D A N  O ’ B R I E N

Remember necklacing in the townships
where they’d grab a white guy and slam a tire
full of petrol over his head and arms
and set him on fire? Under apartheid
you’d think I’d be just the person to give
that necklace to. But they were like, You’re free
to observe. *When another tire blows out
in Helmand Province*. My fixer’s chatting
inscrutably with a mechanic while
I burn in the sun. On the road again
he says: The mechanic was suggesting
we chop your head off and offer it to
the Haqqanis. Fifty-fifty. And what
did you say? My car is clean. Ask me when
my car is already dirty—ha ha
ha!
The War Reporter Paul Watson
at the Courthouse/Jail

Our last hope for peace will come from lawyers
and judges in this apartment complex
cum-courthouse/jail. Where shell blasts trouble
bones and windows. Assault rifles rattle
like a street festival. We’re listening
to a policemen gripe about these ghost
-militias sucking blood from businesses
like America used to. Our millionaires
fled into Egypt, the shame of the rich
of Syria! he cries. The judge fumbles
for middle ground. Men of God will decide
with their hearts, he philosophizes, bulbs
stuttering, paint flaking. But men of law
have no such luxury. While below us
ghost-militias entangle like orgies
out of Bosch, on wall-to-wall carpet, sick
generator spitting. Lake of leaking
rainwater encroaching. The jailor’s light
stirs the flesh. Razor spines as if threatening
to tear through skin. A fundamentalist
rebel admitting to raping two girls
smiles through the bars. The jailor says, He’ll live
until we receive a mandate from all
the people. To do otherwise would be
a crime as well.
The War Reporter Paul Watson
and the Boys in a Crater

full of water. *Joy could be agony from a certain angle.* Wet clothes sticking to their bodies like caul. Dead wires, bent pipes dangling from the apartment block behind sheared-off walls. Summertime in Aleppo and the blue sky is breezy. Blue water from a blasted mains. Bright blue bicycle parked in the rubble. *In an instant joy should be sorrow.* One boy twists, his friend leaps at us. Another boy in purple pants considers, in danger of getting knocked flat by the lunger. One boy is rising from his dip, football jersey wicking, hips flexing as if surfing, pockets jam-packed with something. Like what? Another boy’s dropped to his knees, collar of splashing water almost regal around his neck, ulu-lating with ecstasy, maybe. One slumps on the lip of the crater, face in hands as if collecting tears. *Their laughter is sorrow’s best friend.* I’m not in Syria to take this picture, Freddie Paxton is, but I can’t tell you how happy I am he’s caught it.