

PORCHLIGHT

Final Issue



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Porchlight: A Literary Magazine
Where Narrative, Design, and Photography Intersect.

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LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

So this is it. The last one.

We hope you have enjoyed our short run, which can now live on (indefinitely) in digital purgatory.

This last, super issue is a showcase of everything we feel has made Porchlight great; it features new and established artists and writers from around the world, threaded together with great design and beautiful photo essays.

The editorial staff is kicking around ideas for another mash-up of literature and multimedia art works, and our designer is moving on to his own projects. Look for announcements on our website in the coming year to find out what's new with all of us. Like our contributors, we just can't stop creating.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "L.J. Moore". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "L.J." and the last name "Moore" clearly distinguishable.

L.J. Moore

CONTENTS

Sound View by Elissa Leichter	6
Hurricane Maps by Catie Cleary	7
Madigan Theocrat by Andrew Madigan	10
Photography by Mike Chylinski	14
Coconuts by Shayne Barr	19
Wren's Revenge by L.J. Moore	30
Night Crawlers in the Rain by Clayton Adam Clark	32
Photography by Lawrence Dizon Sumulong	33
Ignatius by Amy Bergen	35
Photography by Sherri Damlo	42
Behaving by George Moore	45
Drawings by Jenny Starr-Busch Johnson	46
The Magic, Fantastic Epiphany of 1968 by J. David Hollingsworth	49
Covered Bridge by Taylor Brown	56
Leaving Ranney Ranch by Blue Renner	58



Sound View

by Elissa Leichter

Midday and a firefly lights
inside rib cage, warming
me up as General Washington's suspension

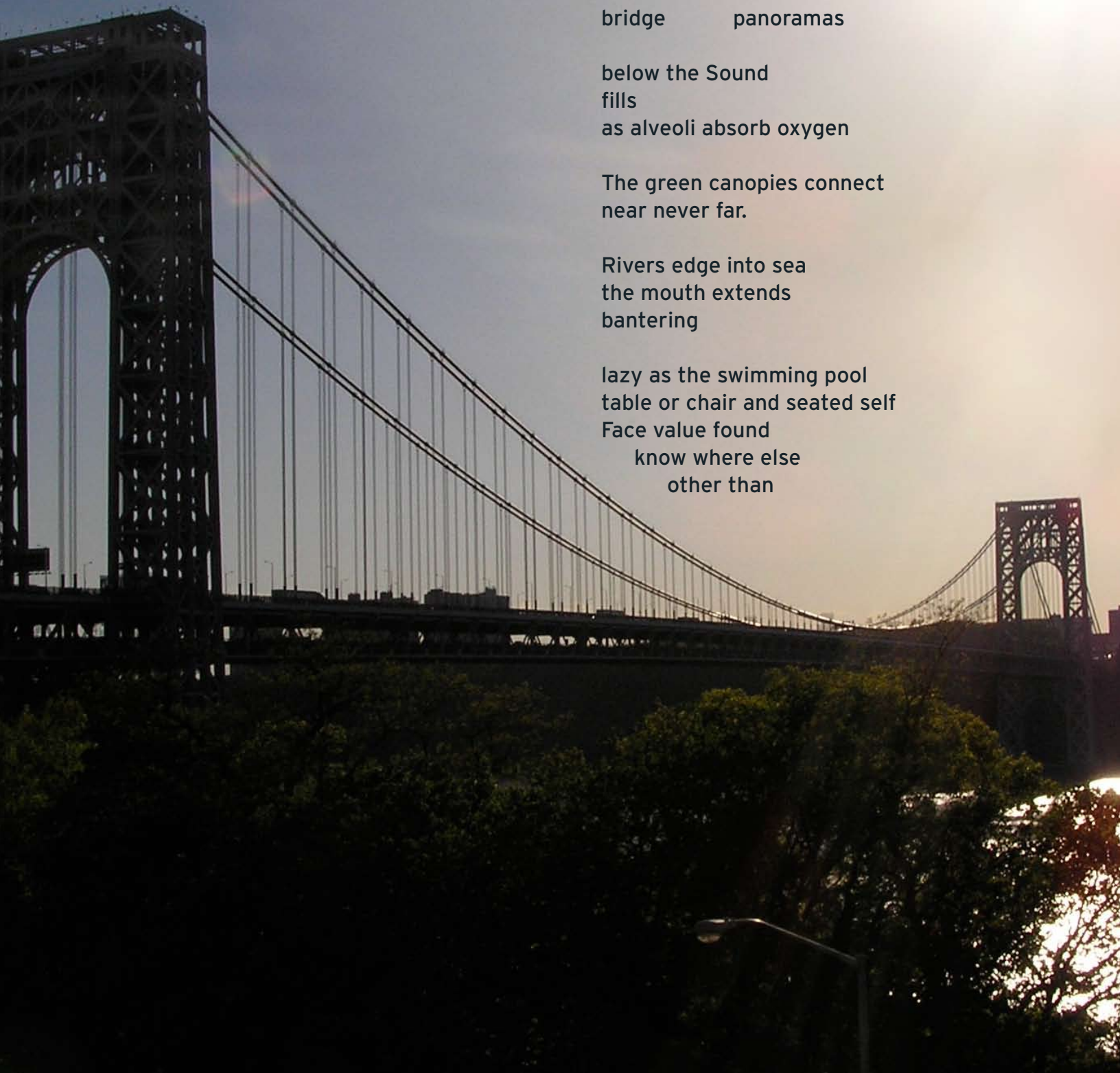
bridge panoramas

below the Sound
fills
as alveoli absorb oxygen

The green canopies connect
near never far.

Rivers edge into sea
the mouth extends
bantering

lazy as the swimming pool
table or chair and seated self
Face value found
 know where else
 other than





HURRICANE MAPS

by Catie Cleary

I have always understood the certain plotted and contained romance of a map. It was the idea of restricting and holding back that which couldn't be held that enthralled me, the impossibility of the whole idea. After all, who hasn't, at some point in their life, desired nothing more than a map? To be sure, there are some mornings when I wake up and wish there was a map lying by my bed, wish that some sort of delicate paper covered in lines would tell me how to get through the day.

What do you want me to tell you again?

That's right, how I survived the hurricane.

Patience, I will say. Patience is a lonely sort of virtue, it isn't like grace or beauty—nobody is born with it. Rather, it is forced upon us; it is the virtue of the survivor. How does one survive anything? With patience.

What did you say? You want me to discuss my experience?

You know what I'm going to tell you.

Patience, my friend. Patience.

If you haven't guessed by now, I'm a cartographer. It's an outdated profession, I know, everyday another one of us is replaced by some sort of fancy software program. There is something to be said though, for the simple voice of necessity. Drawing a map is, at its heart, an essentially pure exercise; it stems from the desire to rationalize and explain, the desire to guide and to teach. Ask me what lies at the core of the human experience and I will tell you this: maps.

How does one fall into the profession of mapmaking? It's simpler than you might think; there are things to be mapped all around you. Listen, I will illustrate this. As a child I drew lines and so my parents enrolled me in art class. The instructor was Israeli and, as often happens when English is one's second language, she had a very succinct and poetic way of speaking. I can only imagine this came from the lack of connotation the words held for her. For example,

when she told us to “assume the human figure” I am positive that her brain didn’t immediately sing-song “make an ass out of you and me,” causing her to reconsider her word choice. And so because she spent more time searching for the true word, the word she felt as opposed to the word she knew, I often left art class breathless under the weight of her words. I remember one afternoon, she was explaining angles and proportion and she mentioned the slight difficulties presented when a model’s pose shifts accidentally. “Sorry,” immediately came the model’s voice from the stand.

“No, no,” said our instructor in her thick accent. “You must move, you have to move, you—” here she paused to summon forth the English words for what she knew, “you’re alive.”

It was the preciseness of this phrase, its sharpness, which caused me to remember it today. It sliced through the ideas about drawing I had constructed for myself, deflated them like a balloon. I was not capturing a still life, an image. I was capturing something alive, and one cannot take life and pin it down in the way that I was intending.

To this day I begin drawing a map in the same way that I began that drawing anew. It’s a simple realization really. To accurately draw a map one must surrender the idea that a map could ever be accurately drawn.

This is a short story though; I never intended to try your patience. I could talk much longer about maps, you understand. I could explain to you how skin is a map to the human body, how handwriting is a map to the fingers. I could explain to you how leaving behind footprints on a beach is leaving behind a map to one’s very countenance and bearing. After all, everything there is to know about a person can be learned from the way that they walk. However, that isn’t what you asked for, is it?

How to describe a hurricane? It’s dreadfully tedious. In fact, most of the time they come at night, while you are asleep, and so you remember them as a collection of disparate images that appear when your dreams are interrupted. A crack of thunder and you are startled awake, a tree through the roof and your eyes flutter open at the noise. Sleep is resilient though, and I have often found that the hurricane weaves itself into my dreams, a small thread of lightening or the cold needle of bayou water. It is when you wake up the next morning and there is only a grey rain and fallen trees across the roads that the hurricane is fully realized. Surviving a hurricane is like a love affair: it isn’t the act itself that is so difficult, but it is the aftermath that presents a problem. You find your favorite southern magnolia tree that you tended so carefully from a seedling pulled up from its roots by some mysterious violent force and dragged three houses down. You see it resting with its branches through the window of a strange house and its roots raised upwards. You find yourself terribly confused and in a rather poetic mindset. “Hmmm,” you think, “I really didn’t plan for this.”

I could mention the weeks without electricity, the waterfront hotel that completely disappeared, the school closings. However, those aren’t really things that happened to me and so they have no place in my survival story. My mind keeps returning to that magnolia tree, or, more precisely, to the hole where it once was. Noticing an absence is one of the hardest things

we are asked to do. I can't say that I bore this burden any better or worse than those before me. It was only a tree, you might say, and I will reply: he was only your father, they were only your legs, she was only your first love.

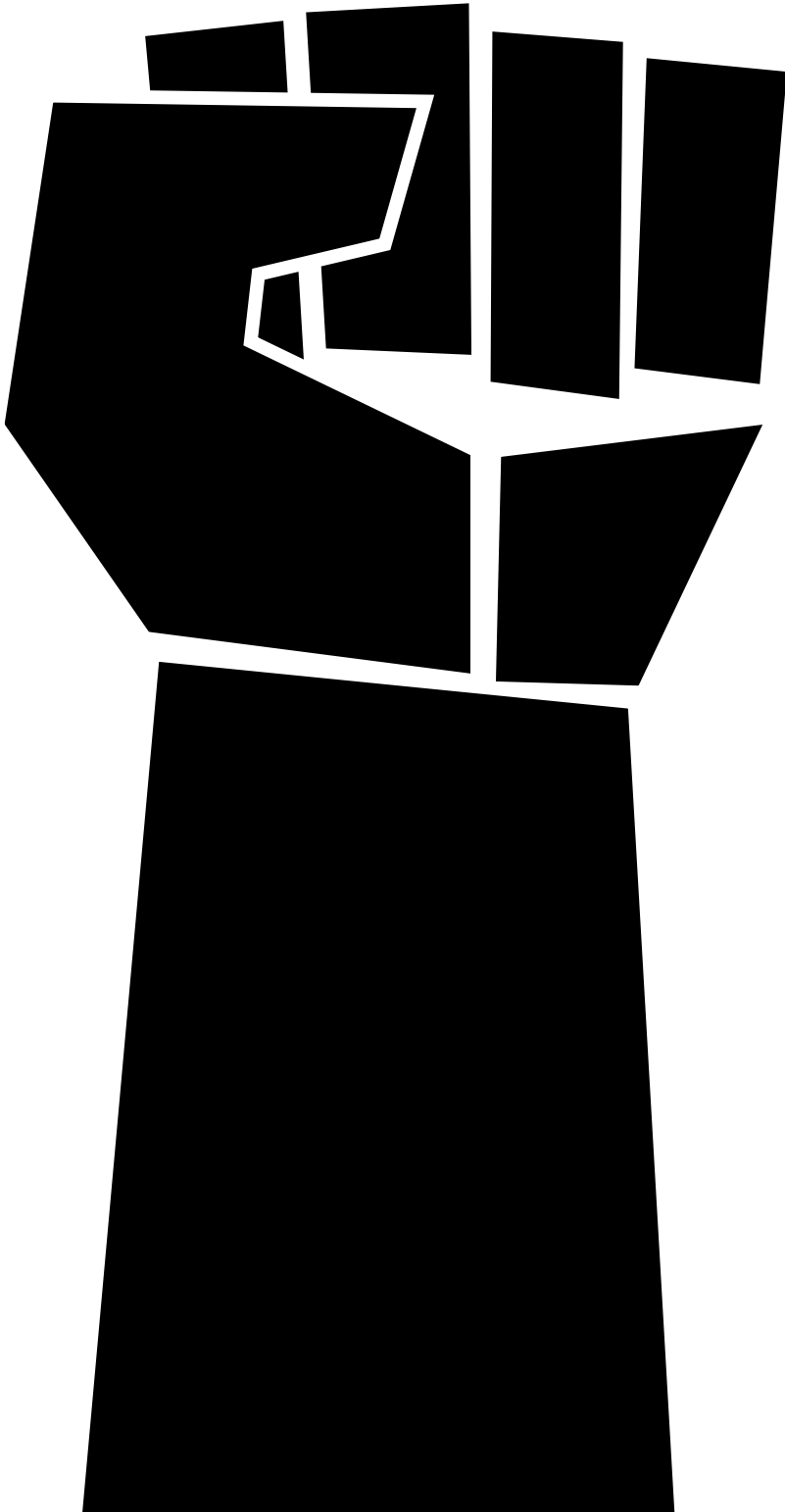
So I drew a map. I drew a series of maps. I drew a map of my house before the hurricane, I drew a map of the patterns of shade the magnolia would cast across my yard in the summer, I drew a map of the tree's roots, I drew a map of the hole where it stood. I drew a map of my house after the hurricane, and that was the most difficult of all. I drew the broken windows, I drew the hole in the roof, I drew the ruined and soggy carpet, I drew the water moccasin coiled in the kitchen cabinets among the cereal bowls. I believe that earlier I spoke of patience. These maps took me half a year to complete and by the time I was finished my neighbors had already pieced their own yards and houses and lives back together. They looked complete while my own life still looked to be in many small pieces.

As to be expected of any cartographer, I have a room in my house dedicated to map chests. Each drawer is dated and labeled and when I pull one open I feel the welcoming thrill well known to anyone with a passion for the unusual. When you care very deeply for something that most people don't understand you get to feeling very possessive of it. It's important to keep this in mind when imagining me opening a new, unlabeled drawer and placing my maps carefully inside. Imagine me writing out a label: Hurricane Maps: September 2008 and letting the drawer snap shut behind me. Imagine me telling you, "The beauty of a map is that it speaks of exactly where you have been."

Imagine that room, with its broken out windows and mildewing red carpeting, the sun coming through to dry out the pools of water that have gathered in the corners. *P*

MADIGAN THEOCRAT

BY ANDREW MADIGAN



Review of The Theocrat by Bensalem Himmich. Trans. Roger Allen. New York: AUC Press, 2009

The *Theocrat*, a mongrel of fiction and history, is the story of al-Hakim bi-Amr Allah, an Egyptian caliph who was himself a curious blend of leader, visionary and dangerous madman. Ruling in the 10th century, al-Hakim's life and leadership tell us a great deal about the contemporaneous conflicts within Egyptian society and throughout the Islamic world. His story also relates to the West and its future history.

The novel was originally published in Arabic as *Majnun al-hukm* (1989), meaning "he who is crazy in rule" (ix). As the translator explains, al-Hakim reigned during a time of intense social, political

and economic upheaval, which he only exacerbated through a series of decrees mandating not only what his people should do, but what they should believe as well. If his life was enigmatic, his death, or rather his “disappearance,” was equally mysterious. After his uncertain end, the historical al-Hakim’s disciples fled to Syria and founded the Druze sect.

The novel, like al-Hakim himself, is a hybrid of narrative styles and text types: al-Hakim’s peculiar and often disquieting proclamations; quotes and epigrams from Medieval historians; anecdotes; descriptions of what the caliph said and did during his “visions”; and relatively traditional narration. Himmich blends the real and the invented such that we can’t always distinguish between the two, much like Oliver Stone’s marriage of documentary and artificial footage in *JFK*.

In a subsection (“Ribbon of Values”) of the first part of *The Theocrat*, we encounter a selection of al-Hakim’s pronouncements and sayings. “Anyone who does not carry excess to its uttermost limit comes close to the regions of whiteness and indolence. What an idiot!” (10). This is a typical Hakimian utterance, filled with paradox, peculiarity and not-quite-brilliance. It’s an intriguing snippet, and the novel teems with them, but they generally fail to serve and sustain a larger narrative objective. We get a sense of the leader’s madness, his poetry and near-wisdom, but little else.

Some of al-Hakim’s jeremiads work well, however, because they point to our own time and the fatuous, self-serving rhetoric of contemporary leaders:

You ask me about the reasoning behind my penchant for destroying monuments and values. My response (take it away and reflect on it) is: anyone who does not destroy does not know the meaning of building; anyone who does not practice evil cannot do good. (10)

His misguided self-confidence—which becomes central to the novel—is arresting. A modern speech-writer would get a bonus for coming up with something like this: I am good for precisely the reason that you think me bad. Al-Hakim’s discursive style falls somewhere between political doubletalk and Nietzschean epigram. Do we see a visionary leader or a charlatan? Or is he a leftfield thinker whose rants push the limits of philosophic discourse, whose writings are delicious with meta-irony, with seemingly contradictory and absurd truths?

If Himmich is gazing back to Nietzsche, he’s also gazing further back to Machiavelli: “There will be no peace for the caliph if he is not permanently suspicious of everyone; he must lop off his own shadow if it seems strange or ambiguous” (11). Al-Hakim’s obsessive uncertainty, paranoia and deconstruction of logic resonate equally with the Florentine Republic and the postmodern age; al-Hakim could easily be a character from Pynchon or, for that matter, a portrait of Richard Nixon.

This is perhaps the novel’s greatest strength, its ability to signify not only with Egypt’s past and its long history of leadership, but with a wide variety of writers, thinkers and politicians. Himmich is able to make al-Hakim a particular and a universal figure, an individual as well as a type. Sometimes we spy a shrewd, persnickety Socrates and sometimes a bonkers King George III.

Al-Hakim is an intriguing, many-textured, multi-dimensional character. His increasingly erratic, disturbed and rather disturbing mandates are among the most enjoyable and often comic elements of the novel: “I, al-Hakim bi-Amr Illah, hereby announce the reversal of times and meetings. From now on, work will be at night and sleep in the daytime. I hereby forbid all travel

around the city after sunset, all assemblies outside houses, all fouling of street space” (20). We can’t help but think of Gibran when we confront al-Hakim’s grand, resounding exhortations. If al-Hakim were a poet, we might forgive his pronouncements as metaphorical, but he was a statesman so we’re forced to interpret them in the harsh light of literal meaning.

Just when we think we know the caliph, Himmich paints him in a new color: “In the eighth year of al-Hakim’s quarter century his Shi’i devotees published, with his connivance, a decree concerning ancestors, requiring that insults be posted on doors, walls, cemeteries, and street corners” (20). Was he mad or merely a patsy for his deranged acolytes? Was he joking, cruel, idiotic, insane, flippant? According to Ibn Kathir, a renowned Islamic scholar, if al-Hakim “found anyone cheating, he ordered a slave whom he always took with him, named Mas’ud, to sodomize the offender” (35). Should we see in him an analogy to George Bush or Ulysses S. Grant, the Sun King or de Sade? The author refuses to answer, but rather, with each disconnected narrative unit, merely provokes further questions.


Like many recent works of Egyptian fiction—Mahfouz’s *Before the Throne*, Yusuf Idris’s *City of Love and Ashes*, Miral al-Tahawy’s *Gazelle Tracks*—Himmich takes on his nation’s history and leaders, and his novel suffers for the same reasons. The union of history and story is clunky and often dull. Himmich has some intriguing ideas, but they’re underdeveloped and inadequately united with the more basic function of effective storytelling. He seems to presume that the novel’s basis in historical reality, mediated through an “interesting” narrative structure, will be enough to sustain the reader’s interest and to qualify the text as an important literary work. This assumption—for which the acclaimed, popular work of Mahfouz is partially to blame—is unwarranted. *The Theocrat* is strong on research, as an account of historical figures and their meaning for present-day Egypt, and as a study of al-Hakim’s teachings, but it’s weak on story, narrative arc and other traditional features.

The translator, Roger Allen, seems to predict such criticism. In his introduction, he explains his criteria in selecting a work to translate:

...works that tend to distance themselves from the expectations [...] of Western readers regarding the nature, techniques, and purposes of fiction. In other words, I have hoped to find examples of Arabic novels that [...] will manage to convey to readers of English aspects of the more intrinsically Arab and Arabic contributions to contemporary Arabic fiction rather than those which, in one way or another, can be seen as replications of the Western tradition. (vii)

His idea, then, is that *The Theocrat* represents a distinct break with the Western canon and with our conception, more generally, of the practice and design of literature. Implicitly, he seems to be arguing that Western readers might not understand or appreciate the novel because of its difference. This is indefensible, however. Himmich’s text is not a mainstream page-turner, but neither is it distinct from Western literature. Structurally and aesthetically, *The Theocrat* is securely grounded in modernist and postmodernist “experiments,” such as pastiche, temporal distortion, historical metafiction, plotlessness and defamiliarization.

Allen further attests that the “truly remarkable” (x) aspect of Himmich’s work is that, when he records al-Hakim’s visions, he does so in the actual linguistic style of those visions. Far from remarkable, this is quite expected. Following the modernist battles with traditional form that began over 100 years ago, this technique—the transformation of a writer’s style and tone, in a text with multiple narrators or centers-of-consciousness, to match the content and point of view—has become commonplace. Joyce, Woolf, Barth, Burroughs, Vonnegut, Pynchon and Wallace are just a few of the many authors who’ve done just this. Faulkner even applies this strategy to a character quite similar to al-Hakim: Darl Bundren, from *As I Lay Dying*, is like al-Hakim both visionary and mentally unsound.

Allen might argue that Himmich is not interested in plot, setting or other novelistic conventions, and this would be a valid argument, but unfortunately the novel isn’t sufficiently agile, in its “unconventional” manner, to sustain our interest. The difference between Faulkner and Himmich is the latter’s inability to control the techniques he tries so valiantly to deploy. *The Theocrat* reads like a narrative experiment that exists in a vacuum, an interesting assortment of forms that serves no greater artistic purpose. We might occasionally admire his writerly ambition, but rarely its execution. The novel has some intriguing flourishes, and Himmich fleshes out an alluring character in al-Hakim, but he fails to make something new from his influences, from Faulkner to Mahfouz. Moreover, he doesn’t tie up the ragged ends of his many and varied narrative threads, so that epigrams, anecdotes and edicts are left dangling, un-unified, unsatisfying. 

Photography by Mike Chylinski



Bikes on Lawn



Motel Mississippi



Bi-Rite with Cat



Champagne St. Jose



Bill South El Monte



Elvis Presley's stillborn twin, Jesse, lies entombed beside the King at Graceland. It miffs Jesse that although he was stillborn, he is buried beneath a man-sized slab of marble.

Symmetry over accuracy? fumes Jesse.

Outrageous I say. *So* I say, but Dad shouts *Patton!* and breaks the psychic connection. I nest my crystal ball in my pillow and rush downstairs into the den, where a large gift sits beside my father on the sofa.

You thought I forgot Dad says. *Go on* he says. *Open it.* My father has wrapped the gift in lonely-hearts classifieds. A red circle rings "Beautiful, busty, in debt!" Two stars beside "Seeking fully-employed king without kids."

Happy eighteenth, son says Dad, as I peel the newspaper away from a turquoise suitcase.

Now get packing he says, and laughs himself into grinding coughing, coughs up lung-mud which he chews, swallows. The turquoise suitcase, speckled with mold, is a fixture in our basement. The trip into the den is probably the farthest it has traveled since leaving the store.

I know you'd prefer pixie dust Dad says. *But tell you what. I'd prefer if you had a different face.* There is nothing to say to this. I stand holding my suitcase and Dad stares me down. He wants an opportunity to interrupt me, and so I deliver. I say *Today at sch—*

Hey Merlin Dad interrupts. *Watch and learn.* He aims the remote control like a magic wand, incants the magic words *Stabher cadaver!* and the anchorwoman on TV talks louder. Dad settles into the sofa, rapt.

Upstairs, I fill the turquoise suitcase with clothes, tarot cards. My crystal ball reflects my face. Although my father never cared for fatherhood, he had loved Charline. After birthing me, Charline walked out as soon as she could walk again, having booby-trapped my genes with a last “fuck you,” which is to say that I have inherited her cheeks and her lips. Dad stashes a framed photograph of Charline in a hollowed-out copy of *The Physics of Bowling: Beyond the Basics*, which he pretends to study almost every night.

My suitcase slams each step as I sleigh it into the foyer. Dad cranes his head over his shoulder. *Aw hey* he says. *What’s that?*

Suitcase.

Aw hey now he says. *I was just playing* he says. He half rises. He crouches an inch above the cushion until his program flashes into a commercial. Then he comes at me saying *I didn’t mean it! I didn’t mean anything by it.* Dad rests his hands on my shoulders. *Don’t go* he says. A gunshot cracks from the TV. Eight black men glide around a red track.

Lookit’ ’em fly says Dad. *And they don’t even have purses under their arms.* When his laughter rattles into coughing, Dad drops his hands from my shoulders to his knees, and I make my break. Dad wheezes something emphatic. Door slams. But by the end of the driveway I know I’m not going any farther than the end of the driveway. Three cold miles to the Greyhound, this heavy suitcase, and when the bus dumps me, what? I bundle on extra sweaters and drag my suitcase across the lawn. I sit on the suitcase, beside a hedge for an hour. After an hour, I let myself back inside.

He’s back! says Dad. *I was getting worried. I looked all over for you* he says.

Thanks, Dad I say, sitting beside him on the couch.

Yep Dad says. *Looked all over. I looked for you in the bathroom. I thought I might have seen you in the fridge, but it was just chicken. Want this?* he asks, shaking a drumstick in front of my face.

You have it I say, and I hope that he chokes.



Less than a year after my eighteenth birthday I move away from my father, which is not to say that we lose touch. Each morning I make time for us to be alone. I gather my palms and my fingers around my crystal ball. I close my eyes and press my forehead against the sphere. Breathing slowed, I concentrate on Dad’s face. I concentrate on feeling his feelings. For years he never feels anything but fine. Gradually, however, I sense that remorse is killing him. I invite myself home, where I find the same old blade.

Nobody with a third eye sees twenty-twenty-twenty I console myself, and try to enjoy our walk. Dad is different in that he is elderly, and in that he has converted to Judaism. It is the holiday of Yom Kippur. In synagogue, Dad draped a shawl called a “tallith” over his head, formed a cave in

which he swayed and muttered without being distracted by other swaying mutterers. We stroll off the stiffness of morning services while he recounts his epiphany.

Nine pins down Dad says. I'm lined up for a spare. Shoulders squared, backswing straight, I'm releasing the ball when this voice booms 'Dino! Wilt thou leave thy sins and go to Heaven? Or have thy sins, and go to Hell?'

You made the right choice I say.

I can't spend forever with your mother he says. Shoot he says. I'll have to atone for that.

Yom Kippur is a day for fasting, and my father walks unsteadily. Twice he uses me for balance.

Why don't you do something honest he says.

I love what I do. I help people. I happen to be one of the Tri-State's most esteemed clairvoyants.

You're nuts he says. I remove my hat and blot sweat from my scalp with a Kleenex. And a Coppe. Coppe is Charline's surname. One of the few facts that I know about my mother's family is that both of her brothers were stricken with baldness in the fifth grade.

How old am I, dad?

35.

No.

37.

I'm 43 years old. His eyes flare and his mouth turns down. His throat threshes out a lurching grinding sound.

This heat I say, flapping my hands around my face. You OK?

Fine says Dad. It's a good thing that he's such a terrible liar. I'm ready to catch him when he collapses. I drag his body to the side of the road and call 911. Paramedics arrive in no time. They pour ice water on my father's head and throat. I help them slap color back into Dad's cheeks and pick the leaves out of his hair.

Any history of heart problems? asks the alpha EMT, poking around Dad's neck for a pulse.

None answers my father, faintly.

Other conditions?

Prostate cancer.

Cancer! I say. I thought it was remorse! The tech does not look up from unbuttoning Dad's shirt.

Jesus he says. Everyone bands closer. Big-rig trucks sport mud-flaps behind their rearmost wheels. Often these mud-flaps feature Yosemite Sam, pistols drawn, crouched atop an embossed warning to tailgaters: "BACK OFF!" This image and text, tattooed in Technicolor, spans Dad's chest.

We've got to save this one says a paramedic, and they ambulance my father to the hospital for dehydration and heatstroke. I meet with Dr. Graffeo, an oncologist, at Mount Mercy Hospital. Without consulting a crystal ball or cards, Dr. Graffeo forecasts that my father will live for one more year.



That Monday we select a cemetery plot with a lake view. We choose a pine coffin, commission a granite headstone engraved with a six-pointed star and the inscription “Mighty Dino Has Struck Out”. On Tuesday Dad drives me to the airport.

Can Jews have tattoos? I ask, on the freeway.

That’s the point says Dad. *Any Messiah tries resurrecting me, he’ll know to back the fuck off. I want to stay dead.*



Dad parks the car and pats my cheek. *It’s been good having you here son*, he says, and I float up to my terminal. A gentle gate monitor fills the jet in increments. *Section A, please line up with your boarding passes* he coos into the loudspeaker.

We’re just not “A” people a woman behind me explains to her daughter. *We’re “B” people*, she says, and laughs and I laugh too. Back in New York, a red light stops my taxicab beside a competitor’s storefront.

How does he make rent I wonder aloud.

There are a lot of stupid people says the cabbie. Neon in the window blinks “Energizing Crystals”.

What? I say. *You don’t believe in energizing crystals?*

I’m Catholic.

So?

I believe in the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost and that’s it.

Turn around, please. The cabbie turns around in his seat. Looks at me.

What? he says.

The cab I say. Turn the cab around. I left a bag at the airport. I settle back and examine the postcard that “Jablonski, Brunon” has taped to his Plexiglas barrier. Christ, spikes sledged through his palms and feet, does not look at the soldier who lances a pike through his guts like a needle through thick cloth. Instead Jesus beams up at his Father, who beams right back down, responsible for all of it.

Turn around I say. Brunon mutters something about a nuthouse, but does as I ask. My father must want me to be with him now. But now he knows how it feels. Lifting my turquoise suitcase from the cab’s trunk, another year blows by, days like looped footage.



I watch a movie about my namesake, General George Patton, Old Blood n’ Guts on TV again. Patton looms over shell-shocked Private Bennett in an infirmary tent. Men churn bloody sheets, faces burnt off, empty space where you’d expect flesh. Private Bennett trembles like a puppy in a thunderstorm.

You’re trembling like a puppy in a thunderstorm growls Patton.

It’s my nerves says Bennett. *I can’t take it anymore.*

Shut up that goddamned crying you yellow sunuvabitch! explodes Patton. *I won't have these brave men seeing a yellow bastard sitting here crying. You ought to be lined up against a wall and shot. I ought to shoot you myself, God damn you!* Patton pulls his pistol from its holster and waves it in Bennett's face and my phone rings. Dr. Graffeo tells me that my father has collapsed buying groceries.

There were telephone numbers in his wallet for a Ms. Divinity Fudge, and for you says Dr. Graffeo. I left Ms. Fudge a voicemail. Then Dr. Graffeo says that if I want to see my father alive I had better book a flight tonight.



The next morning I land in New Merrill. On the sixth floor of Mt. Mercy I find my sleeping father's shrunken body cupped in the furrow of a mattress. A ripe IV hangs from posts brambled with tubing. Room 648 is super-ventilated, and lit like a ball park.

Welcome to steerage says a French woman in high heels, except that when I look closer it's Fran Ramsey. Fran Ramsey right from New Merrill High. Her white throat still deserves nothing less than obsession.

Fran? I say. *Fran Ramsey?*

Oh! she says. *Oh...hi!*

Patton Nix I say, taking her soft hand.

Patton! She said. *Yeah! Now I see it* she says, but I can tell that she's pretending.

It's OK I say, as Fran eases away her hand.

No, no. How have you been? I'm so glad someone is finally here for him Fran says, motioning to Dad.

I live far away.

I bet I live farther.

France?

Oui.

How'd that happen?

I was an international stewardess for awhile. I had a break day in Paris and stayed.

So you've seen the world.

Paris, anyway. Ma mère she says, pointing at a hairless woman wheezing in the bed to the left of Dad's. *And Claire and Tinker. Tinker, c'est Patton.*

To the right of Dad's bed lies a woman whose youth will be her middle and old age, too. Machines do her living for her. Tinker sits in a chair, bent into his wife. He raises his face from Claire's stomach and nods "hello," then lifts Claire's limp hand and puppeteers a wave. A card of folded printer paper is propped on Claire's bedstand. Markered in hot pink: *Mommy, without you, I'm not OK. Come home soon!* Plastic curtains the color of tanned pelt are bunched against the wall at the end of their tracks. I want to be alone with the kinks in my chest and stomach. I move to draw the curtains shut.

I'm so glad you're here says Fran. I release the curtain. *It's been so boring. So what have you been up to?*

Lots I say. *Just let me say hello to my dad.* I walk to my father. On his bedside table rest his

plump tallith bag, and The Physics of Bowling: Beyond the Basics. *Hi Dad* I say, looking into his sockets. *Hi Dad. How do you feel?* He squints, rasps Charline?

It's Patton, Dad.

My father closes his eyes, and I sit down beside Fran. A cinnamon scent lifts from her blouse as I lean in and inform her that I happen to be one of the Tri-State's most esteemed clairvoyants.

Clairvoyant? says Fran.

It's an industry term I say. *I'm a psychic. Crystal balls, palm readings.*

Read mine Fran squeals. *Would you?*

Of course I say, because there was a time when the words "please," "God," and "Fran Ramsey" were distributed equally among my prayers. My pointer finger traces her lifeline and flushes a vision out of the furrow: A woman opens the door of a closet in which hang blue and charcoal suits, and a man on a short, thick noose. A putrid corpse-stench overpowers Fran's perfume.

A long happy life I say. *Are you hungry? I'm starved. I'm going to go for some coffee.*

I don't want to be a mooch said Fran. *Here*, she says, and begins kneading my right forearm. *I'm a certified masseuse*. Concentrating, the tip of Fran's tongue bunches through the gap where her right canine tooth should have been.

You have very defined wrist flexors says Fran. *You must be single.*

I'm hungry I say, but she bears down harder with her thumbs. *Please!* I say, and pull free.



When I return, Fran has dragged her chair over to Tinker. They huddle towards each other talking hushed French. Both stiffen when I cross into the room. Tinker faces me and nods, but Fran does not turn around. I set a cup of coffee down hard at her feet.

Thank you Fran says. She sips and grimaces. She lunges for the door and wrenches into a garbage can.

I'm lactose intolerant! Fran screams, coffee dribbling down her chin.

Does it matter? Fran fires a burst of air through her nose and turns to her mother for support. She opens her mouth to say something, but my father farts. Then he coughs up a mist of blood. Slowly the spray settles, freckling his gray face and neck with red. Fran gawks for a moment, and then her small mouth tightens over grinding teeth.

I've got to use the ladies' she says, and snaps out of the room on those heels.

Could I have that asks Tinker.

All yours. Tinker pulls a long drink of coffee while I clean my father with a spitty tissue.

Is there even cream in this? asks Tinker.

No.

I guess she's got a right to be high-strung.

We're all on the brink.

Talking about it in French helps. Makes it seem less real.

It's hard.

I can't even imagine what it's like for Kaylee. Claire was the best mother. From our third date I knew she would be the best mother.

How did you know?

We were walking before dinner. We passed this kid climbing a tree planted in the sidewalk. The kid yells I found a coconut! This tree doesn't even have leaves, but Claire stops and says Could you pass me a coconut, please? The kid says Ready? and Claire says Ready! and the kid drops down this big armful of air. How about one for my friend? Claire says, and the kid drops another. Tinker stops. His hands tremble.

Keep going I say. Don't stop.

After a moment Tinker says So we thank the kid and I tell Claire that she was sweet. And Claire goes So is this coconut and we keep walking, laughing, eating our coconuts. Claire says she isn't even hungry for dinner, that she's too full of coconut and I think she's giving me the slip. But then she says that she'd like to wash the sticky off of her hands. I say that my apartment is close, we could go there, and Claire says Great and we don't leave my bed until the next afternoon. Tinker strokes Claire's thigh, sobs. He kisses Claire's raw kneecap. He shakes harder and I say Go ahead. This is the cry of your life. You'll never have to cry this way again.

Yes you will says Fran. Her hand grazes Tinker's cheeks, his forehead. She has slipped off her heels, and entered silently.

But you and me Fran says. We'll get through this together, and they seclude themselves in their French. I drop into my chair and watch my father's chest barely rise and barely fall, breath rustling out from the hole in the pouch of his face. The room will not shut up. Monitors beep and rotors throb along with the air conditioner's interminable exhale. And now this French. I evacuate into the corridor. It's past six o'clock and most of the staff has gone home. I wander. Down on the fifth floor a grown man clad in lemon-yellow pajamas shuffles past, gripping the shoulder of a male nurse. The patient rolls his head and makes porpoise noises. A fat orderly leans against a cart loaded with purple juice boxes. She holds a cell phone in one hand, and a juice box in the other. She slurps purple juice through the straw and says into the phone I got to go water my vegetables. She pushes her cart into the closest room.



When I return to room 648, three cots are sardined across the floor. Fran and Tinker sit thigh-to-thigh on the edge of Tinker's cot, chatting in French. I hear "Nietzsche" as Fran works the knots out of Tinker's forearm. A nurse enters with a tray of Dixie cups and leans over Mrs. Ramsey.

Medicine, Mrs. Ramsey says the nurse, sweetly. She bores two gloved fingers into Mrs. Ramsey's jaw, prys at clamped teeth. Mrs. Ramsey parts them enough to chomp the nurse's fingertips.

Shit! says the nurse. She might respond to you she says to Fran. To your voice. Fran crosses to her mother's bedside.

It's OK, Mom Fran says. *It's medicine. Open up* Fran coos. Fran pinches her mother's nostrils shut until the viced teeth gasp apart. The nurse places two white tablets on Mrs. Ramsey's tongue, and dumps water down her throat.

It might be time for a morphine drip says the nurse as Mrs. Ramsey coughs and swallows.

Then she'll be gone? asks Fran.

She'll be in la-la land with Mrs. Bunyan says the nurse, nodding at Claire.

Maybe in a day or two said Fran. The nurse moves on to my father.

What are those? I ask.

OxyContin.

Is that necessary?

Cancer hurts.



That night, Claire's hectoring breathing and her groans keep me awake. Fran too. Fran's cot creaks as she thrashes from her stomach to her side to her back, and then stands. Stepping over me, Fran looks down, and there I am, staring up. Fran freezes. Shrugs. I roll over onto my belly. Fran finishes her stride and draws the curtain between my cot and Tinker's shut. When Tinker sputters awake Fran *shhhes* him. A belt buckle rings against the tile.

But Patton says Tinker.

Is sleeping Fran lies. A zipper unzips. Stockings and panties slide against skin, then the muffled sounds of careful sex. Claire groans and the squeaking quickens quickens, quickens, stops. Claire's moaning keeps up until I fall asleep. In the morning, everyone wakes where they should.



We might have slept later were it not for a sound like a heartbroken foghorn. Everyone starts upright. The horn sounds again.

It's my stomach I say. I'm hungry. You all hungry? They aren't, and so I leave them alone to work things through.

What's that I ask to a nurse outside.

The chauffeur.

Like the driver?

I guess. The Jews blow it in every room for their New Year. Get yourself some Tylenol.



I buy Tylenol, plus two towels, a razor, and a bottle of shaving cream at the hospital gift shop. Black stubble is strewn across my father's face like iron filings, densely gathered at the corners of his mouth and in the rut of his chin. I drape a towel across his chest. I wet the second towel

under the hot tap and press it against Dad's face, soaking the bristle out of his whiskers. Moving my hand in small circles, I lather him, then razor long strokes through the slopes of his cheeks and his neck. Fran quits rustling her magazine. Tinker pauses pulling a brush through Claire's hair, and for a moment there is only the rough of grit giving against the blade.

When my father's face is smooth, I continue shaving. I shave until his head is smooth too, and nobody says a word. When I finish, I carry the smock to the garbage can and shake clumps of hair and wads of black-flecked foam into the bin. Tinker moves towards the door, not stumbling, but not steady. He collides with Dr. Graffeo, spins off the doctor and hurries down the corridor without saying "excuse me."

Hmm says Dr. Graffeo, ballooning out his left cheek and tapping it flat with a pen. *He must need air.* He sees the hair on the floor. *Hmm* says Dr. Graffeo. *We'll get that cleaned up.* He turns to me.

I'm glad you're having this time with your father he says.

Me too I say.

Any questions?

How long does he have?

It could be anytime. We just want to make sure that he's comfortable. With this, Dr. Graffeo flits from Mrs. Ramsey to Dad to Claire as the chauffer blasts below us, from room to room to room.

Looking good! says Dr. Graffeo, and he dips out the door as a nurse enters, balancing a tray of Dixie cups that rattle with morning pills.

Here says Fran. *Let me* she offers, and plucks the left-most cup from the tray. *She responds to my voice* Fran explains.

Medicine, Mom says Fran. Mrs. Ramsey gapes, pops out her tongue. Fran touches her mother's tongue twice, but palms the OxyContin.

Be careful with those I say, once the nurse is gone.

Are you going to tell Dr. Graffeo on me? Fran sneers. *Are you going to tattletale to Claire?* I shake my head and Fran crushes the tablets between two credit cards. Snorts three long lines.



Mrs. Ramsey's agony kicks in before Fran's high. When Mrs. Ramsey begins twisting and gnashing Fran says *Maybe we should call Dr. Graffeo* and when Mrs. Ramsey flutter-kicks her sheets and screams, Fran shouts *Help!...Help!Help!Help!* I run into the corridor but Dr. Graffeo and a nurse are already bolting my way.

How many mgs. is she on? pants Dr. Graffeo.

One-twenty says the nurse to the floor. Dr. Graffeo takes Fran's shoulders. *Giving your mother more will jeopardize her life* he says. *Do you understand?* Fran bobs her head "yes."

The dose will take affect soon says Dr. Graffeo.

Goody. Fran sighs.

Do you want to step out until she settles down?

I'll sit. Fran pulls her chair to her mother's bedside.

Mom says Fran. Mom—I'm here, Mom. I'm going to squeeze your hand every minute so you know I'm here. I count six squeezes before Fran's arm drops and dangles. Mrs. Ramsey writhes as if she is burning, and trying to roll herself out in very slow motion. Fran slumps back in her chair and watches, legs open wide. I dig my crystal ball out of my turquoise suitcase so that I can close my eyes. I close my eyes. I spread my hands over the ball and allow my attention to drift across psychic frequencies.

Hi says a voice.

Who is this?

Devin.

It's nice to meet you, Devin.

I like your voice.

Thank you.

It's sexy.

So is yours.

All of me is sexy says Devin. Want to see? She dictates the web address www.marylandmissing.com like a phone number. I'm under "Arizona" she says. Fifth row down. Far left. It's a bad picture.

You all use computers up there?

Duh.

I don't have one with me I say. I'm at the hospital.

Are you sick?

My dad is.

Awww says Devin. You sound so sad. Don't give up hope she says. I can make you happy. I know what will cheer you up. I hurry to a single-occupancy restroom, place the crystal ball in the sink and cover it with my left hand. I spit on my right palm, convert a loose fist into Devin's vagina, and push inside of her.



T*hat was amazing sighs Devin. You were amazing she says.*

You too I say.

Can I tell you something? asks Devin.

Anything.

I just want to tell you...

Tell me I say, but someone knocks on the door and I flip on the tap and wash my hands.



B*ack in 648 a young black woman stands over my father. She startles when I enter, and introduces herself as Lydia James. An earring pinned in her left ear spells "Divinity" in gold script. The right earring, "Fudge." She bends down and kisses my father's lips. That one's for free she murmurs, and veers out of the room.*

For hours I sit watching my silent father. Towards evening, Tinker returns. He holds his shoulders back and tries making eye contact with Claire, but Claire is sleeping. Fran snores, so Tinker tells me that he had dismissed the nanny, that he and Kaylee had made an afternoon of a laser pointer and an aggressive housecat named Jerry. The laser pointer has three settings; it projects a dot, a smiley face, or Jerry's nemesis, a butterfly.

We shined the butterfly over the floor and then up the wall says Tinker. Jerry chased it every time. Rammed headfirst into the plaster. Tinker laughs. He never learns. It's so much fun says Tinker. He tilts his head back and looks upward. Now I get why You do it.



An orderly wheels in trays of food, but neither Mrs. Ramsey, Claire, nor Dad can stomach solids. *You guys hungry?* asks the nurse. We are. I gobble the meatloaf. Tinker spear-fishes for grapes in the syrup of a fruit cocktail.

How's that coconut? I ask.

Huh?

The coconut. How is it?


Tinker smiles. *Delicious* he says. *Top-notch.*

I didn't get any coconut says Fran, groggily. She stirs through her fruit cocktail.

Here I say. Have some of mine. I fork her an invisible hunk.

Oh! says Fran. She laughs. *I could use some of that right now.*

We scrape our empty plates, thoroughly chew nothing, swallow nothing in gulps and feel fuller. Dad makes a sound like a sucking wound. A monitor screeches. Dr. Graffeo is here. He translates the squalling: *This Is It*. Everyone but me leaves the room. I unzip Dad's tallith bag and shake the clove of coarse silk into a sheet. I tent it over us. In that darkness I lean my face into Dad's warm cheek, kiss his smooth pate.

Don't go I say, because my father is cruel, but at least he is actual, not spitty hands or spirit friends who all seem to speak with my voice. When his chest stills I duck back into the room and I rummage my crystal coconut from my suitcase. I sit cross-legged on the floor, grip the sphere and concentrate on my father. I listen for my father, but there is only the shofar, howling out the sound of what I'm feeling. Blowing in the New Year. 

The background of the entire page is a blue-toned image. The top half shows a clear blue sky, while the bottom half shows a dark blue sea with small, choppy waves. On the right side, a human arm and hand are visible, emerging from the water with the fist clenched and raised high, symbolizing protest or solidarity.

Wren's REVENGE

A REVIEW/MANIFESTO IN RESPONSE
TO JACOB WREN'S NOVEL,
*REVENGE FANTASIES OF THE
POLITICALLY DISPOSSESSED*

by **L.J. Moore**

There are books that are read. These books you see on lists compiled by ratings agencies like Nielson's Book Scan and published in the New York Times. These books rarely show up on syllabi and they can almost always be found in big box bookstores and even little box bookstores. In America, these books are overwhelmingly by American authors, although you'll catch a foreigner listed now and then.

REVENGE FANTASIES OF THE POLITICALLY DISPOSSESSED is not one of these books. It does not get read. It is also not on any syllabi (yet?) and likely can't be found at your bookstore. It is written by a Canadian and published by a self-described "one-woman" Canadian publishing house founded by Beth Follett (Pedlar Press). None of these facts make this book unimportant. *REVENGE* creates its own importance in the shadow of big lists and big retailers and big authors. *REVENGE* is about the high and the low, the open and the insular, and all the circles in between. *REVENGE* is about global paralysis and political impotency, might and sociopathy, love and fidelity. In other words, *REVENGE* is about living right now.

As I read this book, I let it take me where it wanted. At its core is Wren's voice, which is sincere and self-conscious, an endearing combination in a work that attempts to address the current political mess of a failing, flailing America in a fed-up, conflict-ridden world. The book avoids diatribes—it is, after all, a novel—and approaches these themes through the experiences of its characters, living through the mundane (a broken heart) and extraordinary (being followed by the CIA). With multiple points of view, the book builds to a metafictional/non-fictional mish-mash on media and journalism and political power and the military industrial complex...even the author was self-consciousness enough to end with an epilogue where the fourth wall is broken, and we are left with a bit of dialogue that (in my opinion) too dismissively undermines all that has come before:

"Sometimes life feels like a fantasy," she said, looking at him, for the first time in many years really looking at him, long and hard, one ear still tuned to the sounds of swimming in the distance.

"Yes, he replied, "sometimes it does."

And yes, isn't all fiction fantasy? And isn't our reading of it an escape from what IS? Except *REVENGE* is not that kind of escape. *REVENGE* may be a story, full of made-up people, but the dystopian malaise underlying its themes is palpably real. *REVENGE* is about feeling small and facing a government and a global economy that wants you to feel that way. But *REVENGE*'s existence, that it was written, was read (even by one), undermines this political surrender. The king's head has already been cut off. The age of lists and "books that are read" is ending along with the empire. Fantasy or not, reading this book, buying it, reading another by someone else, talking about it, telling your friends, making your own network of distribution, your own hierarchy of values, your own community of ideas, is its own revenge. Wren is on the right track, even if he's only just being heard. *P*



NIGHT CRAWLERS IN THE RAIN

BY CLAYTON ADAM CLARK

An angiograph gone wrong:
the radiopaque lymph inch
from muddied canals onto
the sidewalk, without fear
of drowning, to line up
head to tail (tail to head),
al fresco in the dark.

How do you know to meet her
(or him) here in the middle?
This concrete slab could be a happenstance
of sweat-slimed vessels, your *discotheque*
for kneading clitellums along
each other long enough to rub
some pus out and scrape home
to your mother's couch before daybreak,
a stamped hand and neo glow
wristband flagging out
the passenger window
with a scream—*We sleep*
anywhere we lie.

Chinatown. Lower East Side. New York City. 2010.
by Lawrence Dizon Sumulong

I take you as I take the moon rising,
Darkness, black moth the light burns up in.

-Charles Wright, "Death"

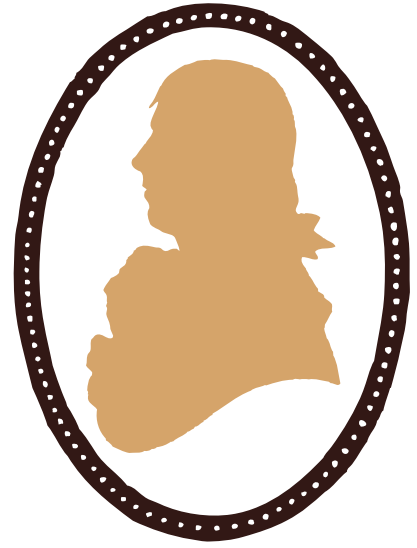






IGNATIUS

by Amy Bergen



Mira came home from London with a simple diamond ring and told her friends she was engaged to a man she'd met two weeks ago, an Italian. "A point for fairness," she told her ten-year-old son. "I shouldn't be penalized because I have a chipped tooth and too many freckles."

"Oh, Mom," said Christopher Wendell. "Teeth and freckles didn't keep people from marrying you."

"It's that or my personality," she said.

He tied his face into a thoughtful little knot. "I'm glad," he said. He tipped his head to one side. "I'm glad you're happy."

.....

The paralegals clustered around her desk at work. "What are you *wearing*?" they asked her. "Whatever ends up in the suitcase," she said.

Mira wrote "paralegal" on her CV because at thirty-nine being an "administrative assistant" almost made her weep when she saw it in print. That was her whole history of deception till now. She could type a hundred words a minute, and she was an okay mother. Once she had tried to make a list of her strengths in a seminar and these two items were all she could think of. "You need three," said the seminar leader, tapping the table with a manicured nail, and Mira took the thumb-high mini-pencil and scratched down *patience*.

She told the girls at work that Ignatius had proposed on a rowboat. He'd let the row go slack, and when he asked she had the impulse to do something impossibly childish, like reach over and hug his knees. When he kissed her, his mouth tasted like mint and dirt and aloe, growing things. What did he say? the girls asked. What did he say?

In the late afternoon her ring glinted like fish scales in the sun, winking at her, a shy flirtation.

.....

“I’m marrying a Catholic, Mom. Can you believe it? His name’s Ignatius.” She smelled the blown-out candle on her mother’s table and thought of the Catholic saints. Rosewood and prayer, stiff pantyhose and smoke. The little box of the church and its odd comfort.

“You know your father can’t travel,” her mother said. “He’s not exactly sure where he is at the moment.” She moved like a ship to the kitchen, slow and tender. “Do you and Christopher Wendell want some of this oatmeal bread? We won’t eat it all.”

“How’s Dad?”

“Well, you know. Go talk to him.”

Her father was folded into a blue chair in front of a game show. The room smelled stale. The drapes had been left open, and the pink-lemonade sunset hit the crest of her father’s bald head. His ugliness made him look a little holy, a little inhuman; too good for the world. When she touched his shoulder, he jerked.

“How you feeling, Dad?” Mira said without any calculated brightness in her voice. She didn’t want to sound like the home aide. She hated the home aide.

“My hip’s dislocated.”

“Oh, well, let’s relocate it. I think that chair just isn’t comfortable.” She knelt and twisted her father’s body. It was so strange, feeling the heft of his hips. He’d lost weight. He buckled back and snarled, an animal snarl, and Mira called to her mother, “He says his hip’s dislocated.”

“It was. The doctor fixed that and now he’s fine. He’s just griping.” Her mother appeared in the doorway with a meal – a snowbank lump of mayonnaise-covered chicken, a small puddle of peas and corn. “John, did Mira tell you she’s getting married?”

“You get Father Andrews?”

“Dad, I think he’s retired.”

“Father Andrews. St. Thomas Parish.”

“John, he’s retired. Here, eat,” said her mother. She put a tray in front of him and set out the plate, curled his fingers around a fork.

“He did our wedding,” said her father.

“He didn’t do our wedding, John. Father Collins did our wedding. Eat.”

“The doctor said I can’t drink coffee.”

“We know, dear. Eat.”

John dripped vegetables into his mouth. When Christopher Wendell was a toddler he’d drive Mira to distraction by building whole infrastructures with his food, forts, tunnels, bridges.

“If you’re going to have the ceremony over there, I’d like to come,” her mother said. “If you’re dead set on having the ceremony over there.”

“It’ll just be in a courtroom.”

“Courtroom fiddlesticks. You said he was Catholic.”

“Is that Roslyn there?” John asked. Roslyn was the home aide. She was reed-thin with pageant posture, while Mira was round and red-haired and at least a foot shorter. That wasn’t why Mira hated her. She hated her because Roslyn never made mistakes. And Mira was glad, so breathlessly

glad Roslyn didn't make mistakes, but the hatred still coiled up in her and made her dull and quiet whenever the home aide was around.

"It's Mira, Dad. It's your daughter. Look. Crazy-haired Mira," She pulled on an untamed curl.

John grunted.

"What's going on here?" Mira asked her mother. She waved her hand as if to implicate the whole apartment, the whole world, in disastrous dealings.

"I'd like to know that myself," her mother said. She scooped a chicken salad snowball and eased it into John's mouth like an offering.

.....

Mira's friend Holly said "Two weeks? Two weeks ago you met? I'm thrilled, I mean, I wish you every blessing, but, really? Are you..."

"Yes," said Mira.

"All right," Holly shrugged. "Let's find you a dress."

Holly wore suits from Talbot's and scarves with weekend sweaters. She took Mira to a boutique where the saleswoman fluffed Mira's curls into a bun and suggested an empire waist. *Em-peer* waist.

"I thought it was *Em-pire* waist," said Mira.

"Tomato, *tomahto*. It's tight, find a tailor to let it out a bit," said the saleswoman.

"What do people mean when they say tomato, *tomahto*?" Mira asked.

"Six of one, half a dozen of the other," said Holly.

Mira stuck her toe out of the gown's folds. It blinked at her, coy as the ring. The blue-painted nails twinkled. She'd want to wear heels.

.....

Mira had gone to London to use up her year's vacation, when Christopher Wendell was at science camp, and she started regretting on the plane. The shape of her regret was turning, tricky. It always settled on a different point—her son. Her parents. Her selfish sleep, spread out over the double bed. The last man she'd seen, an Internet match, whom she'd stopped calling simply because whenever she picked up the phone to call him she remembered something else she'd rather be doing. The fact that her favorite thing to do in London was to drink a pint and watch the water, which she could have done at home. Occasionally she'd watch the water with a newspaper open in front of her, though she couldn't read more than the first few sentences of any news story. She tried, but the stories in the beginning were already as interesting as they would ever be. She lit a candle in Westminster Abbey for her father and hoped he had eaten.

When she got home, the man she'd stopped calling had left her a voicemail saying *this was nice, but*. "The word *nice* means exactly nothing," she told Christopher Wendell later. "It can be an insult as easily as a compliment. It's just a filler word, really."

"So if I say somebody's a nice person I could be insulting them?"

"You could be."

"What if I call them a good person?"

"Better. But still very vague and general."

"How about a *spectacular* person?"

"Oh my," said Mira. "I might like to be called a spectacular person. That might work."

.....

"Ignatius, what a name! Tell me about him," said Holly in Mira's living room.

Ignatius Morelli grew up a wine merchant's son in Italy, and went to Cambridge for school. He worked as a lawyer. ("Oh, dear," said Holly.) He had black hair which he trimmed into a pointed goatee, a diabolic look, but a smart one. He thought Mira had a healthy glow to her body. ("That's sweet," said Holly.)

"He handwrites letters," said Mira. "With stamps from the British Museum. Did you know they had stamps?"

"Anything you can't stand about him?" Holly asked, tapping her nails against her cheek. "I won't tell."

"He's a little too...fastidious."

"Fastidious?"

"Tidy."

"Is that what that word means?"

"He lines up his pens."

"I line up my pens," said Christopher Wendell, from the computer.

"Yes, you do," said Mira. "And it's very annoying."

"I also fold my own clothes," he added.

"That I like," said Mira. She poured Holly a cup of cinnamon tea.

"Is he moving here?" asked Holly. "Are you moving there?"

Mira looked out the window. It was April and starting to snow. Little puffs. Hardly a thing. But still. "We haven't decided," she said. "We've both got parents with early, early, early-onset Alzheimer's."

"How young do you have to be for early-onset?" Holly asked. Her face had softened with just the right dose of concern.

"Our age. My age. I don't know actually. Dad's was only a little early, I didn't need the three earlys."

"Here's what I always wondered," said Holly. "When you first get Alzheimer's, do you know you're losing your mind?"

"There's a question," said Mira. It was what she said to Christopher Wendell when he asked ridiculous things: How can astronomers count all the stars if they can't see them? Why don't people who have money give it to the people who need it? *There's a question.*

.....

She hadn't put Christopher Wendell to bed in years but that night she made him a cup of hot milk with a little chocolate syrup in it.

"What are you going to do about Ignatius?" he asked.

"For the moment?" she chuckled. She pulled on the frayed pink waistband of her pajama pants. "Get presents."

"Oh," Christopher Wendell said. "Wait. Isn't that illegal?"

"Not that I'm aware of."

"Oh."

"Just dishonest."

"Oh," He slurped from the bottom of his cup.

"You just dribbled milk down your shirt front," she said. "Did you even notice you were doing that?"

Christopher Wendell squinted at his wet *Star Wars* shirt. She smoothed her son's fine hair. His father was a sperm donor, good people, Yale-educated. She'd never understood why such a successful man would donate sperm.

"I'm not proud of myself," she said slowly. "But we all lie."

"I don't," said Christopher Wendell.

"Never? Never, in your life, never, ever, ever?"

He shrugged. "Maybe once. Not on purpose though. Just because I didn't have all the information."

"No one has all the information."

"I bet someone does somewhere," said Christopher Wendell.

Mira cupped the round bowl of her face in her hands. It would be nice, she thought, if some mind knew everything. It would be nice if there was God.

.....

On her wedding registry she listed a throw rug, a bookshelf, a teak statue of an elephant, a hardcover collection of Shakespeare's plays, a set of really, truly silver silverware, a DVD documentary about the planet Earth, a waffle iron and an ice cream maker. She'd lost eleven pounds since London. She looked at her ring finger and felt new and full. She jogged in the mornings, looking back over her shoulder at her sneaker prints in the thin, timid snow. Holly threw her a potluck shower with champagne and red velvet cake. Mira got everything she asked for, even the elephant. Even twin bathrobes and twin towels and a lace-edged photo album.

"Ignatius has a thing about pictures, um, pictures of himself," she said.

"Is that a cultural issue?" asked someone.

"It's an Ignatius issue," said Mira.

Everyone laughed a little.

"I think it's a control thing," said someone else. "Greg always has to be behind the camera. I don't think we have him in a single group shot."

Mira wound her way to the kitchen, hazily drunk. She stared into the sink and laughed. She stayed long enough that Holly sent everyone home. "I was just like this before I got married. I was all over the place," Holly said, putting two arms around her. Mira was amazed and somewhat put off by her friend's touch, so light, so strong. The two of them and Christopher Wendell finished the tuna noodle casserole, forks clinking in the middle of a soggy tray. When they spoke, their words were pasty with mayonnaise.

"Thank God," said Holly. "Now I don't have to take that home."

"People don't need to give us their leftover food. I don't know why they feel obligated to," said Mira, still thankful, her head on the couch.

"Cake is the best when it's been in the freezer," said Christopher Wendell. He carried the pillow of leftover cake into the freezer and started the dishes.

.....

Mira gave her father the *His* bathrobe. Garden-thick and green, it was the brightest thing in the whole room. John looked at it suspiciously and tossed it onto his bed. Roslyn lifted the robe onto a hanger, and Mira hated herself for not doing that in the first place, then hated Roslyn for her look of serene competence and her *you idiot* eyes. John had stopped talking, whether by choice or by compulsion Mira didn't know. Roslyn fed him, dipped open his jaw and tucking the spoon inside, poised a napkin under his spitting chin. The woman seemed to have five hands. Everywhere at once. Mira went into the living room and sat with her mother and her quiet son.

"I want to know when you are thinking of getting married," Mira's mother said, "because I want to buy a ticket to Italy."

"You can't leave Dad, though."

"The heck I can't. He's like a little boy. Just leave him with a babysitter. And you need to get a place. Those places book up. That's just the way the world works."

"I don't think the world works any particular way."

"Sure it does, Mira. Sure it does."

John coughed, and they all went into his room. His eyes were dropped to the floor. Roslyn had a hand on the back of his head, and she was saying "It's all right. It's fine."

"Thank you, Roslyn. Did he take his meds?" said Mira's mother, with a peculiar note of tenderness and irritation, her eyes on her husband. She didn't wait for an answer but guided Mira into the bedroom by the elbow. A wedding dress was laid out on the bed. It was pearl-white and shiny and looked like it had been pulled off an antique doll.

"It's very easy to alter," said Mira's mother.

"Oh," said Mira. She didn't want to say that she had a wedding dress on layaway. Or that Ignatius would die soon, or leave her for another woman, letting her keep the gifts and the respect. The skirt lifted itself, a struggling white balloon. It took little breaths of air.

"Now only if this is what you want. I don't know if it's what you want," Mira's mother was speaking too quickly, her hands picking hair out of an old hairbrush, like a nervous child. "I'm just, when I have something to be glad about I get a little unstrung."

This is unstrung for you? *When I go unstrung there's feathers and flour on the ceiling*, Mira thought. "Mom," she said. "I swear to God. I don't know how you do it."

"Don't swear to God," her mother answered. "I taught you better."

.....

Christopher Wendell sat cross-legged, facing his grandfather. The two looked like they were talking and agreeing on some proposition. Any minute, they might shake hands. A done deal. Roslyn sat on the swivel chair, poised and straight-spined as an office manager. Maybe she'd worked in an office in a past life.

"Does he know who I am?" Christopher Wendell asked.

"I doubt it, honey," said Mira's mother.

"Hmmm," Christopher Wendell didn't seem sad; his eyes were alight as if he were considering a logic puzzle.

"What did you even talk to him about?" Mira asked.

"Everything. Nothing. School. The mysteries of the universe."

Mira's mother settled a blanket over her husband's shoulders, and he wrestled it off, and she lifted her hands in surrender. "You know what, Roslyn. Mira's engaged, did I tell you that?"

"No!" said Roslyn. Her big brown moon eyes got even bigger. "Congratulations!"

Mira wiggled the diamond on her doughy finger. A little to the right, a little to the left. Christopher Wendell gave her a gentle look that drew a finger of fear up her spine.

"I don't know what I'm going to do," said Mira.

"You'll figure it out as you go along," her mother said. Roslyn nodded. "I figured it out," said Mira's mother with a brisk laugh, a laugh sharp enough to cut the air in two, splitting the space between everyone in the room. John raised his head, then lowered it, then reached out bowed fingers—his wedding ring yellow and rusty, melting into flesh—to grab a chunk of nothing. He grinned a little as the nothing slipped out of his hands. P

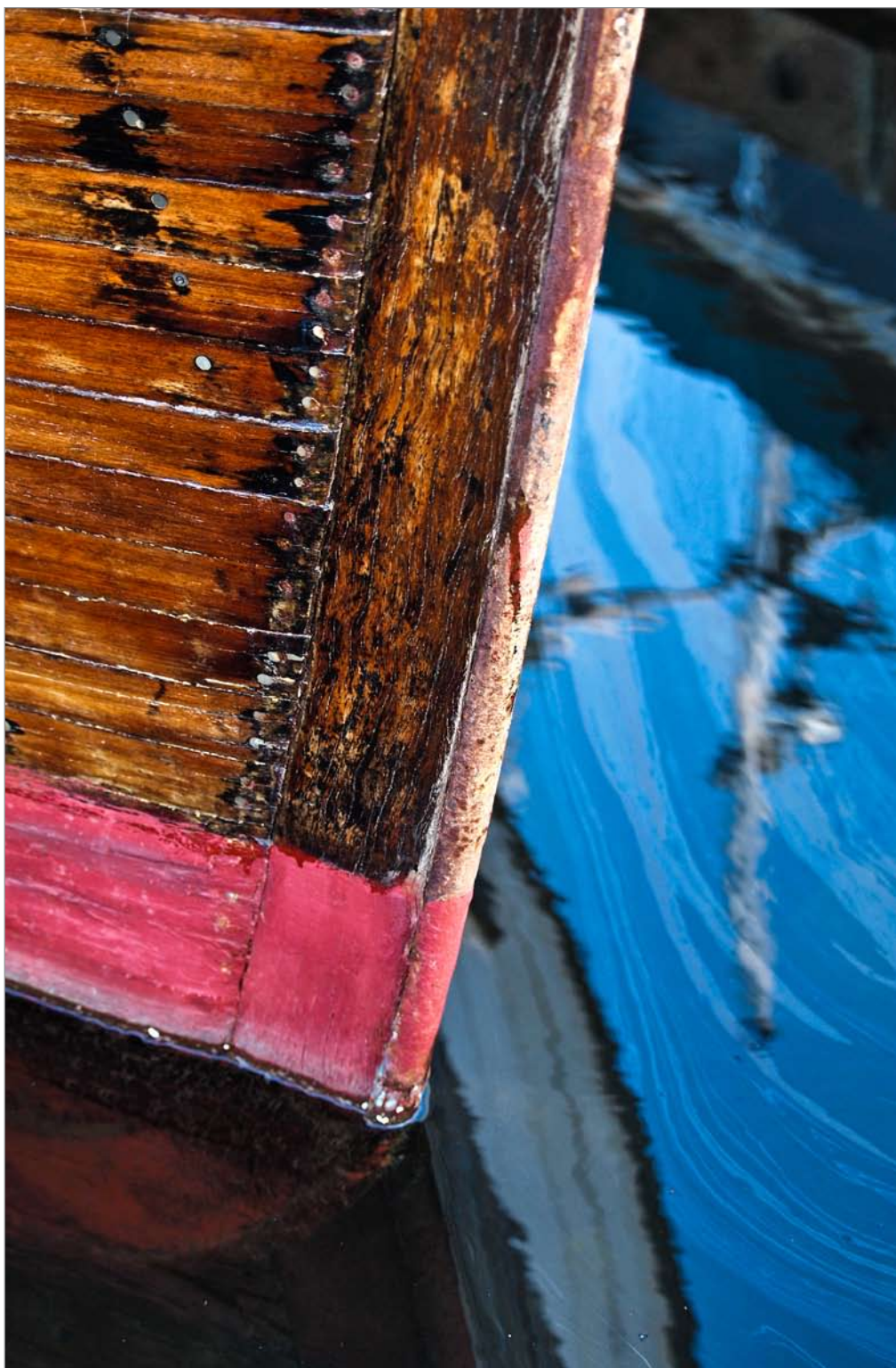
Photography by Sherri Damlo



A Carefree Summer's Day



A Straight Odonate Line



A Little Bit of Oil

BEHAVING

BY GEORGE MOORE

What would we
have
punished in the world:

sleepers a stone's throw
from morning,

under attitudes

of angry sky?
I do
often emote without reflection.

The surface grows
dull with enemies.

Who's in the way
of blueness,
who eats the air,

cracks the shell to climb out
undoes the troubles

caused by history?

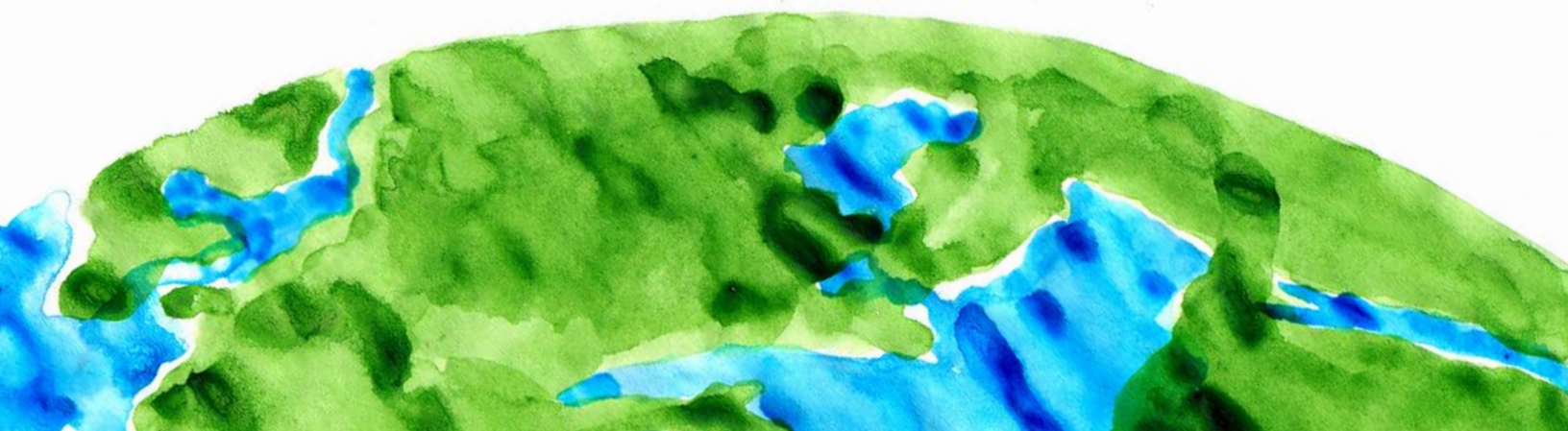
Martians will not
save us. Oh how sweet that
particular postmodern lullaby.

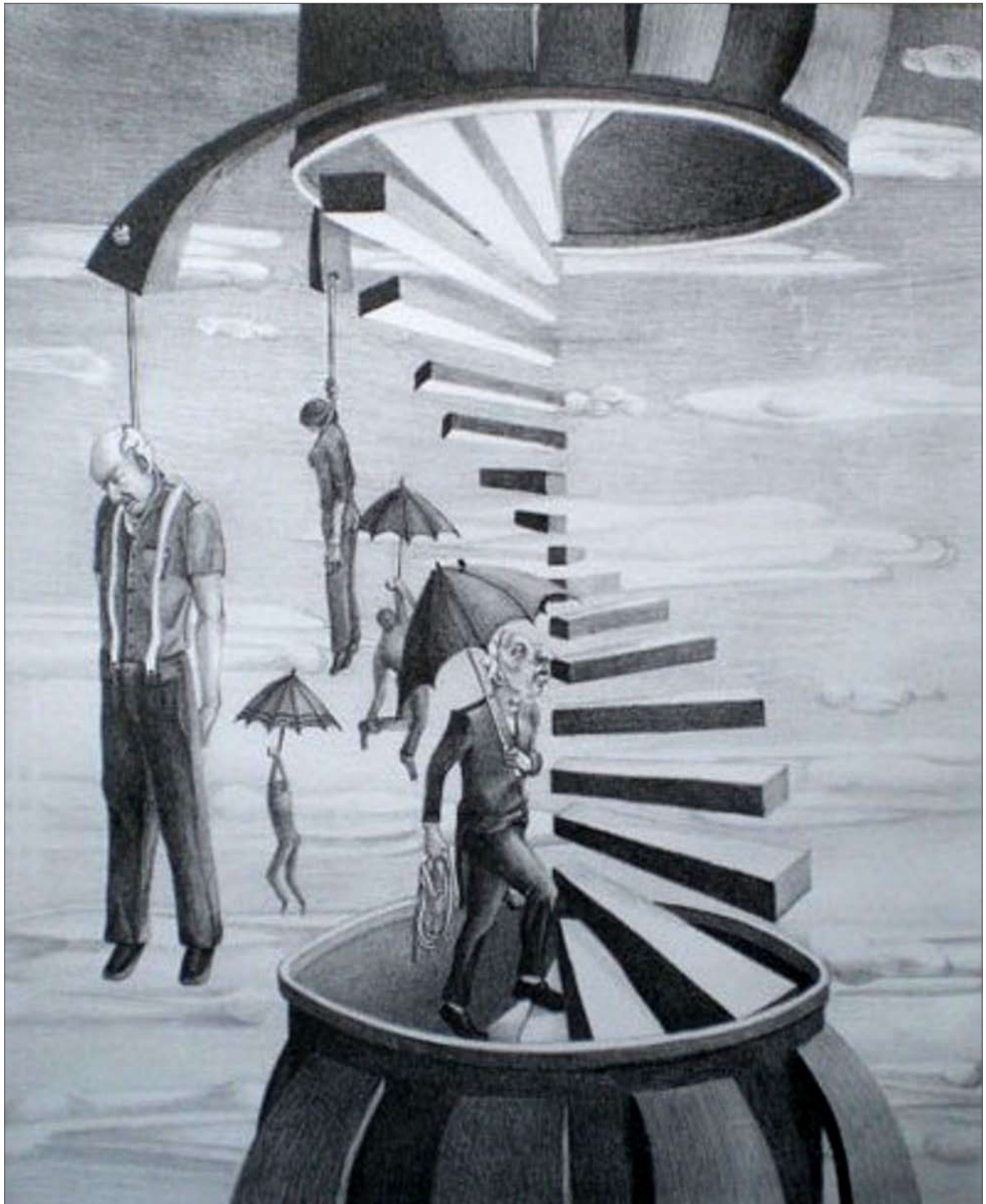
We must
fall to fly, learn the tricks

of evasion, coming up
for air in attitudes of nowhere
else, nothing more.

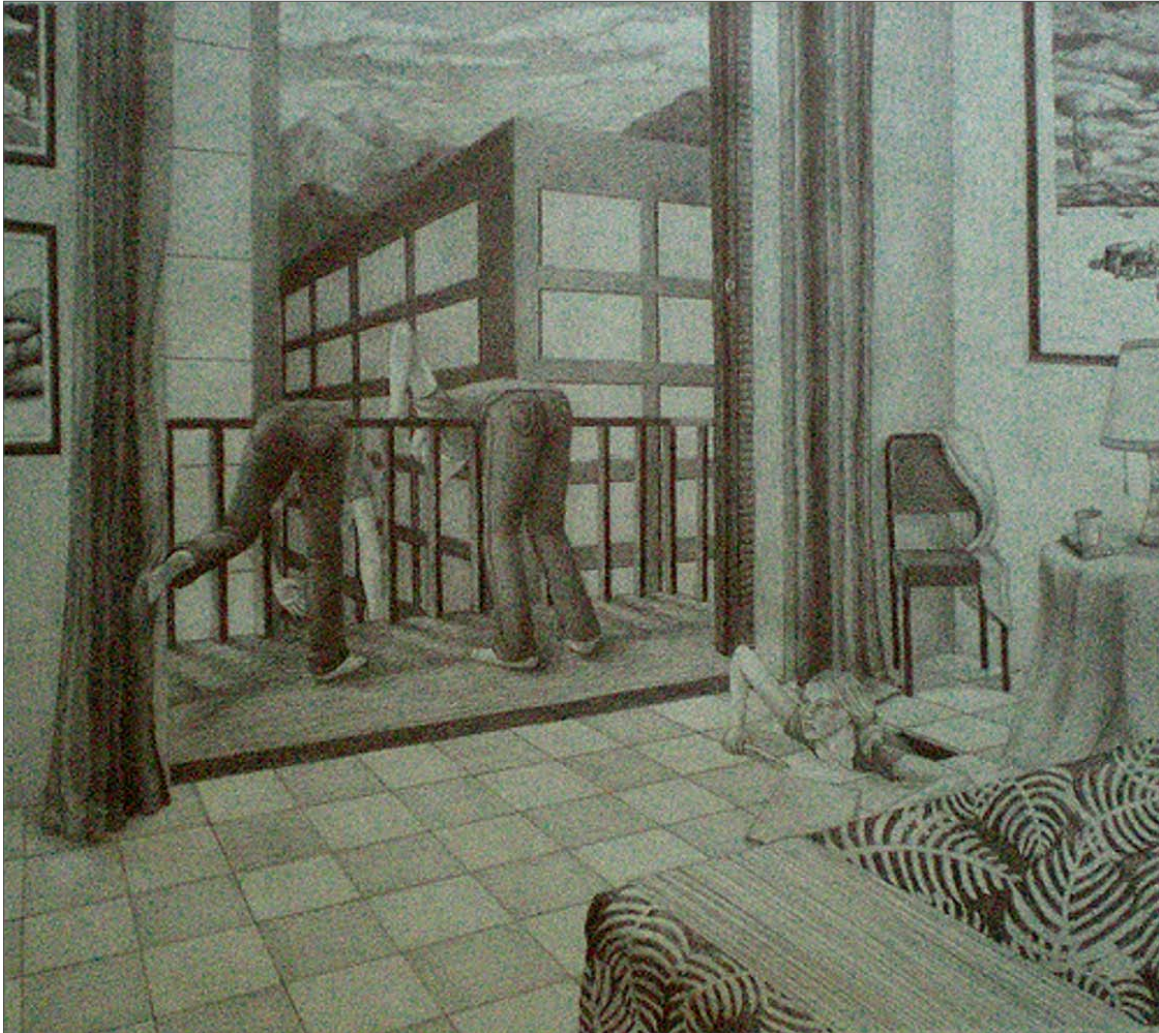
These forms so rare
need revision,

in the manner of explosions.

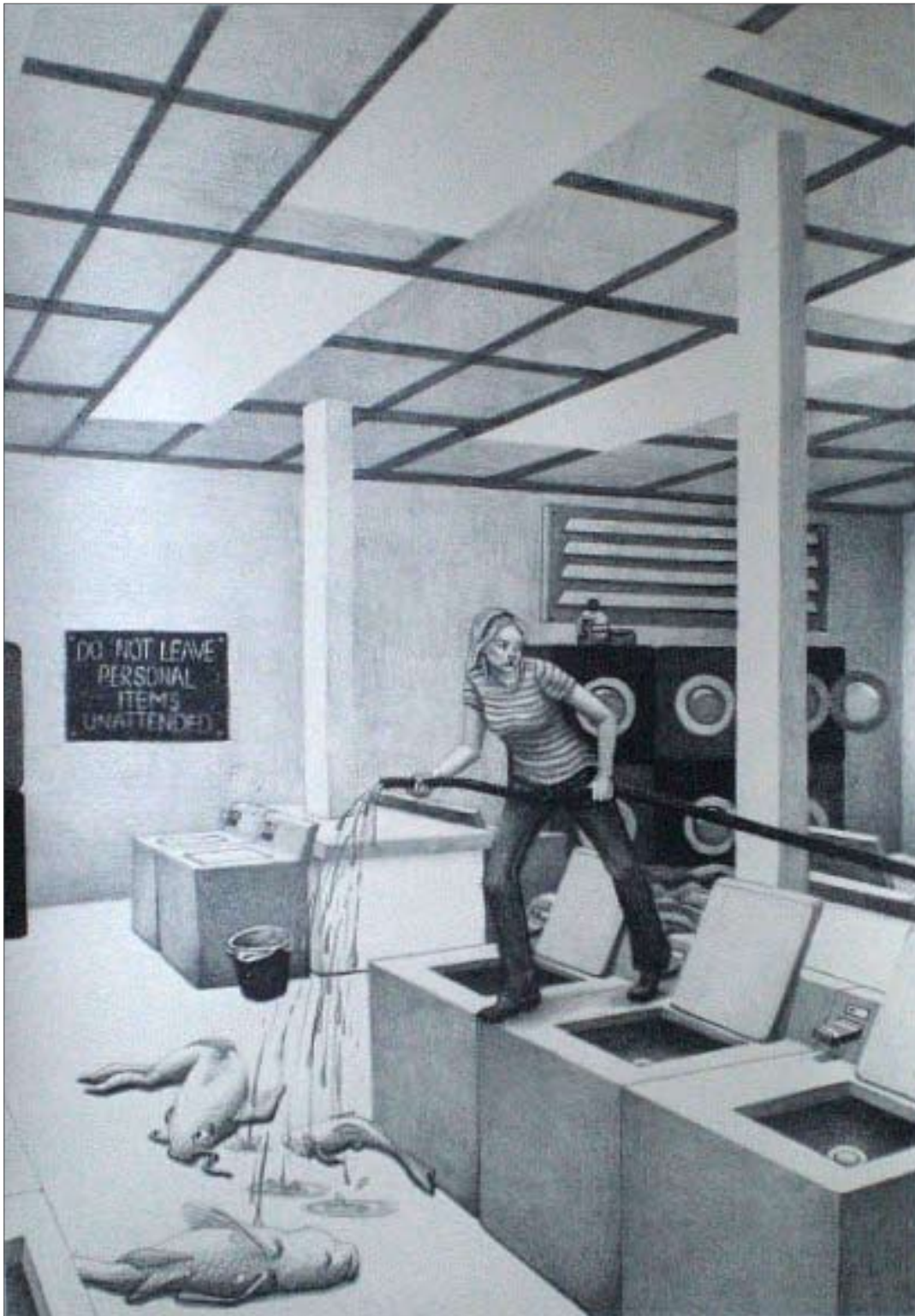




Spiral Staircase



Balcony



Laundry Room

the magic, fantastic epiphany of 1968

by j. david hollingsworth

On a late summer evening under a pink purple sky, and those long, lingering rays slowly melt into night.
There's a hundred tiny paparazzi flittering in flight all 'round my garden, blinking bright yellow green lights.
See these random dots of neon? Was it ever so quiet? And for an hour or so, I might have been a kid again.
You know, we were gonna change the world, but the summer of love shoved us up against the wall, my friend.
LBJ jammed us uptight, waist deep in the Big Muddy fight, and the big fool said to push on to the end. But why?

Snapshots of a Cataclysm

'68, was to me a purple hazed dream, tie-dyed & sweet, rocking & rolling, conflicted; a darkly, irreverent tragedy.
Early on, TV news from Tet & Khe Sahn hit us in the chest like a hard right from Sonny Liston; way too intense.
We smelled the fear in our ears, hearing from our guys overseas a steady drumbeat of terrible heat & dissent &, then
Mai Lai. Lt. Calley went, in "self defense", to save the village, and for three hours, liberated it down to the ground.
Enough! SNCC took us outside, & Hell No! We won't go! Marching, those non-violent sit-ins & on-campus events.

Back from 'Nam, to his hometown bowling alley. Don't come in here, no niggers allowed, no boy, you aint white.
Three young black college kids got dead, shot-gunned in the back, at Orangeburg, in the crowd on that cold night.
Their sacrifice nurtured the Liberty Tree, but we would overcome, and we just had to know; Whose land of the free?
Eldridge Cleaver put up his Soul on Ice, & thousands immediately enlisting in his Revolution. I guess maybe we
shoulda seen the danger signs, but we had our call to action, a Change Was Gonna Come, aint no calming in sight.

On a quiet April evening he fell in Tennessee, on the Loraine balcony, NO! NO! It can't be, it can't be; but it was.
Earl Ray stabbed us again, like before in, '63, his dream, incited, inverted, now burning a violent turmoil, & riot.
A powder keg was set to ignite underneath the Liberty Tree, because people everywhere, WERE going to be free!
Ben Spock went on trial for menacing the system, but his self-sacrifice revealed our very own doubts, & the next
thing we knew, that warning just grew into a bonfire of draft cards, Yessir, and we had a brand new national anthem.

Crumb drew some magical scenes of acid sunshine and green tambourines dancing there in Peoples Park,
while back on the Ponderosa, the Brothers Smothers were paying real hard for their anti-war controversies.

Cheap Thrills and Strawberry Fields, & blue microdots where nothing was real, but man, It's Beautiful Day!
Laugh-In turned it all around, and Timmy Leary told us to Tune In, Turn On & Drop Out, but did anybody really know what time it was, did anybody really care? No, so we grew our hair & sailed Up Up & Away!

In June he had just won in California. On his way to bigger and better things, soaring on the wings of our hopes and all our dreams that we knew could still come true. We had wished upon a star, you see, we just had to believe it would happen. He decided, at the last minute to route, sideways, through the kitchen, and in that place the curtain fell down on the floor. The dream was murdered there, in the glare, and that goddamned Liberty Tree bled some more, and I thought I saw them walking up on the hill, but how could we ever care, after he was taken, again just like before?

We called out the instigation, we saw something in the air, we felt it in our fingers, and we felt it in our toes, and the love was all around us, and it came along, to turn on everyone, and for our love we could give everything, so one Tuesday Afternoon, we cast our fate to the wind. Loyalty to their kind, they could not tolerate our minds, there in that White Room, gazing through a Glass Onion, some, chasing White Rabbits, some Waiting for the Sun, yes, the music was all around us, and the love was everywhere in our Cathedral Fillmore, so we just Let it Grow.

Ali was completely locked out of the ring, sidelined, but not jailed, and Ike knocked a hole in one, of all things. Earl Warren flew off the Court in dismay, & The Prisoner, newly arrived on TV, & docked by the side of the bay. HAIR let the sun shine in, off-Broadway, and George Wallace tapped Dr. Strangelove; Gen. Curtis LeMay for VP just as Betty Crocker quietly slipped onto the scene, & the Whole Earth Catalogue laid out a wholesome new day. Mrs. Robinson seduced a young Graduate, (how plastic!), and McDonald's had a fantastic new snack; the Big Mac.

The Man in Black went back to Folsom Prison just to sing the blues & our own Fortunate Son, he hitchhiked on down to Galveston and found her Eight Miles High, living At the Zoo! With nothing to get hung about, man, we were the Crowns of Creation, Experienced! Now what's that sound, everybody look what's goin down! Marijuana possessions were political crimes. You say you want a Revolution? Expect to do some hard time. The music's breathing in the Thirsty Boots and moving beat of a million feet, and the times they were a-raging!

I saw the train wreck coming, I knew there'd be no escape, Abbie Hoffman had his hand at the wheel, boy that bastard had promises made, and with the whole world watching, in Chicago all those kids in the streets gave Nixon and Regan the ultimate treats. Yippie! Then, when Tommie Smith and John Carlos in Mexico City, they raised up their fists, there was no way out to avoid the reckoning; so I flew hard left, heading for Berkley. But none of it mattered at all, no sir, 'cause back in June, it seems I walked into an Honest-to-God Happening!

The Epiphany

Mr. Hunter Thompson had a muse unlike any other. You see, he could sit up, turn around, and stare back down at bunch of self inflicted demons cursing in the ruins of his ego, thriving on punishment & gore. Yes he could. But not me. Oh no not me. I had a muse with long legs, and blue eyes, and flowers in her hair oh so brown, & she teased me for years, & years pouring poetry into my soul, but in the end she must have gotten terribly bored, until one sad day the fickle bitch up and left me for a fat Angel on a really fine Harley Davidson motorcycle.

On the day Bobby was shot, I rode in on the wind, and faded into a scene, surreal, straight from Alice B. Tolkas. I was at the Armadillo World Headquarters in Austin Texas, sitting with Lady Madonna, in shock you know.

Watching Angels in leather trading insults and Jack Daniels, while Hippies so delicately inhaled their colitas, floating away all day, edgy, bickering, wondering how long this madness would keep on keepin' on, & on, & on. Then Jesus Christ, with Mr. Kite, arrived with Wolfe & Castaneda, & a troupe of dancing shamans for the show.

The absurdity impressed us quite a lot, but when Carlos started cart wheeling in the Texas dirt, all those Angels got nervous real quick, so they split, roaring off on their big hogs for the east coast, & New York City, taking my pretty muse, with them too. And there I was, lost & hurt & lookin' at Jesus himself, mostly embarrassed & bedeviled.

Over on Mt. Bonnell, to the left, Hunter refereed Carlos and Wolfe in a nasty, brainy, insult melee, while I waited, awkwardly, until finally Jesus looked up, winked, and said, with a grin, "Well kid, what are you gonna do now?"

"I dunno", I musta shrugged, and He said, "Don't worry kid, it'll come to you later, I'll promise you that buster."

So I stuck out my thumb for South Padre Island, to test out His theory, just like it was before, out on Highway 61.

Now, South Padre is where the girls from Ipanema get resurrected real good on white sands every Easter, yes they do.

On South Padre the moon looks like the eye of Cyclops, son, but incredibly huge, like everything else in Texas does.

Deep in the heart; the White Birds & peyote grow wild and free for you and me, way down south on Island Padre.

I slept out on the beach, my soul for to keep, and dreamed a revelation of redemption or maybe reward; & suddenly Ken Kesey's bus, finely silhouetted, flew over the moon, just like that kid in ET, a sentimental, metaphysical bomber, Neil Cassady's knuckles were whiter than Mt. Rainier under sunshine when abruptly he rose up to veer left really hard & there was Jesus hanging onto the back door of that bus with one arm pointing like a rudder, flying free swaying.

He's steering high, straight across the universe, magically touring just like Lucy way up in the diamond studded sky.

Jesus yelled, out for me, "Avoid the greed, kid, love is all you need, try not to pass me by, & have a little faith, baby!"

Waving back, I said, "Thanks a lot man", & watched as that bus slowly dissolved like ice cream into the full Moon.

A year later, Mr. Neil Armstrong got up there, jet propelled, in a tin can, & he took a giant step for everybody, on TV, but I knew that Neil Cassady and Jesus had already beaten him to the punch, yes it was true, earlier that June in 1968.

And that's the way it was; I think, therefore I'll always have a dream, but now, no matter what, I could just Let it Be.

References to Music, Lyrics, Persons, and Events in Order of Appearance:

The Summer of Love:	The pinnacle of Haight-Ashbury counter-culture activity in San Francisco during the summer of 1967.
"Waist Deep In the Big Muddy"	Folk Singer Pete Seeger performed his controversial anti-war song on the Smothers Brothers Comedy Hour in 1968.
Purple Haze	Title song by Jimi Hendrix.
Tet & Khe Sahn	Crucial battles in the Vietnam War, marking the loss of popular support for the war.
Mai Lai. Lt. Calley	The Mai Lai Massacre; in March of 1968 a unit of the US Army, under

direct orders to destroy the village and everything in it, murdered hundreds (some accounts place the number over 500) of unarmed civilians at the hamlet of Mai Lai. Nearly all of the victims were women, children, babies, and elderly people. Many of the victims were sexually abused, beaten and tortured. The village was burned to the ground, and the massacre lasted over 3 hours. The killings were finally stopped by the efforts of Warrant Officer Hugh Thompson Jr., who maneuvered his helicopter and trained his weapons on US troops and advised that he would open fire if the killings continued. He was awarded the Distinguished Flying Cross, and his crew was awarded Bronze Star medals. They all received hate mail and death threats when they went back to the US, some found dead animals on their doorsteps. After the massacre was made public, conservatives began to blame the press for our “defeat” in Vietnam. The Army attempted to cover-up the incident, but failed to do so, and in 1970 Court Martial proceedings began. Only Lt. William Calley was convicted of any criminal activity, and then President Richard Nixon released him from prison. Some have said that the Mai Lai trial was a reversal of the findings and sentences at Nuremburg.

Orangeburg Massacre

A Vietnam Vet. Returning to his hometown of Orangeburg N.C. in Feb. 1968 was refused entry to the bowling alley due to Jim Crow laws. Within 24 hours, a crowd of 200 gathered, and a riot broke out. In the end, over 50 were injured by police gunfire, and three black college students were dead from shotgun blasts to the back. The police were not charged with any crime.

Soul on Ice

A series of essays by Eldridge Cleaver, written in prison, became an intellectual foundation of the Black Panther Party. Cleaver himself ran for President on the Peace and Freedom Party ticket.

“A Change is Gonna Come”

Recorded in 1963, this Sam Cooke song became a Civil Rights Anthem.

Lorraine balcony

Martin Luther King was murdered at this motel in Memphis, Tennessee..

“People Got to be Free”

Title song by the Rascals, released in 1968.

Benjamin Spock

Americas leading pediatrician, author of Baby and Child Care. was put on trial in 1968 for conspiracy. The charge grew out of his anti-war activities and his encouragement to young people to resist the war. Soon after, college students began burning their draft cards en masse all during the year.

R. Crumb

Illustrator and “underground” comic artist working in the San Francisco bay area during he 60’s & ‘70’s.

Acid sunshine	LSD
“Green Tambourine”	The Lemon Pipers song was popular in 1968, the sound is distinctively psychedelic.
Peoples Park	In Berkley, CA, this park was the center of a number of confrontations between students and the authorities between 1967 and 1969. Governor elect Ronald Regan ordered an armed confrontation between California Highway Patrol and student activists in 1969, one activist was killed by a shotgun blast.
The Smothers Brothers	Their variety show on CBS was finally canceled because of ongoing conflicts over the content of the material that the Smothers Brothers insisted in airing. They often used their show to promote anti-war sentiment.
“Cheap Thrills”	A 1968 album by Big Brother & the Holding Company, featuring Janis Joplin.
“Strawberry Fields”	Refers to the song Strawberry Fields Forever, on the Beatles, 1968 album “Magical Mystery Tour”, the lyric “where nothing is real” is from the same song.
blue microdots	LSD
“It’s A Beautiful Day”	San Francisco psychedelic rock band popular in 1968.
“Does anybody Really Know What Time it Is?”	Song by the rock band “Chicago”, popular in 1968.
“Up UP & Away”	Song by the 5th Dimension, popular in 1968.
In June he had just won in California...	Refers to the assassination of Bobby Kennedy.
“and I thought I saw them walking up on the hill”	Lyric from Dion’s 1968 song “Abraham, Martin & John”.
“call out the instigation...”	Lyric from Thunderclap Newman’s hit; “Something in the Air”.
“we felt in our fingers & we felt in our toes”	Paraphrases a lyric from the Trog’s; “Love is All Around”.
“it came along to turn on everyone”	Paraphrases a lyric from “Sexy Sadie, The Beatles “White Album”.
“for our love we could give everything”	Lyric from the Yardbirds “For Your Love”.
“Tuesday Afternoon”	Title song from the Moody Blues album “Days of Futures Past”.
“Cast Your Fate to the Wind”	Jazz instrumental popular during 1968.
“Loyalty to their Kind...”	From the Jefferson Airplane song “Crown of Creation”.

"White Room"	Title song by "Cream" with Eric Clapton.
"Glass Onion"	Title song from the Beatles "White Album".
"White Rabbit"	Title song from Jefferson Airplanes "Crown of Creation"
"Waiting for the Sun"	Title Song from the Doors album, "Waiting for the Sun".
The Fillmore	A famous music auditorium in San Francisco, it was the center of '60's counter culture rock & roll concerts.
"Let it Grow"	Title Song by "Cream" with Eric Clapton.
"The Man in Black..."	Johnny Cash, returned to Folsom Prison in 1968 to perform a concert, and released "Folsom Prison Blues".
"Fortunate Son"	Title of an anti-war song by Credence Clearwater Revival, 1968.
"Galveston"	Title song made popular by Glen Campbell, 1968.
"Eight Miles High"	Title song by the Byrds, popular in 1968.
"At the Zoo"	Title song by Simon & Garfunkle, popular in 1968.
"nothing to get hung about"	Lyric from Strawberry Fields", the Beatles, "Magical Mystery Tour".
"Experienced"	Title of Jimi Hendrix album from 1968..
"now what's that sound..."	lyric from "For What it's Worth", by the Buffalo Springfield; By 1968, this song had become an anti-war anthem
Thirsty Boots	Folk song and Civil Rights anthem.
Abbie Hoffman & Chicago	The 1969 Chicago Democratic convention, when thousands of anti-war protesters clashed with Chicago police. "The whole world's watching" was chanted by the crowd and became a rallying cry during and after the event.
Tommie Smith and John Carlos	While collecting their gold and bronze medals at the Mexico City Olympics in 1968, these two US Athletes raised their black gloved fists in the black power salute on the Olympic podium, making a powerful and controversial political statement.
"Ride the Wind"	Title song by The Youngbloods.
Alice B. Tolkas	References the 1968. Peter Sellers movie "I Love You Alice B. Tolkas".
Armadillo World Headquarters	Before it became a music venue, in 1970, it was rumored to be a meeting place for Texas radicals.

“keep on keepin’ on”	Bob Dylan used this phrase often in his songs throughout his career.
“Lady Madonna”	Title song by the Beatles, released as a single in 1968.
Mr. Kite	References a character in the Beatles song, “Being for the Benefit of Mr. Kite” from the album “Sgt. Peppers Lonely Hearts Club Band”.
Tom Wolfe and Carlos Castaneda	Both published important books in 1968. Wolfe: <u>The Electric Kool-Aid Acid Test</u> . Castaneda: <u>The Teachings of Don Juan</u> .
“Highway 61”	Title song by Bob Dylan, from “Highway 61 Revisited”.
“The Girl from Ipanema”	References a popular bossa nova song popular in the ‘60’s.
“White Bird”	Title song by It’s a Beautiful Day.
Neil Cassady	A central figure in the Beat Generation and the San Francisco counter-culture. He traveled extensively with Jack Kerouac. One of Kerouac’s characters is based on Cassady, and he was mentioned in Allen Ginsburg’s <u>Howl</u> . Later he drove the bus for Ken Kesey’s Merry Pranksters across the US, as described in Tom Wolfe’s <u>The Electric Acid Kool-Aid Test</u> . Mr. Cassady died mysteriously in Mexico early in the year of 1968.
“Across the Universe”	Title song by the Beatles.
“magically touring”	References the “Magical Mystery Tour” by the Beatles.
“Lucy in the Sky”	References “Lucy in the Sky with Diamonds” by the Beatles.
“Let it Be”	Title song from the Beatles last album, “Let it Be”.



COVERED BRIDGE



BY TAYLOR BROWN

Baker stepped rock to rock, downward, his bare toes gnarled for traction on the slick-tilted planes of river rock. He watched for gaps that could swallow a leg, angles that could break an ankle. His palms were sweaty, a loose-handled satchel gripped in one hand.

Below him the river hissed and whorled, eddied drunkenly at elbowed corners of boulder-rock, then jetted whitely ahead, rapid-foamed, and Baker knew the real danger lay in the black-shooting hydraulics that ran beneath the surface, that could knock you from standing and hurl you crammed under a hunk of rock old as the world, leave you there amid the bone-jammed carcasses of deer and dogs and children gone missing.

That would never be him, he told himself. His thirteen-year body was muscled and lean this summer, hand-made himself in the high-school weightroom, looking to play tailback come sophomore year. A match for near anything short of the varsity defensive line. They still outweighed him by nearly a hundred pounds a man. But his time would come, he told himself. Would come.

He reached a big flat-topped hunk of rock, big as a Volkswagen. Perfect for sunbathing if the climb down wasn't so tough. There were many other paths to the river, easier ones, which his scanty-clad peers used on weekends to find sun-tilted planes to lay out over the water, to drink beers and frolic and tan.

But days like today Baker preferred the shade of the covered bridge. The covered bridge had been there as long as he could remember, red-roofed, past it a ten house community of working families who'd built it. That was Moss land up there, or had been—Moss his mother's family. All the houses up there had been of one side that family or the other, blood or marriage. But now those houses were gone, leveled, the families paid out well to move somewhere else, to the edge of Lake Lure mostly, making room for the luxury homes planned to go in their place, thirty homes where there used to be ten.

On the high side of the land, where the earth went shallow before the rising crust of rock, was the graveyard where his mother was buried, the dirt churned black over her grave.

Baker crossed the big flat rock and climbed down the other side, into the shadowed cool of the bridge. He sat on a chair-shaped rock, his feet dangling in the black rush of water, and opened the satchel he carried with him.

Flowers. Day lilies mostly, red-orange as a girl's summery lips, and azaleas too, these his mother's. Dead now but not yet the seeds she'd sewn. Not yet. His father wanted them cut, gone. He didn't care how or where. Baker had scythed them down this morning with his pocketknife, pulling handfuls of them taut like you would a throat before cutting. They came loose, light as air, flowering from his hand, pedals tickling his skin like fingertips.

They'd buried his mother in a casket, full-bodied, instead of cremating her to ash, as she'd wished. He didn't know how it all came about, probably something to do with his father's family, Presbyterians all. They did not believe in degrading the body, as though they'd never seen the rotting carcasses of livestock mangled in barbed fencing, as though that degradation didn't transpire in a person's coffin.

Baker palmed a handful of flowers from the satchel, their brightness undiminished by the shade. He examined the petals, so tender. The day lilies you could eat. His father used to make day lily fritter, batter-fried golden. Baker lowered his upturned palm toward the rush of water, the bottom-stones long smoothed by hydraulic action, no edges to them, serene despite the torrents that ripped over them year on year.

A clamor downstream stilled his hand. He looked up. Bare-backed locals were standing up on their rocks, dumping coolers of silver beer cans into the river, throwing away ziplock baggies of weed and pills. Uniformed men were descending the weekend trails, shuffle-footed, hands steadying their sidearms, black sunglasses down-tilted to watch their steps.

The cops never bothered anyone out here, no one local, not until now. Baker heard steps above him, on the slatted pine of the bridge, then on rock.

"You, boy, get up here."

Baker looked up and squinted at a black shape thinned against the overwhelming power of the sun. He nodded and started back the way he'd come.

"Bring that bag with you. That's the reason you're coming up here."

Baker nodded and stooped down to pick up the satchel and climbed four-limbed up the rocky creekside, his dry skin making good friction against the crags, the bag draped over his articulating shoulder.

He stood finally before the policeman, a young man with a starched shirt and shaved head.

"Let's see the bag," he said.

Baker handed it to him, his heart beating like he'd done something wrong.

The police officer swiped open the satchel with a rigid hand, cocked his head to see inside the black well of cloth.

"What you got in here?"

Baker swallowed. "Flowers, sir."

The man's brow crinkled.

"Flowers?"

He shook the bag over a random-hewn stone, just a few of the orange and pink flowerheads falling upturned like bright propellers onto the rock. Pink and purple, some red. The lilies orange.

"These some kind of funky flowers, edible?"

"No, sir. Those is just day lilies, and those others azaleas, my mother's."

"Your mother's?"

"Yes, sir."

The man squinted at him, suspicious. "What's a boy like you doing with all them flowers?"

Baker stiffened. "Nothing," he said, too quick.

The policeman nodded his head like he was beginning to understand. "Son, ain't nothing illegal about being a—"

"They're just pretty is all," said Baker.

The man looked down at the bladed petals, like flowers from rock. He cocked his head from one side to the other. After a moment he exhaled.

"Shit," he said, "I reckon they are."

He handed the bag back to Baker and looked over his shoulder. He was young, his face round, unlined.

"Listen," he said. "You best just get on out of here. There'll only be trouble down here today." He nodded downriver, boys chest-puffed against handcuffs, their girlfriends hip-leaned toward their badged captors, flirting for freedom. "You don't want any trouble, I'd get on."

Baker nodded and squatted down to gather up the loose-strewn flowers before walking back the way he'd come, walking quick and light as he could to salvage his soles against the scorch of the blacktop.

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At home he placed the satchel in the garage refrigerator, where they kept beer and soft drinks, placing it in one of the empty vegetable drawers where his father wouldn't notice.

"Where you been?" his father asked, looking up from his paper.

"Down at the river."

"Don't you got a gym regimen to keep up?"

"It's Sunday."

"My day, there weren't no days of rest."

And look where that got you, thought Baker. He looked out the bay window, the glass heat-warped, to the hills rising green-folded from their yard, steep as walls. You could not even see the tops of them from inside the house. You had to be out there, right underneath them, looking straight heavenward like a kid in the front row of a movie theater, a trick of angles keeping you from ever seeing the peak, the summit, only the last ledge of barefaced granite you couldn't ever reach.

"You take care of them flowers?"

"Yes sir. Buried them. Full-stemmed I did."

"What's that matter?"

Baker shrugged. "Reckon it don't."

"Well, you best just stay away from the river. I hear they're trying to pre-sell half them homes before the bulldozers even get cranked. They don't want no riff-raff hanging round the river, scaring off them buyers from Charlotte, Atlanta."

"Yes sir."

.....

Come midnight, Baker was huddled underneath the covered bridge, his bedroom window agape some mile distant, the satchel left in the fridge, too risky to wake his father.

Diesel hulks roared and smoked on the far hillside, angular earthmovers with square white eyes. Baker heard more of them traverse the bridge above him, tank treads squeaking like reinforcements. Long drips of oil fell through the slats overhead. Tiny spouts of steam hissed on the cold black water.

Baker was rigid with gooseflesh, his skin alien on him, the fine mist off the running snowmelt so cooling in daytime, so frigid at night, no sun to fight the cold. He'd not expected this, gone barefoot as always, his black wife-beater worn as camouflage.

A wooden fence was going up around the perimeter of the community, head-high and barbed ornately with gold-tipped spires.

His mother had owned a parcel of land up there, a half acre was all, but green and unbuilt, willed to his father at her death. A short walk through sparse trees to the Moss firepit, the banjo and mandolin and yearn-filled voices of singing kin. He'd always thought he'd live there, now sold alongside all the Moss land, his father's doing.

Baker palmed the hard square-cut piling beside him, the wood damp-dark over the gush of water, like a tide had risen when he wasn't here. He held his hand there, flat-palmed, and felt the fine mist against his knuckles, the wood darkened by invisible flecks of spray. The wood was unsodden by so much whitewater, just as sturdy as the days it stood living from the earth, bark-bound and leafed.

He patted the wood and slid his hand upward, against the grain, asking for splinters. His hand disappeared into the shadowed joinery overhead.

.....

Senior walked down the stairs stiff-jointed, skipping the loose and rickety steps where news of his going might groan into the upper reaches of the house and wake his boy. He snuck a six-pack from the back of the garage fridge and walked out toward his shed, through the yard, weaving between the broken white flagstones, the grass crackly and cool underneath his bare feet.

The tin corrugation of the shed held a strange luster in the darkness, like it lagged behind the rest of the world, still reflecting the last glimmer of dusk.

For most his days he'd been a dynamiter in the rock quarries all around the state. They would send him rappelling down sheer rock walls with his rope, his gear, his explosives. All day he'd drill one-inch holes in the naked exposure of rock, striated century on century, and neatly insert his sticks of TNT, running fuses from the blasting caps to the T-handled detonator on a far ledge. At end of day he'd watch his handiwork blow dust-white towers into the blue sky, eons of granite and shale blasted heavenward, broken, raining down hotly into the carved-out bowl of earth, there to await the trucks, the grinders, the stone-cutters.

That was until the fall, his broken back. The doctors told him he'd been lucky his spinal cord wasn't cut, no paralysis. He walked carefully now, stiff-spined, like something might still slip, some sharp-edged bone fragment of his past cut his legs from underneath him.

He opened the shed and stepped into the dark. Found the cache of candlestick dynamite hidden in a cardboard box labeled X-MAS LIGHTS. He started descending the path through the woods, three sticks in hand, the six-pack under his arm.

.....

Senior's johnboat floated silently in the middle of the lake, the moon an ovate silver sheen across the surface. It did not touch the quadrant of black water he'd chosen.

He slurped the last sip from a can and set the crushed aluminum in a bucket alongside its companions. He lit a cigarette and inhaled, then touched off a TNT fuse with the ash. It crackled like a sparkler. He tossed the stick over the side, the white spark haloing through the air. It hissed when it struck the surface, sank.

Senior leaned to watch, one forearm shielding half his face. The dynamite had come with 60 second fuses, but he'd cut them down to 15 seconds, timed to blow like depth charges. In his day he could eye a fuse better than anyone. He'd won many a bet over fuses crackling nakedly against the white rock-dust of the quarries, cutting them by sight alone to burn a given number of seconds.

He waited, watching the white spark descend deeper, deeper. Nearly disappear, the seconds down to one. The white seed exploded ball-shaped from the depths, outburst like a supernova, the lake suddenly electric with power, illuminated, the depths exposed white-lit a single second, the hull hovering suddenly high and weightless, as in air, over a sunken rowboat, tiny from such height, and schools of stunned fish, limbic and unswimming, their scales silver-struck.

Senior sat back in the boat, looked heavenward, blinded. He closed his eyes and imagined the fish rising all around him, white-bellied, their bladders ruptured, specking the black surface in droves. He palmed his way around the bottom of the boat, found the net.

.....

“Trout for breakfast?” asked Baker. “We never eat nothing but fish around here. Don’t seem natural.”

Senior waved the greasy spatula in his direction.

“Jesus Christ was a fisherman, boy. And I never heard him getting huffy about it.”

“Well,” said Baker, “seems like we might could stretch for something different every once in awhile, what with all that land money.”

Senior set the thick china plate down hard before his son, the silverware rattling on the table. Flaky pink meat bleeding a yellow pool of butter. Then he set down his own plate, hard too, and took his seat at the head of the table, Baker at his right hand, an empty chair across from him.

“Let’s say grace,” said Senior.

“Grace,” said Baker, picking up his fork.

.....

By nightfall Baker had already crossed the bridge onto the old Moss land. The workers were on dinner break, or maybe changing from dayshift to night. No one was hardly around. He walked up across the construction site and up the far slope to where the headstones shouldered out of the hard earth in broken formation, his mother’s the whitest.

There were no pretties to grace them, no glass vases or new-cut flowers or notes hand-scribbled for the dead to read. He knelt over his mother’s grave bare-kneed, the earth still soft and dark, and the ground here felt warmer, safer, like some remainder of warmth and running blood infused the ground. Some spirit. He spread his hands flat to the dirt, soaking what he could through his palms, and then he clenched handfuls of the black dirt in his fists, let go and clenched more, his hands burrowing of their own accord, like animals for warmth or to escape some predator.

“Hey, boy! Get away from there!”

Baker bolted upright, black-handed, his eyes wide. A big man in a hardhat was barreling toward him, his finger pointed in judgment. Baker looked down at himself, his hands, the torn-up earth between his bare feet. He took off running down the slope, heard the man yelling behind him.

“Graverobber!”

Bobcats and backhoes littered the hillside, stacks of wood, and men suddenly everywhere, stepping down from newly-arrived trucks, big men with hardhats that gleamed under the halogen worklights flickering to life in the dusk.

Baker felt his velocity build, faster and faster downhill. A workman lurched from behind a yellow digger and Baker dodged him, spinning, running straight again until another man, this one white-chested and tattooed, hunkered low before him, readied. Baker jukeed left, right, too quick to follow. The man crumpled before him, as if spell-struck, and Baker shot past.

He vaulted a sawhorse table from a higher ledge, the angles right, and landed sure-footed, still running, and felt something whelm up in his lungs, the hot rasp of exertion but something else too, the river nearing, the bridge, his power crescent, too fleet-footed to be caught, and he was almost there when the blindside came, exploding skull to skull from the right, his footing lost, his body wheeling downhill, rag-dolled, toward the river rock.

.....

He woke to a halo of grim faces arched over him, above them the bruise of dusk. The square and hair-grizzled jaws were moving but he heard nothing save the monotone ring inside his skull, like a far-off siren.

He turned from the faces, saw where the river ran sunken through crag-rock only a few steps away, the covered bridge straddling the silent sluice of dark water like a shelter of some kind, red-shingled and shadowed from heavy snows and the mean-boring sun.

The voices started to break through the ringing, but barely, like the low gush of running water. More pleasant the lightning bugs, their bulbs flickering yellow like the tiny lanterns of tiny men, moment-bright and gone.

Baker sat up, his world dizzied, and started to stand. A heavy hand kept his butt to the ground. He could not quite decipher the exact words delivered him, their separate shapes and meanings, but understood their message. That he could not come back here. That his kind was not welcome. No dirty-footed mountain trash, no black-handed graverobbers. No trespassing.

"Moss," he told them. "My mother was a Moss."
No exceptions, they said. No names carried extra weight, especially names they'd never heard of, like Moss.

Arms hooked underneath his armpits and lifted him to his feet, dizzied, no surety in the ground underneath his feet. Hands ushered him toward the open maw of the covered bridge, that once shelter, now like a tunnel bored through the air where none was needed, a one-way path to his past, no future of Moss land, not even a grave.

His feet crossed the slatted pine of the bridge, the river hissing darkly beneath him, the rocks jagged and black and wet. All around was shadow, night come early in the shingled darkness. Ahead the outlet, the squared light of dusk, the old mountain highway whose broken shoulder would lead him back to his father's house.

He crossed the threshold, stood, turned to look back the way he'd come. A lightning bug drifted before him, the vertical body and disc-like wings hovering like a miniature hummingbird, that delicate. The white bulb on the tail ignited, yellow-lit, and Baker reached out and caught the luminous being in the hollow of his cupped palms. He could feel the tickling flutter of tiny wings.

He looked up the darkening slope of the hillside, past the gold-spired fencing and the earth-moving equipment, past the worklamps and helmeted men, to the sparse stand of trees where his mother lay buried. So far-off, and not but one way across, this bridge,

and that thwarted by men at the far threshold, their arms crossed, their bodies growing one-dimensional in the falling dark, silhouettes only, dark and unyielding as a wall themselves.

Baker clenched his hands into a double-handed fist, maddened and powerless. He wanted recourse, had none. No way to tell them this bridge was his past, this land his future. No voice they would hark, no sledge but his brittle knuckles. He unmade his two hands until they made a prayer shape against his chest.

Only later, after hiking most of the way home, the broken-shouldered highway rising crookedly into the dark upper reaches of the mountains before him, did he open his hands from their steeped place against his chest and see the crescent smear in his palms, luminosity burst against the black lines of grave-dirt. A sad sight to behold, sadder still because he could think of no other end to the short dream of holding the world intact.

He kept on walking, calm-hearted despite the ringing in his concussed skull, walking another mile up the mountain hollows to the dark country of his home, his father's house, the glimmering shed where his father kept the Christmas lights hidden from his son, or thought he did.

.....

Come dawn, the blue-ridged highlands grew around the flat mirror of the lake, upthrust, their peaks articulated out of darkness against the rising light. Senior's johnboat chugged across the water in blue puffs of smoke. He pulled up to the warped dock where he stored the boat and tied it to a rusted cleat. He climbed out, another night's catch heavy over his shoulder, and zigzagged down the uneven planking, no sleep to steady him.

He needed to sell off his catch while it was fresh, and the riverfront grills would already be opening, happy to buy fresh fish at a big discount, no questions asked. He trudged toward town. Before sunup there were few police around to ask questions, no heat to turn his catch foul-smelling and unsellable.

All night, his boy's dinnertime bitterness had stung in his mind. Senior had only done like the rest of the family, the Mosses, selling off the land at a good price, and the money he'd stuck in a trust for the boy's future, college or tech school or something. Baker believed he could get a full ride playing football, despite his size, and maybe he could. Still, he needed a way to bridge one future to another, should the first go crooked of its aim. In Senior's experience, only money and firepower made you any kind of real change in the world.

.....

Senior stood on the deck of the river grill, the chairs still stacked on the tables, most his catch sold off to the cook preparing for Sunday brunch. The cook had thrown in a can of cold beer, and Senior popped the ice-crust top and slurped the contents, the river flowing past in white v's around jagged hunks of rock like the kind he'd blasted once from sheer mountainsides.

He was thinking of that, his past, when a boom exploded in his chest, a blast from upriver. Senior dropped to his knees, his ears ringing, his beer foaming across the deck. No one else in the county had the explosives for that kind of blast.

No one else.

He was still on his knees, his hands gripping the deck railing, his eyes set stinging on the water, watching for debris, for blood, when the flowers came cascading down the dark shoots of water in bright flurries, wheeling and fresh, the petals like frozen outbursts of color. He saw them and knew they were lilies and azaleas cut long-stemmed from his wife's garden, cut by his boy, flourishing the river like some kind of parade, and Senior thought of the short-cut fuses of his dynamite, cut to blow so much quicker than the labels read, and he could think of nothing but his boy, his boy.

He closed his eyes to the blossoming flood, the terrible hemorrhage of beauty in the river, and crumpled fully to the deck, hearing only the river run onward, so jagged-toothed and sweet, its voice unchanged before tragedy and beauty both. P

RETURNING FROM RANNEY RANCH

by Blue Renner

Watermelon sky pulls my truck
down road. Pink tears stream
from the corners of my eyes
blur this morning's first stretches of dawn.

My New Mexico rubs night
from the corners of *his* eyes.

Fall into step with this landscape.
Watch the pull back of bedcovers
as day pads into sun blush of light
mountains breath, bold in this morning.

The gas pedal silver and loose,
clingy winds tangle me.

Never seen this mountain complexion,
dewy, without hours of make-up,
before it can sneak into day, then night again,
its Piñon pine skin pure

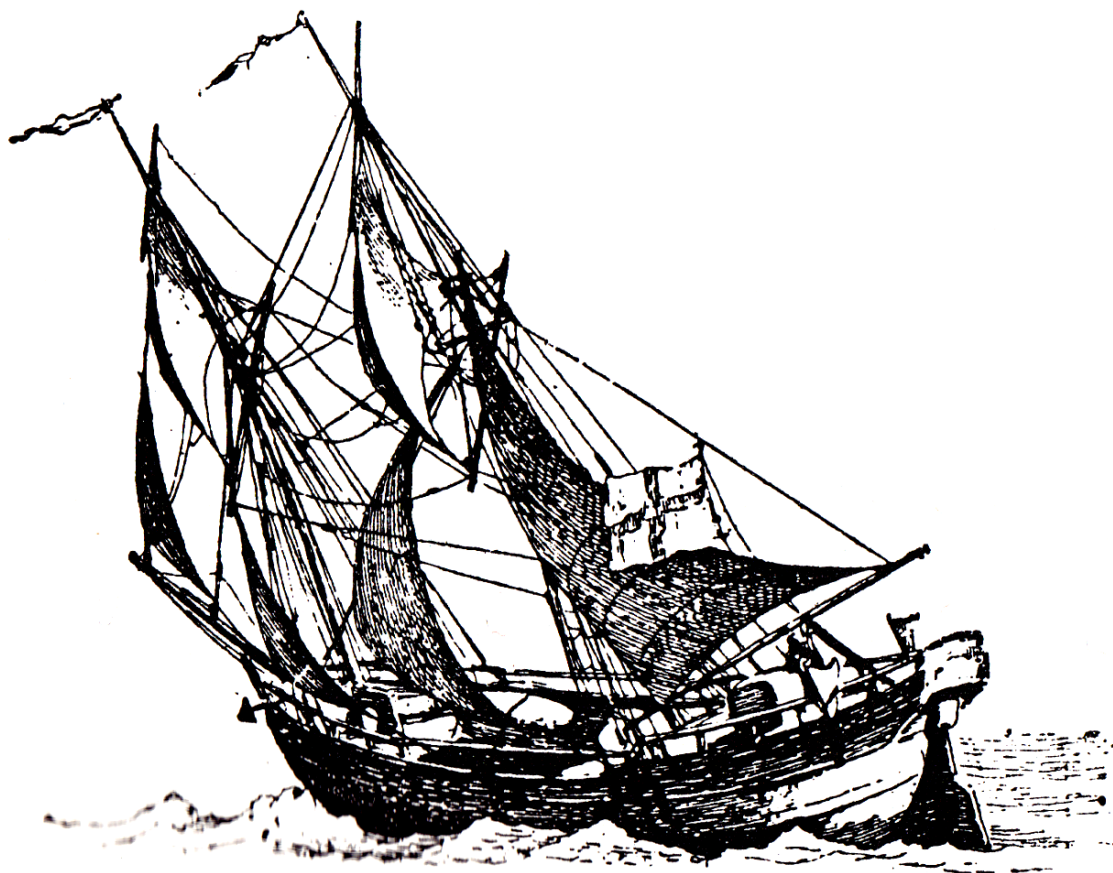
freckled with fawns and buffalo grasses—
prairie sage gently towels, pats it dry.

Through the window,
sweet trace of weathered leather,
new hay. Dust. I hang onto every single tumble
weed as it spills into my path.

Help me, I lean into the steering wheel.

Help the way I hold onto my horses.

Bring me the right saddle.



OUR CONTRIBUTORS

Elissa Leichter, 32, was born in New York. Poems have or will appear in *Calliope*, *Negative Suck*, *Barrier Islands Review*, *Triggerfish*, *Gargoyle Magazine* and others. She graduated from Cornell University in 2000, obtained her Master of Science from Fordham University, 2002. After teaching for several years in New York City, she began working at a rare and used bookstore where she started collecting first editions. She attained her Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Writing, 2009 at Sarah Lawrence College. While attending SLC she was Vice-President of the Graduate Student Senate, sat on myriad boards, and worked with the Valhalla prison's 'youth offenders program' teaching poetry to male inmates. Readings include The Ear Inn, Cornelia Street Café, The Ireland House and others. She lives in Manhattan with her husband, Dan and their dog Beckett.

Catie Cleary is a nineteen year-old art student currently living and working on a farm in the San Juan Islands.

Andrew Madigan lives in the Middle East, where he teaches creative writing to Emirati girls, edits a journal, and plays rugby.

Mike Chylinski is a musician and photographer living in Los Angeles who still shoots exclusively with a variety of archaic film cameras. His photos have been published in *Shots Magazine*, *L.A. Architect*, and *Don't Think Just Shoot*. His latest project is a blog inspired by record covers at longfade.wordpress.com.

Shayne Barr is the Cornell Woolrich Fellow at Columbia University's School of the Arts, where he is pursuing an MFA in fiction. He graduated from Columbia with Departmental Honors in Creative Writing, and for two years served as Editor-in-Chief of the *Columbia Review*.

L.J. Moore is a 2010 graduate of the MFA program at Columbia University and is the Editor of *Porchlight: A Literary Magazine*. She has previously been a professional business plan writer, poet's lackey, and linguist. Current projects include a Young Adult novel that has nothing to do with vampires, and a novella set in the American west.

Clayton Adam Clark hails from St. Louis, Missouri but currently resides in Columbus, Ohio where he spends much of his time reading, writing, teaching, and editing. When possible, though, he likes to see new places, eat strange foods, and drink strong beers with friends and family.

Lawrence Dizon Sumulong (b. 1987) is a New York City-based photographer and a recent graduate of Grinnell College, where he majored in English and studied the craft of poetry. Upon graduating, he was awarded The Lorabel Richardson/Academy of American Poets Prize. His photo essays and long-term documentary projects seek to analogize light, shadow, and visual forms to the poetic forms learned in his study of literature.

Amy Bergen lives very, very far north in Manhattan. She is a former science teacher and literary intern. Her work can be found online at *elimae*, *Staccato Fiction*, and *Emprise Review*.

Sherri Damlo, 28, is a medical editor by day and an amateur photographer by night. She is originally from the Midwest but now lives in the Pacific Northwest with her husband—also a photographer—and their two four-legged furry children. More of her photography can be found at www.flickr.com/sdamlo.

George Moore was nominated this year for two Pushcart Prizes, two “Best of the Web,” two “Best of the Net,” The Rhysling Poetry Award, and the Wolfson Poetry Prize, and previously was a finalist for the National Poetry Series, the Brittingham Poetry Award, and the Richard Snyder Poetry Prize. He has published poetry in *The Atlantic*, *Poetry*, *Northwest Review*, *Colorado Review*, and internationally this last year in *Blast* (Australia), *Antigonish Review* (Canada), *Dublin Quarterly*, *Semaphore* (New Zealand), *QRLS* (Singapore), and *Anastomoo* (Tasmania). He spends part of each year at artist residencies in Europe; last May he worked on the island of Rhodes, Greece, at the International Writers and Translators Center, and previously in Portugal, Iceland, Spain and Canada. Some of his poetry has been in collaboration with visual artists in the last few years, with installations and exhibition in Spain, Canada, and Iceland. Collections include *All Night Card Game in the Back Room of Time* (Pulpbits 2007) and *Headhunting* (Mellen, 2002). He teaches literature at the University of Colorado, Boulder. He can be found on the web at: <http://spot.colorado.edu/~mooreg/Site/About.html>.

Jenny Starr-Busch Johnson is inspired by a variety of illustrative artists and their individual styles, such as Alfred Rethel, Wilhelm von Kaulbach, Dr. Seuss, and Caspar David Friedrich. Her artwork revolves around happenings in her life and her imaginative responses to them. They are mainly executed with lithographic stone printmaking or mixed media drawing. She is a recent graduate from Missouri State University with a BFA in printmaking and drawing and a BSED in art education with a minor in art history.

J. David Hollingsworth, a refugee from the 1960s, took a very long hiatus while making a living and searching for his wayward muse. Hiding in plain sight amongst those with short memories and bizarre social agendas, he discovered that expressing himself through literary venues has a more positive outcome than beating his head against a brick wall (at least most of the time). He lives somewhere in occupied America with his wife and a rescued, deaf, dumb, and blind dog who is not named Tommy.

Taylor Brown is a native of Georgia. He now lives in Black Mountain, North Carolina, and works in advertising. His short fiction has appeared in *CutBank*, *Thuglit*, *Pindeldyboz*, *The Dead Mule*, *The Liars' League*, and the *Press 53 Open Award Anthology*, and he was the recipient of the 2009 Montana Prize in Fiction. His website is www.taylorbrownfiction.com.

Blue Renner is an MFA candidate at Lesley University. She is currently working on a project that explores women and their poetic perspectives on war. Her work has been published by *The Journal News*, *Brink Magazine*, and *Connotations Press*. A writer temporarily based in the Southeast, she hopes to make it back to her city-love NYC soon.

Carla Robinson is a former literature textbook editor for Holt, Rinehart & Winston and Houghton Mifflin Harcourt who now enjoys volunteering as a park ranger in the Petrified Forest National Park in Arizona. She visited and photographed more than 48 national parks and forests last year, and her photos have appeared in publications by the National Park Service and the American Museum of Natural History. She is now pondering the following ranger posts: interpretive guide for a sculpture garden in New Hampshire, sled dog handler for demonstrations at Denali, and “living history” educator at Minute Man National Historical Park, where she’d get to fire black powder muskets and share stories about The Wayside authors.

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