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The Blotter

magazine



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“Static”

I try not to spend too much time ruminating over what crosses my news radar. I exist with a combination of exhaustion and tinnitus – where my emotional ear just can’t listen to all the yelling anymore. Yes, it could be said that I have become a slack bastard, no longer fully and appropriately connected with the minutiae. You’ll get no apology from me for that. It’s a noisy world, seemingly even more so than when I was younger, I think, and much of it is so because there are so very many microphones and each one is attached to so many speakers to pass on the noise.

I feel we have an unfortunate tendency to imagine that everything needs to be rewound and played again, sometimes running the same tape over the recording heads so that we amplify the words, making them seem more credentialled and therefore more true. That is, of course, a fallacy. Things can’t be more true. They are only true, or false. Adding the emotion of increased volume doesn’t make anything helpful, or true. Repetition doesn’t either. Misunderstanding helps not at all.

In Noisy World, so many of us have an urge to be heard, published, read, cited, liked, hearted, starred. We want to be acknowledged. So we crank up the volume another notch and increase the frequency of our messages. Whatever we think at the moment. Repeating the loudest thing we just heard, we cock an ear into the reverberating tumult in the desperate hope of receiving some kind of analytics about our action. Hello! Hello...hello....

And when there is so much clutter, so much...amplitude, if you will... that which is shouted the most may be all that gets heard. And having been heard, the *louderthing* is the only thing that gets repeated by those who hear it. (In an obscure way, this makes me think about how barnacles somehow adhere to shoreline rocks where waves incessantly crash. How, I ask, can they hold on? Desperation is the answer.) People who are hungry for information will cling frantically to whatever they hear. They may or may not grapple with the ideas that information contains, but will merely echo it into the ether, for the same reasons mentioned above. And think how children hear their parents, their teachers, their friends, the noise around them, and repeat what they hear, sometimes with unfortunate consequences.

I recently saw a post in one of the social-media platforms from a person, a writer I assume, who suggested that literary magazines should go

the way of the dodo-bird. That their time was past, and their “services” no longer necessary. Writers should, alternatively, post their writing in their own websites, blogs, walls, pages, channels, what have you. And readers can just read what they want. Without addressing the poster’s concerns (I don’t know what they are – perhaps one too many rejections, or just a general malaise for the whole submission/consideration/rejection or publication-iarchy,) I wonder if this may be something the writing and reading world is slipping towards, and if it is as misguided as it seems. What is the root-cause of such a perspective? Is it the natural inclination of writers to work in a vacuum, with only their cognitive biases to support them? Disappointment of some sort? A lack of trust in tools that can be hoarded and guarded by the profit-makers? Or a lost confidence in curation?

We’ll see, and then we’ll know. Maybe that day is coming. The hunger, resentment, the opportunistic availability of tools - I find no energy to be stridently against such a confluence of events. I can only go on reading submissions.

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CAUTION

Should be a little more than a one-night

“Global Positioning”

by Sara Garland

I’m prone to a good existential crisis like any other overthinking, stressed-out, perpetually confused human being. Nevertheless, according to the bank and the tax collector’s office, myself and my house most decidedly exist. Neither of those establishments would be too keen on any philosophical discussion on the matter. I owe money; therefore, I am.

However, according to every map created by GPS, my house is nowhere to be found. Every delivery driver, friend, and relative who has had any need to visit my doorstep has had trouble finding the place from the day I received the keys. While this is a well-established neighborhood, this particular street is relatively new. However, I contend that the GPS mapping companies have had time to recognize the existence of approximately 25 houses all in a row.

I first discovered the issue when my uncle was helping me move. He ended up in a traffic circle with my couch hanging over the back of his tailgate while my mother tried to talk him over to my street. The next group I had to verbally coach into the driveway was a furniture delivery crew bringing my new kitchen table. They had the added difficulty of trying to maneuver a very large truck into a neighborhood not built for large trucks.

In those examples, they each share a common thread—it was their first trip to the house. It’s understandable to have trouble finding an address on the first occasion. However, with my earlier conclusion that GPS has had time to prove my home’s existence, I

also contend that any restaurant that has delivered pizza to this address *more than once* has had plenty of opportunities to store this location in their memory banks.

And do I *ever* eat pizza. Most of my favorite restaurants in the city have figured out my regular orders. I’m fairly certain that several of the places immediately start putting together my order the second they see my number flash across caller ID. My level of predictable behavior is often quite helpful for them.

Then, I moved.

That’s where this episode of fun began.

(The addresses have been changed to protect myself from more people not being able to find me.)

Every time I call for a pizza delivery, I have to offer up a local geography lesson, compounded by the problematic naming of the streets in my subdivision. My neighborhood lies just adjacent to a well-known golf course (a golf course I’ve never actually used), so it’s assumed that most people in my small city of approximately 70,000 residents can *at least* find the well-marked signs on the interstate, main highways, and side roads pointing to the area.

Still, since I don’t appear on GPS maps, the first response I usually hear on the other end of the line is, “Yeah, this address isn’t showing up. I have one that ends in ‘Street,’ but not ‘Drive.’”

My response has been carefully rehearsed over the last several months.

“Right. The ‘Street’ is one street over. If you keep going past the main

entrance to the subdivision, I’m the next turn. Make an immediate turn after that, and my number is clearly marked on the front door.”

On very rare occasions, I’ll speak to someone I’ve spoken with before who knows about my home’s existence. Those conversations are delightful and refreshing. However, this is a college town, and pizza delivery is a high-turnover job, meaning that I will usually speak with a new employee who is not from the area.

One such conversation *almost* convinced me to start learning how to cook edible food.

I came home from work one day during the winter, exhausted and hungry. I placed the call, and, naturally, I heard an unfamiliar voice. The voice belonged to a very pleasant young lady who loved to stretch short words.

“Hiiiiiiiiii . . . thank you for calling. How may I helllllllp you?”

“Yes, I’d like a delivery please,” I responded.

“Okay . . .” she paused. I could hear the clicking of a keyboard. “What’s the phone number?”

I gave her my number, including the area code for good measure.

“O . . . kay . . . I’m showing that number for a . . . Mortimer Jefferson?”

“Uhh, no, ma’am. Could you please read the number back to me?” I asked, thinking that she most likely had entered the number incorrectly.

She hadn’t.

“Wow, okay, nope, that’s not me,” I said.

“Maybe that’s the person who had the numberrrrrr before you?” she halfway asked.

“Well, I’ve had this number for almost 20 years, so . . .”

“Ohhhhhh . . .”

“Could you try it without the area code?” I responded.

“O . . . kay . . . ah! Are you Sara?”

“Yes, that’s me!”

“And you’re at 2022B Iris...”

“Umm, no. That’s an old address,” I sighed.

(Mind you, this was about the tenth time I’d called their establishment since moving to my new address.)

“Where arrrrrrre you now?” she asked, the clicking on the keyboard growing more frenetic.

“I’m at 3842 Town Drive,” I said, slowly.

“O...kay. 3022B Town. Is that an apartment or a house?”

“It’s *three-eight-four-two* Town Drive. A house,” I explained.

I heard more clicking on her end before she spoke again.

“O...kay. And what would you like?”

I told her my order and she gave me a price and time estimate before hanging up. I settled down on the couch to read while I waited for my order to arrive, knowing full well that I would be receiving another phone call once my food was in a vehicle.

Thirty minutes later, I received that call from a young man.

“Hi, I’m your delivery driver. I’m leaving the store now and I’m trying to find you,” he began to explain.

“Yes, I understand. This address doesn’t show up on GPS yet,” I said, pre-empting his confusion.

It didn’t work.

“Yeah, this says you’re at 3022B Iris...”

“Uhh, no. I told her 3-8-4-2 Town Drive,” I said, correcting his co-worker’s mistake.

“Oh, I apologize. That’s...uhh... further out, right?”

“Yes, you can just follow the signs toward the golf course. It’s past that,” I responded.

“Okay, I’ll call back when I’m a little closer,” he said. I thanked him,

and five minutes later, I answered the next call.

“So, I’m at the entrance to the subdivision and heading down the main road...”

“Sorry, you can’t get here from there. You’ll need to go back out the main entrance and make a right back onto the highway,” I said.

“Umm... I’m not from around here, so...let’s see. I’m in the traffic circle...”

“Yes, head back towards the highway.”

“The highway...umm, okay. Let me see. I see *Town Street*, is that it?”

I took a breath and chanted a mantra in my head: *It’s not his fault... it’s not his fault. G-P-Someone fix this, please.* The other part of my brain was rooting for the kid, knowing he would feel a tremendous sense of accomplishment in finding a house that didn’t exist.

“I’m on *Town Drive*. It’s one street over. You have to go out to the main highway, make the next turn, and then another immediate turn. My number is on the front door. You’ll see my porch light,” I explained, trying to breathe slowly so as not to have a stroke over a pizza.

“Highway...okay. OH! It’s the street across from the auto body shop, right? In the little circle drive by itself?”

I threw my arms up in victory as the bells and whistles went off in his head. In the South, landmarks such as auto body shops go a long way in explaining location.

“Yes! Awesome! That’s it.”

“Okay,” he responded. “I’ll be there in a few minutes.”

As he rang my doorbell, he apologized profusely.

“Oh, there’s no need to apologize!” I responded.

I did feel bad for him. The whole issue *really could be* eliminated if GPS

would run one of its little cars through my neighborhood to end my real estate existential crisis.

“Here you go. Have a blessed day,” he said, handing me my pizza and invoking a phrase that makes my teeth itch. It’s not that I have anything against blessings, but the word is thrown around in a very haphazard fashion these days. I tend to associate blessings with the deeper, more infrequent occurrences in life. If I have a truly “hashtag blessed” day, I’ve either gotten married, had a kid or two, or enjoyed the company of a family reunion.

I smiled and responded politely, keeping my study of linguistics to myself.

“Thank you. Glad you found the place!”

My pizza hadn’t had a “blessed” day. At all. When I opened the lid to the box, it appeared as though a blind samurai had decided to take a sword and hack the pie into seventeen unequal pieces, including a long, thin piece of crust unattached to any slices.

Now, I can’t be sure anyone at that particular pizza restaurant has any sense of direction. While GPS would be extremely helpful in getting my food out to my house, it won’t help a cook cut a round, cheesy pizza into equal-sized slices for an optimum consumption experience. It won’t help if the address is entered incorrectly into the computer. But it could save some trouble in the right hands.

Still, in the grand scheme of things, I ordered an existent pizza which eventually showed up on my existent doorstep. They expected existent money for it so that I could eat and continue to exist.

I owe money; therefore, I am.

Existential crisis averted—until my next pizza delivery. ❖

“The Night Hale Went to Hell”

by Donald Hubbard

Chilled, Red Freckless drilled the final plywood board over a side window to the snack shack at Nathan Hale Park, home of the Class D affiliate of the Milwaukee Braves. After he finished, he took his coffee and climbed to the top of the bleachers in an attempt to warm up, and to contemplate the empty diamond.

He rubbed his frozen hands together, wishing that he had battened up the shack weeks ago, but he just didn't want to believe the unceasing rumors all season long that the Braves intended to move the club closer to Wisconsin, in order to save some money, seeing as the Braves themselves had left Boston a few years before, now thriving in their new Midwestern location.

The only controversy that ever attached itself to the minor team occurred when they named themselves the Pequots, which upset the local Mohicans, so they restored of the moniker of the major league club. The Braves.

Red had cashed his final check, which further removed the incentive to do any work, but he finally closed up the park like he had for the past twenty years, because somehow he felt that by doing so, it might automatically reopen next year.

Indian summer had passed, the dew turn-coating into frost, as Red finally dressed the place up for a decent funeral. Maybe even a resurrection.

At the Old Town Hall, the Parks Commissioner and the three Selectmen huddled in the Clerk's office, mapping out scenarios on a blackboard for keeping the club in www.blotterrag.com

town. Third Selectmen Chet Blancherd wiped the chalk dust off on his pants after sketching out his plan to replace the Braves' affiliate with one from a different major league city.

“The Red Sox could use a club closer than Louisville where they could keep watch over their prospects and bring a player up in an emergency if one of the Sox got hurt. We can get a player to Boston in less than two hours. You can't do that from Louisville, even if you fly a guy up to Logan.”

Parks Commissioner Packard Wirth chirped in, “That won't work. They have a lower tier minor league team in Albany. But maybe we could threaten to boycott the Red Sox if they don't give in. The Hale Polish Falcons send a couple busloads of fans up for at least one game every year, and a lot of families from around here head up for a game or two.”

Chet said, “That's all very nice, but there are a million folks living in Boston, and only a few thousand here in Hale. I doubt a boycott would do much good.”

Second Selectman Cole Cabot sucked on his pipe, looking far more thoughtful and intelligent than his IQ revealed. “Maybe we can get the Yankees or the Giants or the Dodgers to bite?”

Chet cautioned, “The Dodgers and the Giants are also thinking about moving their major league teams out west and the Yankees already have a good thing going with a farm team in upstate New York.”

First Selectman Walt Belinsky sat watching the smoke rings from Cole Cabot's pipe float up to the ceiling

like halos.

Conversing with himself, he observed, “it was an early biting frost this year. At least it killed the rag weed.”

Chet took an eraser, wiped the blackboard clean, and started drawing up another plan with his chalk.

At Kleinschaefer's General Store, Ute Kleinschaefer had not sold a Milwaukee Braves cap for several months, ever since the rumors first began that the local nine might move. Most of the customers ignored the caps like dented cans of kale, though some carpied about wasting space in the store for hats from an ungrateful ball club that had left Boston, and threatened to pull its minor league team out of Connecticut.

In a corner, her husband Ollie commenced creating a sign with his magic marker:
BRAVES CAPS FOR SALE
\$5.00 EACH
FOR GIANT BONFIRE OF ALL BRAVES
MERCHANDISE
NOVEMBER 25, 1955 AT 8:00 p.m.
OUTSIDE NATHAN HALE BALLPARK
BUY WHILE SUPPLIES LAST!!!

Ute scowled at Ollie as he taped the sign to the store's front window. The Braves caps normally sold for a couple of bucks, but Kleinschaefer calculated that by tomorrow, all of the caps would be sold out.

“Who gave us permission to start a fire outside the ball park?” Ute said.

Ollie replied, “No one. And no one is going to stop us either.”

A moving truck crossed over the Hale border from Durham with two movers, hired by the Braves to load up the rusted old score board and some of the leaky compressors at the Nathan Hale ballpark, and haul it all out. The movers had orders to remove all of

the team's uniforms from the clubhouse, and to load up boxes of candy from the snack shack to be returned for credit to Schrafft's, per their original deal.

After arriving in Hale, the movers parked their truck a block away from the Ball Park, lit up a couple of cigarettes and split a six pack of Schlitz.

Red Freckless guzzled Schlitz as well, along with a whiskey chaser, in an attempt to warm up at the Indian Head Inne. He played playing cribbage with Kleinschaefer, and advised Ollie against running that "Fire Sale" on Braves' caps. He asked Ollie where the idea for the bonfire came from.

"Kleinie, God knows this town loves a bonfire, but it's too early. What if the Braves decide to keep the bush leaguers here, then they hear that we burned all of their merchandise? What good is pissing off someone when you may not have to?"

"Too late, I already put the sign up in the window. Plus Braves caps don't sell too good anymore, I can only move Red Sox and Yankees hats. It's the economy."

Dusk descended as one of the movers used his cutter to cut the lock on the front gate of the ball park (which Freckless was supposed to leave open) while the other man drove the moving truck inside. They emptied the club house and the Snack Shack, but found it impossible to remove the score board in center field. Corrosion had locked the nuts and bolts in place, and vandals had already cut all the cords.

"We might have to leave this behind."

"You don't have to convince me, it's too fucking cold to work outside any more. This place should have

been shut down weeks ago. Hell, probably twenty years ago"

They jogged back to the truck and covered all the clubhouse junk and the candy with a tarp, and secured it with rope tied in bowline knots.

"That should do it."

The movers got back into the truck and the driver wheeled it around to leave, but when they arrived at the gate, a station wagon blocked their path. Town Constable Sid Carruth gamboled over to speak with the driver, motioning for him to roll down his window to talk.

"What are you guys doing here? Don't you know this is private property?"

The mover in the passenger seat reached into the truck's glove compartment and pulled out a work order, which directed them to haul away a list of items from the ballpark.

Sid grabbed the yellow work order and knelt in front of headlights of the truck to read it, after which he approached the driver and said, "everything looks to be in order, I guess you boys can go. And by the way, you can tell your boss to go to hell for me."

Sid moved his muscle car out of the way so the truck could get by, but the truck never got close to the gate before it had to stop again. Three bright red fire trucks swarmed into the park as all of Hale's volunteer firemen had jumped out and pulled out all the available fire hoses.

Someone had set fire to Nathan Hale Park.

Red Freckless, Ollie Kleinschaefer, and the rest of the patrons and employees of the Indian Head Inne ran out to start up their cars to drive over to the ball park, once someone phoned into the bar the news of the massive fire. Kleinschaefer bee-lined it

to his store so that he could grab his entire inventory of Braves' caps. He meant to sell them for ten dollars apiece.

Fire trucks from as far away as Hartford and New Haven arrived at Nathan Hale Park to attempt to knock down the fire before it blazed completely out of control. The stands, bleachers and outfield fences had already caught fire.

Constable Sid hurried the two movers from their truck to his station wagon, in order to protect them from the townspeople. He drove them out of harm's way, all the way to the end of Campion Street, on the border with Middletown.

Good thing he did. The moving truck later exploded, scattering charred bats, baseballs and bases everywhere. Like Easter egg hunters, children scrambled through the smoke to loot the debris.

As though they were actually there in front of him, Red Freckless chewed out Braves' management, "I guess you sons of bitches would rather be murdered than commit suicide."

Shortly after the Town Selectmen and Parks Commissioner arrived at the little ring of hell, Selectman Chet Blancherd deadpanned, "I guess our problem just solved itself."

Most of the townspeople had come out to the ballpark to participate in the fire. Ollie Kleinschaefer hawked his Braves' caps for ten dollars apiece, telling everyone that Sid the Constable had caught two guys from Milwaukee who, instead of announcing that they had an official work order from the Milwaukee Braves to repossess Braves' property, looked like they were trying to steal anything worth anything for themselves.

The Blotter

Hale's citizens actually bought the hats and threw them on the fire, along with all the trash and junk that had accumulated in their cars, and soon a proper gigantic bonfire marked the spot once occupied by home plate. The out-of-town firemen departed while the Hale Volunteer Fire Department stayed around to guard the mess.

Ute Kleinschaefer arrived with several marked-up bags of marshmallows, selling them to children, who brandished their Scout knives or pocket knives and carving pointed sticks to roast the marshmallows with, above the smoldering embers of the Snack shack.

Vandals, mostly plumbers, began to remove any copper and other valuable metals they could detach from the premises, which of course caused flooding.

Red Freckless removed a red bandana from the back pocket of his Levi's and commenced to weep into it.

Square dancers formed along the old right field line, and began to promenade.

Later, it became known as "The Night Hale Went to Hell," although to be accurate, that event had already happened, pretty much the day after Japan signed the treaty ending the Second World War on the deck of the USS Missouri. The war ended and soon most of the town's small factories and farms, which had benefitted from the war, shut down and sold their land to speculators who built rows of ranch houses so that the returning soldiers might commence their baby boom. People had stopped working in Hale. Now, they only slept there.

Like the four towns in Massachusetts that ceased to exist once the State condemned them in

order to build the Quabbin Reservoir, Hale threw one last party before the natives left.

A few days later, the Braves' general manager, John Quinn, flew in to Bradley Field from Milwaukee, then drove a rental car down to Hale to survey the damage.

He met at Hale Town Hall with the Selectmen and the Parks Commissioner and asked the Town for restitution for the losses to the team and the destruction of the rented truck.

First Selectman Walt Belinsky raised himself off of his chair to speak.

"We do not have a police department here, only a few part-time constables. The State Police have started an investigation into who started the fire but I doubt they will come up with anything. If anyone knows who did it, likely no one is going to speak up and rat out a neighbor. We will not allow the whole town to pay for the act of one fire bug or some drunken teenagers. Maybe you folks in Milwaukee would like to pay for the damage to our town caused by your truck blowing up and your park being constructed like a fire trap. We supported your team for years and we kept up our end of the bargain, but you had other thoughts. Unless the Braves intend to burn down another part of our town, I think we are done here."

John Quinn replied, "what gave you the idea that the Braves were taking their D team out of Hale? We have a great relationship with Eau Claire in Wisconsin, but we also have a good thing going with you folks, and the Perinis still in Boston can drive down here and see some of their youngest players. Now you've ruined it. Did it occur to any of you solons to

pick up the telephone, dial the operator and call me?"

Disgusted, John Quinn left the Hale Town Hall and got into his rental car for the return trip to the airport. He put on his gloves, started up the car and blasted the heat. The first snow began to fall on Hale, Connecticut as he turned on his windshield wipers. "I guess those bumpkins would rather commit suicide than pick up a phone." He drove past the old ball park, past the blight, and past a charred sign that one time had read

HOME OF THE HALE BRAVES!

Postscript: Ute Kleinschaefer's Turn at Bat

No one ever deduced the identity of the firebug, so I will tell you, under the promise of secrecy, that it was me.

Initially, I torched the ballpark as a cry for help, knowing that my husband would run from that damn bar he frequented to be at the scene of the arson, to be with me.

It did bring us together, at least for that evening, as we hawked every Boston Braves cap in our inventory, enough to pay for a nice dinner and cocktails at the Monte Green Restaurant.

All these years later, I now know that I destroyed that ballpark because I wanted to keep Hale small, sweet and manageable. I wanted to keep it from becoming another Levittown. By removing the only form of entertainment other than the annual horse pulls at the local Durham Fair, I was sure that no one would want to move into Hale with their spouse and raise a Family.

Instead, three major developers bought tracts of land the year after the fire, spawning rows of ranch houses in

newly carved out roads called Lilac Lane or Sycamore Street. One developer built twenty houses in the old Nathan Hale Park, serviced with a circular road dubbed Nathan's Lane. I hastened their project by providing free demolition work, by setting fire to that damned ballpark, and I never saw a nickel for my work.

I have regrets. Ollie and I are grandparents now, and we love telling our grandkids all about the good old days when baseball lived and thrived in Hale Connecticut, before Hale went to hell, when it was small, sweet and manageable, and when there was a beautiful little ballpark here, until it was gone and all those people moved here in order to live in, as my old friend Malvina described them, "little boxes made of ticky-tacky, and they all look just the same." ❖

"Tiny Flame"

by Randall Van Nostrand

In spite of the sun boring a white hole through the smoky air, Christy saw only darkness. It was an existential darkness. No place was safe.

It used to be if you locked the doors at night, paid your electric bill, and kept up with the rent- if you followed the rules and tried to be a good person- bad things wouldn't happen. It wasn't true. Bad things happened all the time. It was just that Christy used to believe in safety. Now the veneer was gone.

She wondered if her troubles were random arrows from an uncaring God or karmic debts for long ago irresponsibilities? She had plenty of those. Her twenties were littered with carelessly dropped boyfriends. They hadn't been true boyfriends but she could have been smarter, kinder, wiser. Was anyone wise in their twenties? Not her. She'd been an out of control hula-hoop. Back then she'd assumed by the time she turned forty, she'd be established in her career with a calm, steady life. What a laugh. She was fifty-two and as calm as popcorn on a hot burner.

That afternoon someone had tried to cheat her. It began with an email from a neighbor who she didn't know well but liked. The neighbor asked how she was doing. Christy was touched to be thought of and responded. Later the person wrote she was caring for a sick child. Could Christy do her a favor and pick-up a gift card for her niece's birthday? It was disappointing to have fallen for a transactional kindness. Still, wanting to be a good neighbor, she found an

online link for the gift card and sent it to the woman with an offer to stop at a store if she needed an actual card. The response made it clear, it was a scam and not her neighbor's email after all. She felt violated. On top of the pandemic's isolation and the hot, smoke-thick air, there were people preying on kindness.

She remembered her first apartment as a young actress in NYC. It was a fifth-floor walk-up in a sketchy part of town. Sketchy then, nice now. She'd come home to find the cat meowing in the hall, the front door open, the place ravaged. Not that she had much- a mattress, an old crate for a bedside table, a cheap desk she'd found on the street. Her resume pictures were strewn over the floor, fifty faces smiling. They'd stolen the two things she cared about: a wristwatch from her father and a pair of earrings that had belonged to her nana. When the police came, men too big for the tiny apartment, they said this kind of thing happened all the time. She should get a bar-lock for the door.

Still, back then she'd been a disciple of possibility. Wasn't this how your twenties were supposed to unfold? Wasn't this the stuff of stories to tell when your life was lived in the port of calm?

Now there were fires burning in every direction. Where did you go to be safe? If you left this place didn't you run into other disasters- floods, hurricanes, tornadoes? Wherever you went there was danger.

Christy dreamed she was in a rowboat too big for one person to

The Blotter

handle. The waves, black and cold, broke over the sides. She was trying to get to land without knowing where it was. In some versions of the dream she rammed into pilings or got stuck in the mud. In others, her bow dipped under the water.

At fifty-two she knew safety was a fun house mirror. Reassuring words meant nothing. Nobody could be certain fire wouldn't take her home. The evening news predicted lightning storms. The word 'storm' suggested rain. These storms were heat-filled and rainless. They crackled with electricity and ignited over-dry woods. In her more philosophical moments, she saw the fires as cleansing; her little home a part of the debris to be burned and swept away.

When she looked around her house, she wondered what it would

mean to lose it all. It was strange how things carried memory. If she lost the Chinese vase would she also lose her long-dead grandfather? If she forgot to take her late mother's pearl necklace would her mother's love disappear? How did non-things get so tangled up in things?

She searched for hope and found darkness. She searched for certainty and saw uncertainty. She searched for better times and couldn't imagine anything good lasting. Perhaps this was a new maturity, seeing the truth clear-eyed and violent. If everything was a necessary part of one's education in life, were these the changes she needed to build character?

Christy had never been good with change. Change made her short-tempered and anxious. "Calm," she said now as hot winds lassoed her ankle to

throat.

As a child she'd been filled with light. It had spilled out of her like sunshine. Back then the world was an amazing place. Where was the light now? Could it survive years of broken expectations and tossed away dreams?

She closed her eyes and far away saw a tiny flame on a birthday candle. She watched it flicker melting blue and white wax. Compared to the smoky air, to the pandemic isolation-hell, compared to the email phishing scam and the too big rowboat- it was nothing. What good could a birthday candle do against the roar of darkness? Still, with one tiny flame you could light others. There would be fifty-three candles on her next birthday cake. Perhaps one tiny flame was all she needed. ❖

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.

Lava - My departed father, whose smile had always shone through mist and rain, is looking rather sad and unusually stern, viewing a tapestry of rocks too beautiful to paint. His hard-knit brows forebode a scene. The sea that had long retreated begins to wash a voluptuous slope whose marble bosom had once heaved with water but is now too loath to part with the sun's fervor. Hot water begins to bubble out of the peak with lava that furrows our streets, scorching our feet. Distraught with what to take or leave, each fumbles in drawers for gold or beads. [14th September 2007]

Mass-Slaughters - "Why these mass-murders of migratory birds?" I ask. "Oh, they've gone mad, attacking friends!" is the response. The elegant heads of storks and flamingoes with their enchanting beaks look quite vicious. The streets are strewn with twisted necks and doors are barred with constant checks. A spectral white now haunts our beds since graceful beauty with terror has wed. [16th September 2007]

Mathematical Mystique - This dream is incomplete since memory fails at mathematical mystique. All I recall is figures with a four (3.14 !), multiplied then divided, a circle's lore. The geometrical pattern is a sophisticated thing, whose intricate lines haunt memory's lanes, a quadrilateral or rectangular theme. I wish I had a clue to what I mean. I nudge my brain, but all in vain. Stage two has to do with sexual yearning. Stage three is vague, not a speck or flake. An illustrated book could help elucidate. [19th September 2007]

Susie Gharib, Latakia, Syria

"Stop Being A Spectator"

by K. A. Williams

The Ferris wheel
stops me at the top
where I can see out
over the fairgrounds.

A young couple stand at a booth.
He throws darts at balloons
while she waits hopefully
for the big toy animal prize.

Teenagers chase each other
with cotton candy cones
trying to stick the fluffy colors
into each other's hair.

Toddlers ride the animals
on the merry-go-round
under the eyes of
watchful parents.

The ride takes me back
down where I get out,
join the crowd and
stop being a spectator.

“Blithe Spirits”

by Andy Conner

BBC India reports
The Universe has summoned
Keeley and Kyle
From Nottingham
To The Great Temple of Om
In central India
Where they will truly
Discover themselves

(presumably
The Universe thinks
this is unlikely to happen
in Nottingham)

LOCKDOWN

‘Hell on Earth’
Snaps Keeley
To our reporter
Close to the ground

‘God knows
When the tailor
Will be able
To return my saris
And I can’t even tell you
When I last sipped a latte

And does our government care?’

In the background
Of the shot
Another elderly Indian
Kneels in the dust
Sips water from a puddle

Kyle

(the sleeve of his kaftan
frayed by anxious chewing)

Whimpers
‘How can
Consciousness expand
When a dude’s been abandoned?’

And does our government care?’

(he’s always been

a bit of a lingam)

Then one or the other bleats
‘All we want
Is enlightenment
Then to drift down
For a few days
On the beach’

(nearest beach
837 miles)

Just out of shot
Oblivious
To the stranded throngs
A child kneels in the dust
Playing solitaire
Unaware
She can never win the game
Because there are
Cards missing

*

Marquee farewell party
In Mummy and Daddy’s pile
Buckinghamshire
Bucks Fizz
Outside caterers
And so on

‘Long Island in the Bahamas’
Mummy snorts
‘It sounds just like a cocktail’
Tosses back her mane
Did Daddy marry his horse?

Rose-petal speech
‘We’re off to Paradise
But how could we possibly forget you
And we’ll always be on Skype
Of course’

Cue polite applause

Twelve months later

CYCLONE

Rips the roof off Eden
Splinters
In the sea

'Our boss has done nothing
Though he's so big in pineapple

London doesn't care
Although we used to pay our taxes

How could these peasants
Forget
To fix the signal
For the Internet?

Maybe this poet
Has a chip of ice
On each shoulder

He's never shaken
Or stirred
With the smart set

But I hope I'm not the type
To pleasure in asking
When you moved into
A cyclone zone
What the fuck
Did you expect?

Did you think
You'd been born
To sleep soundly
Swaddled in the eye
Of every storm?

Yes, there's a plane overhead
No, it won't be landing

Be thankful
You're the chosen
With a bit of your house

Still standing

*

It would be wrong
To add insult
Stick the boot in

But what on earth
Possesses people
To splash thousands on a trip
Scrimp a hundred on insurance?

ACCIDENT

A drunken dive
A scooter ride

Family bereft

'We might have
To sell the house
The government
Has left us

Hospital cares for nothing
But who's going
To pay the bills'

I'm truly truly sorry

Nothing is so cheap
As human life itself

Why should they
Make sacrifices
For a complacent
Tourist

When every single day
Hundreds of
Breadwinners
Lie down in their shacks
Die
Of preventable illness?

*

I don't wear a halo
But I'm touched
By midday sun

When the attitude
Rising to the surface

Is that for all
We should have learned

Countries and their natives
Exist purely for our service

Please do me a favour
Stick to Blackpool
Weymouth
Shanklin

Send me your passport

I'll refund the postage
Take care of the recycling

two by Andy Conner

"Apples"

'The landmines are just like apples'

Khmer Rouge survivor

Apples can peel your skin
Like it isn't there

But more often than not
The cruellest fruit
Sucks the rusty blade

And leaves threads

Dripping

Threads of skin
Threads of your life
Dripping
Seeds onto barren ground

You mean nothing to the apples
You mean nothing to the apples
You mean nothing

Their anaesthetic minds
Hold no sense of time
No sense of pain
No sense
No sense of what remains

And if you
Are one of the hand-picked
Who escape in a step-right-on-it flash
Give thanks for this windfall

Which leaves survivors

Green
To the core

As they crawl
With the worms
With the worms
And the decay

Praying
To scrimp a handout
With no hands
For the crumb
Which may or may not come

As they sit
In their own shit
Begging
On their stumps
For a friendly worm
To turn
Up
And eat it

“I Raise My Glass...”

to Rosa Parks, who knew it wasn't just a bus seat
 to jet age travel, which cleared the haze from my mind and eyes
 to my mother, who carried on regardless
 to the unpublished, who carry on regardless
 to Leonard Cohen, for marrying community and communion
 to William Shakespeare, for revealing my limitations with such fun
 to my colour blindness, which gives me my own palette
 to my colour blindness, which strengthens my sense of obligation
 to the honest, why should they wait for the next life
 to Brecht for demolishing the fourth wall, no-one is absolved from acting on their conscience
 to Patti Smith, for holding a mirror to my feminine side
 to Patti Smith, for poetry that rocks
 to the single parent, working two Dickensian jobs
 to men who cry, I've always needed strong role models
 to Charles Bukowski, for showing it as it is
 to Paralympians and street children, I used to think that I have problems

Contributors

Sara Garland holds degrees in Journalism and Music Education from Arkansas State University. Her work has appeared in a variety of journals including *Potato Soup Journal*, *Funny Pearls* (UK), *Mystery Tribune*, *The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature*, and *Remington Review*.

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

Randall Van Nostrand writes, “My stories have appeared in *Chantwood Magazine*, *Bards & Sages*, *East of the Web*, and *The Rappahannock Review*.” He resides in Mill Valley, CA.

Susie Gharib is a graduate of the University of Strathclyde with a Ph.D. on the work of D.H. Lawrence. Her poetry and fiction have appeared in multiple venues including *The Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Scars Publications*, *The Ink Pantry*, *The Opiate*, *Mad Swirl*, *Impspired Magazine*, *The Curlew*, *Amethyst Review*, *The Pinyon Review*, *A New Ulster*, *Synchronized Chaos*, *the New English Review*, *Miller's Pond Poetry Magazine*, *Westward Quarterly*, *The Peacock Journal*, *The Penwood Review*, *The Blotter Magazine*, *Leaves of Ink*, *Crossways*, *Green Hills Literary Lantern*, *Grey Sparrow Journal*, *Foliolate Oak Literary Journal*, *Plum Tree Tavern*, *River Poets Journal*, and *Peeking Cat Review*.

K. A. Williams, of Charlotte, NC, has had poems published in *Ariel Chart*, *The Creativity Webzine*, *Calliope*, and *Nuthouse Magazine*. She also writes fiction, mostly speculative.

Andy Conner is a Birmingham, UK-based poet, activist and educator, with a long track record of performing his work nationally and internationally. His work has also featured in numerous publications. He is a Pushcart Prize nominee. His credits include BBC Radio 4, Jaipur Literature Festival and India International Centre. He has also conducted workshops for The British Council.

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danger almost destroyed another woman's life...

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