

The Blotter

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The South's Unique, FREE, International Literature and Arts Magazine

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The Blotter

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“Surreptitiously - Serendipitiously”

I have a lot of things on my mind. I'll bet dollars to donuts you do, too. I suspect it's because there's a lot of noise out there, and the filters in our skulls are having a difficult time determining what is important and what's not – what's truth and what is pure silliness. It's difficult because one person's silliness may just be another's lifeline to the universe. The fateful message in a bottle. In some limited number of characters, or a ten second video. Because we've compressed our communication into small bites. Nibbles, even.

How can we be expected to communicate well with each other with a language like ours, where words mean different things to different folks? We probably agree more than we think we do, but have no way of expressing it.

Although there is a sort of diaspora going on in the heady ether of social media, I still see postings about all sorts of writing-related subjects. Unfortunate decisions to disband major literary mastheads. (Can't imagine what is going through the slushy noggins of the powers that be at a university when they make such a consideration.) Writers getting discouraged because they've been rejected by...and then they list the blue-chip slush piles they've tossed their manuscripts on. Editors giving submission advice in the form of hard and fast rules and regulations.

Recently came across an idea written on a page of a scribble-book in a coffee shop. One of those things left on a table for people to write in or draw on and then leave it for the next person to find, and then, I suppose at some time the person who left it behind comes back to fetch it and read, keep, archive this little paper time capsule. “Time is all we have, and don't.” I looked it up: words of an anonymous writer called Atticus Poetry. I'm probably way behind the curve, but I appreciate the pithiness of the sentiment. I am sometimes over-concerned with the things in my life but am becoming more aware of the value of my time, and the time of others. Trying to not waste so much. I know, I know – good luck with that.

Discouraged. I could be one of those people. I recently sent three poems to a magazine, and was politely told no. I've been told no before, but this time I gave it some real thought. They're good poems, well-crafted if I do say so myself, and competently handled. The right words, if you will. And I thought that each pertained to a subject worthy of crafting a poem to being with. So what did I do wrong?

Answer: nothing. The receiving editors did not think they were a good fit. It's that simple. Not their size, shape, color, style, fabric, season, what have you. No, Garry. But thank you, anyhow.

Take nothing away from rejection, not a new mood nor advice or a correction in your compass heading. The only thing that has happened is your pride has been affected. You've bumped up against something that hurts for a moment. That will pass.

Somewhere out there is a writer having enormous fun. By enormous fun, I mean being a kid again, on a sunny day in midsummer, fun. Imagine someone telling you when you were ten years old that there were a dozen donuts in the kitchen that had to be eaten or they would go to waste, and would you please, as a favor, do the honors? That level of joy.

I tell you this, because I see occasionally in that some writers aren't having such a good time. They comment in cover letters or social media that they are discouraged by some hurdle or another – finding time to write, getting in the mood to sit down at their keyboard or with paper and pencil in hand, losing their way in their work-in-progress, stumped by the miseries of rewriting, wanting a good editor to help them, struggling with submissions processes, and engulfed in the general malaise of being rejected again and again.

I acknowledge that these are the troubles that writers must navigate to get their work into the hands of readers. On the other hand, this is what comes with the territory. Is it hard work? Yes. Does it seem like hard work to non-writers? I don't know, but who cares? Convincing non-writers is not the writer's job. Entertaining readers is. And is there anything in the world like writing a good piece, and finding a "home" for it? I don't think so.

That being said, here we go with the unsolicited advice I just said to avoid: don't give up. Get back to work. Write more. One word after another. Write every day. Talk about your writing with others. Read other writers' work. Listen, but remember that opinions vary. Send your stuff out. Sometimes the answer is yes.

Garry - editor@blotterrag.com

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

Hello, haven't I seen

"Of Horse Girls and Honeysuckles"

by Catherine Puma

I told myself that I had not thought of you in years, but when I saw that photo of you, I couldn't help but daydream about what might have been. If only we had grown up together beyond friendship and if only you wanted me the way I have always wanted you. You stood barefoot in your family's kitchen, wearing skinny jeans and a cotton tee with your blonde hair brushed back in a long ponytail. Sleepy spring sunlight highlighted your bright blue eyes and relaxed smile. The cream-colored walls were decorated with your favorite horses' horseshoes and portraits of small-town songbirds.

The butterflies fluttering along your shirt's hem led me back to the park where we spent our middle school days. The honeybees of memory guided us to where the honeysuckles bloom. The small white and yellow blossoms would peek out from among their vines, which had woven all over the chain link fence.

To consume a honeysuckle, you would pinch the petals at their base, pulling them off and licking the exposed nectar droplet. After sucking our fingertips clean from our dozen-flower feast, we would race through the clovers and tumble down the hill, prancing about like we could will the wind to manifest horses of our very own. Our hands would hold invisible reins and we would fashion switches out of twigs that we would flick against our thighs as we chased each other across the field.

Giggling our way into fantasyland, we would become faerie princesses with pony familiars. They would speak to us of all the things they have seen and show us the best clearings and creeks. We would be filled with joy at each new creature we would befriend

and would protect the old forest with our horses' magic. Following the swishes of your sunlight hair along the fence under the honeysuckle vines is the closest I came to lifting the thin veil between childhood and fantasyland.

But in a time before cell phones or email exchanges, life pulled us to different towns and we lost touch. Working at stables let me form relationships with other people's horses, but never one of my own, and never you. I fantasized about working for your family's riding school someday and that our childhood friendship could grow into adult romance.

I would be the hired stable hand and you the lead riding instructor. I would haul the hay and muck the stalls and stitch tears in the tack. You would run the kids' pony camp and coach the riding school competitive team.

We would run a business together and meet halfway at the core of it all, in the training and well-being of the horses entrusted to our care. We would give out blankets, saddles, reins, and bits as well as good food and clean water. We would groom them and schedule veterinary appointments and scheme enrichment activities, such as new salt licks, rubber toys, or trail ride trips in local state parks. We would tease the cheeky ones and encourage the shy ones, and adopt those in need whenever we could. You, me, and our horses, as it used to be.

Would time working side by side bring us closer?

Would you watch me carrying feed bags high on my shoulder across the yard, catch my eye, and want more?

Would you find me after hours, and after some hesitation and blushing, ask for a kiss?

Would the leather you smell be from the saddle in the corner or from my work gloves

as I pull you to me and never let go?

Would your soft cream pants smudge as I trace its stitching up your thigh?

Would your riding boots scuff against my Timberlands as you press me against the empty stall wall?

How long until I kiss your lips as red as they've ever been in your life? I would kiss you for longer than that, if I could.

Would your breath hitch as I undo your polo shirt buttons with my teeth and trace your clavicle with kisses?

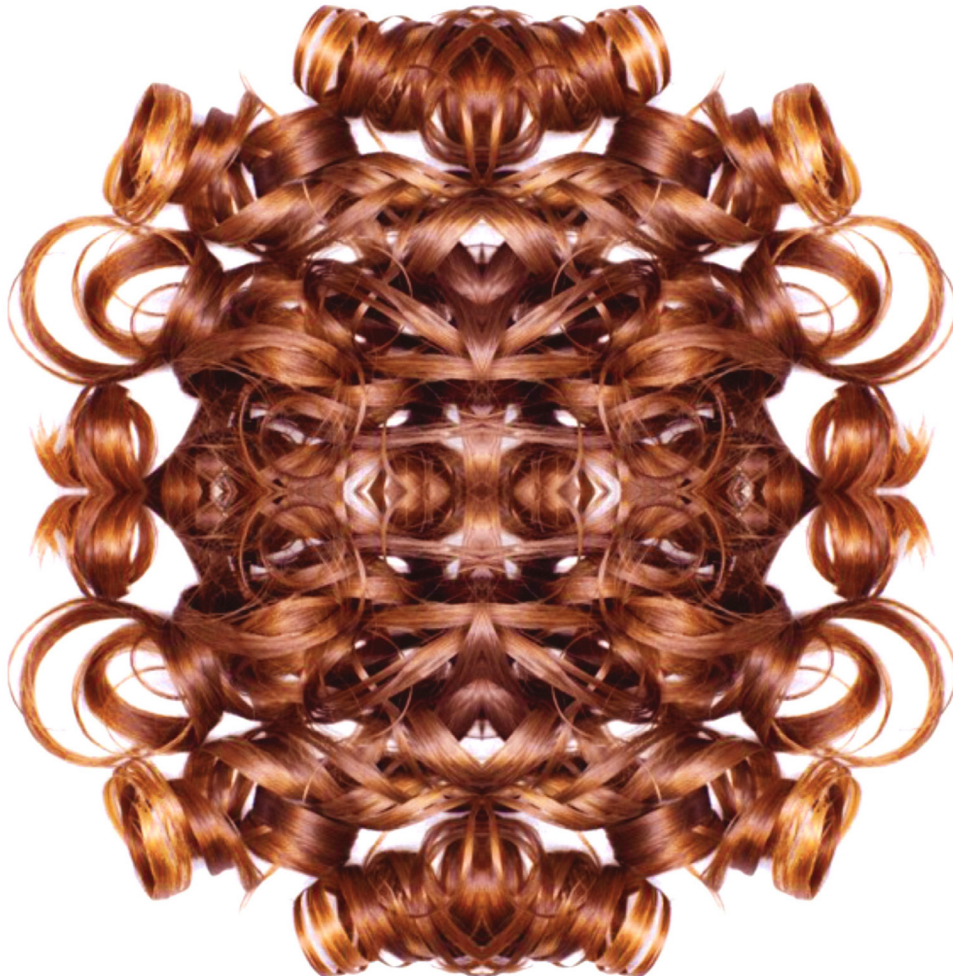
Would your heart gallop in pace with mine as we spend the nights together?

But when my heart slowed to a trot once more, I was still alone in my bed. I never joined you at your family's riding school, and now didn't even know how to begin to talk to you anymore. It felt as if on one of those park

afternoons, I just kept on running, racing right out of that small town, and I didn't look back, and you didn't chase after me.

Are you to be found underneath the honeysuckle vines, waiting for me to lift the veil? How I long to follow you along the fence again, where horses first came alive by the magic of our childhood hearts.

Perhaps I will find someone someday, and maybe she will be a horse girl too, but she will never be you. You will remain the faerie princess of my dreams, always held in high esteem, but whose face blurs as soon as it comes into focus. Whenever I see the honeysuckles bloom or watch a horse cantering with the wind, clover fields underfoot, you are there.



"Many Are Called"

by Paul Smith

"So, did he have a lot of friends? You know, guys from school or whatever?"

"Of course, of course he did. We don't simply refer to them as friends. We've given them the title of Apostles. Yes, they were very close."

"Well, that's a selling point, you know. Everyone wants to relate to someone with lots of pals."

"Indeed, yes, but 'pal' is a bit dismissive. We prefer 'Apostle'. Once you get to know us a bit better, you'll grasp it. I'm sure of that."

"OK. So he has his Apostle friends. Who were they?"

"A lot of them were fishermen."

"Yeah, fishing was big back then. What about friends from work? What did he do?"

"His father was a carpenter. There is a certain gap in his historical perspective. He was with his parents up till about twelve years of age, then this gap, then his public life. Not much material for you to work with there."

"A man of mystery, hmm. So he didn't hang around with carpenters like his dad did?"

"We're not certain about his father's circumstances and who his companions were, at least not his earthly father. His Heavenly Father is another story, the one we'd like you to emphasize. I won't say the word 'embellish', but something close to it. 'Highlight' might be the correct word. We are just not getting the response we'd hoped for, and we've tried just about everything."

"Hence. . ."

"Hence, someone skilled in marketing like yourself. And we don't even want to think of it as marketing per se, rather 'a voice crying out in the wilderness'. You do have that voice, don't you?"

"I was number one in my class. Oh, yes. I got it, I really do, and believe me, I'm grateful for this opportunity, especially after what you said what was in it for me."

"Yes, if you can, in fact, deliver. It's just that attendance at our services is waning, and we need a spark or something."

"Let's go back to that Heavenly Father thing. So he had two fathers – one was Joseph the carpenter and the other one is up there, in heaven?"

"Yes. He is part man, part God."

"I thought you said he was God."

"I misspoke. He is God. He has human nature, though. Part of him is human nature. He did that to feel a bond with us so he could forgive us our sins. My apology."

"No need to apologize. I just want to get the story straight so I don't get off target."

"You won't."

"But Joseph was his real dad, you know what I mean."

"This is another crucial aspect of our dogma that requires honing, explanation, but not too much, and a heavy reliance on faith. He was not conceived in the way we know it. An angel came to her."

"Her? His mother."

"Yes, to Mary."

"An angel. You told me about them – Michael, Gabriel. So the angel comes and says. . ."

"We have this prayer 'Hail Mary' that sums it up by saying that she will conceive him by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's just leave it at that."

"OK, OK, I get it. I'll stop with the questions. But you know, you're asking a lot of these folks. They like solid things they can grasp. In Gaul, you know, they worship wild

animals. They mount the heads and chant to them all night long in the forest. Let's look at another angle. You say when people do come to the services, they're mostly men. So we need to work on the women. Did he have any women in his life, you know, besides his mother?"

"There was one – Mary Magdelene."

"Another Mary?"

"Yes."

"Do you ever get the two mixed up?"

Mary's a pretty common name."

"No. They were very different."

"So did they go out and stuff?"

"They were friends, that's pretty much it. She was good-hearted. Let's leave it there."

"Oh. One of those."

"We can't be too judgmental. He wasn't. One of, no, the main point of our community is the concept of forgiveness. Whatever errors she may have committed, he forgave her. This is what makes us different. We preach the forgiveness of sin, and you will, too, if everything goes. . ."

". . . according to plan."

"According to plan."

"So Mary Magdelene is a dead end. OK, let's go back to the other Mary, his mother. The angel appeared to her, then the Holy Spirit. Then she and Joseph raised him. Hey, by the way, what about Joseph? Is he a saint? I'd like to be a saint!"

"After his family life, not much is known about Joseph. Yes, he is a saint. He is much revered."

"How do you get to be a saint?"

"Well, the quickest way is through martyrdom."

"Oh."

"Don't be put off by that. Not so much of that happens anymore."

"You know that?"

"Well, we assume so. We haven't heard anything about it lately, not for the last several weeks. Peter was crucified upside down. Paul was beheaded. His other disciples and apostles suffered similar fates, but let's try to

focus on the present, about how you can stimulate interest in our community."

"And spread the word."

"And spread the Word of God."

"And get my own territory."

"After that apprenticeship."

"OK, so getting back to Mary. She's his mother. And she was there when he died?"

"She wept bitterly. And after three days, they rolled back the stone at the tomb. He had risen."

"That must have really shocked her. How did she take that?"

"Like everyone else, she was taken aback. There was no ready explanation. Things like this did not happen every day."

"So he's risen from the dead. Joseph is nowhere to be found. The Romans and the Jews were martyring all his friends. What about her?"

"Mary, the mother of God, is full of grace and did not die an earthly death. By the power of the Holy Spirit, she was assumed directly in heaven. We have a Holy Day of Obligation named after this event – The Assumption."

"She WHAT?"

"She went directly to heaven."

"That's it. That will do the trick."

"It wasn't a trick."

"No, no, I didn't mean that. What I meant was this is the key to get women to come to church. They can see one of their own – not a carpenter, not a fisherman, not a man of any kind, but a woman like them, going straight to heaven. Every skirt in town will love it. You can bet your holy book on it. This is something I can definitely get the word out on."

"So, you're in?"

"Count me in."

"We're proud to have you."

"Proud to be here. Now, about that other thing. What, uh, territory did you have in mind? How about Babylon? I heard they have some pretty spectacular gardens."

"We're pretty much covered there. I was thinking. . ."

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"I'd like to be a saint, you know, a big one. I'd need a big territory, some place with a lot of people, a lot of notoriety."

"Well, we could really use some help near Rome, by the Via Laurentina. That's where Paul was beheaded. The natives are restless down there."

"Beheaded? How can you forgive someone after he's chopped your head off?"

"Forgiveness is only part of our doctrine. We have other parts."

"Like what? Like what are the main beliefs of this startup of yours?"

"Like I say, we have quite a few, but here's one: If you want to get along, go along."

"And?"

"If you want to pitch, you got to catch."

"And?"

"You have to take the good with the bad, the rough with the smooth."

"Any more?"

"Badda-bing, badda-boom."

"That's a lot to absorb."

"If that Rome situation seems stressful, there are other areas where help is needed."

"Any place warm?"

"We could find something, yes. But you're into this proselytizing effort, right?"

"Yes, minus the beheading."

"Well, they don't behead anyone down in Cairo. How does that sound? The mystery and romance of ancient Egypt. The pyramids, the Nile, the Sphinx, the tombs."

"Catacombs?"

"No, but they have some really fine museums."

"I heard the weather is great this time of year."

"It's lovely. And you'd make lots of friends."

"I could work on my sun tan. No beheadings, though?"

"No."

"Are you sure? I mean - you seem pretty certain about lots of things I've never heard of before - him getting conceived without Joseph around, about him rising from the dead,

about Mary going directly to heaven and not even dying. That's a lot to take in. So you think Egypt is a good place for me to someday become a saint without too much downside risk?"

"Yes."

"And nobody lately has been beheaded, right?"

"Right."

"So it probably would not happen to me."

"That's what I assume."

"In other words. . ."

"Yes. . .badda-bing, badda boom." ❖



“AN “I”? REMEMBERS AND FORGETS”

a prose poem by David Earl Williams

I remember when common sense caught fire
and collapsed, and I remember when John D. Rockefeller
incorporated all the rats, all the rats that dreamed of becoming bigger rats, yes, they did—
and he incorporated them, made them into subsidiaries, yes, and i remember when the
General Assembly of the League of Treaties convened in London, oh, yeah, uh-huh, they
did, H. G. Wells presiding, you betcha, and they all got together to welcome The Future,
THE FUTURE, yes, they did, they welcomed The Future with open arms, with
open arms, and crossed fingers, and I remember, I remember when
when the Prime Minister of Eden, yes, Eden, the “NewEden”, “soon to re-open on
earth... “, yep, That One, and The Prime Minister and the obnoxious
famous actress, you know who I mean?— yes,
that one, the one
who was good at
Pretending, pretending she cared— that was her best role, she really pretended the hell
out of that one, she really pretended that, that she really cared, and finally she
really did, she cared, she convinced herself, and I remember, hell, I was there
when they established their cult, and I ought to remember, I was
their first member, and I remember the First Black Dashiell Hammett, do you
remember him?— and he wrote that “Mulatto Superhero” advice column— “Mulato Super-
hero!?!”— well, it was a long time ago— at least 20 years— “for Everyday Superheroes” who
lived here but came from Other Worlds and mighty mighty mighty mighty mighty beings
they were but mixed with the Lower Beings once they got here, once they were shipwrecked
here, once they got here they lived “Invisible” — lived as a “something else” a betrayed, a
shipwrecked “ Something In Disguise”, yes, right, “Superheroes!”, And, orphans, it was a long
time ago, long, long when such words were said,
said and said seriously. “Hero”, words like that, honestly, it was, and seriously, “hero”, and
more like that, and there were even medals handed out,



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but,

that was a parallel universe, where as he said, “anything can happen, and often, does”, he said, it was a world where, why, even Henry Kissinger could get a peace prize, another world, of course, not this world, and I remember, lookit—

when George Meany played golf with 1974 NFL football, and sat in the clubhouse with the owners, and had a cocktail, and thought,

“this is the life” — “...this

is what it looks like...”, and I remember, “IT”, It, it,

and when and when I-ran, Iran, Iran-Iran, when

Iran dealt with the various women in its life, Iran, Iran Iran Iran, and right there on the verge of growing up, too, growing up, getting a handle on things, things, Iran sat on the stainless steel table under the fluorescent lights, in that gown, white gown, on the cold table, that very same cold table where it had been tortured, and sat there there trying not to blink, sat there trying not to be a mental patient, but it was one anyway, anyway shit shit ,man it was crazy as hell, but, I forget

Yes, I forget WHY you must be settled elsewhere, and so many of you, and through no fault of your own, no, no fault of your own, and why you must go, go and stay gone, forever, or else be murdered, and I forget,

Well,

I know— you know— there is a deadline, I know I know, but I forget— what is it for?— what’s the big deal?— why is it just now? and what is it for?— - but, I remember, yes, I remember

it clearly, I remember that there’s another

deadline after that, and after that deadline another, and another after that, and after that one, and after that, but I forget— I forget, and then I remember

I forget

the part where socialization is difficult, so very, very, very difficult, how hard it is to learn the rules, and especially the first rule— that the rules may or may not make sense, they’re just The Rules— like: “you may not have any pockets” but, “you must pay rent... AND LEARN THE RULES, no matter what the rules are...” you must, you must, yes, you must learn the rules and you must learn them so well that you can forget them, and I forget, if, then, if, then, if then?— Therefore!— That’s IT!— I forget, if!, then!, therefore!— if! then, you’re in the world,

like it or not, like it or nut, you’re in the world and it’s weird, it’s the weird world, the weird whirl, and there are drugs you can take for that, there are cures you can seek for it, and it’s why you have a drug habit, and if you do,

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if, then, therefore why you gotta get a license to have a drug habit, don't you? if you do? don't you? Gotta a habit of sleeping and waking up and not understanding, don't you? — you do, don't you, and I forget, maybe it's the drugs, and maybe it's the drugs, but I remember

I remember pharmacies

I remember pharmacies, and I think, yes, I think,
which is a rule I forgot

I forgot not to think, and I think of Pfizer, and I forget,
again

I pop that

first pill of the day, and I forget, and I take that first step, first step of the day,
from the top of the stairs, in the dark hallway, foot dangling in space, and I take
that first step of the day, forgetting, not looking or remembering, or thinking,
or seeing the staircase,

and I'm dangling my foot in space in the dark—

“I”?

... and I may be have heard the word “sophist”

BUT!

what does it mean?

mean ?

(does it mean “mean”?) mean. mean. mean....
Mean...?

Red Queen... ?

Red Queen! Red Queen!

Scream.

Scream!

OFF WITH OUR HEADS! — ?--- maybe, but

should i remember

or should i forget...

The FUTURE? Or. The future that's past... ?



The Blotter

Three prose poems

by David Earl Williams

"ON SALE!"

artisanal-Avant Average HIGH-END Low-Ambition

Entrepreneurial terrorist Algorithms

... or, really, any terrorism algorithms you'd like to spiff up your
hey-nonny

Helter-Skelter/s, hi-ho!

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"THERE IS A HURRICANE

ALL UP IN YER ASS..."

where instead of daughters, instead of friends you have
misdemeanors and felonies

where instead of sons, instead of wives and husbands
you have co-conspirators

all/ up/ in/ there/ in/ yer/ass's mind's eye

— shit or go blind ?

"TRUE?/FALSE?"

when your ambivalent average priest of what-not
secular or wholly holely

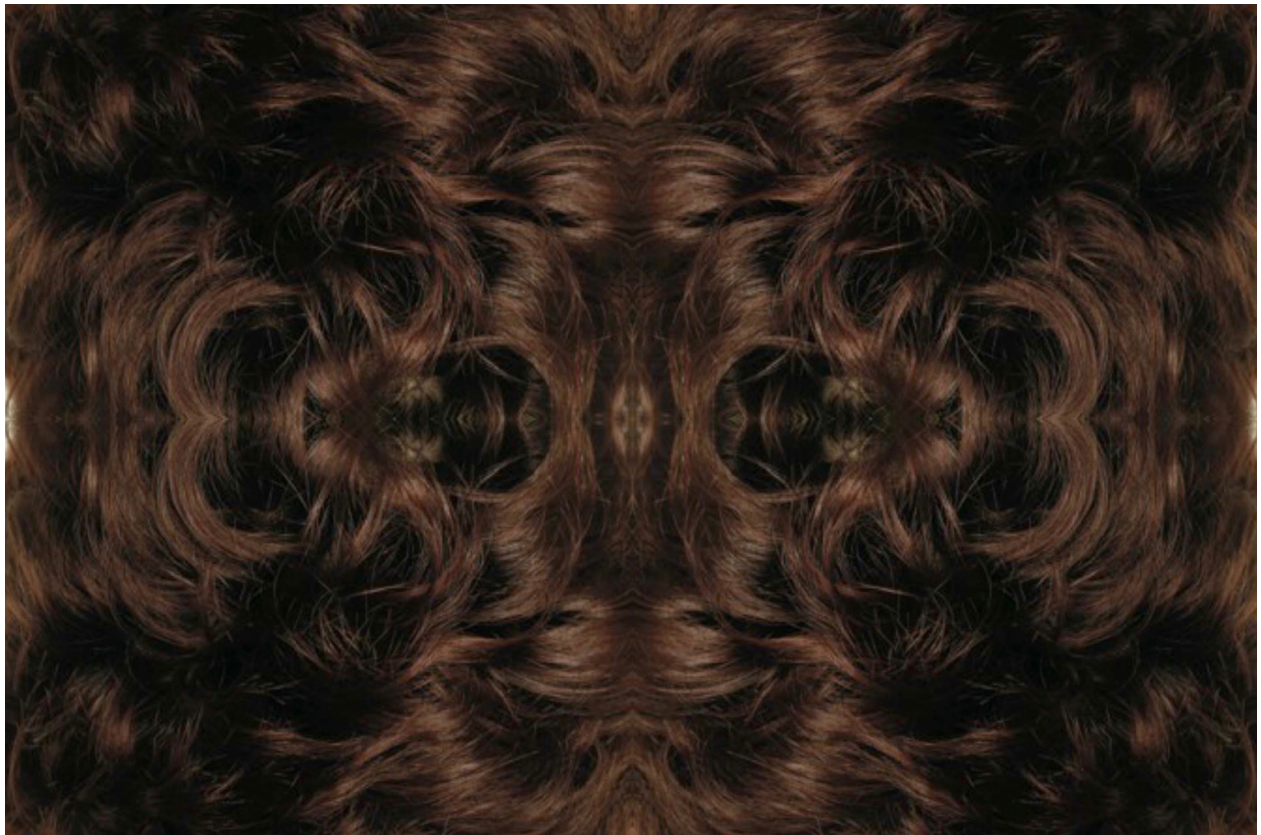
starts looking for a cradle-to-grave luminous-liminal-estasic mag-
ic status and lowered spelling work-load they turn all the way
100% spirit-mentaled predatory narcissists from

50% spirit-mentaled predatory narcissists and what they
arrive at as a center that they can share with the world is a fig-
ment

of an anti-biopic
of "lost" twins
re-jointed

by a transcendant re-birth which is actually a self-discoveryself-re-
alization

which looks great on them — very stylish but which will cost
more— as will be reflected in your monthly charges.



The Blotter

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.

December Dream

Leaning to look out the window because the thunder and lightning are particularly lively. I think the power is going to go out as it does when the weather is like this. I hope it won't, or if it does it will hold its horses until my show is over, as I do not have a way of recording it. Why not? Because VCRs and TiVo have not yet been invented. I'm so far back that the television I'm watching is on a metal TV stand, and beneath it are magazines stacked one atop another. On the desk, sitting by the wall is a landline phone, black, indestructible.

Lightning strikes a telephone pole across the street, sending sparks showering down in the rain. I flinch away from the flash and wait for the accompanying thunder. But there is nothing. No instant noise, no deafening crack. What happened? Did the noise go past or through me in some sonic mystery I am not privy to?

I smell a whiff of smoke but chalk it up to the ozone stink that sometimes follows a thunderstorm, isn't washed away by the rain. Or is this the generic cigarettes that I've become accustomed to as someone trying desperately to quit cold turkey, over and over again, which everyone tells me isn't cold turkey at all, but some strange, destined to fail, weaning off the stuff plan?

Now, certainly just because I have wondered about it, the lamplight flickers and the television ripples in response to the storm. The power will go out, and soon, as it almost always does during these events.

What shall happen when the lights go out? Will I be able to navigate my way upstairs? Will my family be there, together, in the dark? The stairs may not even be there, or I will become lost in the attempt.

I am only now aware that this is not a real thing. I am not projected back in time to an earlier me, a younger, more foolish person. The lightning hitting the transformer suspended off the ground is a memory, perhaps, or something manufactured out of the star-stuff of my brain, the workings of which are not yet completely understood.

Scout - Cyberspace

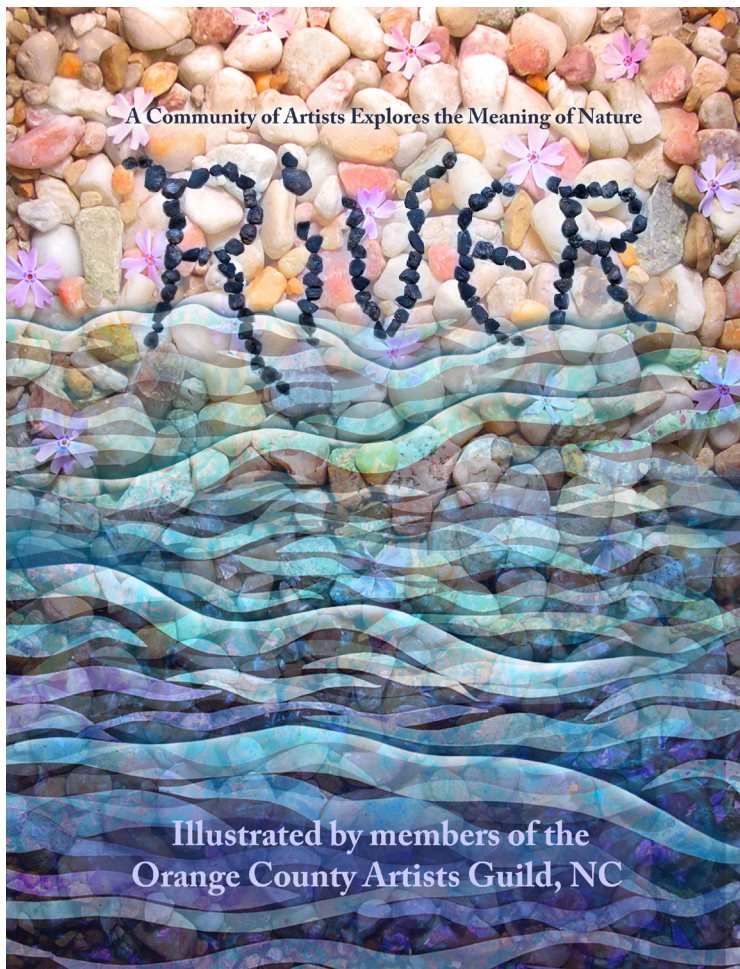
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Catherine Puma (she/they) is a member of the Arlington Writers Group and Poetry Society of Virginia. Her work is featured in *ionosphere* and upcoming in *Lit Shark Magazine*. She will always perk up at the mention or sight of horses. Follow her on Instagram @thecatandtheleaf.

Paul Smith writes poetry & fiction. He lives in Skokie, Illinois with his wife Flavia. Sometimes he performs poetry at an open mic in Chicago. He believes that brevity is the soul of something he read about once, and whatever that something is or was, it should be cut in half immediately.

David Earl Williams, The Absurdilachian, writer of absurdist anti-dada dadaist poetry, was born deep down near the bottom of the Ethnocentric Gorge and grew up on the banks of the great Ethnocentric River just like everybody else who was ever temporarily alive. D›Earl›s chapbook: *EVERYBODY LIVES HERE ONE NIGHT AT A TIME*, Hillbilly DaDa Poetry (for sure as hell rollin› in the aisles, barkin› at the moon DaDa-Dogmatic times...) is available for purchase @ <https://wetcementpress.com> (Berkeley) \$ 9 cheap ! Reviews, more bios, and poetry may be found @ <https://cruellestmonth.com> or @ The Dead Mule School of Southern Literature , or, simply google: david earl williams poetry.

Bill Wolak is a poet, collagist, and photographer in Bogota, New Jersey, who has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages and photographs have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, and *Barfly Poetry Magazine*.



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