

Jack McCreedy couldn't have been more than five when he first saw the steeple from the church down on Birmingham's Main Street ease its way back out of the lake. It hadn't rained in months and Paducah needed the water. He had been running through our dusty garden plot to tell his dad it was dinner time when the light from the evening sun made the crossbar cast a shadow across the lake. He thought it must have been a little scrap of wood floating out there, but it didn't bob with the waves. The whole summer, he watched the crucifix that topped the steeple reemerge a millimeter at a time.

In 2031, Jack was in Miss Beverly's fourth grade class. His class was her first teaching job and her bubbly twenty-two year old optimism practically beamed out of her. She had gone to school *Up-North* somewhere and had been sent to his little community by Americorp. He remembered she tried to teach them about the Great Drought, but most of the students had never seen the world outside the Jackson Purchase. Jack could remember that once Miss Beverly projected up old photos of some lake out west. The Great Drought was felt out near Las Vegas first and the cities took so much water that all that was left were the bleached walls of the depleted reservoir. Jack could still remember how sick and sad it looked. It was like when he left a glass of water beside his bed for too long. The water evaporated away and it left behind those white rings that were hard to scrub out. Miss Beverly compared it to something called the Dust Bowl, but Jack never really cared that much for history.

When he was small, no one worried about the water. He grew up in his great grandparents' on the Land Between the Lakes. Kentucky Lake on the west and Lake Barkley on the east literally surrounded his house with the stuff. Sure, the water level had gone down over the years, but it wasn't anything to worry about. There was still so much left.

Jack was fifteen before the roof of the church started to creep back out of the depths. Kentucky Lake had been built in 1944 by the Tennessee Valley Authority. In '42, they started buying up all the land north of where they planned to dam up the Kentucky River. This meant the whole town of Birmingham. That summer, he took his dad's old fishing kayak out onto the lake to check it out. The church steeple was a good mile's paddle away from his house, so he started in the cool of the morning. It had to have been May, because Jack had just finished up with school for the year. He packed a snack in the little waterproof compartment and took off. Before long, the sweat was dripping from his legs and making him slip around the cool bottom of the plastic kayak. He paddled for what felt like an hour before the tip of the kayak bumped up against the roof. It scraped one or two of the ancient slate tiles out of place and they scratched as they slid into the water.

The warm Kentucky sun beat down on his back as Jack paddled around the church. If he squinted, and shaded the water from the sun's glare, he could just see the gutter on the edge of roof a few feet below in the murky green water. He sat there for what felt like an hour in the eerie stillness, letting the small waves, kicked up by the wind, bump the kayak into the mostly submerged structure. The longer he was out on the water, the more he needed to see what was down there. He thought about the lives that people had built being washed away by the water and about how his own world was changing because of the lack of it. He wondered what else was down there, just past where the sunlight could penetrate. What ghosts still crept among the ruins. It was almost as if he could feel something moving below. He knew there was a whole world just beneath the surface, ready to swallow him up. Jack spent the better part of the early afternoon paddling around what he thought must have been the center of town. Here and there he could see areas where the water seemed darker and lighter than others. He assumed that had to be buildings lurking down below the surface. Jack imagined cat fish swimming

between school desks and in and out of mailboxes. Had the folks who lived their left their furniture behind?

When the sun started to fall a little past noon and the trees on the far side of the lake started to cast shadows in his direction, Jack started to paddle for home. Once, he thought he could feel his paddle gaze something beneath the surface. The cold water underneath his kayak instantly felt colder and he paddled a little harder toward his old farm house on the hill.