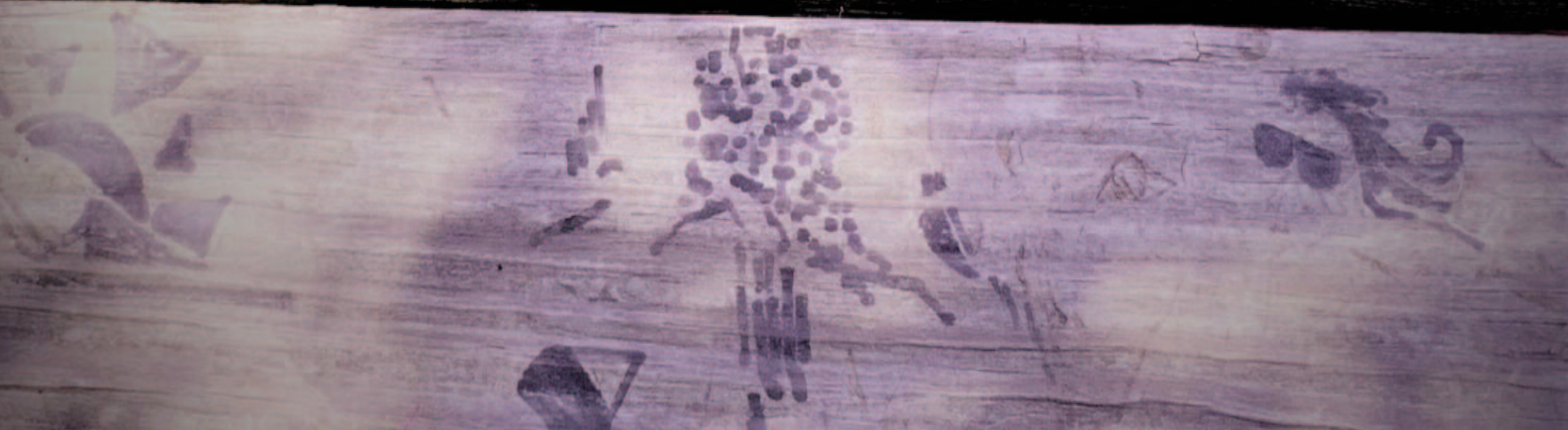


September 2022

# The Blotter

magazine



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

[www.blotterrag.com](http://www.blotterrag.com)

G. M. Somers.....Editor-in-Chief  
Martin K. Smith..Publisher-at-Large, Treasurer  
Marilyn Fontenot....Director of Development  
Laine Cunningham.....Publishing Consultant  
Brace Boone III.....Marketing Advisor  
Richard Hess.....Programs Director  
Olivia Somers...Social Media and Art Director  
T.J. Garrett.....Staff Photographer

**Subscriptions Contact:**  
Martin K. Smith  
M\_K\_Smith@yahoo.com  
919.286.7760

**Advertisers Contact:**  
Martin K. Smith  
M\_K\_Smith@yahoo.com  
919.286.7760

**Submissions and Editorial Business to:**  
Jenny Haniver  
mermaid@blotterrag.com

Garrison Somers, Editor-in-Chief  
chief@blotterrag.com

919.869.7110 (business hours only! – call for  
information about snail-mail submissions)

**Marketing & Public Relations Contact:**  
Marilyn Fontenot  
marilyngfontenot@gmail.com

**COVER:** Found art: table doodles,  
Carrboro, NC

Unless otherwise noted, all content copyright  
2022 by the artist, not the magazine.

**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](http://www.blotterrag.com)



Council of Literary Magazines & Presses  
www.c l m p . o r g

## “It Isn’t Easy Being Me”

I don’t know why. I think I’m a terrible listener. I want to talk so very much. Maybe too much. Not always about me, but about...oh, everything.

It’s a habit, probably a bad one.

Still, people tell me things. Firstly, they ask questions: have I ever...? Do I know about...? Remember when...? Then they reveal themselves to me: dirty laundry, scars in strange private places, hell, even open wounds.

I tell them I’m a writer (I suppose I am, after all) and I tell them I’m an editor of a literary magazine (it is, after all). And they nod and smile and continue telling me stories. True stories, mostly, as much as they remember them. Or ideas for fictional tales that they haven’t put to paper, yet.

And I listen, and ask my own questions, and find myself fascinated and maybe that’s why they think I’m a good listener.

My questions almost always begin with “you know you should write this story down, right?” And then I follow with “It’s a hell of a thing” or something to that effect, because that’s the best compliment I can think of for someone who has a great story in them and hasn’t yet written it down. It is a hell of a thing, like having a thorn in your foot or a hangover from a great party. Something that needs to be handled. Removed, possibly. And I don’t ask too many questions, because to some extent it might be rude. What color was her hair? Probably OK, although I still wouldn’t ask because it doesn’t really matter. I have a picture of just about everything in my mind’s eye, ready to be taken out and used in the movies my brain creates. I would give you better examples, but I cannot. And you will understand why, I hope, by the end of this little essay.

Here’s what I don’t say: I can help you write your story if you want me to. I never say it. It’s rude, I think.

I’ve thought about this a lot – the unspoken question, the offer never voiced. I do want to help. Almost desperately. Almost but not quite. And, as they say, therein lies the difference. Because they’re not my stories. Not mine. I’ll be honest with you. Right now there are six very, very good yarns in my head; things told to me over coffee, or sitting on a bench waiting for a child’s after-school playdate to finish, or during dinner or some other non-event. And if I were so inclined, I could scribble them down. Figure out the fine details as I go. Polish them. Make them quite something. But they’re not mine. It would be wrong.

Not that I was held to some sort of blood-oath to not touch the stories. Or, conversely but not equally to the point, the storytellers themselves are probably never going to do anything with them, in spite of their brief enthusiasm

for the craft of writing. Once upon a time, so to speak. But neither of these facts is relevant to me.

Rather, it's that there must be some kind of trust, a particular kind of honor among thieves. Writers are thieves, after all. We do kiss and tell on ourselves, and include others in the story, stealing their personas whether or not they want to be included. For what is a story without characters that remind us of us? Even the Gospels aren't just about Jesus. They're about the other folks, too. Fishermen. Little old ladies. Tax collectors. We don't have them sign release forms, either – we just sweep them up into the narrative. We steal style from those we admire. We steal words – one or two, mind – not a whole bunch of sentences (that would be deeply wrong in our book of rules) – that work where we want them to work. We steal pictures turned into words: places we've been, gardens we've sat in, buses we've ridden on, what have you. No one claims copyright over a flower arrangement. (I don't think. Maybe they do. I guess it's possible.)

But someone else's yarn? Something so interestingly twisted and turned that I cannot successfully extricate myself from the moment, that half-hour across a table where I first heard the tale, asking for a refill of my wineglass and reaching for another handful of pistachios (trust me, they go together), and leaning back to hear the denouement revealed. I know where I was and what I heard, and the sound of the voice telling me what I heard, and how I felt about what I heard. I know that you're not supposed to take that idea, even the kernel of it, and use it.

Wait a minute. Let me rephrase that. I know that *I'm* not supposed to. Maybe it's just me. You make your own decisions.

All that said, there is part of me that wants reach out, to touch base and, somehow – I don't know how – bring up the subjects of those long-ago told tales and try and nudge them along again. *Hey, remember that great thing you told me about? What's up with that? You making any headway with it? No? Really?*

*Damn.*

Bad on so many levels.

So what happens now? The stories remain in a neatly wrapped bundle on the slushpile of my mind, I guess.

**Garry - [chief@blotterrag.com](mailto:chief@blotterrag.com)**

We often use Bobco fonts, copyrighted shareware from the Church of the Subgenius. Prabob. We also use Mary Jane Antique and other free-ware fonts from Apostrophic Labs and other fonts from other sources.



in the Great State of Georgia!



The Blotter Magazine, Inc. (again, a 501(c)3 non-profit) is an education concern. Our primary interest is the furthering of creative writing and fine arts, with the magazine being a means to that end. We publish in the first half of each month and enjoy a free circulation throughout the Southeast and some other places, too. Submissions are always welcome, as are ad inquiries.

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](mailto:chief@blotterrag.com).



CAUTION

*on the sky, put a dollar in the kitty*

## “The Memory Detective”

by Edward Jackson

---

You're waking up in your car in a Target parking lot on a Sunday. How did you arrive here? It is morning but the time is unavailable since you don't wear a watch, your phone is dead, and you cannot find your keys to turn the car on to check the digital clock on the dash.

In the car there are a few items that can help piece together the previous day. A bottle of cheap Cupcake brand red wine, three-fourths empty, lays on the floor of the passenger seat. Its sour smell is permeating your gray Honda Civic hatchback, which has become a greenhouse of regret as the heat of the summer sun bakes the car with the windows rolled up. Nothing grows in this Honda greenhouse but anxiety. Without keys you cannot push the button to force the windows down and allow some fresh air in, as fresh as air can be in Atlanta in the summer. The previous car had windows with an actual crank that didn't need power. This Sunday would have benefited from such lack of technology. You miss that type of window rolling device. You miss the days of simple machines.

Beck's CD, *Morning Phase*, is laying on the passenger seat. The irony of the CD title does not hit you for years. You don't have a CD player at home but you hate purchased the CD because when Beck won the Grammy Kayne protested it. You already owned it on vinyl which came with a free digital download. The impulse to purchase it again on another medium is indicative to how you live your life.

The glare of the Georgia sun is bouncing off the CD and into your face. It is both a comfort and annoyance. The heat of the beam feels good on your face, but since you wear glasses the sunlight is penetrating your socket and blazing your brain afire of pain and regret,

but you aren't sure what you regret yet. You wonder if the CD is ruined from the sun beams that have been trying to burn it, with increased strength from your greenhouse car windows now yellowed from too many cigarettes.

There is a bag of Taco Bell thrown in the backseat. You pick up the 32oz cup from the holder next to the stick shift and take a sip. It's gross. Warm and watered down Diet Pepsi. You think to yourself, Pepsi is number two in the colas and only losers drink number two colas. This is Atlanta and no one drinks Pepsi in the land of Coca Cola. It is fitting that you live in the birthplace of Coca Cola and are addicted to cocaine, a drink that once had cocaine in its recipe.

You wished the drink was a McDonald's ice-cold Diet Coke. It's not. You must have been desperate to not only accept a number two cola, but also soy filler tacos from the Bell. But since you feel like a fucking loser, it seems fitting to have Diet Pepsi warm and watered down in your mouth. You can't find the keys to your car and are desperate for some air, so you open the door and half spit out the warm and watered down Diet Pepsi and half throw up. The throw up is a reddish brown, letting you know that you drank that Cupcake red wine not that long ago.

You cannot remember what you did last night because you are addicted to many things and the top of that list is the addiction to forgetting. While it would be easy to blame the Ambien, it is far more complex than a pill. You take the Ambien because it is a mind eraser. You have the strongest of desire to erase this time of your life. To erase all times that are unpleasant. You are addicted to forgetting. Why you drink and inhale cocaine is a symptom of something

greater than you can admit or excavate from the recesses of your mind. Worse is the pills as they allow you to forget the impulsive behavior.

The most curious item in the car, beyond the sad Diet Pepsi, is an unlabeled VHS tape. You don't own a VCR. There is no record of it on the Target receipts crumpled on the floor of the car. Target does not even sell VHS tapes. It's ridiculous you looked. What you do know is this VHS tape may or may not contain you on it and you may or may not be naked engaging in sex. The thought of this causes your heart to race, but that could be a side effect of a weekend of cocaine. However, you limitedly eliminate that thought and the panic in your heart comes from the VHS tape. You are explicitly sure what is on it, but your detective senses tell you that it may contain you and what you did last night.

The sun is so bright, you have to put a hand over your eyes. You walk around to the back of the store to take a piss behind the dumpster. As you unzip your pants you realize you have no underwear on. This is confirmation you hooked up with someone. Your detective skills are kicking into high gear. However, it is still speculation and would not hold up in court as you could easily place some reasonable doubt in the minds of a jury. You can only confirm that you are without underwear and while your lack of underwear in the past is an indication of a *Grinder* hook up, at this point it is only speculation. You choose to place reasonable doubt in your mind, which has now sobered up enough to be your jury. You want to forget you are without your underwear. The addiction to forgetting is failing at the moment. Half laughing-half tearing up, you wonder how many pairs of underwear you've left around this city. You stop that wondering as it requires counting. Counting sexual partners is never a good feeling in private.

Back at the car, you get on your knees in the Target parking lot to feel under the driver's seat for the keys. You

find lots of interesting things under the seat, but no keys. You find wrappers to fast food places you tell all your friends you refuse to go to. You talk a big game about how you eat healthy, but your once 29 inch waist is now ballooning to 33. They know you eat like shit and your friends must have a good go at you behind your back when you lie about what you eat. You are not healthy. You are the only coke head who gains weight the more coke you do. It is because you reward a three-day binge with delivery and fast food. The ability to go without food for three days minus some bread to soak up liquor is not unusual with your kind. The pounds melt off quickly as your body eats itself as the booze and coke and pills are not nourishment. You feel good about your ribs showing when you quickly drop pounds, only to hate yourself for a full lack of restraint when you put the pounds, and girth, back on when you inhale delivery and fast food for forty-eight hours afterward the three day fasting, if it could even be called that.

You stare at the VHS tape and put it on the passenger floorboard and cover it with Taco Bell wrappers. Are you on it? You keep asking yourself that. You cannot deal with it right now. You want to forget you even have it. While the VHS tape mocks you, you are incredibly curious how you were able to sneak it out of whatever place you were. You need your phone to figure this all out. It is the tool the detective needs to solve this mystery. If only you had another Ambien to forget this moment in the moment. That is the beauty of a hypnotic pill, you are active and awake by all accounts, but you remember virtually none of it. You want answers and you want to forget this all.

You are in shorts, so your knees become rubbed raw from the parking lot asphalt. When you stand, it looks like someone ran a fork over your knees, albeit lightly since the blood is only faint. You rub your hand over the blood and then lick it off your palm.

Maybe you are a vampire since the blood tastes good. You are a vampire who can survive in the blazing Georgia sun since you have a small burst of energy and go to the passenger side and get back on your knees to search for keys.

Underneath the passenger seat are tiny bags. Lots and lots of tiny bags. Some clear, some green. That means you visited a few of your dealers. You wonder which ones since you have many and the colors of the bags are evenly divided by usage among them. There are over a dozen empty bags under that seat. How much money did you spend on cocaine in the last twenty-four hours? Crumbled ATM receipts are mocking you with shame. Don't uncrumple them. Just don't. You know you have cash advanced on your AmEx. That is an expensive endeavor you cannot afford.

You have often fooled yourself into thinking you are saving money with the cash advances on your American Express card. You love how people brag about having gold and platinum AmEx cards at the liquor store, as if using a debit to get drunk is somehow less than using a gold card to get drunk. Drunk is drunk and you all are buying booze at the drunk liquor store. But the fool in you thinks that the miles you are acquiring makes up for the exorbitant cash advance fees. They do not. AmEx is the worst for you as they keep raising your debt ceiling to the heavens. Your debt ceiling should be the lilac bush that graces the landscaping at your place. In the end, you probably will trade those miles for a ticket for a dealer and you will only have used miles to buy more cocaine.

Luck comes your way as there are one and a half bags with gritty, grimy poorly cut cocaine still in them. You collect the empty bags and walk over to the cart corral and dump the empty ones along with the ATM receipts in the trash can. You never did look at the crumbled receipts and this is a poor detective move on your part. No good memory

detective would ignore and discard such important and critical evidence.

Looking around the parking lot, it is empty but for a few cars on the side of the building. At first you wonder if the world has ended, and you are going to have to break in and steal all the over the counter sleep aids and allergy meds along with Diet Coke and candy. Maybe you'd get lucky, and they have a combo DVD/VHS player, and you can play that mysterious tape in your car before the grid fails. They film *The Walking Dead* near your place, and you've seen the star running in your neighborhood. They should film this zombie scene of your sin in the Target parking lot you are engaging in. It would be highly entertaining. Then it hits you, it's Sunday and they don't open till noon. Damn, an end of the world would be kind of good right now. It would help you not focus on this current situation. Most days it feels an end of the world may be the only way you stop doing cocaine. You wonder if there would be cocaine production in the post-apocalyptic Atlanta since everyone in Atlanta seems to be highly engaged in the consumption of this product.

Still no keys. Open the hatch and sit on the back of it like you are tailgating to the saddest game ever and take two bumps to wake up enough to look for keys. You are so brazen now that you don't even look around to see if anyone can spot you snorting cocaine. The privilege is indeed real that you exploit.

You have no memory of what you did with the keys. It is painstaking slow, but the memory detective knows well how to scour for the tiniest of things. When you are coming down from a weekender binge of drugs, you know how to search your apartment for just a little bit more.

You fish through all the tote bags. Windex, Pine Sol, paper towels, Pledge, Clorox wipes. You only buy name brand cleaning products because you have a prejudice against generic brands. Particularly the glass cleaner. You have a

## The Blotter

---

frosted glass dinning room table that is perfect for cutting and snorting cocaine off and it deserves only the best cleaner. The cheap stuff just streaks. When you cannot sleep after a long night of partying you clean. You do this in silence as not to wake neighbors. Your ability to fold laundry in silence is impeccable.

A giant bag of almonds is opened and spreading the hatchback. Cheese so cheap it's just vegetable oil now that it has melted in the greenhouse you call a car. You take the oily cheese and internally debate if you should dump it in the trash. That would be a waste of money to throw it out. The irony of concerning yourself with \$2.99 cheese, while you clearly spent hundreds last night on coke and booze is not lost on you. But booze and coke were consumed, not tossed into the trash, so it's not a total waste of money.

You begin to methodically search the car, inch by inch. Flip the visors, pull everything out of the glove box and throw it on the floor. You search inside, underneath, and even rummage through the trash you threw out already. All you find in the trash are all those tiny empty baggies that let you know you did copious amounts of cocaine all weekend. The exhaustion is so palpable you worry it will cause something far more harmful than the rails of cocaine you have done. Since divine intervention does not work in situations like this, you refuse to consider that divine intervention or inspiration forced you to lift up the clipboard in the hatch where the spare tire is, but there they are. Keys. Fucking keys. That means you can go home. You will be safe in your home and can become the memory detective to figure out what you did for the last day. You can figure out a way to watch an unlabeled VHS tape that may or may not contain you on it having sex.

Driving is a gamble at this point, but you do it anyway. You aren't fully aware of the last time you ingested the cheap red wine but feel steady enough to drive the 2 miles home down Briarcliff road to the Little Five Points [www.blotterrag.com](http://www.blotterrag.com)

neighborhood where you live in a tiny one bedroom condo.

You are touched with an innocent look that even when pulled over, cops would never assume you have had so much cocaine in tiny baggies in your car that you would go to prison for a long time. You have spent an adult lifetime getting out of things due to your innocent look and your white race. Back in the days when Atlanta had 24 hour nightlife, and before share rides were invented, cops would often put up checkpoints near the clubs. You were filled with so much bravado that you would willingly drive up to them knowing you'd never get pulled for a sobriety test.

Your lawyer friend told you not to buy your coke in tiny bags due to the distribution rule. It made you laugh because it's clear you will never deal because you can only consume. You are drug dealer brand specific and therefore stuck with tiny bags. You've been pulled over plenty of times with drugs in your car. However, you are a white, middle-aged man with tiny stature, thick glasses, and have an eager to please mannerism. All work in your favor to limit suspicion and they have gotten you through many sticky situations.

This morning there are no cops on Briarcliff looking to stop druggies and drunks. They are at the churches ready to do traffic control since Atlanta church traffic is spectacularly horrible. Thank god it's not yet noon and all the churches on Briarcliff Ave haven't let out. Being stuck in church traffic may be precisely the thing you need to spend time pondering your situation but being home sounds better. You think about all those people in church, and you used to think they didn't have fun on Saturday nights and that is why they are in church. You no longer think that thought since your life is no longer fun. You wonder if it ever really was fun to live like this.

As you drive home, you glance at the clock that reads 9:45 and think about your neighbor you would like to avoid. You are fascinated with a neigh-

bor that is so beefed up; you are sure his testicles have shriveled up to the size of peas from excessive steroid use. This assumption is not fully unfounded as you often see him shirtless and he's full of bacne. Your friend used to tease you that you were always cruising him, and in a way you were, but not for sex. You had an insatiable and unacceptable desire to pop all those tiny pimples on his back. There are hundreds. You had purchased many zit popping tools off the internet that would be a joy to rake over that infestation of his. You are sure there is mutual disgust you both have for each other for your individual illegal drug usage. His groans, when he lifts weights, sound like the groans of your gay porn and you both hate each other's respective groans that come through the shared wall. You are sure he refuses to see your excessive masturbation to gay porn as exercise, but that's only because he has no idea how much labor is involved. It is exercise.

When you get home, you realize you failed to plug the phone into the cigarette lighter in the car, so you plug it into an outlet in the bathroom and shower. When you are done the texts arrive from the weekend.

*did you leave*

*I'm waiting for you*

*\$180*

*How much U want*

*Versatile*

*How much longer*

*We are at The Fountainhead*

*Come over*

*what the fuck happened to you?????*

"I'd like to know," you responded to the last one.

You notice a peculiar lack of punctuation in texting among your circle except when using too many question or exclamation marks for affect.

While the texts are clues to what happened, they can be misleading. You respond benignly to them. None of the texts mentioned a VHS tape. That tape now sits atop your television begging to be played. You can't. No VCR. You want to see this tape. You fear this tape.

You scroll through your texts and find an invitation for happy hour that came through midday. It was far too enticing to take the car home and instead you got a share ride. You rushed to happy hour as the sender of the text was a friend who surely had cocaine on him at that moment.

You take that Uber to Mi Barrio because your car is safer overnight at Target than the restaurant, where it surely would get towed. You know this firsthand from having your car towed in the past. In the end, it didn't matter as the desire to get to cocaine was so strong that you were willing to abandon the car and head to Mi Barrio for shredded tongue tacos and margaritas so sour they make you hurl the tacos. This is a repeated problem you have with your favorite restaurant. But the bathrooms are single stalled with a lock on the door, perfect for drug usage, even if the margaritas are sour. You open your bank account on your heavy laptop with a *Postal Service* sticker on it and indeed you spent around fifty bucks at Mi Barrio.

Open up your share ride app and piece together yesterday's map. It is a maddening zig zag around Atlanta that looks like a millipede crawling over the map on your phone. Flashes of images are burning your brain that include a tall, mustached man in really faded Wrangler jeans in a home you've never been to with a brown recliner, Mi Barrio's bathroom, coke dealer who wears Stevie Nicks knockoff lacy clothes, bars but you're not positive which ones since so many have the same stools, and you can only see the images of tall chairs, Kroger, drag queens, and ping pong. It is the man in faded jeans you need to figure out. While you made up the Wrangler jean detail when you retell this story, the mustache is indeed real. You are positive this is the link to the VHS tape.

After Mi Barrio the next ride is to your friend's home in the Virginia Highlands neighborhood who is not the same friend you had shredded tongue

tacos with. This is ping pong friend. Ping Pong is a real friend, not a coke friend. Ping Pong does not do coke. Ping Pong is where you play ping pong and video games. You play ping pong with a two-handed backhand because you have tiny hands. It also distracts people to watch and allows you many free points. Your thirty-ninth birthday party was a ping pong tournament a friend organized, not Ping Pong though.

You weren't picked up at Ping Pong's home but at The Highland Tap hours later. The Tap is your favorite basement restaurant about half a mile from Ping Pong's home. You must have walked there from your friend's house, which is strange since he and his wife are so against you walking places alone since you were mugged not that long ago, but that was in DC not Atlanta you tell them each time they call you a car. The idea of another meal is impossible since you were doing so much coke. You check the bank and the amount spent there is truly a meals worth and then some, but you will safely assume that is booze, lots and lots of booze. The bank account shows many transactions at three restaurant bars in that neighborhood. This is a common technique among drunks to prevent being refused service. Bartenders won't notice your slurry mannerisms until the request for a third. Order two doubles of gin and tonics then move on to the next drinking place. Your bank account shows you hit Surin and George's along with The Tap.

The share ride app shows you were picked up at George's restaurant and taken across town to your place around 7pm. That gives you relief. You aren't the worst pet owner in the world. You were home by dog's dinner time and walk. And you stayed home for a reasonable amount of time. By reasonable you mean enough time to do all your coke, get on *Grindr*, and head back out before midnight.

Uber shows you were picked up at home and taken to your favorite drag bar, Friends on Ponce. It is your favorite

drag bar because the comedy queens are not insult queens. You once walked out of The Armory drag show ten minutes in when the queen called you the illegitimate son of Harry Potter and Rick Moranis. While you freely make fun of yourself, you don't enjoy random drag queens doing this. While you immediately left that night you have appropriated this joke and use it to make fun of yourself often calling yourself Rick Moranis' illegitimate son.

You like Friends on Ponce because you are allowed to walk into the manager's office without even knocking. Not because you are cool, not because you are fun to hang out with, but because you are unassuming and spend large amounts of cash on her coke. The drag queen manager is aging like you. It's as if you are the two last persons standing at the club at closing time. She has injected filler into her cheeks, and it's hardened strangely, but she is kind to you and you have a long history of back room drug use together. This history means she won't cheat you when selling you coke. It's never cut too painfully. She also uses those tiny old glass containers sometimes to sell her coke which makes you feel like you time traveled to the 80s.

You stay at Friends on Ponce for what looks like the length of time for one show and then Uber shows you were taken to across town to the East Atlanta Village. Your dealer there has red hair and a long leather jacket that looks like the one Spike wears on *Buffy the Vampire Slayer*. He hangs out at The Eastside Lounge. Looking at the bank website you spent money at Flatiron and The Earl as well. By 1a.m. the bank receipts show you were back at Eastside Lounge looking for more coke.

Uber shows you made your way to Little 5 Points neighborhood, to Wicca dealer. You are not sure she is actually into Wicca, but she wears black lacy dresses that remind you of Stevie Nicks. Her coke is unpredictable in quality, but she likes you and lets you hang out a lot. You live only a quarter-mile from

## The Blotter

---

her, but around two-thirty in the morning it shows you were taken from her place to an address way outside the perimeter highway. There must have been a really good reason for you to go outside the perimeter (OTP) since you are an ITP (inside the perimeter) kind of guy. There is a divide in Atlanta regarding the perimeter highway I-285. Either you live inside it or not. If you are outside, you are basically a suburbanite and therefore uncool. But this was not your first foray OTP to find sex. But this may be the answer to the mystery of the unmarked VHS tape.

Dick pics. It must be dick pics, so you scroll through your *Grindr* app to see if there are any exchanges longer than the standard formalities of “what’s up?” and “Looking?” There are none. Of course not, you are middle aged, barely acceptable in looks, and not at all in shape. Atlanta *Grindr* is for the opposite of you. Why you won’t delete that app is silly since its lack of activity mocks you when you are on it. This makes you feel old. You are the person who has stayed at the party too long. You have overstayed your cocaine and party presence longer than anyone you showed up to the party with.

You open *Growlr*, a much more acceptable crowd for your place in the gay pecking order. You find dick pics. You scroll through where you move beyond the response to “looking” that then include a large exchange of dick pics and others, then an address that matches the share ride app. You open Google and do a quick search for the address to get both the satellite and street view images. It is way far from the bar you were at, but the dick pic warranted it apparently that night. You message the man on the app and ask what happened. There is a red dot in the corner of his account pic indicating he is not online. You see this was one of the most expensive share rides due to surcharge time and the fact you tipped 100%. This is a common occurrence. You tip generously all the time even

though you have exhausted all of your savings on coke. Years of dishwasher and waiting tables instilled that in you. It’s funny, your friends with far more lucrative careers tip way worse. Perhaps that’s why they have savings accounts, and you have crumpled receipts on your floorboard from cash advancing your AmEx.

You refresh your app an hour later and his dot is green. Probably still cruising for end of the weekend sex.

*I was kind of out of it last night.*

*Did we fuck?*

*Yes*

*Did I fuck you or you fuck me?*

*Yes*

*Which one is it?*

*Both*

*Did we play safe?*

*Yes*

*Cool*

*Don't contact me again*

*Wait. Did I act a fool?*

*Don't contact me again*

*Wife home tonight*

The good thing about this exchange is that men with wives rarely give you trouble. Even if you acted a fool, there is no one for him to gossip to about it. While the downlow man is trouble sexually, he is not trouble socially.

Flashes of images on a living room floor accompany that recliner in your mind. There is a television so large that it must have time traveled to Mustache Man’s home. It is one of those large televisions that were made before flat screens and required four men to deliver it due to the weight. You can see porn on the television in your fuzzy memory, but the most jarring is the sounds you can remember which are of women. Straight porn is a rarity to be playing in the background of your hook ups.

You look at the VHS tape. It’s got no labels and you are sure this came from Mustache Man’s home. You would

love to know how you snuck this out, but try as you might, you cannot force that memory to come forward the way straight groaning porn does. Why do the auditory memories come easier to you than the visual ones?

You make your way to Ping Pong’s Sunday night to avoid looking at the VHS tape on top of your TV. Your dog wants nothing more than to be with you, but you cannot be with yourself alone right now so you leave to avoid the tape and your memory. You take dog with you to play with Ping Pong’s dog.

You want to forget this weekend and all you did. You watch TV at his home and drink a copious amount of beer. Sundays are not a big deal since you have the summer off of work and the days blend together. But you form a plan to watch the tape. You will go to Goodwill and buy a used VCR.

But Monday comes and you are hungover. You don’t leave your bed for two days except to walk the dog and answer the door to collect take out delivery. You masturbate continually during those days because masturbation is such a mentally focused activity it allows you to forget. You are addicted to forgetting what you did last weekend. You are addicted to forgetting what you did ten years ago. You need to forget.

The VHS tape begins to collect a bit of dust over the week. By weeks end you go to Goodwill and buy a used VCR and watch it. You are not on it. But Mustache Man is, and he’s having sex with a woman that you will assume is his wife. He looks like the porn star John Holmes. Tall, skinny, and very 1970s. You are relieved and panicked at once. Grateful you are not on it, but horrified you had sex with someone who lives in the suburbs with a mustache and a wife. You take a pic with your phone of Mustache Man and show it to Ping Pong the next weekend.

“You had sex with him?” Ping Pong asks. “He’s twice your age and three times your height.”

“Yea. According to the *Growlr* app I indeed had sex with him,” you reply.

“Fuck dude, he looks like the cheap version of Burt Reynolds. Wait, no he looks like a roadie for Lynyrd Skynyrd on meth. No. That doesn’t work. He looks like an extra in *Boogie Nights* who wants to be the Burt Reynolds of *Boogie Nights*. No. He looks like John C. Reilly with feathered straight hair from *Boogie Nights*. I think Riley had a Stache in *Boogie Nights*.”

“If you say *Boogie Nights* one more time I’m going to fucking punch you in the face.”

“Well at least he doesn’t look like Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Boogie Nights*. Dude you have to stop taking the Ambien, or at least take in only when you are literally in your own bed with covers on.”

Ping Pong is right, at least you didn’t fuck a guy who looks like Phillip Seymour Hoffman in *Boogie Nights*. He is even more right that this yearlong foray into Ambien is bad. But without it, your catch phrase you steal from him “well at least I didn’t fuck a dude who looked like Philip Seymour Hoffman in *Boogie Nights*,” wouldn’t exist. You exploit that catch phrase for years at dinner parties when retelling your story.

The root cause of all of this is your worst addiction, far more dangerous than cocaine and booze. It’s a desire to forget. Why you want to forget is buried so deep in the recesses of your mind you cannot even recall the events that led to this addiction. In order to excavate that trauma you must rid your addiction to forgetting. The addiction to forgetting through booze and drugs has ingratiated your body so powerfully that you are unsure how to end this and begin the excavation process. Either way, pain will be involved. But what pain are you willing to endure first? The pain of withdrawal from the booze, pills and coke or the pain of figuring out why you desire to forget in the first place. What is your root trauma that got you into this mess in the first place? ❖

## “A Clandestine Affair”

by Dixon Wingrove

My mother came to visit me yesterday, the bitch. It was the first time she’s come since I’ve been in this place. She said she’d been “too scared” and “too guilty” to come before. “You bitch,” I said. “Get the hell out of here.” She said other things, began to drone, her voice a downward *glissando*, slowing, slurring, sloshing, while the orderly tiptiptiptipTIPTIPPED a pen against his thighed clipboard, louder, louder, yelling, the tips, and the clock, the cursed clock, mocking our mortality with its every second, wretched its pedantic shouting and ever-present slipping of sand, tickticktickticktick. The ticks and tips and my mother’s drones echoing and cracking in great swaths of ominous and darkly colored waves. Crashing and breaking in an endless cascade, slipping through and into their own Möbius strip, only to return again, a penumbra more lurid and debased still. And accompanying this glum and dour display, this vitriolic cacophony, this *Götterdämmerung*, the distinct crush of Pearl Jam’s hit song “Black.” Oh!, oh, and I’m spinning. Spinning. Have I ever felt such melancholy and despair? Wretched! I clutched my head in my hands, covered my ears. With nails uncut scratched deep my cochlear canals. Still the dirgelike waves: purples and blues and greens and blacks and browns and grays and pewters. A rank and arabesque patina blooming over pastures once fecund, my life.

Then through the storm, the flood, the maelstrom—panacea, a beacon, a dove, a voice—yes, my mother’s voice, breaking through! Saying something. What? What is it, mother? I’m listening. I’m *here*. Draw me to you! Help your one and only son. Help him to *understand*. Hold him to your breast. Drag me from the mire, mother, and

with your chasuble wipe me clean. Whisper me your soothing matins. Save me, mother, please, save me!

“I am not your mother. Do you hear? I am not your mother.”

I opened my eyes. The clock’s ticking ebbed back to the peripheries of my psyche. I could see, yes, and hear. All of the senses coming together—all five, six, higher senses, eight, nine, ringing, all corroborating this frank confession laid bare here before me: my mother is the doctor. Or, rather, the form which was just my mother has become the doctor. Or the doctor and my mother are one in the same. Pragmatically the thing to be dealt with was the doctor there in front of me.

“I hear you.”

Which was all he needed to hear, we all knew, before he whisked me back to my room. My room, my sanctuary, peaceful and rubbed smooth with habit and lacking totally any sort of vibratory decibel or stimulus for my consciousness to fall prey to. Ah, yes, my soft, sweet room.

Though there is stimulus. There has to be, habit only able so much to assuage the perils of existence. But these things should be accepted, allowed to remain as they are in their relation to myself. Which has been great advice from the doctor, I must admit.

Take for instance this very pencil I’m presently writing *with*, and these paper pages of uttermost secrecy I’m presently writing *on*. These pages here. Of course I accept their existence and the stimulus they provide. I must. Or else how to interact with them? How to utilize their potential to reach you, fellow sufferer? For only you and I know of these things. Only you and I seem attuned to the pencil and the paper and the metaphysics therein, the signs and

## The Blotter

---

symbols being relayed between us and through these pages here like some sort of subaqueous duct by which the leaders of two byzantine and decrepit metropoli might communicate the esoteric and timeless perils of their people and of themselves. These pages here. Feel them.

Only I don't know where they came from, how they appeared nor their conception, their genesis, the paper and this pencil. It's possible a nurse left them for me. There are progressive nurses here who believe in the efficacy of writing and art and expression as a therapeutic mode. Which, to tell the truth, I'm not so sure of myself. It seems like it could lead a brittle mind to turn in on itself, cannibalize and shatter. Break. The ol' broken egg. I've seen men stupid beyond comprehension who could prove the point. Lobotomites and catatonics. Though I really should here admit I'm not so well versed in contemporary psychiatric practices, having read only Freud and Jung and small bits of Lacan and Alpert and a little Adler and Reich, but only insofar as he relates to the great Devo and their orgonic music, and Foucault, most of Foucault, but not much else, no Bandura or Piaget or Pavlov or Vygotsky or James or Briggs or Rogers or Myers or Erikson or Lilly or anyone else of much merit, really. So I guess it could be healthy, this cathartic writing. I don't know—I just don't *know*.

No, in fact, I know where the pencil came from. I stole the pencil. From a woman. A woman called Wanda. Wanda Tinasky, and I stole her pencil and her heart and the story is for another time, some other place. Someplace with soft lights and cheap pictures in gilded frames and patterned wallpaper peeling back at the corners where lilies of mold poetic beyond description eat at the glue holding it all together. And coming from close by, from a room just like ours, the groan of some faceless love, and we might sit on the steel-framed bed, poised and tense,

and together listen solemnly and laugh.

This pencil, this reminder, these papers and sheets and walls and ceiling all so smooth, goddamn it all. Wanda Tinasky, if you ever existed damn you too; and if you didn't, damn you especially. And this paper, this paper is nothing but the empty pages of the Bible, the Bible I stole from the Gideons, and even if they're only three inches by five inches I'll cover them in my scrawl. And if my soul were to take flight and all that was left were the etchings I'd made with this graphite against my floor and walls and body, the skin cut fine and let of blood, if only my perfect words remained I'd be satisfied with my life and its components and exponents and proponents and opponents and every ponent I ever saw. Great swaths of orange and red and pink and fuchsia, Stephen's epiphanic rose alive and spread out before my mind's eye in a boundless kaleidoscope of sartorial vision and peace and bliss. 311's "Amber." Brainstorms, take me away.

Because I stole the pencil so long ago, no one save us knows it's here. Slowly it will rub away, peeled back at the snout by the edge of my nail, snuffed out of this world.

My god, do I hate the doctor, the shapeshifting leperscum shiteating sonofabitch. Each and every day he tells me my mother is dead. He expects this proclamation to bring great joy, relief. His jowls curl up in a radiant-yet-appropriately-somber grin. He waits with bated breath. But I see in his eyes the same as my mother's hatred and cold and I know her omnipotence and lack of mortality. "Do you think there's an unresolved Oedipal complex, sir?" I ask. He slaps me across the face. "Don't talk nonsense to me, boy." And to the nurse, "Get him a suppository."

Though it could be an unresolved Oedipal complex, I'm resolved to the fact. For my father, bless his soul, never even made it to forty-five. What, with his

role in the whole Enron business, hamming up their numbers and all, and just generally prevaricating around until his entire pension was boiled up and gone, he felt it his absolute duty bound honor to perform the ol' harakiri. All while I was still just a boy, and so I never did get the chance to kill him myself. Oh!

Oh, but there he is!, right in front of my face, drifting in and amongst the whorls and cuts of these very characters, these letters here. A great Aramaic vision. The horror! My father! I see his head brought in upon a platter, placed upon the plinth, his eyes old and milky with the bloodletting of the crème de la crème. "Why, my son?" He asks. "Why is it we're here facing the slings rather than dancing with our kin fair and ever peaceful?" But it's my own face there, pock marked and pale, a tonsured and gimcrack monk awaiting another of Fortuna's spins. I can see it now, the fragmentation, the atomized self—total loss, ego death, the whole Leary trip. I'm Herzog'd, Incandenza'd. No questions to ask. Nothing to say, myself eating a peach.

At night I can hear the doctor's voice ordering the nurses about, commanding his duchy with the authority granted him by god and country. The nurses like sixteen-year-old girls too beautiful for their own good, with teeth ready to fall out of their goddamn mouths. Who smoke cigarettes under the bleachers and wrestle with their brothers. Bitches! Every last nurse and doctor and mother I ever had! The door creeps and creaks open and the doctor thinks I'm asleep but I'm not, and he thinks I don't see his beady eyes luminous in the dark but I do! Oh yes, Mr. Doctor, I know you watch me pretend to sleep while you fiddle yourself in the corner, you disgusting snake of a pervert.

They found my writings, the janitors, the sonsobitches. They took it

all and brought me kicking and screaming into the doctor's office and dumped a heap of it on his desk. Meaty and horned hands held me back as I lurched to grab it all. "*Écrasez l'infâme!*" I cried. Oh, a whole mound of my soul spoiled, defiled by the doctor and his men. Reading it, pawing through it. Pantomime of laughter and gesture, their eyes darting about the page, to me and back again. Gum wrappers and cigarette packs and toilet paper and bible pages and newspaper margins and prescription labels and playing cards and paper plates. They won't ever let me have it back. It'll burn in the incinerator. I'll feel the heat in my heart of hearts, the smithy of my soul. I'll ache and cry and thrash about in impotence. Oh, but I will write. I have my pencil—they weren't so thorough as they thought—and from henceforth it will be the most clandestine of affairs, the forging of a new path for my people, naked and caked in ash.

I had today the Vision of all Visions, the Beatific Episode of Enlightenment and Grandeur. There I was, on the doctor's couch, a couch too firm really to sink deep, and then it's there, a great clover of fluctuation and pulse beating against The Void, frames and frames of my soul and the soul of souls, sequences, fragments, ripping by and gone. Great fingers and stamens and caverns and caves and swords and pens, floods and the great archetypes of time forgotten and omniscient, all coalescing and copulating in a nexus of light where they're vomited and shat out again, altered and hemmed, the same arcane and exoteric essence. Oh, and there in the nexus sat I, some great Buddha Christ Krishna Kali, my elephantine head throbbing and seizing, the hairy mole of my face exuding all which came and will come forth, hairs like dendrites and tendrils of a hundred squids washed ashore, with pellucid eyes and beaks of dynamite, the creator and consumer of ohm. Oh and oh and

could it go on forever? Could every moment stretch on and on so as to last into nothingness and thus constitute a flipped coin, a duality, an adequate comparison by which we might understand all? For all time? And from the question, The Questioning, the audacity to ask, the vision *itself*, I heard the call of reality, the great and awesome Tug of Attachment. "Get me some Thorazine, stat!" And my mother was over me, my motherdoctor, the bitch snake of a shapeshifter, hair swarming her pallid and hollow face, lit from behind with a radiant corona like some eternal reredos as she stabbed my arm with her totemic syringe. Sweet ease and soft white and gone.

I was told there was a breakthrough today. It happened during our session, the doctor sitting easily across from me as I lay splayed on the *chaise longue*, deeper and deeper. I was told it came serendipitously, our conversation following the swells of discussion as they came, mining my subconscious for the causes and effects of my foibles and neurosis. The doctor declared it time for my individuation.

"You've never become yourself," he said. "You've been concerned with pleasing others, reaching high-esteem in the eyes of your peers, but never your own." His hand came up, index finger pointed towards the heavens, perspicuous and authoritative. A smile cleaved his face; he was really quite satisfied at having expressed himself so concisely, with such poetry.

Yes! Yes, I declared. It was true. Eager to please, to show I understood what the doctor had said. Please, bring me to my room! You are right, motherdoctor. All my actions, my entire life, lived not for me but for someone else. For you, motherdoctor. For you!

The doctor feigned pity. "What it must be like to live your whole life as a performer, every hour on the stage. I can't even imagine." He shook his head. "We'll make it happen, though. We'll

make you, well, you," he said. "Or I'll be damned."

But the gulf had opened. I was falling deeper still. Whereas before I'd been perched on the cliffside, precarious, to be sure, but perched nonetheless, overlooking those aeonian depths and the darkness I didn't dare plunge, I was now hurtling through the canyon of myself, faster and farther still from the crest of the world. Dovetailing downward. I grabbed. I clawed. Dear reader, did I ever claw! But there was nothing, no frame of reference to hold, no context with which to orient my disintegrating self. Had the doctor any idea the infinite regress he'd punted spiraling through my head? I was inarticulate, writhed on the couch. A series of guttural noises punctuated by the clicking of teeth, a primeval try at communication. "Yes, never the process of individuation. Undoubtedly a latent inferiority complex." At which point I fell to the ground, kicking about in a pain so acute and psychic as to nearly break my body in half. I kicked the coffee table between us over and the glass top shattered and skittered about the floor in a dance of jewels so fine as to not exist at all. The doctor again entered my flesh with his needle and all was calm.

They told me this through the slit in the door, the nurses' mouths pressed tight against it, eager and fighting to tell me about myself, their voices hissing through the room like Furies. I was told the individuation process had begun, they'd started it somehow, kicked it off in my brain. "You sonsofbitches! You touch my brain, I'll bite your face." "Shut your mouth, you dolt, or you'll get the broom." "Give him the broom, Lea, give him the broom. We know you like the broom." "Dear god, not the broom." "I told you to shut your goddamn mouth!" The slate came down hard. The nurses were gone and with them the shadows I had watched dancing on the wall.

The jacket they have me in hurts my sides and makes it hard for me to scratch my nose. How is it then these words are being written? Are they written on the *tabula rasa* of my mind, a mind being rebuilt by the great psychiatric system of America? Or am I yelling them, yelling them so loudly someone outside is forced to take notice, to write them down as feverishly as I get them out? My voice, my words a vessel by which I'm reaching a sympathetic soul. What is it in a story? A life?

My self is not my self. I am told there should be a unified whole, a sense of continuity with which I might make sense of who I am and the world I exist in and as-a-part-of. At the least a monad of identity, without which I'll simply flounder, washed about by the currents of life, unable to find a hold on any of the disparate integrants of my psyche floating there on the top. There is no talk yet of bridgings these integrants, of finding this monad deep in the id.

But perhaps it's not about holding onto anything at all. Perhaps the notion's misguided. Hear this, dear reader, if you hear my words at all. Perhaps instead of treading atop the currents, instead of grabbing the first semblance of self I see floating by, I let myself sink, fall between the gaps and move about without agency, pushed by the currents, below the surface, unmoored and deranged and stupid and holy.

And slipping down, down, I know the alluring effulgence of Self, deep and prepared and immolating. A sugar self, radiant and hot, ubiquitous and poised to lick and subsume and thrum forth. Like a crab I crawl to the fire. I know the doctor is in the room, watching me transform, his many eyes opening and closing against the dark, blinking. My motherdoctor shifting for a final time and like a sigh is gone. White light drawing me into myself, consuming me quark by quark, and when the nurses

come to perform their matutinal duties they'll find nothing save my soiled rags, baked in blood and sweat and cum and shit and piss and all the refuse of existence, and swaddled in their midst these pages, my flesh pressed from the ashes of my flesh, these pages resurrected and spread about like the

seeds of a fir, the last bulwark against the hordes. My soul fired clean in the kiln of my bowels and expelled amongst my people, the unanchored boats of the sea, at last to rock them to sleep. ❖

## 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 September

The hallways are like pipelines of kids. Flow this way. Flowing that. I am just another part of that stream. Or a particle suspended. There's no extra air, just that which we push around and that we inhale and exhale back out again. It is more than musty – it's just short of rank – that odor of feet and old shoes and under-hygienic under-arms and not quite but close to dirty hair and teeth, and the occasional sneak-fart and so on, mixed into the flow of students like a slow liquid. Like melted grease dripping from a stove. If it were canned as a spray, under pressure, given a particular color, it would be instantly recognizable to any parent of teenagers, to any teacher in a high school. I'm sure that of all the aspects of the recent pandemic, they appreciated N-95 masks most of all, despite anything they said to the contrary.

Why are there no windows? Why is the bathroom-style tile four feet off the floor? What sort of heinous splashing are they expecting? A flood of some sort? It seems possible. But not today, just the tide of walking between morning classes, all of the English classes moving one way, the Math in another, the Phys. Ed back-flow clogging up some playfully locked door. No talking, says a teacher at a corner, minding traffic like a plumber. One minute to late bell, says another, a bit further along. The rumble of the pipeline slows at the corner then speeds up again. Not because the teacher said anything. No one would let the teacher have that satisfaction.

Sybil E. - cyberspace

# “Teacher”

by Ricardo E. Rojas

I am lost in life.  
I crave a good direction.  
Teacher can help me.

In isolation,  
at the base of a mountain,  
Teacher welcomes me.

I explain myself.  
I will do what Teacher says.  
I await orders.

A wagon appears.  
I must move this heavy thing  
to the mountaintop.

But there is no horse,  
so I put on the harness  
and pull like a mule.

Soon after I start,  
I feel a jolt behind me;  
the load is lighter.

I quickly look back;  
Teacher is now behind me  
pushing the wagon.

A flat place appears,  
so we secure the wagon  
and take a short rest.

Teacher then explains  
that I must bear such burdens  
as long as I live.

But no rule decrees  
that I must bear them alone;  
Teacher can help me.

This news comforts me  
as we resume the journey  
up the mountainside.

With help from Teacher,  
I carry burdens with peace  
for all of my days.

## "As You When"

By Harris Coverley

raise your hands  
raise your voice  
raise a shed under a lake blue sky

you can move between the trees  
you can love and chuckle at their roots  
you can eat the last marshmallow  
you can play a ukulele with a single untuned string

put on your good shoes  
take them off again  
and put on your old ragged slippers

read that book you always wanted to read  
tell the dog to get on the bed  
set the alarm clock to 1 pm  
pull the sheets over your head

dream whatever your hippocampus will allow you to

feel everything you want to feel  
and let that initial queasiness  
set at the sides of your latissimus dorsi  
slide away  
down the slope  
out of it all  
into the black

and don't forget to dream

you always forget to dream my lad.

## Contributors:

**Edward Jackson** has published works in a variety of publications including *The Louisville Review*, *The Pennsylvania Literary Journal*, *The Gay & Lesbian Review*, and *School Library Journal*. He holds degrees in English, Education, and Information Science from WMU, UGA, and YSU. Currently he is researching LGBTQIA+ book banning in school libraries at the University of Pittsburgh. He lives in western PA with his husband.

**Dixon Wingrove** is a member of the Creative Writing Workshop at the University of New Orleans. He weighs 138 pounds soaking wet, but can read almost a page a minute. When he isn't writing or reading, he is watching TV, mostly syndicated episodes of *King of The Hill*. His work has previously appeared here in *The Blotter*.

**Ricardo E. Rojas** is an Associate Professor of Mathematics at Northern State University in Aberdeen, South Dakota. He has a peer-reviewed article published in *The College Mathematics Journal*. He regularly posts his haiku and short stories on <https://oldruinsoldtales.wordpress.com/>, a website that he created in May 2020. "Teacher" is his first published poem; he is grateful that *The Blotter* helped to make this happen.

**Harris Coverley** has had short fiction in *Curiosities*, *Hypnos*, *The Periodical*, *Forlorn*, and *Rivanna Review*, amongst many others. A former Rhysling nominee, he also has had verse in *Polu Texni*, *Star\*Line*, *Spectral Realms*, *Scifaikuest*, *Tales from the Moonlit Path*, *Novel Noctule*, *Corvus Review*, *View From Atlantis*, *Yellow Mama*, and elsewhere. He lives in Manchester, England.

# ARI

# PAPPALARDO

## MINSTREL CLASS

“An eclectic fusion of indie-rock, pop, and jazz elements packed with lyrics about topics such as unrequited love, voodoo, ghosting, loss of innocence, and regret. There’s an enticing interior spark to Ari Pappalardo’s music; residual energy that lures listeners in by means of emotional authenticity.” — *V13*



**DEBUT ALBUM  
AVAILABLE ONLINE  
EVERYWHERE!**

