

AMERICAN PATRIOT





On a Personal Level

I have tossed massive truck axles onto pallets at the end of the assembly line, Ford Sterling Axle, down Mound Road seven miles from the Motor City. Huh (lift)/ Ugh (toss) alternating with another guy to allow a few seconds of human recovery time, though at the end of my early shifts my arms tingled and ached with numb strings of sweat as I wobbled toward the time clock. What I want to say is I lived in a little house like this at the time: grungy pale green siding with aluminum awnings that would never be white again due to the nature of the air from factories like mine. Why bother scrubbing?

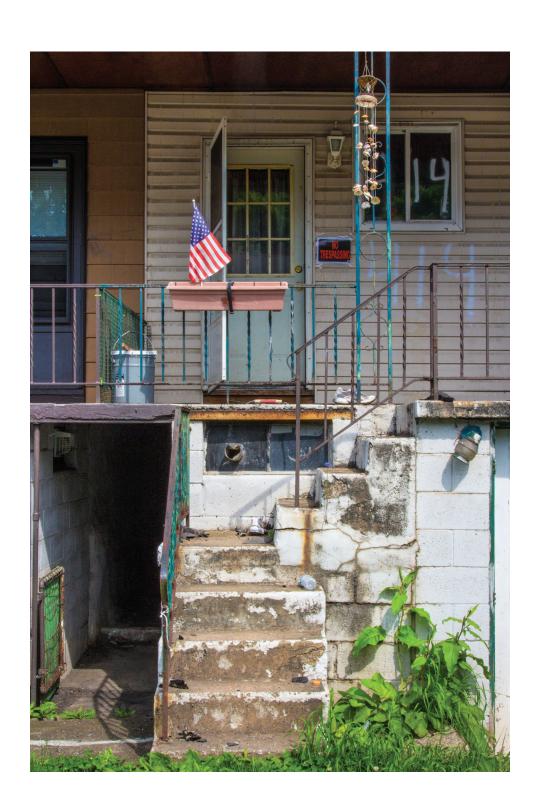
On a universal level, how about that flag? Nobody laying on that pallet. You could be crucified on it, and I believe a few people have, while the rest of us were busy carving tree stumps into cute little bears. How much power does it take to keep it upright and useless, some odd compromise with sacrilege not to toss axles or bags of fertilizer or mysterious boxes on it when tossing things on the damn pallet is supposed to be All-American in the first place. Why bother

scrubbing, I guess I am asking. The bear looks lonely or constipated from this distance, the *real* flag to the right, a little ragtag, ridden hard, out of breath against the perfect fake shutters next door.

Is it just me, people, or is that flag pulling the whole house crooked, tilted to the right? I try not to read too much into things. Er—I mean, that's all I do is read into *things*. So, when your gutters don't connect—

which came first, the pallet or the flag? I lived in a house like this. The guy I alternated with took extra axles when I first started to give me more of a breather. We didn't talk about it and he didn't expect any favors back. I don't think anyone ever noticed. The steel pallet grease-infused, though looking back on a personal level, somewhere beneath the grease, that pallet was red, white, and blue. Huh (lift)/ Ugh (toss).

Feel free to make fun of the bear. Why bother scrubbing?



Yes, Trespassing

I've been thinking a lot about trespassing lately. When does wandering turn bad? I have never gotten a citation for wandering.

Wander a mile in my shoe. The other shoe dropped. I'm wandering into that flower box and remembering the bright scent—

of betrayal? A turn for the worst. Who knew turning up the volume would crack the cement?

Bad flowers! Painting the steps always a bad idea. Never paint your steps.

If the flag is the brightest thing in your window box, you're screwed.

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Oh, I'm full of the wisdom of the I told you so's and the already damned.

This too is America, I know, 414, and your neighbor 416 who's sick of living next door

to your heap of—hey, can you at least pull the weeds? Is it trespassing or wandering

or stupidity that makes me want to walk through the open gate and into the darkness

that sure as hell ain't no Eden? America's got a cellar, sure, well-vented for the stench.

What's that saying about not wanting to see what goes on in the sausage factory?

It's cleverer than that. Cleverness has no business being in the basement of 414.

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I've been wandering a lot about thinking, lately. Like, it is okay to kneel for the anthem

if Aretha is singing it? Must be the fumes getting to me out those vents. I've got a weakness

for reggae and redemption. God must get pretty tired of blessing us. Or dealing

with the clowns who imagine they have the authority to speak in his name.

I've spent my life trespassing. I've carried the cross and I've carried the flag

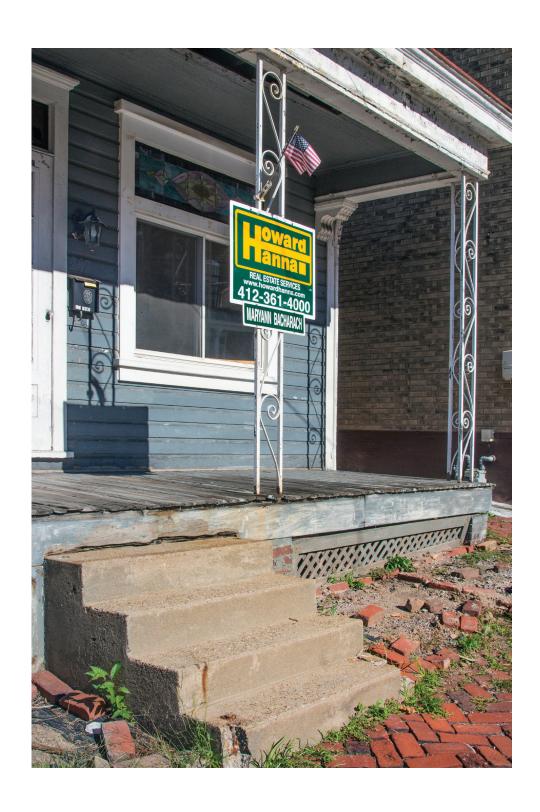
and I've carried the fire and I've carried the water

and I just want to rest my weary soul on the steps of 414. Yeah, I see the tools on the porch, and I know there's work

to be done. It don't much matter if those are scrapers or weeders or paint brushes up there

with that 5-gallon bucket of primer. 414, that's a start. I understand, Americans being big on numbers.

That shoe, it looks just my size.



Don't Stop Me If You've Heard This One

The brick garden was doing just fine until X moved into the neighborhood.

Yeah, we're moving out. Not surrendering, we're just giving up

in the great American tradition.

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If you love your country you'll buy my house.

Flag included. Wave proudly.

A rare Siamese Twin flag. For luck.

Don't worry about the X's. Oh, you're X too?

I just thought. Nevermind. You'll need it, the luck.

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Shoulda known bricks don't grow in this kind of weather.

That's why the sign's up high. Keep from catching what the bricks caught.

That's why the flag's higher. An arm's length can kill you. We're going some place where no X's live.

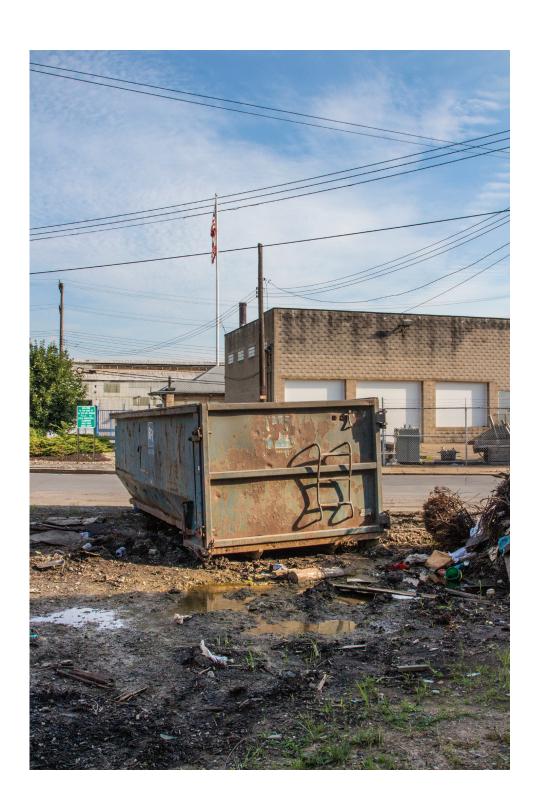
They stole our flag's shadow. Said it was a misunderstanding

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We're taking every one of them bricks to our new glass house.

The boy's out back loosening up his arm.

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Behind the Scenes

No protection is needed for a television antenna or flagpole whose mast enters the earth. Both are automatically grounded, and lightning will simply travel down their length into the soil. But an antenna or other pole that does not contact the earth has to be linked to it by means of grounding equipment. —NYTimes

The colors of mud and industry fail to register on the spectrum of flags

yet they are everywhere we bend down to make or build a miracle.

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In the sag of wired stillness above, don't you long to be electrocuted/

I mean electrified/I mean connected to the larger human grid of cut wires

and mad dancing?

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Poles for light and telephones for electricity and flags.

What else must be raised above us and who decides, and when?

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The detritus lies out back next to the rusty skid. Our tour guide might be napping inside.

Let them sleep in the holy womb of the discarded.

We know lightning strikes highest objects first and water is the magic ingredient

for life. What we do with that information in the tilted face of blue sky?

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How many of us have stood on a loading dock and directed a truck backing in to load

or unload? Held up our hand and nodded and said, that's good?

Raise your dirty hands but do not smudge the flag.

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I'm seeing a tank and thinking battle I'm seeing a flag and thinking grief.

In the stillness, in the wreckage.



Superstition

or, what keeps us safe. 13 stripes at 113 Superstition and on every single flag.

Fifty stars, now, and I'm guessing forever, but you won't find them

ordered like this in the sky.

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If you ring the bell, a family of tiny flags will emerge.

I can't predict what they will have to say, but I think God

will come up rather quickly. I can't predict whether

they'll let you in and offer you a Virgin Bloody Mary

and a bowl of Better Maid chips. They might have better

snacks next door, or a loaded gun.

I think American flags should be made with colored

duct tape. But that's just me wandering the neighborhood

looking for my country.