San Jose State University

From the Selected Works of Alan Soldofsky

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Flood and In Character

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Alan Soldofsky

Flood

There are children in the trees. We see them from our boat as the waters rise. They signal us to try to reach them. But walking on water can be a problem. And even if there was room, to what shore would we bring them? Anyway, we are poorly provisioned. We won't last two weeks. So, what's the point? The fins of TV antennas scrape the hull. We leave a wake of hieroglyphics, an iridescence spreading outward. Codices tangled in the reeds. Incomplete sentences, alibis for our species. Aureoles of verbena in the air. A bright garment floats on the tea-coloured surface, stems of light sinking through the silt. An opaque layer of brownish-yellow a few inches down, through which we can almost make out the topography. The smell of humidity hanging over everything. Weeks of rain, then the sun beats down. From somewhere the whine of cicadas. A scum of algae ripples between rows of cornstalks, and a heron launches itself from atop a drowned barn, circling us before it dives into the syrupy current, then emerges from its emersion, bowing its neck, a fish's slippery, metallic comma dangling from its mouth. The bird is not intended as a symbol.

In Character

The actor on the Today show said what he was most afraid of was being seen. Meaning as some one other than Miss Daisy's chauffeur or indignant detective, soldier, cowhand, prisoner, or thug — that there might be inside him a puppeteer, some useless utility of self with no business on the screen. His light deflected like so many of us, modest in our skins, his claim to fame a personhood patented out of looks, gruff-voiced, belonging to the very bricks we see him walking on. Late night, the pavement slick, windows reflecting darkly the bleakness of the street, taking us with him into the emptiness of the building next door, extinction looming in the corridors, in the trashed stairwell, where we want him not to go. We, content to be visible — lonely witnesses who strive to live only within our names.
... a fiddlehead, that small plant that grows in the Saint John River valley in the spring, and which is said to be symbolic of the sun.

Alfred Bailey
February 1945
(first issue of *The Fiddlehead*)