

July 2021

The Blotter

magazine

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

www.blotterrag.com

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The Blotter is a production of
MAGAZINE

The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,
Durham, NC.

A 501 (c)3 non-profit

ISSN 1549-0351

www.blotterrag.com



Council of Literary Magazines & Presses
www.clmp.org

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“Getting Stuff Done”

I am told that it’s been four hundred forty-four or so days since the beginnings of Covid Lockdown back in 2020, and we’re not locked down so much anymore — although I do not know what the world has in store for us by the time this is posted, or when you read it — and I’d like to say something. I am also told that to write about this at this point is dog-piling, or boring or something of that ilk. Which is not my intention. I would rather talk about writing. Which I have been doing a great deal of since four hundred forty-five days ago. Put down “on paper” (an archaic term, yes? Who still prints anything out to get a better view?) the first draft of a novel, set it aside, started another and as of today I’m about two-thirds of the way through it, I think.

To what do I owe this burst of creative energy? Creative angst? Is it that uncomplicated — in times of difficulty, we have the need to create — to leave something, a trail of breadcrumbs for us to find our way back to normal or a trail of breadcrumbs for our rescuers to find us as we become lost in the existential forest?

Wait — that was kind of complicated.

I don’t know how it is for you, but I try to sit down at the desk and write each and every day. Some days more than others are very productive in a linear sort of way — the work-in-progress gets more added on where I left off last time. In my case it’s my first-person narrator trying to come to grips with his first “experience” in young love. Or something like young love, but is mostly the abject terror of being in a teenaged body with a teenaged brain trying to run things, and mostly he gets asked questions like what are you thinking and he’s got nothing to say. Because that’s how I remember it. It’s not a memoir — because that would be deeply messed up at this point in my actual life — but more like putting what I remember of my seventeen year old self placed in situations I can only thank the gods I didn’t have to deal with, and what might I have done in those very fictional situations.

Write about what you know? Oh, horseshit. Write about what you feel.

And some days this works brilliantly. Other days are more like chipping away at a block of granite. I look for a point of entry, find it and burrow in to see what I can say about it. I don’t get up from the desk and walk away (although I do sometimes get up and walk around, ruminating about plot arc or the lack thereof, or ask my characters what happens next, spinning in ever widening circles until the path

becomes clearer in the fog.

And that is why lockdown has been my wheelhouse. I couldn't go to the store for a loaf of rustic French bread, couldn't take a break and go see a movie (well, not any farther than the living room), couldn't wander over to a friend's house and bug them, when they should be writing, too.... I did carry a (paper) notebook out on the front porch and scribble in the glare for a little while, from time to time, which counted as something accomplished even if it was off WIP topic and ended up a poem about missing going to the grocery store and will we ever have the woman in the back of the supermarket making pigs-in-a-blanket dipped in home-made barbecue sauce on toothpicks again? What if pigs-in-a-blanket dipped in barbecue sauce is a cure? How do you know? Did anyone even check? I did convert my files to online documents that I could share with my occasionally short-tempered beta readers – who have shown the patience of Job with my loss of internal clock and calendar. Yes, I sent messages at the wrong time of day, the wrong days of the week and then followed up with calls to ask if my messages had been received and what was the answer? Yes, I sent a graphomaniacal (is that even a thing?) amount of content to folks who had better things to do than keep me informed about the viability of my story-line and sketchiness of character development. What's the old saying – friends will read your prose, good friends help you murder your darlings. And, no, you shouldn't test friendships during a global anything.

So I am getting back out in the world – a little slowly because I like it here at my desk. I like the little space I've carved out, with books behind me and a comfortable chair in front of me (you know, when I need a nap because writing is desperately hard work.) I like that there's coffee almost 7 X 24 in this joint and what my younger daughter calls "Oreo knock-offs" on a shelf over the fridge should I get peckish. I like how one of my characters is a teacher that's a knock-off of my Dad, and he's a funny sort with a bad haircut who understands the rough patch some teenagers go through.

I hope that you've been safe and productive and that you're finding your copy of this magazine in a place you love.

Garry - chief@blotterrag.com

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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Subscriptions are offered as a premium for a donation of \$25 or more. Send check or money order, name and address to The Blotter Magazine Subscriptions, 1010 Hale Street, Durham, NC 27705. Back issues are also available, 5 for \$5. Inquire re. same by e-mail: chief@blotterrag.com.



CAUTION

Come inside, the show's about

“Behold”

by Daniel Lalley

Rene Lagrange, seventeen, 192lbs, first-squad all-boys pre-collegiate wrestling – Roussin Academy. This is a kid who puts up about two points on the ADI-R spectrum but he'll light into a smug-tempered letterman with the nerve of a cornered cape buffalo.

“If he wasn't so fucked up in the head, he might have a chance at state,” his coach says, which retranslates to something like “Si n'était pas si foutu dans la tête, il pourrait avoir une chance à l'état” in his own backcountry Quebecois tongue.

Twenty-one-odd years of blood, sweat, Saturday mornings scraping hair and fingernails from the seams of wall pads and rolling mats, and I've seen just about everything they can throw at a veteran in the realm of interscholastic athletic competition. Let's not forget who was in the corner for Our Lady of Perpetual Harassment when Dougie Welterman led boys' jayvee straight to a NY State regional title after taking Sandy Saltzman-Schwartz of PS-123 and driving his right shoulder through the radial complex of his collarbone. Keep in mind who was there with the whistle between his teeth and all fours on the mat when Wesley Woodcocks stuffed that Latin American kid with an ankle pick and nearly suffocated him behind the lucadoro mask he insisted on wearing to every match. I've seen

every sort of scrap and fall out, all manner of heartbreak, defeat, collateral trauma – I know what every flavor of Gatorade tastes like crashing in a cascade of cold victory, falling upon me over the sweat of brow and ball cap. I know what pride and pain look like written across the red, beaten faces of rubber-mouthed freshmen and thick-jowled varsity. I've been a high school wrestling coach/ 9th grade Principals of Health instructor since before the W. administration and never have I come across a specimen of pure genetics and guile like LeGrange in either capacity.

We're talking about a real roughouser here. Six feet, four inches, and two hundred fifteen pounds of gal and energy. He grew up on the north side of Park Ex and had it about as rough as a stray pincher, getting his share of ass handed to him by the La Fessée boys of lower Montreal. These kids weren't just futzing around either – a whole A-squad of gay adolescent street thugs known for sorting out the noses and bridgework of easy come latchkey kids and metro passengers, they knew how to flood the ER intake at Montreal General. LeGrange learned to hold his own even through the stomp and batter of platform disco shoes and fastball river rocks. He's got a scar above his left eyebrow where they caught him clean with the shattered end of

a BubbleTime pop bottle. And this is just the raw oomph we're talking about, the street smarts and survival instincts. This kid couldn't pass the muster of your standard autism evaluation, lashes out in the context of classrooms and car rides, eats Crayola, cries at fifteen, but he'll fuck anyone up when push comes to so much as poke.

This is what brings me court-side to the Christopher Benoit Memorial Auditorium off the refurb wing of Roussin Academy. I sit here three days a week cloaked out in trench coat vinyl with a facial prosthesis tacked beneath the frames of Ray-Ban Clubmasters. Not exactly a master of disguises but then again no one really sees the plastic schnoz and sweeper stache beneath the top margin of my morning Montel Gazette. LeGrange competes in boys Greco Roman, free, and folkstyles 90 kilo class and he's in this gym every Monday, Wednesday, and Friday right after third period lunch, which for him consists exclusively of two sixteen-ounce cans of Furmano's Pinto Beans. The rest of the time, I think they keep him locked away in some type of life skills lab with padded walls and a drain in the floor.

“N'approchez pas! Partir! Sors d'ici!” yells RA grappling instructor Alan Lemieux. Each time LeGrange takes to the mat, the man steps up off his FlashFurniture™ outdoor folding chair waving the entire squad back against the sidelines. His arms fan out, flailing like he's flagging a rescue craft, his eyes fixed on whatever poor son of a bitch they've thrown to LeGrange. Lemieux locks a glare on the trem-

bling kid and just sort of nods in this somber salute before the two boys turn into a dust cloud of arrant limbs and lightning bolts.

The whole squad looks on biting at their knuckles and wincing with puckered, sweat-beaded mouths and flaring nostrils. I'm at the edge of my own seat, sure, but not nearly as horrified since, remember, I have seen quite a bit myself in the way of adolescent combat athletics.

After LeGrange inevitably puts the poor fuck on his back, he takes to a three-litre jug of Berry Bonkers Hawaiian Punch, which like tints his mouth with this purple milk mustache. (I feel I should mention here that after having observed LeGrange in his own homeroom environment, plus having spent the last few months learning the behavioral ropes of Special Olympics USA, that a healthy margin of those with congenital mental abnormalities actually do tend to walk around in their day-to-day with mouths hued in the same like high fructose tinted fashion. Of course, the colors vary depending on personal beverage preference.) He takes a seat on the bleachers and in no time is either subsumed with the latest volume in a serial of middle grade horror novels entitled *École de la Mort* or is content rocking on his ass and staring into the laces of his ASICS Matflex 10s as if they bear riddles.

Today is really no different. The team's spent the last half hour warming up with a whole protocol of calisthenic anguish and scramble drills. Now, they're loose, hale and

pink complected, ready to spend the next half hour knotted up in pairs of combat strategy. This particular troop isn't half bad either. I haven't really seen one of them that's fit to scrub the jock of like Smarty Wexler, the Jewish Mauler I once coached out of the JCC on Staten Island, or Jimmy French, this freshman flyweight who one year was solely responsible for a scarcity of nurse referral slips at PS124, but they seem to know what they're doing in terms of basic cradle pins or shrug downs. One of them has the entire Nelson catalogue of like purple face assault at his disposal. And then there's LeGrange.

"What can I tell you, the kid's wrestling some deep-seated psychological trauma somewhere past all the faulty wiring and cognitive ruin," says Artie Perrier, Vice Principal at Roussin Academy.

Artie knows why I'm here three days a week sporting a trench coat and the daily paper but can't really kick me out as I have student access credentials through the US Special Olympics and I'm plugged into six American and Canadian teacher's unions like a KGB counterintelligence mole.

"I don't know why you're sniffing around the boys' gymnasium like you can just easily cart him off for your own Greco Romantic ends. If Coach Lemieux finds out why you're in there every day wearing a novelty disguise, he'll sic the whole god damn squad on you then finish you off himself with a riding crop and some zip ties. Ask me know I know this?"

"I'm well aware of the whole Ben Valentino fiasco," I tell him.

"You know Ben still sees a therapist twice weekly and can't so much as look at anything leather or even equestrian for that matter?"

"This is a different story entirely," I say. "I'm not out to recruit him for DII college play here. This is the Special Olympics we're talking about. It's a boon for the integrity of your whole organization."

And I believe that too. Vice Principal Perrier brings me in his office every so often just to check the tab on my intentions here which I can assure you they are on the absolute up-and-QME-sanctioned-up and are meant to do no one any harm, save for maybe a few cerebrally disadvantaged adolescents with the bad luck of getting between LeGrange and US Special Olympic gold – but that's all part of the fun anyway.

"I just need to take Coach Lemieux aside long enough to show him the bigger picture here. Goddamnit, if I could only come to him with some common ground, speak his own regionally distorted language, he'd see that there's more to all this than another Montreal provincial title. This is LeGrange's shot at being an Olympic gold medalist."

"Special Olympic gold medalist."

"Can I see him just one more time?"

So, it appears this is my shot. It all comes down to a little broken-tongued dialogue with the one man

besides myself who has designs on a seventeen-year-old autistic grappling dynamo with a topographic range of back acne and voice like a punted kickball.

After the contact drills and three-minute spar sessions, Coach Lemieux lines the entire team against the pale-wax grain of stacked bleachers and dresses down the entire day's work from even the most minute form infractions to wild accusations of flawed technique, rudimentary failures – he calls into question the fighting spirit in one of the boys which sends the kid's chin so far into his chest, the top of his gear-matted head begins rolling like a hanged outlaw's. LeGrange stands rocking on the heels of his boots, inspecting the dirt between his fingernails and casting bored glances from side to side. In all the times I've born witness to these post-practice scrutiny sessions, I've not once seen him subjected even to a polite word of constructive criticism. He has nothing to worry about here.

"If I may," I interdict, and a hush falls over the entire room as if someone has just fumbled something very fragile and costly. "I don't know if you've seen me back there, sort of just minding my own business these last few months, for the most part really just reading the advice columns and weather report, but sometimes I can't help it but to peek up from the page. I'll hear the twack of a solid cradle pin or the agony of damaged ligature and I'll look up every now and again."

The entire squad is quiet now, looking straight ahead except for

this antsy sophomore bantamweight whose eyes are bouncing like driven pinballs, straining for the contact and composure to return Lemieux's own grey-eyed scowl. The moment they succumb to the intrigue of it all and land upon me, Lemieux snaps in a loud, spit-cumbered command, "Une cantaine de poms!"

And the poor little son of a bitch drops to the floor, banging out a whole series of one-armed pushups. The rest of them remain starched as queen's guards, awaiting further disruption with palsied kneecaps and bowed-out throats. One of the boys is sweating so profusely about the forehead that his face looks like it's been filtered through a pixel blur.

"All this to say," I say. "I've had the pleasure of noticing some shit here on the sidelines of your wrestling clinic these last several months and I can tell you for one thing that your boys look staunch as a string of insults. You got a few of them ready for the whip of state-sanctioned varsity competition, no doubt. You yourself, sir, if I may, seem to have a grasp over the entire operation. I mean, obviously."

Lemieux rocks back on the heels of his Cole Hahn combat boots and spins a dime-tight about face in my direction. He ambles up, marching over with the swagger of an armed head mistress. His head is cocked, brows daggered and deliberate. He's got the heavy, box-cut forehead of a bullet ant, his face quick and angled beneath it.

"Qui es-tu et pourquoi es-tu

dans mon gymnase," he shouts.

I can only make out so much before one of the boys pipes up.

"He wants to know who the fuck you are and why you're in his fucking gym," the voice echoes, though I can't make out which one of them is speaking as they're all so uniform at attention that their mouths look equally muzzled and rigid.

"Parler ou sortir," Lemieux shouts.

"Speak up or get fucked," one of the boys parrots, this one more alto and cracked.

"Gentlemen," I say, "I'm not here to horn in on the progress of a perfectly sound wrestling camp. If you think my presence here is indicative of anything more than honest to God curiosity and maybe a touch of like unbridled support, then you've got me all wrong."

I clap the paper across my knee and begin to approach Lemieux. He's 165 pounds, all knots and callous, but if I shot a double or ran him down with a rear body, I'd have his ass horizontal across the squeak and burn of hi-gloss varsity parquet. As I impose in on him, he can tell too. He chins up to me, quivering about the lip but planted nonetheless. I really don't want to have to drag his ass in front of the entire lineup so I make like a Samaritan and extend my hand in the whole courtesy of mutual interest. He takes it gently, bringing it to his face like the white knight in a Rock Hudson flick then whispers something in that dirty Quebecois drawl before giving me an actual god damn kiss between

the knuckles of what is at this point a pretty clammy fist. The kids do not seem at all phased.

I couldn't tell what he whispered but once he drops my hand he goes off again in that dawn drill tone.

"LeGrange," he cries.

And LeGrange comes back hoarse and heavy chested, "Qu'Est-ce que c'est?"

"Viens au tapis," Lemieux yells again, summoning LeGrange to the mat.

"I don't know what kind of exhibition you've got planned to run here at the cap of your afternoon drills but I can assure you it's all just going to be lost on me. I already told you, I'm just here to catch up on my Ask Abigale column and maybe take in a little good-spirited horseplay while I'm at it. If I've spoken out of turn, I'm sorry but you can go back to whatever the hell you we're up to before I said anything. I only wanted to mention that you've got a one in a dozen scrapper in that handicapped kid right there and I think maybe he might do well in an organization with enough athletic distinction to give him a run for his mentally disadvantaged money."

This sends Lemieux's mouth into a sort of pucker as he paces shrieks into the gym floor. He walks over, nabbing LeGrange by the scruff of his neck and hurls him forward onto the wrestling mat.

"Venez ici," he yells, summoning me over to the mat. "Voyons ce que tu dois nous apprendre," he says, which I believe translates to like "Why don't you go ahead and show us a thing or two if you think

you know a thing or two."

I spent fifteen odd years on the mat as one of the best Greco-Roman clinch men the Southern Tier of New York State had to offer. I took titles out of there all three years I spent in the brush of varsity competition. I went onto a full ride at Syracuse, instigating some of the most violent collegiate bouts the Mohawk Valley had ever witnessed in the context of NCAA-ranked competition. I had a hip throw to bull over even the most planted heavyweights. Mind you, this is back in the day when the ole anabolic injection was about as common as a high-carb diet and the officials would just as soon sort of whistle and walk the other way or say something to the effect of like, "doping, shhhmoping," when confronted with a 250lb silverback sporting a cystic zit range across his shoulder blades and a rather ill-fitting jockstrap.

All this to say, I think I know what I'm doing when it comes to tangling up with the hale, huffing battle class of high school wrestling contenders.

"Okay, fine." I say, removing my shades and wadding my trench coat up around my morning paper. "You want to put me in there and give me a run for my money? Show these kids what's what in terms of technique versus brute strength and determination. Hell, I don't even know if he's got the latter."

LeGrange kneels into a solid neutral and leers at me, summoning me to his side as he curls an index finger in my direction. I never took the kid for a lackey or like a kiss ass but kneeling there at

the feet of his Quebecois coaching staff, I have to say I was a bit disappointed in the shape of his self-esteem.

"I guess you got me all figured out huh," I ask, walking over to where LeGrange is already starting to claw the matt like a taunted bull. "You can probably sniff out a scout from twenty kilos in each direction. You got me pegged, sure, but if you think I don't have it in me to show this kid a thing or two about like compromising limbs or putting his head into very damp and uncomfortable areas, you're not as smart as you thought you were."

I oblige his position, wrapping my arms around the perimeter of his waistline. He feels even more solid there, kneeling and tough — just waiting for the peal of Lemieux's engraved *bitpat* whistle.

"Give us a three count," I say, "I need to get my feet under me before this kid pulls some action."

Lemieux stares me down from under the cape of a quick-cut brow. He's grinning around the stainless-steel between his lips and raising a finger for every second that passes before blowing into the whistle.

LeGrange bucks and we're off and scampering. It's been since I laid down, Brian "The Goose" Buckthorn in a Jr. high recruiting demo that I've actually had any real competition when it comes to like anything above the 180 class but I'm holding my own there for a second, sort of tucked in between the hook of his elbow. LeGrange is everything I thought he'd be in terms of like heart and chutzpa. He's got real power through the entire form, the type of hard-set

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strength you couldn't earn through a thousand sets of offseason lifts. In one swift move, he's grabbing me by the head, ready to set a bulldog choke and have me call him uncle.

"Get after 'em," his teammates yell.

"Uncork him!"

And in an instant I'm locked in and losing air, the gym and everyone in it fading into a scurry of electric black and bolts of static. I have about a half pint of air inside me and I know I'm going to need something swift to get this kid on his back. I heave out, giving it the old college try, a real effort to set things right, and I spin around but in a second I'm worse for the effort – right where the son of a bitch wants me. He's got me in a pin, dangling all manner of drool and whimper over my eyes and it's in this moment that I realize what I did wrong. The only thing I can think to do to get him off of me is wind up with an elbow. I sink it hard into the fascia of his gut and he pauses there for a minute, his eyes rolling back, his nostrils flaring like discharged umbrellas and the whole gym is still for just that second, right before his cheeks inflate. His lips quiver over the strain of a pucker and in an instant it's all over me; what seems like two gallons of Furmano's Pinto Beans and Berry Bonkers Hawaiian Punch accompanied by the whole bio load of snot, sweat, tears, and whatever else comes next running through the collar of my shirt, down my chest – my face and hair look like something fished from the belly of a cafeteria grease trap.

"Oh god-damnit," I can hear one of the boys yell.

"LeGrange," cries another.
"You fucking retard!" ❖

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.

Dream Journal – July 2021

Picked up by a friend, for a ride home from school, or to get me to the bus for the ride home from school, but he takes me past the high-school – not mine, but it's the one I'm supposed to be at so I can get my ride home on the bus? – and then he goes past the middle school, too. I don't understand, so I ask why he's driving me farther away from home – if he would just let me out now, I could walk the two and a half miles home, but he keeps going and lets me out of the car at the elementary school. Five miles from home.

The girl I like is here. Ah, now it makes sense. She teases me about following her around, and I say I am not – although in the end I am – but that a friend left me here to figure out how to get home. She needs a way home, too, but I don't have a car. Are we in elementary school? is a thought that goes through my head for a moment. The girl goes back into the elementary school to get her stuff, and I wait outside as parents pick up their children. Are we teachers? is the new thought in my head. Parents wave at me. Then I see someone else I know, in jeans and a hoodie. It is my sister, and she needs a ride home, too. To her adult home? To our childhood home? Does she have a car we can all use to distribute ourselves to the appropriate places?

In the end, we are walking along a sidewalk, uphill, houses along the side of the street supposedly familiar, so we are heading to our neighborhood.

Jonesie. - cyberspace

Three Poems by Jason Visconti

My Father, The Comic

Somewhere in the alcoves a man is faint,
The set-up has cruised him through the seats,
The punchline peeled sense until the pulp of his brain,
Leaving the core like a souvenir,
Untouched even by a pun.

My Father, The Teacher

The last gray hair has the most to give away,
The patches of his beard keep us small,
And his long arm extends across the world.

My Father, The Student

At the intersection of row and column,
Into a bunker and out through a cave,
Looking down from a mountain into this age.

two by John Tustin

"Leaves And Stones"

I opened the windows a bit and I heard
The conspiratorial whisper of the leaves
And they sounded like a million simmering bees
Or perhaps many gently droning violas
As I drove on to my home
To meet no one but my always ugly me.
Within minutes the brightest sun gave way
To the early darkness and as I turned on my headlights
I turned the corner to where I live without love
In such continual disappointment.

My world is not the same since I arrived here.
Slowly, I stopped sending so many letters.
Slowly, I drank more and more often.
Slowly, I stopped hearing the birds over the din
Of the leaves in the morning.
I drink until I am not anything but me
And I put myself to bed to the sound of a string quartet,
Pretending I am wanted and beautiful.
I never understood the morning language of birds
But the songs of the leaves moving in the wind
When the nights came earlier,
I understood them so well
Just before the leaves turned red or yellow or brown,
Pushed off, fell down and died.
I also understand their willing deaths.

Soon it will not be leaves falling but stones
And as they fall, I will lie alone among them,
Hearing every utterance as they land.
Closing my eyes and wishing
I was not here
But with them.
With you.
Like always.

"She Went Back To Him"

Like she said she never would,
always vowed to herself,
she went back to him.

When I told her the night we dissolved
that she would be back with him by Christmas
she told me it was the most insulting thing I had ever said to her
and that if she did go back
it would mean she had lost any self respect she gained when she left him.
And now here she is smiling across from him in the chain restaurant,
smiling as she shows his sundry gifts to the camera,
smiling as she listens intently to a singer as they sit on the lawn
in Central Park.

Smiling as she drinks a toast to marriage
under the Kleig lights of social media.
Smiling for the man who called her a cunt under foggy side street lamplight,
cheated on her with more women than I have known,
stalked her, harassed me,
used their children as human shields in his battle for dominance.
She smiles, her wild hair in perfect place,
looking like a puppet.

I don't love her anymore,
I don't want her anymore.
I don't even like her.
I look out the window,
sick in the alone,
thinking of my stitched guts, the pitiless march of winter,
I see only darkness at my fingertips
and beyond.

I look out in the distance,
it's all black nothing but I smile.
The moon will come back again
To hold her lantern,
the light dusky but infinite.
Certainly not tonight
But
she always does return.
With that I smile.
But my smile is real.

"When I Get Senile It Won't Be Pretty"

A prose-poem in seven uneven stanzas give-or-take a thousand words, total

By Garrison Somers

There's something slightly (to me) funny about
padding around the house mumbling to myself,
but picking up the urgently jangling phone and
demanding the robo-caller "hump a duck, mother-luck"
isn't in the Venn diagram set of comedy, according to my wife.
Secretly, though, it's how I plan to spend the rest of my life.

Best place on Earth to take a quality nap? The public library.
Pick any book, the stack of best-sellers is perfectly boring and
even the furious shushing of librarians at my faux-snoring
is a stream burbling over rocks making its inexorable way to the sea.
Speaking of which, I once heard a guy on NPR say
That he never laundered his favorite pair of blue jeans.
Apparently, he reported in dulcet baritone, time and the very air
itself remove the stink of fart, the ancient swiping of mayonnaise
on my hands from a chicken and arugula sandwich,
so I've been hiding mine from its weekly washing.
I pull them on every fourth day and wear them
proudly, without regard, sheepishly – in every way that last adverb
can be defined. A fashion statement, if you will. Or else
it's a pretty good experiment to see what action or inaction on my part it
will finally take to make casual trousers spontaneously
generate new forms of life, or combust, either or,
and I'll give you fair odds on which will happen first.

The phone rings again. "Monster-truck, you chicken plucker!"
I howl into the receiver. I hope that my next-door neighbor hears me bellowing
and struggles to make some sense of it.
I like sitting on the front porch with my sweatshirt on backwards
putting corn-chips in the hoodie to nibble on while I read.
My neighbor (same one) walks by with his smelly old gray abracadabradoodle and I
rumble in my throat, so he thinks I don't want his dog to
pee on my wife's peonies. Truth - I couldn't care less.
My god, man, it's what dogs do, their sole canine raison d'être.
Piss away, dixie land! Hold fast against the fascist leash! Wilt those damned daisies...
Although the thing here is I won't own a dog myself. My personal rule
for carrying dogturd in a bag is that

I'm either going to place it on someone's porch and set it alight
or not carry it at all.

Ha! Got you on the second ring: "Bad luck! Bite my chili-suck!" (Ooh, good one.)
I like to stand in Trader Joes and ask zombie-foodies pushing carts
to explain to me what a freestone peach tastes like and shake my head
with a gently derisive tsk-tsk when they inevitably use the word "peachy."

There's this circle in my neighborhood,
what you may know as a roundabout,
where roads come together
as spokes on a wheel,
traffic slowly whirling
like seats in a carnival ride.
Sometimes I take the full spin
two and even three times, because
once you're in the hub you have right-of-way,
and frankly I'm in no hurry to arrive anywhere.
Another fun thing: if my wife isn't paying attention,
but staring and thumbing at social media posts on her phone,
all that constant-left-turning can make her nauseous,
and that's something, right?
I shoot for "what the hell are you doing?" but am
quite satisfied with "will you cut that out..."

It's all part of my plan.
Keep 'em guessing, on their toes.
Pretty normal stuff I suppose, inasmuch as I was ever normal,
or in this style 10/6 hatter-mad.
When queried how I vote,
I change my answer every time.
This week I'm a registered dependent.
How do you spell pusillanimous xenophobe?
I'm not going to tell you – get away from me!
My favorite restaurant?
That little pizza joint at exit 57 on the road to Hell.

My idea of passing time productively is to send
emails to a friend and include in the body of each note
in no particular order, the words
new, clear, and bum.

And while I won't blatantly use the word "atomic,"
the terms "btomic" "Potomac," "Stomach," and "chthonic," are all fair game.
I cannot begin to fathom the NSA's confusion at reading "sub-chthonic articles,"
imbedded randomly into a birthday greeting,
leaving intelligence analysts wondering how soon, and where it might happen.

I do not, however, recommend duplicating this prank at home.
I'm no professional but I have spent my entire adult life doing such irresponsible
and yet (for the most part) harmless
things and while it is not "expected" it is at least "comprehended" by loved ones
that I know I've done something wrong and am not particularly penitent.
Not to mention that when the inevitable, unenviable,
late-night pounding on the front door comes
It'll be for me.

On a completely different note, I recently bought
a small aerosol can of "new car smell" at the Ace hardware store.
It cracks me up some to spray it in the can after dropping a load,
and so much better than anything floral,
which instead of disgust-disguising the abominable event,
instead presents a whole new olfactory horror show,
like a giant, ancestral tyranno-hummingbird's sugary shit.

It occurs to me, I haven't had a close shave in seven years,
nor do I have a full beard infestation.
Rather, I prefer sitting alone in the coffee shop, my cup empty,
and affecting an absolutely non-specific look
like I've been months panning for gold in the Mexican hills with Walter Huston.
Down on my luck, you might or might not say.
I top it all with an unlit Lucky depending from my lip,
gargling with Lapsang Souchong to lend veracity to my character.
You know, someone almost always scolds me,
smoking can take ten years off of your life.
Oh, good, my reply. I hope it's the nineteen-seventies.

Damned phone – "Kiss me, you fools!"
I'll bet you a donut if they're recording for quality purposes, that one
is going to have them all scratching their heads. ❖

"A Song"

by Brendan Macie

"Don't let me die in the suburbs," I'd yearned
Twenty-three years and far more to learn
I could die happily if on but one term
Don't let me die in the suburbs

Bury me out on the lonesome prairie
I dare not be breathing my last breath in Cary
A sterile environment that shan't be disturbed
Don't let me die in the suburbs

There's more to be seen and I wish I could know
Driving away through the old mountain roads
I wouldn't care if I never came home
I couldn't just die in the suburbs

Safe from resistance, lost in the sprawl
Nary a person to hear out these calls
Hoping that one day my voice leaves these walls
Don't let me die in the suburbs

Contributors

Daniel Lalley is a fiction writer living in Deep Ellum, Texas. He holds a BA in Creative Writing from the University of North Texas and an MFA in Creative Writing from the University of San Francisco. By day, he's a copywriter for casinos and college sports. At night, he practices MMA. His work is in Cimarron Review, HOW Journal, Printer's Devil Review, Pacific Review, Forbes Magazine as well as many others.

Jason Visconti of Queens Village, NY, writes, "I first discovered my love for poetry after losing my mother at a young age and needing a way to express myself. My work has appeared in various journals, including "Allegro Magazine", "Indigo Rising", and "The American Journal of Poetry". I especially enjoy the poetry of Pablo Neruda and Billy Collins."

John Tustin's poetry has appeared in many disparate literary journals since 2009. fritzware.com/johntustinpoetry contains links to his published poetry online.

Brendan Macie is a folk musician and writer from Carrboro NC

Jeremy Szuder lives in a tiny apartment with his wife, two children and two cats. He works in the evenings in a very busy restaurant, standing behind a stove, a grill, fryers and heating lamps, happily listening to hours of hand selected music and conjuring ideas for new art and poetry in his head. When his working day ends and he enters his home in the wee hours, he likes to sit down with a glass of wine and record all the various words and images that bear fruit within his mind. Jeremy Szuder only sets the cage doors free when the work begins to pile up too high. In this life, Szuder states he has no illusions of being a professional artist in any way, shape, or form.

THE LEGEND OF WIPE-ONCE WALLY

AND HIS 13 RULES FOR HOW TO SURVIVE A GLOBAL PANDEMIC
IN A NATION THAT'S GONE COMPLETELY BATSHIT CRAZY



Joe Buonfiglio

Does living through
a global pandemic seem
WEIRD?

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WEIRDER!

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Pandemic in a Nation That's Gone Completely
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