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Last Prayer to Mack Wolford

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LARA ELMAYAN

Last Prayer To Mack Wolford

*And these signs will follow those who believe: in My name they will cast out
demons; they will speak with new tongues; they will take up serpents; and
if they drink anything deadly, it will by no means hurt them; they will lay
their hands on the sick, and they will recover.*
— Mark 16:17-18.

It's a book, jackass.
— Lane Smith

You said the snake that bit your father had my eyes. You remembered his
reflected like new moons or bottoms of whiskey bottles through the nose,
so you could see in them for one holy moment the Appalachian stretch sinking
into the hot faultline of America. The snake's, I mean,

not your father's. Not the eyes of the man whose be alive in the Lord drenched your skin
even when we were grafting into the fake leather of your car's back seat. The dead
are disruptive. You balanced a kerosene coke bottle on your throat in memory and spit

flame: praise the Lord and pass the rattlesnakes, brother, but that rattlesnake passed
you right by as if it never heard you sing the Gospel. What a casual fuck you,
no drama, no fuss; how enviable, unaware of its own forced story. What shine it left in its path
into the woods, where your wife's animal cries echoed for so many miles that the dying

gathered to shake happy morphine heads at the hole in the sky. What a kindling of faith

that your blade-to-tongue sermon tremble could never conjure. We are setting up snake
as El in the ruins of the church where you said we could all be saved. Once you kidnapped

me in joy just to deny me in the weeds of your ancestral burial ground. Once you saw the Lord
and the strychnine reminded you of my mouth, asphyxia turning paralysis. Once you heard the blues
and understood, and had to spend a week on top of a mountain where Indian ghosts
ignored you and you could wait for the lightning crack of salvation. The dead were never

as disruptive as you wanted them to be. You must've watched your entire bloodline dissipate
into the haze of West Virginia, where history was already setting up its own noose. In dreams
I sense vaguely the heat of your thigh, and I open my mouth for prayer and a familiar taste
of dust.