



SUCH MEAN ESTATE

RYAN SPENCER

Essay by LESLIE JAMISON

Such Mean Estate

By Ryan Spencer
Essay by Leslie Jamison

Published by



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This PDF of *Such Mean Estate*
is only a **partial** preview of the book.

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To see the complete version, please contact Declan Taintor,
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*...my mind was intently fixed on the consummation
of my labour, and my eyes were shut to the horror
of my proceedings.*

—MARY SHELLEY

Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus

1818

Catechism

LESLIE JAMISON

What does the sky hold?

Too many birds. Broken freeways. The frail limbs of a charred forest. Blindness if you stare straight at the sun. Helicopters swarming the sky like mosquitoes, then smoked propellers falling past the sign reading BUY LARGE. We did.

Where does danger live?

In the salt swell and the spider's web; in the burnt trees and the child at the door and the parking lot where the undead hordes are wandering. A woman in suburbia has blood on her shoulder. Something explodes in the distance. Look closer: also blood on her hands. She killed for breakfast. She smeared the dead thing on her toast.

Where does the light come from?

From comets and bombs; from the blistering sun. From flashlights trained across a dark swamp in the dead of night. Brightness begins as something circled by birds; becomes the gleam

reflected in the goggles of a scientist. It keeps bleeding into dawn over a doomed city. It sharpens into a pair of headlights just before a man steps out of the truck to shoot up the fog. Light becomes the still point once more. Birds wheel around it. It catches glints of a broken freeway. It ghosts the big clouds. It haunts the aftermath.

Is the light hope?

Sometimes we row our little boats toward it. We keep our fingers crossed.

But?

Sometimes it explodes. Sometimes it's a living terror in the sky. Sometimes hope is a little girl holding her own severed arm in the street. Sometimes a boy raises his fist to the exploding sky. Whenever a man and a woman stare at an explosion, a part of them is already fucking under it. They are glistening with someone's sweat, or someone's blood, or some sky's rain;

and somewhere deep inside their tired bodies they are getting ready to help the human race survive.

Did we do this to ourselves?

We make traffic jams trying to escape the world we've built. We bought too large. We exhaled too long. The boy on the trampoline jumps so high that his head disappears from the frame. Now he lives without his eyes. Dad watches the sky split open like it was his favorite sitcom playing syndicated. The woman with golden earrings glances over her shoulder to catch sight of the horizon catching fire. Clouds roasted like marshmallows; everything—eventually—scorched beyond simile. A man stands behind a flag so his eyes are gone too. Or gone to us. He sees only stripes. Another man stands at the edge of an overpass, deciding whether he should jump. Whenever someone looks beyond the frame, you wonder what they're looking for—some kind of answer; some kind of monster.



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*Why lies He in such mean estate
Where ox and ass are feeding?
Good Christian, fear: for sinners here
The silent Word is pleading.*

—WILLIAM CHATTERTON DIX

“What Child Is This?”

1865

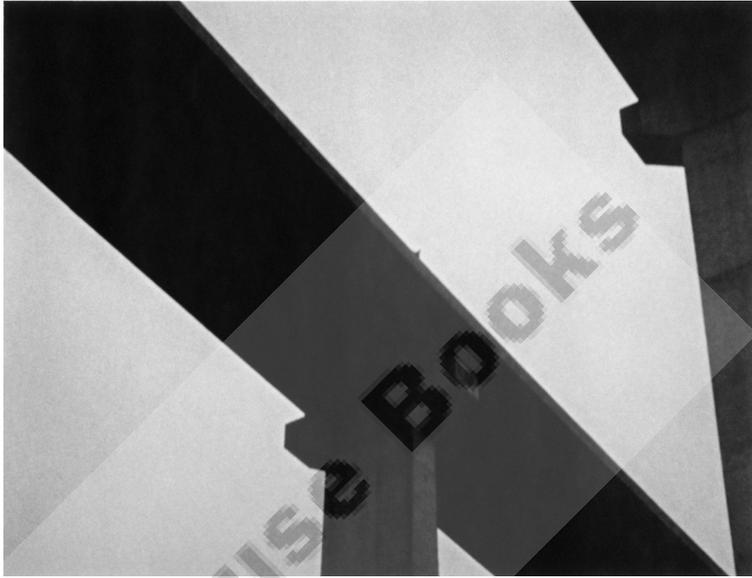
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