

**LESTER
LIES
DOWN**

**JAMES
LADD
THOMAS**



For Ron Harris, Patrick Morrow, and Barry Lopez

“If liberty means anything at all, it means the right to tell people what they do not want to hear.”

George Orwell

ANOMALY

THE LATE AFTERNOON SUN soothed Lester Gordon's face, a face tight from the thoughts of the past few weeks. The October grass tickled his neck and something wiggly crawled up his right leg under his pants. Whatever it was didn't sting, so he felt no urgency in its removal; lie on the ground and bugs will find you. Lying face up in his backyard felt good this day, the shaggy overgrown grass providing a cushion of turf in this late fall day bearing a swimming-pool-blue sky, though good wasn't what he had been feeling during these past eventful days.

"Now this is much better," he said to himself. Bending his chin to his chest, he examined his go-to home attire: blue jeans, faded and worn, his favorite pair; a black and blue flannel shirt; and a pair of tan running shoes, worn from use. His arms and legs were so contortedly positioned on the billowy grass that if someone had spray-painted the outline of his body orange, the shape would have matched the misshapen outlines in endless TV dramas. He wasn't dead, just, like everyone else, wounded.

Mary King, the neighbor directly behind his house, saw him lying on his back while she gazed out her kitchen window as she made her husband, Bill, his usual Saturday roast beef, hot peppers, and thick-sliced tomato sandwich for lunch. If anything, it relieved her to see Lester sunk in

his six-inch-high grass. Such an odd sight took her back to her youth when her mother drove her to school every morning. Mary remembered the innocence of a neighbor's special needs son who stood most every morning in his driveway waving at the passing cars. She turned to Bill as she spread the mayo on a slice of white bread and remarked, "Sure is good to see Lester lying out there in his backyard. Certainly odd, not what you would call ordinary, but somehow it's reassuring."

Bill, while keeping his eyes on the sports page, replied, "What Lester needs to do is get off his butt and mow the grass."

Mike Alexander, the neighbor to Lester's left, sat at a worktable in his carport where he kept his fishing boat and tackle. He had seen Lester come out and lie down while Mike tinkered with his outboard Mercury motor. After a few minutes Mike had called out, as he had done many times through the four years of living next door, "How's life, Lester?"

Raising his head toward Mike, Lester shouted back, "Sucks, man."

Mike's response, a loud "Don't it, though," made them both laugh, and as usual the conversation had comfortably died there.

Connie Rogers, the neighbor on Lester's right, saw him as she jammed her old '72 blue Beetle into reverse and beeped her horn; she was on her way to the grocery store. When Lester heard the beep he raised his right hand, forming his fingers into the peace sign. Like the others, Connie thought Lester lying on his back in the grass was as natural as if he was sipping a cold beer in a hammock on a hot summer afternoon. Lester was doing, in their view, what Lester did.

One of the constants in Lester Gordon's life involved his capability of just dropping down and lying on his back anytime and anywhere. As a toddler, Lester would suddenly drop down to his knees, roll on his rear, then ease back to "The Lester Position," as his father came to call it. He would do it while playing on the cracked sidewalk in front of his house, while watching cartoons on the den floor, even while eating lunch at his Big Bird table in the kitchen.

A few times his mother found him under his bed looking up at the bottom of the box springs as if contemplating their complexity or perhaps pretending to be a mechanic like one of the workers at his father's car wash who worked on cars in his backyard garage.

To this day his mother tells friends he became nearly obsessed with spread-eagling on his back while accompanying her in the grocery store as a young boy, though he seemed to prefer the dairy aisle where the tiles were refreshingly cool on sweltering summer days. He would pat the floor next to him while looking up at her grinning face. His mother, being the loving mother she was, would drop down and join her son in observing the world from a grounded view (though in stores she'd shake her head and exclaim, "I can't do that here, honey").

His fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Jordan, said he would stretch out on a worktable at the back of the classroom during morning break and stare intently at the ceiling tiles. In high school Lester enjoyed gazing up at the pine tree branches in Mastin Lake Park while nestled in the copper pine straw. He loved to lie back on the top row of the bleachers during baseball games. His first girlfriend, Donna White, said he loved to lie on her front porch while they talked and smooched, but his place of choice was to lie out in her front yard looking up at the stars and moon.

More than once an employee had stumbled onto Lester while he lay on his back in the storage room of the video store he owned and operated. A couple of his high school workers, in their ignorance, thought that he was crazy. "I'm working for Rain Man," eighteen-year-old Paul Hagan often said.

No one ever understood why he did it, why he would stretch out on his back like he was about to take a nap, though there were all types of explanations. His sister had always said he wanted attention, wanted people to look at him. "When we were little tykes he saw Momma's and Daddy's looks of satisfaction as I rode my bike for the first time without training wheels. Then and there he plopped down on his back in the middle of the street in front of our house. Old Man Daniels from across the street almost ran him over with his Cadillac while pulling out of his driveway."

At first, his parents thought his behavior was just plain cute, as most parents would think of their toddler. However, as the years flowed by they understood there was something unusual about this habit, something that didn't appear to be diminishing as he grew and matured. His mother thought he might have an equilibrium problem and took him to the doctor, only to be told Lester was, physically speaking, fine. His father, ever the man of reason, said the habit was nothing more than a benign eccentricity. "Who is he hurting?" he would always say. "Let the boy have his pleasure. It's not like he's masturbating in public." They knew their son was different, that he was odd, a bit off. And many nights in bed together they reasoned that "some people are just eccentric." Their attitude reflected their love for their son. They helped him in any way they could, but most importantly they loved him for who he was, not for who they wanted him to be.

When asked, “Why do you lie on your back, Lester?” his response, whether as a young boy or a young man, was generally the same: “It makes me feel good. It stops the world from spinning out of control, like everything’s okay.” Most people nodded their heads at this explanation, but deep down they did not understand what that meant exactly, that he was just playing them off. But that wasn’t the case at all. Lester was being honest, as was his way forever and ever. When the world became too much, when too many pitches from the world came at him at one time, Lester would apply the brakes by plopping down and looking at the sky. It baffled Connie, the neighbor, as much as anyone when she first observed these lie-down breaks, but her curiosity hovered at a distance until the day she mentioned Lester’s behavior to a special needs teacher friend who told her that such a behavior could be a trait of autistic people.

“They lie down to center themselves, to calm the sensory overloads they can easily experience. They also do it because they are fearful of the world.”

“Fearful of the world? What do you mean?” Connie asked.

“Autistic children, even autistic adults, feel alienated when they are around neurotypical people. They are in a world that they find terrifying. Maybe terrifying isn’t exactly right. They see a world where they must always try to fit in. It’s exhausting for them. Lying down helps them take a little break. A little recharge.”

“Huh,” said Connie. “I never thought of it like that.”

“Most people don’t,” said her friend.

The immediate cause of Lester Gordon’s need to stretch out under this day’s soothing sky was from a seed that had been planted a few weeks ago when he had seen Bob Mosely standing in Connie Rogers’ front yard. That evening had

boiled Lester's blood like the black bubbles in the steaming roofing tar he had used during a stint as a roofer the summer of his first attempt at college. He had been awakened at 2:30 in the morning by a fire truck's siren as it screamed down his street to answer the call of Phil McAllen's house fire. He stood bewildered, the hair on the right side of his head pillow-mashed a side-angle pompadour, on his front porch steps looking left down the street at the flicker of red lights to see whose house was burning. People all along the street poured out of their homes, stood in their yards, on the sidewalks, in the street, and tried to catch a glimpse of the flames and firefighters doing their jobs. He turned right to see who was out of their houses on this particular side of the street and saw Connie, in a white T-shirt and blue sweatpants, standing in her front yard. He had taken a few steps toward her when he saw a barefooted Bob Mosely walk from Connie's front door wearing tan shorts and a black T-shirt with TENNESSEE written in orange across the chest.

Bob Mosely? he thought. He raised his right hand and gave a wave to Connie and Bob. *Must God mock my very existence?* he whispered to himself.

He then noticed Bob's truck sitting in Connie's driveway, a late-model Dodge with a gigantic chrome grill. Lester laughed. "Sorry about your little dick," he softly said to no one.

"Hey, Lester. What's going on? Somebody's cat stuck in a tree?" Bob shouted out with a chuckle.

"I think it's Terry and his crew out for a joy ride. Gets kinda boring at the fire station," Lester called back. He looked at Connie. She waved. He decided to walk over, at least have the pleasure of absorbing her beauty. He walked deliberately across his yard. A cool breeze blew through his

shoulder-length hair and across his bare feet. The frosty breath of winter's approach surprised him, though the first intrusion of cold caught many unprepared. Lester could see Connie quite clearly since the moon was full, shining a soft, comforting light, the faint shadows providing a deathly tone.

"It's a wonderful night for a fire, don't you think?" Lester said as he walked up to Connie and Bob. Lester looked at Connie. The shape of her face and the tint of her skin bespoke a Native American quality: high cheekbones narrowing down to a firm chin, rather noble in structure, eyes that glistened with intensity, yet their dark, forest green color made Lester question life's genetic crapshoot. Was the universe this insanely chaotic in its creations? Those deep-set green eyes and skin colored with several drops of carmine pigment caused Lester to pause beyond a polite stutter of focus. Though fully conscious of this brain freeze, the seconds collected into a dab, then a pile, then a small mound until finally provoking Lester to avert his eyes from this "accident" of nature. Lester's social skills were awkward, to be kind, whereas some would call these social burps rude and narcissistic in nature. The more attentive observers, such as Connie, found these odd behaviors endearing.

"That's exactly what I was telling Connie just a few minutes ago as we were sipping glasses of wine in her bed."

Lester searched Bob's face for a smile, a showing of teeth. In Lester's view, Connie should have been physically, intellectually, emotionally, monetarily, culturally, humorously, even musically far beyond Bob's place in the universe. And, it came, of course, the gloating smile, from just a slight lift of the upper lip that revealed his teeth in the light of the moon. When Lester's eyes had finally stopped on Connie's

face, he saw her giving Bob a sidelong stare. After a few seconds, Connie turned to Lester and looked him straight in the eye without saying a word. Lester enjoyed the intimacy of her look, but as always, he had no clue as to what it meant. The three of them stood in Connie's front yard under the moon's revealing beam for a few minutes making mild chatter while Lester and Connie exchanged glances. That night, not for the first time, Lester fell asleep picturing his lips kissing Connie's.

The next day, Lester rose at mid-morning, walked into the kitchen to put on a pot of coffee, then made himself pad into the den and take a glance out the window to see if Bob's truck was still parked in Connie's driveway. As he pulled back the curtain, he only saw Connie's blue Beetle in the drive. He walked back through the house and eased out the front door to retrieve the morning paper. He glanced toward Connie's house, considered walking over and placing her paper on her front steps, but he dismissed that thought as rather childish or excessively good-neighborly. He walked back into his home, made a cup of coffee, then went out to his back patio and sat down in one of his two aluminum garden chairs with woven green and white nylon strips. The chairs had been handed down from his parents and dripped with childhood memories, and he loved them far beyond their monetary value.

While reading the paper, as ever full of death and chaos, Lester intermittently chastised himself for not taking the initiative in his relations with Connie. Lester had always been rather clumsy around people, of course, especially women. He masked his awkwardness by imitating his friends and family. Through the years he sharpened his

social skills in order to fit in, but when facing impromptu conversations with the feminine world he would become a tongue-tied schoolboy, melting like a salt statue of Thor in a blinding rainstorm of the libido.

“Come on, man, take the dog to the fight, you passive sad sack of dicks,” Lester said to himself. “Now or never, man.”

“Who you talking to, Lester?” Mike called from the fence while on his way to his carport.

“Just me, myself, and I. We got quite the argument going on.”

“Don’t let me interrupt y’all. Just keep it peaceful; no fighting. This is a good neighborhood.”

“We’re all friends enjoying one another’s company most times. Except when the other two are drinking. They can get a little ugly and mean.”

Mike had rested his arms on the fence while he talked to Lester. He nodded his head. “Okay. I get that. Y’all be cool,” then he turned and walked into his carport and began preparing for a fishing excursion to one of the sloughs on the Tennessee River.

By early afternoon, Lester had finished dutifully folding a load of socks and underwear when he heard a knock on his front door. He opened it and was struck almost breathless by the sight of Connie holding a bottle of wine and smiling. Lester smiled back, his eyes gliding over her face. She flickered not a bit, not a smidgen, her eyes piercing his tenuous shield of confidence. Lester glanced away.

“Hey, Connie.”

“I thought you might like a little wine with your Saturday afternoon.”

“The only thing better with wine than Saturday afternoon is Saturday evening,” said Lester as he stepped back and swung his left arm around in a panoramic wave. “Enter, young lass,” his words whipped through the air. Connie

smiled, then chuckled and shook her head as she walked in, giving the den an overt quick study.

“You know, I’ve never seen the inside of your house.”

“You can’t say that now, huh?” Lester walked over to the middle of the room and opened his arms. “At first glance, what do you think? Does it fulfill all your expectations, or are your dreams suddenly dashed? Be honest, I can take it. I’m fully aware I have no taste. My whole life is like driving in a snowstorm.”

“To tell you the truth, I didn’t know what to expect. You’re an anomaly, Lester Gordon. A mystery.”

Lester smiled. “A mystery,” he repeated. “A mysterious man. I like that. Keep ’em guessing. The less you know, the more you’ll like me. That’s a fact, Connie.”

Connie held Lester’s eyes, trying to understand this quirky neighbor with whom she felt an odd attraction. “Oh, it’s all a mystery, right?” She held up the bottle of wine. “Shall we?”

They drank the bottle of wine sitting on Lester’s aged green leather couch, another relic handed down from his mother. While Connie stroked his right arm with her fingertips, a gesture in its second hour, he took notice of her lips, billowy rims, swollen, deliciously puffy. After they emptied the bottle, he slowly leaned over and kissed her. It was sudden and without thought. He wasn’t sure if the kiss was appropriate. He would never know if such a kiss was appropriate.

The kiss lasted several seconds, a delicate meeting of the lips at first, then a slow grind, not his first kiss but one of the few he possessed at this stage of his life, a twisting, turning, mashing of the folds of flesh. Lester kept his eyes closed for the initial touch; but as the kiss intensified, libidiously coiling, tongues probing, dancing, he opened

his eyes to her lush forest-green circles surrounded by the bright white.

The next morning, Lester woke to an empty bed and a throbbing head. He quickly closed his eyes, the night a jagged memory. Connie had retrieved a second bottle of wine from her house once they polished off the first one; music played, their laughter intensified. He remembered Connie leaving, but the exact time was out of his reach. He was dozing when she gathered her clothes, kissed him delicately on the lips, then sashayed to the bedroom door; her long look expressed through sleepy eyes and a soft smile. The memory ended and he finally opened his eyes and glanced at the clock radio on the bedside table; the red numbers forced him with their indifference to contemplate the new day. "8:09?" he whispered to himself. He rubbed his eyes with the heels of his hands.

Walk over, say hello, "I enjoyed the evening," no, too soon, let her come, just work in the yard, mow the grass, nope, lawnmower not running, take to the shop, maybe next door, let Mike have a go at it, no, not happening, fishing today, call her, just let her know last night was nice, ohhhhhhhhhh, front lobe pounding, need to drink water, down several aspirins, toast, maybe cheese toast, salted grits, get up, gotta get up, come on, raise head, oh my god, down, easy fella, how big of a fool was I last night, blips of scenes, could have been ridiculous, she could be on the phone with friends, relating obnoxious acts of lust, belly-splitting laughter, curled up on her couch, tears streaming down face, living next door to the cable guy, pondering a move? will she ever speak to me again? calm down, settle, everything's fine, remember the look as she left, she'll be back, mentioned a canoe trip, Flint

River? with friends today? declined her invitation, fearing to appear anxious, complete idiot, truly moronic behavior, blew it, a dunghill of pathetic confusion, could be over there now, deliberate sabotage? a paralysis of fear, a toad of masculinity, must force these bullfrog legs to function, get up, even an ape would seek some form of relief, crawl to bathroom, shower, maybe lie low today, watch a football game, a movie or two, nurse head back to health, let the world come to me, check email, ohhhhhh, the phone, avoid contact, could be Connie, let machine pick up.

“Hey, Lester, are you there? Hey, man, this is Snook.”

Lester grabbed the phone. “Hey.”

“Did I wake you?”

“No, just nursing a family-size hangover.”

“You tied one on last night? Where’d you go?”

“Nowhere. The abuse took place at home.”

“Who came over?”

“Next door neighbor.”

“Mike? I didn’t think he drank.”

“No, not Mike, the other side. Connie.”

“Connie? Beautiful Connie came over?”

“Out of the blue, man. The gods decided to reward my worthless ass. But I can’t talk right now.”

“You mean she’s there with you?”

“No, no, she’s gone. It’s just that I’m in the process of dying. I’m speaking to you through gritted teeth. Let me call you back. I’m still trying to process the night. Are you going to be around this afternoon?”

“I’ll be in and out all day. Give me a ring. Maybe I’ll drop by later on. I want to hear more about the evening.”

“It was a very nice evening. I think completely spontaneous, at least on my end. I don’t know where this is going, but I like the first step. I’ll talk to you later, okay?”

“All right, man, later.”

Lester found himself waiting for Connie’s return. He waited the rest of that day. Sunday evening he noticed Connie’s bug sitting under her carport. A few times during the week he saw Connie pull out of the driveway. On Friday afternoon, Lester finally made eye contact for the first time since early Sunday morning. He was walking back to his house from the curbside mailbox when Connie pulled into her driveway and came to a stop under her carport. He shuffled his mail as he walked up his driveway. She carried a couple of plastic bags of groceries along with her purse as she walked the few paces from her car to the steps leading up to her side door. She turned and gave him a half-wave with her left hand. Lester returned the wave as he walked toward her but stopped after a few steps.

“Hey, stranger,” he said.

“Hey, Lester. What a week. It’s been crazy at school. Lots of parent conferences. How ya been?”

“Fine, business has been rather good lately. Thank God some big names have new releases. Most of it is schlock, but, you know, give the people what they want. I was going to come over or call you tonight to see if you wanted to do something this weekend.”

Connie smiled, then hesitated. “I’ve got plans for this weekend, but maybe some other time,” she said.

“Oh, sure, some other time.”

“Well, I need to get in. I’m expecting a call.”

“Okay, I’ll see you later,” he said, then turned and walked across the yard to his front door. Lester sat down on his bed, bowed his head. He closed his eyes, before allowing himself to fall back and watch the red minutes change on his clock. The light gradually receded from his room, his thoughts still whirled around Connie.

Lester awoke to the slamming of car doors that poured in through the bedroom window next to Connie's house. He quickly popped out of bed and walked over to the window facing her carport. Pulling back the curtain to create a crack of sight he saw Connie loading a sleeping bag into the back end of a blue sports utility vehicle that was parked behind her VW. A young man Lester didn't recognize stood next to her, tickling her belly. They exchanged words and broke into laughter with Connie jovially punching the man on the shoulder, before he closed the rear hatch.

Lester walked into his kitchen and downed a can of beer in a few large gulps, then walked through the house looking for his small cooler before he remembered that he had left it at a party a couple of weekends before. He pulled out a kitchen garbage bag and loaded several cans of beers from the fridge and a few hands of ice from the freezer, then walked back into the bedroom for one more peek out the window. The SUV was gone, and Connie's house was dark besides the front porch light. Carrying the bag of beer and ice he walked back through the house and out his back door, stood on his patio, and looked up at the fall sky. A blustery wind blew across his backyard; a cold front had pushed into North Alabama from the northwest. Feeling the biting approach of the inevitable winter, he walked back inside and retrieved an old Army jacket he wore for the woods.

Adjusting the coat as he returned to the patio, Lester looked over at Connie's house and opened one of the beers from the bag. He chugged a few swallows of the liquid gold and called out into the night, "Kilroy was here!" A non sequitur for everyone but Lester. He looked at the other houses surrounding his backyard for any curiosity seekers, perhaps Mary King giving a stare out her kitchen window or Mike poking his head out of his workshop, but he found

no one at a window, no heads poking out of doors. Lester finished the beer and dropped it into the bag, then walked over to Connie's house and sat the bag of beer just behind the carport, turned and walked back over to the rear of his house and retrieved an aluminum extension ladder. He adjusted the ladder so the top would jut up a couple of feet above the carport's flat roof. Tucking the beer under his left arm he slowly climbed the ladder, placing the bag on the roof when he reached the top, then stepped onto the roof himself.

Lester looked around the carport's rock and tar roof, a scattering of a couple of Frisbees, a wine bottle, and what looked like a shirt. He scanned the neighborhood once more, the view from the roof allowing a more-reaching detection. Many lights glowed from the homes, the evening ripe with activity. A group of teenagers climbed out of a sports car four houses down from Connie's front yard. They laughed, two dancing around the yard while the others walked into the house. He spied the Johnsons lying on the couch together watching television through a sliding glass door at the rear of a house, a kind and earnest elderly couple who had always been nice to Lester and lived a couple of houses down on the street behind Lester. He turned to look at his own front yard and suddenly spied what looked like several dogs standing in his yard just out of the street. They were white, which Lester found strange. They were looking right at Lester as he stood on the roof, staring at him almost in rapture as if they had been looking for him, waiting for him, and suddenly there he was, on the roof of the house next door. He didn't see a collar around their necks, and he was positive he had never seen them before. Surely, he would have remembered several white dogs living in his neighborhood.

“What are you looking at, motherfuckers?” he shouted at the dogs.

He heard a crash in the backyard of one of the houses a few lots down from his own. He quickly looked over and eyed a woman bent over on her patio picking up the pieces of a broken flowerpot. And when he looked back at the dogs they were gone, nowhere to be seen, not in his yard, not in Connie’s yard, not in the street, no signs of the white canines as Lester quickly panned the neighboring yards. Vanished.

Shuddering, he zipped up his coat and dug his hands into the pockets to look for the gloves he usually kept for hiking during the bitter months of winter. With relief he found the gloves and pulled them on, then turned up the collar to provide another defense against the intruding cold. Low clouds hovered above, blocking the stars and moon. He sat down, crossed his legs, and pulled another beer from the bag. After popping open the can he poured a few more swallows down his throat.

Within twenty minutes, he emptied two more beers from the bag. Without hesitation, he decided to drink one more rather quickly. Why? He wasn’t sure, but it made sense to Lester while he sat shivering on his neighbor’s carport roof. Two minutes later, the beer can clanged against the other cans as he dropped it in the bag. He leaned back, letting the weight of his head slowly take him down until the touch of his shoulders to the gravel roof allowed him to finally relax. He closed his eyes and listened to the wind play a melody through the surrounding pines and oaks, limbs and trunks creaking and cracking, the rush of air whispering and sighing. The roar of an engine and the peel of rubber on asphalt alerted Lester to an approaching car; and for a brief moment he feared Connie’s sudden return, but the

car quickly passed. Lester fell asleep for a few seconds but awoke with a start from a loud knock that sounded very close, as if under the carport, but when he sat up he found himself lightheaded and had to use his hands to give himself balance. He waited patiently for another sound, but he heard nothing save the symphony of the cold wind.

Tangled in the haze of the mild acceleration of beer intoxication, he slowly came to his feet and began walking across the many slants and angles of Connie's old home. Stopping and steadying himself a couple of times, he made it to the chimney, the very top and center of the house. With one hand grasping the rim of the chimney for balance, he inspected the nearby houses and unceremoniously dropped an empty can from his bag down the chimney and waited for the clanging that never came. Lester panicked as the can left his grip and then peered down into the open hole, a curious and infinite black. He shook his head, feeling the bitter wind gnaw at his face and neck, unable to comprehend the silence. Again, Lester slowly scanned the neighborhood. He found himself crying without understanding why.

On his walk back to the flat carport roof he stumbled, but this time was unable to right the loss of balance and began tottering down the backside of the roof. Though possessing mind enough to jut his limbs out in an attempt to stop his tumble toward the edge, the combination of beer and the cold wind made the attempt ineffective. As if in a slow-motion replay, he tumbled over the edge, still gripping the bag of beer cans and ice, and began his descent to the grass below. He feared falling on his head, but, luckily, that was not to be. Lester landed on his right thigh and hip, which would have been fine but that his right leg was sticking out like a spider in his attempt to break the fall. The weight of his torso on his limb snapped his thigh bone much like

the breaking of a Popsicle stick. The pain from the break, although not a compound fracture, was, of course, excruciating, but only a part of the wound Lester would negotiate for months to come.

After a few seconds of gathering his thoughts, Lester Gordon began to yell for help, a desperate wail that pierced the frigid wind. Mike Alexander, who was in his workshop and had heard “Kilroy was here” earlier, was hunched over one of his fishing lures when he heard the shout and knew immediately that Lester was in pain somewhere. He dropped the plastic bait, then rushed out of the shed and began running toward the direction of the plea. Lester Gordon was lying on his back, drunk, in pain, cold, and confusion in the icy darkness of the approaching winter.