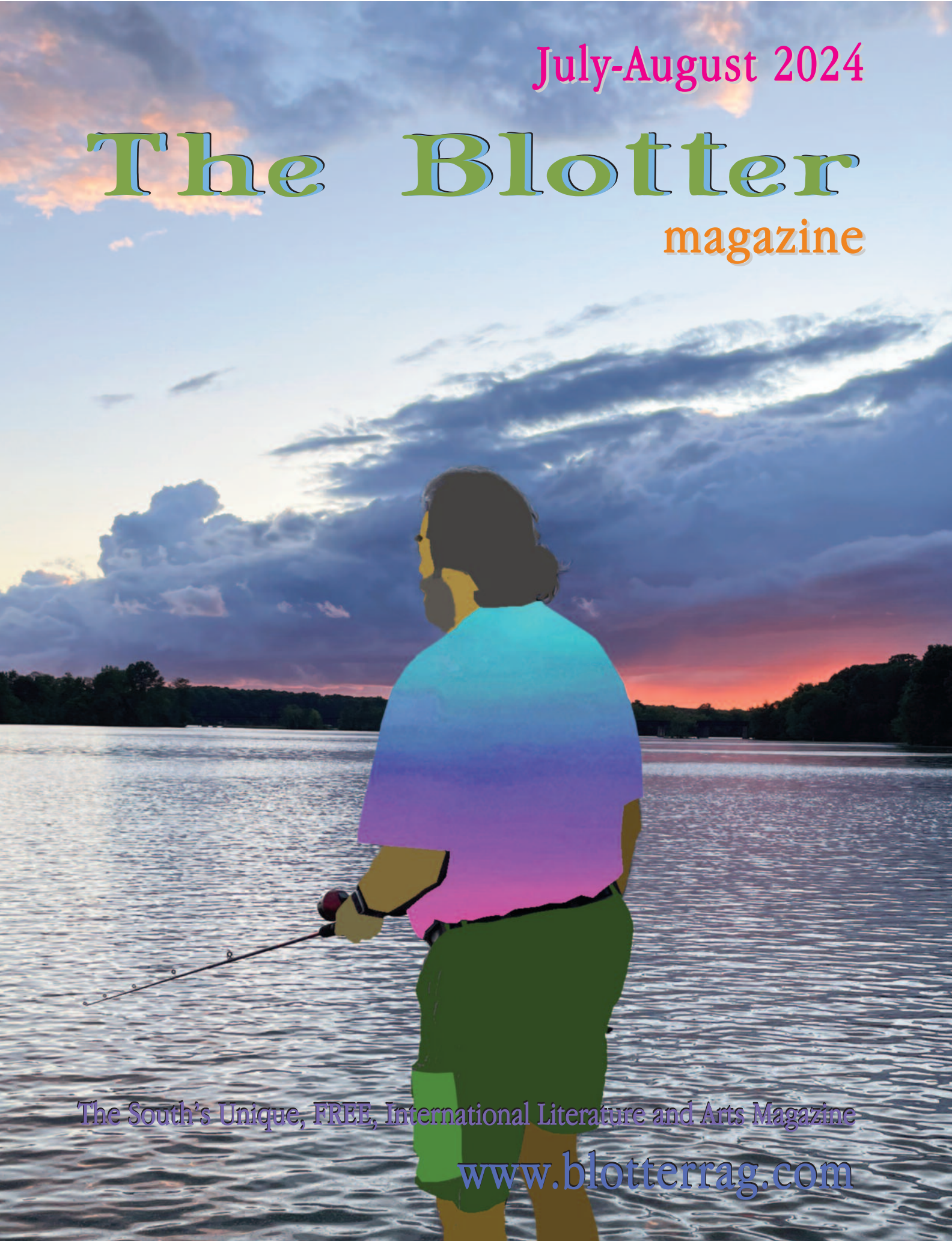


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magazine



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“Panegyric...Paregoric”

Our language is a sonofabitch sometimes. It doesn't always play well with others. It argues that you can do just fine with a workmanlike grasp and a little attitude and then smothers you in misunderstanding and incorrect definition, nuance and new usage. And context. And volume. Anger, frustration and distrust.

Lately, I've been talking a lot with my daughters. They are both out of school now, grown up, busy. and full of new knowledge that I want to know, too. (Try saying that five times, fast...) I call them and ask a lot of questions. Dumb ones, too, I'm sure. Things I'm not up-to-speed about. How to get followers on social media. How to do a clip mask in Photoshop. What does this acronym mean, and when do I use it? (Oh, never?)

If I was my younger self, I would be troubled by this role-reversal, but I pretty much saw it coming. There was a time not so long ago when I pedaled faster, in an effort to keep up with the current. Lately, however, I'm reading old books I should already have read, and my music playlist is antiquated. Yes, those are both true and metaphors, simultaneously. The girls understand, and don't seem to mind. They haven't yet put me out to pasture.

In fact, the best part is that they still call. I'm not quite unnecessary but can be a quick reference for certain things (when to use sundried tomatoes), or someone they know they can unload on with no repercussions, particularly with regard to recent events. In the latter, however, despite promising to always answer honestly, I try to avoid the questions I personally don't enjoy answering. Those things I call “Why?” questions. Because *why* is frequently, not always, an opinion. I want to stay in my wheelhouse, but *why* makes that difficult.

But one cannot always avoid trouble. I rely on my language skills. My vocabulary, if you will. I may say to them, “I think the question may be the wrong question. Do you mean...” Or, perhaps, “Ask me that a different way. I want to know exactly what you're implying.” And we go on. Sometimes we don't get to the point. Sometimes I apologize. (Sometimes this is later.)

I don't do this sort of arguing thing with many people. Why? (see what I mean?) Because I'm not inclined to do so. I could explain why (aargh!) I'm not, but I won't.

Am I getting lazy? Possibly. (probably!) Also, I just don't know why so, so many things happen or are said or thought. I'm not that clever. I always assume the best answer to such questions is “just because...” Or

“I dunno...” Rather like I’m either a tired parent or a teenaged boy living in the 1970s.

Both of which I claim some experience in having been.

Personally, I think we’re all lazy. Not necessarily with intent, but lazy nonetheless. There was a great interest a few years back in a form of what I call human cataloging, in which persons responded to a series of questions and after their answers were analyzed, were assigned four emotional and intellectual quadrants of traits that were theirs, based on that analysis. They were told by licensed leaders and educators that they had qualities that matched with others, that blended well, or possibly conflicted with. The whole process, rather than being even remotely scientific or credentialed, turned out to be something designed as a parlor game by a couple of women back in the 1930s. Still, corporate organizations took it very seriously for a while, and it was at least fun. Fun to take a look at yourself through a new lens. Fun to belong to something as simple as a personality fraternity. Fun like...Astrology?

And, in the end, this team-building exercise went the way of the dodo. But there was one piece of information that stuck with me anyway. The leader always concluded the personality analysis with the comment that our quadrants are not who we are, but the rut that we tend towards. In short, we are often lazy not just because it’s easier, but because it is difficult to overcome the inertia, to pull out of a tailspin, to steer a less travelled path.

And I don’t want to cast aspersions, but there’s been a lot of this going around for a while. Instead of legitimate debate, chanting in a crowd something short and easy, something that rhymes. That’s not poetry. Listening to the so-called talking-heads feed us a line and nodding our heads. It’s not expertise, credentialed and fact-checked. And so it is with conversation. We have our vocabulary, and imagine it does us well enough. Until it doesn’t. Until the anger and frustration kick in. *Pick a side. Shut up. Bullshit.* Digging the ruts ever deeper. Imagining we did all we can do? What alternatives are there - everything is shrinking (down to seconds and characters and pixels, etc.) and the quality of human interaction is deteriorating to a point of no return.

I much prefer having the conversation, the argument, where we take the time necessary to parse the situation and find a way to make our considerations heard. *This is good, and that is bad. How do I know? Because I read it in this book or that paper or watched video in which so-and-so stated it. What do you think, and why?* I fear that this last-best ship may already have sailed.

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CAUTION

it's just a shot away

“A Very Important Dream”

by Hannah Montante

Sylvie awoke to the memory of a dream. It was a vision of her at a restaurant with a mysterious man, having the time of her life. He was incredibly handsome, with long brown hair and a long sloping nose to match. He'd been eating a salad that consisted of only iceberg lettuce and pieces of steak and drinking a tall glass of red wine. He'd told a joke (she couldn't remember what it was, but it must have been hilarious), and she'd laughed and laughed hysterically, the other restaurant goers looking on and giving the couple dirty looks. They were just jealous that they didn't have their own handsome and mysterious man to laugh with.

The first time she'd had a vision she was in the first grade, when she dreamt that an old woman had appeared at her house one day out of nowhere. She'd told her parents about this strange vision of hers, to which they explained that she'd had what was called a “dream,” something “your brain does to process the events of your daily life.” This sounded suspicious, because why had she never had one before? And shortly after that, her mother's estranged aunt had come to the door asking for money, looking exactly how Sylvie had imagined her in the dream.

Sylvie threw her thick comforter onto the floor, wondering about the man from her dream. What was his name? Where did he live? Did he have any idea she existed?

She jumped out of bed, grabbed her phone, and rushed into the living room. Taking a seat on the couch, she knew she had to tell the most important person in her life about the news first.

“Why aren't you at work?” her mother asked instead of saying hello.

“I think I've found the perfect guy for me.” She beamed. But instead of giving her the response she wanted, she could hear her mother sigh on the other line.

“Where this time?”

“Mom, I'm serious,” she said. “I know I haven't talked to you about this kind of thing in a while, but, um, I, uh, had a vision.”

“Sylvie.”

“Who is it?” Sylvie heard her father's voice ask in the background.

“It's Sylvie, she's—”

“What's wrong? Is she okay?” her father interrupted.

“Yes, she's fine,” her mother responded in a low tone. “Sylvie. How many times do I have to tell you? Just because you had a dream about something, and it sort of comes true later does not

necessarily mean you've had a vision.” She paused. “Now, please go to work. You'll only be a few minutes late if you get ready now.”

“O.K.” Sylvie pressed the end button with force, purposely not saying goodbye. She frowned. She'd show her. She'd soon be visiting her parents with her dream date, and they'd be so impressed by how kind and funny and handsome he was.

Instead of going to work, she knew what she had to do – find this mystery man and ignore all other responsibilities. With every swipe, Sylvie felt her heart beating faster. There was always the chance that the next up could be her dream guy. But after a few hours of searching, she was already bored. The prospect of finding the guy was starting to feel less thrilling and more like work, which she would've gone to if she'd wanted to.

Suddenly, Sylvie awoke, hand stuck to her face with drool. She sat up quickly and looked around, realizing she must've fallen asleep. She reached for her phone, which she'd assumed was behind her on the arm of the couch, but it wasn't there. She reached under her, not finding it there, either. She finally found that it had fallen onto the floor, and as she reached to pick it

up, the screen lit up with a notification.

Ben liked you! When Sylvie squinted at the tiny photo, she realized it was a face that looked familiar. Her heart thumping, she clicked on the image, opening the app. It was a selfie of the man of her dream(s), smiling at the camera, long brown hair flowing in the wind, with a message he'd left on a photo of Sylvie smiling that said, "hi cutie!" She swiped through his profile and there was only one more photo, another selfie of him posing at a slightly different angle, showing off his long, sloping nose. His profile read: *Ben. 25. Love long walks on the beach and road trips with my dog! Let's go on an adventure.* The profile didn't strike Sylvie as remarkably original, but she didn't care. Her profile wasn't all that interesting, either, but he'd obviously he'd liked it.

She matched with Ben, responding to his message with "hey!"

Ben responded within a few short minutes asking if she'd want to meet at a local restaurant called "Peppers" that night. She had never heard of it before, but that made perfect sense since she hadn't recognized the restaurant in her dream.

Sylvie found a spot in front of the eatery and walked toward the entrance, butterflies in her stomach. But as she walked in, she didn't recognize the restaurant interior whatsoever. While the place in her dream had been decorated

with greenery and hanging lights, this restaurant looked like a children's pizza parlor with an arcade. Not that she had any problem with children's pizza parlors, except that she was not a child and also did not eat pizza. She looked around, but there was no sign of him. Sylvie messaged him and he responded almost immediately, saying that he'd gotten a table in the corner booth. Glancing over at both corner booths, she didn't see anyone that resembled her dream guy; only a group of children in the left-most one, and a guy who did not look anything like Ben in the other. She decided to approach the guy who did not look like Ben.

"Hi... um... Ben?" she asked hesitantly. The man got up from his seat and went to give her a hug, but Sylvie grimaced. He was a short man, which she had no issue with other than the fact that she was quite tall, and he wasn't necessarily unattractive, but he smelled strongly of mulch. She sat down.

"How are you?" he asked, grinning. "How was the drive?"

"I'm good, uh, are you Ben? You look a little different from your photos."

"Oh yeah, sorry about that. I took those about a year ago," he replied, failing to acknowledge that the photos were clearly of another guy. Sylvie laughed uneasily, wondering if he had gotten a face transplant. Was that a thing? Maybe he'd been in a terrible, traumatic accident and had

needed a new face. It was a reasonable explanation. She didn't want to judge a book by its cover.

"I hope you like the place I picked out for us. It's my favorite restaurant."

"This is fine." She looked away, frowning.

"Is everything okay? I hope I didn't do something to upset you."

"I'm sorry. I just, uh, can't get over the fact that you seem to have a different face than what was advertised to me." Sylvie hadn't wanted to bring it up, but this was clearly not her dream guy. Even if he had gotten a face transplant, how would it be possible that the guy she'd seen in her dream had his old face? Unless they'd switched faces.

Ben looked disappointed. "I guess I must come clean. I used someone else's photos. I'm sorry. I hope you'll still give me the opportunity to get to know you, but I understand if not," he said dramatically.

"I have to go," Sylvie said, sliding out of her seat and out of the restaurant. She was so distraught that she didn't even notice she had almost bumped into the hostess, who gave her a dirty look on her way out.

Wandering the streets, Sylvie couldn't even remember where she had parked her car. It was starting to get dark out, so she walked quickly and aggressively, holding her keys in her fist to defend herself. It wasn't until she had walked a block away from her

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house that she realized she'd been parked in front of the restaurant the whole time. She spun around in the middle of the road to start making her way back, but a man wearing a large trench coat, a beret, and dark sunglasses bumped into her.

"Hey! Watch where you're going, asshole!" she yelled, keys ready.

"Excuse me?" he said, stopping in his tracks.

"I said watch where you're going. You ran right into me," she replied aggressively.

"Is that you?" the man said, lowering his sunglasses, and in that moment, Sylvie realized that the stranger looked familiar. Where had she seen him before? Was it some creep she'd talked to online?

"Do I know you?" Sylvie asked. A car honked as it tried to drive past them.

"Well, no, not exactly," he replied, "Maybe we should go over to the sidewalk."

"Don't tell me what to do," Sylvie replied, but as he walked over to the sidewalk, she followed. She did want to know more.

"I'm Jimothy, but my friends call me Jim," he said, outstretching his hand. "Can we be friends?"

"How do I know I can trust you? You look awfully suspicious."

"I'm from Europe," he replied, and she realized that he did have some sort of accent... where had she heard it before?

"This might sound strange,

but I had a dream about you..." he said. "Sometimes, I have dreams that actually come true. Just a quirky little thing about me." He smirked and took off his hat.

Finally able to see more of his face, she gasped. It was her dream man, *and* he had the same talent as her? She'd never met anyone else with it. Her parents were going to flip when they heard the news. They'd finally believe her after all these years.

"That's crazy. The same thing happened to me..." Sylvie replied, in awe. "In fact, I rarely remember my dreams, but when I do, they always come true."

"Me too!" he exclaimed. "That's amazing. Hey, would you like to come in for tea, or maybe some crumpets? Then we could go to this restaurant I love down the block."

"Sure," she replied, playing it cool. She followed him up the steps to the house they were already standing next to, which was apparently his house, unless he was just breaking and entering someone else's. Since he was her dream guy, she supposed it didn't really matter, anyways. ❖

“Grace Note Blues”

by Billy Stanton

Outside was Midwest mid-night. Outside was strips of flood-lit tarmac half-filled by ten-tons and pick-ups awaiting their dawn-of-day drivers; outside was spiraling off-ramps; outside was more chain-link fences than there seemed land worth fencing off; outside was the yellow neon-halogen glow of signs for waffle houses and liquor stores. Outside, on windows and windshields, lights blinked blue, white and gold. Outside, the crossroads were eerie and silent, pavement and dust and dead grass, and beyond it all was the moon showing the colour of old cream. It was still hot out, muggy, but even hotter inside, and Johnny Boy was sweating hard.

The stage was more like a miniature circus ring. The perimeter of the circular platform was marked by sandbags and was only elevated about a foot off the ground. The five-piece band had earlier struggled for space around the drum kit, having to remain rooted to their chosen spot when they usually liked to prowl around a bit. But now Johnny Boy and Peery were the only two left, and they had room to swing and jive. The other three had disappeared with the manager-roadie to either the shadows that hugged the damp-stained walls or the back room with its crates of discount

whiskey shipped from the South.

Peery hadn't stopped blowing his harmonica- not once- since the gig ended, save for the occasional breath that he took down in big, shallow-deep gulps. His instrument rattled and whined, flew high on arpeggios like silk shot through with Youngstown steel, then it went down and bubbled and gurgled from flooded ankle-deep gutters. For a while he had gone on alone, most of the rest of the band, the other black bluesmen, watching for a bit before dispersing. The crowd had left fifteen or twenty minutes before that, along with the bartender, who'd vanished behind the squat building with a local girl he seemed pretty familiar with.

Eventually, Johnny Boy- the only white musician, the one-time pick-up boy turned good, country flavour with T-Bone Walker licks- had joined him, holding a strapless acoustic to his body. He hadn't turned the solo performance into a duet out of pity or just to keep company; he'd joined because he'd watched Peery the whole time - his screwed-shut eyes, his flaring nostrils, the wet puddle of his forehead- and been moved by the music. He'd never heard a harp go like this before, not in person, only occasionally on ancient, battered recordings by famous men, and there was some-

thing that hurt in it, something that needed grounding, something that needed sweetness when it was corrosive, something that needed flowers beneath the thunder and the lightning that was scorching the earth. He felt if he didn't anchor Peery that moment then the whole world would be burned up and no more world didn't sound so unappealing to him, but might be a sort of shame for everyone else.

So Johnny laid down the chords from the bits of old songs that Peery worked around. He recognised Stormy Monday instantly, then got to Boll Weevil Blues, and was sure he hit upon the right Skip James tune. Dynaflo was hard but he arrived at that as well.

Peery was pure flying: by turn, he seemed to be a steam train, a ragtime player (and Johnny Boy dropped honey in his wake), Jimmie Rodgers yodeling, Satchmo on Potato Head Blues, a cradle song crooner, a poet overlooking a tempestuous sea and the Boll Weevil itself hatching and burrowing. But they became like a unified force, like a symphony, like a two-headed monster of myth the longer they played, the more Johnny Boy's shirt clung to him.

The centuries began to roll away and unravel, the past laid

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itself open, the cotton rows the ancestors of both men had worked became re-populated by bodies bent and aching under the devouring sky. Peery hit notes like lashes, like reminders of torment, and Johnny Boy saw corpses and went mournful, dragging his fingers along the strings, bending weeping notes like he was on a pedal steel, until it felt like God was opening the clouds, pulling the cotton candy and cotton wool apart, letting the rain down to wash it all away, to flood it again, to drown the curse.

They soared once more, they ducked once more, the sewers spewed forth once more, the good blood was let once more, the party erupted again in waves of pretty streamers, the circus swung back into action, the waxing moon filled the room with white and-

- they stopped.

They held back after an hour. Peery had been exorcised.

The performance of his life was over. If Jack Scratch came and took him now, if his grave was dug and his stone erected, then it was about time.

Peery turned and said, 'I knew a fella once, Robert Pete. He was old by time I knew him, even older than I am now and he'd recorded a bunch. He told me, "This is the troublest world." Like that? Then he said, "But it's not the world, it's the peoples in it."'

Johnny Boy smiled. 'Even us? After that? After we joined up so good?'

"That don't mean a thing. You see anyone here to bear witness? Not even our band. That's what makes it the troublest world. You can scream, shout, blow and pick every song there's ever been, every memory there's ever been- you can hold it and bear it all- but don't mean anyone'll hear it or see it or know it. Not many who see or hear a thing worth a damn, even when it's right under their nose, and never could. Cotton-eyed."

"Ragged but right."

"You try to forget and try to remember."

He threw his arm around Johnny. They went into the back room and took a bottle from the crates.



“Got a band?”

by KM Brunner

I met Dan in the middle of August. He had been out in front of my building, busking with one of the worst guitars I've ever seen. I worked in the basement of the building opposite, crushing rocks and pellets of mud for a sedimentology lab.

Dan was playing some classic rock I didn't recognize and reminded me of a young, emaciated Dave Grohl. He had long hair and a heavy brow— all he needed was several million dollars, a gut that screamed *I drink to excess*, and a stadium tour. I almost wrote him off as a wannabe Cobain, but his voice was arresting. He sounded new. And so I stopped.

He was not entirely in tune and way too loud, which I would learn were hallmarks of most of his solo performances, but I could tell there was something different there. At rest, you wouldn't think much of him, but while playing, Dan was compelling. Sometimes he was an explosion of exuberance and joy, but often he spent his time onstage playing songs so melancholy they'd make your heart break. Those were his best performances, but it was always hard to watch him pour all that pain into his guitar. The intimacy of it, how open he could be - it felt like exhibitionism.

When I first heard him, I had been in performance withdrawal after three years out of the circuit. It's hard to admit I crave being onstage because it screams narcissism, but for me, it's not the attention I like. I treasure being on stage because I like to become furniture. I like to blend into the background, get talked over by drunk people, and to please a crowd so well that they don't realize why they're comfortable. Watching him play on the street was painful not because I wanted eyes on me, but because I wanted to be part of the hum of the city.

I discovered performing when I was really little, before my brain started taking liberties with itself. My first public performance was a kiddie rendition of “Once Upon a Dream,” from *Sleeping Beauty*, which I sang in front of most of my elementary school. I developed as a performer as I grew, and likely took more artistic risks and left turns than Green Bay, Wisconsin was ready for. I was asked to compromise - implicitly and explicitly - often, and I refused each time. In my senior year of high school, at the big-deal “Pops Concert” they put on every year, I sang Supertramp's “Logical Song” in slippers and a blouse from Talbots. I sounded like a boy rockstar and dressed

like a middle-aged fashionista and the whole thing was perfect.

I remember one of my classmates' fathers came up to me afterward and said, “You were the only one who looked like they were having any fun up there.”

I probably was, too. Half of that confidence was due to the fact that, at the time, I was also fronting a punk band. I thought it was cool and rebellious, but my parents were secretly thrilled, because, as I heard Dad say once, “at least she's out of the house.” I got my hair cut shaggy and stayed out at night with my guitarists and drummer, both boys, both stoners, and both terrible for my reputation. My entire diet was a slurry of sour gummy worms, Mountain Dew, hash browns, and diner coffee.

My little band played in tiny, dark basement venues and opened for equally bad local groups. There aren't many performance spaces in Green Bay, so we spent our weekends at community centers, a megachurch, a few dive bars, and this place called The Eagles Club, which was kind of like a VFW hall. I've always thought The Eagles Club - though the showrunners were kind and did their best - was what tetanus would look like if it were a building.

My band was awful and the scene was awful, but that's alright. We were teenagers, the boys were high most of the time, and I'd just gotten diagnosed with epilepsy and I didn't understand why. By the time I met Dan, I understood why (there is no why) and was much angrier.

That was okay, though. Dan was angry, too.

Despite my confidence while performing, it still took me a minute or two to introduce myself. I'm awkward - painfully awkward, sometimes - in social situations. So between songs, after some tactless lurking, I blurted: "You play here often?"

Dan looked at me, one eyebrow raised, and slid his guitar around to hang off his back. "I'm usually by Boston Common. Why?"

"Just wondering, is all." I was silent for a few moments before following up with "What's your name? Got a band?" *Subtle.*

"It's Dan." Mercifully, he returned the question: "What's yours? And why— do you play?" "Katie. I sing." I cringed. Singers can be the worst.

"Gotcha," he nodded. "No, I'm not with a group. You?"

"Not anymore," I answered.

He pulled a bent cigarette from his pocket and lit it. "What happened?"

"Went to college. Nothing bad."

Dan nodded his head lazily, in that musician, *alllllright* way. "Cool." He blew out a little stream

of smoke.

He gestured to the bench, which I interpreted as an invitation to sit. He placed the guitar gingerly in its case, on top of the coins he'd earned. He sat close to me, but to be fair, the bench was small.

I spoke first. "Are you going to be here next week? We can sing together. I mean, as long as you're not a serial killer."

Dan smiled, crookedly— he had a singular smile. It was lopsided, charming, blinding. "No, I'm not a serial killer. I'll be here, but only if *you're* not a serial killer."

"I'm not a serial killer," I laughed.

"Well, that's good."

We were both quiet, then. It wasn't awkward, which was shocking. I'd never felt so comfortable with a stranger. I listened to the rhythm of his inhaled, exhaled, and was grateful I liked the smell of cigarette smoke.

Eventually, the silence had to break, and it did when Dan fished a pen and a receipt out of his pocket. As he wrote, he said, "Here: I'll give you my number."

He handed the thin paper to me, and I slipped it into the front pocket of my jeans. I took my phone out to check the time and swore.

"Got something to do?"

"I have to go to work," I said apologetically, pointing to the building in front of us. "But I'll text you!" I assured him, "I

promise."

"Sure you will," he said doubtfully. "I'll be here next week, anyway." He shrugged, picked his guitar up again, and slung the strap around his broad shoulders. He was tall.

"Anything you want me to learn?" I asked.

"What's easiest? Beatles, Mitchell, Loretta, maybe?"

"Um, I can learn whatever." I didn't know music - good music you can play with other people - yet. I knew musical theatre, a shocking number of Italian arias, and some Top 40 singer-songwriter bullshit tracks.

"You know any country?" he asked. "There's this song— 'If I Needed You.' It's a duet. You'd like it."

I didn't know any country, and up until I listened to Emmylou Harris and Gram Parsons sing this song, I thought I hated it, but I smiled anyway.

"I'll take a look. Maybe *after I text you,*" I emphasized, "you can send me a few more recommendations."

Dan nodded and stubbed out his cigarette on the edge of the bench. He strummed a chord.

Picking up on the wordless dismissal, I waved manically and jogged into the building. As I walked to my basement lab, I imagined our voices together. We sounded good in my imagination, and eventually, we'd sound even better outside it. A month after that first meeting, I remember staring at the side of his face while

we performed and thinking, *I was right.*

But sometimes soulmates hurt one another. Sometimes people change - or refuse to. Often, what was sweet turns to poison, but God did we sound beautiful. ❖

"In the Hour After Sex"

by John Grey

The hills rose.
The bells rang.
Even in the dark,
I saw so many more colors.
And, deep in my lab,
I invented perfect weather.

I found the gates open
and the path clear.
I saw postcard scenery
that I will never forget.

Of course, birds soared
and sang.
But now, they weren't
the only ones with wings.
Or clear high voices
for that matter.

My favorite film
was projected on the bedroom wall,
alongside a Renoir painting
of a rosy-skinned girl
stepping into a tub.

After all of what I thought was life,
I discovered there was more life.

“Russian Bride”

Olga wasn't the same
as her photograph,
much older and plumper,
but Tom loves her anyway.

She came from Russia.
What choice did he have?
She minds his house
while he tends to his cattle.

Her English is minimal
but she can cook
and not just beef stroganoff.
Besides, her full-bodied hugs

are welcome after
a hot and tiring day.
But she is a mystery to all others.
The accent, the shyness,

they all play their part.
He's older than her by fifteen years
But to the prospect of a better life,
companionship, that's nothing.

Some other lonely bachelors
considered sending for
their own “Ruskie bride”
but they never did.

Only Tom was brave enough
to take that step.
He'd never admit he was desperate.
Just lonely. And Olga was the same.

No one ever called them
the perfect couple.
But, as trade-offs go,
they are matchless.

“The Put-Upon”

The wear and tear
involves your skin at last.
No longer just a wound here,
a bruise there.
Your face is a wound.
Your mouth is a bruise.
Your entire body
is one gigantic scar.

And then there's the eyes.
They've always looked lived in.
But now, three lifetimes
of seeing and seeing through,
redden the iris, distend the sockets,
sag the brows and lids.

You lack the privilege
of ordinary hurts and road-bumps.
Some have it all.
You've had it all done to you..

“Read It Or Don’t...”

book review briefs by
Mary Fallon

Hello Beautiful

by Ann Napolitano

I keep a list of the books I’ve read. The list started with Titles and Authors and date read. Then I added a YES/NO/MAYBE column for whether I’d reread it, or recommend it to someone else. It has a column for the very briefest of descriptions so I can remember what it was about. I’ve also added a column of how I heard about the book.

I had read *Hello Beautiful* in October of last year. I didn’t like it then, and I just reread it and didn’t like it again. I always struggle whether to reread a book, almost any book, and especially books that have a “NO” in the reread column. But it was picked for my book club, and in respect for the other members, and the person who picked it, I dove back in.

What was worrisome is the description from my spreadsheet was “4 sisters” and I could not remember what the book was about. I could not remember a sister, or the plot, or the end!

As I began to skim through it I remembered why I didn’t like it. I didn’t like the characters; I didn’t care about them. I think it was trying to be a modern “The Little Women” but no one quite fit

the mold. It claimed to be taking place in the 1980’s, but the sisters’ attitudes were very much 1950’s. The mother was mean, with no explanation as to why, the father was a drunk who loved poetry and seemed to be beloved by everyone but his wife. There was depression, adultery, out of wedlock babies, lesbians and a token black character. There was attempted suicide, a disabling sports injury and of course someone has to get an inoperable brain tumor. But hold on, we all live happily ever after.

I want more from my characters, more from the author, a more interesting plot.

Please don’t waste your time reading *Hello Beautiful*.

Snow Country

by Yasunari Kawabata

Years ago (2002? 2003?) I was reading a *New Yorker* article about an older woman learning to drive. She was struggling to learn something new, but convinced herself she could because “she read Endo”. So of course, I had to read Endo to discover what inspired her.

I picked *Silence* by Endo for my book club, and we all felt a bit superior because we had read it. The book is an amazing story

about a missionary in Japan in the 17th century who had to make some difficult choices for his faith. Martin Scorsese directed a film based on the book, starring Liam Neeson and Adam Driver.

So *Snow Country* was mentioned in an article in *The Washington Post* by Elisa Gabbert. Elisa Gabbert has kept a list of the books she’s read for 10 years, and since I keep a list as well, I thought I may like her recommendation. Although the book is only about 160 pages, I dragged myself through it.

The story is about a man who retreats to the Japanese mountains and has a relationship with a geisha or two. Perhaps it’s the culture, or the translation, but I didn’t get it. He had a wife and family in Tokyo, but would go off for a month or two to rest and relax with his geisha friends. The geisha life seemed quite desperate and doomed to servitude and pleasing the men. It ends with a fire.

It tempts me to contact Elisa Gabbert and see what she found so intriguing about it!

I regret to say, don’t bother reading *Snow Country*, or if you do, explain it to me. ❖

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.

The man in the car in front of me is waving a pistol out the window at the car in the lane next to him. I keep hitting my brakes, but they both are slowing down, too, and our relative positions don't change. I am white-knuckling the steering wheel, but want to reach out and take my cellphone and call the police. My own driver's side window is open and I can hear shouting over the windstream and people in the two cars are having a shouting match, or loud conversation of some sort – I can't make out the words – and if it weren't for the fact that we are driving, or that the one person is waving a gun, this would be amusing, bordering on silly. No one behind me is hitting their horn, but I don't risk looking in the rear-view mirror. I suddenly have a thought that I'm very glad that this is a dream because if it was actually happening I would be terrified.

KC - Chapel Hill

Contributors:

Hannah Montante is a writer and singer-songwriter who likes to write about quirky characters and semi-true events.

Billy Stanton is a London-based working-class writer and film-maker, originally from Portsmouth. His short fiction has appeared in numerous magazines and anthologies, including *Litro*, *Wyldblood*, *Tigershark* and *Rural Fiction Magazine*. He co-runs the 'Noli Me Tangere Short Film Festival' and writes on film and television for The Geek Show. His blog is: steel-cathedrals.wordpress.com

KM Brunner is a writer and digital marketer living in Boston, MA. She's also a hobbyist painter and has an as-of-yet unrivaled passion for ugly sweaters.

John Grey is an Australian poet, US resident, recently published in *New World Writing*, *North Dakota Quarterly* and *Lost Pilots*. Latest books, "Between Two Fires", "Covert" and "Memory Outside The Head" are available through Amazon. Work upcoming in *California Quarterly*, *Seventh Quarry*, *La Presa* and *Doubly Mad*.

Mary Fallon writes, "I was born and raised in Buffalo, moved to Raleigh/Durham in 1996 to continue to work for IBM. After retiring, I have worked at a golf course, and have played many many rounds. My life goal is to play a lot of golf, read a lot of books, see many plays and movies and travel the world. This column is a part of all of that!"

“Who gave these idiots
microphones?”

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