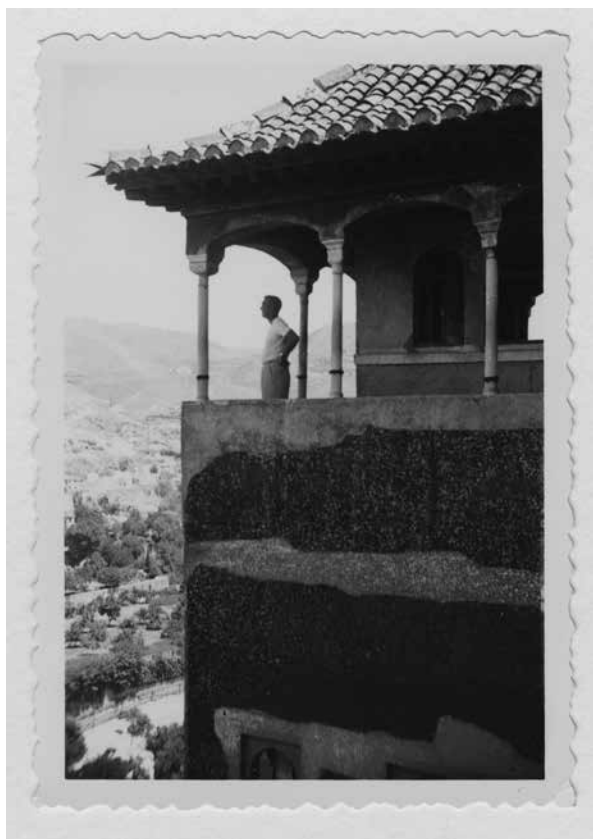


SUDDENLY

SUDDENLY

Allen Frame



SUDDENLY LAST SUMMER

the empty Blue Jay notebook got bigger and bigger, so big it was big and empty as that big empty blue sea and sky. . . . I knew what I was doing. I came out in the French Quarter years before I came out in the Garden District. . . .

MRS. HOLLY: Oh, Cathie! Sister . . .

DOCTOR: Hush!

CATHARINE: And before long, when the weather got warmer and the beach so crowded, he didn't need me any more for that purpose. The ones on the free beach began to climb over the fence or swim around it, bands of homeless young people that lived on the free beach like scavenger dogs, hungry children. . . . So now he let me wear a decent dark suit. I'd go to a faraway empty end of the beach, write postcards and letters and keep up my—third-person journal till it was—five o'clock and time to meet him outside the bathhouses, on the street. . . . He would come out, *followed*.

DOCTOR: Who would follow him out?

CATHARINE: The homeless, hungry young people that had climbed over the fence from the free beach that they lived on. He'd pass out tips among them as if they'd all—shined his shoes or called taxis for him. . . . Each day the crowd was bigger, noisier, greedier! —Sebastian began to be frightened. —At last we stopped going out there. . . .

DOCTOR: And then? After that? After you quit going out to the public beach?

CATHARINE: Then one day, a few days after we stopped going out to the beach—it was one of those white blazing days in Cabeza de Lobo, not a blazing hot *blue* one but a blazing hot *white* one.

DOCTOR: Yes?















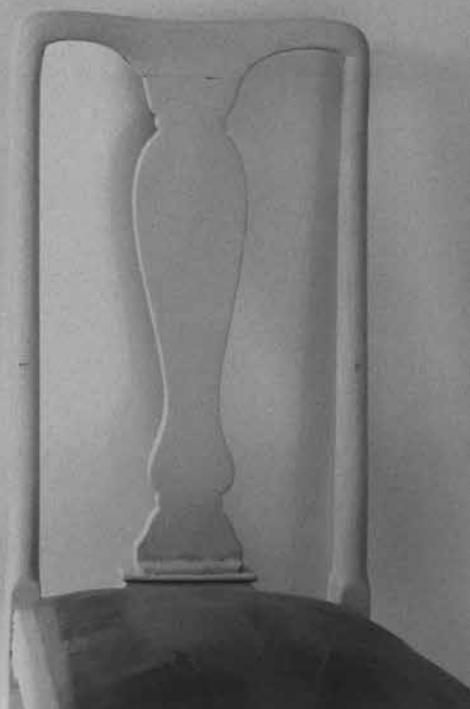














Suddenly

A man is run out of town
for some queer deed, the legend of it
haunting his family.

Don't scare the little children

Charles Henri Ford would say,
bemused, which meant,
keep a lid on it.

I liked to scare myself,
as a child in Mississippi,
hypnotized by a water moccasin
gliding across the bayou.
That woman in the Studebaker
who was not known to any of our parents
was a kidnapper of children.

Don't let her see you!

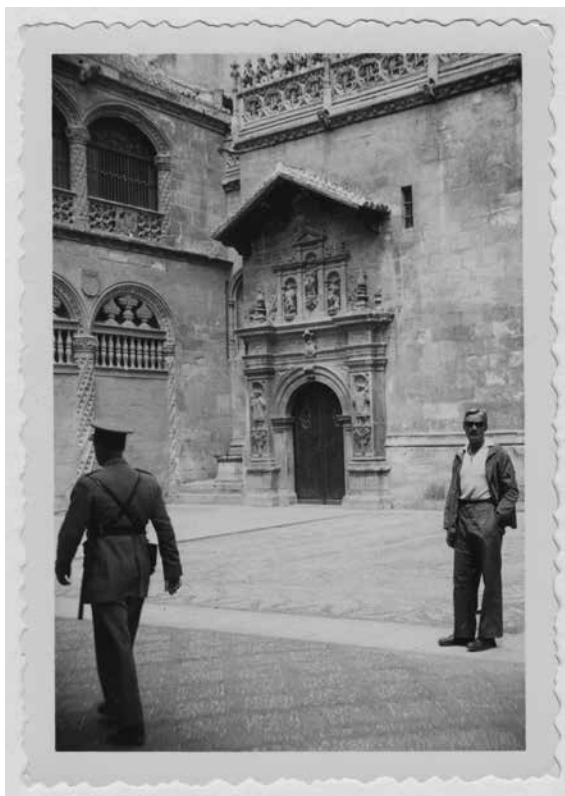
I wanted to be in a B movie.
I wanted to know about trashy reputations.
My mother let me listen in to the phone conversations
with her girlfriends. *Just don't let them hear you.*

In my twenties Leon told me stories of the poet Will Percy,
being chased across Europe by scandal
but coming back home, safe and discreet,
black men knocking at the back door. His book collection
became the town library but when Leon offered
to make a portrait bust of him,
the library board declined.

I thought of Percy when I spotted the two photographs
in the Rome flea market, the blonde male tourist in sunglasses,
posing in front of a church, peering off a balcony.
Who's taking the pictures?

I thought of Sebastian Venable,
from *Suddenly Last Summer*,
traveling with his mother, and then with Catharine,
his beautiful cousin who served as bait
for the young men he wanted to meet
in the proper salons or the wrong beaches,
and I thought of Tennessee Williams himself,
prowling through Italy and France in a blue jaguar.
He drove into a tree at 70mph and the typewriter on the back seat
hit him on the head but he got just a minor cut
and a bout of insomnia.

I thought of my LA cousin Tom,
who left Mississippi in the 50's and never came back
until his mother's funeral, so I didn't meet him until he was 75,
in New York for the holidays, reserving meals in every landmark restaurant,
telling me shocking stories from the minute we met,
his crush on my father, his crush on my uncles, and how
he gave blowjobs to black men walking home from work
when he was 12, behind the tall hedges next to his house.
He became a doctor and moved into a ramshackle ranch house
in the Hollywood Hills. He would meet his mother on Sanibel Island
but he was done with Mississippi. He now sits at home
with round the clock care and Parkinson's.



SUDDENLY

Photography by Allen Frame and anonymous found photographs and drawings.
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