

# the HARLEQUIN

*Peter Campion*

**Return Trip from the Ruins**

A smear of birds of paradise.  
Tin roofs and roadside shrines.  
Then, who would stick it there? and why?  
spray-painted skeleton on particle board.

Our driver mumbles “Guarda Civil  
who sometimes stopping  
passengers to steal.”

Maybe I know the Testimonies  
(“after they stripped our wives  
they made us bring the children”)  
but his minivan  
swerving beneath lush canopies  
feels safe as home.

Hours pass and he taps  
my arm and points to the radio.  
“Very bad man who kills my friend  
and today [he crooks his fingers  
round his neck] la horca.”  
So the hanging  
was broadcast?  
which would sound like?

Maybe I’m the same  
person I am now:  
wanting to see myself  
the good guy in the movie  
but the wanting shows.

Whatever reason, though: I nod and he turns  
the dial and nothing comes.

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Except this nothing  
was the sharpest  
simmering hiss: as if a life itself  
he had me incline toward  
straining to discern  
what revelation in that sibillant  
and microsonic language. And afterward  
all I remember’s  
the checkpoint, one Quonset hut  
they shunted me through  
as some German hippies  
(one of the women hawk-like, beautiful)  
sat detained on a low bench  
and ordering them  
to empty their backpacks

now take those boots off now  
lie down  
the guard articulated everything  
with jabs and swivels of the barrel of his  
Bushmaster AR-15.

Thank you for reading! Find more at [www.theharlequin.org](http://www.theharlequin.org)

