

## Lynn Hansen

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### Cairo Perfume Palace, 1971

Hot in the summer, Cairo, Egypt  
slumps on the banks of the Nile River,  
bustles with city traffic and sidewalks  
crowded by street vendors hawking  
their wares. Here, what takes your breath  
is not the view, not ancient ruins –  
though impressive – it's the odor  
of the place– outhouse stench.  
None of us tourists wants to breathe, but must.  
Wishing to distract us from our disagreeable  
olfactory experience, our Egyptian guide offers  
to show us Al Amir's Perfume Palace.  
Out of the heat, located in the midst of the city,  
not far from Giza, site of the Sphinx,  
the showroom boasts mirrored walls,  
lines of shelves with frosted glass bottles,  
each one with aliquots of unique and powerful  
fragrance. In charge of sales, Mr. Fayed,  
a middle-aged Egyptian merchant –  
a magician with words. His toothy smile  
welcomes us into his realm, his basso  
voice charms us through his sales patter.  
Like a dancer, Mr. Fayed, swirls around  
the showroom floor, then places a dab  
of perfume behind the earlobe, or forearm  
of all the women. But, when he comes to me  
he stops suddenly, bends down and with great  
ceremony places a dab of his oily concoction,  
*Attar of Roses*, on my exposed knee .  
Twenty dollars and this powerful scent,  
only available in Egypt, is mine –  
perfect souvenir and antidote  
for the horrid odor of outside.  
I make the purchase.

Twenty years pass before I open  
*Attar of Roses*. One whiff –  
I am back in Cairo.

## **McHenry Avenue, Post 2016 Election**

Six lanes of traffic stop, wait  
at a red light on McHenry Avenue.  
A young black woman, firm grip  
on the hand of her six year-old son  
and a McDonald's Happy Meal,  
marches briskly in the crosswalk,  
eyes forward, passes  
the stationary vehicles.  
The boy, walk-running beside  
his mother, turns his face toward  
an audience of drivers, flashes  
a smile of radiant innocence  
and waves.

What he does not see  
is the Confederate Flag  
on display in the back  
of a pickup.

## Neighborhood Talent Show

It is billed as a night of mellifluous  
pleasure. Neighborhood children  
come to present their musical talents –  
a kind of hometown version of *The Voice*.  
Three parents are judges, their seats  
conspicuously close to their cronies.  
All children are contest rookies.  
Each sits waiting a turn.  
Performances begin – a flutist,  
a drummer, three pianists,  
a harmonica player, a rock-n-roll  
band. The last performer, a tall girl  
stands ram-rod stiff, as perpendicularly  
to the floor as anyone could, gripped  
by fear. Why she chose to sing  
*The Star Spangled Banner*  
is a mystery. Her mouth opens,  
releases a painful caterwaul.  
After an eternity the song ends.  
Judges convene. The tall girl  
is declared the winner.

After this election, would anyone dare  
vote against a patriot vocalist  
that sings our National Anthem?

## The Bus to Benque Viejo del Carmen, Belize

Silver shafts of December rain pelt the bus terminal.  
Garafuna, Belizean Kriol, Mennonite, Maya and mestizo,  
line up like livestock for recycled Blue Bird school busses splashed  
colors of forest green, oriole gold or tangerine, ready to load.

A poor man's carriage, the James Bus Line travels  
to Punta Gorda, the red and white National Transport delivers  
patrons to Chetumal, Mexico, the Gilharry Bus goes to Corozal  
but I take the green and yellow BBDC Bus to Benque Veijo del Carmen.

Inside the bus people sit on straight-back naugahyde seats,  
three to a seat, some have to stand. Duffel bag, plastic feed sack  
or suitcase luggage is stashed in compartments under  
the bus or tossed like refuse onto the roof-top rack.

After the loading frenzy, I sit by the window. A mestizo man sits  
next to me holding a live rooster, its legs bound with leather strips.  
Restrained, the fowl flops its head onto my thigh, stares at me. Startled  
I return the stare. On the aisle a woman nurses her baby.

As the bus departs, the conductor sweeps down the aisle, collects  
tickets, stops by a man who fumbles for a ticket he doesn't have.  
The two argue. The conductor commands the driver to stop,  
ejects the slacker and his plastic sack out into the driving rain.

Back onto the Hummingbird Highway, the bus turns  
left onto the Western Highway, passes farms of sugar cane and citrus,  
Black Man Eddy and Teakettle Bank when it stops. We have no lights.  
In Spanish the conductor assures us that repairs will be *un momento*.

No one stirs. The driver leaps out, yanks wires from undercarriage,  
duct tapes the lights to the battery. Our journey continues  
through Cayo then San Jose Soccotz arriving in Benque in the evening  
where I am met by Humberto's mestizo smile. *Did I have a good trip?*

## **The Morning After**

It is the usual regret of a victim –  
bad choices, then ultimate surrender.  
You have a President Elect,  
and have prostituted yourself  
in the process.

He has frolicked with you,  
showered you with his  
ejaculate of ego. Unconcerned,  
about the environment  
he refused to use condoms,  
left without paying the price  
saying you were not as advertised.

Wake up America!  
Your President elect  
regards you as a piece of ass,  
grabbed your pussy, his orgasm  
leaving a stain that will last  
long into your future.

**Lynn M. Hansen** is a retired community college professor of marine biology. A member of the Ina Coolbrith Circle, Orinda, CA, and National League of American Pen Women, she has been published in *More Than Soil*, *More Than Sky: The Modesto Poets*, *Quercus Review*, *Rattlesnake Review*, *Stanislaus Connections*, *hardpan*, *Modesto Poets' Corner*, *The Song of the San Joaquin* and has two nominations for a Pushcart Prize. In 2013 a collection of her poems was published by Quercus Review Press entitled *Flicker, Poems by Lynn M. Hansen*.