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Report by Steven Volynets

An Election Night Convergence in Brooklyn



If you don't know Wheeler's, then you're not from around here. Then again, no one is from around here, not anymore. Not since the super storm flooded out the last of Sheepshead Bay's star-spangled rowhouse class, those municipal payrolls and pensions now scattered all over the city. I don't mean Hurricane Sandy, either. I'm talking the real super storm: a wave of fish-tank condos whose shadows now stretch all the way to the sea.

Still, it was to Wheeler's I went on the night of November 8th last year to watch the returns with people and a stiff drink. By then, both Ohio and Florida had turned red, but the bartender put on a basketball game instead. He didn't want to pick up broken glass and scrub blood, I suppose, not on a Tuesday. Tall and lanky, he wore a white shirt and a red tie, a gentleman in a place like Wheeler's.

I sat at the bar, flanked on my right by a little man with a sparse beard—a retired special-ed teacher who said his name was Scott and that he was real concerned about his CDs (certificates of deposit, not compact discs)—and on my left by a hefty young woman, thirty-something, wearing glasses with old-lady frames.

"You do what?" the little man cupped his ear at me.

I waited until his second drink before telling him. Admitting you are a writer at Wheeler's is like admitting to folding origami or shopping at the Whole Foods. Seeing as Scott had been a teacher, I told him instead that I was a Jewish immigrant kid from the Soviet Union, that I'd learned English from reading books.

"Oh, yeah?" he said and went on about how much he loved Flannery O'Connor. Back in school, his special-ed kids, despite learning troubles, somehow took to her words.

I asked what his favorite story by her was. "Revelation," he told me, then stopped and said, "You know, she died of lupus."

I did know, but I acted surprised. I also thought about that story. "Revelation" begins in a doctor's waiting room with the small-minded Mrs. Turpin and ends with her hellish comeuppance. I looked around the bar that night and remembered the way Mrs. Turpin dismisses the people around her:

She could tell by the way they sat—kind of vacant and white-trashy, as if they would sit there until Doomsday if nobody called and told them to get up.

As the crowd at Wheeler's grew thinner, the lady in glasses, the one on my left, began to unzip her sweater.

"Guess it's safe now," she said, after she caught me looking and shed the fleece. Underneath, she wore a T-shirt with a print of a pair of handcuffs and the line *Lady Cops Like to Have Fun Too*.

Turns out she and I were from the same neighborhood.

"How come I never knew you?" I moved my chair closer to hers.

Because she was taking care of her disabled kid brother, she said, working as a court reporter before joining the force.

Around three in the morning, it was official. Scott cheered, assured now that his CDs were safe. So did the lady cop. "On me," she said and bought me a shot of Fireball Cinnamon Whisky.

Again, I recalled "Revelation." At one point, Mrs. Turpin thinks:

Usually by the time she had fallen asleep all the classes of people were moiling and roiling around in her head, and she would dream they were all crammed in together in a box car, being ridden off to be put in a gas oven.

It felt stuffy at Wheeler's, so the three of us stepped outside. You could see the Voorhies Avenue condo from there, a couple of blocks down from Wheeler's, not fully up yet and already the tallest thing in south Brooklyn.

Scott pulled out a pack of Marlboro Lights, offered me one. I told him I quit fifteen years ago. Nearby, the bouncer fingered the screen of his phone, his big brown face aglow with the pale light.

"I guess it's back to the cotton field," the bouncer said, shaking his head.

His friend, even bigger and darker, agreed. "I'm going back to Africa."

"Where in Africa?" asked Scott the CD man.

"I don't know, Ivory Coast."

"Sounds nice," said the lady cop. "Take me with you!"

I took one of Scott's Marlboros and lit up. We stood there awhile, in front of Wheeler's, smoking and facing the empty condo—a rising monster potted with square holes—and laughed and laughed and laughed.



Publishing Information

- "Revelation" by Flannery O'Connor from her collection *Everything that Rises Must Converge* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1965).

Art Information

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Everything that Rises

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Steven has recently completed a collection of stories and is at work on a novel. He also translates books from Russian. You can find him on Twitter (which he doesn't take very seriously) [@StevenVolynets](https://twitter.com/StevenVolynets) [5].

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