

Crudo by Olivia Laing. (Note: this excerpt contains offensive language.)

It was midday, Saturday 12 August 2017, she ran herself a bath and fumbled a book from the small tower she'd assembled last week. She chose an extended essay by a New England novelist, a pornographer with good syntax, a lusty grammarian. It was about another novelist she liked less, it was an ardent assessment of his sentences and soul. She breezed through words like tennis, suntan lotion and adultery. Nabokov and Henry James were called into service. Then the New England novelist made an astounding statement. He said that the only good novels were written by gay men and women, that they have the gig locked, that they're streets – whole boulevards! – ahead. The gaiety was how he referred to the homosexual community, which suggested he didn't know many of them. However, Kathy agreed. What's the novel about if not getting fucked.

That afternoon, she and her husband decided to go for a walk. They drove into the countryside, not a place where Kathy spent much time. They followed a path in silence, eating blackberries as they went. A moth, her husband said. Or perhaps a butterfly. They saw a car parked at the edge of a field. How did it get there? There was a striped sheet or towel blocking the windows. Kathy, who thought about suicide a lot, wondered whether someone had killed themselves, but the car was empty. They walked a little further. There was gunshot. Bird-scarers Kathy said confidently, and saw a small fluttering thing in the field spasm and fall still. There was a fort of hay bales and inside there was a man with a gun. This was why Kathy hated the countryside. Above clouds like helium balloons, like zeppelins. Further on another man bulky in black was leading a small child with long blonde hair across a cornfield. Everything looked not-innocent, she shouldn't have come.

It was no better at home, it was worse. She watched a stream of images coming out of Charlottesville, armed militias, crackers in camo armed with assault rifles. They were chanting Fuck

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You Faggots, they were waving Nazi flags, they were holding up Tiki torches they'd bought in Kmart to scare off mosquitoes, disgusting putrid horror-faces, Halloween mask America. Why do men always want to punch you in the face, what was that about? The women stood on the sidelines in tight red vests that said FREEDOM right across their boobs. Nazi flags but T-shirts, sloppy, Kathy thought. Aviators and button-downs, belted chinos, pimpled white chests. She'd been writing about Nazis since 1988, she knew what she was seeing. Let's communicate w/out hate in our hearts, Melania or let's face it her aide tweeted some hours in. The headline of the Daily Progress: Fire and Fury. A car drove into a crowd of counter-protestors, HORRIFYING FOOTAGE everyone retweeted, one woman dead, nineteen injured.

Kathy was becoming obsessed with Holocaust-deniers, especially the young ones, the Nazis who'd rebranded themselves as the alt-right. She kept going on the Daily Stormer or following threads. The main argument seemed to be that there weren't enough gas chambers, enough mass graves. They used words like cuck and octoroon, fag obviously, they liked testosterone and whiteness, they were anxious about having their car windows smashed. They made jokes about gassing Jews, they were like stupid boys at school except killing people and in the government, it wasn't a great moment in history, she still couldn't quite grasp how it had all come about. The Holocaust was said to have happened in the 40s, she read on a Nazi website, when information was exactly six million times harder to come by than today. On it went, talking about the absence of gas chambers, the reconstruction of gas chambers, how there were no mass graves or evidence – a sarcastic emphasis on evidence – that any more than a few people had died of starvation and disease in these work camps, how the whole thing was a narrative that got fixed. Sunday morning, 13 August 2017. There were people in the White House who believed this shit. Truly Kathy was living in interesting times.

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Other things were going on at the same time. Houston had flooded, there were photographs of a care home in which several residents in wheelchairs, elderly black women, were up to their chests in dirty brown water. The President was on it, he was using a full arsenal of exclamation marks. Kathy read a long essay on Ivanka and Jared, she was doing her duty as a citizen, keeping abreast of corruption. No one liked them, that was the gist. Who gave a fuck, Kathy thought, no one liked Putin, likeability was irrelevant, what mattered was whether you could make people numb enough to change all the laws, change the entire system, that was the game. Once you pardoned a corrupt sheriff who'd openly run 'concentration camps' for Latinos you were probably well on the way.

Numbness mattered, it was what the Nazis did, made people feel like things were moving too fast to stop and though unpleasant and eventually terrifying and appalling, were probably impossible to do anything about.

I sat there, inexplicably furious. Inexplicable because I'd been amused by and watched other people be amused by these—what a ridiculous word and how accurate it is!—*microaggressions* ever since I'd known Quin.

And so *many* people had been amused, and not only from the publishing world. He gave huge parties two or three times a year, lighthearted, thrilling affairs that mixed people from the art world, movies, fashion, criticism, literature, medicine, and, more rarely, local politics. He'd occasionally invite a beautiful woman he'd met on the street that day and she would actually show up—stunned and stunning girls, barely out of their teens, from Eastern Europe or Ethiopia, who barely spoke English but somehow trusted that this strange, slender man was worth their time. You never knew whom you'd sit next to—a handsome young hotshot running a phony pharmaceutical concern, a desiccated artist down on her luck, an elegant literary lady from Iceland—or what he or she might say. There was one regular, a young woman who wrote for an online art magazine; Quin had apparently invited her after she'd smacked him in the face a couple of times with a fly swatter, which she carried with her for a precise purpose—that is, to swat men who irritated her. When she came to the door the first time, Quin's wife, Carolina, greeted her warmly: "Oh, Miss Swatter, so nice to meet you. I've heard so much about you!" And, sure enough, the lady had brought her flyswatter with her; throughout the evening, she repeatedly swatted Quin in his own home, to his red-faced, beatific delight.

Read the full story on [The New Yorker website](#).

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After my case has been dismissed—and I feel there is a good chance of that happening—I want to make a statement. I’ll write a blog, maybe, or send something to the *Times*. Maybe I’ll just read it in court. The idea came to me late one night—early morning, really, probably around four, when I woke with my heart so low in my chest that I could barely feel it. Carolina was next to me, and, though I wanted to press against her for strength, I lay still. Her features were barely visible in the dark, but I saw the contours of her forehead, lips, nose, and cheek; these shapes expressed sadness and helplessness, but her curved shoulders and her neck declared animal determination *to push through this shit*. Carolina: the sacred figure behind the gaudy tapestry of my public life. Unable to help myself, I moved closer and, coming into the area of her warmth, was flooded with relief and residual happiness. Then she moved, in her sleep, away from me.

I thought, I’ve got to do something. I have to fight somehow. I could check in with old friends in London. Maybe the poison hasn’t spread there. Terrible to have to face my father, but . . . I rose and went into the living room and looked out at the park, with its deep vegetable greens and rough browns under the colorless sky. But I didn’t want to go to England; I wanted to stay here. A few cars moved sluggishly in the street; a horse-drawn carriage humped along at the curb. Sounds came up—a garbage truck, a bus, something large beeping horribly as it turned, the gray noise of traffic. Horns, blaring and bright then soft around the edges, subsiding into the dominant gray. Beautiful from here—the obedience to the grid, the vying against it. It gave me faith in myself. Words and music flowed freely in my mind, coming, it seemed, from a place of deep subterranean order, a place from which the signs and symbols of society draw their vitality. Buoyed by the ramshackle order of the waking city, I felt that all could be well, that I could make myself understood, and—perhaps—even make peace with those who had felt wronged by me.

The Great Gatsby by F. Scott Fitzgerald

“Civilization’s going to pieces,” broke out Tom violently. “I’ve gotten to be a terrible pessimist about things. Have you read ‘The Rise of the Coloured Empires’ by this man Goddard?”

“Why, no,” I answered, rather surprised by his tone.

“Well, it’s a fine book, and everybody ought to read it. The idea is if we don’t look out the white race will be—will be utterly submerged. It’s all scientific stuff; it’s been proved.”

“Tom’s getting very profound,” said Daisy, with an expression of unthoughtful sadness. “He reads deep books with long words in them. What was that word we—”

“Well, these books are all scientific,” insisted Tom, glancing at her impatiently. “This fellow has worked out the whole thing. It’s up to us, who are the dominant race, to watch out or these other races will have control of things.”

“We’ve got to beat them down,” whispered Daisy, winking ferociously toward the fervent sun.

“You ought to live in California—” began Miss Baker, but Tom interrupted her by shifting heavily in his chair.

“This idea is that we’re Nordics. I am, and you are, and you are, and—” After an infinitesimal hesitation he included Daisy with a slight nod, and she winked at me again. “—And we’ve produced all the things that go to make civilization—oh, science and art, and all that. Do you see?”

There was something pathetic in his concentration, as if his complacency, more acute than of old, was not enough to him any more. When, almost immediately, the telephone rang inside and the butler left the porch Daisy seized upon the momentary interruption and leaned toward me.