

CIRCA

A NOVEL

ADAM GREENFIELD



Circa by Adam Greenfield

ISBN: 978-1-938349-90-4

eISBN: 978-1-938349-91-1

Copyright © 2018 Adam Greenfield

This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution-Non-Commercial-NoDerivatives 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>.

Cover artwork by Abby Weintraub

Layout and book design by Mark Givens

First Pelekinesis Printing 2018

For information:

Pelekinesis, 112 Harvard Ave #65, Claremont, CA 91711 USA

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Greenfield, Adam, 1973- author.

Title: *Circa* / by Adam Greenfield.

Description: Claremont, CA : Pelekinesis, [2018]

Identifiers: LCCN 2018027102 (print) | LCCN 2018028432 (ebook)
| ISBN 9781938349911 (ePub) | ISBN 9781938349904 (pbk)

Subjects: | GSAFD: Humorous fiction.

Classification: LCC PS3607.R45367 (ebook) | LCC PS3607.R45367
C57 2018 (print) | DDC 813/.6--dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018027102>

An excerpt from

Circa

by

Adam Greenfield

pages 320-329: “Shooting Range”

* * *

The office was busy, humming the way large rooms with lots of people busy doing their own thing bristled. He tried to figure out how to plug into it, but there was no clear way in. He rearranged the few knick-knacks he had on his desk and then got a coffee from the dirty communal kitchen, but neither thing made him feel more centered. He made sure Ken saw him as he walked back to his desk but didn't stop once their eyes locked. That would be putting too fine a point on it.

He was four hours into an internet search about Potter with nothing much to show for it but a ringing headache and a debilitating neck cramp worthy of an Oxycontin addiction when an email came in from Oscar telling him to meet him at the West Valley Gun Club in an hour. This after four hours of surfing the internet that had led him to websites claiming to sell pieces of the original flowers' dresses that were a "must" for any real "suicide aficionado" and conspiracy theorists who alleged the raid on the compound in '84 was actually perpetrated by rival networks trying to draw viewers away from NBC's coverage of the Olympics. He didn't know if he was

in the Dark Web or not, but it sure as hell felt like it.

Closing his eyes, he rubbed his temples and had a quick flash of himself waist deep in a grave of his own digging. He laughed and when he opened his eyes was startled to see Ken standing over him reading his screen.

“Gun club with Oscar, huh? Good luck with that. You should check with HR, but I’m pretty sure workers’ comp doesn’t cover gutshots or pistol whippings.” He laughed and then cleared his throat, embarrassedly, as if instead of laughing he’d ripped a loud fart. “Is he helping you find a way in to Potter?”

“No, but I’m working on him. Inch by inch.” Henry replied with a smile he hoped emitted more confidence than he actually felt.

“Remind that shell-shocked asshole that his notes and contacts from that story are the newspaper’s property. Not his.”

Ken sounded annoyed and Henry hoped it had more to do with Oscar not being forthcoming than it did with Henry’s progress on the story.

In a few minutes he was in his car speeding north on the 101 toward the Valley. Most people who lived in LA hated having to go to the Valley and talked about it, and the people who lived there, as though it were an internment camp for asthmatics. Henry didn’t feel that way. He liked the openness of it, the reliable heat, the stippled strip malls that were an endless ellipses of commercial opportunities.

The West Valley Gun Club was in a gigantic office park out by the Van Nuys Airport, and when he finally got there and parked it was amid a sea of oversized pickup trucks and gas-guzzling SUVs. The cars all seemed to have American flags waving from their antennae and the display of patriotism reminded him of a military cemetery decorated by Boy Scouts for Veteran’s Day.

Inside, Oscar was waiting for him at the check-in desk. He was chewing a piece of straw and making small talk with the clerk, who seemed to know him. Just when Henry was almost next to him Oscar swung around with surprising speed and yelled, “Bang!” Henry felt his heart take a leap into his stomach as he clutched his chest.

“Whoa,” Oscar laughed, “you’ve gotta relax, buddy. All that tension is gonna kill you one of these days. Forget about guns. Your heart, that’s the real killer.”

“Jesus, Oscar,” the guy at the counter said with a complicit smile, “you’re a real son of a bitch.”

“We’re gonna have a great time today,” Oscar went on in his fast mumbling way, the space between his words being eaten by the words themselves. “I’m so glad you could make it. Do you like guns, Henry? Would you say you’re a gun guy?”

Henry could still feel his heart buzzing inside him like a fly bouncing against a closed window trying to find a way out.

“No, I wouldn’t say that.”

“Not a gun nut, huh?” Oscar sighed and put his hands on the counter. “Too bad. I like gun nuts. They’re reliable. They’re the only people you can trust to tell you the truth all the time. It’s a Constitution thing. They think if they lie, God will send Communists to rape their daughters. They operate from this place of really violent fear and profound paranoia that I deeply appreciate. It’s kind of glorious to behold.”

The guy at the desk laid two pistols and a couple of boxes of ammo on the counter.

“No thanks,” Henry said politely.

“What do you mean ‘no thanks’?” Oscar shot back. “These aren’t Brussel sprouts. Pick up the gun.”

“I’m not going to shoot,” Henry said.

"Oh, come on," Oscar said, sounding genuinely disappointed. "Don't tell me you're one of those liberal gun-hating types."

"No," Henry said, stuffing his hands in his pockets. "I just don't want to shoot."

"Have you ever held a gun before?" Oscar asked taunting him a little. "Do you know anything about them?"

"I know enough to know that I don't want to shoot one, let alone hold one."

"Well that's an awful lot of knowledge for someone who just admitted to being willfully ignorant."

"I'm not ignorant," Henry said, trying to swallow the lump he felt swelling in his throat. "I'm the opposite of ignorant."

Oscar laughed. He crossed his arms and shot Henry a look that made him feel small.

"And why's that?"

Henry took a deep breath before he started. He didn't like the idea of talking about Grace to prove a point. She wasn't currency and he didn't owe Oscar anything, but he did want something from the man, and if this is what it was going to take to get it, then so be it.

"My sister was murdered. A long time ago. She was shot, and ever since then I guess you could say I've had a little bit of a thing about guns." He turned to look at the guy behind the counter and then turned back to Oscar. "Is that the opposite of ignorance enough for you?"

Oscar said something that he could tell by the tone was contrite, which Henry only slightly heard, because underneath it all he was concentrating on the irregular spatter of gunshots ringing out from the next room, the eerie pauses as people reloaded, the anticipation of not knowing when it would begin again but knowing that it would, that it was as

inevitable as the next breath.

He put on the oversized earmuffs he was handed and followed Oscar into the main room, a dark cavern of a place that was infused to the rafters and in every corner with the rich sweet smell of gunpowder and the eddying pinwheels of smoke drifting stoically in the air, giving it the look of something alive and prehistoric, a single-celled organism out for a midnight stroll. As Oscar started loading one of the guns a few large men came over to say hello. One by one they clapped him on the back and then folded their gigantic arms in front of T-shirts bearing reference to particular Marine units and divisions. They exchanged words for a few minutes, and once or twice all four of them looked over at Henry before turning back to one another and continuing their quiet conversations.

When they'd finished talking, each of the guys nodded at Henry before walking back to where their guns were waiting to take more target practice.

For the next ten minutes Oscar wordlessly emptied his gun into the man-shaped targets down at the end of the range, switching between the two guns now and then, reloading, shooting again. It was hypnotizing to watch and before too long Henry found himself imagining being at the other end, behind the targets, watching the muzzle flashes and the grim looks of determination on all the shooters' faces, feeling the dull thuds of the slugs entering his flesh, manipulating it unkindly, and then his breath, the last simple thing he'd ever know, and then that too dissipating in awful, slow gasps.

Oscar finished his last few shots and when he turned around, Henry flinched.

"Whoa," Oscar said, holding up his hands in mock concern, "jumpy much?"

Oscar reached in his back pocket and took out a hip flask from which he drank for several seconds before proffering it to Henry.

“No thanks,” Henry murmured softly, still unsure what the hell he was doing here and what it would take for Oscar to tell him what he wanted to know.

“Right, of course you don’t drink,” Oscar said, taking another sip. “That would be absurd.”

Oscar took another long pull from the flask and held it out meekly once again to Henry.

“Come on. There’s tons to drink to.”

“Like what?” Henry asked, his eyes darting this way and that, making unconscious notes of the various exits, the location of Oscar’s friends, where the guns were. Worry was an exhausting chore; he could barely imagine the effort that genuine paranoia took.

Oscar smiled at the crack that had opened.

“I like to drink to the men we could have been but aren’t. You know, giving yourself a little credit for what you could have done but didn’t. That’s my superpower. I walk around silently lordling all the shit I could be doing to people over them but don’t.”

Without thinking Henry looked him in the eyes and asked, “If I drink, will you let me hear the tapes you have, and tell me how to find Potter?”

“Is that what Ken told you? That I knew how to find Potter? Like he was my personal snake handler, on call to answer my questions whenever I have a nightmare or get into some existential funk. Does that sound right to you, Henry? Does that sound like something a guy like me would know how to do?”

Oscar's voice was almost pitying and Henry felt, for a moment, like he was being consoled after finding out too late that the money he just invested had gone into a pyramid scheme. The flask was offered again and in one continuous movement Henry grabbed it, pressed the cold metal to his lips, tilted it up, and drank for several long seconds.

"Wow," Oscar said, impressed by the gusto with which Henry drank, "I guess I don't need to ask what your superpower is."

Henry shrugged and handed back the flask while the tequila he'd just drunk worked its way along his bloodstream to the muscles in his neck, which immediately bunched up into painful little bouquets as they always did when he drank the stuff.

"Tequila gets into my negative spaces," he said gently massaging his neck. "Also, that's not my superpower. My superpower is the ability to feel guilty about anything."

Oscar nodded. "Good to know."

Henry swung his neck around in an effort to unlock his cramping muscles.

"So," he said, not feeling like being there anymore, "what am I supposed to do?"

"What did Ken tell you exactly? Did he tell you to say that the paper owned my memories? Or did he tell you that he kicked me out of my office last week, didn't fire me exactly, but took away my desk, had me clear out my things. I'm not sure where he expects me to go, but that's probably the point, right? Doomed to haunt the halls forever like a ridiculous rumor, looking for an outlet to plug in my electric typewriter and the forehead of some young worshipping newbie to hang my Pulitzer. Now tell me, does that sound like a life to you?"

Henry said nothing as around them the sound of guns firing filled in the uncomfortable silence. Gone now was the fun-loving lout, he thought, as he looked into Oscar's eyes

that suddenly had the seriousness of narrowed grooves cut into marble.

“Feeling guilty yet?”

Henry shrugged. “I feel something, but it’s hard to tell if it’s the tequila or the guilt.”

“That’s okay,” Oscar said, “one usually precedes the other. We’ll get there eventually.”

Now he wanted to leave. He didn’t even want to talk about Potter anymore. He wanted to be in his car, tucked safely into traffic somewhere, anonymous as he’d been as a kid when to crave being noticed felt like the most decadent wish there ever was or ever could be.

“I don’t...” he began but as soon as Oscar interrupted the words just felt like a vain attempt at remembering a safe word.

“A few days ago I heard that prick, Jeff, and that other prick, Ken, talking in Ken’s office about an apartment building your friends have turned into a nation state. Apparently no one knows these guys but you.”

Henry was confused. “You want the story?”

“Not exactly.”

“Then what?”

“Me and my friends,” Oscar said, indicating the men he’d introduced Henry to when they first came in, “want to go there.”

“And do what?” Henry asked, still not understanding.

“What do you think I’m talking about, Henry? Stop being so fucking obtuse. We want in. We want to be there. We’re offering ourselves up to the cause.”

“Race war?”

Oscar laughed. “Not race war, you fucking weirdo. The

‘Cause’.” He threw up air quotes as he said the word ‘cause’.

Suddenly, Henry understood what he was talking about and the prospect frightened the hell out of him.

“No, you don’t want to go there. You guys would...I mean, they’re just a bunch of confused dads and weirdos looking for an excuse to get out of their sad lives for a little while. They’re not serious about it.”

“That’s not what I hear.”

“What do you mean?” Dread was starting to inflate in him like a balloon.

“Your friend...Truman...Is that his name? Funny. Anyway, Truman called the paper trying to get someone to come down and interview him about it all. He was talking about urban warfare and armed resistance. He was talking about property rights and Existentialism. These are enticing subjects to me and my friends.”

“Sounds like a bunch of bullshit to me,” Henry replied. Since when had free speech become such a fucking nuisance? “So why do you need me?”

“Because, we want to join him and we need an introduction. You can give us entree. How’s that feel, buddy, to have all this juice?”

A few of the ex-soldiers were gathered around them now, listening in on their conversation.

“I think it’s a bad idea. You’re too...Someone’s going to get hurt.”

“Don’t mistake bloodlust for gumption, Henry.” He smiled and patted Henry on the shoulder. “Why don’t you go away and think about it. I’ll tell you everything you want to know about Potter and the COL. In fact, I’ll do you one better. I’ll introduce you to one of the Flowers. All you have to do is

take us to the building and get us in. That's it. Simple syrup."

"The Flowers?" Again he felt like he was one step behind. "There are no flowers. The ones that didn't die left. They're all gone."

Oscar shook his head matter-of-factly. "No, they're not. They're still very much around. Just waiting."

"Waiting for what?"

Oscar raised an eyebrow at him. "What do you think?"

The saliva in his mouth, he realized, had evaporated. It was happening. He was becoming a desert.

"How do you know her?"

He shrugged. "I met a lot of those people when I did my Potter story. It's a pretty small world, that whole end-of-the-world scene. Also," and this time Henry detected a little empathy in his voice, "they never really leave. It doesn't work like that."

Oscar was all smiles again as he walked Henry out through the lobby and back into the parking lot. Far off in the distance the sun was setting over the ocean, spilling its secrets that were a million shades of red and orange. They stood next to one another, appreciating it for a moment, before Oscar turned to him and said, "All we want is to be moved, Henry. Forget everything else and focus on that. We're lucky men. We know what it is that moves us. Do you know how rare that is?"

Driving away, he looked back in his rearview mirror and saw Oscar still standing in the parking lot watching the setting sun and he thought to himself, as his stomach bobbed on the rising and falling tides of panic, that it was no coincidence that LA was at its most beautiful when it looked like it was on fire.

About the Author

Adam Greenfield's short fiction has appeared in many literary magazines including *MungBeing*, *Outsider Ink*, and *Prole*. He lives in Los Angeles with his wife and two children. *Circa* is his first novel.

Twitter: @donkeydate

Instagram: donkeydate



112 Harvard Ave #65
Claremont, CA 91711 USA

pelekinesis@gmail.com
www.pelekinesis.com

Pelekinesis titles are available through Small Press
Distribution, Baker & Taylor, Ingram, Bertrams,
and directly from the publisher's website.