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# The Blotter

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## “Some Thoughts About Endings and Beginnings”

It’s always a difficult trick for me to finally put down my pen (metaphorically) and have the congratulatory drink and cigarette (also metaphorical!) when working a writing project and reaching those words “The End.” I’ve asked other writers, and they tend to have a pat answer to my question. *Oh, yeah, it just ends*, they tell me, or they have had it outlined since the start and so it’s just a small matter of connecting the verbal dots. I don’t believe them, of course. Ending is always a bitch.

Why is that?

Ending is defined as that never quite perfect point between utter confusion for your reader as to why they ran out of pages to read but don’t understand what happened and the glazed look in their eyes when the typing continues but the point in reading on is lost.

I mean, we’re supposed to be storytellers – and when the story is over, isn’t that all there is? Or when there is nothing more, don’t we stop telling the yarn. Cease the regaling? *Oh, wait, I forgot about...this is funny...I’ve left something...add that on.* Tweaking, nudging, polishing, revisiting. All of those thoughts, yes, but they are not my only concerns. There’s a bigger thing going on here. Part of that is ending includes giving something up. Surrendering it to others. Releasing it to the wild, so to speak. And just as troubling is ending means not doing it anymore. Doing something, but not this. Ending is about moving on. And moving on is not easy for some folks. Most people.

Well, all of us so-called creative types who fiddle with things until they are finally snatched out of our hands.

Here’s my not very original theory: ending is not the same as finishing. Completing a race is finishing. Finishing a meal is not the same. The difference, you say, may be only slight – a nuance of interpretation. Maybe.

Ending never goes well, does it? Relationships? No. School years? Administrations? No. Binge-watched costume dramas? Hell, no.

Another *why* question: why can we finish meals (knowing we can start another in a few hours, if we ate all of our vegetables), but have a hard time ending the writing of a story or poem, even though we know

(implicitly) that we can begin scribing another if we are so inclined. And, yes, I am fully aware that writing a poem is three degrees of difficulty greater than swallowing a serving of lima beans, but I hope you get my point.

I say yes, with hesitation. I could be wrong.

There is a great deal of wheel-spinning when I begin something new. Launching sentences somewhere other than the story's beginning. I find achieving narrative traction seems to require it - I don't know about you. On the other hand, I have a friend that begins with the best of them, can scribble page after page of... *preamble*, and then consistently rides completely off the rails. He can't find plot development on a map, has no middle game, won't defend the premise or give the characters permission to move from their opening positions, as if it is a chess game with no timeclock. Instead, he just keeps describing the whole world, and all of the people in it.

Character development is good, don't get me wrong, but providing more character description (I was just about to write "...than is necessary" but of course if they must do it to get past this sort of 'block' then it's necessary, isn't it?) is just as big a non-starter as my own wandering off-topic and creating side-stories that often need to be polished away in rewrite.

Another theory: that the false-start is something that can be fixed in rewrite, but the inability to end is that which prevents rewrite. Ah-ha! Is that inability to end of which we speak a ruse to keep from having to set the story aside and, when it has fermented appropriately, begin the rewrite? Or do writers not enjoy the act of ending a story because it leads to having to start the next? Do they dislike beginning because it inevitably proceeds towards another bit of heartbreak?

Have I pursued this line of questionable reasoning as long as I should?

Stop.

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CAUTION

*much better than an owner*

## “What Are The Odds?”

by Charles J. March, III

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They were both at odds with love, as well as with *the one* above. Her ex turned out to be a “sociopath,” and ripped the romantic cath out of her intimacy stream (which made her scream), while his ex-latina spun him out like Hurricane Katrina.

But where there’s a will there’s a way, and he was sure disposed to pay any price to fly the Hispanic lass here under the fuck facade of making amends that were supposedly sincere, but her carnal knowledge knew that he was up to something less dear. So she wound up expressing that she was expectant, which made him expectorate, and impregnated him with trepidation, like that of a child who loses its paterfamilial. They then prosecuted to turn a deaf ear to each other’s calls in reciprocating fashion, which gave his gray matter quite the lashin’—and he knew he could no longer be a shackled slave to this paramour anymore.

Then his other señorita said he wasn’t sober enough, so he grew gruff, threw his hands into the fluff of a low and oppressive sky, and relegated himself to be alone until it was his day to die. This really worried his panic-stricken Mother, who wished he’d still bother with discovering his other. This was her wish over a New Year’s Eve dinner—that he’d be resolute in observing the absolute in some other sinner. He uttered that if he were ever to find that special someone, she’d have to be exactly like him, and give him a lot of space. His Dad wiped the slate, and insisted that he was a pessimistic narcissist, which dropped the conservation into a *tristesse* state.

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But diminutive did anyone notice that his intention was whisked into the winds of the universe, and would soon blow him.

A couple days later during the The Rose Bowl, he jokingly dressed as a Jewish terrorist, and self-deprecatingly so—declared that he was going to blow everyone away at the game, for he hated their pigeonholed happiness. I prescribed that he bring along a bouquet of roses, since he was going to be in idiomatic Rome, and would never again come home. Looking back, the bouquet would have been synchronistically suitable for the earth-shattering escapade that he was about to experience.

Later that night, around the witching hour, I returned from my travails and found a confounding car with a license plate from afar in the driveway. When I penetrated the domicile, I found my friend in a tenebrous chamber, sitting next to an enigmatic young maiden, with a nebulous luminesce from the boob tube in the background. From what Lilliputian I could spectate, she seemed to be a “cool chick,” as evidenced by her nonchalant, tomboyish slouch, as well as the raspy edge with which she spoke. In keeping with their paradoxical canoodle, he was curled up and over to her like a cross-legged, engrossed *ingénue*. She kosherly worked for my company, but after a short-winded chinwag, I went up to my *boudoir* to slumber. Directly after lying down, the guileless giggling and “talking” of two young lovers early in their entanglement broke through my Shakespearean window. There was

then a brief moment of muzzle, before she piloted her Tin Lizzie into the darkness.

A few days went by before there was any mention of the tryst, but then came the morning when my schoolmate approached me like a stimulated schoolgirl. The good ol’ boy was on fire all right. He commenced to tell me all about his lady of the other night, and that she could someday be his significant alternative, as opposite sides of the country was indeed an efficacious amount of space.

When I raised how they orchestrated their rendezvous, he remarked that for whatever reason, he just so betided to study his all but deep-sixed Facebook messenger app (which had no notifications), and lo and behold—there she was, yearning for him. She was in town for The Rose Bowl, and felt like reaching out. Per his dispassionate demeanor, he said that he wasn’t willing to go up to L.A. to descry her, but that she was more than welcome to come down to his level. When she did, he knew that there was the feasibility of more than just a friendly fornication.

When I inquired as to how she savvied that he was “into” her, he verbalized that she has a way of bringing *the truth* out of terrestrials. When I aroused the query as to how they had originally acquainted, he said that they had first bumped into one another at a beach while he was trying to do a handstand, in an assay at impressing her, due to her monokini physique, which *au fond*—lead to him dislocating his shoulder. I guess you could say that that’s when he first fell for her. He also averred that he used to roll along with her and her swain as the third proverbial wheel, waiting for him to break his flat affect so he could come through in the clutch. He

# 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.

ultimately wished to be his baby's vehicle, to take her anywhere she wanted to go, and now that he finally had some shekels in his change purse, he opined that he was planning on taking a sojourn to her home in NC to do just that. When I interrogated where in NC, he delivered, "Asheville."

At that moment, I felt the prick of Providence deep inside of me, and knew the aggregate had brought the three of us together, as it was just the day before that I had come across the anomalously merry millstone of The William Matthews Prize. I originally thought I'd write about my service ascendancy in Camp Lejeune, or the Venus fly traps in Wilmington, but it was now unmissable that I'd write about the mesmerizing music of Cupid's cute harp.

When I solicited as to how they left things late the other night, he disclosed that they had osculated just before bidding each other goodbye, which is in keeping with the quiet I adjudged. He then proceeded to tell me that he received a "dopamine dump" from her follow up, betokened text message—which indicated that she couldn't wait to neck him again. It warmed my heart to hear something so sweet, innocent, and human—in this current, hellacious, "hookup" culture. So I nodded in approval at their *Notting Hill*-like boy and girl colloquy. She also professed that she was ogling forward to *finishing* their unfinished business, so I wished him well on his business trip, and prayed that God's odds may be with us all. ❖

OK, so my dreams in the last six months or so have become much more vivid and involved and involving and long-lasting and detailed and including features usually absent in my dreams, like sound / talking, and faces, and people who are clearly specific people I know, and more clearly remembered long after waking, much more so than at any other time of my life, when I'm allowed to sleep uninterrupted for a long time. I don't know why.

Today's dream was one of the most vivid yet. You may use it or part of it, if you like, in the dream journal, but I would ask that you mask the identities of the people in it first.

S and I were visiting you and K in NC. Don't know what the occasion was. For some reason, during this visit, you and S had to go to work at your regular jobs during the day. Fast food, I think. K and I hung out together a little at your house, which was 10 times as big as the real thing, but she was mostly busy with the comings and goings of various friends / daughters, and left me pretty much alone. This suited me, since I was then free to look through your extensive video library, which was more or less alphabetized by title. But I was at least as intrigued by your giant computer monitor, which took up half the wall, the other half occupied by your giant TV screen. I sat down to the computer, and it occurred to me that the item K had pointed out earlier, which looked like a peppercorn but covered in chocolate, was, I thought, called a perigord. K confirmed the name and spelling, and I went to look it up in an online dictionary on that computer. I couldn't type the name in in the dictionary's search box, for some reason, so I tried looking up other things similarly spelled, like peridot. (Turns out, later, not in the dream, that Perigord is a region in France. Must have read it in a book somewhere, years ago.) This was eventually interrupted by K pointing out that we had to go and get you and S from work, where you and S were dressed up as Batman and . . . something else, maybe Wonder Woman, can't remember . . . . But before we got there, K and I emerged from some very large building, clearly in the \_\_\_\_ area, like a giant auditorium, and walked out onto the narrow strip of greensward that separated the building from a large river. K was wading and fishing in this river, which I called to her to verify was in fact the Charles River. She confirmed it. (Yes, I know the Charles River is in Boston, but this is a dream, OK?)

There were other components too, richly detailed, that I can more or less no longer remember. If memories of these resurface, I'll try to write them down and send to you.

HH - cyberspace

## "Superstar"

by Virginia Davis

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Ward K died today. I was watching my soaps when a ticker tape started rolling at the bottom of my screen. It read: 'the body of rock and roll icon Ward K was found unresponsive at his New York City penthouse earlier today by his girlfriend, actor Shannon Reed.'

I always knew him as Howard Kachmarzinski, not the most popular guy in school, not the brightest or most athletic, best-looking or anything - just plain Howie. By the time we started our senior year, he was calling himself Ward K, I guess because it sounded cooler, that, and everyone always had a problem pronouncing his last name. We still called him Howie, though. Some of us out of habit, some of us to piss him off. Now he's Ward K - Former Superstar.

I can see it now.

Maybe Shannon wakes up and makes a big pot of coffee to take the edge off. She's schlepping around in a flimsy silk negligee, perhaps a leopard print and turns on the television to some cooking show like Rachel Ray, or The Iron Chef - something that doesn't require attention, because her head is stuffy, and her brain feels like a big, ol' jar of Fluffernutter.

I have every single one of Ward K's CDs. All eight of them, including an import he recorded live at Budokan in Japan. One time I listed an autographed copy of this on Ebay! and auctioned it for two hundred and twenty-three dollars plus shipping.

The truth? I could never afford a ticket to one of his shows, so one day to make rent, I dug my yearbook out of the attic and found his senior class

picture where he had scrawled in big, block letters: 'To Jenny Stay kool, Ward K.' I used a piece of tracing paper and practiced until I was sure I could wing it, then used a purple Sharpie to forge his name right across the front cover of that CD. Came out real nice. The next month, I sold my yearbook, and got more for that than I did for the signed CD. Crazy, right? Who wants a book full of dumb-looking high school kids they don't know, even if Ward K. the Superstar is among them?

Now Shannon is probably getting hungry watching those food shows. You can pick up your phone and get anything delivered in New York city, right? So, an hour later the doorbell to Ward's penthouse rings - ting-a-ling - and Shannon opens the door on the most unbelievably handsome dude she's ever seen. He's holding a bag of H&M bagels, cream cheese and some lox, while she stands there in her flimsy, leopard print negligee. You can clearly see her tits, but he's not really paying much attention, because he's originally from Bedford/Stuy and has seen it all, and Shannon's wondering if she should just muck on to him now before Ward wakes up, because he's way hotter than Ward. What she doesn't know is that Delivery Boy moonlights as Amanda Blowhard at a burlesque show on Fridays down in the Meatpacking District, but I doubt she'd care even if she did.

Knowing him since I was five years old, you'd think I'd have some really good stories to tell, like how he took me to my first formal dance and bought me a corsage of gardenia

which I have pressed in an encyclopedia, or how he used all his quarters to play Journey on the jukebox in the cafeteria because it was our favorite band. But nothing like that happened. What I can tell you is that in the second grade he was paired as my dancing partner when we were learning the Virginia Reel. He refused to hold my hands, instead he forced my arms up into the air by the cuffs of my shirt and announced at the top of his lungs that I had cooties which caused every boy in the class to laugh and me to refuse to dance at all. Then a few years later there was the dodgeball incident outside after lunch, when he aimed a little high and I got a bloody nose. I had to spend the rest of the afternoon in the nurse's office while everyone else had a Halloween party and Bobby Jenkins stole the cupcake my best friend Cindy had saved for me.

Shannon hollows out the insides of her bagel, (that's how she stays thin), dabs it with cream cheese and lox, eats it, and feels a little better than she did when she woke up. She goes back into the bedroom for another romp in the hay, because Delivery Boy made her really horny. She steps over the mirror they left on the floor last night when they were doing bumps of coke, and scoops up two of Ward's one-hundred dollar bills that he had rolled up into straws and shoves these into her Birkin bag which sits on top of the dresser beside bottles of booze and pills. She climbs on top of poor Ward, who if still alive, would have had some of the best day-sex of his life. When she realizes he's dead - she screams.

Our class's tenth high school reunion is next month. Wade's PR girl responded to the invitation saying that while he is between tours and will try his best to attend, Ward K cannot com-

mit to providing musical entertainment for the evening. We never asked him to perform. Half of our class didn't even think he'd show up. Now we know he won't.

The last time I saw Howie it was a week after high school graduation. He was pumping gas into his Dodge Neon at Cumberland Farms. We pretended not to see each other. I heard a few weeks later, that he walked out on his job as dishwasher at The Sandy Dunes Restaurant and hopped a bus for Los Angeles.

So, let's say it's six weeks later, and Shannon's beginning to get her mojo back. The barista with the rainbow-colored hair got her order right this time, and she's sipping a double caramel macchiato with a shot of vanilla outside a Starbucks, somewhere on the Upper East Side. She is happy. The coroner announced Ward's death an accidental overdose, and the cops are finally off her back. She's single again and getting tons of publicity. Shannon digs her phone out of her purse. When she wants honest advice, she calls her agent. Her agent says, 'Do you have his family's phone number?'

A kid picks up on the second ring. Shannon introduces herself as Ward's girlfriend. She says this as if he is still alive. She asks to speak to Mr. or Mrs. K; Ward never got around to telling her his last name, and she never told him that she got her start in Hollywood by screwing a rich movie producer.

The kid on the other end of the line puts the phone down and yells out: 'someone here wants to talk about Howie.' ❖

## "My Brother"

by Virginia Davis

My brother was a hustler. When he was eight – before I was born, my brother set up a stand and sold cups of lemonade for twenty-five cents to a construction company across the street from our house. It was a hot summer - my mother swore that he drank nearly as much as he sold, but my brother kept with it, dutifully pooling his quarters neatly on the kitchen table every night after he closed shop. 'I'm glad the water is free,' he would comment, before passing mom some of the money he had made so she could replenish his stock of Kool Aid packets.

My mom loved to tell the story of the night my father came home from work, and instead of his pre-dinner Jack and Coke, dumped what was left of my brother's product into a glass and mixed it with a healthy dose of the vodka he kept in a cabinet behind my mother's stack of records.

"Now that's what I call lemonade," my father remarked after he lifted his glass, chugged it down, and smacked his lips.

The next day, trusting my father's enthusiasm, my brother topped off his pickle jar of lemonade with a good-sized portion of Dad's vodka and doubled his price. For the better part of the week he worked a crowd that grew as word leaked out. Builders across the street, shop keepers, older boys coming home from shooting hoops, even our mailman, Mr. Hajosy, would stand in a line for a cup.

My brother was pocketing quite a profit until he sold a cup to a young

mother who by chance took a sip before handing it over to her toddler. One phone call later, and my brother's money-making venture came to a bitter end, but not before the dynamics of supply and demand had tunneled its way in and made a nest inside my brother's eight-year-old head.

As my brother grew older, he took jobs repairing anything from small engines, and lamps to toasters; he could fix any appliance. He would stay home from school whenever there was a chance to make a buck. He could get away with this because he was smart. He could skip class for a week and return on test day and get every answer correct. Truancy notices were sent home coupled with comments on his good grades. Kids like that frustrate the hell out of teachers.

I'm watching I Love Lucy reruns on television, when my brother comes home from work just after noon. He has been working with a crew from Portland Maine roofing a new block of condominiums in a development across town. It is July and my brother checks the thermometer hanging by a rusted nail next to the kitchen window.

"Ninety-seven fucking degrees." He says.

I finish two episodes of Lucy before I hear the shower water shut off. He slicks his long hair back from his forehead and sits down at the kitchen table.

"Aren't you home awfully early?"  
"I quit." He tells me. "Life's too fucking short to be pounding nails on roofs."

“What are you going to do for money?” I ask.

My brother lights a cigarette and holds it between the first and second fingers of his right hand. He rubs his chin with his palm.

“I don’t know, Scotty, that’s what I’m trying to figure out.”

My brother sits at the kitchen table for the rest of the afternoon, squinting.

The next morning, my brother spelunks through a mountain of dirty laundry on his bedroom floor. He emerges waving a holey tee shirt in the air like a flag.

“This is perfect.” My brother says. He slips the shirt on. It is one I have never seen him wear. It smells like death. He makes a bagged lunch and slips it into an old Star Wars backpack I had in the sixth grade.

“Hey, isn’t that mine?”

“So, sue me.” He says.

He opens the kitchen door and heads outside. The screen door slams shut.

My brother was a magician. He could pull an egg out of his ear. He really could. I saw him do it at Jordan MacPhearson’s fifth birthday party. I never could figure out how he did that. A little girl named Penny started screaming and ran out of the room with her hands clamped to her ears. My brother tried to coax her out from underneath Jordan’s bed. He told her ‘It’s only a trick. Cross my heart and hope to die’. Finally, a call was made, and Penny’s mom had to come and get her. I was only five years old myself, and for a year or two after that party, I believed my brother really did pull that egg from the inside of his head and out through his ear, and he told Penny that it was only a trick to get her to stop crying.

That wasn’t my brother’s only magic. He could also start a fire using a tiny stick of wood and the heel of his boot. On Sunday nights during episodes of Mutual of Omaha’s Wild Kingdom, he would light up and I would sit on the edge of the pool table in the basement and stick my fingers through billowy clouds of smoke rings as big as my fist, as a band of hyenas crossed the African plains.

My brother comes home every night and lays out big piles of cash on the kitchen table. He stops shampooing his hair and rings of grime collect in the folds of his neck and behind his ears. He sorts through the cash and picks out gift cards from Hannaford Food Shop and Dunkin’ Donuts. He stacks the cards in little piles and stores them in a bread box on the counter. He discovers socks, deodorant, and other personal items in the mix he brings home. He tosses these things in a trash bag.

My brother was a mentor. Five summers ago, in the late afternoon when the sun still shined but temperatures had dropped, my brother would jump in our truck and go get little Benny Jones who lived down our street, and bring him to City Park to teach him how to hit a baseball. They practiced every day. Sometimes I would try to come along for moral support, but my brother would shoo me away, worried that I would be a distraction. When my brother returned home a couple of hours later, I would ask: ‘Is he getting any better?’ But his lips were sealed tight, never giving me more than a shrug. It was a gutsy undertaking. Benny Jones, faithful Little Leaguer, had never hit a ball in his life.

The season got underway at last and Benny was up to bat. There were

no expectations with the veteran crowd when Danny Ahew threw his first pitch, but Benny’s bat hit the fast ball with a satisfying ‘plunk’. He sent the ball flying dead center past the outfielders and headed toward the parking lot.

Everyone in the stands jumped up from their seats but my brother was the first; his right fist pumping the air as he hollered at the top of his lungs: “Benny ain’t riding the short bus anymore!” And then there was Benny, taking his time trotting from base to base, a huge smile of half joy and half smugness spreading like wild-fire, ear to ear. My brother nudged me in the ribs spilling half of my orange soda.

“Now I’m going to teach him how to run.” My brother said.

My brother was a mystery. He walks through the door with a beautiful Delmonico wrapped in waxy paper tied with twine. While he waits as two pats of butter dance in the hot skillet, he makes a bologna and cheese sandwich. He offers me half.

“Are you working tomorrow?” I ask him.

“I work every day.” He says.

“Don’t you ever get a day off?”

“Every day is a day off.”

My brother chops his meat into tiny bites. He massacres it with ketchup until it looks like fresh kill. This is the way my brother eats steak.

I wait for him to grab the salt-shaker before I reach for a piece. He slaps the back of my knuckles with the tines of his fork.

“Get out of here.” He says.

My brother was a hero. Seven or eight summers ago, a cute nineteen-year-old girl from Old Orchard Beach got swept away in a rip tide. My brother hauled her to shore, fell on his



knees and breathed life back into her limp body. I was unable to help in any way. I sat on the sand by her head and watched as the ocean emerged from her lungs and dribbled from her mouth into little trails on her blue bathing suit.

Her name was Sara and her parents had left her alone for the weekend, so we took her home and she showered as my mother put fresh sheets on my bed. Sara napped until dinnertime when my brother took her out for a hamburger. She stayed for three days. A week later my toes discovered a piece of dry seaweed lodged between the slats of my bedframe. For reasons unknown, I stashed it away in my bottom drawer of my bureau. It's still there.

"That's not my brother," I say to my friend Kevin.

We are sitting in a McDonald's parking lot across from a shopping mall watching a guy panhandle at the intersection of Fore and Commercial Street.

"My brother doesn't have a shirt like that."

"That's because it's my shirt, stupid" Kevin says. "He borrowed it from me last summer." We sink down a little further in our seats; we watch what's going on, our eyes just peering over the dashboard. We stuff French fries in our mouths.

My brother – an urban cowboy performer.

A banana flies into the air. My brother catches an apple with his left and an orange with his right. Fruit cycles through the atmosphere in a circle. Every now and then – more than you would expect, a hand appears from a car window and passes something to my brother. When it is a

female donor, my brother winks and blows a kiss. I watch him store things in my backpack with the Darth Vader patch. People toot their horns and wave. It's obvious that my brother has a following. On a piece of corrugated cardboard at his feet is a declaration of misfortune and a blessing from God.

Kevin and I whisper as if he could hear us.

"Your brother's a scammer."

"What I want to know is where did he get that stupid cowboy hat?"

"*That's*' what you want to know?"

I think of the cash, rolled tight as a fist in my brother's sock drawer. I think of the gift cards, and the way my brother comes and goes with no set schedule; the fact that he's unemployed yet always has money.

More money is passed from motorists to my brother's outstretched hand. Instead of looking downtrodden and down on his luck - under the brim of his hat, my brother wears a grin as big as the Atlantic Ocean. It is obvious his audience loves him, and by the look on his face, you'd swear that the love is a two-way street. I wonder aloud if he has hotspots in other towns.

"I've only seen him here. I told you and you didn't believe me." Kevin looks hurt.

"I still can't believe it." I say.

My brother lays low most nights, but occasionally hosts poker parties in our basement. Headaches come on Saturday morning from Friday night cigar smoke. It creeps into the seams of our home and mingles with the dust motes that are only detectable with the light of the sun. We sweep ashes and beer cans into big, black, sinister-looking garbage bags and every now and then my brother runs the vacuum to pick up any leftover

debris. I never mention the discovery Kevin and I made earlier in the summer, and he doesn't ask me how my job at the hardware store is going.

My brother is gone. He's left me to deal with the everyday without his craziness, his courage and the ability to adapt. In a bizarre twist of fate, my brother was gunned down in a case of mistaken identity by a car full of gang members looking for redemption. The driver was a brother of the cute girl my brother saved from drowning eight years ago.

Word is that the fact of her very own brother involved in the shooting drove the cute girl crazy. She is now hospitalized at the Dorothea Dix Psychiatric center in Bangor. Her brother spent time in prison, was released last year, and committed suicide shortly after. I guess you could say he ruined three lives.

The birth and death dates of our parents are engraved on a family headstone inside Grand Trunk Cemetery in Portland. After my father's name is the phrase: 'dedicated father, loving husband.' After my mother's name: 'dedicated mother, loving wife.' It's up to me to sum up my brother's life with his own epitaph. Heritage Memorials are waiting for direction from me, but how can I begin to cover the years between the dates on that marker?

*My brother got things done – my brother was a hustler. ❖*

Two by Kevin LaTorre

“Clasp”

We are waiting for the hummingbirds,  
Our hope for their cracked, whistled calls  
Lighting us in the window.

Together in the glass we are only  
Spectacles astride the nose of a bird-girl, whose  
Fingers smooth the orb'd nether-scape  
Of the empty perch outside.

Detail colors us only where the sliding  
Light falls, and our brimming wait is  
Nearly the dawn but still the night.  
Interlinked within one another, our cells are  
Silent like whispers in a sacred dark.

At last, in a quavering hum,  
One small bejeweled bird flits  
To sit in his perch.  
His candied profile is elegant, he twitches

With age is and gone again.  
A longing achieved and a century still to know,  
We clasp fingers as a satisfied tableau.

## “Cobbler”

In its pair of well-worn hands  
The dessert dish meets the table’s setting,  
Holding a crusted terrain of infirm peaks  
Dotted with miniature descents.

Though a browned and thickened dough,  
This solid pastry cannot  
Hold against the plunging spatula.  
The dessert’s heart, dripping sour blood, emerges.

A glopping sound of cherry innards  
Upon grandchildren’s plates, which pleases all  
Around the table. It draws a drinker’s sneaking smile from him,  
A gentle crescent as crooked, as battered, as his fingers.

Ten, all bulbous, all hardened.  
Each has dug beneath the earth’s vegetation dress  
To prepare, finally, a garden in her black dirt.

They have formed, cast, and removed fish hooks, but also  
Caressed the slender inner arch of  
A married woman’s foot—

Eased a child’s squirming heel  
Defly past the tongue of a tied sneaker.  
They’re wiped now on his cooking apron,

Our misremembered past—lives like banquet courses—held back  
From the sight of sour cherries picked, sugared, and sliced today.

## “Forty Or So Things We’ve Been Waiting For While In Isolation”

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Alexa smartspeaker to play motion-sensing crowd noise and applause whenever you get up and walk around inside your house.

Sweat-smelling bath soap so you can pretend to yourself that you’ve worked out today.

Order-your-own Burger King supplies kit, for making and wrapping your own Whoppers. Now with “You Do Like Fries With That!”

and a shake.

The Game of Thrones board game, with real daggers and actual poison, fun for the whole family.

A Proust’s *Remembrance of Things Past* Zoom book-club. Three times a week!

Speakers positioned all over the neighborhood that play Wagner’s “Ride of the Valkyries” while you’re walking the dog.

A bathtub full of good luck with that Sourdough starter.

Flavorless and odorless Covid Gin.

Masks with external horse-hair ZZ-Top beards.

Genuine Burgess Meredith *Twilight Zone* end-of-the-world Broken Reading Glasses.

Spring vegetable garden starter-seeds that actually f\*\*king germinate!



Connect-The-Dots Democracy quotes for your idiot “friends” on Twitter.

Baked goods food-trucks that drive around the neighborhood like the Ice-Cream man.

Large Incessantly Barking Dog auto-answer for your phone.

Christmas-tree scented laundry detergent.

Speak-and-Spell-check — The autocorrect that weaponizes all of your frustration with your hand-held-device into an high-voltage, low-amps tazer. Safe for use on the kids, hubby, boss.

Random two weeks of social media black-out.

Fox News toilet paper.

Massive Multiplayer Role-Playing Naps.

Nerf-Curare darts. A little goes a long way

Penal Colony of French Guiana Day Care.

Virtual Reality Depressing Brit-coms (they’re even better when you stop watching!)

Lime & Cilantro Cheerios with *Tequilamilk*.

A publishing service where you schedule authors to call and read to you from their Work-In-Progress.

Automatic pants-glasses for Face-timing with co-workers with “put-

‘em on” or “take-‘em off” settings.

An annual subscription to “Pork-Fried Rice Monthly” Magazine.

Uber-delivered Gerbil-balls for people who are afraid to go outside.

Major-League Baseball

Supercomputer creating a full CRG season of thirty teams playing 162 games each, drafted from a pool of every player who ever played.

Banana-flavored Tilapia fish, with no bones.

Spray-on PPE.

Google-gargle — keeps all your searches minty-fresh.

The New Election Lottery — Winner gets to pick which local or national contest is thrown out and done over. Not to be confused with the New Eviction Lottery — where the winner gets to pick who gets thrown out....

Door-Dash “private table” restaurant RVs that come to your house and let you eat in the back.

Chap-Steak lip balm. You loved it last night for dinner, why not every day!

Danish Zombie-mink Coats.

Electric Candy made with non-toxic and bio-degradable batteries, that gives you a little shock when you eat it.

Clocks with no hands and alarms

that go off randomly to remind you to do for god’s sake, *something, anything*.

The Weatherporn Channel, where meteorologists wear tearaway clothing out in storms. (Honest, this sounds like a better idea than it actually is.)

Cold drinks held by actual Yetis that growl at people when they come too close to you.

“Us, Too” Interactive television news service that permits you to shout questions at the correspondents.

Nooman’s Own ecstasy-laced cookies, putting the “snapped” back in Ginger-snaps.

*Ping!* The security tool for your house or apartment that shoots non-lethal projectiles at people trying to steal packages off your porch.

Recyclable beer, goes out the way in went in. (Now available in “coffee.”)

Drone-Wars radio controlled combat game for air supremacy above your neighborhood.

Guaranteed lockdown Doctor “McDreamy” hospital visit.

❖

## “Justice”

by B. T. Macie

I look back on my life and see how my definition of fairness and justice has changed over the years.  
At first it was obeying authority.  
Then it became compromise.  
Then disrespecting authority.  
Then simply speaking up.  
But finally balance. Justice is balance. Balance is not compromise. Balance is coexistence.  
Justice is coexistence.

## Contributors

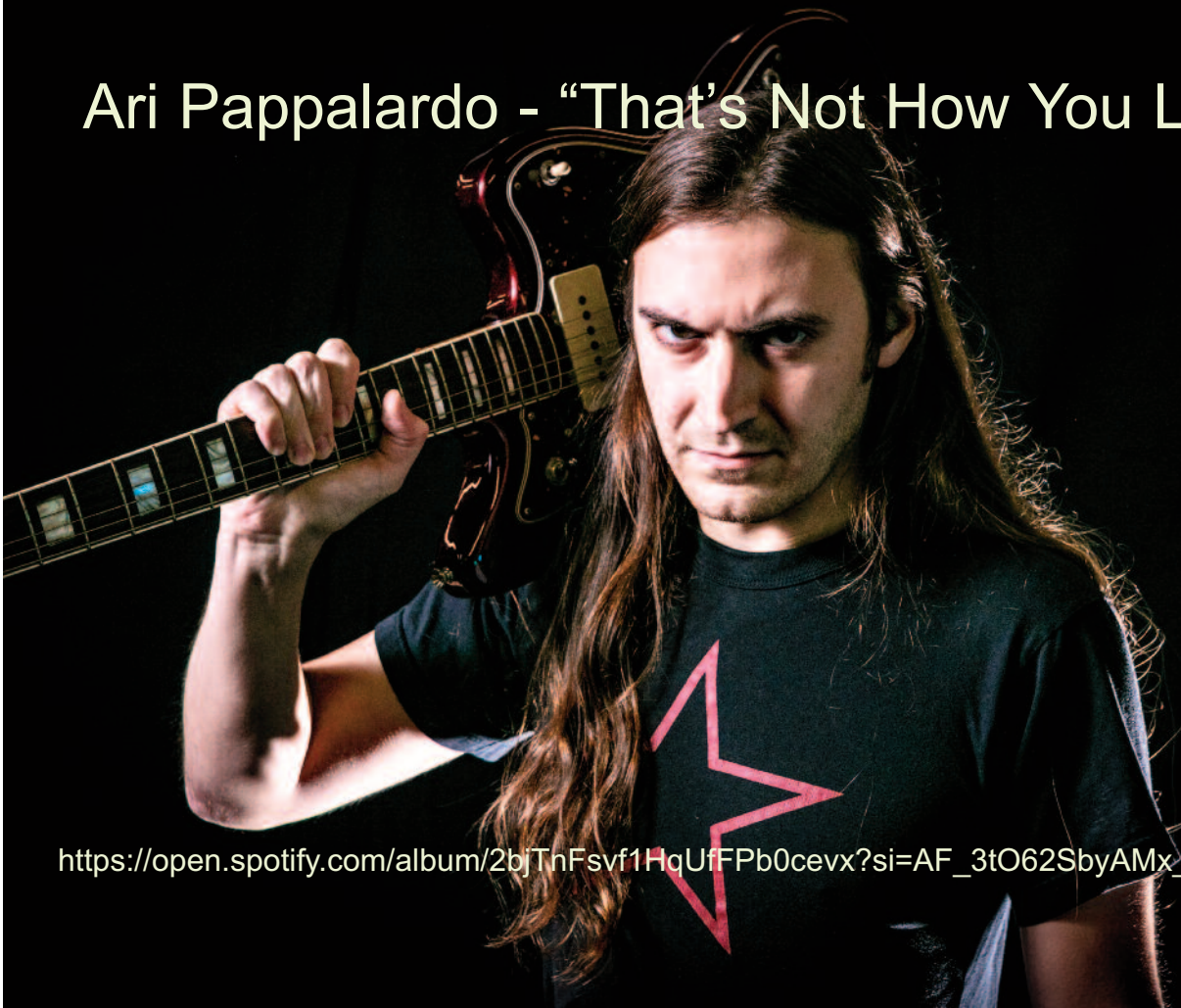
Charles J. March III is a person currently living in California. His works have appeared in or are forthcoming from *Evergreen Review*, *Chicago Tribune*, *L.A. Times*, *3:AM Magazine*, *BlazeVOX*, *Expat Press*, *Queen Mob's Teahouse*, *Maudlin House*, *Misery Tourism*, *Litro*, *Otoliths*, etc. More can be found on LinkedIn & SoundCloud.

Virginia Davis lives in the coastal town of Portsmouth New Hampshire. She divides her time between fiction writing and patternmaking. Her short fiction has appeared in *Delphinium: A Journal of Art and Literature*, *ALM Magazine* and *Adelaide*.

Kevin LaTorre is a graduate student and editor living in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. He's lucky enough to be a 'repeat offender' poet with *The Blotter Magazine*. You can dredge up his other poetry at *Echo Literary Magazine* and at *the Nocturnal*, and his short prose is calcifying at the *Storybook Corner*.

Brendan T Macie has been enjoying expressing himself through various forms of creativity his entire life, be it from his education in visual arts in high school to his formal education in Bluegrass music, production and music business at East Tennessee State University. In 2015, he and Hank Close formed the folk rock duo Hank & Brendan, which became a local music staple of the Carrboro, NC music scene, releasing three albums and touring throughout the east coast as far reaching as New Jersey and New Orleans. As of this writing, he has two published written works, one being the piece you just read, and the other being this bio sketch that you also just read.

# Ari Pappalardo - "That's Not How You Love"



[https://open.spotify.com/album/2bjTnFsvf1HqUfFPb0cevx?si=AF\\_3tO62SbyAMx\\_IMUBVHw](https://open.spotify.com/album/2bjTnFsvf1HqUfFPb0cevx?si=AF_3tO62SbyAMx_IMUBVHw)

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**Joe Buonfiglio**

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and  
**WONDERFULLY ABSURD**  
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