

Cabinet of Particulars

by stephen hastings-king

I was searching for an object that might fit into a kitchen to resolve certain issues and went from place to place looking for whatever it was. The going was the process.

Trying to focus is like when you turn the ring of a lens, an activity that is extended in time, time spent, in my case, walking very long corridors strewn with particulars: various unwanted dining room sets and an actual photograph of an actual screen-door-sized photograph of Santa Claus on plastic; tourist art from Giza or Kinsasha, China or Vermont; a collection of accounts by astronauts of what it's like to walk on the moon, a chandelier glowing over a platoon from World-War I headed over the top of a barrister's bookcase, incoming made of dust, tiny soldiers that never die. Nothing added up.

Sometimes I had the impression that the floors I walked were angled slightly, some upward and others down. I wondered whether I was ascending and descending levels, but everything I passed was the same as before in the sense of nothing being the same and I could find no direction---except for front, which I faced, and toward which I kept walking.

Once, stopped to look out a window, I saw water below with a warehouse made from brick wavering on its black surface and imagined it a recurrence of the Egyptian labyrinth that Herodotus described.

I walked corridors of shuttered beauty salons, the studios of imaginary art collectives and everywhere jumbles of debris. I reached Meryl's House of Nothingness. It seemed some kind of trap. I did not go in. Behind me the word EXIT glowed in the

medium-distance. I did not think it was there before. But maybe I just missed it.

Then I was outside, amidst the ruins of a factory complex become interiors where automobiles went to die, bodies of water, and segments of abandoned railroad. An iron bridge spanned the wreckage of a canal. By its entrance hung a sign. No Jumping Off This Bridge. Someone had spray-painted HA HA over it in heavy letters. I walked out to the middle and looked down at the water-black. The crocodiles Herodotus described were looking back, waiting.

I kept searching for an object that might fit into the kitchen and resolve certain issues. I went place to place, looking for whatever it was. The going was the process. Eventually, what I was looking for came into focus: a Hoosier Cabinet. Once I knew what it was, I began to find instances, some with assemblages of flour sifters and sugar dispensers, some without, each made an individual by its damage, like we all are.

