

Souvenirs
Susan Harlan



1. New York Snow Globe

When I tip it over in my hand, I see half a price tag. I remember picking at the bar code as I walked through Times Square, on my way to the library. I had seen the globe in the window of a shop and thought, Why not? I don't live here anymore. When I tip it over in my hand, the amalgamated skyline points to the ground, and then it flips back up, and then the snow falls and settles between the Stock Exchange and the Empire State Building and the Staten Island ferry. The snow always falls too quickly. It is never quite right.

2. The Eiffel Towers

One is a glass bottle, etched by a machine. It has a golden cap I can't take off, and the base is lined with the brown film of old perfume. Avon Rapture Cologne, New York, New York 10020, 3

fl. oz. It's the same height as two of the copper-colored towers in my collection.

One is rusted, as if it was left outside. This is the heaviest one, the oldest, too—not flimsy modern junk. Dust has settled in its grooves.

Two of them have marble bases that fit on my palm. And one has a smaller copper-colored base that reads Tour-Eiffel, a reminder. The Eiffel Tower does not exist. The Eiffel Tower is a souvenir, a name.

One is the bright gold of ugly jewelry. I bought this one at a souvenir shop many years ago, and I carried it around Paris all afternoon. When I set it on a cafe table, next to the salt and pepper, it looked like a little landscape.

The tallest one is a green bottle, opaque like seaglass. A bottle of booze, probably, its cork stopper broken. Now it's empty, and lighter than you'd expect.

One has a thermometer that runs from the second tier to the top. The mercury gathers in a dollop at the bottom of the glass tube. The thermometer reads 0–1–2–3–4. I have no idea what this means, but I can just fit my thumb in the base and up to the second tier. Empty space.

One is a keychain, just about an inch and a half tall. When I pick up my keys, it swings back and forth. I know the chain will break soon, and the tower will fall off and be lost.

One is a tri-color tower with PARIS written in silver letters on the blue section. Red for the first tier, white for the second, then blue. I got this one on my last trip, in one of the stands along the river stocked with old books in clear plastic bags and small oil paintings of the city. It was winter, and the tower was cold to the touch.

Four of them are a tarnished brass, or a cheap metal that looks like brass. This color looks a bit like iron, and so they are closest to the original. The original.

All of these towers are lined up on my windowsill, a monumental

parade of nothingness.

3. New York, New York, Las Vegas

There is New York in the desert. There is the Statue of Liberty, shrunk. And over there, the Empire State Building and the Chrysler Building. Silver like Liberace's suits.

New York is a pasteboard panorama, an invented place.

When I said I wanted to drive through the desert, people said that the desert is nothing. There is nothing there, they said. There is nothing to see. But this is not true.

It is like going to sea, and when you come back from being at sea, you bring things with you.

New York is an enormous souvenir. A magnet to make me remember. All the buildings there together, side by side. New York, New York is a song, a place. Two places.

New York looks best at night, behind the lighted palm trees. Lady Liberty a lurid green. The lights of Vegas are the lights of memory, cast up from nothing.

Many years ago, my sister and I walked along the Strip. The July heat melted her shoes. This place melts things into other things.