



# Magnolia

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photo by Pat Allen

**ROY BENTLEY**

## The Last Man on Earth Takes a Walk in Jupiter, Florida

It would happen on a day like any other in South Florida, the projector in a revival-house movie theater looping *Treasure of the Sierra Madre* or Errol Flynn in *Captain Blood* because someone had hooked up a generator, pull-started it, and finished off the last of the popcorn and Pepsi. Maybe they'd buried the corpses or burned them and boarded up. Maybe a tsunami of communicable disease had thinned the unmanageable ranks over a period of years; a plague that, in its final months, assumed withering proportions. Nothing absurd about thinking of one freakish survivor as the fly of hope not yet swatted dead. Maybe hostilities, if it was a war, ran their course elsewhere, mercifully up-

or downwind, but the oceans died. Whatever happened, we were warned that unintended consequences are a bitch. Now, as if the soul were a set of casual clothing from the Gap

laid out for a final outing in rain or fabulous sun, he stoops to dress. Returning to the world is a habit hard to break. He readies himself to pass flood-deserted strip malls—lines of solar-powered and pointless signage. This time, he walks a service road to a park named for Burt Reynolds. When he speaks, a voice knocks around in the seasonal theater of the body. Resonates. Farther on, he glimpses water finding track by the dead raised roots of date palms. The snapping of a tarp on a dock nearby is benediction.

## Red Stands Out

Think of the tropisms of hyacinth blooms canted toward morning in Florida. Think

of slouching pole barns in August in Ohio. Think of the terrain of exhausted summer

and certain varieties of Rome apple, rust—the seasonally blistered hands of laborers.

Think of a pair of male cardinals preening in shade, safe from the blur of knife-blades.

Think of ribboned trees marked for clearing and the lipstick shivers of crimson brushfires.

Think of blood come to absolve the world of its chief sin: loving all the wrong things.

Think of neural flarings in the cranial dark mapped as signature moments on an MRI.

Red stands out. Who can trust bland white when purity has fallen so far out of fashion?

And blue: so inseparable from sky as to be ceded to the celestial clockwork of the literal.

Think of red as a definition of transcendence: that intemperate slit-skirt she made magnificent

teaching you to tango in a bar in Buenos Aires,  
the aria of her lies as sweet as won money.



photo by Dan McGavin

## Dixie Highway

Here date and coconut palms lean, row upon row,  
propped upright by lengths of cut lumber, survivors

of last year's hurricanes, bent but straightening out beside two-lane A1A, what locals call *Dixie Highway*. Floridians have come to terms with sand and sand's ceaseless gypsy blowing. But an ocean isn't a thing you come to terms with, not ever. The dazzlement of the waves says that, regardless of our preparation, water gets what water wants. Date palms opening in a flash of color isn't a thing to be bargained with, though the air from off the Atlantic is our history, an American history, meaning bloody. Wind's story here is the story of slave ships; of war and huge waste. *Way down yonder in the land of cotton, old times there are not forgotten—look away, look away...* You know the song. Here I am making a judgment call about the guilty Rule of Law that bends in response to the capricious whims and ocean sounds in the blood and bones of the few every day in South Florida, here where the rich enter oblivious and leave this life ecstatic in their good fortune while the rest drive A1A across Jupiter Island, and dream. I had parents—poor folks, and proud—I'm not crying for food like some Sudanese orphan pestered by flies that swarm around Misfortune like the words of a story. And I know the universe isn't fair: Roads to and from all begin, any day, in the country of back-breaking work and low pay. I know, too, that in December the beach at Hobe Sound will empty, pennants signaling swim-at-your-own-risk snapping and flapping like mad—the same wind that spins out the tow and undertow washes to shore as light and litter, plastic soda bottles, kelp-draped, arrived from God only knows how far.

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