



THOMAS CAMPBELL

Large Quilt #4, 2013

Paper, Acrylic, Packing Envelope, Thread, Acrylic,
Spray Paint, Pencil, Rice Bags, Money, 53 x 37 in

ANDREW MCINTYRE

We Will Find Our Way Shipwrecked in Algiers

I was down on my luck in Algiers because I had lost my job on a ship, the M.V. Antwerpen. Jrovnic, a shaven-headed Serb, had been trying to get into my pants for a week or so. The next stop was Tunis, and I just couldn't stick it any longer. We got into a fight, and I jumped ship. They'd thrown my gear overboard, so I had nothing. Algiers, where you could be killed if they thought you were French, and I didn't speak a word of Arabic. In the way of things that sometimes happen when you are at rock bottom, someone comes along, and I had met Muhammad, a Berber. He had been looking after me because he didn't know anyone in Algiers, he was from Oran, and we were both on the skids. In his denim jacket pocket he carried a small hatchet. Together we were strong. We had been trying to sell clothes Muhammad had smuggled from Morocco, to make ends meet.

In an uneasy silence we sat contemplating. We had been in the Kasbah for two hours, and we hadn't sold a damn thing. At this rate, we weren't going to eat that night. Muhammad spat into the dirt amid the dusty calloused feet and rotting vegetables, grinding the phlegm into the ground with the sole of his shoe. The phlegm curled, rolling in the grime, attracting ants.

"Let's go. Let's get out of this filthy place. I hate the Kasbah."

"Yes. Where to?"

"The other side of the bay. Perhaps we will have luck there."

Turning his back on the chaos, he stalked towards Bab El Oued, the bag over his shoulder hanging like a gigantic pale scrotum. He seemed completely untouched by fatigue.

"You are not tired?"

"Non. I have not slept in a bed for a month, maybe longer. I don't know. The train is enough. The train, you know, for many it is the dormitory. The Oran-Algiers train. Sleep to Oran for four hours, and sleep all the way back. Soon we go to Morocco to get more clothes."

"That is where you always get the clothes?"

"Yes. Across the border. We go to the mountains over the border to get them and bring them back in. You can't get clothes here. It is dangerous. You can die in the snow or be shot by the guards."

"How long does it take?"

Muhammad stood, cigarette in his mouth, the smoke curling into his nostrils. The axe bulged in his jacket pocket.

“About one week. We will share the gains. It is unwise to go alone.”

Climbing down iron stairs hammered into the ancient stone of the fortress, we entered a large palm-lined square. Old men were playing chess on benches, watching us, smoking rolled cigarettes. Some slept in their hooded burnouses. Muhammad stood, surveying the scene, smoking another cigarette. I shifted my feet drawing designs in the dust with the toe of my boot, then I sat down on the kerb, suddenly exhausted. Traffic sped by in front of us. The buzzing drone of scooters and mopeds. We waited for a taxi, the air thick with diesel fumes. Muhammad squinted, deep in thought.

Beyond the faded palms of the boulevard, the black peeling railings, the glinting expanse of azure sea beckoned seductively, sapphire in the bright day. Further down, nearer the station, the grey docks. Old broken freighters in the bay. I remembered the muddy brown of the Mersey, glimpses of Liverpool and Birkenhead, Glasgow, Belfast, Newcastle, the misty, reluctant dawns of winter, the feeble orange sun never quite rising. Dank silhouettes of buildings, and sick people with smoker’s cough. Derelict factories, green buses swallowed by poison, the stagnation of failure and poverty. The ship had gone, and I wondered about Jrovnic. Muhammad stood, cigarette in his mouth, the smoke curling into his nostrils. The axe bulged in his jacket pocket.

“It is good to see the port so busy,” I said.

“What?”
“The port. It is busy. That is good to see. Back home it is not like that. The ports are finished.”
“No ships?”
“Few.”
“Oh. Oui. Here is busy. Oran too. I maybe try to work on the ships. Good money. Regular meals. A bed.”
“Yes. It is not bad. A good life.”
“You were how long on a ship?”
“Two years. Before that I was in the army. The pay is good.”
“Why did you leave?”
“I stabbed the mate in the buttock because he tried something.”
Muhammad paused, staring at me. Then he laughed, the breath hissing between his teeth. “You stabbed the mate? In the buttock?”
“Yes, he wanted me to be his bitch. That is the place to stab people like that.”
For a long time, he laughed uncontrollably, the tears rolling down his face.
Suddenly he became serious. “Then you left the ship?”
“There was no other way, the situation was not going to improve. They threw my gear overboard.”
He frowned, “The ships, it is easy to get work?”
“Ask around the docks. They are always looking. The captain will hire you.”
He turned, signaling wildly, shouting at the top of his lungs. A taxi slowed, yellow, filthy, one window cracked, driven by an old man in a brown pork-pie hat. He was missing several teeth. He waved at Muhammad.
“We go now. To the other side of the town. Come on. *Tout s’arrange*, you see. We have no problems there.”
“Let’s go,” I said.
The driver stopped the car, staring into the mirror, “Who are you? Why are you speaking French? Eh? Eh? Why don’t you speak Arabic?”
“I am British,” I replied. “I don’t speak Arabic.”
“British? British? What the fuck is British?”
“He’s Belgian,” Muhammed interrupted. “He’s a Belgian sailor, off a Belgian ship.”
The driver laughed, “Belgian? Then that is alright, my friend. I will therefore speak French. I hate the French, I fought them in the war. You see I have few teeth? I lost

them to Bigeard and his paras, a tooth for every piece of information extracted. The fucking French.”
We revved away, Muhammad crouching towards the driver, saluting the direction, spewing laughter and guttural instructions in a long rambling monologue, his sinewy neck craned forward like a jockey. The driver nodded pulling into the traffic, yelling at a car in front of us. We were on the make again, going somewhere, some direction. One more time, once again. Forward. We sped round the bay, weaving in and out of the lanes, past buses, delayed at lights, Muhammad cursing.
Laughing, his false teeth wagging loose in his mouth, the driver leaned around, the car driving itself, and we all shook hands. “Who are you? You are very strange fellows. I am Azziz.”
Muhammad gestured, “This man is André, the Belgian sailor, a good man, he is my friend.”
“That is very good, very good indeed, you are both fine men,” said Azziz, seizing the wheel. “The Belgians hate the French, and the French hate the Belgians, so everything is fine. It is very good indeed you are not a Frenchman.” He swerved just avoiding a truck, waving, “These drivers are amateurs, imbeciles, fools, like the whole of this confounded city, like our leaders, the country, see you not the metaphor? In this chaos you can see the whole of the future, everyone going round and round to nowhere like a whirlwind in the desert, there is no answer other than war.”
“It is a matter of time,” Muhammad agreed. “The war is very near.”
“And what is your employment, if I may ask?”
“We are merchants,” replied Muhammad. “We sell clothes.”
“You are from Oran?”
Muhammad smiled. “Yes, Oran. And you?”
“I am from Constantine.”
“The city of the great bridges and the cliffs.”
“Exactly. With the war we will defend ourselves well. I will return there soon.”
Muhammad ruffled my hair. “André and I, we will find our way when the time comes, eh André?”
“Of that I have no doubt,” I replied. “We will find our way.”
We stopped at the bottom of a steep climb, hundreds of steps to the Monument. The cliff loomed above us, the

blue obelisk poking over the top of a mossy ledge gleaming brightly in the morning sun. The docks in the distance, the Kasbah cubist white on the hillside far away.
“We have arrived. Good luck, my brave lads. Here, let me see the wares you are selling.”
Muhammad produced the bag.
Azziz examined a shirt, a faded Fred Perry. “Very fine, I have not seen such quality. How much?”
“Five dinars,” said Muhammad.
“Three dinars and I will purchase.”
“Four,” replied Muhammad.
Pulling out some coins, Azziz laughed, his teeth loosening. “Here.”
Muhammad took the coins, flipping some notes.
“Just give me one dinar. You are like my sons,” Azziz shouted driving away. “I will always remember you.”
We waved, the taxi merging into the traffic mayhem.
Muhammad grinned. “First sale, strange how it happens. And we have the axe. *Tout s’arrange*, we will sell the goods.”
“Indeed,” I agreed. “*Tout s’arrange*. And we are an unlikely alliance, have you not thought?”
“André, my friend,” said Muhammad patting my shoulder. “Together we are strong. Better than the ship, eh? *Al-lons y*.”

Educated at boarding schools in England, **Andrew McIntyre** attended universities in England, Scotland, Japan, and the United States. He holds master’s degrees in Economics and Comparative Literature. He has published stories in many magazines, most recently in *The Taj Mahal Review*, *The Cop-perfield Review*, and *Long Story Short*. His short story collection, *The Short, the Long, and the Tall*, was published by Merilang Press in December, 2010. He lives in San Francisco.