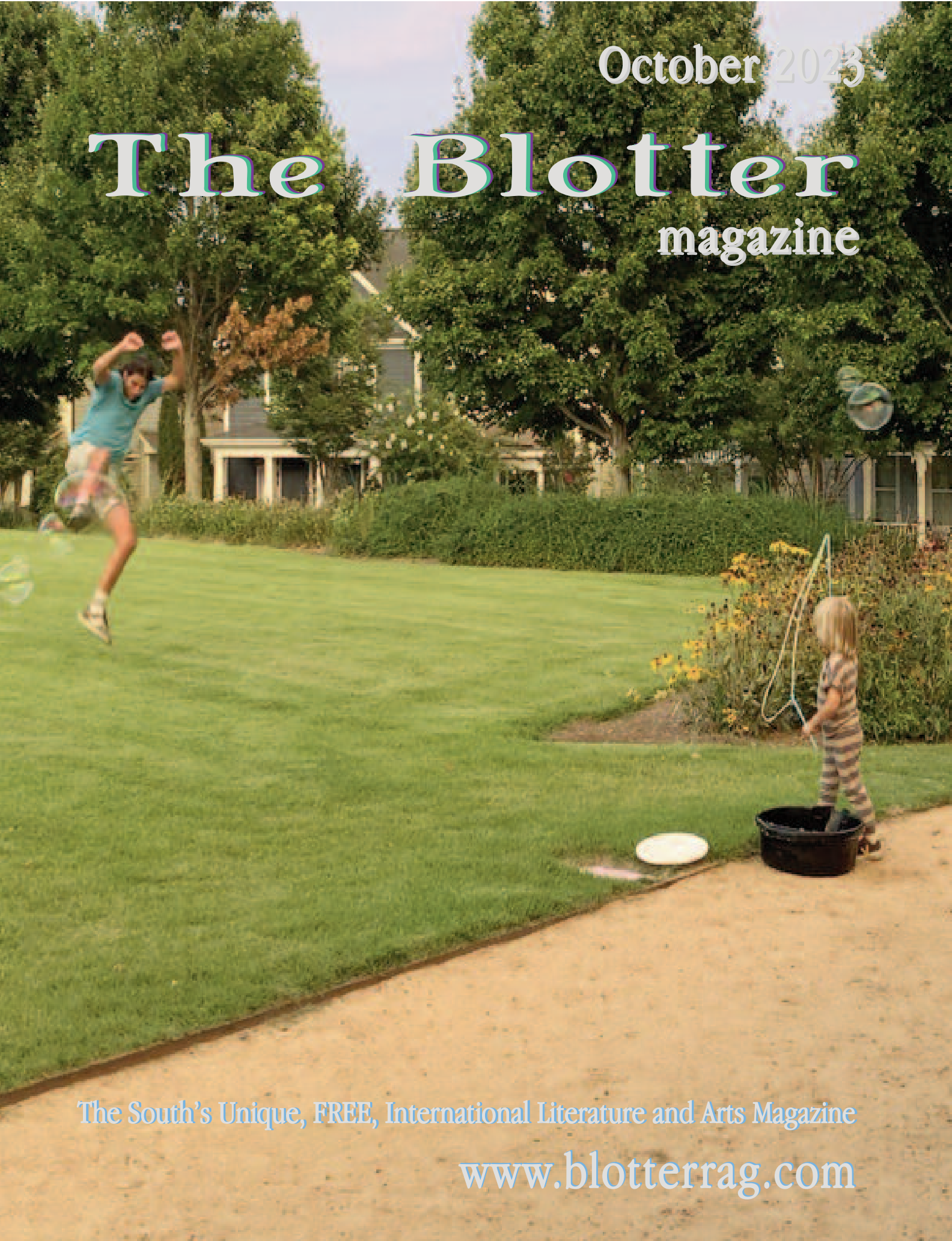


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# The Blotter

magazine



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## “Do I do as I say?”

I am reading more lately, even more than before, which was already a good amount. I am diving deeply into things I already might have read had I not tried to keep up with the news, technology and social media. You, too, may find those broad concepts difficult to avoid, or even risky to ignore, if you are still out there in the workplace and trying to fit in, or keep up your game. I, on the other hand, no longer must toe that line, tote any barge or even consider lifting that bale. Instead, I read. What do I read? It depends.

Lesser-known volumes like Vardis Fisher’s 1965 novel *Mountain Man*. It is marvelously rich in description, a bit tone-deaf (for our time), but worth the look back. I didn’t know that Fisher was one of the American writers employed by the Federal Writers’ Project during the Great Depression.

What else, what else? Oddities, like Englishman G. F. Buxton’s *Life in the Far West*, a memoir from M.DCCC.XLIX. (how I adore Roman numerals). Also, Currie and Padian’s *Encyclopedia of Dinosaurs*. Not as research for anything, but mostly because I read Roy Chapman Andrews as a kid, so many years ago, and I want to know what the science says today. And I like to look at the pictures. M. R. Katz’s brand new translation of *The Brothers Karamazov*, to keep my brain working as hard as I can force it. The manga of Junji Ito – my younger daughter gave me her copies of *Tomei* and *Uzumaki* (with my promise not to spill coffee on any pages nor leave them propped open to break the spine). Presently, Geraldine Brooks’ novel *Horse* is being passed around the family. It will get to me soon. My apologies, Ms Brooks – that’s how we do it, but if I want my friend John to also read it, I will buy him his own copy, I promise.

I’ve read my wife’s catalog of heirloom roses. I would like to buy something, but I don’t know where I would place it when it arrives. Our yard is quite small, and it’s been claimed, by and large, by her. Rightfully so, as her gardens are very beautiful and well thought out, with coleus and columbine, hostas and hollyhocks, ferns and foxglove and other wondrous flora. I will need to read up on the pros and cons of planting roses in pots. I’ve studied a recipe for making aioli, substituting apple cider vinegar with lime juice. It worked well, and we enjoyed ham with gouda on challah, slathered with this stuff. I must admit that I’m not sure I’ve ever had aioli before. Perhaps in a restaurant? It’s amazing, and I highly recommend it. It is just as likely that everyone else on Earth is

thinking *what took you so long?*

I successfully followed the steps for installing new cordless phones for the house landline, flying simultaneously with and against technological currents. My wife wonders why I don't just use my cell phone. My answer is, as Vonnegut said, *so it goes*. Additionally, I've perused the set-up instructions for a 2.5 gallon, bow-front aquarium, which is currently out on the back porch in the too-warm-for-tropical-fish weather, but apparently optimal for growing algae. I must soon carefully carry the tank inside and set it on the file cabinet and put in some snails and a couple of golden swordtails and see how they do. I read that I should only put in one inch of fish per gallon, so let's hope that they're both boys. Or girls, of course. On the other hand, I have read that there are fish which will change gender if the environment or social situation suits or necessitates it. Which I think is very interesting.

I'm reading translations of poems from China by the scholar Red Pine – ancient works by Hanshan and Shiwu and others. No, not all the time, but the volume is on the bedside table and this particular book also contains explications of when and where the poems were created. It all sounds quite highbrow, I guess, but it's also just...relaxing to see the words played with. I have an old professor of poetry who would say that with each reading there is deeper meaning to be gleaned. He would also give you a wink and tell you for nothing that there need be no deeper meaning than the calm one gets from some poems. We are language-based life forms. We do well to communicate one to another.

Oh, yes. I have finished Dame Mary Beard's highly readable history of Rome, *SPQR*, and am about to commence her forthcoming *Emperor of Rome*. This should keep me busy until the weather gets cooler (as I write, it's still mid-August - no pun intended). It's nicer to sit outside at the coffee shop and read, all bundled up on a day when the sun is doing its level best, even though that level is just a bit lower in the sky. I will pitch a few crumbs of walnut scone to the finches that gather looking for the spoils of war, and smile and turn the page.

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

*outside of society, waiting*

## “Malay Godiva”

by Ben Umayam

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I am, how you say, coming along for the ride. Auntie Maring, she wants me to escort Risa, Darisa for long. Although this child, she needs no chaperone. When the movie *Silence of the Lambs* was big, she insisted everyone call her Clarisse. Now she is older, and Risa suits her finer.

We are not really close. Close in age, that is correct. But although distant female cousins, we did not play together. She went to international schools all her life. In KL, Kuala Lumpur, all the rich families, they send their kids to international school. A lot of British influence. And a lot of Australian too. They come to KL to teach in these schools for the rich. So, Risa speaks with a mixed Brit, Aussie, mostly American accent. International.

I speak English, Malaysian style. Me my name is Malaika. My family could not afford international schools. I went to the local public schools, where we speak the English with a pronounced Malaysian accent.

I tell Risa, “We picked dis one, seester, for our last tour in Mexico, in Oaxaca. The other tours, well, eet is more of de same. Pyramids, and candle shop. Billages with wooden carvings and spirit crafts. Da voodoo stuff, we don’t need to see dat again.”

“And this tour?” Risa questions, a giant tree and a petrified forest with a waterfall. “Does that

mean the forest was underwater and is now dried up and all the trees now are fossils. Weird, Malaika. But I like this waterfall, petrified. What does that mean? Is it scared to death?”

“Eet is deese stalagmites. De slow, slow drip of water. Only dis time it is not like giant structures in a giant kayb. It is a waterfall that has dripped slowly so it is like a big stalagmite waterfall. Looks frozen but it is not cold. Bery Unique, they say, only two in the world, one here in Oaxaca. The other one is in Turkey.”

“Uggh,” Risa says. “I hate Turkey. I was there on holiday. No one speaks English, or if they do, they pretend not to unless they are hitting on you. We went to the south, Antalya, some beach with German and Belgian tourists all picking up young boys, getting them to give them massages. The sunscreen bottles not the only thing squirting. Ugghh. The Turks, and they are so anti-gay, which is so weird. You know the stereotype, Turks and Greek men, they LUV doing each other.”

Eek, this Darissa, Malaika thinks, she can be so vulgar with her international school speak.

The first stop on this tour is the tree, in the town of El Tule. They sometimes call it the Tule Tree, the biggest in the world not like the sequoias. This tree is big in circumference. Supposedly the

widest tree in the world, 177 feet in circumference. There is probably some bigger- in-circumference tree somewhere in the Australian out-back, not yet discovered.

The mini-bus, which holds maybe a dozen people, is full of Spanish-speaking people from South and Central America, even the Iberian peninsula, all here on vacation in Mexico. The only non-Spanish speaking folks are these two girls from Malaysia and us.

We are a gay couple from NYC, doing the most popular tour in Oaxaca, taking pictures of our vacation, the tree, the town, and the market in front of town hall. And, of course, the town sign, big block letters. The Malaysian girls, they haven’t stopped taking pictures. Like they are on some sort of glossy magazine shoot. For now, they look like they just might be posing at every angle around the tree, a big tree, in circumference.

Kevin: “That dark one, she is a real beauty. And she has big gazoombas. Her outfit emphasizes the size of them. She almost looks African but naaah, her roots are the dark sub-continent, Indian or from Goa. Is that the name of the Portuguese colony?”

Albert: “Portuguese, Goan, she is some beauty. And that plunging neckline. I wonder if she is some model. They aren’t using professional cameras; maybe they are just Instagram fanatics.



“C’mon honey, let’s offer to take some pictures. The Chinese-looking girl, the pale skin one. She is the photographer. Let’s ask them if they want pictures, the two of them. Such a contrast, one so dark, one so white.”

“You know, the Chinese in Southeast Asia, they aspire to be very white. They even use bleach products to whiten their skin, sounds so Trumpian. Remember, drink bleach? During the lockdown.”

“Ay, honey. Leave da Jessica out of this; that is so last political season. We are vacationing. Okay, you ask them if they want their pictures taken.”

We introduce ourselves, Kevin and Albert, Risa and Malaika. The girls want five pictures with every pastel letter that spells out the town. I tire of this quickly and hand the camera to Albert, who tires even easier. “Okay girls, we’ll see you back on the bus.”

The trek to the waterfalls, called Hieve de Aqua, is a dirt road uphill. The birds that fly so high up here fly with you instead of way up above. A little disconcerting to see the prey in their mouths, having just swooped down and up to our eye level.

There is some commotion at the wire fence gate overlooking the enormous chasm, a 200-foot drop to the bottom of the valley. A Polish girl breathlessly tells us, “There is a Disney character on the fence, so beautiful.”

“Disney character,” Kevin says to Albert. “Can’t be Dumbo, maybe Bambi, a doe on a fence. It must be

small. Is Tinkerbell in a petrified forest?

\*\*\*

The dark beauty and the Chinese Malaysian have snuck up behind us. “Eet is beautiful, no. Like some Tiffany piece of jewelry.”

We all are looking at what appears to be a giant, bejeweled grasshopper on the fence. “Just like what we saw on Antiques Roadshow,” Kevin says. The head is sapphire, the thorax is sapphire, and the wings and tail are rainbow-colored.

“Ay, don’t touch Risa. Deadly dangerous. The thorax is poisonous. You won’t die immediately. But you weel get nasty skin irritation, burning, inflamed. It is a toxic type of grasshopper that survives by poisoning eets enemies.” Malaika knows these things. She studied insects at university. She knows about that Brit Henry Bates, who lost himself in the Amazon forests studying butterflies. He discovered that the ones that survived they did so by taking on the wing pattern of the poisonous species. The idea was not to be prey but rather disguise against predators. She knows a lot of stuff, about his friend Wallace who, together with Bates, influenced Darwin’s theory of evolution, how the fittest survive.

Kevin whispers, “So pretty and so deadly. No wonder no one has snatched the grasshopper up. Ooooo, I get it. The Polish girl meant cricket, as in Jiminy cricket. She got her insects wrong.”

The walk to the top of the mountain, another half mile. The birds of prey are flying below us

now. At the summit, there are three pools, jade colored, and a path that leads to the edge of the mountain. This all overlooks the petrified waterfall. Stuck in time, minerals form a permanent image of falling, all from a slow, slow drip drip drip.

You have to walk to the very edge to get the best view.

“Uh-uh, Albert, dizzy queen syndrome. I can’t go to the edge.” Kevin fears heights. “Will you look at that? What a wonder, and the only other one in Turkey. I am so glad we did this tour.”

“Sweetie, let’s get into our swimwear and hop into these pools.”

There is a short walk to the dressing rooms, funky. Hand-painted signs saying Hombres, Damas, and not much else, the door is plywood with no locks; you must pry them open and closed for privacy.

The girls have beaten the boys and exited the Damas section, decked out in sheer kimonos. Underneath, they are wearing thong bikinis. Her tan bikini makes the dark Malay gal look like she is not wearing anything under her lace cover-up.

“We are going to the pools, are you swimming too?”

“No thanks, boyz, there is a local with a horse, a nice white one. We want to take photos of me on the pony with the backdrop of the mountains up here. I want to look like Lady Godiva. Do you know that Brit story?” She reviews for us. “Lady Godiva’s hubby had been taxing the villagers too much, so she tries to convince him to ease up on them. He agrees if she rides

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through the village naked, covered only by her long, beautiful hair.

As the girls go to the bluff edge, the boys wonder. "That must be uncomfortable, that thong thing. To have the thing crawling up your crack."

"Uncomfortable, but all the beach gals all wear them. Sun, fun, and a thong up your butt-crack. That dark beauty. Looks naked under her cover-up thingy."

They watch as the girls negotiate with the local, and Risa mounts the white horse. "Like some Malay Godiva."

"Yeah, like they are shooting for a glossy skin magazine. Maybe that's how they pay for the trips, sell the pictures, her almost naked on a horse up in the clouds in the mountains."

The emerald pools looked nice from afar but are gross close, and near. They are stagnant pools, green with algae, and no source of a hot spring. When they first get in, Albert and Kevin slip on the moss-covered rocks. Others are playfully swimming. "I don't know how deep it is, and the bottom is so slippery. And it is cold, and I am not warming up. Let's get out and soak up the sun."

They have difficulty getting out, things are too slippery, they are older, one has just fallen off a bike, and both are paranoid about falling again.

They spread a towel and bask in the sun and watch black predatory birds fly around them at eye level. Everything so idyllic. And then it is all broken.

"What! What the fuck are you

trying to do. You can't be touching me like that. What are you trying to do. Blimey bloke! What kind of a duffer are you, ya piece of shit! I am no scrubber, swine. Frigging tosser, keep your paws off of me. Motherfucker!"

She is screaming at the top of her lungs. It echoes through the bluff. It has broken the pristine peacefulness of the place.

Heads turn, shake.

The commotion is coming from the girls, who have been taking pictures, Risa posing on the white horse in a bikini thong covered by a sheer kimono.

Finished, the beauty has gotten off the horse, and the stream of curses cuts the air. "You mother fucker, I know what you are doing. You don't have to grab my ass to help me off the horse. How would you like it if I grabbed your ass. How would you like it if I grabbed your crotch. You probably would like it you piece of shit. Motherfucker, where is the police? Where is security? I am going to report you to security. You piece of shit!"

The onlookers murmur in Spanish. Everyone takes sides. What does she expect dressed like that, say the men. The women quote the signs on the subway. Untoward touching is not acceptable. The native guy stands in the shade, scratching his head, wondering what has happened. What has he done that was so wrong?

We go to the dressing room, the girls nowhere in sight.

We go to the bus to return. Some passengers have taken the

bottom path to see the petrified falls up close. They say it is spectacular. Others talk about the refreshing swim in the green ponds. "If you like slippery moss under your feet," I whisper to Albert. We are all waiting. It is now a 15-minute late departure, and the Malay girls are still not back. I mention the screaming; it seems she was molested getting off the horse. The teacher from Colombia says, in his pretty good English that the guy smashed her boobies too. The men on the bus say did you see what she was wearing? What do you expect? The women on the bus all say men need to understand, they can no longer molest; women will not stand for it anymore.

Ay, we are so late returning, 30 minutes. We go to the back of the bus. It is uncomfortable, the silence on this bus. Are they mad because we have caused them to be late? No, it is as if all the tourists on the bus, blame us for what has happened.

One of the gay guys, Kevin, moves to the back where we are seated. "Can I tell you a story, gurls. My dad had taken me to this department store in Rome, *Rinascimento*. We needed to buy me a black suit for this semi-private audience with the Pope. In the fitting room, this nice-looking older man in his forties is getting too close to my crotch with the measuring tape. Back then, there were no zippers on Italian pants. He is fumbling with the buttons of my fly, fumbling the wrong way. I knew even though I was just 11 years old, this was wrong. Still, I immediately

get a boner. My dad drew the curtain, saw what was happening, and dragged me out of the store. Like it was my fault. You did the right thing. Always scream bloody murder.”

He pats Risa’s hand. “We had the audience with the Pope. He wasn’t a saint then; he is now. I had to wear my dark plaid purplish sports jacket. You can see it in the family picture of our audience. The Pope is holding my hand, me wearing a tacky plaid jacket, and his assistant is lewdly eyeing my older sister, her smiling under her long black veil.” This gay guy. He has gotten Risa to smile. We both smile.

The bus proceeds to the Mezcal tasting, this part of Mexico is the home of Mezcal. The tourist ladies on the bus request some reggaeton music, and everyone knows and joins in on the chorus, something about getting guys too drunk with another *caña*, Spanish for a draft beer, and them drinking till they drop.

This French guy, he has suspiciously joined us. He was not on the bus earlier, perhaps from another bus, another tour. The guide breaks us up into a Spanish-speaking group and an English-speaking group for the tour of agave plants and mezcal production. The Frenchie joins our English-speaking group. He is older and handsome but with a curl of the lip that looks, how you say, lecherous.

Us girls, we don’t know much about Mezcal. I tell the distillery bartender, “I neber drink, you know, the Muslim part of our culture.” Now Risa is, they say, a two-

fisted club girl in KL, although she knows nothing of this Mezcal. She coaxes me into testing it out.

“C’mon my lovie, we can taste as many as 50 mezcals; that’s what the tour brochure said.” We taste and drink and taste some more. All the others agree on the pineapple and the cinnamon-flavored spirit. We girls giggle. The Frenchmen nudges closer to us, it seems. Kevin tells Albert, “You got my back.”

He says later he doesn’t speak perfect French. He warns the Frenchmen, supplemented with international sign language. He points to Risa, “That lady, she is Lady D in Malaysia. She flies like a butterfly, and stings like a bee.

Back off, Jacques, if you know what

is good for you!” He backs off.

Us Malay-dees cover our mouths demurely, like those Japanese school girls in *The Mikado*. We run to the little girl’s room before returning to our tour bus. That Mezcal, it goes right through you! On the ride home, *las chicas* request that beer-drinking song repeatedly. The girl from Barcelona gives us a loose translation. The chorus says, “. . . drink another *caña* and wake up on the floor, lipstick on your face and your butt all sore.” We are all laughing and laughing, on our way back from our tour of the Petrified Waterfall in Oaxaca. ❖

## 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.

I am with my brothers and other people in a remote house. The mood is jovial, but it’s not a party. The Rolling Stones stop by on their way to a gig. I briefly chat one-on-one with Mick Jagger. He confides that he will soon embark on a new solo project in Scandinavia. I ask him if he likes smelts and share my fondness for mackerel and fish from the North Atlantic. Taken aback, he quickly excuses himself and moves on. I immediately rebuke myself: “A great artist shared news of his career and I react with a comment about seafood – how stupid and callous!” I lament that I will never have the social skills to socialize with rock stars and go off in search of another drink.

Maxwell C - cyberspace

## “The Good Life”

by Hardy Coleman

(for Eric Diamond)

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When I grew old enough to run away I set up housekeeping with my imaginary friend in a cave. Included were all the amenities: Climate controlled, underground parking, running water 24/7.

It all started one day while perusing the classifieds with Billy. (That’s my friend.) The ad jumped right off the page at him. “Yo, dude,” he said. “This one looks affordable!”

*RUSTIC CHARM! HIGH CEILINGS  
& LOW OVERHEAD IN A QUIET  
NEIGHBORHOOD.  
NO BACKGROUND CHECK.  
NO SECURITY DEPOSIT.  
AVAILABLE IMMEDIATELY.*

“Come on! Pack your bags,” said Billy. “We can be moved out before your folks get home!”

So we grabbed a box of Saltines, five or eight cans of Kipper Snacks and my red pajamas with feet. Then we hit the road to independence.

Things went pretty well through the winter months, considering this was our first time out on our own and all. We’d while away the hours, days, weeks around the campfire roasting wieners that sprouted from the ceiling, discussing the finer points of Godzilla versus Elastic Man. Or, “When The Flash exceeds the

speed of light, does he start slowing down? Does he begin morphing into a new breed of super hero, like maybe The Human Snail?” “Is G. I. Joe a macho thing or a faggot thing?” Or, “Which do you prefer, parental abuse or parental neglect?”

The possibilities were endless.

I suppose, in retrospect, that the first sign of trouble was when Billy took to decorating the apartment. He’d prick a finger and squeeze three drops of blood onto a patch of lichen, grind it all into mush with the broken end of a stalagmite and paint the rooms. The bedroom he did in Mesozoic herbivores. The bathroom sported a mollusk motif. The den, a pastel shade of pterodactyl. The kitchen was subtly highlighted in early Pleistocene carnivores.

The more he festooned our crib, the more deplorable his decorum became. At first he’d merely omit the occasional participle or adjective from his speech. But before long his sentences consisted of little more than, “Me step out take leak.” Then, “Me take leak.” Then simply, “Leak.” Next thing I knew, he’d just mutter, “Ugh!” and piss on the floor.

His forehead began to slope.

And for the first time since Billy and I met (next to the teeter-totter at the 24 hour preschool), I

was lonely. I mean, we didn’t have cable T. V. or an all sports radio station. We had nobody but ourselves to chew the fat with and Billy wasn’t talking.

It finally ended when I went to the cupboard and discovered he’d eaten the last of the Kipper Snacks and crackers. The can, the fish inside the can, Saltines, box, plastic wrappers. . . everything. I had a severe case of the munchies, so I yelled, “To Hell with Clearasil! Let my pimples be!” and went out for pizza. That first slice was a lot better than anything I’d ever eaten at Billy’s Pleistocene Diner, so I ordered a second. Then a third. Washed it all down with an underage beer and consequently never went home.

Being lonely is easier when you’re alone.

\*

I caught a rumor that Billy got on for a while in the primate house at the Como Park Zoo. But then, or so I hear, his cellmates couldn’t stomach his manners, claimed he was sullen and tight-lipped. Allegedly, he was also a slob, didn’t even bother to use toilet paper, so they had to let him go. After that, who knows? The job market for imaginary friends has always been hit or miss, even in the best of times.

As for myself, things couldn’t be rosier. I sold the rights to my



life story and bought a nifty condo all my own, right in the heart of downtown. It has internet hook-up and a satellite dish and a vast array of buttons to push if I'm ever at a loss for something worthwhile to occupy my time. There's even a balcony way up here in the clouds.

Sometimes I saunter out there. (Thirty-four storeys high and what a view!) Sometimes I amble out real easy and embark

upon a discourse with my subjects down below. We discuss the pros & cons, what-ifs, has beens and maybe sos. All the jurisprudence I'll enact when I'm elected president.

Sometimes when I'm feeling really, really adult, when my full-fledged grown-up juices are flowing at their peak, I'll whip it out. "Ugh!" I shout, and piss on them!

I'm not lonely up here. What do I care if nobody listens when I

threaten or cajole or climb onto my soapbox? Hey, it's their loss, right?

No, my little aerie is not the least bit forlorn. Why just the other day three of my close personal friends called up and sold me the Sunday paper, a discount subscription to four magazines I've never heard of and an Acme Wizard Slice'n'Dicer which automatically transforms zucchini into bite-sized penis heads. I inquired with each of them as to whether they had any news of Billy.

:Oh yes!" they replied. "He's top salesman." "He's employee of the month." "He married the boss's beautiful daughter and they've got 2.3 lovely children on the Dean's list at Harvard."

What a buncha liars! Billy would *never* grow that old.

It might be nice to see him again. Maybe I should rent a column inch in the 'help wanteds' and wait by the phone. Maybe he's tired of being on his own. Maybe he'd like these skyline digs, miles away from everyone. Maybe I could learn to speak his language. I mean, what is language anyway, but pissing in the wind?

\*

There are those who think I'm crazy, that I'm talking to myself. They've got it wrong. I'm just talking.

There is no one here at all.

❖



## “Ephemeral Piss & Vinegar on Route 95”

by John Christopher Nelson

---

This story would be much more interesting, amusing even, if my first Sheryl Crow album had been *Tuesday Night Music Club*. It would be years before I learned about all of the associated nineties mythology, the performance on Letterman, or Carroll Mine. But that’s another story. This is what actually happened.

For my twelfth birthday, my parents gifted me my first portable CD player and three compact discs. Sheryl Crow’s eponymous sophomore album was released the previous autumn, while Alanis Morissette’s *Jagged Little Pill* and No Doubt’s *Tragic Kingdom* both arrived a year earlier. My access to pop culture was limited in Tonopah—a defunct silver-boom mining town, perched in the central Nevada high desert: the caricature of a community in which the only accessible radio stations played fifth-generation country or evangelical sermons—but tracks I’d encountered from each artist on MTV had piqued my interest. No matter how small the town where you lived, in the eighties & nineties, you could always rely on MTV.

Back when all of this happened, it was my third year as a trombone player and the middle school band was participating in an early summer concert. Steven and Thomas played trumpet. Paul

played trombone, like me. The back of the band room, perpetually crowded with pubescent goofballs and their spit-valves.

Miranda played the flute. Miranda was not a goofball. Miranda was even out of Steven’s league, although he would insist otherwise.

A school bus hauled all of us the three hours to Henderson, where we convened with bands from other somewhat-nearby middle schools. I don’t remember which songs we played. It certainly wouldn’t have been anything by No Doubt. Mr. Crawford wasn’t the kind of band teacher to entertain contemporary music, even if poorly performed by preteens for a laugh.

Mr. Crawford was the kind of band teacher who lived less than a block up the street from my family and whose house burned down. He paid me to help remove the salvageable possessions from the blackened remains: a mess of soggy, passive wood that smelled of a faulty outlet’s transgressions. Even though the integrity of the structure was ruined to the extent that it could not possibly have offered electricity, I possess a false memory of the Shelley Duvall *Popeye* playing on the television while we carried Crawford’s melted furniture out of the slumping structure he’d called home only the day before.

As for the concert, our long day eventually offered its reward. The school had arranged for us to drive through Las Vegas on the way home from the concert. We stopped at the Excalibur, which had a downstairs arcade known as the Fun Dungeon—which, as an adult, sounds to me as though it would offer an entirely different Las Vegas experience than the one we had then. Steven and I fought at least a few battles on *Mortal Kombat 3*, there were several rounds of air hockey played, and I went on a 3D motion “ride,” in which I lugged down a Swedish mountain. Or something. Memory is elusive and finite, right? Anyway, we were eventually corralled back to the bus.

In an act of complete serendipity, I was assigned to ride alongside Miranda on the way home.

It was post-dusk and daylight’s leavings were intruding through the bus’s greasy-fingered windows. I was surprised by how friendly Miranda was, but after some deliberately casual chit-chat, she fell asleep. By then, the dialogue had dwindled and we’d settled into our respective headphones. While I was listening to “All I Really Want,” Miranda was dozing to Silverchair’s *Frogstomp*.

Then.

It feels like a fabrication, a liberty a screenwriter would take for the movie version of the scene:

Miranda's sleeping head shifted to rest on my shoulder. My pale, doughy shoulder. In the movie version, the camera would pull back through the rear of the bus, up among the indifferent stars of the desert, to observe the vehicle's retreat into the darkness surrounding Las Vegas. An unexpected wince of sin among the shiftless expanse of sand.

In real life, Mr. Crawford

rebuked my decision to quit playing trombone. In real life, we moved out of Nevada and Miranda was never heard from again. In real life, I wouldn't listen to *Frogstomp* until I discovered "Anthem for the Year 2000" on *Neon Ballroom* and dove into Silverchair's back catalogue. But on a school bus in 1997, a jewel-cased neon-green frog suggested that whatever Miranda was listening to was undoubtedly cooler

than me or anything I could be listening to. I didn't know then that there are different ways of being cool but it didn't matter. I suppose it still doesn't. ❖

## "relentless hungry animal"

By Sharon Lopez Mooney

with raven i hunt for You along a reach of mountain  
eavesdrop on  
    a squabble of gulls wrestling  
        each other with flap of wing  
i wait breathless for  
    little flits of sparrow songsters  
        to answer You  
i follow the trail of tiny beetles  
        over the edge of wonder  
i scour silver flashes of sea for messages  
surrender to hypnotic waves pulsing  
teasing my hopes  
    with empty bubbles  
        no answers lie within these surges  
original treasure is buried  
    deep inside the center of birth  
i excavate Your core  
    to find the answer  
        i already know  
            but cannot not name

Two by Craig Kirchner

"Gated"

Driving in, I spotted her.  
Standing in the only shade for blocks  
on a boulevard of vast divergence,  
but little in the way of trees,  
with layered clothing, a knit beanie, and boots.

Leaning lackadaisically  
on worldly possessions,  
packed tightly in a shopping cart,  
she seems to be pondering the newly,  
reconstructed portal, with its red cones  
and white arm in front of the formidable,  
original, wrought iron gate, in front of the  
imperiled, gated neighborhood.

The community sees this as security,  
keeps out stickers when it rains,  
or temperamentally malfunctions.  
This afternoon it perceives itself,  
as protection from the Walmart cart  
and its comrade, who doesn't appear,  
to have any desire to enter.

Typical condo, equity, a pool,  
two bedrooms, and an office,  
which handsomely houses about six hundred books.  
Volumes, which will never be allowed to  
go homeless, be exiled to a shopping cart,  
to be disregarded in the Florida heat,  
seeing as how they have lived,  
and breathed for me when I needed them.



## “Breakfast and some news at the Twin Kiss Diner”

The booth was claustrophobic.  
The sports section I held between us,  
was like a volleyball net,  
your stares lofting over,  
like shots of fresh egg, I couldn't spike.  
When Alice came to take your order  
and you looked at each other,  
for the first time, the silence  
was as thick as the coffee.

Twins – identical,  
if her hair had been curled  
and she'd had some cleavage.  
I can't remember who was  
first to speak, probably me,  
but then you ordered.  
One egg, one sausage – one carb.  
I felt I had to order two of something,  
just on principle.

You ripped my 'Post' to shreds,  
and smashed my reading glasses,  
before you stormed out of the diner.  
I wasn't sure if it was the five sugars,  
I snuck in your coffee, or my comment,  
that your hang-ups were cultural.  
Most likely, it was my suggestion,  
we get together with the waitress,  
when she was done her shift.

I stood four-eyed in front of the cash register.  
Alice gave me six quarters change,  
for a dollar, for a USA Today,  
winked, cracked her gum,  
lightly dragged her forefinger,  
across her lower lip,  
stuck out her studded tongue,  
and walked back into the kitchen.

“...an armed bystander saves the lives of...”

a news flash

by Sharon Lopez Mooney

tv words smolder in heavy clouds  
promising further damage,  
a damnable idea hiding in wait  
to tempt more mothers to be armed shoppers,  
fathers to become supermarket warriors,  
single women super guardians  
all self ordained saviors.

The power of a news flash,  
influence of a #hashtag's aftertaste,  
the clever simmering deceit of defense  
all, gathering and creeping into  
a deadly heart disease,  
with its delicious seduction  
suspended in protection.

Cringing, I shudder  
can't let go of voracious  
fear as it makes  
a nest in my heart  
crowding out twigs of hope  
until I turn off the tv  
and turn back to the sea.

## Contributors:

**Ben Umayam** moved to NYC to write the Great American Filipino Gay Short Story. He worked for political pollsters, then became a fancy hotel chef and then retired. He is working that short story again. He was recently published by *Children, Churches and Daddies*, *Querencia Fall Anthology 2022*, *Midway Journal*, *The Phare*, *BULL*, *Down in the Dirt*, *Metaworker*, *EthelZine*, *34th Parallel*, *Digging Through The Fat*, *Corvus Review*, others.

**Hardy Coleman** writes, “Precinct of Minneapolis, where George Floyd lived and died.. So, it’s been an “interesting” few years here in da hood. He’s got a children’s novel out, *Game Day* by Moonfire Publishing, and has work coming soon in *Misfits* and *BarBar* Magazines. He was once nominated for a Pushcart Prize and twice had work appear in *Modern Drunkard Magazine*.”

**John Christopher Nelson** writes, “I am a graduate of the Stonecoast MFA and earned my BA in Literature from UCLA. My work is forthcoming in *Horrors of the Deep: An Anthology of Startling Sea Stories*, and is featured in *DUM DUM Zine*, *The Real Story*, *The New Guard*, *Chiron Review*, *Able Muse*, *Indicia*, *The Matador Review*, *BE ABOUT IT Zine*, and elsewhere.”

**Craig Kirchner** of Jacksonville, FL has written poetry all his life, is now retired, and thinks of poetry as hobo art. He loves storytelling and the aesthetics of the paper and pen. The beautifully parallel, horizontal, blue lines on white legal, staring left to right, knowing that the ink, when it meets the resistance of the page will feel extroverted, set free, at liberty to jump, the two skinny, vertical red lines to get past the margin. He was nominated twice for the Pushcart Prize, and has a book of poetry, *Roomful of Navels*. After a writing hiatus he was recently published in *Decadent Review*, *Gas*, *Ink in Thirds*, *Ginosko* and *New World*.


**Sharon Lopez Mooney** writes, “As an elder, I’ve come to understand that everything is political (politics with a small “p”), and everything is spiritual (spiritual with a small “s”), and so all that I write has those threads of being human in them. I am hoping that *The Blotter*’s vision is radical enough to have boundaries able to allow my unique voice and themes. I have chosen poems I think might fit within your “outsider” definition, since I’ve been out of norm for my whole life – in my own way. As a poet, I believe I have a responsibility to communicate with others and to offer perspectives toward positive change and hope with all I write. And one of the reasons I love *The Blotter* is that anyone can read its online issues. Thank you for that.

And so, I submit my collection in hopes of having my writing be in tune with your vision for the press, and I will be honored if you find that to be true. Thank you for possibly sharing my poems with your readers, and for your time and energy you put into making possible this press’ presence in the world.

Wishing you all smiling hearts / Deseándoles corazones sonrientes, Sharon Lopez Mooney”

BIO: Sharon Lopez Mooney, poet, is a retired Interfaith Chaplain from the End of Life field, living in Sonora Mexico, and part-time in California. Mooney has received a California Grant for a rural poetry series; was a “Best of the Net” nominee, a “Peseroff Prize” finalist, and honored with “Editor’s Choice” and “Elite Writer Status”. Mooney’s poems are published nationally & internationally in such as: *Glassworks*, *The Blotter*, *Umbrella Factory*, *MuddyRiver Review*, *Revue{R}Évolution*, *Avalon Literary*, *Alchemy & Miracles*, *Ginosko*, *California Quarterly*, *Galway Review*, *Existere*, *Ricochet Review*, *Adelaide International*, *Field Guide Poetry Magazine* and elsewhere. Currently she facilitates poetry feedback workshops. Mooney’s poems are indexed at: [www.sharonlopezmooney.com](http://www.sharonlopezmooney.com)





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