

LARA ELMAYAN

## Last Prayer To Mack Wolford

*And these signs will follow those who believe: in My name they will cast out demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay their hands on the sick, and they will recover.*

– Mark 16:17-18.

*It's a book, jackass.*

– Lane Smith

You said the snake that bit your father had my eyes. You remembered his reflected like new moons or bottoms of whiskey bottles through the nose, so you could see in them for one holy moment the Appalachian stretch sinking into the hot faultline of America. The snake's, I mean, not your father's. Not the eyes of the man whose be alive in the Lord drenched your skin even when we were grafting into the fake leather of your car's back seat. The dead are disruptive. You balanced a kerosene coke bottle on your throat in memory and spit flame: praise the Lord and pass the rattlesnakes, brother, but that rattlesnake passed you right by as if it never heard you sing the Gospel. What a casual fuck you, no drama, no fuss; how enviable, unaware of its own forced story. What shine it left in its path into the woods, where your wife's animal cries echoed for so many miles that the dying gathered to shake happy morphine heads at the hole in the sky. What a kindling of faith that your blade-to-tongue sermon tremble could never conjure. We are setting up snake as El in the ruins of the church where you said we could all be saved. Once you kidnapped me in joy just to deny me in the weeds of your ancestral burial ground. Once you saw the Lord and the strychnine reminded you of my mouth, asphyxia turning paralysis. Once you heard the blues and understood, and had to spend a week on top of a mountain where Indian ghosts ignored you and you could wait for the lightning crack of salvation. The dead were never as disruptive as you wanted them to be. You must've watched your entire bloodline dissipate into the haze of West Virginia, where history was already setting up its own noose. In dreams I sense vaguely the heat of your thigh, and I open my mouth for prayer and a familiar taste of dust.