

Happy Columbus Day

by Barry Basden

He wakes in the early morning darkness, needing to void again. He swings his feet onto the cool stone and rests a moment. His knees hurt so bad. He hobbles to the window and after a time begins to urinate weakly into the flower bed. The burning sensation almost makes him weep. He strains for a few more minutes, then gives up and shuffles back to bed, his bladder still half full.

He's wealthy at last, but what good is it? The gold, the holdings in the New World? What does it matter? His body has betrayed him. But that first trip, thinking he'd find India when fools thought he'd sail Isabella's ships right off the edge of the earth. Hispaniola. God's joke on them all. What exciting days. And the native woman, though she abandoned him when the troubles came. Like everyone else.

Dawn's weak light seeps into the room and he tries to ready himself for another day. Oh to be young and vigorous. Even with his many mistakes. Do everything the same. In the end what does it matter?

He can no longer read his accounts or oversee his businesses. He trusts that his son does not cheat him, but he doesn't really care. His wealth buys him nothing of value.

He struggles to rise but a new pain makes him gasp and he lies back. He tries to inhale but an awful weight sits on his chest. He clutches his night shirt. His head flails. He perspires. A blood vessel bursts in his left eye. He stops resisting and turns toward the window. A final look at the Spanish sky.

Meanwhile, back in the New World, everything has changed.

