadows, about why women aren't allowed at their gatherings. You alone will truly feast tonight, and that is why this poem is about you.

“Some of Us Just Hide Away”

by Holly Day

My daughter cries in the other room, a fire engine siren of an angry, angry wail, and I think, Cry! Cry! Go ahead and shout until you can't shout any more because you have no idea of all the horrors and terrors that are waiting for you and your tiny, chubby little hands and feet, out there in the real world. Get used to the tears, the anger, kicking at doors and walls and metal crib bars with those tiny barefoot feet. Get

used to being in cages, because there are so many more waiting for you. I think of all the lullabies I could be singing to her, to prepare her for the toxic world she'll emerge into from the safe cocoon of this house the miles of hot concrete waiting for her to burn and stub her toes on, scrape her knees against, the broken glass waiting to cushion her falls, and oh, cancer.

She cries for her bear and I bring it to her, because that's the one word she can get out that I can translate, "bear." "Bear!" I think of telling her that her teddy bear is tricking her with false security that real bears are hungry and angry and growl and don't make happy peeping noises like they do on TV, but that she won't have to worry about bears when she grows up because they'll probably all be dead by then. Instead, I just hand her the stuffed animal, stuffed with plastic fibers and possible carcinogens, kiss her forehead

wish her years of impracticable happiness
pray for impossibilities.

"Shelved"

by Kevin LaTorre

The interior is spick-and-span and
The convertible top is locked into place.
Same for the smoothed clutch,
The grazed tires, locked and
Still as an exhibit.

Not much bigger than a
Shelved toy model.

Wedged in by the wheel
Waits a cigarette lighter coiling
Its imaginary smoke,
But the jet seats retain the crisp
Grandfather smell, no fire at all.

Just the tidy un-smell of
An absence.

Its love on these gray days fingers
The album no family members
Could finish. No one could
Handle the speckled leaves,

The candid little boys sporting smiles,
The infants emerging from
Gift wrappings, nephews and
Grandsons wearing plump tuxedos,

Expecting everyone to be
Buttoned to the nines.

Here, under this slate ceiling, there is only
The un-drive of a ninety-five Miata
Interred in a cold February garage.

“End of the Line”

By Kevin LaTorre

Without knowing it
I had followed the young boy
Darting between the library shelves,
Where his striped shirt rose
No higher than the second row of
Books in stark adult lettering.

He looked up to every page in sight and
Laughed too quietly for his drifting parents
To find him.

He ought to squat down and prop his legs apart,
Lean on the copy of *Diasporae* and
Read until he ages and rides creakily home.

On the bus I watched an old man
Dip the brim of his bowler to
Read *Novelle* in mumbling translation.
He conferred once across the aisle
With a woman scrolling in Swedish, and
Their secret, wandering counsel was
One even they couldn't know.

I had to get off before
He rose for his stop, but I
Imagine his feet are concerned with balance,

His hands steadily letting the rail ride on.
I know his laughter
Rises like waving rain, in a mirage's heat.

“A yellow legal pad”

by Justin David Koehn

The mostly yellow paper is almost translucent with patches more fully pigmented than others. You can't quite see your hand through it in this light, but you can make out the shape. The blue lines do not conform to a uniform width at every point and have a greenish tint to them. The binding running along the top of the legal pad is a white adhesive holding the yellow paper between a strip of cardboard and the cardboard backing. Each yellow page is perforated across the top. Each contains the potential of an even, perfect tear. This is the last remaining page and the binding is still thick with leftover paper; a small reminder of every page that came before and that even after they've been used and torn the binding holds them all together. The binding protects the scraps, too, the bits of sheet left untouched. The right-hand corner contains one bigger than others, but for writing still not enough. A piece remaining as it was.

Contributors

Patricia Bishop is an interdisciplinary artist living and working in Greensboro, North Carolina. While pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree at UNCG, she creates collages, sculptures, quilts, music, and is forever searching for a new craft to explore. She teaches a Youth Pottery Class at the Center for Visual Artists, and is greatly inspired by the fearlessness of a child's creative mind. You can find her on instagram @patricia.basho

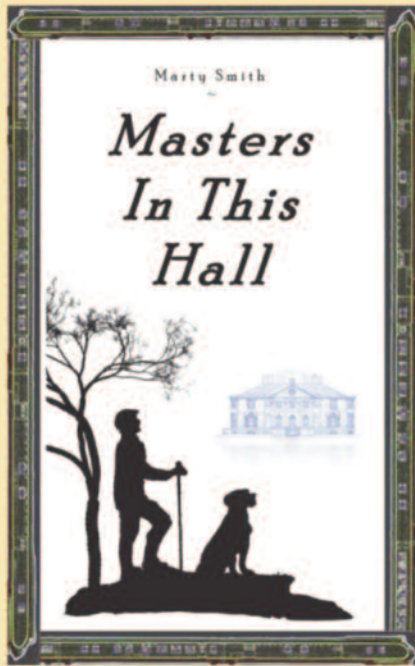
Robert Kinerk of Cambridge, MA, writes, “My fiction has appeared in *Narrative*, *SLAB*, *Hunger Journal*, *Summerset Review*, and is scheduled to appear in *Drunk Monkeys*, *Dime Show Review*, and *New Guard Literary Review*.”

Holly Day's poetry has recently appeared in *Asimov's Science Fiction*, *Grain*, and *Harvard Review*. Her newest poetry collections are *In This Place, She Is Her Own* (Vegetarian Alcoholic Press), *A Wall to Protect Your Eyes* (Pski's Porch Publishing), *Folios of Dried Flowers and Pressed Birds* (Cyberwit.net), *Where We Went Wrong* (Clare Songbirds Publishing), *Into the Cracks* (Golden Antelope Press), and *Cross Referencing a Book of Summer* (Silver Bow Publishing), while her newest nonfiction books are *Music Theory for Dummies* and *Tattoo FAQ*. She has appeared many times on these pages and lives in Minneapolis, MN.

Kevin LaTorre is a content writer and soon-to-be grad student. He recently moved to North Carolina after graduating the University of Texas with an English degree. His poetry has appeared in *Echo* and *Nocturnal*, as well as the Oct 2019 issue of *The Blotter*.

Justin David Koehn writes, “I currently read, write and work in Raleigh, and my poetry has previously appeared in the *Short North Gazette*.”

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