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# The Blotter

magazine



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

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## “A day in the life”

Of *course* hot coffee in July. Don't even start with me. This is the definition of dexterity: I can fill the coffee pot with water from the tap without looking at the fill-line on the side of the pot. Eight cups exactly, based on the weight in my hand.

The day begins so early, a rapture of robins and mockingbirds vying for my auditory attention barely after false-dawn. Those moments when daylight wants to peer over its coverlet of clouds but then slips back to sleep. Who can tell the sun what it is supposed to do? I pad downstairs, boot my computer, push yesterday's scrap paper into the recycling bag, strap on my wristwatch, find today's ball-cap. The Mudcats. They're having a rough season. When your pitchers are your parent club's, nothing is certain, nothing reliable. You are a teacher in the third grade, thinking "this child is something, something..." but you will never see the results of that potential, never get to catch that fireball in your own glove.

Take the reader off of its charger. Flip to the most recently achieved page of "Moby Dick." Carry it out to the porch. Wish again that there was a chaise lounge out here, one with the nice cloth cushions that have to be brought in so they don't get mildewed, and best conform to my lumpiness. Go back for the coffee, set the cup on the little table with the citronella lamp – not necessary at this time of day. Cars go by, people heading for the office, to the grocery store for milk or fresh muffins or some-such. I'm not one of them. I'm reading a book I should have read *in toto* back when I was a shirt-tail lad, but, like so many things, it slipped past me (time and the book) while I was doing other stuff. Now I am of an age where the languorous pace of the prose, the attention to detail, the 'splanation of every little thing to the most absurd length and degree, pleases me greatly. I am in no hurry to finish this yarn (which I know, or think I do, already.) When I finish it, sometime this summer, I will pull another dusty volume off the shelf (1001 Arabian Nights? Jane Eyre? War and Peace? Dubliners?) and plow those fields.

Observation: we hand out reading to youth like punishment. No wonder they don't enjoy it. The world is full of things we do, and things we don't. Reading shouldn't end up one of those things we don't do. Our humanity is in what we think, and how we act based on our thoughts. We are an assembly of event fibers, stretched into threads, spun into skeins of yarns and then woven into the cloth of us. Those yarns are stories, things we've done and said and heard, and read.

My girls are well into their busy days by the time I come back inside looking for food. The kitchen is quiet, except for the click and hiss of the dry cycle of the dishwasher. Anything in the fridge? This and that, poke and hope. Yes, I am no hunter nor gatherer. If it is not fairly readily available, I won't find it, and it won't get eaten. On the other hand, if peanut butter were a wild beast, I would be a tribal elder. I'm not sure exactly what I mean, either.

To the computer, patiently waiting for my password to launch. Do I want to go to the point in the document where I left off last night? How nice of you to ask, inanimate application. Very kind. Now the magic begins – scribbling, editing, layout, art selection, looking at yesterday's baseball scores, reading notes,

correcting spelling errors, sipping cold coffee, staring at maps. I'll bet this is how William Faulkner spent his mornings.

I have a small garden growing in the window behind my desk. It is the best place for summer afternoon sun. Succulents, begonias, a coffee-arabica bush in a glazed-clay bowl also containing a small carving of the elephant-headed deity Ganesha. I have read that it is Ganesha who is the bringer of wisdom, good luck and success. Who doesn't want those? But it is also my understanding that Ganesha is lord of obstacles, so that paying him respect may help one overcome... technical difficulties. It seems to me, therefore, that Ganesha is in charge of breaking writer's block. So he gets a place of honor in the shade beneath the lush leaves of my coffee plant.

I am wearing one of those wristwatches that tells me how much I walk and analyzes my sleep-cycles. It is also good for telling the time, I suppose, but who cares? It's a bit strange, somewhat Pavlovian, to have instructions for stopping what you are doing to do something else, even a suggestion so basic as "get up and walk around for 250 steps, please." I am a good student. I save my file, take off my glasses, and walk around the house. Some days I fetch a trash-bag and empty the cans around the house. Yes, yes, I know! Please forward my Nobel prize to the mailing address on the inside cover of this magazine.

At first I didn't like being interrupted when I'm writing. My schedule used to be that I had between 9 PM and midnight to get my work done. Now that the girls are pretty self-sufficient, I have re-captured the daylight hours like MacArthur at Inchon. You know what I mean, with inferior equipment, some problems with the tides and possible loss of the element of surprise.

The neighbor's dogs are barking at the neighbors' dogs. This used to bother me, but now I've become as used to it as I have to the cuckoo clock on the wall (although the half-hourly hooting has been disabled) or the yard-men with leaf-blowers and weed-eaters.

Writer's tip: don't let noise, or the lack thereof, be a reason you can't concentrate on the creative process. I had a roommate in college who stayed up all night and slept in the afternoons. He dipped snuff and left the... expectorant in dixie cups around the room. At first it was the sound of him spitting, every seventy-five seconds or so, that kept me awake at night. I asked him to be more or less regular about it, to no avail. So I just... turned it off. And he stopped making that noise in the room at night. Also one morning I accidentally tipped over a couple of tobacco spicups onto his Calculus notes, so that might have had something to do with it. Anyhow, you don't control the world's noise, nor do you really want to poke out your eardrums with your number 2 Berol Black Warrior, so the best thing to do is work through the problem until it isn't one. The same rules apply to social media and checking your email.

Well, I don't have a set list for this concert, but I think I'm about done, and I'll bet you could use a break, too. I've been mulling over a sentence that recently formed out of the storm and fog of my mind, and offer it up to you as a last bit of advice: Life can be either a train wreck or a train robbery, and it's up to you whether or not you're the drunk engineer or the Sundance Kid.

Good luck with that one. *Namaste.* **Garry - [chief@blotterrag.com](mailto:chief@blotterrag.com)**

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in the Great State of Georgia!



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CAUTION

*Try and set the night*

## “Backwoods Smartphone Kiss”

by John Tavares

The British Airways flight attendant, who worked several years ago as a substitute teacher, recognized me, served me biscuits, almonds, and black tea, and stopped to chat when I told her I was emigrating to Canada.

“My mother thought I was making a mistake moving to Northern Ontario, taking a job as a school principal in Beaverbrook. She urged me to stay home in London and accept the position as headmaster at a small private school for exceptional students in Chelsea.”

As I read work related documents, recent school board meeting minutes and the new course curriculum, I flew economy class from London to Toronto aboard a 777 jet, which the smiling flight attendant, with perfect, straight, shiny teeth and immaculate grooming, told me was on its maiden airline voyage across the Atlantic. From the airport terminal at Pearson International Airport, I hurried to franchise cafes and takeout kiosks, seeking the best cup of black tea I could find, before I passed through security gates and checkpoints, airport lounges, flight boarding, and passenger waiting areas. Meanwhile, habitually and repetitively opening and closing my foldable cellphone, I fielded concerned calls from my mother. Before I left, my mother tried to give me a refurbished Apple smartphone, but I didn't want the fancy apps, the super clear video screen, the gadgetry, the video camera, and the wireless earbuds of a “fancy” iPhone. I didn't even want a cellphone, period, but my work as an education administrator demanded I have a mobile phone for communications so I opted for the sparest, lean-

est, toughest, and least expensive form of technology available, a basic prepaid flip phone.

I explained to my mother, as I tried to control myself from getting exasperated at her declining memory and her tendency to repeat herself, in her advanced age, I cherished and appreciated life as a single man, as I also enjoyed travel and adventure, particularly if it involved my career as an educator. Single all my life, I was happy with my lifestyle choices and relationships, or lack thereof.

When I took a Porter Airlines regional turboprop flight to Thunder Bay, I found myself sitting a few rows aft from a tall, thin distinctive looking man, with a clean-shaven head, whom I later recognized as Eaglerock. He kept giving me this fierce and intimidating look, as he talked animatedly with a fellow passenger. I thought he looked Spanish or Portuguese, for some peculiar reason, possibly because I vacationed there during holiday breaks, as I overheard him saying he was also a school teacher, returning from the Pride Week parades and festivities in Toronto. Then I rode a bush plane through turbulent summer weather to Northwestern Ontario, across the aisle from the same individual, who glared at me as he read the Pride rainbow edition of *NOW Magazine*.

My landlady, with whom I had already spoken several times long distance from England, knew in advance I was new to the town of Beaverbrook. When she heard and saw in the living flesh I was indeed English, from London, England, and the new principal of the Lost Lake High School, she waived my damage deposit and even

insisted on returning last month's rent, which I offered in cash, without requesting a receipt. She even offered me the use of her Honda Civic, rusty, dented, with a cracked rear windshield, but she said she hardly drove the car any longer.

Ms. Jones said she retired from teaching a decade ago, after a career that spanned three decades. When she insisted on knowing more about me, I explained I was born and raised in Knightsbridge, but didn't mention my privileged and wealthy mother, daughter of the heir to a marine insurance agency. She worried aloud I was the most eccentric man she ever knew, and I was her only offspring, a fact of which she seemed sometimes ashamed at parties and dinners.

“You're from Knightsbridge, as in the Knightsbridge of The Rolling Stones' song “Play with Fire.”

“Yes, you know the lyrics.”

“I still have the original vinyl album. The Rolling Stones' *Hot Rocks* was my favourite collection, but I've must have played the records forever. Would you like to hear?”

Before I could reply, she returned from her living room and a shelving unit, which held a bookcase, with hardcover and paperback books, record albums, compact discs, and a shiny vintage high-end stereo system. She proudly handed to me, encased and sheathed in a protective plastic covering, the double album *The Rolling Stones Hot Rocks*. She pulled out the first album, which contained “Play with Fire,” and was ready to play song on the vinyl LP on her turntable, but I warned I heard the album many times. I didn't tell her I literally bumped into The Rolling Stones frontman whilst shopping for a Christmas present for my mother in Harrods department store, but, while Jagger laughed off the clumsy encounter, a member of his entourage took exception and pushed me away. She said she intended on keeping the album in her collection in mint condition and



had even recorded copies of the album on cassette and then a blank compact disc. She said her mother bought her the album at the Hudson's Bay Store on Front Street in the neighbouring town, Sioux Lookout, in 1972, along with a portable turntable, while she was waiting to catch a CN passenger train to the Lakehead. Her mother, who hated travel, visited her in Thunder Bay, where, after her first year of teacher's college, she was a patient, suffering from depression, in the Lakehead Psychiatric Hospital. Jones said a nurse told her she held the record for having received the most electroconvulsive treatments in the psychiatric hospital.

The staff allowed her to listen to the album and the music helped lift the depression she suffered. She didn't know if the depression lifted spontaneously as she repeatedly listened to the album or if it was a result of listening to the album, but, aside from being her favourite collection, the Rolling Stones held a special spot in her heart ever since. I didn't want to make light of her past condition or personal history, but it seemed as if a moment of levity was required.

"Well, I guess we're dating ourselves," I said, adding with a chuckle The Rolling Stones' *Hots Rocks* was actually not an original studio album but a greatest hits collection released in the early seventies.

"You don't need to get pedantic; I know my pop music history," Jones said.

After unpacking and settling down, I decided to take advantage of the scenery, and some of the more endearing aspects of the Canadian Shield landscape, including the scenic beaches, fringed by evergreen forests, and the fresh water in the boundless lakes and rivers. As I drove around the streets around the high school and downtown and along the highway, I saw the town of Beaverbrook and the neighboring town of Sioux Lookout in some respects resembled a reserva-

tion. I was beginning to wonder if I made a wise choice in accepting the position of principal of the high school. Jones joked I was hired because the high school was desperate for personnel.

That hot, humid Sunday afternoon I sauntered down to the beach. I wore my thong and sandals and the strongest sunblock I could buy in the drugstore downtown. The weather turned cloudy and humid, and thunderstorms billowed and towered, lurking on the horizon. The beach was beautiful, fringed with huge towering white pine trees.

My landlady recommended the spot on the lake, which she called MNR beach and was surrounded by tall, majestic white and red pine trees, near a forest fire fighting base, with a helicopter landing pad, a communications centre, warehouses, and dormitories. She said she last visited the beach decades ago, when she was a young woman, but among all the beaches, including vacation resorts in Mexico and Cuba, this beach still ranked as one of her favourites. I thought I could understand why after I saw the scenery, a serene Canadian Shield lake, surrounded by countless miles of rocks and forests. Still, I was an avid reader and brought along Dicken's *Great Expectations*.

As I sat on the beach towel, reading the novel, I thought the text was remarkably prolix, but reading in the age of the Internet, email, and instant messaging neutered one's literary tastes and style. I supposed I could blame the Internet for becoming moribund intellectually, for affecting a breezy style in my writing and taste for prose.

I stretched out on the beach towel, applying suntan lotion. As I glanced up, I thought I saw Eaglerock, the geography teacher, whom I met at a professional development meeting held by the school board in the neighboring community of Sioux Lookout. That couldn't be Mr. Eaglerock, I

thought, when I saw him with a much younger person, but who else could the person be since this man, like Eaglerock, had a bald head and was remarkably tall and thin.

The young man with whom he was socializing or romanticizing couldn't have been more than eighteen. Further complicating matters for me was the fact Eaglerock's younger companion appeared indigenous, and I started to worry. Then I saw Eaglerock bend across the beach sand and a towel and plant a kiss firmly on his lips, as he held up his smartphone and captured the image for posterity.

Uh-oh. I had to pretend I didn't see that exchange, that gesture, that overt sign of affection, or however I wished to describe what I construed as blurring beyond the bounds of indiscretion into moral corruption. I wasn't certain I understood the kiss' meaning or significance, or indeed if it was even a kiss, but one didn't believe it was a kiss they were in denial. The kiss, moreover, was not a mere peck on the cheek but a romantic caress, the stuff of lovers, a full throated, prolonged kiss on the mouth, and apparently the man was bold enough to record his transgression on smartphone. It was none of my business, I mused momentarily, as I applied to apply sunblock and took a drink of sugar free cola from a can in the beer cooler.

When I saw an Ontario Provincial Police cruiser turn at the roadway to the beach the officer scowled. The officer stepped out of his cruiser and glanced down the beach, with his cold stare. I thought I recognized him as a part-time school board trustee, but, from behind the uniform, baseball cap, and sunglasses, he certainly didn't appear to recognize me. Then he stepped back inside the black and white police cruiser and drove off. The teenager—at least I thought the young man was a teenager—quickly got up from his towel, and the geography

## The Blotter

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teacher threw on capri pants and a T-shirt. They departed in a Mini Cooper convertible with the roof down, a car which almost made me feel like I was back in England. This was a more unusual and peculiar situation, I thought, but possibly to be expected in a small town in northwestern Ontario.

I continued to read, and swam far in the lake, admiring the warmth of the water, compared with the coolness I experienced when daring enough to swim at Brighton Beach. Then I towed down and walked along the shore. Where Eaglerock lounged with his friend, I came across an open backpack filled with an unopened bottle of wine and an empty bottle of Crown Royal Northern Harvest Rye. There was also a smartphone on the sand beside a driftwood, a tree stump, and a backpack.

I assumed the pair had consumed too much liquor, panicked when they saw the police officer, then left in a hurry, and forgot the empties, including a can of craft beer, and booze. I took the phone and the backpack to my beach towel and examined the bottle of wine inside the backpack. I enjoyed and appreciated the taste of the wine, a Bordello Meritage Blend, a wine made by The Dirty Laundry Vineyard in the Okanagan. There were even oxycodone painkillers in the backpack as well. I realized this medication might relieve the symptoms of kidney stones I was experiencing recently. Besides, I was open to psychological adventure with the passage of time and maturation. I took a painkiller and sampled the wine. I continued to read the Dickens, as the heat of the summer continued unabated into the August evening. Within an hour, I felt a buzz, mildly euphoric.

As the sun settled beneath the horizon of the lake and forests, and I had difficulty reading for lack of light, I thought that maybe the time had arrived for me to purchase an e-book

reader, with a lit back screen, and I decided I better return home to my meddlesome and intrusive landlady. I packed the smartphone and the backpack and got in Ms. Jones' Honda Civic. I drove into town from the gravel road to the beach and then along the highway and found myself trailed by an OPP cruiser.

I started to worry about the fact I consumed a fair amount of alcoholic beverages, a whole bottle of wine. The police officer put on her siren and flashers. She pulled me over and asked if I had anything to drink. I said I earlier drank a few ounces of liquor. The police officer explained she wanted to give me a breathalyzer. I failed the portable breathalyzer, but the police officer decided to give me a break because she recognized me. I thanked the officer and drove promptly and directly home as directed. I was beginning to think coming to this town to act as a high school principal was a mistake.

I was even tempted to hand the backpack and smartphone over to the police officer, but I figured I knew the identity of the owner of the backpack. Besides, I didn't want to complicate matters for anybody. I went home to the basement I rented and fell fast asleep on the couch. When I awoke in the morning, it was six am. I showered, shaved, and then went for coffee. Early in the morning, I walked into the empty high school and glanced at the group graduation portraits of the students and teachers hanging on the walls outside the administration and attendance monitor and guidance counsellor's offices.

I even recognized the young man, Wesley, who had just graduated at the end of the spring semester. I noticed he was wearing traditional indigenous dress and was holding an eagle feather in his graduation portrait, which caused me trepidation and concern because it was my understanding to hold an eagle feather was

a significant honour. Then I finished some paperwork, took my laptop beneath my arm, and decided I would resume my work at the coffeeshop. When I arrived back at home in the basement, I discovered my landlady in hysterics.

"You need to go to the authorities," she insisted. "You need to go to the police. This man is a pervert."

"What are you talking about?"

"Just look at the pictures of this man on the cellphone. He's kissing this boy."

"Ms. Jones, what are you doing on that cellphone? I was going to return it to the owner."

"And I knew it wasn't yours because you told me you hate smartphones—"

"I said I don't use or need smartphones, with their apps and videos and cameras. I didn't say I hate smartphones."

"But that's how I knew it wasn't your cellphone—you've an old-fashioned flip-phone, the kind that folds. That's why I checked to see who owned it, and how do you check? You look at the pictures."

"Ms. Jones, you need to respect people's privacy and mind your own business."

"You need to call the police."

"Ms. Jones, I can handle this matter personally—and professionally. I will talk to Mr. Eaglerock and get this matter sorted through and figured out."

"These pictures are horrible, simply unspeakable. Look at them," Jones said, holding the smartphone screen towards me. "I don't need to see the pictures, Ms. Jones. I'll speak to Mr. Eaglerock about his smartphone, and see if I can obtain a satisfactory resolution."

"No, you need to take action."

"Then I'll take action," I said, trying to sound more committal, in a matter for which I had little conviction or certainty.

I began to think I made a mistake moving from England to take a job as a principal at a high school in Northwestern Ontario. Now I felt encompassed by a scandal with the potential to destroy my career; so I considered the most prudent move was to discreetly ignore my own observations. I took the backpack and the smartphone and returned to the beach where I originally found these personal belongings, which, I realized, in hindsight, I had no business disturbing, however positive and constructive my intentions.

I resumed reading *Great Expectations* by Charles Dickens. I thought of tossing Mr. Eaglerock's smartphone into the lake and tossing the backpack into the bushes, but my landlady insisted on punitive retribution, so I needed to alert him and reassure her I acted. She warned she even took photographs of the images with her own smartphone. How crazily redundant did these selfies and this smartphone picture taking get?

I read the novel until the sunset. Hot, sweaty, and humid, I decided to take a swim in the cool lake and then, shivering, drove home and took a warm shower. In the morning, I finally found my cellphone and called the geography teacher.

"Yes, Mr. Eaglerock, I'd like to have the opportunity to speak with you. Yes, I'm the new principal of Lost Lake High School."

We agreed to meet at the Country Style Coffee & Donuts restaurant at nine pm. I took my thong, towel, beach towel, sunblock, and sugar free carbonated drinks into Ms. Jones' Honda Civic and drove down to the beach. I finished *Great Expectations* after a swim. As the hot sunny day continued to burn my fair skin and bleach my blonde hair, I moved to the shade of tall red pines along the shoreline and decided to read *Oliver Twist*.

By the time the sun set beneath the horizon of pine, Douglas fir, and

spruce trees and the winding lake, I realized that the foreboding time for what I anticipated as an edgy meeting with Eaglerock arrived. Having taken along the backpack and the smartphone, I drove through an evening summer drizzle to the café at the edge of town.

"Mr. Eaglerock, I have your smartphone." I could see Eaglerock grow angry, as his muscles tensed and his face became suffused with redness at the mention of his mobile phone.

"Well, could I please have *my phone* returned?"

"You forgot *your phone* at the beach last Sunday. I should have left the cursed device stuck in the sand."

"Yes, thank you for finding and returning *my private property*," Mr. Eaglerock said. He turned on the smartphone, which Jones fully charged for her perusal, and immediately checked for e-mails and text messages.

"Mr. Eaglerock, you need to end this relationship with this young man."

"If you're talking about my friendship with Wesley, it's none of your business. I've been a geography teacher at the Lost Lake High School for the past twenty-five years—since I was twenty-two. You can't tell me with whom I can or cannot associate."

"Mr. Eaglerock, the times have changed. A high school teacher, even off duty, is expected to conduct himself in a certain manner."

"My friendships are my own personal and private business. I'll not have a carpetbagger, who sounds like a hoity toity BBC announcer, tell me who I can have for friends."

"Your friend is young."

"My so-called friend is eighteen years old. I've known Wesley since he was a senior. He's a disabled learner, but he's determined and dogged—traits I've always admired: his perseverance and persistence. He was born with Fetal Alcohol Syndrome, but despite suffering that condition and attention deficit disorder, he managed to graduate with his Ontario

Secondary School Diploma."

"Yes, he's still a student, and therein lies the complication, the source of concern."

"Wesley just graduated from Lost Lake High, but he's a mature student and plans to return come fall to obtain a few academic credits and raise his grade point average. He hopes to improve his odds for admission to a trades program in the college of his choice. He dreams of welding pipelines in the oil sands. You're just starting your job as principal, so how do you even know he's a student?"

I was uncertain I had the authority to inquire, but I was sufficiently concerned and bluffed. "I checked his students records online, as easy as the push of a button."

"Are you even authorized to see his academic records?"

"At age eighteen I'd hardly say he's mature. I looked at the figures for the demographics of the student body, and he'd hardly be the oldest student."

"Sounds like you're into profiling."

"Mr. Eaglerock, I've been a high school teacher in the UK for twenty years. I worked for an investment bank for a decade before I switched careers. You can't expect me to be naïve."

"You sound like a prude, Mr. Woodbridge, and you need to be careful about the personal lives of your teachers. It might come back to bite you."

"Are you trying to threaten me, Mr. Eaglerock?"

"Mr. Woodbridge, I'd like to remind you I'm First Nations, Anishinaabe. My mother is Ojibwe, from Lac Seul, and I never met my father, who, my grandfather informed me, was an American tourist outfitter who took advantage of her and got her drunk when she visited a bar in Sioux Lookout. I consider myself indigenous, Anishinaabe, not English, not hyphenated-Canadian, and, in fact, I am a band member of Lac Seul First



Nation.”

“I don’t necessarily understand what that’s supposed to mean.”

“I don’t subscribe to the white man’s code of justice. Do I look like a white man to you?”

“Why aren’t you teaching at the reservation school?”

“Because the public high schools in Sioux Lookout and Beaverbrook were the first places to hire me after I graduated from teacher’s college.”

“Mr. Eaglerock, need I remind you have little moral authority on this issue? Whether legal or not, Ms. Jones snapped photos of the pictures on your own smartphone with her smartphone.”

Eaglerock’s hand trembled—I sensed from more anger than fear—spilling coffee on the table. He wiped the splash and small puddle of coffee with paper napkins.

“I don’t really like these smartphones, Mr. Eaglerock. I have a cell phone, not a smartphone—I use because it’s convenient but it bothers me at all hours. Now I’m very bothered. I haven’t looked myself at these pictures and I have no intention of looking because gentleman do not read other people’s mail, but Ms. Jones—”

“You mean Miss Electroshock, the eccentric retired home economics teacher. She told her ECT story so many times in her accounting class she was asked to stop.”

“I’d say her story’s inspirational; it sounds as if she overcame some real adversity in early life.”

“She even got reprimanded for playing The Rolling Stones in her accounting and business machines class. Apparently, a pair of Pentecostal parents were less than enamoured with her Rolling Stones songs.”

I raised my brow in consternation and looked around for a server for another coffee, but was reminded again Country Style Coffee & Donuts was a self-service restaurant. “With her

liberal standards, unfortunately, Ms. Jones sounded sufficiently scandalized and shocked. She is an alarmist, but I suppose her opinions would hold weight with the average parent, teacher, or trustee who attends a school board meeting.”

Eaglerock pounded the table in exasperation.

“You must end your relationship with this young man immediately. Then you must consider what you will do with this smartphone. You must exercise careful and prudent judgement and do whatever you consider best for your students and yourself. I do not consider you a predator or a danger to students, but—”

Eaglerock punched edge of the table and his knuckle bled.

“Show some self-control, Mr. Eaglerock. Appearances and perceptions matter and the times have changed. These days even more is expected from our teachers, whom, I’ll be first to admit, are overworked and overburdened. I hope you understand my concerns.”

I sensed the antagonism Eaglerock exhibited earlier was diminishing as he seethed and sighed. “Mr. Eaglerock, you must understand it is not only your career at risk, but mine as well when it has barely started at LLHS in Northwestern Ontario. I moved all the way from England to take this job, but now I must deal with a potential scandal. I realize now I may have made a huge mistake—which may torpedo my career.”

Eaglerock quickly ordered a take-out coffee, drained the last of his cappuccino from the paper cup, and then stood up to toss his napkins in the wastebasket.

“I never meant anyone any harm or intended for anyone to lose their job.”

“You do appear to have been a bit reckless, and that may be the unintended consequences of your actions.”

“Usually, I’m careful, but I think I

had a little too much to drink that afternoon. My mother passed a few months ago, so I’ve been using liquor as a coping mechanism.”

“Which reminds me.”

I reached beneath the chair and passed him the backpack. I mentioned nothing about how the alcoholic beverage discovered therein on that occasion complemented the oxycontin. I asked him to please sit down, but he insisted on standing, though he listened carefully and looked me directly in the eye for the first time.

“When I first graduated from the London School of Economics, I worked for a decade in London financial district in investments, the bond and stock markets. Those were go-go years: deregulation, privatization, the tech boom and bubble, the commodities boom, takeovers, mergers, profitable times for brokers and traders. There was plenty of money to be made for those willing to roll up their sleeves and work the phones and trading desks and computer terminals. I loved my job: I was a natural; the work felt like a perfect fit for my interests and aspirations. And, yes, did I say I loved my job? I was a trader, but I discovered traders could be greedy, ambitious, pushed the envelope, and went over the line. Some could be corrupt and took shortcuts or actions plainly unethical or immoral or downright illegal, in selfish disregard of the clients’ best interests. I decided to report them to my supervisors and the regulatory agencies. Even though I did the right thing, I was considered a whistleblower and a rat. I was denounced by my employers and fired on some trumped pretext, even though they agreed I had done the right thing and a good job, and they liked my work, and saved my firm plenty of money in losses and potential losses. But I committed the cardinal sin of exposing the weaknesses in the business, including in oversight. So I could never work for the compa-



ny or in that industry again, when it was work I loved and which I thought suited me better than any other job. Please don't put me in that position again—not in the field of education. I don't like teaching and education as much as the investment business, which was the best job in my life, but it's adequate, thank you very much.”

Earlier, Eaglerock appeared aggressive and confrontation in our discussion, at the start of our meeting, but that hostility appears to have dissipated and abated. He no longer appeared as hostile. “I think I understand.” He took the cellphone in his shaky hand. “Whatever you do be careful with that cellphone.”

“Yes. I understand.”

Eaglerock thanked me for returning his backpack and smartphone and left the coffeeshop; it was already past midnight. I returned home to my apartment in the basement of Ms. Jones' house near the high school. While I stayed up very late reading in a reclining chair, my mother called from London, where it was morning. I explained to mother I thought that, at the very least, as I examined my socks for signs of wear and tear and neatly folded my khaki trousers and oxford shirt on my bed, I needed to find a new apartment, if I didn't return to London anytime soon and take a job at that Chelsea private school, or even move to Toronto and accept a position from a friend who held dual citizenship and worked for Upper Canada College and offered me a teaching position at that prestigious boarding school. But I also thought I should consider resigning from Lost Lake High School.

“You moved all the way from England to take a job as a headmaster in the Canadian backwoods and now you want to quit?”

I told her there were four weeks left in the summer before the fall semester of the high school started. I thought this period of adjustment

would provide me sufficient time to whether I should stay in Beaverbrook. Finally, I managed to calm my mother down before she suffered a myocardial infarction or a cerebral hemorrhage and managed to turn off and flip to a close the cellphone before the battery died in mid conversation. She worried I hung up the telephone on her in annoyance and she started calling back nonstop in a panic.

As the summer ended, when it was sunny and hot, I put in my hours at the principal's office, reviewing policies and procedures manuals, directives and guidelines from the Ontario Ministry of Education, and revision to core course curriculums. Then I drove to the beach and continued to read Dickens on my beach towel and blanket stretched across the smooth sand of the shoreline. When it was cool or rainy, I did high school paperwork, examined prospective teachers' resumes, sat in on a few interviews and meetings for a replacement for the guidance counsellor, large with her pregnancy, would be leaving shortly on maternity leave, faxed orders for office supplies, and supervised classroom moves. Then, after I found an excuse to leave the principal's office, I went to the high school library and read back issues of the local community newspaper and news-magazines.

In the evenings, I went to Country Style Coffee & Donuts and read the *Chronicle of Higher Education* newspaper and *Canadian Teacher* magazine, read and composed school board memos and e-mails to administration staff, teachers, and even a few school board trustees and concerned parents.

One evening, when I went to the Country Style Coffee & Donuts, I heard some odd gossip and chatter in the background and heard Eaglerock's name mentioned. Then I saw the Thunder Bay *Chronicle Journal*, and my restless, wandering eyes, wary and

wary of school business, caught a compelling headline in the section of the newspaper filled with regional news—news the local paper hadn't reported because it came out once weekly and tended to gloss over bad news, or report bad news cursorily, or focused on banal, bland news, which advertisers, I guessed, preferred as layout borders for their wares, offerings, and services. Mr. Eaglerock had been found dead in his house. The police were investigating, and, although his death was not suspicious, they hadn't ruled out foul play. When I returned in the evening, I left the newspaper on the kitchen table for Ms. Jones. When I woke in the morning, Ms. Jones greeted me.

“Have you heard the news?”

I grunted my assent as I toasted sliced bread.

She turned from washing dishes at the kitchen sink. “He did the right thing.”

“Why do you think so?”

“If the boy killed him, he did the right thing, too.”

“How do you know?”

“He was a pervert, and it looks as if he died the death of a pervert.”

I didn't know what to say to Ms. Jones, but I realized, while I possessed one less future potential problem with which to cope and further, I had new problems, such as finding a new geography teacher, willing to work on such short notice and to move to the north, where he or she might experience social isolation and hardship finding suitable housing or accommodation, a few weeks before the start of the fall semester and a new school year. Yes, the new geography teacher would require a place to live, and I wasn't certain I could recommend Ms. Jones. I also sent e-mails to the vice-principal and guidance counsellors, exhorting them to refer anyone suffering or in distress to professional help, from the school nurse or hospital mental health counsellors and psychologists. I also

urged them to render assistance to any students, or teachers in dealing with any potential crisis after Eaglerock's untimely passing. Finally, I gasped and sighed and decided to stay in Beaverbrook but give Ms. Jones notice. In four weeks, I intended to move out of this house and into my own apartment. Ms. Jones could find a new tenant and live whatever life she preferred. ❖

### 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.

[mermaid@blotterrag.com](mailto:mermaid@blotterrag.com)

I hold her close and feel the long line of her along my body from my neck to my ankles. Normally, this type of hug would make me uncomfortable - I have social anxiety, and let it run rampant through my workaday, keeping me at my desk in my cubbyhole while others go to meetings or lunch or after-work drinking holes - but this particular situation was a surprise, a moment when I let myself be cornered by affection. She smells like some kind of flower, one of those spring blooms that last only a moment and then are swallowed back up by a late-winter return of the cold, or crushed beneath early summer sunshine. It is a nice... odor is the wrong word...and she breathes in my ear once, twice and then releases me to my discomfort and obsessive aversion of eyes.

Jenson - cyberspace

## "Somnambulist"

by Ian Curl

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*Editor's Note: The following is an excerpt from an epic poem, just a taste of the form and function of a poet's lifework. For that reason, we have included the poet's explanatory introduction and a synopsis of the work for your entertainment and edification. Enjoy.*

### INTRODUCTION:

Awakening in the depths of insanity, a nameless man escapes the Amrikan megalopolis into the wilderness, where he discovers the truth about his identity and a warning he must deliver before it's too late.

"Somnambulist" is the story of a near-future Aeneas struggling against the collapse of his city and his sanity. The epic recounts the hero's harrowing journey from madness to the sobering realization of humanity's impending destruction. On his odyssey, the hero falls for a village doctor who nurses him back to health; meets her father, who has connections to Amrika and knows more than he lets on; and reconnects with an old brother-in-arms in search of salvation, who reveals the secrets of the hero's shadowed past. While on his trek, the hero learns of a secret plan for global annihilation. Compelled to warn the unsuspecting citizens of Amrika, the hero must overcome his past and race against time to deliver his message.

"Somnambulist" is a long narrative poem written in eleven parts from the first person perspective. It contains a mix of styles that include elements of free-verse, lyrical, and concrete forms. It is a cross-genre psychological thriller, with elements of science fiction and romance. As an epic poem, it follows a mythical/heroic

story arc and can be read in the span of an afternoon. In developing the plot structure, Joseph Campbell's work on myth and folklore was profoundly influential. The piece is also influenced by a wide and eclectic mix that includes Homer, Virgil, Milton, and Dante; as well as The Mars Volta, Pink Floyd, The Talking Heads, Bad Religion, Berlioz, and many others.

I began writing the epic in 2003, after hearing The Mars Volta's "De-Loused in the Comatorium." As a fan of At the Drive-in, I was blown away by the departure Rodriguez-Lopez and Bixler-Zavala took from their previous band.

As a fan of 70's concept albums, I loved hearing a modern take on the form. The story and accompanying music are frenetic and intense, with multilingual lyrics and widely eclectic musical influences. It inspired me to put pen to paper and Part 1 poured out in a stream of consciousness that remains largely as it was first written.

I spent the next seven years working on the rest of "Somnambulist," until I finally completed a working draft. I then spent many years editing and polishing the work, based on suggestions from friends gracious enough to read it. My friend Seth advised me to write a prologue, since Part 1 (like its inspiration) is somewhat jarring. The Prologue serves as an overture, introducing the style and rhythm of the poem to the reader. It is set after the events of the epic, itself.

### Detailed Synopsis:

The Prologue serves as an overture, introducing the style and rhythm of the poem to the reader. It is set



after the events of the epic, itself.

As Part 1 opens, the narrator is suffering from a progressive mental breakdown. He has come to recognize an underlining dysfunction in Amrika, though he cannot fully articulate the problem. Allusions are made to previous trauma he has suffered, but since his mental state is unhinged, he's an unreliable narrator. Ultimately, he decides to escape from Amrika. Part 1 is the longest part of the epic and serves to establish themes and motifs. It also serves as a counterpoint to the rest of the story, in that as the narrator regains mental stability, the poem becomes more coherent.

Having abandoned Amrika, the narrator wanders the wilderness through Part 2. As he wanders, he comes to recognize how ill prepared he is for exposure to the world outside of the city. He sees distant signs of a settlement and decides to investigate. As he approaches, he is caught in a storm and collapses. When he comes to in Part 3, he finds he is in a hospital room in the settlement, having been rescued from the storm. The narrator is nursed back to health and learns about the town hosting him. Obvious chemistry between the narrator and his doctor leads to the doctor inviting him to her father's house for dinner.

In Part 4, the narrator, the doctor, and Paolo (the doctor's father) eat dinner together and have a conversation which reveals more about the narrator's history (that he had been tortured), as well as discussions of the history of the settlement and larger discussions on politics. After dinner, the doctor invites the narrator back to her apartment. They make love through the night. In the morning, the doctor tells the narrator that it is the Spring Equinox, a festival day for the settlement. As part of the festival, people there consume psychedelics and "commune." The doctor offers the narrator as well the opportunity to commune.

Though suspicious, the narrator

obliges. In Part 5, he goes on a spirit journey through the forest. In the forest he meets a guide who leads him to a river and beckons him to cross. After nearly drowning, the narrator makes it to the other side to meet Humberto, who leads him to another camp. In Part 6 Humberto leads the narrator on an scouting expedition to a military installation. He further reveals that there is a moon colony and that there is a plan to eradicate the rest of Earth's population, in order to have easy access to mineral resources.

In Part 7, the narrator returns to the settlement and to the doctor and reveals what Humberto had told him. She insinuates that she might know more than what she is willing to say, but suggests going to speak with her father. Paolo reveals that what Humberto had said was true. He further reveals that he knows who the narrator is and may have been involved in his torture. Paolo also reveals that he was once a Planner for Amrika. The narrator is determined to notify the people of their impending doom. Paolo refuses to help the narrator, so he leaves to reconnect with Humberto. In Part 8, he and Humberto discuss a wide range of topics, including the revelation that the two had served in the military together. It is also revealed that, when he became a threat to Amrika, Humberto was ordered to murder the narrator's family and torture him. Humberto invites the narrator to join the camp in attacking the military installation, which is revealed to be a fallout shelter. The narrator instead insists on making it back to Amrika to warn people.

Through Part 9, the narrator pushes himself as hard as he can to make it back to Amrika. As he approaches, he witnesses the first bombs explode. Part 10 closes with the narrator left to wander the nuclear wasteland as a sole survivor.

## Prologue

In the days before,  
I was a ghost to myself...  
an apparition,  
shadows of forgotten sin.

The City, my only home,  
became a fearful prison—  
concrete walls closed in  
from every direction.

In desperation, I ran away,  
freeing myself,  
losing myself.  
I wandered through the wilderness.

Like a dreamer trapped  
in a nightmare,  
I struggled to find my way.

Abandoned to chaos,  
Death tracked me down.

but

Saviors and Scourges  
served to guide me through  
to safe passage  
and I was not overcome.

From the perspective of  
distance,  
I came to find  
my reason,  
to find my purpose.

I ran headlong,  
back into the wilderness,  
back to Death,  
and I was not afraid.

Today,  
I recount my story,  
so that I never forget.

## Part 1

In the days of neither  
memory nor prophecy,  
when a City spanned  
the history of  
men and women,  
there existed a concept  
and they used to dance,  
before the poltergeists rose up  
against their masters and  
defiled their graves.

I was a ghost then,  
alone in the world of housed and  
harbored fugitives.

I was invisible, then.

Intoxicated with the power  
found in writing memoirs,  
the policrats lived in  
seclusion, communicating  
in double-talk, on the backs  
of books and boxes of kitchen  
matches.

I was sick, then, and  
could no longer sleep with  
the lights off, but  
their invisible heat  
brought on fits of fever  
and hallucination.

This was before human machines,  
but after the distrusting public  
sought retribution from  
the pigs they had slaughtered.

I the ghost  
I the figment  
I the half-hearted lie  
I the

My days followed suit.  
repetition was habitual,  
and coffee was my drug.

It seemed easier then,  
when the wind or  
inclement weather,  
the strays, the homeless,  
the sheep, the shepherd,  
when they were against  
me.

This was a time of asphalt  
and concrete towers;  
when the last trees  
were housed by museums.

This was the time of Reality.

Though it seemed that  
everyone begged the  
question,  
they marched on  
orders received  
orders followed...

until the headaches, the nose bleeds,  
and the fevers began,

hot  
throbbing pulse  
bllluuurr-vision  
intensity.  
sight was granted  
by  
Pain.

I followed...

Escape.  
digging the  
tunnel out with my hands  
the dirt beneath my nails  
and a man standing over me  
armed, razor-wire grin,  
mirrored aviators,  
"Not today, boy."



I the ghost  
 I the figment  
 I the half-hearted lie  
 I the lonely pile  
   curled  
     alone on the floor  
 tears and sweat and bleeding  
   waking up there

My days followed suit.  
   repetition was habitual,  
 and coffee was my drug.

They warn us about sleep, especially  
 in the Amrika City Truth Department.  
 so I strain, I fight,  
   I sleepwalk.

Dreams are terrifying.

Cubicle, faceless screen  
 I type papers  
 Form x-127.78, with cover sheet  
   Duplicate  
 Triplicate  
   yellow copy, keep

coffee break  
   my shaky hands  
 fingertips stained, nicotine breathe in...  
   cough out  
   an angry lung

Cubicle, faceless screen  
 I type papers  
 Form x-127.78, with cover sheet  
   Duplicate  
 Triplicate  
   yellow copy, keep

evening meals: dinner  
   micro-wave  
     glowing box dinners

I sit in front of that box  
 . my shadow, I'm sure,  
   along with my lay-z-boy;  
 imprinted memories on the back wall,  
 like a Hiroshima silhouette,  
   a fitting chalk outline

fuzz and monotone:  
 time for bed.

Dreams are terrifying.

#### Part 4

On this day, family  
   brought me in  
   shared memory and love.  
 Hospitality gave the world  
 a human face.

I was their guest  
   and fed

The ground floor was surprisingly vast,  
   divided into various sections  
 by floor material and furniture,  
   and smelled of spice and  
 well practiced cooking

He directed us toward a sofa,  
 with a solid-built coffee table in front.  
   "Please sit. I have baked  
 bread and brought up a bottle of wine  
   from the cellar. I have a few  
 more steps in the kitchen; then I  
 can join you  
   and pass time before dinner is ready."

Across a counter father and daughter  
bantered about gardens  
and shops in the market,  
so I uncorked the bottle—  
the scent sparked the thought that

god it's been ages since

I've been glass of wine  
my last drunk.  
drunk?

of course there was a time for wine  
in the city.

I poured three glasses  
passed them out  
and found an opening into conversation  
taking a sip

*Goddamn this is fantastic.*

and not wanting to pervert  
the  
taste  
with too many words

and tired of my mental monologue  
and lonely

*Where are your vineyards?*

“Sections of our hinterland are  
for grapes. We also have assorted  
orchards and grain fields. And many  
tend a community garden in town.”

*Who tends them?*

“Well, I do along with twenty or so others,”  
says the doctor sitting beside me  
an elbow resting on my shoulder  
propping her head on her hand,  
her other lifting a glass  
to smiling lips

*With what time?*

“I may be on call,  
but I only spend one day each week  
in the hospital.  
I see most patients in their homes,  
which leaves me plenty  
of time  
to pursue other talents.”

her voice sounded honest  
a life lived not in luxury,  
but comfort.

“We all try to give so far  
as we are capable.”

And take as needed?

Paolo boomed with rich laughter  
saturating and warmhearted  
“Is wine a need?”

Thinking of my desert stumble,  
what are needs?

\*brrrrrrrrriiiiiiiiiing\*



“Ah, smell how beautiful that sound is?  
Come, help me.”

*I'm afraid that I don't know how to cook.*

“Nonsense. You're human.  
You've been given the gift to  
creatively provide for your  
nutritional needs, and at the same time  
satisfy wants. It's as simple  
as making what tastes good to you.”

Reluctantly, I followed him to the kitchen.  
He pulled me close to him,  
almost whispering, “If you  
would get some water boiling,  
that will be enough. Custom and  
hospitality dictate that I invite you  
to participate  
in preparing the meal;  
but between you and me,  
I'm kind of a bully around the stove.  
Cooking is art, for me.  
I can be pretentious about it, I admit,  
but too many cooks spoils the broth.”

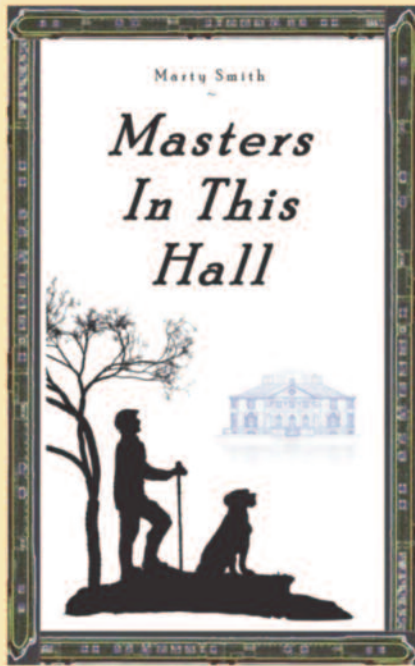
So I filled a pot and placed it on a burner.

#### CONTRIBUTORS:

**John Tavares'** previous publications include short fiction published in various little magazines, literary journals, and anthologies, online & in print: *Blood & Aphorisms*, *Plowman Press*, *Green's Magazine*, *Filling Station*, *Whetstone*, *Broken Pencil*, *Tessera*, *Windsor Review*, *Paperplates*, *The Write Place at the Write Time*, *The Maple Tree Literary Supplement*, *The Writing Disorder*, *Gertrude*, *Turk's Head Review*, *Outside In Literary & Travel Magazine*, *Bareback Magazine*, *Rampike*, *Crab Fat Literary Magazine*, *The Round Up Writer's Zine*, *The Acentos Review*, *Gravel*, *Brasilia Review*, *Sediments Literary Arts-Journals*, *The Gambler*, *Red Cedar Review*, *Writing Raw*, *Treehouse Arts*, *The Remembered Arts Journal*, *Scarlet Leaf Review*, *Ginosko Literary Journal*, *Mgversion2>Datura*, *Riverhawk*, *Quail Bell*, *Adelaide Literary Magazine*, *Grey Border's Magazine*, *Free Lit Magazine*, *Montreal Writes*, *Yarnswoggle*, *Queen's Mob Tea House*, *Westview*. Also, over a dozen of his short stories & some creative nonfiction was published in *The Siren*, then Centennial College's student newspaper. Following journalism studies, his articles & features were published in various local news outlets in Toronto, including community & trade newspapers such as the *East York Times*, *the Beaches Town Crier & Hospital News*, where he interned as an editorial assistant. He is also an avid photographer & his images were featured in *The Writing Disorder* & on Flickr's popular *Explore*. Born & raised in Sioux Lookout, Ontario, Mr. Tavares is the son of Portuguese immigrants from the Azores. His education includes graduation from 2-year GAS at Humber College in Etobicoke with concentration in psychology (1993), 3-year journalism at Centennial College in East York (1996) & the Specialized Honors BA in English from York University in North York (2012). He worked as a research assistant for the Sioux Lookout Public Library & as a research assistant in waste management for the SLKT public works department & regional recycle association. He also worked with the disabled for the Sioux Lookout Association for Community Living.

**Ian Curl** is from Goldsboro, NC, but has lived in the Triangle since 2002. He is working on self-publishing ebook versions of "Somnambulist," which will be available on both iTunes and Amazon in late 2019

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