

A close-up photograph of a basket filled with pears. The pears are in various stages of ripeness, with some showing a mix of green, yellow, and red. A purple cloth is draped over the top left corner of the basket. The background is a light-colored, textured surface.

February 2022

# The Blotter

magazine

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

COVER: Sweet Harvest, from our  
archive

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

The Blotter is a production of  
The Blotter Magazine, Inc.,  
Durham, NC.  
A 501 (c)3 non-profit  
ISSN 1549-0351  
www.blotterrag.com



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

## “Cleaning House”

I’m not very good at letting go of things. Some things. I can easily let go of certain ideas. Others hang on and I have to wheedle the knots out carefully or, like wet sneakers, they will be stuck on me and the shoelaces have to be cut loose. Yes, this happened to me when I was young: Chuck Taylor high tops, worn in the Passaic River while fishing for carp. They were never the same again, and I only got one pair a year, so . . .

Particular moods stay with me and I have difficulty shaking them. Maybe I think too much. To clarify, maybe I think about whatever I’m thinking about too much. I think about seeing someone, just to talk about what I’m thinking about. The person I think about seeing should be both a therapist and a barista. And we should meet outside, on a bench, like two old secret-agents from the Cold War, going over the past and wondering how it all changed so quickly and completely. Spilling a little spirit from a flask into the coffee, because it’s still not Springtime.

I promise – I’m not making fun of therapy. This is just how I feel my therapy should take place. Like a spy-thriller, with mysteries to be revealed, guilt and innocence yet to be determined.

It is sort of funny to me that anger is not one of my moods that linger. Funny strange, not funny ha-ha. But even though I release anger and it dissipates, it still leaves something behind; an odor, scuffs on the floor that don’t buff out. Embarrassment, on the other hand, remains as tacky as a newly varnished tabletop. And to belabor this metaphor, it reacts poorly to touching, just to see if it’s dry. Fingerprints all over the place, unique reminders of others’ impatience with me. Ah, well.

Sometimes I confuse anger with frustration. I can’t say why. They’re different, or so I’m assured.

So what is a mood that leaves quickly, and doesn’t leave a mark? Accomplishment, for one. Are you also one of those folks who gets something finished, and doesn’t receive the full satisfaction of having completed the task? I’m not sure why this is how it works for me. One pet theory is that all work is like doing the dishes. Do a good job – no one is impressed. Hurry up and complete the job quickly and there are no kudos, and it doesn’t change the truth that you’re going to have to do it all over again in a few hours. Take your time,

and the same is more or less true. But go ahead and break a dish, and you'll hear about it from everyone, forever.

I have a friend who writes, but never finishes anything – not that I know of, anyhow. He reveals his works-in-progress early, shows the pages, even reads excerpts aloud. We are happy that he is happy with what he has finished so far. We share our pleasure in the pithy dialogue, the textured beginnings of plot development. Then he explains via synopsis what will happen next. And *nothing happens next*. The papers seem to flutter to the ground like leaves from a tree, awaiting something else, something more momentous. But for my friend, apparently, the harder work isn't fun, and comes with no assurances. So he receives accolades - his satisfaction - during the process of initial reveal. Whatever he deems sufficient in the writing process arrives in those moments. Why bother to finish a story? What good can come from working more, working harder, only to possibly let down the audience and, therefore, himself? What value to create something good, but no one cares? Why do your part, only to have the other half of the boat sink anyway.

Hint: we're all in a boat together. A great big boat. You should tell me if there's a leak up in your end of this boat, and I promise to do the same over here.

It feels vaguely like truth: committing to just enough. Don't do something well – there's no point to it. Being on the receiving end of a lack of support or appreciation...in a word - sucks. I don't know what to call that, feeling (other than suckish?) but I get it and it hangs on like a summer cold. (Or what summer colds used to be before we either didn't acquire them through our masks or were terrified by the sensation of a sore throat and sniffles.) Are our accomplishments' short-lived-ness simply resentment? Or perhaps something more complex? Aren't there lessons, therapies, entire religions dedicated to helping us through the moments of disappointment that come with some assembly required but no clear instructions?

I think mediocrity, half-assed effort, *incompletion*, exist (flourish) because sincerity of effort often runs into the wall of facetiousness, sarcasm, cynicism, drollery, caustic humor and every other behavior substituting for wit. Earnestness cracks beneath the weight of contempt like pottery. No one appreciates effort. They hardly give a good goddamn about results.

continued on page 15

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



in the Great State of Georgia!



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

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



CAUTION

*let there be no doubt about*

## “Wings”

by A. E. S.

---

I saw her lying face down on the wet earth, the berry bushes and pine trees swaying gently above and around her. Her dalmatian dappled wings were drenched with rainwater, and her naked body bore the cuts and bruises of a long fall. I stood still for a moment, in shock, before I looked around, but only the wind and the rain bore witness to this holy outsider. I dropped my umbrella, wincing as it splashed mud onto my legs, and ran to her. I tried nudging her to see if she moved, but to no avail. Finally, I flipped her over, and that’s when I saw her chest rising and falling. This heavenly creature was alive, and I was the only soul for miles.

For months, I had appreciated the solitude that comes with living here. As long I stayed far from town, which I usually did, no watchful eyes nor well-meaning words intruded upon my daily life. No one asked me how I was doing, if I needed anything, if I wanted to talk. There were no glareful looks from watchful wolves, no whispers thrown like daggers between parents who could never forget. At home, I was left, to my relief, utterly

alone in my cabin deep in the northwestern woods, as far from the world as Neptune was from Earth. I tended to my garden, hiked imagined trails between the trees, and read my heart out. I liked to keep busy.

Using all of my strength, I lifted the angel, bridal-style. I thought I might buckle beneath her weight, but I persevered as I took trembling steps toward the front door. Shutting the door with my foot, I listened as the sounds of the storm outside became muffled and distant. Finally, I half set, half dropped her onto the old green couch in the living room. I shifted her body so that her face faced the ceiling. I didn’t want anything to obstruct her breathing, and I wanted to know if she opened her eyes. As I stood, panting from the effort of bringing her inside, it struck me how beautiful she was. Her dark, curly hair framed her inhumanly perfect face, and a smattering of freckles lay across the bridge of her nose. The blood and the bruises that tattooed her body didn’t even put a dent in her beauty. And somehow, through the rain and the muck, she smelled like . . .

wildflowers? I shook my head in wonder.

The realization hit me soon after that that she needed to be dry and warm. After all, she could develop hypothermia from the cold. Racing through the living room, past the cluttered bookshelf and the potted plants and half-hearted art projects, I ran into the hallway, where I found the hall closet. From there I gathered washcloths, bandages, and thick towels. I wet the washcloths and returned to the living room, where I gently tried to clean up the angel.

After unfolding her wings with care, I gently wiped the mud from her feathers. They felt like a bird’s, soft and light beneath my fingers. I cleaned the muck and blood from the rest of her body, bandaging the places where the cuts ran deep. I left any sensitive areas alone, knowing she probably wouldn’t want a stranger touching them. When I was done, I wrapped her body in plush towels, making sure to cover her polar cold feet.

As I watched her, this sleeping creature of awe and wonder, it struck me how surreal this all was. I mean, I believed in the

whole shebang, unfortunately: Heaven, Hell, angels, God. But here was proof, right in front of my eyes, that death wasn't the end. It hit me, no, buried me, then, like a house crumbling around me, what this truly meant. I had hoped, hoped for months, in a blaze of tears and screaming and cutting my wrists, that death didn't hold suffering. That everything melted away, that the universe didn't punish cold-blooded mortals with pits of fire and a world of torment. I could hardly imagine it, didn't want to imagine it. It often wracked my body with pain and fear and brought on panic attacks. I desperately wanted it all to be a cruel, sick lie.

I stood, swaying a bit from a sudden bout of dizziness, before righting myself and trudging solemnly to his room. A feeling I couldn't name swirled inside of me, something dark and terrible. My son's name escaped my lips, and I tasted something bitter and broken. My hands felt the smooth yet firm walls of the hallway as I made my way to his door.

Crafted from dark, impenetrable oak, with a glass door-knob, his door loomed before me. My hands, shaking from fear and a hint of rage, clumsily reached for the cold glass. They missed twice before grasping it,

and I felt my face contort into something monstrous. I opened the door. It groaned, but acquiesced.

His life stretched out before me. Sports trophies, concert tickets, stuffed animals, his cherry red backpack, and other items from his short life adorned the empty room. Posters from both sappy dramas and action flicks covered the walls, and photographs of him and his friends smiled at me, unaware of the tragic end he would suffer. Woozy, I stumbled onto his perfectly made bed, and collapsed into a blue green sea of blankets and sheets. I held them close to me, hoping to smell his scent, but there was nothing.

Getting pregnant had been glorious. He was very much a wanted child, the product of expensive IVF treatments and hope. If my wife and I could have had a child the old-fashioned way, we would have, but all of the cisgender lesbian sex in the world couldn't have created new life. We decided to let science do that for us, and I was implanted with our embryos, fragile cocktails of my eggs and Kyra's brother's sperm, so that our baby would biologically belong to both of us. When we found out I was expecting, we celebrated, laughing and chatting the night away. We wondered

what our child would look like, how his voice would sound, what his first words would be, and what he would call us. Would we both be mom? Momma and mommy, perhaps? Or maybe something new, something just for our family and ours alone.

As my belly grew, I felt the demands of pregnancy more clearly. I vomited often, and what I felt was a ridiculous amount, but Kyra told me the parenting books said it was normal. I felt his tiny hands and feet reach out to me, and I also felt his energetic kicks as I laid in bed. I won't sugarcoat it. I was often tired and uncomfortable, but I was also hopeful about the baby boy I would one day get to hold. I imagined touching his soft cheeks and hearing his gurgling laugh, and I delighted in painting his room purple, buying his sturdy crib, and picking out his tiny clothes.

Brutal does not begin to describe his birth. I wept and screamed as I laid in the delivery room, my vagina on display for everyone to see. I felt like a show animal, and I felt a rage and sorrow that only comes with bringing a life into the world. Kyra tried to comfort me, but there was nothing she could do. I had to endure the pain alone.

I remember crying when I

## The Blotter

---

finally held him, and I wasn't sure whether I was crying tears of joy or relief. He was beautiful, so beautiful, and Kyra and I fell in love with this delicate human being immediately. We endured the delirious days of new parenthood, heeding his milk hungry cries and rocking him late at night when he refused to sleep. Kyra didn't shy away from motherhood, and we worked as a team to take care of this tiny boy we created together. Our happiness grew as he got older and became more independent. We drank bubbling champagne when we discovered he was finally sleeping through the night, and we laughed and smiled as he learned to walk and talk. Life was beautiful then.

He quickly grew into a happy young boy. He loved board games and finger painting, baseball and ballet, nature and tangerines. His laugh was infectious, and his questions, although they got tiring sometimes, made me think about the world we all lived in. He asked why we didn't keep ducks for pets, why we closed our eyes to sleep, why so many songs on the radio were about love. We answered his questions thoughtfully, and we taught him to be brave yet sensitive, strong yet loving, and confident yet curious. Kyra loved being a mother,

his mother, just as much as I did. Things weren't perfect, of course. They never truly are. But we were happy, and we were a family.

And then, everything seemed to change. The happy boy I knew became a withdrawn, angry teenager. He rarely cracked a smile, rarely wanted to spend time with his mothers anymore. He stayed in his room with the door locked much of the time, practically an ironclad fortress. I tried to encourage him to spend time with his friends, but he seemed to have had a falling out with almost all of them. I tried to get him to open up, but his mouth was clamped shut. He refused to go to therapy. Kyra thought it was typical teenage moodiness, and I thought so too.

Kyra and I made plans to get pregnant again. We missed the feeling of nurturing a tiny life, of hearing a baby's laugh and lovingly feeding them mashed fruit with a soft spoon. A friend of a friend agreed to donate his sperm, and we were so excited the first time I inseminated Kyra. I knelt on the floor between Kyra's parted legs, tenderly squeezing the turkey baster we hoped would deliver his gift to her waiting egg. When all was said and done, I laid beside her, the love of my life, and felt the

soft crush of her lips on mine, and the way she tasted like nectar and warmth. In the days that followed we made love again and again, pretending that our thrusts and moans would take care of the rest.

And then it happened. Our son, in a rare moment of vulnerability, hugged Kyra and I one day before he went to school. He told us that he loved us, and of course we told him that we loved him too. He said that he hoped the inseminations worked soon so that we could have a brand new baby in the house. It was a glorious, hopeful thing.

He died that day, his body riddled with bullets after he shot up his school. No one knows where he got the rifle, the weapon that ended the lives of four other students. He refused to surrender to the police, and they shot him. They murdered my beautiful son. I never found out why he did it, and I grieved for what seemed like ages, spending much of my time in church. I feared that the boy I had grown in my belly for nine months, the boy I had held and talked to and loved for years, was burning in Hell. I couldn't stand it. I slashed my wrists and ended up in the emergency room more than once.

All the while, Kyra's stomach swelled with new life. An

embryo, it turned out, had formed after all. She gravitated between grief and love, new motherhood against the loss of her baby boy. It took a few months, but she hauled herself up out of the pit of despair I couldn't seem to escape. We fought often, and she got tired of talking me out of cutting myself again. I hated the baby inside of her, and wished she would miscarry before it arrived. I couldn't bear to take care of another fragile life again, not after him. I refused to raise another child and watch them die. Kyra left me, of course. I don't blame her, but I miss her every day. Sometimes at night I wake myself up screaming, but I don't know if I'm screaming for her or my son.

I slowly sat up in my son's bed. His soft blankets felt scratchy and rough. Tears stained my face as I took in the room around me, evidence of the life he used to have. The life that was ripped away from him. He was too young, far too young.  
#

The angel's eyes fluttered open, her gaze at first unfocused, and then searching. She looked around the room, probably trying to put the pieces together. Then she saw me. We stared at each other, two creatures from two different worlds

who never should have met. I saw fear and uncertainty in her eyes. I'm not sure what she saw in mine. Perhaps lust. I was a bit drunk, and I wished I could fuck her until the pain in my heart was no more. It had been months since I had felt another woman's touch, and I wanted her to make love to me the way Kyra used to, before tragedy found us.

"You are human," she said. Was that . . . awe in her voice?

"You're an angel," I answered. "You're really divine, right? Not just some freak with wings?" The words stung coming out.

She stared at me for a moment, perhaps searching for the right response.

"I come from the kingdom of Heaven, yes." Her eyes, surprisingly golden, were still searching for answers. She didn't seem sure if I was friend or foe.

I swallowed and asked her the million-dollar question. I needed to know what happened to my son. I told her his name and explained what happened. I described him for her, told her the color of his eyes and the way he smiled. I told her about his shaggy hair and tendency toward bear hugs. I told her I missed the little boy I used to know.

Her expression, before impersonal and calculating, melt-

ed into one of concern. She seemed genuinely sad. My heart felt like it was being choked, and my vision blurred as tears pricked my skin.

"I do not know this boy, nor do I know where he might be. I am sorry. Some secrets are only God's to tell."

I howled with grief as the rain fell outside. Time no longer made sense to me. The world felt fast and slow all at once. Eventually, the walls of my apartment faded into a world of black and blue, where I was floating, no, falling, until the landing hit like water from on high. My shoulder ached like some beast had sunk its fangs into it, and I groaned in pain, a pain that did not stop.

I heard the screams before I saw them, kids of 14, 16, 17, running for their lives from some unseen villain. Only I knew who it was, who held the gun that frightened them so. I stood, pain blooming in my shoulder and leg, and I grabbed onto a nearby locker for support. I saw him, the boy I thought I knew, remorseless as he pointed a destroyer at a girl on crutches. She stood like a cornered rabbit, ready to kick and run. And she did, her sticker-studded crutch meeting his knee with a flinching swipe. He swore and fell to the ground, only to get up again. To

## The Blotter

---

fire. To kill her.

I knew she was dead. The blood was too much. No mortal creature could lose that much of themselves. Limping forward, I screamed, “What the fuck is wrong with you?” with all the strength of a thunderstorm, with all of the pain that comes with hindsight. But like a ghost, my voice simply drifted away.

Moments played out before me, an unending wave of blood and tears. I saw brothers hug sisters, 15-year-olds knelt in dark corners with urine-stained pants, football players reduced to whimpering pups in the face of death. Kids texted their parents, said they loved them and apologized for squabbles over things that didn’t matter now, not compared to this.

I watched my own flesh and blood dispatch three more kids, smelled the stench of their blood as it pooled around them, as it grew darker and colder and forever left its vessel behind. I called out for those lost souls, screamed sorry until it lost all meaning. There was nothing I could do in the quiet after of that brutal act. Nothing at all.

Petal soft fingers stroked my cheek. I opened my eyes, feeling the all too real pain in my shoulder, and gazed up at the woman before me. She was wearing my dress, an old gray, flowy thing

that would sit right at home in a Victorian closet. Her wings caressed me in a pillowy embrace, and I half-expected her to kiss me, but she didn’t.

“What happened?” I asked. The rawness of my own voice struck me.

“You collapsed from your chair and fainted. You laid silent for a few minutes.”

My voice broke midway through as I said, “It felt like hours.”

A knock at the door jolted me upright. I wasn’t expecting anyone. I got to my feet, slowly and painfully, and staggered toward the source of the sound. My hand rested on the cool knob of the door, wondering if I really wanted to know who, after all of this, was on the other side.

It was Kyra. Her rainswept face saw mine, and my wide eyes watched as she asked if I was okay. I shook my head, and ushered her in, my gaze lingering on her swollen stomach. She was due any day now.

I closed the heavy door behind her and turned to see her shock and awe at the angel in my living room. I tapped her shoulder and wordlessly guided her back to a room she once knew well. She followed, but not without looking behind her.

We sat on the edge of our old bed together, and her soft

hands found mine. From beside me, I heard, “This isn’t just happening to you.”

I looked up at the woman who would always have a piece of my heart. She told me about the angels falling like winged comets from starry skies, about the emergency meeting at the Vatican, about the gatherings of people in ancient churches, praying over something they didn’t understand. The news was in a frenzy, and people were scared and confused.

“I can’t stop thinking about him,” I said. The truth tasted like blood in my mouth. “I dreamed about his . . . his victims,” I managed to choke out.

She was quiet for a long time. “I thought I would find you dead.” Tears ran like soundless rivers down her cheeks. I admired her as I cried beside her, the woman with the crimson red hair and the bright eyes. The woman with the strength of a lion, who was strong enough to bear my child alone.

“I’m sorry I hurt you,” I blurted out. I meant every word. She let go of my hand, but her gaze never faltered.

“I never wanted to be a single mother. This baby was supposed to be ours. But you’re unstable and resentful, and I couldn’t stand to see your torn up wrists anymore.” A cry

escaped her. “I just couldn’t do it.”

We met in that moment, holding each other and sobbing for everything we had lost. For the love we had shared, and the relationship that was ripped apart. For the boy we had buried, and the kids he had killed, now taking their final rest beneath the soft earth. For the uncertain future of the little life Kyra nourished, and the uncertain future of us.

“I’m sorry I can’t be her mother,” I sobbed. “I’m sorry I’m broken.”

“You don’t have to be sorry,” she said. “You’re not broken, just grieving. You never stopped grieving.” Her feather soft hands rubbed my back, just the way I liked it.

“I’m so scared he’s in Hell,” I cried. “I’m fucking terrified. He doesn’t deserve that.

No one does.”

“He’s not, sweet girl,” Kyra said. “He can’t be.”

“How do you know?” I whimpered.

“He was only a child, my love,” she said. I closed my eyes and nestled my face in the crook of her neck. She gently rocked me back and forth, the way the wind gently rocked the trees. The soft patter of rain became our soundtrack as we both fell silent, out of words to say.

“He was only a child,” I murmured. I felt lighter than I had before.. ❖

## 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.

1 - When we sleep and *perchance* we’re not always dropped somewhere odd. Sometimes a dream puts you in a known environment. A room where you grew up or went to school or worked. The clarity of that place seems uncanny – at least from the strange-dimensional views that dreams occasionally give you. A detail of physical enormity might be missing or out of place but feel perfectly rendered, while something miniscule – particulate - is there, precisely where you last left it, even decades ago.

It is not always reassuring that you are somewhere familiar. Dreams are not playful – not like we commonly define the word – but mischievous and not always up to any good. No classroom scene goes well. Ever. Playgrounds turn dark and stormy much more often than they ever did when we were tykes. The kitchen of your youth can open into an impossible ‘scape fully intent on doing you fiery harm.

My own childhood home warps in my subconscious. There is furniture where there was none, and I don’t even seem to mind that it is there. Who put windows in this study, and why won’t the curtains – drapes? – pull back to let in the light? Where are the simple tacky landscape prints my parents hung on the walls? The carpet is deeper, more insidious.

2 - Why are my so-called memories of things altered by my own mind? The dream touches the actual – smudging it. That is, I see her face, hear her voice, but the cheekbones are less pronounced, she is not quite so tall or fair-haired. Her smile less happy. And for just a moment I think her name wrong, call her by that mistake. Still, she looks over and answers. She holds my hand, runs with me, pulls ahead and then lets me go. Is this even her, or some other that I fail to recall at all? Which is shaved with Occam’s razor – that I am being baffled by a hoodoo or that I have forgotten someone altogether?

3 – My only conclusion is that my dreams affect my waking moments, testing my abilities to know what is real and what is only illusion, hazy, vague. I should not challenge so boldly, mock so swiftly, argue so readily or dismiss so completely.

DRWS - cyberspace

## “The Uncodable American Persimmon”

by Chad Knuth

---

The day started with a prayer, our tables set with frozen persimmons on slim white cutting boards placed at every seat. As the prayer went and we thanked the Creator, the persimmons acclimated, and their juices ran free. With every passing minute, they looked more trampled and more spoiled, until at one point, to the untrained eye, they looked ready for the compost bins in the far corners of the room. But as Dr. Linwood Watson would put it, a member of the Haliwa-Saponi tribe and an enthusiast of this Native North American fruit, they were actually just right. “The uglier it looks the riper it is,” Dr. Watson told us. “If you’re nervous about picking it up because it’s about to fall apart, like some of these on your cutting boards, that means you got a good one.”

As part of Native American Heritage Month, the *Native Plant Symposium: “Green Roots, Red Resilience”* (hosted in partnership between the UNC American Indian Center and the NC Botanical Garden) kicked off with an auditorium filled with local residents eager to learn,

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

and Natives equally eager to share. Towering over the lectern, Dr. Watson started the day off with his passionate, unparalleled commitment to the education of younger generations. “It starts with the youth, [...] you claim the youth first,” Dr. Watson repeated throughout his energetic talk. “It starts with the seedlings,” he went on, his overarching mission being to educate the youth and reinvigorate the elders about our Native plants, namely the persimmon, encouraging us to “get out and wrestle with it.”

As Dr. Watson explained, the American persimmon has the largest fruiting tree range and the longest fruiting season of any North American fruiting tree. It is however, not likely to be coded and found in any local grocery, supermarket, or Walmart super center. “You can’t put a price on it, and there’s something special about that.” More commonly than the American persimmon, one is likely to find the Asian fuyu or hachiya persimmon at their local grocery. Reason being: American persimmons require a relation-

ship, or as Dr. Watson likes to think of it, a “persimmon ripening dance.” This is because the southern North American persimmon, the species indigenous to North Carolina, is a fickle and unreliable one, and as Dr. Watson puts it, “you will either be drowning in persimmons or starving for lack thereof.” Why? In early fall of each year, as temperatures drop and the first frosts set in, most fruit trees lie dormant while the persimmon ripens and softens. If picked too soon, persimmons can be astringent, even sickening if eaten in large quantities. One has to wait for, essentially, the perfect ripeness, which is what makes the harvesting so spontaneous and at times difficult. But, if one waits *too* long, they may find that acts of nature are stacked up against them, ie. possums, raccoons, squirrels, and most dependably deer, each clambering in and gobbling up the fruit as soon as they drop. “We are eating a fruit in its way, on its terms, and that is rare,” said Dr. Watson. On the flip side to this dance, the more commonly sold Asian fuyu persimmon stays firm,

resulting in easier transportation, and it is non-astringent, meaning it won't sting the tongue when unripened. This comes at a cost, however, as the Asian persimmon is nine times less nutritious than its American counterpart.

When the time finally came to taste the persimmons set before us, we each took ownership of a cutting board and a now softened persimmon, and we cut into them with knives like high school chemists. We peeled apart the skin from its fleshy jelly interior, set aside the pit and pulled away the stem. While Dr. Watson spoke, the auditorium was tasting, growing a new-found love for the persimmon, myself at the

front of the line. It's hard to compare its flavor to any other fruit. When ripened, the persimmon is not even a touch bitter, acidic, or even a touch resembling the colorful flavors of a berry. It doesn't taste like an apple, a peach, or a plum. A persimmon is uniquely sweet in a way of its own, uniquely pure and uniquely subtle. Dr. Watson told us firmly, "They're fugacious. In order to taste its flavor, you have to listen to your tongue. [...] Modern food processing is taking our kids' taste-buds and we need retrain [them]."

As a child local to Chatham County some twenty years ago, I

had trampled through fallen persimmons and held them in all their gooey, pulpy wonderment, but had never once considered that they may in fact be edible, and be it deliciously so. Now, with the ever-fugacious sweetness on my tongue, I will only ever be trampling lightly. As Dr. Watson's time behind the lectern concluded, the room had practically licked their boards clean, any extras scattered around having been quickly claimed as seconds. It's safe to say we had all added a new fruit to our diets, one we can all find right here at home. ❖



## “Freshman Lit. Essay”

By Sonny Rag

---

What is Moby-Dick about? It is difficult to describe without using the terms “epic” and “saga” and then having to define those hyperbolic terms as I see them. I would prefer not to go that route. And I don’t want to fall back on descriptive “judgment” terminology, with words like “redemption” or “allegory,” although they might suffice in a pinch.

Instead, I’m looking for that “unified theory” sentence, what writers call an “elevator pitch” – a sentence or two that would get an agent through to see a publisher about a manuscript. “I have a story here - the journey of a bored young man going to sea, wrapped in a legend of a madman chasing a monster, stored lovingly in an encyclopedia of all things whaling.”

Nevertheless, I can imagine the publisher either ignoring my agent, or turning and asking, “what is the point of the encyclopedia? Doesn’t it mess up the perfectly good yarn about the kid, the madman and the monster?”

“Well, yes,” says my agent. “It

could be seen so. But it is just as strong an argument that the encyclopedia contains everything a reader needs to discover in order to trust that the author knows what he’s talking about. Lots of the nautical knowledge, the historical, geographical and even the cetalogical information imparted in these...extended tangents are necessary that we may then immerse ourselves in the legend of the madman and the young man’s journey.”

“Doesn’t it make the book longer?”

“Oh yes. Much longer,” my agent gushes. He turns on the charm. “A whaling expedition would have taken many months, even years. Our readers will feel that in the telling of the story, but also in the side-stories and the lengthy descriptions of ships and creatures and places and so on.”

“And you think that there is enough core stuff – adventure, gore, pain, suffering, love, lust, fighting, death, weeping and horror to offset that boring side-bar text?” The publisher sighs, because he thinks he knows the

answer.

“I am convinced that storms must actually rage over us, heat and cold and pain and weariness become our own, so that we live out not just Ahab’s descent into the revenge-hell of his own making, but that we will feel real relief in the end when we latch onto Queequeg’s coffin, floating in the water and see the poor Rachel’s sail in the distance.”

“Queequeg?”

“Oh, yes, he’s a cannibal.”

The publisher takes my agent by the hand. “Let’s step into my office...” ❖

## “Sunrise on the Farm”

By Holly Day

She walks down the road, numb, oblivious to the rasp of burnt grass against her skin. Who knows what happened at the old farmhouse far behind her, its windows like black eyes, watching her walk away? It could be a home she is walking away from, full of loving parents family members who meant well but just didn't understand her dreams, could be something worse, a childhood home, but full of dark memories that were all too easy to leave behind, could be a stranger's house, some place she woke up in, abandoned in a basement or tied to a radiator, her captor off on errands for just long enough to craft an escape, it could be even worse: her own home, her husband, dead on the floor, either because she did something or something happened to him, a heart attack, a hammer to the back of his skull an accidental fall down the stairs, a push.

Is that blood on the hem of her calico knee-length dress, the thin cotton fabric catching and trapping the dried burrheads as she walks? Is that a knife in her hand used to cut herself free from ropes with agonizingly slow and careful determination used to strike out at her captor, her husband, her lover, with unexpected fury and force? Or is that just her purse, clenched tightly against her side containing a single bus ticket with an unreadable destination, a handful of bills a phone number and address scribbled on a wrinkled scrap of paper?

## “Flayed”

by Holly Day

You can unwrap a tree from its bark like you're undressing a ballerina  
pull it off in one, long winding strip and lay it in curls on the ground.  
The tree won't survive its undressing, of course, unlike the ballerina  
who, depending on your relationship, will either stand and stare at you  
defiantly or invitingly, or drop to her knees to cover herself.

If you peel the bark from a tree, it's not like undressing a person at all.  
It's more like flaying the skin from an animal, exposing  
the red, wet muscle underneath. This is a wound that will never heal.  
A tree stripped of its skin may look as though it's still alive  
for a little while, but then

whatever leaves cling to its branches will turn brown and fall off  
its roots will curl up underground and recede far enough  
that you'll be able to push the tree over with one hand  
like a girl with her feet bound or entirely removed.

continued from page 3

And, alas, in this corner of the seventh ring of hell, we have rejection. The blank stare. The blank phone-screen. The short emotional note. The short unemotional note. Swipe left. Spinning in circles with one sneaker nailed to the floor, wondering where oh where I went wrong.

What can I say about being told no that hasn't been hashed over a thousand times in a hundred ways? Do you need me to tell you that there are myriad reasons for "no" beyond the pure dislike of someone or something?

No you don't. I didn't think so...

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

## Contributors

**A.E.S.** is a 22-year-old writer, photographer, and board game designer from the Midwest. She is also a proud lesbian who loves to incorporate LGBT themes into her work. "All We Want and All We Know", one of her previous short stories, was published in Webster University's student magazine, *Ampersand*, in 2018.

**Chad Knuth** is a North Carolina-raised, Michigan-born writer and filmmaker. He is currently on the road looking for his next story.

**Sonny Rag** is an occasional contributor with a strange world-view.

**Holly Day** has been in these pages many times over our tenure. She resides with her family in Minneapolis, MN, and her poetry has recently appeared in *Hubbub*, *Grain*, and *Third Wednesday*, and her recent collection "Book of Beasts" was released (no pun intended) last summer by Weasel Press.

# THE LEGEND OF WIPE-ONCE WALLY

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



**Joe Buonfiglio**

Does living through  
a global pandemic seem  
**WEIRD?**

Well, hold on.  
Things are about to get a lot  
**WEIRDER!**

The Legend of  
**WIPE-ONCE WALLY**  
And His 13 Rules for How to Survive a Global  
Pandemic in a Nation That's Gone Completely  
Batshit Crazy

**BUY IT NOW ON  
AMAZON.com**



Imagine, if you can, James Thurber and E. B. White sharing a taxi to the airport with Alexander Solzhenitsyn.

They're stuck in traffic, will most certainly miss their flights, but are spinning their yarns to each other while sharing a flask of good whiskey and some snacks they purloined from the hotel mini-refrigerator. The cabby, listening intently to the raucous tales regaling from the back seat, has turned off the meter, because why not?

Now you have some idea of the stories of Victor Pogostin, PhD, in his collection *Russian Roulette*.

These...personal papers...from a cold-war - and beyond - intellectual in an occasionally warm world are insightful, funny, and poignant.

And all true.

**Buy it now on Amazon**

# RUSSIAN ROULETTE



Victor Pogostin