

WILLIAM STANISICH

Land's End #9, 2004
Watercolor on paper, 20 x 38 in



COURTESY ANDRA NORRIS GALLERY

NANCY LORD

The Flat Earth Society, 1985

*“We don’t have time for a meeting
of the Flat Earth Society.”*

—President Barack Obama

Her plate of cheese and crackers in perfect balance, Marjory paused on the doorstep to survey her world. The wide, desolate California desert stretched out below their hillside, the sand and the scrub both nearly golden in the evening light. The sun, that wondrous disk of light, was falling toward the distant mountains.

It had always been thus for her: the obvious truth of the sun rising and setting across the vault of heaven. And the moon, God’s other illuminator, covering the night.

In the light, in the lawn chair, in the khaki pants that rode up his legs and exposed his skinny pale ankles—Charles. With a hand to his white-whiskered face and studiously staring down his nose, he looked, as everyone always said, *distinguished*. He could have passed as a professor, smudged eyeglasses and all.

She set the plate on the folding table between their two chairs. Charles, immersed in the day’s mail, made a puffing noise from the corner of his mouth, either in acknowledgement of her arrival or in response to the letter he was reading—it was hard to know, with him, which. He was easily pleased, with cheese or achievement, fandom or challenge. This, more than his looks, is what had attracted her to him all those years ago, when their eyes met across a bin of records. Some would have (and had) called it a chance meeting, but she believed otherwise. How else to explain that they would both be looking for the exact same recording by Acker Bilk in the same place at the same time? She’d seen right away that smart little twinkle in Charles’s eye. He’d said, later, that when he heard her speak to the clerk in her Australian accent he was both amused and enraptured.

His word. *Enraptured*.

Who can resist being the source of enrapture? Certainly not Marjory (née Waugh) Johnson.

They still had the record—two copies. *Stranger on the Shore*. And weren’t they both strangers on the shore? Still? Twenty-five years after their meeting, Charles sometimes said it was the two of them against the world. It wasn’t as bad as that, of course. The organization had 412 members by her latest count, and the numbers were growing. Now that NASA was engaging in its latest hoax, the so-called space shuttle, more people were paying attention.

“Listen to this,” Charles said, amusedly as ever. He read from a typed letter. *Apollo is a powerful God that*