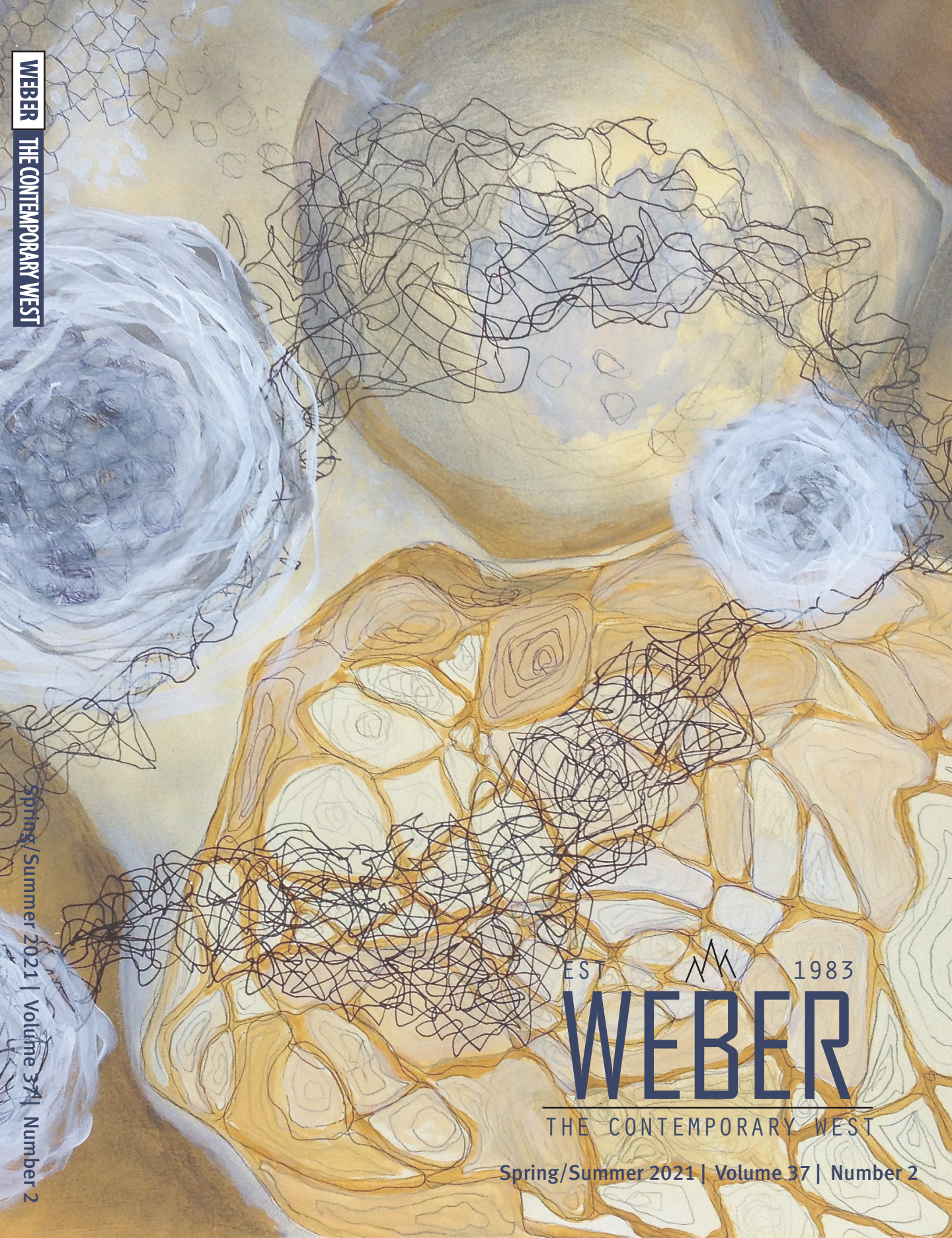


WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Spring/Summer 2021 | Volume 37 | Number 2

EST 1983

WEBER

THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Spring/Summer 2021 | Volume 37 | Number 2

EST 1983
WEBER
THE CONTEMPORARY WEST

Deriving from the German **weben**—to weave—**weber** translates into the literal and figurative "weaver" of textiles and texts. Weber are the artisans of textures and discourse, the artists of the beautiful fabricating the warp and weft of language into everchanging patterns. **Weber**, the journal, understands itself as a regional and global tapestry of verbal and visual texts, a weave made from the threads of words and images.

Farewell, Nikki!



Dr. Nikki Hansen, 1938-2020

We want to say a warm thank you and goodbye to Dr. Nikki Hansen, the founding editor of *Weber Studies in the Arts & Sciences*, who passed in the fall of 2020. With characteristic wit, she observed in her obituary: "Rumors of my death are true. I have prepared this myself, so that my creditors may be informed, and so others may be spared the duty of praise. Say on that eventually I learned humility and patience . . . . Grieve only for the slaughter of the English language." With a further twinkle in the eye, she noted that her education taught her "to abhor the split infinitives we see everywhere now," and that there ought not to be a "'viewing,'" instead requesting of mourners at her private grave to "toss in the remote control and a bowl of popcorn."

Let us, therefore, give Nikki at least a literary viewing in the journal she founded 38 years ago and recognize her singular dedication to the English language. As the associate dean of Humanities at Weber State College in 1983, she had the vision to bring into being a professional journal that has since morphed into, simply, *Weber*. And while the journal, after several iterations, now bears the subtitle "The Contemporary West" to designate its dual regional and hemispheric focus, we have tried to stay true to Nikki's original intent. In an interview with the WSU student newspaper *The Signpost*, she observed that her hope for the journal was to feature contributions "based on the author's research and professional experience, but be comprehensible to people in other disciplines," and that, above all, the writing should be in "plain English and not fancy jargon." Occasional slippages aside, we have tried to honor that vision and strive for communication across disciplinary boundaries. Thank you, Nikki, for your foundational leadership.

Front Cover: Lydia Gravis, *Diagnosis*, 22" x 22," acrylic, graphite, felt marker on paper, 2011.



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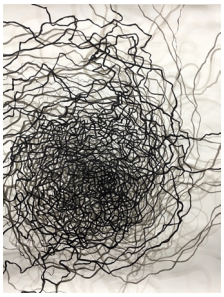
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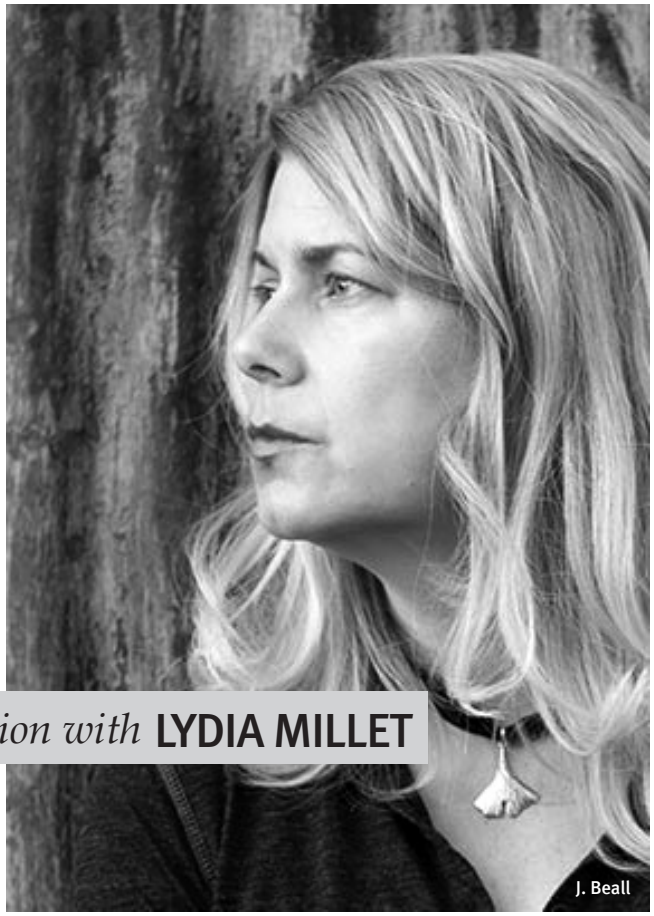


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TELLING STORIES OF ANIMALS, CLIMATE CHANGE, AND OURSELVES—



A Conversation with **LYDIA MILLET**

ALICE MULDER

INTRODUCTION

Reading through the reviews and descriptions of Lydia Millet's books, it becomes clear that her writing covers a wide array of settings, moods, and situations – sweet, sad, dire, dangerous, fantastical, ludicrous, quotidian, comedic, you name it – but her remarkable talent with language, and her telling consideration of the human condition and our relationships to each other and the wider and wilder world we inhabit, rings clear in her work. She has written 13 books for adults and four for younger readers, including the three-book Dissenters *series and* Pills and Starships*, each of which relates through eco-fantasy/dystopia to the impacts of global warming. Her most recent book for adults,* A Children's Bible *(2020), also engages with the climate crisis and youth outrage. She's been a Guggenheim Fellow and the winner of the PEN Center Award for fiction (2003). She was also a Pulitzer Prize Finalist (2010) for her short story collection* Love in Infant Monkeys.

A native of Massachusetts and raised in Toronto, Canada, she lives in the southwest where she has worked for many years as a writer and editor with the Center for Biological Diversity, an organization focused on the conservation of the diversity of life on Earth.

Millet came to Weber State University in Ogden, Utah, for a brief stint in February 2020 as a visiting writer in the Department of English. I had the privilege to speak with her about her writing and the matters of climate change, conservation, and conveying our need to act – topics central to my own academic interests and role as director of the Sustainability Practices and Research Center at Weber State University.

This interview has been edited for clarity and length.

CONVERSATION

Your books deal with lots of different topics, both serious and comical, but clearly the natural world, human-nature relationships, and particularly human-animal relationships are frequent elements across much of your writing. You have also worked for the Center for Biological Diversity for a long time. What are the origins of your focus in this realm?

Well, I wrote a brief column for the *New York Times* a few years ago about animals and their role in childhood—their ubiquity in our surroundings when we're children. And about how we're taught to leave the realm of the beasts when we hit puberty and focus on the realm of men, turn away from the other animals as a childish fancy. You know, I just never—like many people who love wildlife and critters and pets—I just never turned away completely. I was less interested in the natural world for a while, from puberty through my early twenties. At some point I realized I was always going back to the love, the love people have for animals. I don't think I'm in any way unique in that. It's just that we forget our

love; that love of the others fades into the background because we're taught to be so focused on human social life. It took me a while to be able to write about animals. I didn't much, in my early books, because they're hard to write about.

You do have wonderful animal elements in characterizations and comparisons of people, in addition to the inclusion of, or encounters with, various creatures themselves.

First of all, they're everywhere in our metaphor. They're everywhere in our languages. But it's difficult in fiction not to use animals just as ornaments or as proxies for people, which is fine, you know, in children's literature, and it's not wrong to do those things. But we have a tendency, in literary fiction as well, to use them as belongings and deploy them as furnishings or decor—sometimes for humor, sometimes as a form of shorthand. Because it's very difficult to write about them in other ways. I've always felt conflicted in abandoning the subjectivity or interiority of animals in fiction. We feel presumptuous in approaching their interior lives, interposing our own sensibility into the minds of those we don't know, and that's rational. Of course we don't know other people as well as we think we do, often, either. But the fact that people can talk assists us in representing them in fiction. I've tried recently to write about other animals in ways I don't think are presumptuous in terms of the fictional animal selves, but that also don't reduce them to decor. For me that involves trying to think about the mystery of their difference as an end and a good in itself: that you don't need mental interpolation to love the other. Not that it's not permissible or interesting or whatever, interpretation of the minds of other animals, but that we don't have to believe we're experts on them to love them and to speak that love.

How do you see your work in the conservation realm for the Center for Biological Diversity and your fiction writing relating?

For years I didn't write directly about matters of conservation because I wanted to steer clear of polemic and didacticism. Plus, it's difficult to write about things as critically important as climate change, extinction, the loss of species, species loneliness that exist on a macrosocial, systemic, almost staticky background. Grandiose and massive. That sort of grandiosity is a minefield.

I can appreciate that. It makes sense that early on you might feel that way.

And it's still difficult. It's always difficult to negotiate. I don't believe literary fiction has to have a coldness as some have proposed, that the voice has to be agenda-less in some way. I think that's specious.

I've always felt conflicted in abandoning the subjectivity or interiority of animals in fiction. We feel presumptuous in approaching their interior lives, interposing our own sensibility into the minds of those we don't know, and that's rational. Of course we don't know other people as well as we think we do, often, either. But the fact that people can talk assists us in representing them in fiction. I've tried recently to write about other animals in ways I don't think are presumptuous in terms of the fictional animal selves, but that also don't reduce them to decor. For me that involves trying to think about the mystery of their difference as an end and a good in itself: that you don't need mental interpolation to love the other.

I want to ask you about the role of environmental literature and environmental humanities writ large in helping communities understand and act on addressing major challenges. Research tells us that in order to nudge people to adopt sustainable behaviors, knowledge is important, but not sufficient. Emotional and experiential connections are more powerful. Good books like yours are emotional journeys, but they're also vicarious experiences with different characters and contexts. You said you're not necessarily opposed to advocacy in fiction, but do you ever consider yourself an activist novelist?

In a way I think all the work I really like is activist or has been that historically, without necessarily setting out to be that. I find work to be trivial that's purely domestic or purely relationships, so for me there's always abstraction in real literature, the evocation of a certain silence of thought. For me all of those are pathways to understanding beyond the self. I think good fiction achieves that silence, into which readers can inject their own. And some of that has a political or social aspect. Even the generation of empathy within readers, if it's great enough, can begin to enact the sort of change that's difficult to quantify in the soul and the self. We in the arts and the humanities have had a tendency, over the past few years, to ask questions like, is fiction up to the task of addressing climate change and extinction and all those things? I think we can write about these things all we want, and I think people increasingly are reading and writing about these great, enveloping interhuman issues.

Which in itself seems really important, actually.

For a long time it was as though climate, and I would argue to a greater extent extinction, has been—I don't want to say taboo, because that's not quite right—but just this sort of darkness whose name we could not speak. Of course the science has been out there for many years. Sort of marginal groups like scientists and environmentalists and various intellectuals and progressives have been interested in this as a great pending crisis, right, and also there have been disinformation campaigns that have been really very powerful and successful, as we know, by the fossil fuel industry, which continue to this day in some form. Even though they've acknowledged acts of suppression in the past. So I get asked this question, as does my friend Jenny Offill, who has a new novel out that touches on climate, called *Weather*. People asked us both, "Do you think there's been a failure of literature to address these matters in the past?" Amitav Ghosh, and all that. And whatever your answer is to that, really, what we need is law and policy immediately. It's nice that we have ideas about art representing this, but the timescale…

We're under a deadline.

Yeah, we're not going to convert billions with our little books and stories. I'm sorry. What we need is action, and law and policy, and people in positions of leadership who aren't idiots and climate deniers.

In relation to the need for action, do you think people may be better able to examine their own reality when they're taken to extremes of, say, fantasy and science fiction? Particularly I'm

For years I didn't write directly about matters of conservation because I wanted to steer clear of polemic and didacticism. Plus, it's difficult to write about things as critically important as climate change, extinction, the loss of species, species loneliness that exist on a macrosocial, systemic, almost staticky background. Grandiose and massive. That sort of grandiosity is a minefield.

thinking of the kind of dystopia you created with respect to global warming in Pills and Starships*, the societal response and the various powers of good and evil working there. What do you think about that? Does going into these other realms allow us to see something in ourselves, in our world, that maybe we don't see until it's pushed to that edge?*

I think that's a good question and a complicated one. You could say, in almost a facile way, that the young right now, this youth, of which Greta Thunberg is a part, and my daughter, even—sixteen year olds and on up into I'm going to say the younger millennials (I'm not sure about the older ones)—are being positively radicalized. And that there's this correlation between blockbuster dystopian fiction and their generation of consumers. So you could maybe make a connection that there's a receptiveness to these drastic realities from that. But that's purely anecdotal. For many, many years as a culture we've poured big money into extreme blockbuster presentations of, say, various apocalypses in the movies. They'd be huge for years, and we've exported them worldwide. But I can't say I feel like those kinds of movies about the asteroid apocalypse or even the ice age apocalypse—and there's a long line of those vehicles—I cannot stipulate that they've brought enlightenment on any pressing social matters to any large population.

That's a good point. Maybe it's not so influential, but I did wonder if the realm of reading, and that personal space and the wanderings of one's own mind when you're reading, is any different from the hour and a half blockbuster film.

I totally agree that it's different, because of that interiority and the sort of one-mind approach speaking to the privacy of two minds. And I do think the quality of reading is exceptionally different from movies. Still it's hard to assert any causal relation consistently between literature and readers' politics. It's like the video game violence thing: there's conflicting information on how it affects the mind. I think we all know it's not great to stick our kids in front of first-person shooters twenty hours a day. That seems pretty clear for a number of reasons. But we can't say that the imaginative flights of fancy of art or film make monsters or saints out of any of us.

Keeping with the youth focus, I was drawn to the books you've done for younger readers and the Dissenters *series.*

Oh, thank you for reading that. You're one of five people.

I hope more will get to it. Maybe it's because I have kids, but it was also apparent that global warming was present in those books, and it sounds like maybe that's true of your upcoming book?

It's about climate and extinction...

And audience-wise, is it for younger readers?

Oh no. I vowed never to write another children's book.

Really?

Truly. I really had fun with ***Pills and Starships***, and the ***Dissenters*** series began as a summer project that I was writing for my kids. I also wanted to write about ocean acidification because no one was paying attention to it, and the oceans are majestic and amazing. And I wanted to pretend I was back on Cape Cod so I could write myself into that. But I feel—I don't know, I feel I don't approach—I'm not the right person for children's stories.

How was it different approaching that writing for you?

I was willing to be more of an advocate, as you can tell. But also kids aren't bothered by plots that deal directly with problems in the world, the way maybe the literary and adult publishing cultures are. They're very bothered by fiction that

approaches problems head-on. But with kids' lit it's absolutely fine to be that way. I love kids' books—I grew up with *The Chronicles of Narnia* and I love the work of Philip Pullman. Some sci-fi, too...

Is that what you read as a kid?

I read the old kind of classics as a kid. Edith Nesbit and Edward Eager and C.S. Lewis. I only came to Pullman later because he, of course, wrote later. And I really loved Dr. Seuss and still do. I really think that Dr. Seuss is a genius. I still love all that, and so I thought, why can't I write it? Even though no one was asking for it from me.

It's interesting that the didactic aspect is okay for young adult readers somehow but not for adults – we all need to learn. And yet at the same time the climate material you're wrestling with in the Dissenters *series is not easy stuff. The forces and the way you imagine and present them, it's scary. I'm not sure my daughter's up for that one yet. So it's direct in a way that I would also think you have to wonder, at what point can kids access that?*

Exactly, and that calculation is one I don't think I'm either capable of, or interested in, making. I never calculate, I never think of my audience or my readers when I'm writing, and with literature for children, if it's not naturally what you write, if it's not how you came to writing, then I think it's forced. So, for example, plot necessarily plays a bigger role in children's literature and YA (young adult) literature, and I'm just not particularly interested in plot. And so that became very baroque in those books. The third one was frenetic and not perfectly structured, which made me feel itchy after the fact. But it's the case for perhaps all my books that are written for more mature audiences, or whatever you want to call adults, the more literary, language-oriented books. There are always mistakes to regret after publication. There's hardly a book I've written that I wouldn't go back and make better now if only someone let me.

You know, I really enjoyed the series, and particularly the end. The bodies of ancients? I love what you do with that! I now have a new way of thinking and imagining earth elements and those fossils we call fuels. And thinking about the power of the past and the power of these organisms, and I think it goes back to what you said about animals – how do you talk about them? How do you try to represent or understand them? I was thinking of this marvelous sense of power, not only to the various creatures as they come and go, whether they're related to the people or not, like the shapeshifter ones, but also to youth. I think the world of kids in that book is so interesting.

You know, you're literally the first person to mention that book to me.

Really?

Yeah. So, thank you.

I was sucked in. I was really intrigued particularly with the sustainability lens that I have.

I do like the urge in the book to explore the matter of fossil fuels—the beings that are in those. Because I don't think we talk enough about, or acknowledge, the organic form of oil and gas. That these are made from the bodies of the dead. People forget that, I think. We live in a petroleum culture. It's everywhere and it's in everything, right? Everything we touch. And as some of us wish desperately to escape that culture and move toward something else, I think it's also really important to acknowledge our love for what petrochemicals have made. And it is actually love—it's not just routine, but love for, and dependence on, this substance that has radically transformed our civilization. So let's not reductively say, "oil is bad." In the 20th and 21st centuries oil has given us our lives, really—the only life we know, in a certain sense. Some cultures more than others, our culture particularly. It's important to be able to say that and then to say, with equal strength, "It's time for oil to vanish into history." We have to leave these ancient creatures behind. We have

to leave the rest of them in the ground and move on to a new culture. But it's a radical shift that's required, and it has to be governments and corporations that push that shift hard. And culture has to be involved, obviously.

Right. I think everyone and all sectors are needed in this effort to shift, but I'd like to come back to youth for a moment and the issue of climate despair. As you know, youth today – our kids and older, the millennials – they've had their whole lives, as pointed out to me by my students, living under this umbrella of global warming and their future is feeling bleak. I acknowledge that but also flip the issue on its head and say, "Yes, it is. It's a big challenge and a complex issue, but as we work away at this we're improving so many things that are balled up together." I tell them that because so many environmental and socioeconomic issues are tied to our dependence on fossil fuels – extraction through burning and the industries and systems connected to them – that as we move away from them, as we must, as we're using smarter, cleaner and more just kinds of energy, we're ultimately going to make improvements in all the other areas, with agriculture and food, our soil and water pollution, ocean health and human health, equity and air quality and habitat conservation and biodiversity, etc.

What are your thoughts regarding writing and our need for seeing a different future, this big shift? Have you ever considered writing a novel or stories that were set in that future where we've done better?

It's a good question, how to deal constructively with despair. I address that in this novel that I have coming out, *A Children's Bible*. I don't know that a lot of fiction writers have tried, yet, to encapsulate the righteous anger of the young. The book's very much about that youth anger and despair. The challenge is to write about these complex issues without tamping down hope, and how to write about them passionately and convincingly and persuasively without generating fatalism or apathy or paralysis.

I do like the urge in the book to explore the matter of fossil fuels – the beings that are in those. Because I don't think we talk enough about, or acknowledge, the organic form of oil and gas. That these are made from the bodies of the dead. People forget that, I think. We live in a petroleum culture. It's everywhere and it's in everything, right? Everything we touch. And as some of us wish desperately to escape that culture and move toward something else, I think it's also really important to acknowledge our love for what petrochemicals have made. And it is actually love – it's not just routine, but love for, and dependence on, this substance that has radically transformed our civilization.

Is it maybe more powerful to imagine what we are striving for rather than portraying in fiction what we are fighting against?

I think it's much easier to imagine our culture transformed by renewables than it is to imagine stopping the extinction crisis. Even though climate is a huge multiplier and driver of extinction, climate over the long term can be grappled with under certain conditions—perhaps. Then again, some people argue that once the Arctic ice is gone, we're done. There's a lot of despair among scientists about these developments. But I do honestly think that the way we have to discuss things like extinction is on a creaturely basis. We have to pay attention to each being and seek to save it.

Which is the work of the center you're working with, right?

Yes. I think we need to be telling the story of each animal and plant, telling it in the best way we can, almost as a form of worship. It's almost that a new religion of some kind is required, even if, in a sense, it's a secular one. We have to fight for a new way of adoring the natural world. Because we won't save who we are if we lose the others, even if we retain a remnant human population, going forward in some dark scenario. We won't be who we are if we lose everything with which we've co-evolved. We can't even imagine the absence of all that. And we're already living in a world we've never lived in before, and that will be so much grimmer if we allow these losses to continue. I also feel like, although singular stories of extinction are told in the media with some regularity, they haven't coalesced in the public imagination yet as something about which we need to be profoundly concerned, that we need to protect and defend these other forms of life as we protect and defend our own children. For our own children and for the future of all of us.

Because it's all connected, it all comes around to us, too.

I'm not sure what the answer is yet in terms of the stories we tell. We have to discover that, but it's important that we tell these stories visibly, and that maybe we start to understand that our humanism, much as we like aspects of it, is also a dangerous force. Instead we need a kind of posthumanism, where we move beyond the merely human, if we want to preserve this *Homo sapiens* critter we're so proud of being. There's no reason we should only worship ourselves or gods who look like us.

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Indeed. Thank you very much for your time.



Alice Mulder (Ph.D., University of Colorado, Boulder) is associate professor of geography and the director of the Sustainability Practices and Research Center (SPARC) at Weber State University. The center works to further both sustainability education and practice on campus and in the community. She serves as the co-chair of the Environmental Initiatives Committee and is heavily involved in sustainability efforts across campus. Her current academic research interests sit broadly in human-environment interactions, particularly environmental sustainability, sustainability literacy, and land conservation. Her hope is for sustainability to become a lens of habit in how we live our lives.

ACTIVISM, MYSTICISM, AND HOPE—

DAVID SUMNER &
MADELEINE GLENN


Yogesh Simpson

A Conversation with DAVID JAMES DUNCAN

Twenty Years Later

INTRODUCTION

Much like the mountains and forests he inhabits and wanders, David James Duncan is a novelist, essayist, activist, fishing monk who has been sculpted and shaped by the rivers and salmonids of the northwest. A deep commitment to these places and communities infuses his work. His first novel – the award-winning River Why *– has gained an almost cult-like status among fly-fishers and others who care deeply about landscapes and rollicking narrative. He has also published* The Brothers K, *a novel that draws on his Seventh-day Adventist upbringing and follows a Washington family torn apart by religion but brought together by baseball.*

In addition to fiction, he has published many essays and collections, notably River Teeth, God Laughs and Plays, My Story As Told By Water, *and, with Rick Bass,* The Heart of the Monster. The Heart of the Monster *was "written in seven weeks" as a rapid response to a direct threat to the Columbia, Snake, Clearwater, Bitterroot, Big Blackfoot, and other rivers by Big Oil and Big Ore. This collection gives the reader a taste of Duncan's activism.*

Over the years, he has written many essays and delivered many addresses advocating for the preservation of the rivers, forests, fish, and ecosystems of his home. Duncan writes with humor and originality, combining his love of wisdom traditions and landscapes with a wry look at human follies and passions. He is just completing Sun House, *a massive project that combines seven shorter novels and is forthcoming from Little Brown & Company. This interview revisits many topics first addressed in a conversation Duncan and the interviewer had twenty years ago, which appeared in the Winter 2002 (Vol. 19, No. 2) edition of* Weber. *Duncan currently lives with his family along Lolo Creek in western Montana.*

Last time we talked about how when you moved here from Oregon – years ago – there was a community of writers for you and a community of ceramic artists for your wife. How has this community been?

The community here is warm. Missoula is changing fast, but not the way Portland is. (I might be the only person you know who moved out of Portland seven times before our 1993 move to Montana stuck.) We love it here. Our circle of friends is intimate. I've been a recluse because of *Sun House*, a novel made out of seven short novels. What an idiot you have to be to write seven books in one (laughter), so you only get paid once for all seven! But it's my nature. In my imagination, beginnings and ends are arbitrary. Life is a continuum, unfolding forever—a worldview that is a curse in practical ways, but perhaps a blessing in ultimate ways. And my friends remain intimate despite my hermitude.

We also talked about literature and activism…

Yes. The activism has mostly come to an end. In my life as an activist I've been involved in two causes that resulted in victory. One kept cyanide heap-leach gold mines off the Big Blackfoot River. The other victory was to keep Exxon Mobil from turning the barge routes and highways following the Columbia, Snake, Clearwater, Lochsa, Bitterroot, and Blackfoot Rivers from becomng a major industrial corridor connecting Southeast Asian industrial countries and the Tar Sands of Alberta, Canada. In opposition to Exxon, Rex Tillerson, Brian Schweitzer (former Governor of Montana), Butch Otter (former Governor of Idaho), et al., Rick Bass and I wrote a book in seven weeks, believe it or not. It's called *The Heart of the Monster.* It was a true activist emergency, and I expected to lose. But by damn we didn't. Big Oil's so-called "megaload route" along our wild and scenic rivers is no more, and the rivers remain wild and scenic. It was a harrowing project and it paid me zilch. But I was able to pay my crew.

So last time we talked you had published in Headwaters *the parable about the rancher.*

Oh, that's right! A big mining corporation had decided the 1872 Mining Law gave them the rights to some mineral deposits in a Montana rancher's knees, and they were preparing to drill it out of him. (Laughter) That's how crazy that obscenely superannuated mining law felt when it invited vicious Canadian corporations to waltz into Montana and target the Blackfoot River and the legacy of *A River Runs Through It*.

Mining human knees is pretty crazy.

So are those godawful mining corporations. Google the Mount Polley mine disaster, then ask yourself why Canada continues to do this to its rivers, its salmon, its First Nations people, its children, its wildlife, and its insufferably smug self.

We had talked about the tension between activism and art and what you wanted to write and what you felt compelled to write because of your community and place. How, in the last twenty years, has that unfolded?

I turned to fiction, to the consolations of the contemplative life, and to a few of the more describable mystical experiences I've had in my life. The laws of the corporate world are so stacked against activists and idealists that the playing field had come to feel like a vertical cliff we were trying to climb, while insane political leaders and corporate lobbyists stood at the top of the cliff throwing rocks down on us. *The Heart of the Monster* was my last such effort. I have turned to fiction and memoir immersed in the natural world and the people and places I love, diminished

though they are by the industrial assault. I'd rather end my life expressing love than doing battle with inhuman human beings incapable of empathy or even a rudimentary understanding that nature is a tapestry and that the threads they're rampantly pulling out of the tapestry are unmaking everybody's world.

The one exception I will always make is for wild salmon and steelhead. I follow the fate of Pacific salmon because I fell in love with them as a five-year-old kid. Wild salmon gave me my career via *The River Why*. And I lived with them so long that I can't stop tracking and loving them. I'm done with the kind of activist speaking and essay writing I did in my forties. Speaking truth to power came to feel futile to me when I realized the people in power had no interest in scientific fact, moral integrity, or eloquence. But wild salmon continue to swim in my bloodstream. Even in extinction. In my heart of hearts live some preposterous hopes, planted there by people far more awake than me. A great favorite is Julian of Norwich. She had visionary exchanges with Christ, and quoted him as saying this:

"He said not, ***Thou shalt not be tempested, though shalt not be travailed, thou shalt not be diseased***; but he said, ***Thou shalt not be overcome. And all manner of wounded and vanished things shall be well***."

Vanished things returned to us, and for those newly understood things to be respected and nurtured by a humbled version of us? That's a lot to hope for, and it would take many millennia to fulfill such a hope. But the wild salmon inside me are swimming toward that hope at all times. They know no other way. And when I look at the situation humanity and our planet are in, I see no other way either. We've gone so far in a terrible direction that only a completely committed, empathetic and loving desperation can help us now.

How is Sun House *going?*

The only thing I have to say about this book at this time is that it is almost finished, and it has been the most difficult project of my life. The experience of writing ***Sun House*** has felt like a boxing match in which I've been coldcocked at least five times. But literature is a funny art form. You can lose the fight over and over and in the end still get the task done.

One other thing I'll say: working with the legendary Michael Pietsch as my editor has been a steady balm, and frequently a joy.

Do you feel activism has cost you in any way?

Yes, but it has helped me in some ways, too. Thomas Mann defined novelists as people for whom writing is much more difficult than it is for other people. I agree. Long-form fiction is

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particularly difficult for me because I'm slow and I'm a perfectionist. Activist writing is far easier for me. I have known perfectionist writers whose monomania and narcissism have been the ruin of their families. I was determined not to be one of those kinds of writers. So when my daughters were growing up, I did a lot of activist writing and public speaking in order to be more present to them when I was home.

The kinds of essays that are in ***My Story is Told By Water*** or ***God Laughs and Plays*** grew organically, and quite easily, out of all the public speaking I was doing. Because of ***The Brothers K*** and ***The River Why***, I have been invited to a lot of Christian campuses, and I like to lightly bite the hand that feeds me. Not chomp it! But I can't not treat a certain kind of conservative Christianity without a sense of humor. So, I had all this material I'd collected from all those campus visits and talks, and suddenly the fruit was ripe on the trees. It took me eleven months to put together ***River Teeth***; it took me six months to put together ***My Story As Told By Water***; and it took me three months to put together ***God Laughs and Plays***.

Really?

Yep. The words had collected year by year. I've done a lot of gigs. Something like 800. Sorting through the best of my public talks and essays, I realized I only needed to rewrite them in a less conversational voice and put them in an order with good narrative pull. ***God Laughs and Plays*** was then a national bestseller for a little while and a northwest bestseller for a long time. And ***My Story as Told By Water*** was a National Book Award finalist, which was a pretty fun party. ***River Teeth*** helped inspire a fine literary magazine of the same name. Those books did well for what they were. They also created a kind of work that I could detach from at the end of the day or the road trip, and enjoy time spent with my family and friends. Including rivers I consider friends.

And there was another payoff. When a bunch of us were fighting against Exxon Mobil for our rivers, and Rick Bass and I were writing ***The Heart of the Monster***, I found it so hard to put my mind on the horrors of the Tar Sands and Exxon's hideous plans that I could only start a workday by spending an hour doing what Christians term

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Mysticism and spirituality and a sense of wonder at the world permeate your work from the very beginning.

And it's very much still there, thank You, Unseen Unborn Guileless Perfection.

And then you had this essay you presented last fall, "Hearts Like Mountains," which you first delivered as a talk to representatives of fifteen Native American tribes and First Nations at "One River, Ethics Matter – the 5th annual international ethics conference on the past and future of the Columbia River." There are a couple of things you say in there. One is, you quote Wendell Berry's claim that there are only two kinds of places: sacred and desecrated. You also talk about how Christianity and Native Peoples have both been

given a rite through which to enact gratitude – the Eucharist.

I'm glad you picked up on that. I was speaking to a crowd of mostly native people involved in renegotiating the Columbia River Treaty between the United States and Canada, which is vital to them, and right before we gathered, involving great effort and travel for all of them, Trump and Trudeau both blew off the tribes and First Nations with equal arrogance. The Natives' graciousness, and interest in sharing their individual efforts on behalf of this great watershed, despite that insult the two governments had thrown in their faces, moved me to the core. It also made me very happy to be able to tell them that in the annual return of their salmon to their ancient river canyons, they are enacting a rite that is as holy as the Eucharist, and far more ancient: they've stayed true to their living Eucharist creatures for *ten thousand years*. And to ask them to give up on those salmon because dams and industry have made salmon survival almost impossible is like asking Pope Francis and Mother Teresa to give up on the bread and wine they imbibe at every Mass because for them it is the Body and the Blood.

That is exactly what I want to ask about, "The Eucharist of the tribe," which I thought was powerful. So, how do you define mysticism and wonder and spirituality? How does it enrich human lives and enrich our relationships with others?

I'm going to be concrete on this one. A friend of mine for twenty-six years, a psychotherapist in our community, finds her solace in the wild places and amazing mountain ranges of Montana, and the way humanity connected to those mountains before the European blitz. Eight years ago this friend emailed me and said, "I'm starting a little contemplative group. We'll meet at my house. Just seven people, all of whom have some kind of spiritual practice. I have no idea how it's going to go, but I just want to try this." I said, "I'm in."

We showed up for our first group meeting, an amazing little circle of people. And we're still meeting after eight years. We start and end our two hours together with ten minutes of silence, we only begin to speak when we feel something rise up out of that shared opening silence, and the talk that has resulted has been the most cogent, dignified, sustained exchanges about personal spiritual experience that I've ever been a part of. No one leading us. No preacher, no hymn, no offering plate, no expenses. Just empathetic companionship and the peace or struggle of our silences. When Wendell Berry read *God Laughs and Plays* back in 2007, we corresponded some about our respective searches for a living church in a time when the buildings called "churches" seem to us to have grown hollow, or spiritually damaging. Our little living room circle inspired me to write to Wendell saying I had finally found my church—as Wendell seemed to find his in the woods and streams of his own farm when he began spending the Sabbath writing Sabbath poems.

I find this interesting in a couple of ways. One, due to that mysticism that we are talking about and how connection to wonder creates an obligation to the more-than-human.

The *obligation* I feel toward the more-than-human rises out of the intense gratitude I feel toward it. Without the more-than-human, humans can't exist! How so many humans have lost sight of this boggles my mind. But maybe I've had unfair advantages because my love for the wild world began so early in life.

Unspeakable gratitude first descended during a long time in the woods, but even more through early fly fishing experiences, and even more in outright experiential mysteries I'd have on the edge of sleep after a long day immersed in the living world outside.

How do you separate the mystical you find useful or penetrating from the other stuff that drives you kind of crazy?

I wrote of this in *God Laughs and Plays*, *The River Why*, and *The Brothers K*, and those three books are my long answer to that question. The shorter truth is Christian indoctrination simply never took with me. I had to find a different way. I remember being four years old in Sabbath School, ordered by the teacher to make my fingers into "sunbeams for Jesus" while we sang "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," and young as I was, all I could think was, "Why would anyone ask us to do such a thing?" The ladies running the class appeared to get off on our cuteness in some weird way, but I didn't feel cute, nor did I feel I was doing anything connected to or pleasing to Jesus. Whereas at age eight, the first time I walked up a trout stream with a fly rod in my hand, I felt I was following a wild path into the kingdom of heaven Jesus said is within us all. It enveloped me on all sides in a sensory, visual way that led to a kind of disappearance: only the beautiful trout stream *kingdom* was present. I was part of it, indistinguishable from it. A year later, I found a stream I could bike to from home and became able to cross a threshold from predatory energy to self-disappearance to a basking in every element of the natural world. It was thanks to free-flowing streams and the *kingdom* that wild riparians are—not churches—that the mysterious phrase *the peace that passes understanding* began to mean something to me.

Long story short, the good fisherman Jesus never drove me crazy for an instant. The Christian religion of my youth was what drove me crazy. I felt guilt-free to realize I needn't be a Christian to start tracking the spiritual signposts described by Jesus.

When *The River Why* and *The Brothers K* caused me to be invited to a lot of Christian campuses, I enjoyed what a riddle this made me. Christians loved those two books, then there stood the author admitting he loves Jesus but also saying he isn't a Christian. It didn't make the kind of evangelicals who feel they have a stranglehold on All Truth very happy. But it was an interesting starting point for a lot of fascinating and creative conversation with Christians wise enough to be concerned with their own deepest experiences, not just a bunch of old stories that have been reduced to a kind of life insurance policy.

If I don't misinterpret, when you say you love Jesus it's in the same way you love wisdom traditions coming from any place?

I love Jesus in a multitude of ways here in my own Western home place. The mystics have spoken of him as if of a beloved brother, a groom, a lover, a pal to publicans and sinners, and their own essential self. I'd like to add that I love him, and other great spiritual figures, in much the way that I love the Eucharist of the tribes. The wild salmon, their all-giving life-sustaining sacrifice, is total. For me, wild salmon are a reminder that Jesus is all about such a sacrifice, and Jesus is a reminder that wild salmon are Christ-like. Christian religion all too often loses all sight of this. But Christian mystics don't. The mystics remain wonderful to me, because an experiential mystic is not a dogmatic faith cop hounding others with a nine pound Bible that doubles as a truncheon. They're people true to their own depths, and to the greater-than-human knowledge that self-forgetfulness gains access to.

In *Sun House* there's a man who starts a street religion called Dumpster Catholicism based on the fact that the religion of his childhood, Roman Catholicism, reduced the Divine Mystery to a "God of Reason"—an Infinite Oxymoron if ever there was one. They then colonized or erased or robbed or pillaged or falsely accused or sexually violated such a vast number of wondrous people and tribes and cultures and women, consigning them, so to speak, to the RC Dumpster, that my character comes to suspect the spiritual contents of that dumpster may be greater than the contents of the Church. He then starts going dumpster-diving for wondrous things that the RC Church threw out as trash—and scores spiritual treasure galore!

So how do we beat it? If there is sacred and desecrated land as you quote Wendell Berry saying, is there a way to re-sacralize? A way to make land sacred again?

In *Sun House* there's an old woman, Gladys Wax by name, whom the main character meets in high mountains. He fell in love with a small range of mountains in Montana, and somehow she finds him there every year. They have conversations at night by the fire, then she's gone. One night she speaks of what she calls "starfish work." In the right conditions, a starfish can regrow all its legs and its central disk from a single severed limb. The old woman claims wisdom traditions can do this too, so long as we remain in touch with some living fraction of the world that once housed the traditions, and visit these remnant places often. A number of people have written about mysterious mountain figures like Gladys—Jack Gilbert, William Stafford, John Steinbeck—and many high mountain travelers. Sometimes we see silhouettes on mountain ridges and moments later we don't see them. What just happened? Was that shape an animal or a human, or is my mind just playing tricks on me? My main mountain character grows obsessed with such figures and comes to sense their existence is important because "starfish work" is vital. His interest in such will-o-the-wisps earns him the nickname "the holy goat . . ."

The holy GOAT? Ha!

Sherman Alexie named me that when I had a goatee! (Laughter) It struck me as spiritually honest, so I gave it to the novel.

I was drawn to mountains early and have studied the often mysterious people who inhabit them. Gary Snyder and many other Buddhists share a great fondness for Zen Master Dōgen's scripture, "Mountains and Waters Sutra," which I, too, revere. It's an incredible take on mountains and rivers being enlightened beings capable of bestowing great knowledge upon humble pilgrims. I reread it at least once a year.

My feeling, and that of river rats and mountain-lovers far wiser than me, is that there is a world inside the world we inhabit, and that this might be the same realm Jesus calls *the kingdom of heaven*, and because it is located inside us we need to turn, internally, in the opposite direction we've been facing our entire lives. It's the inward location that opens the possibility of making contact with this mysterious realm. When you ask *what is mysticism*, it's impossible to answer unless we turn away from the theological and abstractly philosophical to the experiential. *Sun House* is loaded with depictions of the kinds of hard-to-describe epiphanies, visions, dreams, or inner experiences many of us have, but don't have a name for. I'm not trying to create a vocabulary for something obtuse. I'm trying to depict the humans in a long novel as creatures as wonderfully perceptive as the people I actually know, even though the depth of such people is mysterious by necessity. We can't catch spiritual thunderheads in the gopher trap of American English.

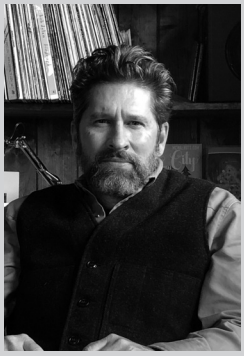
So one last question – do you have hope? I mean, you spoke of hope earlier, but we are in this really tough place as a species. Our

Whether I have hope depends on what I'm asked to be hopeful about. The American nation state? Not so much. I'm on the outs with those conducting a biological and ecosystem holocaust in the faith that investing in a holocaust makes perfect business sense because my heck, you people, murdering our planet creates job, jobs, jobs! *But I have a lot of love in my heart, sometimes an astonishing amount of it, more than I can contain or describe.*

two-legged consciousness is facing our biggest ecological challenges, and we are facing that challenge with many other forms of life and beings. How do you think about that?

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But I have a lot of love in my heart, sometimes an astonishing amount of it, more than I can contain or describe. And one reason for that are my *many* amazing friends and acquaintances. At age eighteen I made a friend the first day of college who looked like a leprechaun, and a month later he invited me to a Trappist monastery where I met several spiritual heroes, and my friend became a Jesuit who went on to spend time with Mother Teresa in Calcutta, and stay with Bede Griffiths in India for a long time, then spend a decade in Nepal trying to help undo the Westernization of Hindu and Buddhist boys, and is now a Trappist monk at that same monastery leading an incredibly compassionate life. And he's just one of *many* such friends who, to varying degrees, are recovering and *experiencing* the human capacity for spiritual depth in this time of great loss and sorrow—and our losses and sorrows often increase the depth. Brooke and Terry Tempest Williams come to mind. Ross Gay. Joanna Macy. Martin Shaw. Fred Bahnson. The list is so long that to even start one just insults the hundreds I'd leave out. In my new novel *Sun House,* these kinds of people are out of the closet, and so are their hopes, disappearances, hard damned struggles, and sometimes fathomless depths.



David Thomas Sumner is professor of English and environmental studies at Linfield University where he chairs the English Department. He teaches courses in American literature, philosophy and literature, American nature writing, and literature of the American West. He has published in the fields of American literature, literature and the environment, rhetoric, and writing pedagogy. His work is particularly focused on the issues of literature and ethics. When not teaching or writing, he likes to either wander the wild places of the West with his family and his fly rod, or to play bluegrass with his bandmates in The Bootleg Jam.



Madeleine Glenn is a graduate student at Northwestern University where she is working towards her M.A. in counseling. She received her B.A. in English Literature at Linfield College where she was a research assistant under Dr. Sumner. When she is not a research assistant or student, she enjoys running outdoors, wine-tasting in the Northwest, and table-top gaming with her family and friends.

A TRUE BELIEVER—



A Conversation with KATE BERNHEIMER

SUSAN MCKAY

INTRODUCTION

For more than two decades, Kate Bernheimer has been a prominent practitioner, preservationist, and theorist of fairy tales, and since childhood also (what she calls) "a true believer" in the beauty, power, and value of the genre.

*From the beginning, her work has been innovative and inclusive, with endeavors such as an invited collection of essays by men on their favorite fairy tales (*Brothers & Beasts: An Anthology of Men on Fairy Tales, *2007); architectural analysis of the castles, towers, cottages, and strange little rooms where fairy tales take place; and currently, an oral folklore project to collect various versions of "Little Red Riding Hood" tales.*

Kate is a professor of English at the University of Arizona and highly sought after for lectures, readings, and interviews across the country.

CONVERSATION

Hello, Kate. Welcome, and thank you for being here with us today. One thing that impressed me in my preparation for this interview was the breadth of your work. There are four novels; two books of your own short stories; three children's picture books; four edited collections of original or reworked fairy tales, which you invited from prominent authors; numerous critical and theoretical articles and essays, as well as more short stories, published in various journals and collections; an annual journal, Fairy Tale Review*, of which you are the founder and editor; and an exciting recent collaborative undertaking with your brother, architect Andrew Bernheimer, on "fairy tale architecture." What do you see as the relationships among your different written genres, your editing, and your other activities? Does one endeavor feed the other? How are they related?*

As you have probably noticed, the organizing principle across all my work is fairy tales, so I actually don't think of any individual project as being in a genre that is different from any other writing I do. It's all writing, you could say. In terms of genre, I think of the genre of *books*. I know that there are more narrowly defined genres, and they are important to scholars and to many readers as well. But from my point of view as a practitioner (you could say artist, but I prefer practitioner) the genre is books. And they come in different forms. Sometimes those forms are dictated by marketing purposes for different readers, but that's up to the publisher, not me.

I love the quote by Maurice Sendak, the great children's book writer—and I've actually just ruined his quote—because he famously said, "I don't write for children, I write." So adapting Sendak's idea to genre, I know that everything I do starts with fairy tales and my love of reading. And I can truthfully say that my love of fairy tales is like the engine for everything I do. That's pretty much the way I think of it. When I'm sitting down to write, I don't decide, "Now I'm going to write a novel for adults." When I work with my brother on architecture projects, I guess that does fall under a different rubric, but Andy and I developed that project just through conversation about our love for houses and stories. Here again, we didn't set out planning to do something in the genre of architecture, if you will. I think differently about it than some people would, perhaps.

So they really are organic: all of the different things you create, they just naturally flow?

Yes. I think over the body of my whole life—or if you want to start professionally, my career—very organically. It probably looks otherwise, but in reality, I am not a very strategic person. I only do what I love to do in my writing. In our workplaces or in our obligations to our families or in society, we all have things that are mandated for us, that are our ethical obligation, or are part of our job—what we are paid for, how we earn our health insurance, if we're so lucky. But when it comes to me, with books and at the desk, I'm not strategic. I'm not thinking about outside constraints or expectations, so if there's any guiding principle, I would definitely call it organic, or intuitive; something definitely operating on a level of the unconscious.

I want to focus on your own creative work and start with your three novels about the Gold sisters: The Complete Tales of Ketzia Gold *(2001),* The Complete Tales of Merry Gold *(2006), and* The Complete Tales of Lucy Gold *(2011). I read Ketzia's book first because I was working chronologically, and I found that it very much shaped my view of the actions and character of the other two sisters, especially Meredith (Merry). So I wondered, why Ketzia first?*

Nobody has ever asked me that question, actually, so thank you. When I planned this trio of books, I genuinely thought of it as one book told in separate parts. So while it was actually a trilogy or a tryptic, I thought of it as like a *roman-fleuve* that was going to keep going. I began with Ketzia because at the time when I started the novel, I was perhaps most intimate already with the interior of that character. Though I knew there were three sisters and a brother, she was the nearest to me. Ketzia was the character who sort of initiated the novel. And then from there, I felt like I should go to the older sister, Merry, because I felt a nearness to her emotionally, and then again to the themes I wanted to explore or hoped to explore.

She is such a tragic character, and hers was the saddest book, I thought, in lots of ways. Did you have their personalities all in your mind to begin with?

It's interesting you think her book is the saddest book. I actually think they're all quite tragic, and I regret that in some ways. But it was what I could do at the time, and I *was* thinking very tragically about character. My thoughts on character have definitely evolved, as all our thoughts do. I didn't have the sisters and their personalities laid out and fully formed from the outset. I have to get to know a character as I write a book, so I certainly would never know in advance what they are like until I'm writing. But I did know three things: I knew that Ketzia was sad. Constitutionally sad. I knew that Merry was constitutionally angry.

I would have said "mean."

Meanness is an expression of her anger, and I like to think her anger is justified, but you're right, her expression of it is mean. I knew also that Lucy, the youngest sister, was very attached to goodness and lightness, and that was her tragic flaw. If you're so attached to goodness that you don't allow yourself to look around the corner to see what else is happening, then you are imperiled. And so she was quite imperiled by her lightness, if you will. So I knew that they were very committed constitutionally to their point of view: Ketzia was, in a way, committed to sadness, Merry to being mad, and Lucy to being glad and grateful. I did know that, and I knew that those responses to their life circumstances were the best they could do. All three of the sisters are imperfect as well as tragic.

I was very taken with the structure of the three novels. The short chapters alternate between an intimate first-person voice and a very matter-of-fact third person narrative about daily lives, jobs, and family relations. Then a short fairy tale will appear and connect to some other key element of action, character, or theme. Reviewers and critics have almost universally commented on and highly praised this narrative structure. I wondered about the genesis of this organization, especially the use of the fairy tales. Can you explain how it came to be?

I thought very hard about the structure. I really did. And I thought about it for years as I worked on the first novel, because I knew—as much

In our workplaces or in our obligations to our families or in society, we all have things that are mandated for us, that are our ethical obligation, or are part of our job — what we are paid for, how we earn our health insurance, if we're so lucky. But when it comes to me, with books and at the desk, I'm not strategic. I'm not thinking about outside constraints or expectations, so if there's any guiding principle, I would definitely call it organic, or intuitive; something definitely operating on a level of the unconscious.

as you can know anything—that I wanted to establish this structure for all three books in the first novel. I didn't want it to be difficult for the reader; I wanted it to feel very natural. I wasn't trying to foreground structural complexity, although the structure is complex. I was thinking very classically, in a sense, recognizing the way fairy tales commonly use multiple narrative voices. In any collection of fairy tales, the various tales will have all kinds of narrators. There is sometimes a storyteller who is first person, sometimes there is not. Sometimes there is a sense of omniscience, and sometimes there is just a fragment of it. So even though it looks very contemporary, I was thinking very classically, if you will. I did select the fairytales and the illustrations carefully for each book. I wanted to work from fairy tales that were not as well-known because I didn't want the reader to have an expectation of where I was going. Mainly I didn't want myself to have fixed expectations.

I work a little differently now when I work with fairy tales. I mean, even Charles Dickens' ***Bleak House*** has both an omniscient and a first-person narrator, so when people talk about a novel being experimental, yes, Dickens was experimental for his time. But that great novel also reads totally naturally. Sometimes a story needs somebody to step in, like a character wants to speak to the reader, but sometimes that single character can't do everything. I knew the omniscience had to carry through all three books because each of the sisters gets the story a little bit wrong.

As I was reading, I did wonder about unreliable narrators!

Well, that's exactly how memory operates. Within families, and even with ourselves. If I tell you a story about my childhood, but then I tell it two weeks later to somebody else, there's going to be different bits and bobs in it. And if you've ever spoken to somebody you've known for years, whether a family member or a friend, and talk about a memory they share with you, they often will say, "I don't remember that at all," or, "That's not how it went." It's the same thing with fairy tales. There's often an interruption, another beginning, a different version.

When you explain it that way, I can see how the three-way narrative of the trilogy accomplishes the same task of spreading the storytelling around, which classic fairy tales depend on, but in a slightly different way.

Thank you so much. You've been such a kind reader.

It's been a delight for me! To finish with your novels, there was quite a change of direction with your fourth novel, Office at Night *(2014). As I understand it, this piece was commissioned by Coffee House Press and the Walker Art Center in Minneapolis, Minnesota, which owns the 1940 oil painting by Edward Hopper entitled* Office at Night. *Your charge was to collaborate with a co-writer, Laird Hunt, to create a story out of the scene in the painting. Was this your first time working with a collaborator, as in this case, where you essentially "team-wrote"?*

I did do one exchange with a writer who wrote a book—she finished stories for people who had begun them and never finished, but that wasn't a true collaboration: it was like a swap. But ***Office at Night*** was different for me in a couple of ways. I'm so jealous of musicians because they get to go into a room and collaborate and have fun. In writing, you're usually just collaborating with your characters and your mind and the culture of the story—not with another writer. This novella was not only my first true writing collaboration, but also my first time having to create with somebody and show the work immediately to him. I'm uncomfortable showing brand-new work, and I didn't know Laird Hunt, the other author, very well at the time. He's a lovely writer. He's such a careful, balanced, well-researched, full-bodied writer, and I was actually a bit afraid to work with him. I was feeling insecure and nervous, but he put me at ease and was so kind and encouraging.

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It helped that we're mutual fans of each other's work, I think. It's a strange little book, right?

It's unusual, for sure. I thoroughly enjoyed it and still find myself thinking about it. As a linguist, I always look for and enjoy interesting structures. I read it a second time and did a quick-and-ready stylistic analysis of the various little chapters to try to identify which one of you wrote which part. Of course, the narratives had different first-person voices to match their particular speaker, but even in the third-person narrative sections, I couldn't find any syntactic, diction, or narrative markers suggesting who wrote what. It was put together very seamlessly!

That's amazing to hear because I have a fear about that book that it's really obvious when it's me and when it's Laird, and that his is better. (Laughs)

Not at all. Office at Night *seemed to me a natural fit for you because it includes so many of the things you do in your other works. Just like with Ketzia, Merry, and Lucy, the characters here — Abraham, Marge, and Hester — have their own voices which we get to hear in the first-person sections, as well as omniscient third-person narrative sections about them. In addition, the Hopper painting has artifacts: the desk, the unused chair, the piece of paper on the floor, the open window, and even the light shining through the window onto the wall opposite. And just like in your fairy tales, those non-sentient elements have a significant purpose here, and very cleverly, I thought, they even get to speak.*

Thinking about the book afterwards, I thought how that is exactly what you do in everything you write, so you certainly held up your end in the collaboration. And it was done so naturally and convincingly! I absolutely loved those aspects of it.

Thank you. We didn't know how it was going to go between us. We didn't know what was going to happen in the story. We just knew that we didn't want it to be what you might expect when you looked at that painting because Edward Hopper himself always said he didn't have stories in mind when he made his paintings: he was just depicting a scene, and he didn't have characterization or plot in mind.

We wanted to honor that, yet at the same time wanted it to be a story. I think that we did succeed in honoring the artist's intentions in



Edward Hopper, ***Office at Night*** (1940)

that we didn't fill in all the blanks the way the reader might have expected. In other words, our story is far from what would come to a museum viewer's mind as to what meaning Hopper might be trying to convey in the scene, when Hopper himself adamantly said that there wasn't any.

That's a great perspective on a very intriguing project, in terms of both outcome and process. I'm a big fan of children's books, especially picture books, so right after the Gold sisters books, I turned to your three books for children With the books in the trilogy so tragic, as you say, I didn't know what to expect with your picture books. I thought of Nadine Gordimer's "Once Upon a Time" (1989), which she prefaces by saying that someone asked her to contribute a story for a child's anthology because "every writer ought to write at least one story for children." In response, she comes up with a horrific apartheid tale full of fairy tale conventions gone awry. When I sat down to read your books, I was glad that you didn't go that way!

Like how *Dear Mili* by Maurice Sendak is really not for children at all because, as I mentioned earlier, he says, "I don't write for children."

Exactly. Yours, however, are three enchanting and delightful books, and although they have received awards and much praise within children's literature proper, I don't think they have received as much general critical attention as they deserve.

Something I thought was important is that not only are the three stories very different from each other, but also that each one has its own illustrator, with a distinct style, use of different art media, and a resulting very different "look" for each book. I wondered about the give and take between the illustrator and the author. That seemed especially significant for the first book, The Girl in the Castle Inside the Museum*, because it has very few words and seems to depend heavily on Nicoletta Ceccoli's elaborate illustrations. The other two stories could be read aloud and appreciated at a basic level without illustrations. Not* The Girl in the Castle Inside the Museum*.*

So, how much did you suggest to your illustrators in general or to Ceccoli in particular? Because everyone wants to either write or illustrate a children's book someday, right?

Well, writing a children's book is not what it might seem. The first job of a writer for children is at the same time simple and difficult. Ursula Nordstrom, the great children's book editor during the golden age of children's literature in this country, has a collection of letters called *Dear Genius*, which I think you would love. She addressed her authors as "Dear Genius," and she was seminal in the field. Ursula Nordstrom said the best writers for children don't write for children, they just think as children; they maintain the childlike throughout their lives but as a book form.

Writing a book that is going to be illustrated has an inherently collaborative aspect with illustration. It is often referred to as "a picture with words." As the writer, you're "picturing" with words, and all the illustrator has to go on are those words. In all the conversations I've had with children's book editors, they stress how important it is not to overdo it. So one thing that you do is to try to pull back so that every word you choose does something, yet is still open. That's because you *want* the artist to interpret. The artist's mode of expression is illustration, which is not my mode of expression when I'm using words. So I want every word to have to be present but not to dominate what the picture might be. So even though my second and third books could be read without pictures, readers are still left to form pictures in their mind. I'm not over-describing, if you will.

Every editor is different in managing the collaboration between writer and illustrator. My editor is Anne Schwartz. She has her own publishing imprint at Penguin Random House. (It was Schwartz and Wade when I published my three, but now she has Anne Schwartz Books.) She is brilliant and amazing but super strict.

She is the one who chooses the artists. Part of her job is to visit galleries and museums. She looks at artwork, and she finds these exquisite artists and commissions them for a project. But she doesn't let the artist and the author communicate, and that is a strict condition!

She develops the manuscript with me. I write it, and we get it just so, and then the artist takes it. Anne sometimes will send me one sample of the artwork and just say, "We love this. What do you think?" And I always have loved it, but she actually does say, "I don't want you two communicating." For the first book, the artist, as you mentioned, was Nicoletta Ceccoli. She is Italian and doesn't speak English. She misinterpreted one of the sentences. The text read, "The castle was very quiet and full of grace," and it's the page where she created all sorts of characters with instruments, and a cacophony of sound. We had to revisit that page to get the words just right, so that it still evoked quiet but fit with her amazing illustration. And that was actually very fun and a big challenge.

Actually, one of the illustrators—I won't tell you who—once emailed me to ask me a question as he/she illustrated the book, with the plea, "Don't tell Anne." (Laughs) She probably wouldn't mind finding out now because it's all over and done.

So for anybody who wants to write a children's book, it's good to remember that editors and agents don't like you to come to them with illustrations, generally. One of the mistakes aspiring children's book writers make is to have too many words and then to tell the illustrator what you want on the page, like "Now there will be a character on the page with his hand raised over his head." Editors really don't like that. They really take charge of the nuts and bolts of it. Children's book editors are eccentric, awesome, controlling, and magnificent. It's easy to find out what the field expects of you before you do it. I just got lucky.

Well, I hope you have a few more in you because they were wonderful.

Thank you. Anne kindly asks. I've been trying to write one for three years called ***Unpopular Girls***. But children's books, even though they have so few words, they take me the longest to write.

I loved how you worked the idea of fairy tales into all of the stories. In The Girl Who Wouldn't Brush Her Hair *(2013), there are lines like, "Another mouse had moved in – a bigger one carrying a suitcase full of fairy tale books," and "She'd read enough fairy tales to remember that mice always turned out to be your helpers." My favorite one,* The Lonely Book *(2012), is all about fairy tales. I think you could read it as a parable of the whole trajectory of the fairy tale in the modern world. Does that fit?*

Yes (laughs). You're my ideal reader!

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So "the lonely book" is the fairy tale genre. It is very popular for a long, long time, then less read, then forgotten about. It isn't thrown away, but then it is rediscovered among all the "good" and useful books. "Still," you write so eloquently, "none was quite as magical as the lonely book. Neither was any as ruined," which I take to mean valuable, used, and beloved. And then it is loved again, read, and restored to its proper place, just as has been happening to fairy tales over the past decade or two.

Exactly! No one has picked this up. It applies also to my story "How a Mother Weaned Her Daughter from Fairy Tales," where fairy tales are again disparaged; they're not seen as "good" stories. My story "Whitework" is about fairy tales too. Write an essay about that, please. (Laughs)

Thanks, I might. The disregard for fairy tales brings me to your influential essay, "Fairy Tale is Form/Form is Fairy Tale" (2009). You write there too about the "underappreciation" of fairy tales and lay out four of their key "formal components": flatness, abstraction, intuitive logic, and normalized magic. That essay has been cited hundreds of times across all kinds of fields.

I'm a formal thinker. I like firm form, and fairy tales have it.

I underlined the sentence "one of the most classical forms in the world is that of fairy tales."

I've been lucky to be considered a scholar of the form. I am completely self-taught by reading. I am working on a book based on fairy tales' form, as introduced in that essay, but very much from the point of view of a reader and a practitioner. At the same time, critical analysis and, I would say, even intellectual thought about fairy tales is part of my practice as a fiction writer, too. I'm just always thinking through fairy tales.

You haven't shied away from the polemics surrounding the fairy tale as an underrespected genre. How would you compare your technical or theoretical writings with the creation of your own fairy tales, say, "Whitework"?

I would think of myself as a practitioner first, and I've been lucky that the work that I've also done on the aesthetics and the formal qualities of fairy tales has reached a wide audience and influenced scholars. I would also think of myself as a fairy tale critic, but not predominantly. However, if others want to see me in that light, I'm okay with it.

What was amazing to me is how early you got into this whole arena. A few dates that impressed me: Jack Zipes's influential volume Fairy Tale as Myth/Myth as Fairy Tale *appeared in 1994; Maria Tatar's* The Classic Fairy Tales, A Norton Critical Edition, *first appears in 1998; your first edited collection* Mirror Mirror on the Wall: Women Writers Explore Their Favorite Fairy Tales *comes out that same year, 1998. And very quickly, you were seen as a fairy tale expert and talked about along with more*

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established scholars like Zipes, Tatar, and others. How did you handle all of that so early in your academic career?

I didn't know I was getting in early with fairy tale studies. And I didn't realize that it was only twenty years prior (1976) that Bruno Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* had come out and was beginning to make its influence felt. So really, I was just coming of age when fairy tale scholarship was beginning to emerge because of people like Jack Zipes, Donald Haase, Maria Tatar.

I was so naive that I didn't really know that it was a new field, or an emerging field, or a small, welcoming field even. And I just stumbled upon the work of those scholars and fell in love with it. I was sort of naive and foolish enough to think I could make a contribution editorially, with *Mirror, Mirror on the Wall*, and I just did it because I wanted to have conversations about fairy tales. That might seem in a way accidental—but no, I don't want to say accidental—I was just doing what I loved, and it led me there.

If it was early, it was perhaps too early in a sense that nobody was interested in fairy tales in the literary world at the time at all. If you even said fairy tales, your opinion was dismissed. It wasn't just because they were associated with women and children, although that was part of it. It was that they weren't considered literature; they weren't art; they weren't of value. And so in a way, that gave me free rein. Nobody really cared, and so I just did what I wanted, which is the best thing to do as a scholar or as an artist. If you're too worried about what everyone thinks or whether or not they value what you're doing, forget it. If you care about that side of it, it's really going to bring you down.

Where I was really lucky was that more established scholars like Jack Zipes and Maria Tatar were very generous to me. Tatar, who is the queen of fairy tales in this country, invited me over for coffee, and I was sort of apologetic and saying, "I'm not a scholar; I don't belong here." But she said something to me that I took to heart: "Fairy tales need you." I think people like her who love fairy tales have a protective impulse for them because they're so easily abused, disparaged, manipulated, disliked, or made popular through cultural engines that we might not abide by. So for me in fairy tale scholarship, the world of scholars turned out to be very welcoming.

Then as things went along and I got more attention than I ever really would have expected or wanted, and was invited to speak at the Museum of Modern Art—things like that—I was terrified. I had to really train my character to do public appearances. When I started, headlines would say, "Fairy tale hero" or "Fairy tale queen," and I was afraid because I would never call myself that. I felt the duty to do a good job, so I learned how to do it, and I taught myself. After a couple of decades of speaking engagements, I have learned to relate to all kinds of groups, big and small; scholars, schoolchildren, and in between. Along the way, I found that I enjoy it because I love fairy tales so much, and I love how the audiences love to hear about them too.

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When you look back at when you started, would you ever have expected the explosion that we are seeing now in fairy tale studies?

No, I never would have expected it. It was very lucky that I decided as early as 1996 that everything I did was going to be channeled through my love of fairy tales. And once in, I was all in! It was almost ridiculous because at the time in talking about fairy tales, the word "fabulism" wasn't really in common parlance even though it had been invented in the 1970s.

In a sense my career skipped a beat because I was, as you said, so early in trying to bring fairy tales into the fray. Well, now they are here, across mainstream, experimental, commercial, and literary fiction, and a lot of writers that I originally published in *Fairy Tale Review* have been getting big book contracts. In a sense, my own work has always been in the margins, where I claim that I prefer to be, but it certainly has gotten widespread attention and I've worked very hard to start and maintain the conversation. It has become a bigger conversation than I ever imagined happening. It doesn't really need me anymore, which is when you've done a good job, right?

Even from the perspective of my small experience, it is an amazing arc of growth, involving not just expansion and popularity, but more importantly, legitimacy.

I'm happy for it. I think fairy tales have never been unpopular, nor have they ever been absent. But now people refer to fairy tales by their proper name, as *fairy tales*. It used to not be okay to say that, in the same way that I think all kinds of prejudices lurked around them in many ways. It has been very gratifying to me to see them rise to what is their proper place.

It has been such a pleasure to meet you and speak with you. Thank you very much for sharing your expertise, dedication, and love of fairy tales.



Susan McKay (Ph.D., University of Utah) is a linguistics professor in Weber State University's Department of English, with expertise in linguistic analysis, syntax, stylistics, and historical linguistics. She is adept at the structural analysis of literary genres, and over three decades has enjoyed collecting fairy tales and folk tales from her many students of different cultures, native languages, and nationalities.

Kate Bernheimer

Whitework



The cottage into which my companion had broken, rather than allow me, in my desperately wounded condition, to pass a night in the thick-wooded forest, was one of those miniaturized and hand-carved curiosities from the old German folktales that make people roll their eyes in scorn. This, despite the great popularity of a collection of German stories published the very same year of my birth! As to the justifiability of this scornful reaction: I cannot abide it, nor can I avoid it by altering the facts. This is where I found myself: in a fairy-tale cottage deep in the woods. And I had no use of my legs.

When we came upon the cottage we were certain, by its forlorn appearance, that it had long ago been abandoned to the wind and the night, and that we would be perfectly safe. Or rather, my dear companion was certain of this. As for me, I was certain of nothing—not even of my own name, which still eludes me.

There were but few details for my enfeebled mind to record, as if the cottage had been merely scribbled into existence by a dreamer's hand. Tiny pot holders hung from the wall in the kitchen, beside tiny dish towels embroidered with the days of the week. In each corner of each room was tucked an empty mousetrap—open and ready but lacking bait. At the entryway, on a rusted nail, hung a minuscule locket, along with a golden key. As to whether the locket ever was opened, and what it contained, I have conveniently misplaced any knowledge. About the key I will not presently speak.

My companion placed me onto a bed, though I would not know it was a trundle bed until morning. I had only vague notions as to how we had arrived at the cunningly thatched cottage, but I believe we had walked through the forest in search of safety. Perhaps we sought some gentle corner where we would not perish at the hands of those who pursued us. Or had we been banished, from a kingdom I no longer recall?

The room in which my companion put me to bed was the smallest and least furnished of all. It lay, strangely enough, down a long hallway and up a stairway—I say "strangely" because the house was so diminutive from outside. I realized, upon waking in morning, that I lay in a turret. Yet from outside, no curved wall was visible. With its thatched roof the house had resembled a square Christmas package, a gift for a favorite stuffed rabbit—a perfect dollhouse of a cottage, the sort I had painstakingly, as a child, decorated with wallpaper, curtains, and beds.

Though there was scarcely any furniture in this turret room, the sparse pieces were exactly correct—nothing more, nothing less: the trundle bed, empty and open; and the walls bedecked with no other ornamentation or decoration save whitework, the same sampler embroidered with the same message over and over. It was embroidered in French, which I do not speak: *Hommage à Ma Marraine.* In the center of each piece of linen was sewn an image of a priest holding two blackbirds, one on each hand. The edges of all the whitework were tattered, and some even had holes. To these white-on-white sewings, my foggy mind immediately fastened, with an idiot's interest—so intently that when my dear companion came up to the turret with a hard roll and coffee for breakfast, I became very angry with him for interrupting my studies.

What I was able to discern, looking about me, while nibbling the roll after my companion had left, was that some of the whitework contained a single gold thread as the accent over the *a*. Why the gold thread was used, I had no idea, and in considering this detail, along with the remarkable fact that blackbirds had been so expertly depicted in white, I finally asked my companion to return to the room. I called him and called him before he returned—disconcertingly, for it seemed he had returned only by accident, to fetch my empty teacup—and when he took the cup from my hand he gazed into it for a very long time without speaking a word.

At last, he closed the shutters of the windows tight, which was my wish, as it allowed me to see the whitework more clearly: I find I see better in the dark. A candle in the shape of a bluebird sat on the floor beside the bed, and I lit it, and turned it just-so, toward the wall. Luminous! I felt I had not, in many years, experienced such nocturnal bliss—even though the broad daylight shone outside the curtained windows, at least a day as broad as a day may shine in a deep and thickly wooded forest where real and grave danger does lurk.

This activity transfixed me for hours upon hours and days upon days.

In time, my companion and I so well established ourselves in the cottage that soon we felt that we had lived there our entire lives. I presume we had *not* lived there our entire lives; yet of the event that drove us into the forest to the cottage I cannot speak, and not only be-

cause I cannot recall it. But I can tell you that we had so well established ourselves in this cottage that I was shocked one morning to discover, under my feather pillow, a miniature book that had not been there before. It proposed to criticize and describe the whitework on the walls.

Bound in black velvet, with a pink ribbon as a placeholder, the volume fit precisely in the palm of my hand, just as if it had been bound for me to hold there. Long-long I read, and devoutly, devotedly I gazed. Rapidly and gloriously the hours flew by and then the deep midnight came. (Not that I knew the day from night with the curtains so tightly drawn.) The bluebird was guttering—just a puddle of blue now, with yellow claws fashioned from pipe cleaners protruding from the edges of the blue puddle. I reached my hand out to try to build the wax once more into the form of a bird, but I achieved merely a shapeless mass of color. Regardless, the candlelight flamed up and shone more brightly than ever upon the black velvet book with onion skin pages.

In my zeal to illumine the onion skin, the better to learn about *Ma Marraine* and so on, I had, with the candle's light, also illumined the corners of the room, where sat the mousetraps. Yes, this turret had corners—quite a remarkable thing, as the room was a circle. If I failed to perceive the corners before, I cannot explain . . . truly this architectural marvel of corners was a marvel inside a marvel, since even the turret itself was not visible from outside.

With the corners of the room thus illumined, I now saw very clearly in one corner, behind a mousetrap, a very small portrait of a young girl just ripening into womanhood. I don't know how that phrase comes to me—"ripening into womanhood"—for I would prefer simply to describe the portrait as a very small portrait of a young lady. But, to continue, I could not look at the painting for long. I found I had to close my eyes as soon as I saw the portrait—why, I have no idea, but it seems to be that my injury, rather than being limited to my crippled legs, had crept inward to my mind, which had become more . . . impulsive or secretive, perhaps. I forced my eyes back on the portrait again.

It was nothing remarkable, more a vignette than an exposition. The girl was depicted from top to bottom, smudged here and there, fading into the background, reminiscent somehow of the *Kinder-und Hausmärchen;* yes, you could describe her portrait as an illustration. She was a plain girl, not unlike me. Her eyes were sullen, her hair lank and unwashed, and even in the face and shoulders you could see she was undernourished—also not unlike me. (It is not my intention to plead my case to you or to anyone else, now or in the future; I merely *note* the resemblance.)

Something about the girl's portrait startled me back to life. I had not even realized what a stupor I'd lain in, there in the turret, but looking into her sullen eyes, I awoke. My awakening had nothing to do with the girl herself, I believe, but rather with the bizarre execution of this portrait, this tiny portrait—no bigger than that of a mouse, yet life-size.

And it was painted entirely white upon white, just like the embroidery on the walls.

Though I felt more awake and alive than ever before, I found that I was also suddenly overcome with sadness. I don't know why, but I do know that when my companion brought me my nightly black coffee, I sent him away for a pitcher of blueberry wine. I asked for him also to bring me a pink-flowered teacup. My needs felt at once more urgent and delicate, and thankfully he was able to find articles in the cupboards that satisfied them.

For quite some time, drinking the wine, I gazed at the portrait of the sullen girl staring out of miniature eyes. At length, wholly unsatisfied with my inability to decipher the true secret of the portrait's effect (and apparently unaware that I very nearly was standing), I fell into the trundle. I turned my frustrated attentions back to the small book I had found under the pillow. Greedily, I turned its onion skin pages to the girl's portrait. "Flat, unadorned," the page read. The rest of the description was missing—everything except a peculiar exclamation for an encyclopedia to contain:

SHE WAS DEAD!

"And I died." Those are the words that came to my head. But I did not die then, nor did I many days and nights later, there in the forest, where I lived with my companion quite happily—not as husband and wife, yet neither as siblings: I cannot quite place the relation.

Soon, of course, I thought of nothing else but the girl in the painting. Nightly my companion brought me a teacup of blueberry wine, and nightly I drank it, asked for another, and wondered: *Who was she? Who am I?* I expected no answer—nay, nay, I did not wish for one either. For in my *wonder* I possessed complete satisfaction.

It was of no surprise to me, so accustomed to confusions, that one morning I awoke to find the painting vanished—and not only the painting but all the little priests with the little birds from the walls. No whitework, no turret, no companion. No blueberry wine. I found myself in a different small and dark room, again on a bed (not a trundle). An old woman and a doctor sat by my side.

"Poor dear," the old woman murmured. She added that I would do well to take courage. As you may imagine, the old woman and doctor were at once subjected to the greatest of my suspicions; and as I subjected them privately, I also protested publicly, for I knew I had done nothing to lose all I had learned to love there in that mysterious prison or home. No: I should have been very happy to be lame and blurred, to have my companion bring me teacups of wine at night, and in the morning my coffee and rolls. I never minded that the rolls were so tough to the bite that my teeth had become quite loose in their sockets, as loose as my brain or the bluebirds in the forest when their nests are looted by ravens.

Cheerfully, the doctor spoke over my protests. He said that my prognosis relied on one thing, and one thing alone: to eliminate every gloomy idea. He pointed toward a room I had not noticed before. "You have the key to the Library," he said. "Only be careful what you read."

I wrote this story in the public library in a small town in Massachusetts, in the summertime. It was fishing season at the time. Outside, children in yellow slickers slung lines over the bridge as I drove to the library, buckets of still-living fish by their feet. But it was always fishing season in the library, with its dioramas of schooners and nets with starfish on the knotty pine walls. I sat at a table across from an old man doing crossword puzzles. He really looked like he belonged in The Old Man and the Sea. *I had been reading Poe, and some scholarship on these instances in seventeenth-century novels of fairy-tale scenes. Somehow, the proximity of all that saltwater, combined with the Poe and the seventeenth-century German, transported me into this story. It is for me a most architectural story, a Joseph Cornell box or diorama, and by writing it I got, for a brief time, to live in the impossible cottage of my dreams. Certainly, it could be said to be a story about the anxiety of influence, or, perhaps more aptly, the influence of anxiety – it contains the code to my work with fairy tales as a writer, I think. But the code is submerged, just as secrets should be.*

– KB

"Whitework" was originally published in the Fall 2007 issue of *Tin House Magazine.*

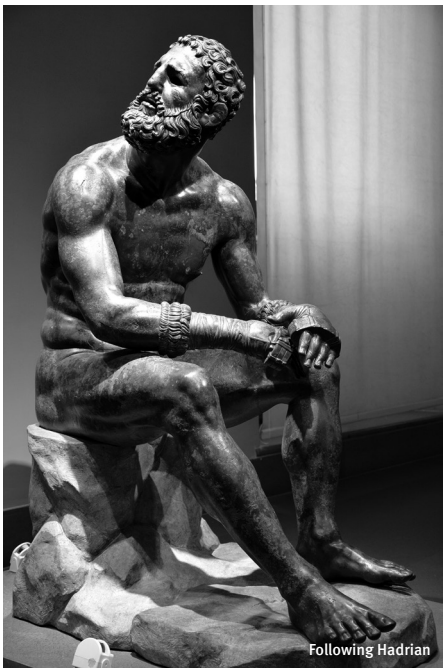
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Mikel Vause

September September



Boxer of Quirinal, Greek Hellenistic bronze sculpture of a sitting nude boxer at rest, 100-50 BC, Palazzo Massimo alle Terme, Rome.

I grew up in Ogden, Utah
Wild West town.

Hard to imagine
In the twentieth century
Hearing gun shots
Ring out on Chester Street.

In the nineteenth century
A peach orchard
Became small farms
Morphed to American middle class.

Such conflict was antithetical
In a neighborhood
Of mostly old people
Empty nesters in neat bungalows
Set in their ways.

Guns going off
Screams and broken glass
Profanity most base
Startling as graves opening and the dead
Rising to walk about.

True story.

There were gun shots
Bad language and broken windows
Tempered picture windows
Shattered by a woman's body
Passing through landing
Against the porch railing.

First silence shattering sound
Came when she shot her husband
Guilty of most the swearing
In the stomach.

Imagine being hit by a .38 slug
Still able to retaliate
To throw a woman
Through plate glass.

No one died
But easily could have.

She was on her feet in seconds
Scrapes and bruises
Able at the top of her lungs
Spit out words I'd never heard before.

Bullet missed his vital parts
Passed through one ample love handle
Blood and pain
Accounted for additional vulgarities
Lasting until the police and ambulance arrived.

All this was terribly inconvenient.

The Gillette Friday Night Fights
Was on the new Zenith black and white
That only a few weeks earlier
Replaced the old cabinet transatlantic radio.

Watching or listening to the fights
Was close to a religious event at our house
A catechism of sorts
Sacrament of buttered popcorn cold Coke.

Before the TV
Both my dad and his dad
Refused to call my dad's dad grandfather
Always gruff mean no tolerance
Sat on chair's edge
Throwing punches into imaginary opponents.

Jimmy Powers provided the blow by blow
Interruption before the final bell
Was not tolerated—no excuse
Even by gun shots
Or a woman flying through plate glass
Regardless how out of the ordinary
The fights were more than athletics—sacred social commentary
Inside the ropes everyone was equal
No color barriers
Religion didn't matter
Equal pay for a win regardless of creed or color.

Golden Age of manly combat
Time for bonding father to son
Reached its pinnacle

Kid Gavilan Benny (Kid) Paret Carmine Basilio
Gene and Don Fullmer Florentino Fernandez
Nino Benenutti Emile Griffith
Were as revered as the Twelve Apostles
Interruption blasphemy.

Morbid curiosity adrenaline
Got the best of three generations
Drawing dad's dad and me to the big front porch
Dad to the street
Collected the gun called for a towel
To staunch blood coursing
From wounded love handle
Kept neighbors at bay
Until relieved by the police.

This landmark disturbance
Cast a pall on the neighborhood
That for some last a lifetime
Foreshadowed the end
Of an American tradition.

Don Fullmer's loss to Dick Tiger
On 9/11/1964 in Cleveland
KOed The Friday Night Fights.
9/11 inauspicious date synonymous
With another American tragedy
Thirty-seven years later to the day.



Mikel Vause holds a Ph.D. from Bowling Green University. He is the author of numerous articles, poems and short stories and the author or editor of six books. His latest collection of poems, *Secondary Sources*, was released spring 2020. His collection of war poems, *A Most Terrible and Deadly Season,* is scheduled to be released later this year. In 2016 he was a Pushcart Prize nominee for his poem "What Said the Thunder."

Simon Peter Eggertsen

I Wonder If Hawking Could Write a Few Elegant Equations?

For Stephen Hawking (1942-2018)



Steam engine in Heber City, Utah.

Now that he has Time before thinking again about the intricacies
of his formula for the Theory of Everything, I wonder if Hawking
could write, as practice, a few elegant equations to solve for a few
of the things that I have witnessed?

I wonder if he could find a way in his math to explain—

the density of the dark matter in Wasatch Mountain granite,
the degrees of separation that protect the millions
of names the Mormons have hidden in their canyon tunnels?

the rolling surge of energy released when the wheels of the Heber Creeper
iron out a penny laid carefully on the tracks by children
at Wildwood, the length added to Lincoln's beard at
the moment of that flattening?

the intensity of sound, the decibels cast off by our loud thrilling
when someone sneaked in, scattered us like charged atoms,
as they freed those who had been jailed as we played
"kick the can" on summer nights in Provo Canyon?

the diminishing length, the slowing rhythm of Time awaiting
Monarchs as they bunch together at evening,
camouflage into the branches of the eucalyptus trees
in Pacific Grove, wait for another morning's sun
to remind them they can fly, the sweetness
of the Manitoba milkweed, the theory behind
their journey home to Canada?

the undulations, the swirled warps, the wavering transformations
created by five female figures draped black as night
as they slide their shade across a mosque's sun-perfected
white, an Aleph in Old Stone Town, Zanzibar,
later that night to reappear as the sails of *dhows* on route
north to the Arabian Sea with spices to exchange for
gold earrings and Omani amber in the *souks* of Muscat?

the half-life of the eight Chinese characters for death
scrawled in the midnight air as tracers ricochet
off the walls near the Forbidden's Gate of Heavenly Peace,
the Time it takes the unsuspecting students massing in
Tiananmen Square to understand that these are
the last words they will ever read?

the looping intuition that speeds the interpretive artistry of O'Keeffe's
imagination, teases out colors and forms not yet in Nature,
allows her to paint, perhaps even better than God herself,
the New Mexico mountains and mesas "outback Jane's"
radiant, stark and clean, then plain and complex, then stark
again, makes them hers, then ours?

I wonder . . . .

—Wildwood, June 2015

God Might Dwell at Wildwood

The morning I last spoke with my mother
she was in her hospice bed, waiting for death.

She said they had "just come down from Wildwood,"
something she'd been doing during the summers
for nearly all of her ninety-six years.

This time, though, the trip was all in her mind,
drawn deep from within the wrinkles of her muddled
memory, her strengthening forgetfulness,
her diminishing sense of place.

A decade or so before, Matthias had told her,
as we were on the road to Taos,
he had seen God at school and knew where
He dwells. "God lives in the mountains,
at Wildwood," he said with absolute certainty,
the kind that only five-year-olds possess.

My mother agreed, hedging a little, subtly
altering a gender: "You're right, Matthias,
She might live at Wildwood."

Wildwood *is* the kind of place where God might dwell—
the place where my grandfather built his mountain cabin,
a Lincoln-logged summer home he shaped with his own hands,
furnished it with leather couches and chairs, soft beds and antique
Navajo rugs, about the time he'd finished law school in Chicago,
about the time my mother was born in the 20s.

Wildwood, deep in the folds of a narrow Utah canyon,
where the morning sun light has to fight for space
then spends the middle part of the day making shadows
for the cottonwoods, the aspens, the pines and the scrub oak.

Wildwood, with its mystery water tap,
its puzzling BurmaShave rhymes and sand paintings,
its swinging bridge, its God-blessed Nature,
its boulder-bound, bumbling creek, its hummingbirds
and noisy, toe-nibbling geese, its Brockbank and Taylor
gatherings, its kick-the-can nights, its obligatory
Scott's Hollow moose, and, its Chapel of the Box Elders,

where, on Sundays, dappled through the trees by the morning sun,
we actually learned to plead for God to be with us
until those Edgemont people told us we shouldn't
do that anymore.

They needed "God with us," they said, "nearer to town."

At her funeral, wanting to believe Matthias,
I expressed a mysticism I hadn't mentioned before,
I said that the next time I went to Wildwood I expected
to feel her spirit-presence there in God's attendance.

The next year, in mid-summer, I went there
and failed to sense the attendance of either of them.

I guess I expected too much.

Because I had stopped asking, I hope that their absence
is not in any way my fault.

And, I hope they are not now trapped at Edgemont.

—*Wildwood, July 2017*

Questions for David in the Presence of Death— Variation on a *Ghazal* +

Nighthawk calls lure you, twist you through their chaffing spaces,
pull us into their skinny labyrinth, into grief's thick black traces.

"*How quickly must you go?*" How far from our gazes glassy?
How long before you waver, break the bonds that together lace us?

Lips tremble as we repeat the plea: "*How quickly must you go?*"
As quick as red cloud fire-flash highlights our mourning faces,

etches a tracery on sharp mountain peaks, withers slowly in the melt

of yesterday's snow? We pray for ease, wish you soft paths, God's graces.

We search southward where we think you might still be lingering with
your cousins among boulders, under bridges, in their Wildwood places.

Deep from the folds of Idaho canyons, we shout at those nighthawks,
haggling for your return until both our cries muffle, lose their basis.

We imagine the hidden blinking fathoms of your clear blue eyes.
"Where are you now?" Swirling in pools of dry desert air, at stasis?

You haunt us at the edge of night, tease us 'round dawn's yellow blur.
At noon, we see *mariposas blancas* flutter 'round and 'round blue vases.

And then we know you have gone, leaving us behind with more sad
questions: "Why quickly must you go?" Our warped disbelief raises.

You should have been with us longer. After another starless night,
we'll ask to hear you speak again, sense the special slant in your phrases.

We'll complain, perhaps even to god, all this suddenness as silence races.
We'll ask Peter to bestow three sweet kisses, free you from death's mazes.

Asalaam aleikum. Peace be with you. Praises in between.

– Ketchum, Idaho, January 2003

+ The prompt for this poem is a *question* and a few images from Clinton Larson's poem "To a Dying Girl."

# of dementia nonsense before departing

my grandmother licks at a dried red peach,
thinks of her life still and the rust crush of age.
distracted by the jumble of weakened sense and memory:

she tastes the delicate blade of a gray winter knife

shave through the dense white matter of summer light;

she smells the prismed edges of sugary autumn sand
slip from the dull languor of blue summer dew;

she sees the glee of a thousand green spring wisps
chase away the doubt of black autumn shadows;

she hears the red-fire frenzy of a summer morning sky
subdue the cold aquamarine hues of winter-splayed 'cicles,

she feels the yellow veneer of a spring wind merry-go-round,
glaze into the orange haze of autumn's plumes;

she re-senses, without knowing, the color and order of her seasons.

— *Utah, October 2007*



Simon Peter Eggertsen was born in Kansas, raised in Utah, schooled in Virginia and England. He has degrees in literature, language and law (BYU, Univ. of Virginia, Cambridge). His work has appeared in *Nimrod, Spoon River Poetry Review, Ekphrasis, Atlanta Review, Vallum,* and *Dialogue*, among others. A set of his verse won the Irreantum Prize for Poetry (2012); others have been named finalists or shortlisted for the Pablo Neruda Prize for Poetry (Nimrod, 2009), the Fish Poetry Prize (Ireland, 2013, 2014, and 2018), ARC Poem of the Year (Canada, 2013) the Bridport Prize (UK, 2019), and, recently, runner-up for the Robert Frost Poetry Award (2020). Eggertsen's poems have been anthologized repeatedly, most notably in *Fire in the Pasture: 21st Century Mormon Poets* (2011).

Ellen Malphrus

Coyote Crossing



Numbfingered,
I stoop to weary bootlaces,
adjust pack and provisions then
rise to bat my knees.

There
she stands
in silent regard.
Exposed. Unconcerned.

Behind her,
snowset
rhythms of
footfall
make brief
hatchments
in the
drifted
thicket.

The gaze we signal is not fear,
not intimidation. We are
two creatures in the
blanket light of dusk,
each now noted on
the hushed template of
the other's remembrance.

Pausing, she allows me,
the cumbersome interloper,
to pass by, then
resumes her soundless roving—
a bristle bellied shadow in the
deep withers of coming thaw.

Through raven woods
we walk on—

untraced and
willing to wander.

Civil Disobedience

Moving across the continent at thirty thousand feet
I think how deer sometimes scatter at the sound of birds
and birds sometimes flush at the sound of deer, but how
neither is concerned with the sound of me,
far above their cloistered woodlands.

I consider crops—
circles and squares and
which might harvest more flavorsome corn or wheat
and why.

Farther west, I muse over mountains and long winding
rivers where landscape won't yield
to tractor made geometry
and fields give way to wild contours—
exquisite in their resistance.

With Walt Whitman as kinsman
I soar the firmament

immersed in colossal cloudscapes
and revel in red rock canyons below.
Exalted.

Then—
the loudspeaker—
with a voice like God, or maybe the principal,
that seems to command:
"All hail the box.
Machines matter most. Shut out
the sunlight. Clouds are of no consequence."

Okay, so in actuality it is the flight attendant, saying,
"We are about to begin our feature presentation.
If you are seated near a window,
please lower your shade."

In protest, I close it only partway,
lean my head against the plastic glass and
refuse to ignore the outspread horizons
where immortality is possible—
or at least there's a shot at some quiet repose.



Ellen Malphrus is the author of *Untying the Moon* (foreword by Pat Conroy). Other publications include work in *Southern Literary Journal*, *Blue Mountain Review*, *Natural Bridge*, *Haight Ashbury Review*, *Fall Lines*, *Review of Contemporary Fiction*, *Poetry South*, *James Dickey Review*, *Catalyst*, and *Our Prince of Scribes: Writers Remember Pat Conroy*. She is Writer in Residence at USC Beaufort and divides her time between the mountains of Montana and the marshlands of South Carolina.

Thom Schramm

Aversive Therapy


USFWS Pacific Southwest Region Flickr

A condor claws at men when they are men,
but when they wear their man-made condor heads
it watches cautiously.
The men make life
repulsive, dangerous, as men, as here
a condor learns again how not to trust,
oblivious to trickery as long
as men stay men when men and never show
their transformation.
In the dark of night
a calf appears—fresh kill—but then a hand
where hands should not have been attracts its eye
and moves: an error that corrupts. Its claws
contract.
Although the men try not to be
themselves, they must become themselves again
and instigate its fear.
It must not know
who feeds it, nor the care they took to fool
its instinct back from where it was distracted
in the first place, by men and what they did.

Holographic Will

Make my bones into oars.
Use my hips as oarlocks
and row with them eastward
into South Dakota,
to the lesser badlands,
where you will find fossils
in plain view. You will know
the place by unnamed mounds
that look like the lost calves
of a giant whale, still
and stranded in the earth.
The road nearby rises
and Herefords disturb
the dirt. What shadows fall
fall from scattered yarrow.
On any untouched bed
of fossils, lay them down.

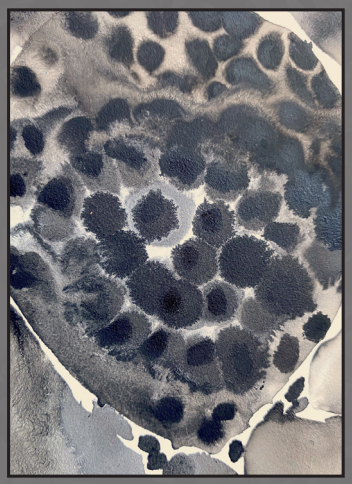
Thom Schramm's poems have appeared in *The American Scholar*, *Harvard Review*, *New Letters*, *Ploughshares*, *Poetry Northwest*, and other journals. He is the author of a poetry chapbook *The Leaf Blower* (Blue Cubicle Press) and editor of the poetry anthology *Living in Storms: Contemporary Poetry and the Moods of Manic-Depression* (Eastern Washington University Press).



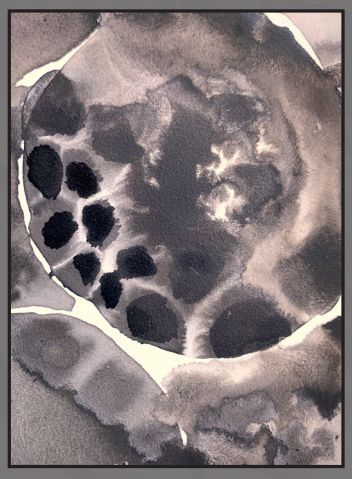
Renew 2, 30" x 36," India ink on clayboard, 2018

The Artwork of Lydia Gravis

The art I make often stems from a desire to respond to situations that are felt, but not necessarily understood; situations that may seem senseless, or tragic, but that connect us to our collective experience of being human.

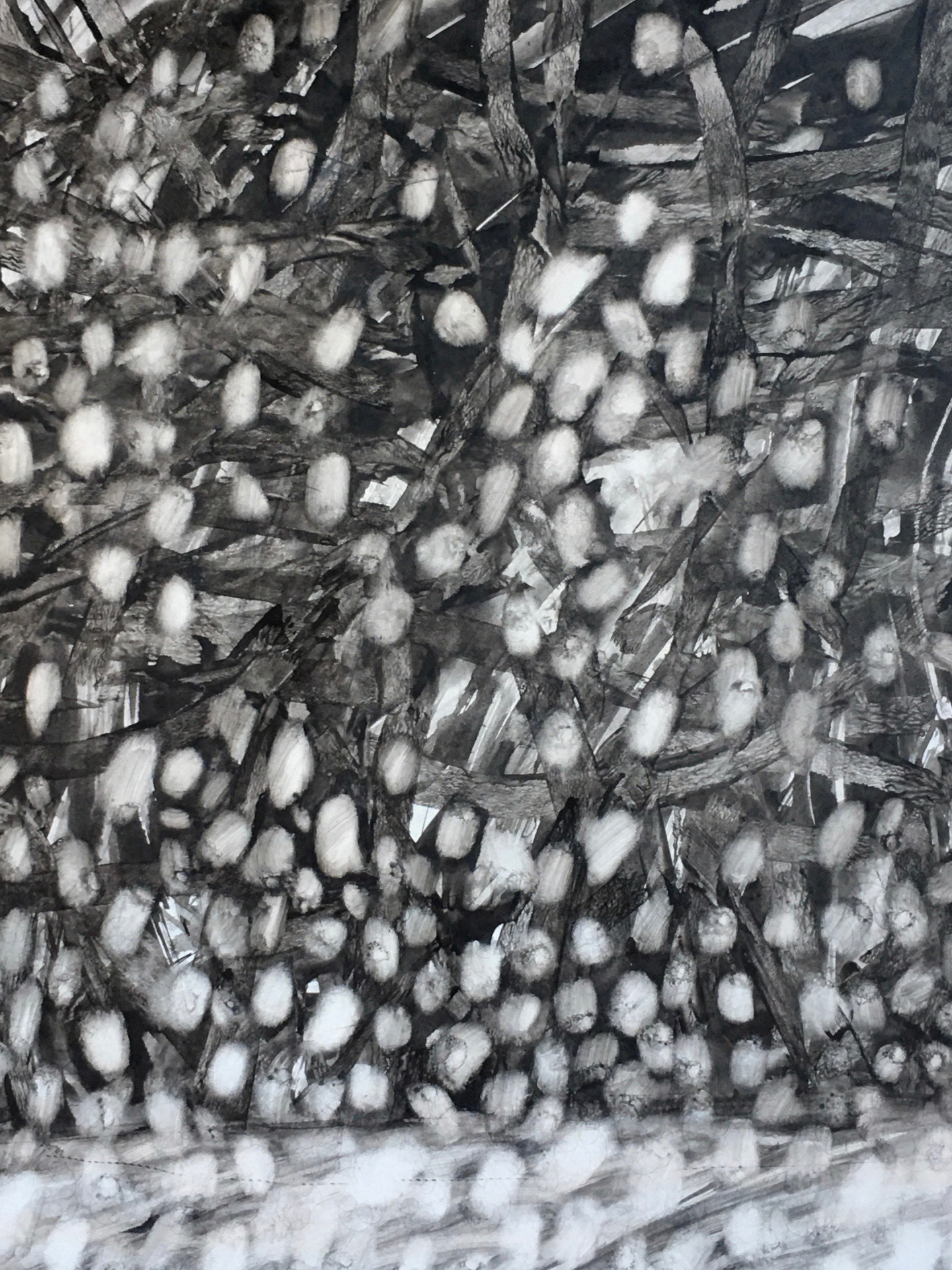


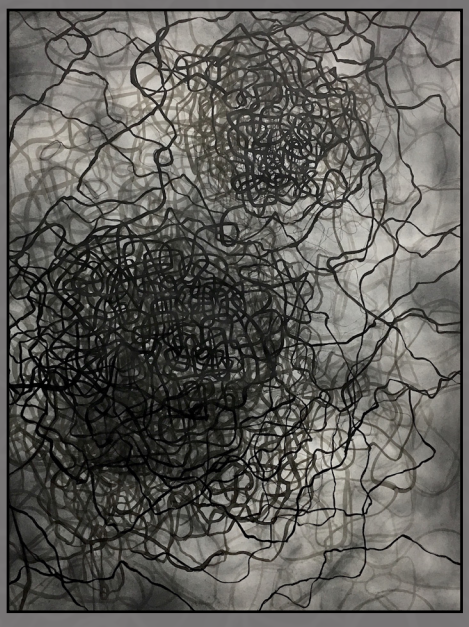




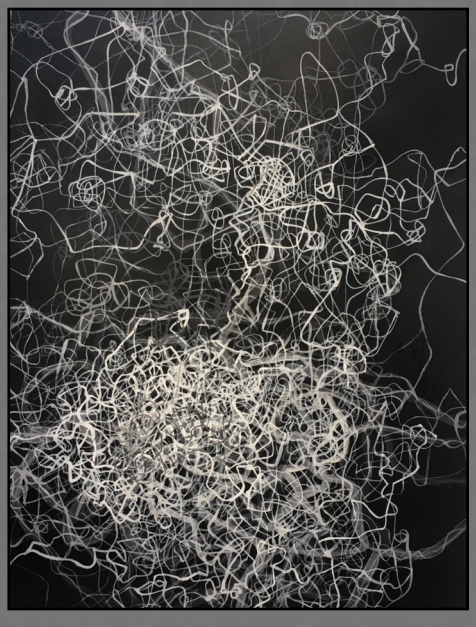


Top Left, *Infiltrate, Replicate, Repeat 4*, 2.5" x 2.5," India ink on clayboard, 2020
Top Right, *Circles of Chaos, Rows of Resilience*, 30" x 37," acrylic and graphite on paper, 2016
Bottom Left, *Infiltrate, Replicate, Repeat 3*, 2.5"x 2.5," India ink on clayboard, 2020
Bottom Right, *Renew 3,* 30" x 36," India ink on clayboard, 2018
Right, *Inundate 2*, 9" x 9," India ink on clayboard, 2019

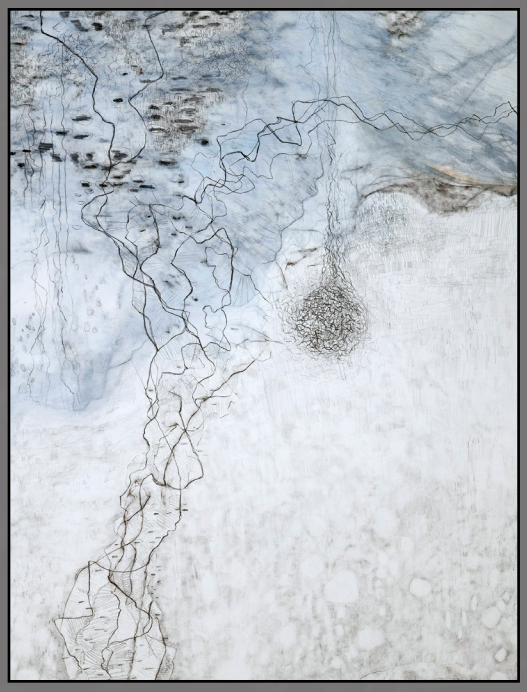








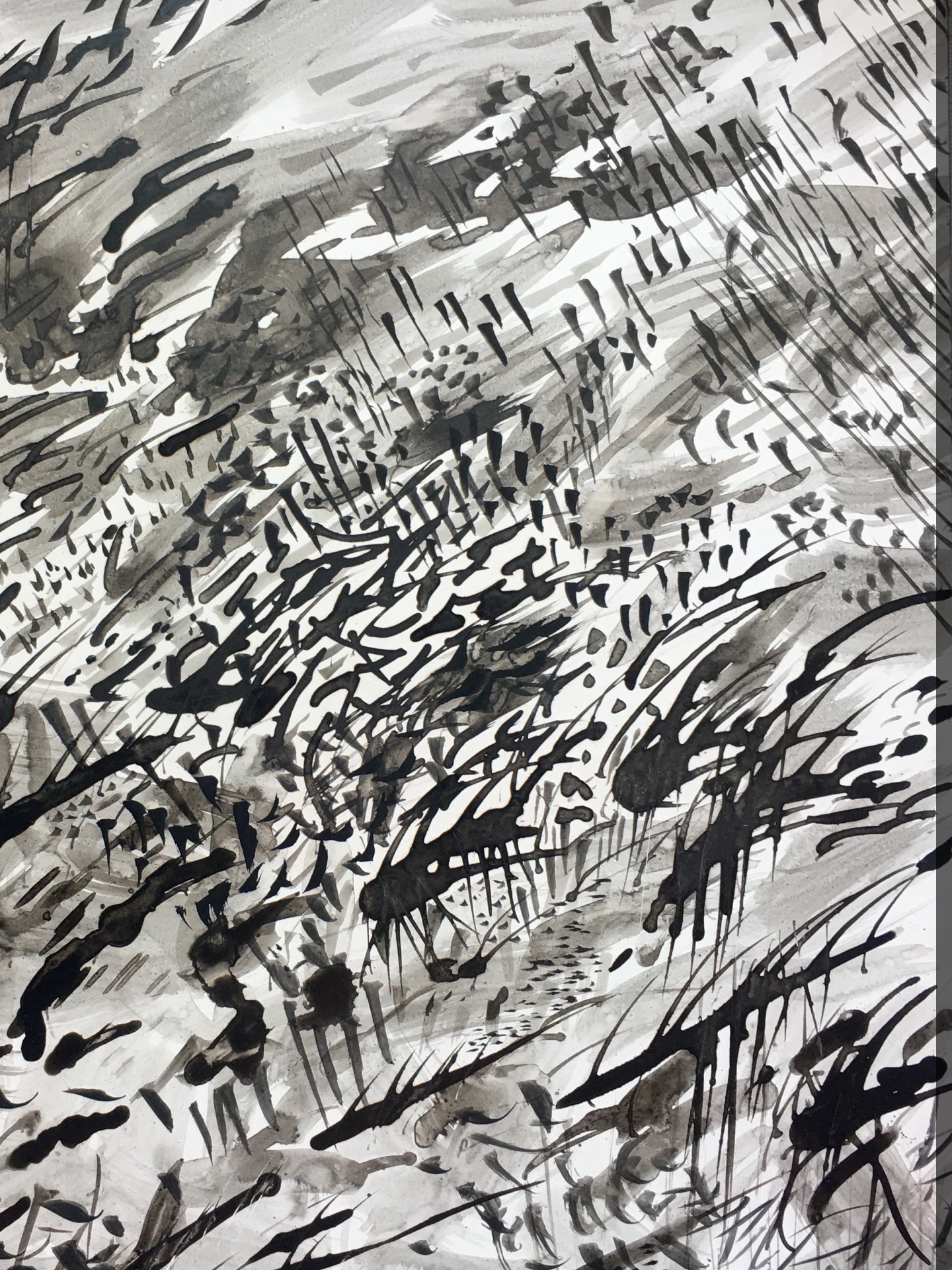
Top Right, *Touching the Void, Naming the Unnamed 2*, 38" x 50," India ink and graphite on paper, 2018
Bottom Right, *Quantum Entanglement*, 22" x 30," ink and graphite on paper, 2018
Left, *Quantum Entanglement 2*, 22" x 30," ink and graphite on paper, 2018



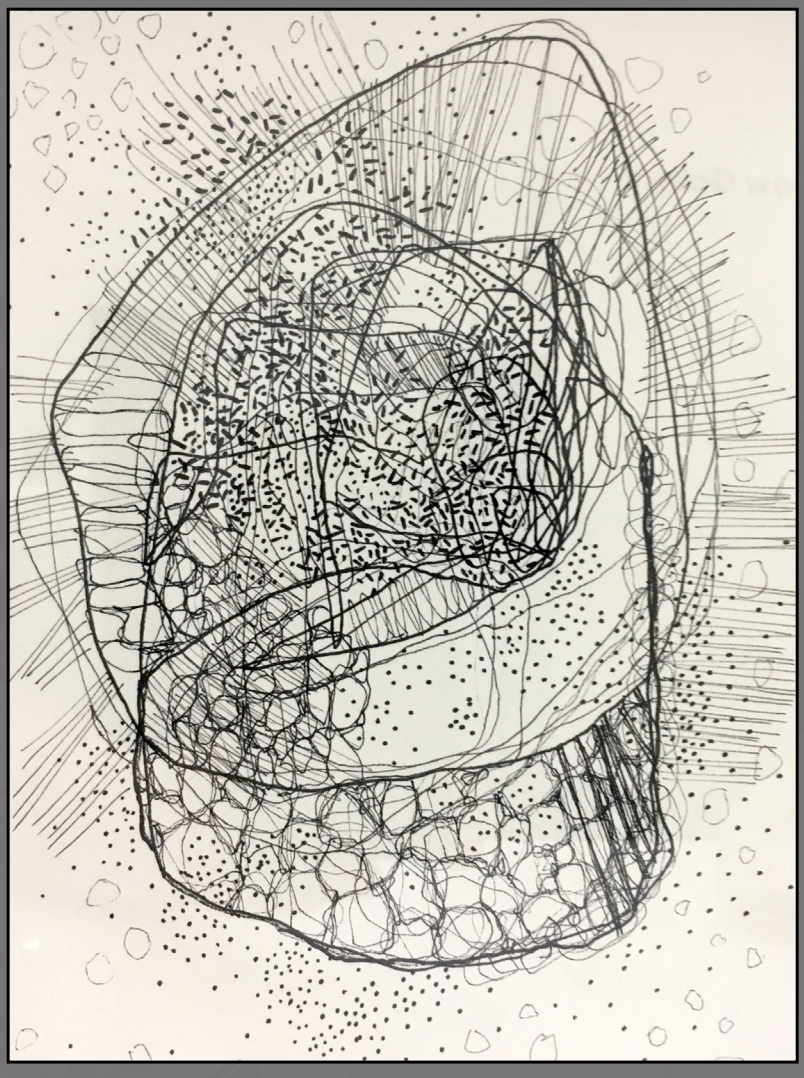


Left, *Distilling the Enigmatic*, 38" x 50," acrylic and graphite on paper, 2013
Right, *Complexities*, 38" x 50," acrylic, graphite, and chalk pen on paper, 2013

I'm fascinated by psychological spaces of human experience that aren't easily defined, but that are undoubtedly felt. This is an abstract idea.

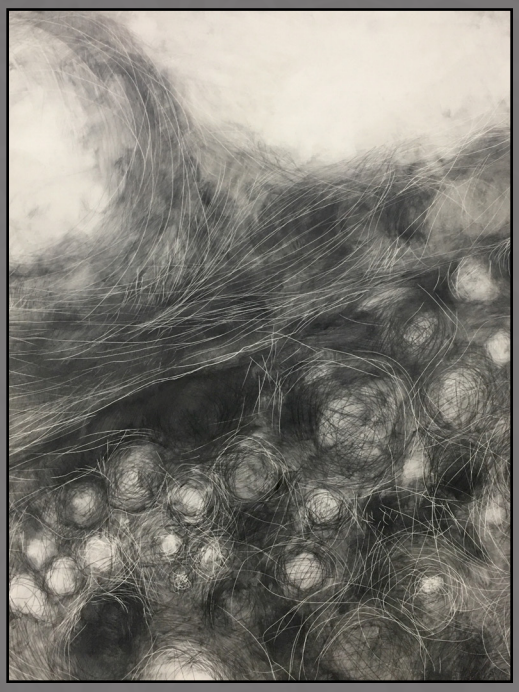


Instead of taking something specific, and abstracting its essence, my work attempts to take something abstract, like the idea of liminal psychological space, and suggest its specificity through visual language.

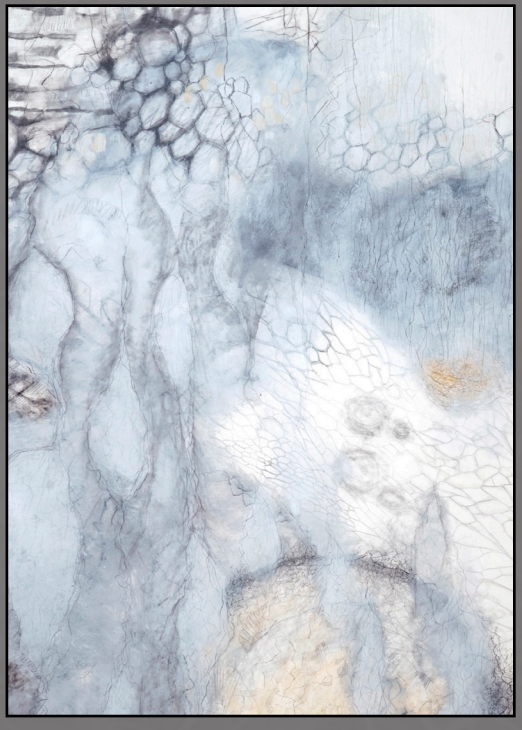


Left, *Inundate*, 9" x 9," India ink on clayboard, 2019
Above, *Embracing the Chaos*, 6" x 9," ink on paper, 2018





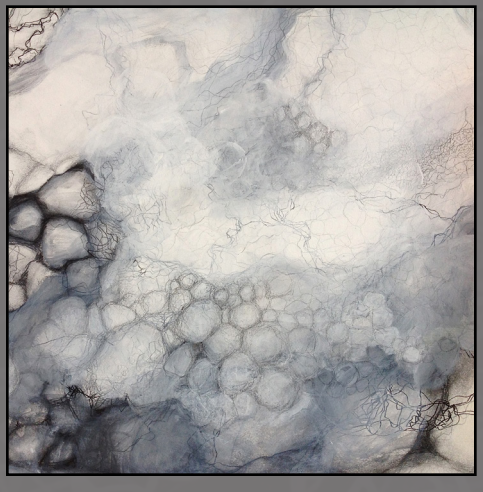
We become overwhelmed by experiences we don't understand, but we're also seduced by our desire to understand them more clearly. I use mark-making and obsessive micro-textures to express that tension.

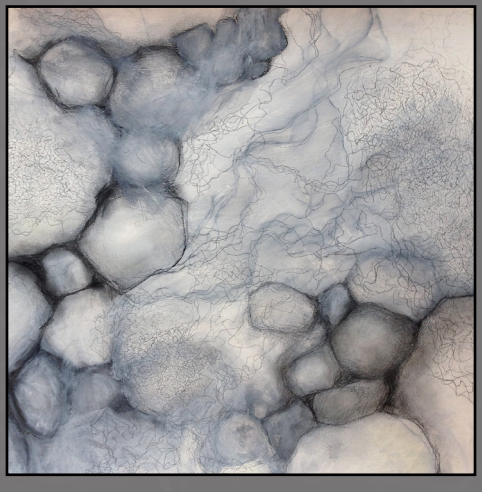


Top Left, *Renew 6*, 30" x 36," India ink on clayboard, 2018
Top Right, *Renew*, 30" x 36," graphite on clayboard, 2018
Bottom Right, *Neither Here, Nor There*, 38" x 50," acrylic, graphite, colored pencil on paper, 2012



By conjuring and obscuring biomorphic shapes with graphite and water media I attempt to depict these infinite psychological spaces of human experience, giving the illusion of form to something that seems present but simultaneously formless.





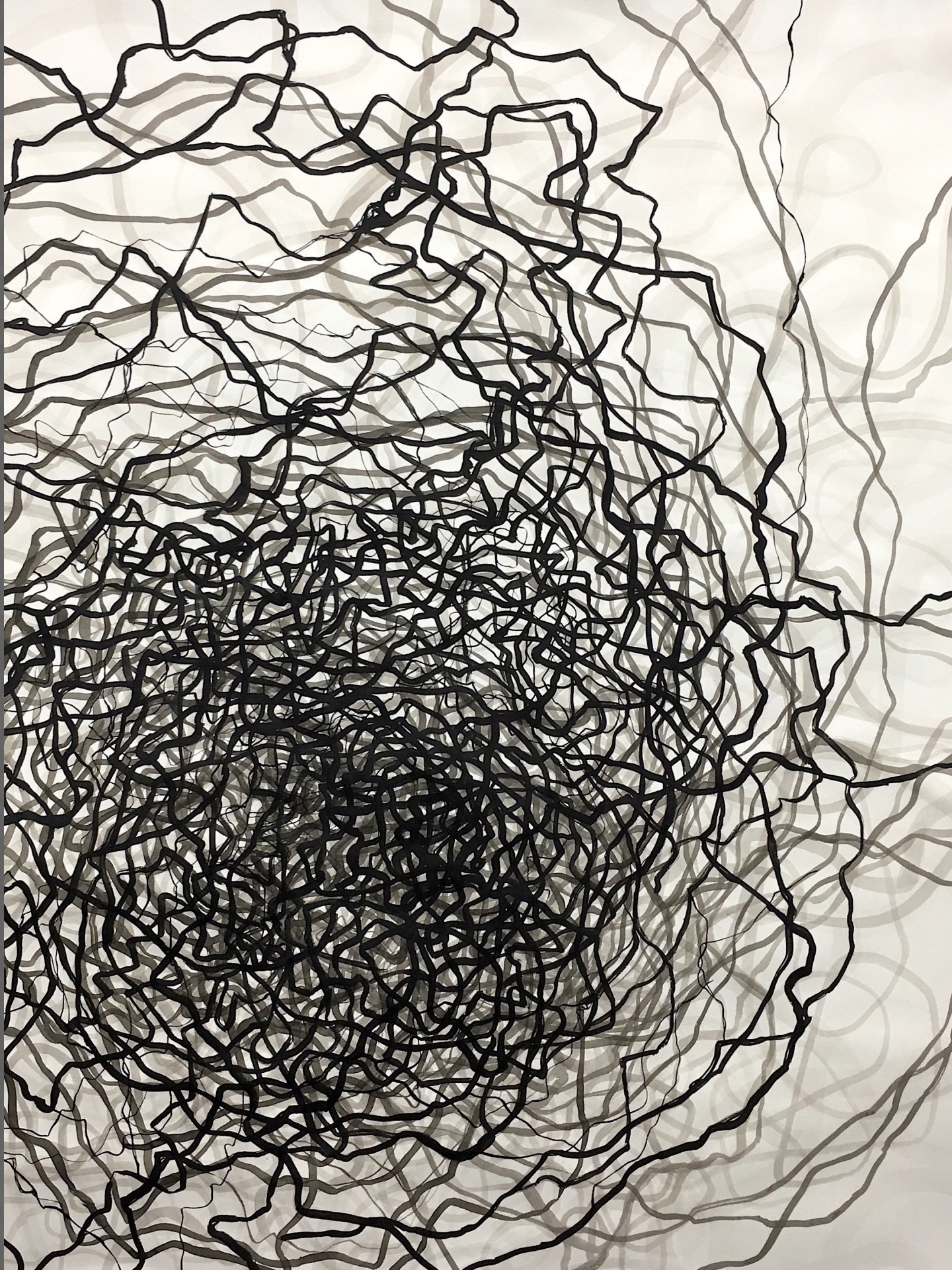
Top Left, *Denial*, 22" x 22," acrylic, ink, graphite on paper, 2011
Bottom Left, *Resignation*, 22" x 22," acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on paper
Right, *Metastasis*, 22" x 22," acrylic, graphite, and charcoal on paper, 2011



Lydia Gravis was born in 1981 in Spokane, Washington. She earned her Bachelor of Arts in Painting and Drawing from Warren Wilson College in Asheville, N.C., in 2003, and her Master of Fine Arts in Visual Art from the Art Institute of Boston at Lesley University in 2013. She's had solo exhibitions at the Northern Arizona University Museum of Art, Nox Contemporary gallery in Salt Lake City, Salt Lake Community College, and Carper Contemporary at the Argo House in Ogden.

Recent media coverage includes a featured artist profile in the December 2019 edition of *15 Bytes: Utah's Online Art Magazine*, and a two-page feature about her work in the January 2020 edition of *American Art Collector*. She has shown in numerous group and juried exhibitions in the United States, has been awarded an artist residency for July 2021 at the Fremantle Art Center in Western Australia, and in November 2020 she received an Ogden Mayor's Award in the Arts. She's worked as gallery director and curator of the Mary Elizabeth Dee Shaw Gallery within the Department of Visual Art and Design at Weber State University since 2014, and lives and works in Ogden, Utah, with her husband and two children. Learn more on her website: lydiagravis.com

Right, *Touching the Void, Naming the Unnamed*, 38" x 50," India ink on paper, 2018



Nancy Takacs

Cilantro

Where there is so much
abundant light,
cilantro lifts its flickering scent
of celery and mint.

Such gentle spines
from tiny black seeds
he gave me in a green envelope.

When I part the row
with my ankles,
fronds open their eyes,
their mouths.

Garden of cilantro in the desert!
Radiant in their bed—
ménage à trois of the tomato,
the onion, cilantro's
carnal teeth of tranquility.

And later, with leaves
on the cutting board,
I am dappled, sashaying
to an other-worldly sea.

I am the lemony pine
on a starved tongue.

When I mince them
into the turquoise bowl,
they tell the truth about
jewels of asparagus,
the juices of bluestem grass,
the mazes of our long love.



ZooFari

Utah Garden

Hollyhocks rise
with their sturdy skirts,
like the women who grow up

in this desert town,
not meaning to go anywhere
but where they must,
impossible to uproot.

Mother-of-thyme
creeps on. Sage holds one
blue leaf. Chives thicken,
and though I never liked them,
they will be sweet.

My prickly fronds and pods
of poppies are the ones raising hell
in the stubble
along my chain link.

I rake sorrel and thistle
away from their maze,

for the coming rain,
their flaming crepe,

their centers dark
and alive as bees.

Prairie Dog Crossing

After this winter of twenty snows,
I take the scrubby shortcut,
to see if any poems
have come back.

And there *is* one thin envelope
in the post office box—my name
I wrote in green pen, six months ago—
most likely a rejection.

Two prairie dogs slip up from their dens,
one standing erect, holding in her forepaws
a blue-flowered stem.

I balance again
on the splintered board over the small creek
I crossed to get here,
under a blossoming plum,

and look at the envelope, my smooth
cursive N's, and remember
Penmanship at Our Lady Star of the Sea

where I pressed too hard on my pencil,
and Sister Cheryl leaned over me
saying *Trust, Open*

I-70, Utah

Pickups and semis head for the Rockies,
call this stretch boring, call this light
damned, what you have to tint
your windows for,
wear your darkest
glasses for, go 100 in,
though the sign says 80.

And it's true the light
will make you squint,
make you crave whitewater,
thick pines, traces of snow,
any mountain, away from
today's crushing heat.

You exit the asphalt
at the rest stop with one juniper,
open your door, stand,
stretch, let the light
glaze your shoulders, settle between
your bones, sift from muscle
to sinew to veins
now swimming in rays,
while you love the beige mesas,

their sheerness,
their violet pockets,
this openness.

You eat the last slice
of Swiss, a Honeycrisp,
and look at the lost ocean of sage.

A small herd of pronghorns
standing in the vista before you
can run for miles under this sun.

They look up and stare,
until you get back in.



Nancy Takacs is the author of three books of poetry and four chapbooks. *The Worrier* poems received the Juniper Prize for Poetry and was published by Univ. of Massachusetts Press in 2017. It was also the 2018 winner of the *15 Bytes* Poetry Book Award. Other awards include runner-up for *The Missouri Review* Editor's Prize, the Sherwin Howard Award for Poetry, the 2016 *15 Bytes* Poetry Book Award, the Nation Discovery Award, and several awards from the Utah Arts Council. She lives in Wellington, Utah, and spends time in Bayfield, Wisconsin, near Lake Superior.

David Axelrod

First Night Out Since You Died

Maybe three hours passed in darkness
the night of the solstice,
then the morning sky paled.

We were out together again
visiting friends on the savannah
west of Spokane

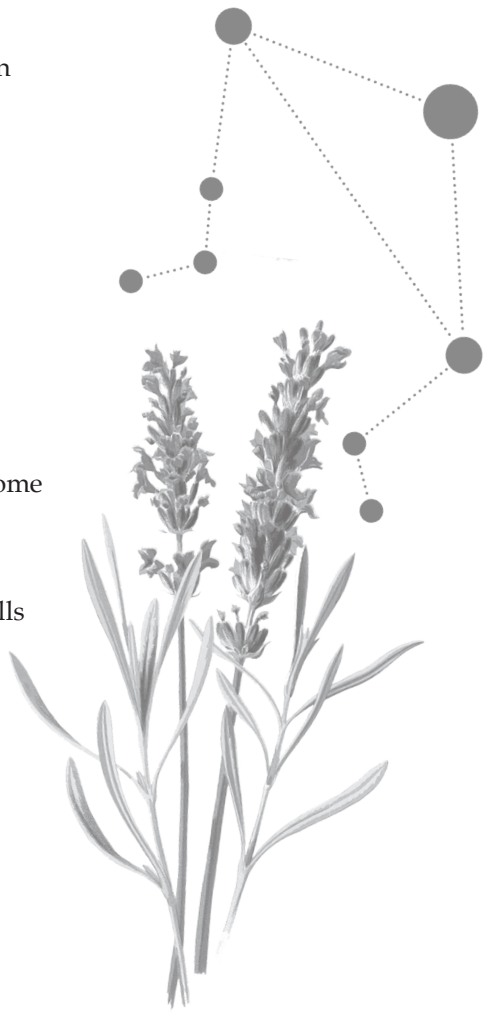
and after dinner strayed into the garden
our hosts planted
over three decades, the edges grown

feral now—rows of lavender
and rosemary entangled,
a corner commandeered by rhubarb,

mint vining toward the wellhead.
In twilight at midnight,
we paused along Deep Creek—

O hospitable world!—dreaming
only of smiles and years to come
of summer nights like that

together, peepers chorusing
glories in the alders, poor-wills
dodging under the scales of Libra.



Thresholds

after Harry Martinson

Winterspring. Dusk. And the mudflat
lamentations of days drizzling at the eaves.

In garden beds, aphids cluster
in the curled leaves of kale.

Straw rots under snow.
More snow, snow and rain,

then mostly just rain. The minute hand
hovering at the quarter hour.

Moss sends out velvet streamers
along the earlywood grain of cedar boards.

Hawthorn. Galls on stems of floribunda.
The pasture and its horses,

backs turned against the wind,
hunkered down to wait.

Lamplight tries to shoulder aside
the dusk leaking in through glass.

I trim the rancid fat, salt the discolored meat
and try to bear this dullness of late winter

in the manner of Franz Joseph Haydn—
the galant tenderness of his mind poised

at the verge of a new, more hopeful era
aspired to, but never reached.

And all this waiting latent still,
high in its corner, where wall

and ceiling converge, a pale spider
upside down in its cradle of air,

an insurgent signal sweeping north,
a faint pulse throbbing inside its silk orb.

Homestead, Crooked Canyon

Hoofbeats shook the cabin on winter nights
and startled them awake.
Staring into window glass,
they saw the Arabian mare
standing out there
forty years later
in moonlight on the other side,
tossing her head,
stamping the ground.
She turned and pushed through
thickets of young pines
whose boughs shuddered and shed snow.

It took decades,
but the meadow they married in shut its eye
and the old couple stood there
alone in the forest.
Where were the friends
who sang to them—
the chorus of groomsmen,
the chorus of bridesmaids—
on their wedding day,
sitting in a circle in the shade
of a horn-crowned,
windthrown orchard?

They split wild apricots
picked that morning
and lay the halves side-by-side
on trays they carried into the sun to dry.
Somewhere still, those voices
laud the greatness of earth,
the lovers, comets
and constellations,
antelope and lilies,
the hum of bees drawn to
wild fruit and pits falling
one by one into a metal pail.

That's a fainter sound today.
And the man can see
only what he feels inside

the woman, the immensity of her
embrace, the dense nervature
of the past that's woven itself
all around them now, the air
redolent with cone-laden pines—
in the beginning
as at the end of worlds—
the amber sap
warming in sunlight nearby.

A Stop Along the Mullen Road

This time of year,
snow dwindles into sooty shadows,
and earth doesn't absorb
so much as it radiates cold.
Sojourners from the mild coasts,
loiter with us a while in the chill.

Orion astride hills
in the west, bare cottonwoods fill
with crows reporting back
from their morning forays
along the valley floor.
What befell this place isn't over,
much less forgiven—
signs warn, *stay in your car*,
don't disturb the ground
beneath you, river shoals
hoard ten thousand
Troy weights of violence.

The crosses welded
to city limits signs sink
into mounds of rust, there's
our historic whorehouse,
the Jesuit's Mount of Cinders,
the eight-rope gibbet

inmates of the territorial prison
built high on the ridge.
There's the abandoned smelter
scheduled for demolition,
tipples, timbers, and miners'
graves under tailings, a plume

toxic-centuries long
creeping westward slow
as locomotives hauling
a hundred tankers full
of shale oil from the Dakotas
to refineries on Indian land.

Alibis, auguries, songs
of homeless and unmoored winters—
we haven't much else to offer.

Sonoma Before the Fire

The pioneer hermit carved
his empty room inside
a redwood, thinking to
inoculate himself against
ailments of history
and subsequent claims.
If angels came and went
through the open door
of that fragrant room,
however they chose
and according to purposes
assigned them on earth,
does the film of their oily
skin remain, a viscid gleam
like a plantain's skin
before it's uprooted?
Who forgets that
stickiness, how it's invisible,
in motion, and aware of us?
Whatever substance it is,

it doesn't scrub off,
however hard we try—
O, little crescents of filth
under my fingernails!

Along the trail
from the hermit's lodge
to the bridge across the river,
we found the words
that spilled from a child's
broken bracelet—
pink *divine*, green
everlasting, pale blue *you*—
and what better reckoning
could we tender the young,
who we meant to teach
distrust of appearances?
Whirling dizzily, weren't they
going to turn into butter?
Weren't their little piggies
meadowlarks singing?
A beach towel a flying cape?
And aren't we become
tinder awaiting its arsonist
and strong winds? The fire
front, gnawing through
dry scrub? Whose oily soot
coats the rail that steadies them
as they cross the bridge?



David Axelrod's second collection of nonfiction, *The Eclipse I Call Father: Essays on Absence*, appeared in 2019 from Oregon State University Press. *The Open Hand*, his eighth collection of poems, appeared recently from Lost Horse Press. He is the editor of *basalt: a journal of fine & literary arts*, and directs the Eastern Oregon University low residency MFA.

David Memmott

In Potentia: A Re-Vision

In essence, there is no universe
present without imagination…
—Fred Alan Wolfe



Charles J. Sharp, Sharp Photography, sharpphotography.co.uk

The yogini flexes
to fix old scores
composed for upper
registers that fall
outside the event horizon.

It's best to first consider
your keyboard:
a seven-octave concerto on, say,
a five-octave instrument
makes a completely different music.
Lost chords and grace notes may be
enough to break the silence.

A collared dove
inside the ribs of spruce
during a chance snowstorm
throws a falsetto against
a deepening pause.
Some hear music,
some hear noise.
Some conflate the thump of their heart
with a thud of snowmelt from a slumping branch.

The unnerving night grows thick
with weak talk;
you're overwhelmed already
by sound without sense.
The yogini leans into a Kundalini fire
that flares on perishable skin
burns away enough
to describe the indescribable.

You bend backward
all the way to the floor,
to illuminate the grace-notes
finding a new octave.

To The Squirrel Who Ate the Suet

Your high-wire act the other day, squirrel,
taught me tricks to do with your toes
reaping the last of winter feed.
That suet was never meant for you.
We put out these hanging baskets
to give the winter birds a boost.

From kitchen window I witness
as Downy Woodpecker spirals
to swing that wire boat, riding the blizzard
on a cake of sunflower seed.
Later, a flurry of junco clattered aboard
the peanut butter wagon, followed by a flicker
and a flurry of finch. I marked the flight
of a rare owl-hawk in and out of the bare pear tree.

Where did you plant the walnuts this year?
We won't know til spring when I pull
green saplings from the garden.
I do not blame you for doing Mother's work.
The trail through snow leads back
to the base of the telephone pole where
the neighbor leaves you English walnuts.

You had me fooled for a time.
The suet I thought hit by the crows
was hit by you, hanging by hind legs
a firm grip on the wet pear bough,
your brown sponge dripping
from deep freeze, body stretched top to toe
to strip, piece by crow-sized piece,
the suet from its spinning cage.

Once birds have flown, you show up
like clockwork, caught in the act
bottom of the food chain waiting a turn.
So busy stealing sunflower seed
you didn't even notice me.
Come finches, come flicker, come sundown,
I've witnessed you walking the wires
You spiraled down the power pole, modest stripper
hidden from my eyes, and dash through the fence
tail painting the snow with hurry.

The neighbor across the street spreads
a new blanket of seed, lays out fresh millet
under the canopy of a century-old pine.
Go get it, squirrel. It's easy pickings.
We're setting something aside for winter birds,
some dry cakes of seed and fat
stored in the freezer for the next big freeze.
Our yellow lab twitches her nose,
leaps at the swish of your broom
ricochets in a dead bolt at the dead end
trunk of the yellow apple tree.

Picking Up the Windfall

Eventually
    the yellow delicious apple tree
    sheds its fruit,
    shaken from crown to root
    by cloudburst.

Its limbs shudder
apples fall into tall
grass, lost like sandlot
baseballs in foul
    territory.

Daddy-longlegs,
orbic dancer on stilts,
bridges two blades of grass
to discover a golden cache
apples overripe, ants
swarming like prospectors.

The lightning-split, yellow, downed fruit
accumulates in conspiracy yellowjackets
thirsty as sin, climbing out
of broken skin, red-eyed
and cider drunk, mad as hail
ready to strike the ungloved hand.

Endings give
away beginnings.
Small matters
mean the world.

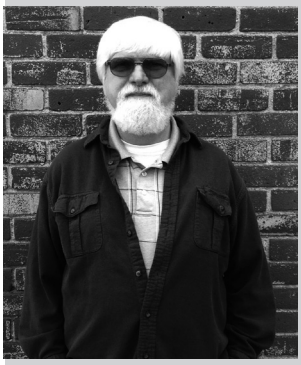
Woodpecker Teaches "Lullaby" to a Swing

In lean years half this harsh
the Labrador hunkered in the camouflage
of yellow ochre quilts and sighed.
Tumbleweeds roll over fallow fields, a strike force
hung up in a rockjack till dawn.
The mountains kick back another storm

lay down a full foot in perfect drifts.
Tree to tree knitted with a winter stitch
accretes by the inch in full white lace
then melts back through layers, dense
water-weight making the roof beams whine,
the white morning unmarked by trails.
Woodpecker teaches "Lullaby" to swing
while I strike out with stiff digits,
scratching the ice from my ears
deadening all sound until the moon
comes round and the collared dove
in the snow maple calls *wahoo-who who*

to whoever will listen.
The wind blows through these mountains
in a steady tone through a wooden nickel.
The hounds start baying. There's enough left
in the storm to strip branches clean.
Juncos and chickadees beeline

for shelter beneath the Mugo pine
cowered in little black cowls like monks
as wonderland turns to slush.



David Memmott's Vietnam-era novel, *Canned Tuna*, was published by Red Bat Books in 2017. A Rhysling Award winner, Spur Award finalist, Fishtrap Fellow, and Playa resident, Memmott has published seven books of poetry and founded *Phantom Drift: A Journal of New Fabulism*. He is the editor/publisher of Wordcraft of Oregon. Learn more at www.davidmemmott.com.

Michael Rogner

Songs in Paradise

Listen to the black pine songs,
the lonely chimney chorus
singing to propane tanks with no faces
and the burnt out skulls of cars.

Listen in the rare green reflection
to waxwings preening, to quail with blistered feet
booming on the ridge, to muffled explosions
up the road where neighbors once stood
singing their songs over fence lines.

Listen to the motors, their voices
vibrating the night like coyotes,
wandering through cracked thirst,
turning their ears to ash to hear
the whispering of voles and gophers
worming through black earth.
There are songs in Paradise,
sunbeams sing above the lowering haze,
the stones are cymbals,
the woods and winds are strings,
there is singing everywhere in desolation,
lifting from dogs lying in thyme,
in the gray scatter vibrating bones.



Michael Rogner is a restoration ecologist in Northern California and lives in Chico with his wife. His first published poem appeared in a recent issue of the *West Texas Literary Review* and was nominated for The Pushcart Prize. His poetry is forthcoming in *Barrow Street*, *North Dakota Quarterly*, and the *Hiram Poetry Review*.

Scott Woodham

Nuclear Silo Pasture



In the southeast pasture,
an abandoned installation,
a Cold War radar shed and missile silos,

once full of hopeless
birds that didn't land so much
as reach apogee then impact—
the blue-footed boobies
of the aeronautical world—more like
phoenixes, all holocaust and
figments of rebirth.

Now, only rattlesnakes down there,
fallen through the gaps
in makeshift silo caps meant
to keep cattle from falling
irretrievably into the black seep.

Cattle lie everywhere
in the sun and rusting shadows
of the radio tower, but the
sick calf the top hand
and I are looking for isn't here.

Here. A single, empty
twenty-millimeter shell,
almost a pound of brass
by itself, easy to see for what it is—
corroded, emptied of threat
half-buried in the dust
beneath dried cowshit—a disposable,
forgettable piece of what violent purpose
seems always to endure.

Somewhere our calf is
shitting himself to death
and we're helpless here.

Notable Tumbleweeds of Adams County

Thad ambling
across the road
toward lunch rush
at Jack-In-The-Box.

Jan bouncing through
Walmart caressing clearance
dresses counting change.

Steve in the corner
delicately raging
against cinderblock walls.

Freeway Darlene exploded
into straw. Cattle truck
hit her mid-bounce.

Anonymous dozen
caught in barb-wire fence
like flies with no spider.

Anna Nicole wearing
candy wrappers like
jewelry inside her body.
William hightailing
the highway alongside
us, rushing to his
lover the horizon.

River Surgery

Last summer we floated
the Snake from Dead Man's Bar
to Moose with Uncle John.

Earlier that spring, ice dams had forced
a fresh main channel through meadow,
willow, and pine above The Bar-B.

What had always been a difficult stretch
became a killing river. New braids, driftwood
logjams, and sweepers confused

the current—drowned two experts
early that season, and could have rolled
us if it wanted. Uncle John, his cancer

a clump of poison-red ash berries waiting
upriver on the bank of the Oxbow
Bend, the stomach of the Snake,

wide, turbid, and digestive,
has seen this stretch of river
change every season for fifty years.

Each ice-bound spring,
malignancy brings a new course.
As we floated that summer through

a meadow, a cow moose only feet
ahead of us crossed a narrow, split channel
onto an island where willow bushes
grow even today,
haloed green and vibrant
in waterlogged demise.

Thirty Head

The boss's ten-year-old granddaughter sprays
Well water to douse fires on branded hide,
But she's new to this like me: her blood
Leaves her hands, and she misses more than hits.
Instead of breakfast we must work thirty head,
And during the first one I want to cry.

A tongue comes out long and curls stiff to cry
Loud, cracked, and heaving screams. Fear-shit sprays
When horn-cutters shut on the young bull's head.
The brass twitch grips his nose, and shudders range his hide.
And again, because they must, those blades hit;
Then into the air and onto us go thin arcs of blood.

John uses electric-hot tools to squelch the blood
Where horns can't grow. This bull bellows a cry,
Then quiets, seems to know we're giving these hits
So he won't kill others later; insides spray
Outside when cattle gore through each other's hide.
We open the latch and release a new steer's head.

The top hand scratches one silent bull's head
Right between little streams of blood
That end at the eyelashes. As the delicate hide
Of the mute bull's scrotum is pierced, I want his cry
So the silence isn't sprayed
Too thick between his last hits.

Near the drill press, a kid too young to help us hits
His younger brother for knocking the hat off his head.
Their grandma sets down potato salad and sprays
Them with the hose—my hands are slick with blood
And shit from twenty-nine. Now I can't cry—
Don't even want to hide.

The last young bull can't hide
Down the chute I've closed behind him. He faints, hits
His head on the foot-bar and can't cry
Out. He's gone out of his head
Quickly—comes back slowly just like his blood.
As he meets the floor, a line of silver drool sprays.

Out of the barn, I hide my eyes while water sprays
And bright sun hits the stream. Water rinses blood
And shit that rinsed the urge to cry for thirty head.

Ranch Dump

Black bags of trash, hot dog wrappers,
toy car, rafts of splintered lumber,
concrete chunks, headless
doll, legless kitchen chairs,
newsprint, bassinet, shotgun hulls.

Between the two short
rises southwest from the house trailers,
in this privacy,
we make the land embrace
whatever we can't save.

Three shod hooves. High chair.
A huge, purple, midway teddy bear
grinning atop a crushed box-spring.
Beneath, a cow spine, empty skull,
skin dried tight over bleached hips.

And so we swing the body of the calf
who shit himself to death.
We swing him back
and forth, letting go on three.

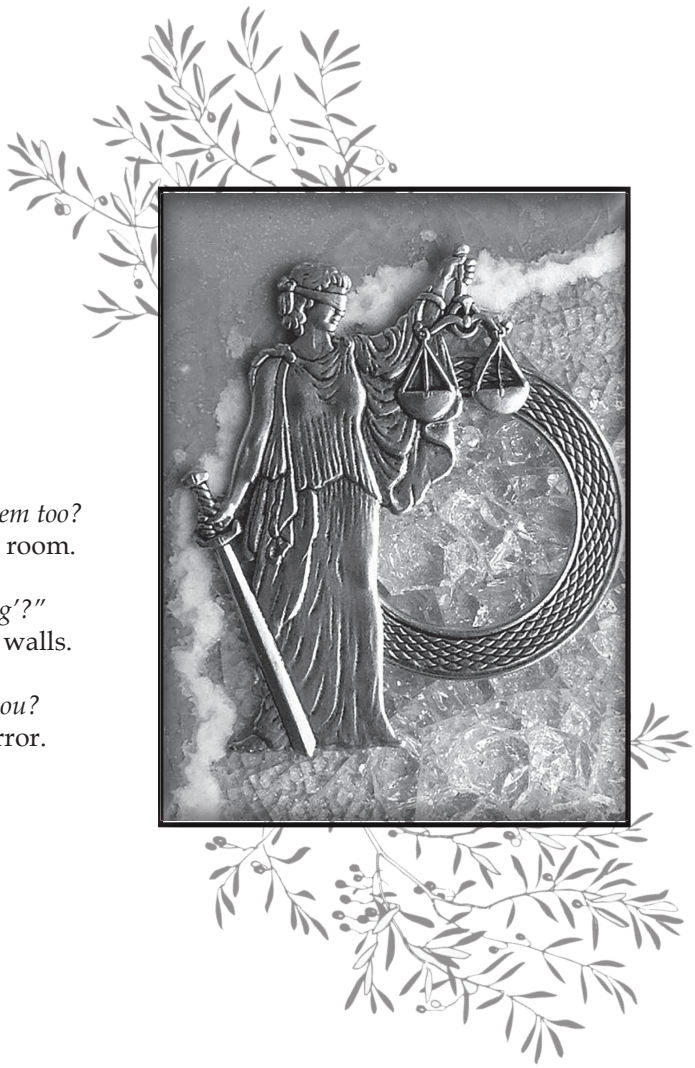


Scott Woodham graduated from Weber State University in 2002 and earned an MFA in creative writing from Murray State University in 2009. After years in journalism, he now teaches at Big Bend Community College in central Washington. A 2020 Emerging Poet Award from the statewide Allied Arts Foundation is helping him sustain work on his first manuscript.

Kevin Clark

Inquiry at the Poets' Assembly

—election night ghazal, 2016



Where are we going, Walt Whitman?
A map pixels the phone's screen.

Does ripe fruit never fall?
The brute mauls at his meats.

What to make of a diminished thing?
The dry tree sings in a fiery plume.

Where are the waters of childhood?
Not touchstones. Never the dream.

Ought I to regret my seedtime?
Ocean waters rot the street.

Must we dream our dreams and have them too?
The search convenes within a tossed room.

"…nothing? Do you remember 'Nothing'?"
A voice inside the voice inside these walls.

Of those so close behind me, which are you?
A question posed only to a blind mirror.

What shall flatter the desolate?
A smattering of faux applause.

What happens to a dream deferred?
Words interred in the gut with gall.

Are you our sort of person?
The courts grant no favor.

And what of the dead?
Figureheads, their petrified laws.

Then what was that rank flavor of blood?
My words, gleaned upon the mud bank—

Nuptials

—*Obergefell v. Hodges*, June 6, 2015

1.

In 1983
on an alfalfa ranch outside Davis,
our lesbian bridesmaid Cherahn, dressed
in the ceremony's flowing blue skirt and white peasant blouse,
grew immoderately drunk
after the vows, then,
for a long theatrical instant
in the white noise of celebrants jabbering in solstice light,
lay down on her back, open-eyed
amid the mowed fields, arms outstretched, a rose
in her right hand, a drained Budweiser
in her left.
For too many years I asked myself
what she saw in the sky above her.

2.

One secret
formed a question to which we'd respond with silence.
No one dared ask what angst of childhood
amped my mother crazy.
While her brother Bob
built a wardrobe of paisleys, she shot hoops
against Bronx boys. She'd play catch with us
in the front yard. Her politics were muscular.

One day I'm twelve years old and she tells me, Kevin,
the country's made up of hawks
and doves. And you better believe the doves are pinkos,
they're commies. That's why
we're hawks.
I looked at her as if
she were mouthing Martian.
By her figuring,
I had dangerously little commonsense. Forgot
lunch or homework weekly. But I knew my catechism,
took home good marks in school. She approved
of my baseball prowess, the All Star team
a check in the motherhood box.
Still, there were days
she'd announce to friends and family,
Here comes My Son the Idiot.

3.
My wife hates hearing this, thinks it's cruel. But
maybe there's something to a son's intuition, because
I never said anything back. At first I used to think
that idiot line funny, figured she loved me, felt
the very opposite, didn't want me to grow
a big head.
In high school she saw me win the County Mile.
It was bad enough that my two-inch wrists
led me to quit the American sport of hardball
for the vaguely European and thus hormonally questionable
pursuit of track. When I came home with my medal
she congratulated me, then said
she was surprised—I kid you not—
that I ran so slowly.
One truth is, she was a hard-ass
with big ambitions for me
and a single command she'd repeat
with a don't-dare-challenge-me laugh:

We'll have no GD sissies in this family!

One day, when I came home from college declaring
I was going to write poetry, my Catholic mother
curled her mouth into a laugh, then
introduced me to a visiting cousin as
My Son the Fag.

4.
Where are they now,
those old lefty friends in the wedding album?
How we all succumbed to the prohibitive quiet:
Funnyman Stan Briggs impersonating Reagan
like a puff adder on helium, Mary Imperato
with her never-give-it-a-break eco-rant,
Jake the Bake Driscoll who quit football senior year
to work the strike lines for his father's union,
Liz Bridgwater whose heart-cutting smile beat back
The National Guard at the Seabrook armory—All of them,
Harvey Moscowitz, Ann-Marie Brinksher,
Abe Lewin, Hannah Sojourn, even Henry Oslom,
male nurse we thought a frail, floating enigma,
such passive rue…

5.

Once, on a second glass of wine,
Henry described to us how years ago he lay out
in his backyard, so often telling
his worried mother he simply wanted to watch
the clashing battleships of clouds,
when in truth
he'd write on imaginary paper his romantic fables
not a single person
was allowed to see, then, before rising,
tearing
each immaterial sheet into tiny leaves flitting up and up.

6.

I don't buy the theorists who contend we're born
pansexual beings,
how we live out an elegy of the body, cut sadly
from the sex we're alleged to reject.
Would I have to describe for Henry
the breathless ascent I've always known
as the cupola of a woman's nipple
rises beneath my tongue?
Perhaps. Once in college,
in a near whisper, he tried to explain his adoration
not for the size
of any lover's penis but rather
for the raging red knot of burl,
the fabulous inner expanse of pressure
so great, he said blushing, that the head
can hardly throb.
There are moments you see for the first time
into a foreign realm.
I could only smile the smile
of strangers, both speaking in the other's second language
as they recognize some parallel swell.

7.

Born in 1935
to a cigar-smoking immigrant lawyer
and his runway model wife, Uncle Bob
weathered years of polite deferral
as family wooed various women
to woo him through each season's blind date…
(My mother would never have heard my caution.)
Escapee of the plague, he forever skirted

the hidden harbors of ruin, a short-sleeved invitation
waving from a car here, a vaporous face
vanishing there…
He didn't make the wedding.

8.
I took the traditional dance with my mother,
after which we looked out from under the winged canopy
at the late silvers of sunset above the coastal range,
and then drew our gaze across the mile of dimming fields
till we saw in the foreground
Cherahn on her back,
arms outstretched as if in the sign of the cross,
her death-still body a din in the grass.
My mother placed her flute of ginger ale on the table,
looked up at me through squinting eyes, shook
her head, said, I know she's your friend—
but her behavior…

I looked away to the steel grey band of sky
thinning in increments
like parchment from an uninhabited world.

9.
My mother's dead more than twenty years.
Her gay brother gone in the silent gale.
As are her four gay cousins. As is
her single unmentionable secret…

10.
When the minister chanted the words of our vows
for us to repeat, he and our family
and the fields of alfalfa
suddenly fell away
in some pre-biblical hush—
And in that moment neither of us had known
possible, only my wife and I stood,
then spoke
with indivisible breath.

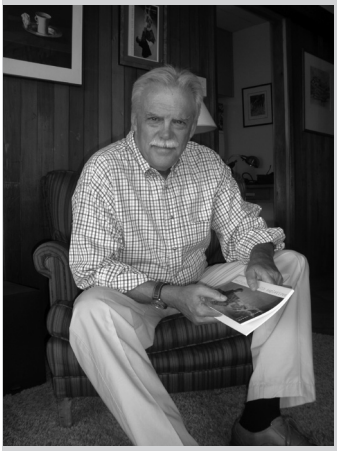
11.
How is it we all practiced
such uproarious silence? Before today,
in that panoramic photo, I'd never noticed
Henry

standing at the margin of the alfalfa field, maybe
twelve of our wise-ass friends far to his left, pointing
in genial mockery at the newlyweds:

You're doomed! Jake laughed. *No escape now!* Abe sang—

I hadn't thought of Henry in so many years, and here he is,
staring without affect above the camera
into, what?—the clouds for godsakes…?
So many years. It's as if he'd disappeared. But
now
I remember: Three years after the wedding, out
of the late-night ether, word came in shamed code
from his mother (a woman, it was said, so phobic
she even lied in her dreams).
He'd passed
from a bad case of pneumonia, she wrote, caught
in a cold downpour, claimed the cursive, you know
how that boy never took care of himself, sighed the letter,
never knew to come in out of the rain.
What's to do but nod
to Henry, then hold my gaze while I wait
the full length of a nuptial afternoon
for him to step out of the album so all of us
might welcome him back. But he doesn't, of course,
no matter the world's turning.

His way was quietude—
a kind of question.



Kevin Clark's third volume of poems, *The Consecrations*, is forthcoming from Stephen F. Austin University Press. His second book, *Self-Portrait with Expletives*, won the Pleiades Press prize. Clark's poetry appears in *The Southern Review*, *The Antioch Review*, *The Georgia Review*, and *The Iowa Review*, as well as *Crazyhorse*, *Ploughshares*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poetry Northwest*, and others.

Paul Willis

Wild Ginger



(Asarum hartwegii)

Here you pulse beneath ponderosa
and incense cedar, mottled
with your white-lobed veins,

fleshier stuff than the sticky fronds
of kitkitdizze, the collarbones
of miner's lettuce, reaching

your full-bodied sway across the duff
and into the breeze, a dark green offering
of your plump, your shaking heart.

—*Sequoia National Park*

Twelve

When I was twelve, I snarled
my uncle's fishing line inside his reel
so badly that he had to cut it with a knife—
not just snip it cleanly off
but slice the entire mess apart.
This was on the meadow lip of Graveyard Lakes,
a day's hike into the Silver Divide.

There were other indignities as well.
The mosquitoes that feasted on my rear
when I dropped my drawers to do my duty.
The mule that out of nowhere sprouted
the biggest erection I'd ever seen.
The other two boys who couldn't stop laughing
whenever I ran to my uncle and cried,
Uncle Earl! Uncle Earl!

One evening, the other men asked me
to fill up a cook pot in the spring.
I found a little creek by camp and climbed
and climbed, but could not find
where it came bubbling out of the ground.
So an hour later I came back with an empty pot.
I couldn't find the spring, I said.
And then I learned they had only meant
the creek itself. And the two boys
laughed and laughed at me.
Uncle Earl! they sang together. *Uncle Earl!*

But that is what it means to be twelve
and scared and clumsy and misinformed,
with an uncle who wants to have your back
but doesn't know how because twelve
is twelve and doesn't get better for a while,
for a very long time, in fact. I just wanted
to be in my bedroom where I could read
about King Arthur and his knights, who
rode into the dark forest and always found
clear bubbling springs and silver fountains
right where they were supposed to be,
coming fresh out of the ground.

—*Ansel Adams Wilderness*



Paul Willis is a professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. His most recent collections of poetry are *Deer at Twilight: Poems from the North Cascades* (Stephen F. Austin State University Press, 2018) and *Little Rhymes for Lowly Plants* (White Violet Press, 2019). Learn more at www.pauljwillis.com.

INTO THE VOID, AND WE SHALL FOLLOW

DAVID EK


David Ek

In wilderness, one is never truly alone. Sometimes even trite and abused platitudes have merit. No one fully understands the forces that compel people towards emptiness; perhaps it is physical, a calling from above, or something deeply spiritual. In wilderness, people may be seeking the meaning and purpose of life, as if the wild could unlock the secrets of hidden truths. If so, the secrets must be deep within open spaces, simply being unoccupied will not do.

There is an inherent difference between open spaces in the East and the empty wilds in the West. The difference is one of perseverance and gentle assurances of the old versus the vigor and energy of youth, or the friendly warmth and coziness of enduring relationships versus the passionate mysteries of new love. Forces are in action in the West. Our ancestors tamed the East, whereas whether the West is tame is a matter of contention. In the lands of the West, an indifferent nature is in charge; human whines are inaudible above the roar of wildness and the purging of the soul.

Abhorring a vacuum, nature in the West fills empty spaces with wind, storms, wildness, and the borderless space between Earth and sky, life and death. For some, this may still not be

Isolated Western landscapes attract people looking for their own vision, or version, of nature's truth. This may include scientists, pseudo-scientists, philosophers, athletes looking to test their mettle, conspiracy believers, religious seekers, atheists, crackpots, social misfits, lost souls, or simply the weary that just want to be left alone. Our society has interwoven these fringe elements into the fabric of the modern Western mystique.

enough to shield from the emptiness, but the pursuit of money, careers, and exuberance are never quite enough to numb or stem the cold. Therefore, our minds may fill empty landscapes with forces ranging from the sublime to the absurd.

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Sometimes, the things with which we fill empty spaces enrich our souls, bring comfort to life, or contribute to a sense of place, while sometimes they are destructive with a want of value or substance. Perhaps this is the dark side of the force—the suspicious and destructive elements that turn us on others or conjure the frightened child's imagination that there really is a monster hiding under the bed. It may have been some of these dark currents that led George Shufelt down his one-way street.

A January 29, 1934, article in the *Los Angeles Times* reported that mining engineer George Warren Shufelt believed a highly intelligent race of Lizard People was living in catacombs in a treasure-filled lost city under the City of Angels. For years, Shufelt amassed what he felt was evidence. Much of his supporting data came from special remote-sensing equipment that he invented for that purpose. His scanners detected a deep labyrinth of tunnels under the city. Determined to find this mysterious hideout and the buried gold that he believed was there, he dug and drilled a 250-foot deep shaft in the middle of Los Angeles, along North Hill Street, not far from the present-day Ramón C. Cortines School of Visual and Performing Arts.

Guided by collaborating rumors, Shufelt visited Hopi villages and spoke with Little Chief Greenleaf. Little Chief Greenleaf told Shufelt that this lost city was one of three such dwellings built over 5,000 years ago by a race of shape-shifting Lizard People. According to legend, the Lizard People had been living undetected under what is now Los Angeles for five millennia. Shufelt learned from Little Chief Greenleaf that the Lizard People were shape-shifters and could take many forms,

including human. He feared that Lizard People might be masquerading as humans and living as next-door neighbors.

To Shufelt, this all made perfect sense. He became determined to expose the Lizard People and their sinister plots. He succeeded in whipping people up, but the frenzy just as quickly vanished. He soon ran out of money and media attention, and eventually faded from the public's eye. Having never exposed the Lizard People or becoming rich by stealing their treasures, lonely Shufelt died in 1957.

The quest for the lost city, its treasures, and the shape-shifting Lizard People did not die with Shufelt—it was too compelling of a Western legend. Years later, a rumor circulated throughout southern California that miners had found a deep tunnel that connected with an underground expanse below the Panamint Mountains near Death Valley. Area residents speculated that this must be Shufelt's lost city. History buffs, treasure hunters, and conspiracy busters ranged throughout the Panamints in search of gold, Lizard People, and whatever else their minds conjured.

Somewhere along the line, the Lizard People story morphed into a more sinister plot. Rumors held that the federal government had known, and been conspiring with, the Lizard People (from the Draco constellation no less) for years. The federal government and the Lizard People planned to take over the world and install a new fascist world order. Suspicious and frightened members of the public claimed to be able to identify Lizard People disguised as humans. This list included famous entertainers and powerful leaders of the day, including President Richard Nixon. It was not unlike the chilling 1960 *Twilight Zone* episode, "The Monsters are Due on Maple Street." Sometimes destructive forces are not bombs and extraterrestrial troopers, but forces from within.

True believers thought the government communicated with the Lizard People's subterranean society by passing radio waves through cave and mine portals. A few local residents designed ingenious devices believed to thwart these communications. They consisted of an assortment of crystalline rocks, metal nuts, bolts, screws, and foil held together by an amber-colored baseball-size resin globule. Others toiled tirelessly in their garages constructing what they saw as finely crafted spheres



This "dressed-up" commercially-made Orgone Energy Generator is an example of the primitive, resinous blobs found throughout the Death Valley region. The Death Valley style was intended less for their decorative appeal and more for their reported signal-squelching abilities. These devices are also called an Orgonite Holy Hand Grenade (a reference to the "Holy Hand Grenade of Antioch" from the movie *Monty Python and the Holy Grail*).

tuned to the specific frequency to disrupt such signals.

As I wandered the Death Valley region in the beginning years of this century, I commonly found these spheres at the entrance to caves and mines. Not knowing which of these openings intersected the Lizard People's catacombs, believers seemingly wandered the desert leaving spheres behind in whatever potential portal they came across.

If I removed the spheres, new resin blobs took their place within a matter of weeks or less. The spheroid-makers may have felt that I was a part of the government-Lizard People conspiracy. The point is, the dry, wind-swept, sunbaked, and isolated desert ranges, caves, and mines were not as lonely and not as empty as they appeared.

Modern conspiratorialists have of course never exposed the lost city and the Lizard People's lair. Sometimes, when a person tries hard enough to find something, their mind conjures evidence. If one stares at a random series of dots, over time, or aided by delirium or chemical substances, he or she may begin seeing patterns in the arrangement. This is likely how ancient peoples devised our series of constellations. To some people when they looked into the sky, they saw images of familiar shapes, such as hunters, scorpions, dragons, and water dippers—perhaps it was their way to provide order out of an otherwise immense, imposing, and chaotic world.

New Age spiritual devotees have co-opted many Native beliefs or have taken them into different realms. Devotees merged many of these philosophies and molded them to conform to legends and conspiracies.


David Ek

Some believers merged select New Age and Native ideas with rumors of Lizard People living in crystal caves under California's Mount Shasta. Another variation replaces the Lizard People with lemur-like creatures that are the descendants of the lost city of Atlantis.

Devout practitioners programmed with vestigial pseudoscience and loaded with assorted facts are especially prone to connecting dots in their search for higher meaning. This mix may have contributed to the theory of ley lines. A ley line is a real or imagined alignment of objects on the Earth's surface when such spatial arrangement is presumed to have higher or deeper meaning or significance. For instance, if people study a map of cultural sites, they may find that some of these sites form a line. If so, they may speculate on ancient connections or some otherwise higher purpose and meaning to their alignment.

Speculations on the meaning of ley lines are diverse. Some claim that ancient aliens, Lizard People or others, influenced these alignments as a form of communication with modern civilizations. Others speculate that

Speculations on the meaning of ley lines are diverse. Some claim that ancient aliens, Lizard People or others, influenced these alignments as a form of communication with modern civilizations. Others speculate that mysterious forces, as yet little understood, shaped the arrangements. Believers think that if they could unlock the mysteries of these patterns, they would better understand these hidden forces and the meaning of life, and perhaps reach a higher spiritual plane. Others again see only randomness and flights of fancy.

mysterious forces, as yet little understood, shaped the arrangements. Believers think that if they could unlock the mysteries of these patterns, they would better understand these hidden forces and the meaning of life, and perhaps reach a higher spiritual plane. Others again see only randomness and flights of fancy.

Skeptics have demonstrated that the locations of common structures in larger cities, such as pizza restaurants and gas stations, often fall along certain lines. They doubt that *Exxon* or *Pizza Hut* built their infrastructure guided by deep spirituality or hidden Earth forces. Mathematicians point out that one can draw a straight line between any two dots, so with any series of random dots there will always be some that fall along a line.

True believers are not convinced. They may connect dots to far-remote speculations. If a government facility is located along this path, they suspect large-scale conspiracies, and such speculations may continue well beyond the absurd.

For those that believe planetary forces create ley lines, they often also believe that Earth's energy preferentially flows along these lines. To them, the places where energy flow lines converge are especially significant, even at the spiritual level. The Earth's energy in these convergence zones are reported to create diverse special effects that defy the laws of physics. True believers, New Age spiritualists, metaphysicists, and the curious minded seek convergence zones for a host of reasons, including the recalibration of their own internal energy with that of the Earth.

Such believers also subscribe to the idea that an even greater force of nature exists—spiritual vortexes, since many vortexes are found on or near such ley lines. Spiritual vortexes are rotating masses of energy that reportedly disrupt Newtonian space and physics. Believers claim that vortexes are gateways to other spiritual dimensions and that strong vortexes are located at several famous antiquities, such as the Great Pyramid in Egypt and Great Britain's Stonehenge. A high percentage of vortexes, they believe, are in the American West. Some of the better-known spiritual vortexes are sites in Arizona near Sedona, Airport Mesa, Bell Rock, Cathedral Rock, and Boynton Canyon. Well-known vortexes located in other states include the Mount Shasta Vortex, Montana Vortex, Santa Cruz Mystery Spot, and the Oregon Vortex.

The Oregon Vortex is a commercial roadside attraction. Paying customers may experience strange phenomena such as spatial distortion, or witness people and objects appearing to grow and shrink in size and proportion.

Other vortexes are harder to explain. Some nighttime vortex watchers claim feeling weighted down and unable to move. They report seeing swaying and glowing green lights emanating from vortexes with black ghostly apparitions that dance around the light display. Their weightiness lifts only when the green lights and darkened figures fade away.

Vortexes are not the only spiritual objects reported to be located along ley lines. Supposedly, some ley lines lead deep into isolated plateaus and ridgelines in the heart of the remote northern Great Plains. Located in these wind-swept austerities are some of the West's biggest mysteries—medicine wheels. Medicine wheels are mostly circular structures built of small and medium-sized stones. The classic medicine wheel consists of individual rocks aligned in a pattern resembling an old-style wagon wheel, with an outer circle connected to interior radiating "spokes" that converge at the center. The centers of the wheels often contain either a single stone or a pile of stones. The diameters of circular medicine wheels range from twenty to two hundred feet.

With few exceptions, medicine wheels are in isolated locations within the upper Great Plains. Most are in southern Alberta and Saskatchewan. Within the United States, most are in Montana. The first recorded, and the most famous, is Wyoming's Bighorn Medicine Wheel. Situated near the summit of Medicine Mountain in the Bighorn Mountains, the designation "medicine wheel" owes its name to this site.

Dating estimates suggest these structures range from 100 to over 5,000 years old. Creators of the medicine wheels are imagined to be one of a variety of cultures ranging from modern tribes to prehistoric civilizations. Adepts believe that the alignment of spokes points to celestial objects, as if the wheel were an astronomical observatory. Data indicates otherwise. The most common explanation for any unknown object built by early cultures is "ceremonial."

I suspect there is not one single purpose for medicine wheels. If these wheels were constructed over a span



Medicine Mountain National Historic Landmark (formerly known as the Bighorn Medicine Wheel). Bighorn National Forest, Wyoming.

of thousands of years, by a variety of cultures, there may be as many reasons for their construction as there are medicine wheels. In addition, later cultures that moved into the region may have adopted or co-opted existing medicine wheels into their own practices, and adapted, maintained, and even modified them over generations for wholly different reasons.

I am glad that we may never learn the full meaning and purpose of medicine wheels. The mystery seems to add to the allure of the Western wilds. However, the nebulous status of these structures may contribute to them having less protection than they deserve. Many medicine wheels have been lost, even recently—lost to vandals, lost to development, lost to ignorance, lost due to the lack of appreciation, and lost to inattentiveness. Many surely have been lost to the winds and time, long before we even knew of their passing.

When thinking about spatial vortexes and Earth's energy forces, it may be an easy transition to think about the Force in the *Star Wars* world. Both involve a mysterious force that exists in all living and non-living things (we'll ignore midichlorians for the time being), and both can be channeled. It is similar to the Chinese concept of *feng-shui*, the Chinese term for "that which cannot be seen and cannot be grasped." *Feng-shui* instructs practitioners to follow the natural current and energy flow and let these forces guide your actions and activities, whether interior decorating or blowing up a Death Star.

If this force and energy flow is omnipresent, why are we more likely to connect with it in isolated and empty Western landscapes? Could it be that modern distractions and noise overwhelm the senses in urban settings? This is perhaps why John Muir once famously said, "I'd rather be in the mountains thinking of God, than in church thinking about mountains."

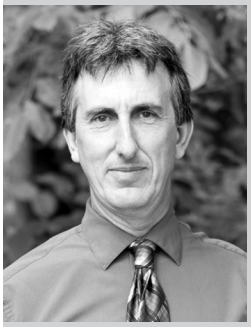
For much of the Western world, life is linear. There is a start and an end, a birth and a death. Other cultures see the world in circles—birth, death, and rebirth. The seasons display an apparent birth and death cycle only to witness a rebirth the following year. In circular-focused philosophies, people do not create symmetry in their life by balancing opposing ends, but rather by balancing within the center of life's circle. Therefore, if you believe in the movement of Earth's forces, locating the balanced center would be especially enticing. Perhaps there is a certain warmth and comfort in a symmetrical and circular world, with an infinite amount of "redoes." Imagining a stressful and chaotic life on a linear path to death, as if you were simply a leaf in a maelstrom, is not very comforting or enriching.

Perhaps in our quest for a higher purpose, we end up grasping at the most convenient explanation that fills our emptiness, whether it be vortexes or Lizard People. Maybe a belief in mysterious forces is encoded in our DNA, like a salmon compelled to return to its place of birth, drawing us back to our primordial ooze. Perhaps people just want to bask in the glow of the sublime, or feel comfort knowing that there are forces and meanings larger than a single human—or humankind.

This begs a question. If ancient people knew about these forces and

spiritual sites, why didn't they build their civilizations around these places? It seems these sites tend to be as remote from civilization as possible. Did our minds conjure up these sites from empty spaces? Do wild places play on our psyche? This may have been the case with George Shufelt and his pursuit of Lizard People.

Regardless of one's specific spiritual pursuits, spatial openess blurs the distinction between the tangible and the intangible, between logic and emotion, science and myth, and fact and faith. Various paths, mysteries, phenomena, lore, and legends have converged on the wild and empty spaces of the American West. As such, these storied places add to their allure and have become an integral part of the Western mystique. Under such drama-filled landscapes, full of passionate characters within communities of like-minded individuals, how could anyone feel alone? In an otherwise complex and chaotic world, how could these storied places not bring at least a little meaning and comfort to life? It is easy to see how the wild places of the West are so compelling, and not as lonely as they seem—even if Lizard People are imaginary and catacombs, in whatever form, remain elusive.



David Ek holds a M.S. degree in geoscience. His career has taken him throughout the mountainous and desert West, but he currently lives in rural Virginia. He has authored numerous essays for scientific publications. His literary work has appeared in *Canary* and elsewhere.

THE RED ROCK CHRONICLES

RACHEL LEWIS

There is a story from my childhood that I know I remember wrong. Sometimes when I picture that day, I am alone in the car. And sometimes I remember my sister being there also. For some reason, I don't remember my mother being there. I know she was—painting or napping in the front passenger seat—while the three of us waited for the rest of the group to return.

I attribute these faulty impressions in my memory to youth and the passing of time, but I also blame Ray Bradbury. I stayed behind because I was tired (or maybe I was just bored?), but I used *The Martian Chronicles* as my excuse. I had a book report due at the end of the holiday break, so I stayed in the car with my coat zipped up and my mittened hands splayed into a poly-blend bookstand for my paperback novel. Perhaps I remember being alone in the car because I felt so alone in the pages. The American astronauts had failed yet again to establish a settlement on Mars. They killed all the Martians with their chickenpox germs and then turned on one another. I found myself alone on the red planet, which I imagined as quite similar to the landscape my family was visiting that day, in the brick-red deserts of Southern Utah.

Little Wild Horse Canyon is a sandstone slot canyon, not far from Goblin Valley, in the most Mars-like expanse of Utah's red rock country. It was New Year's Eve in the early nineties. I was in my early teens. I might have been a "tween," but we didn't have that word back then. My parents planned a daytrip to share some of their favorite local archaeological spots of interest with friends. My mom's friend Donna and her son were there. My father had invited a colleague, Fred, and Fred's wife, Isla, who had their toddler grandson in tow.



Bureau of Land Management

Even at that difficult age, I was an amenable daughter. I enjoyed hiking and camping and being in the outdoors with my family. I was usually up for any excuse to explore, even though I was never able to match my parents' enthusiasm for Native American rock art, the prehistoric paintings and etchings found across North America, especially in the American Southwest. My parents were eager rock art hunters, and we went out looking for sites at least one weekend a month. This day was not meant for exploration, though. My parents were introducing their friends to our hobby, taking them

to sites that we had visited many times before.

We hiked around the Green River area earlier that day and were ending our excursion at this last site. It was unusual for me to have asked to stay behind; I'm a little surprised that I got away with it, in retrospect. My parents didn't allow us to "wimp out" of hikes. But I wasn't alone. As I said, my younger sister, Andrea, was with me in the car.

"I was in the car, too," my mom reminds me. I have asked my parents about the story at a café over breakfast. I was curious as to how their memories compared to mine.

"That's what I thought," I say. "But I wasn't sure."

"I stayed behind because I had a cold," Mom says.

That's it. Mom was sick, and so was Andrea. I was only able to stay behind because they had a good excuse and because Dad was distracted by his friends and his role of tour guide. It helped that the sun was going down and the pictographs were a mile or so from the trailhead. I remember now that there was a bustle to get going so my father didn't take the time to press me.

They were gone an interminable amount of time. Much too long. For us in the car, the time stretched on more delicately by each moment that we waited for one of the others to say what we were all thinking: *Shouldn't they be back by now?*

The shadows stretched gradually, and the retreating sunlight fell in cloud-filtered pink and lavender shades on the sandstone and patches of snow. The cold became more insistent. It pushed through the Plexiglass of the window beside my cheek and filled the open space behind my seat in the Subaru's hatchback. Eventually it became cold even on Mars, where the astronauts' argument about the ethics of colonization was turning violent.

Sarah, my older sister, was the first member of the expedition to return. She opened the car door next to Andrea and pushed in, backside first, bringing the insulating swirl of cold that surrounded her body with her. "Dad fell," she announced. "He's okay, but he dislocated his arm." Mom was out of the car before we heard another detail, and I quickly followed.

Even as I trudged down the trail toward the shadowed figure that was a lumbering Dad-Fred conglomeration, I knew there would be nothing I could do to help. Just getting out of the car was an act of putting myself in the way. Now that they were emerging up the last few feet to the parking area I could see that Dad was leaning on Fred for support, and that Fred had an arm around my father's ribs, but I couldn't see what use that was to a banged-up shoulder. Maybe my Dad was leaning on the man to allow him to feel like he was helping. The only thing that was

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giving the injured arm direct assistance was my father's own left hand, cradling the limp limb. What was needed was transportation to the hospital, 120 miles away in a town called Price.

"Jane, you are going to need to drive," Fred told my mother. "Is that okay?"

"I can drive," my father said. "Jane, I'll need you to shift."

That line is now legend in my family. We invoke it whenever someone's stubbornness has carried them beyond the realm of reason. To this day that person is usually still my dad, which makes the sting of the phrase that much brighter and therefore more pleasurable for the rest of us.

It took the entire family to veto my dad's decree, but we did it. My mom drove us to the hospital.

"I'd never driven so fast," Mom says.

"I remember," I add. Then I turn to my dad, "and I remember how awful it was, trying to get over that dirt road with your arm bumping around. We propped it up on Mom's purse to support it, but you were in so much pain."

"Yeah, that was uncomfortable," Dad allows, but I can tell he doesn't want to admit it, even now.

"The other thing I remember . . . I was in the seat behind you, and you were holding the space where your arm had come out of the socket, and you told me to feel it. I didn't want to. I was scared. But then you yelled at me when I refused, so I reached up and felt it . . . the gap where your shoulder should be. You said something like, 'there, doesn't that feel weird?' And I was like, 'yes, it feels weird. Glad we established that.'" My dad laughs at this, but clearly doesn't remember the exchange.

"Then they gave you those drugs and you were so out of it . . . ." My mom has skipped ahead to the ER now, but I'm not ready for that.

"Wait, wait . . . " I say, asking them to rewind. "Tell me what happened. Where were you when you fell?"

"We were almost to the rock art panel, up on the ridge above the creek bed." I can picture this. The slot canyon opens up and the sides of the canyon stack up in levels. From the creek bed, a rising wall of sand and sage brush climbs up to where it meets the sandstone wall of the canyon again. If the canyon had a third story, they would have been walking along its balcony.

"Were you at the narrowest point?" I ask, trying to envision a trail that, at one time in my life, I knew well.

"No, it wasn't that narrow. We were walking across the top of a large boulder that sloped down away from the trail. It was a steep slope. And there was a thin layer of snow. That's when Fred's grandson—he was maybe three or four—he was having a really good time, but he wasn't being careful . . . . It wasn't his fault; that isn't what I mean. He was just so little. He didn't have the best balance yet. Anyway, he was walking next to me and he slipped and knocked my feet out from under me . . . ."

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This is incongruous with the story that I "know," but I try not to react. Hadn't Fred told me that the boy fell and started to go down the slick rock, and Dad dove for him? Or had I invented that?

"I landed on my shoulder and it dislocated," Dad continues. "Then we were sliding together toward the drop-off. I was able to get a hold of him so that I didn't roll over him and I used my body weight to stop our slide before we went off the . . . "

"Donna told me," Mom interjects, "that the little boy was going over the edge and that you grabbed him with your good arm and rolled over, flinging him uphill before he could fall over." I smile. We have both cast my dad as a superhero: the defeater of death and gravity.

"Maybe," my dad says. "But I think I had him tucked in my good arm and we were sliding backward on my side and my limp arm." I cringe a little picturing that.

"But we came to a stop and we crawled back up. He was pretty shaken but he was fine. But then no one wanted to see the rock art! We had come all that way, and they just wanted to turn around and get back to the cars." My dad raises his hands in the retelling, still bothered by the squandered opportunity over twenty years later. Knowing my dad and recalling the thought and seriousness he put into those daytrips back then, I realize for the first time that Wild Horse Canyon was intentionally saved as the last site on the trip. The grand finale in his carefully composed mixtape of cherished archeological desert spots selected to share with his friends.

"Finally, Fred went the last bit up the trail and took a few photos of the panel," Dad says, and I realize that perhaps Fred got my father out of that canyon after all. Someone had to climb up and take a look just so they could leave.

"We all went up to see the rock art," Sarah says later in the week. I've been invited for dinner and as we set the table, I ask for her version of the story.

"It actually wasn't that big of a deal," she recalls. "It was one of those things where we all went . . . Gah!" She gasps and puts her hands to her throat in imitation of one of those pearl-clutching gestures we all make when we want to stop time and prevent what is happening from happening. "It was really scary for a second. But it happened so fast. By the time I could form the thought that they might go over the edge, it was over."

"Where were you standing? Do you remember?"

"I was behind, but not right behind. There was Dad and then one more person and then me."

"Okay, so what happened?" I ask, excited to hear this. "You were the only person in the family that actually saw it; the rest of us were in the car."

"I was?" she asks. "I didn't remember that. Well, the little boy was walking in front of Dad. And when he slipped, Dad grabbed him, but lost his balance and they both went down. And it was this steep slope, but it evened out just a little bit before the drop-off. That's where they stopped sliding." I decide that I like this version best. My father: the well-meaning klutz who still managed to save the day.

"But then they came back up to the trail and they seemed okay, so no one knew anything was wrong. Well, Dad knew something was wrong, obviously. I think he said his arm hurt. But it didn't sound bad and we were almost at the paintings. We walked the last little bit up the trail, and that's when Dad finally said something."

"What did he say?" I ask. I don't think I've heard this part of the story before.

"He realized that his shoulder was dislocated and he was trying to get Fred to shove it back in the socket. But Fred wasn't having any part of that."

"Oh God," I cringe again. "I can't imagine . . ."

"He wouldn't have been able to do it," Sarah said. "Remember, at the hospital? They had the doctor and two nurses trying to shove it back in, and they still couldn't get it?"

"Yes, I remember," I say, but I know I don't. I've heard the story so many times I can picture it. The nurses in their pale blue scrubs, holding my dad by his legs and his good arm. The doctor trying every technique conceivable, including (according to Mom) putting his own leg on the bed next to my Dad's chest to try to get a more leverage on the useless arm, which was resisting all of the man's training and good intentions. That was when they gave up on the local and just knocked my dad out. It was the only way to get the muscles to relax enough to send the arm back into the socket.

I couldn't possibly remember any of this. I was in the waiting room. It's one of the more notable days of my childhood, but I don't have a speaking role in the story. I only have fabricated memories of the dynamic moments. The hike. The fall. The relocation. I spent it waiting. Waiting for the hikers to return. Waiting as my mom drove to Price. Waiting for hours in the ER's room designated for waiting—feeling both frightened and bored and wishing there were something I could do. At least, I wished I was in on the action somewhere. As I said, I was a tween on the sidelines of the drama.

What I do remember is sitting for a very long time next to a man with a bloody hand. There was a rag wrapped around the palm and he was clasping the bloody fingers tenderly in his uncut hand, cradling it in his lap and sitting very still with his eyes closed in meditation, as if transporting himself away from the pain of it. *None of our expeditions went as planned*, I thought, looking around the waiting room, still thinking vaguely about the wayward Americans on Mars.

"By the time we got home, it was a new year." That is how my mom ends the story, but Sarah said something similar. We weren't a family that stayed up for New Year's Eve, so it might have been the first time we all spent that midnight hour awake together. I don't recall anyone mentioning it at the time, but it fits somehow. Or at least for me it does. My role in the story was to witness the passing of time. It seems right that, somewhere in that day of waiting for the next thing to happen, waiting to be a character in the story and not just a reader of it, the year changed, imperceptibly shifting all of us into the future.



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DRAG RACING IN THE HEAT

STEPHANIE SARVER



Portland International Raceway, 1976. Portland Archives, A2011-006.10693.

I became interested in drag racing by happenstance when I overheard a one-sided cell phone conversation at a grocery store in Portland. A fragment penetrated the din. "Going to the drags at PIR." Later, I googled PIR and discovered a parallel universe, one seemingly at odds with the city that's covered in the popular media. The drags at Portland International Raceway—PIR to Oregon locals—had never appeared in my news feeds, but it became an item for my bucket list. Until then, my Oregon junkets had focused on the state's must-see natural wonders and a few historical sites: Mt. Hood and the Gorge, the lava beds of southern Oregon, and the headwaters of the McKenzie River. I had visited the wheel ruts of the Oregon Trail amidst the sagebrush of the state's arid, eastern plains, and Fort Clatsop near the mouth of the Columbia River, where Lewis and Clark and their corps built a flea-ridden fort during the soggy winter of 1805-1806. PIR took me in a different direction.

Drag racing, as I understood it, seemed an adolescent ritual depicted in movies. *Rebel Without a Cause* or *Grease*. Or Beach Boys songs— *Little Deuce Coupe*, *Shut Down*. The songs, innocent Top-40 tunes, glorified the car culture of the 1960s. That's all I knew of drag racing—that and RuPaul's show, *Drag Race*, which doesn't involve cars, but drag queens. I hadn't encountered drag racing in literature, aside from Hunter S. Thompson's oblique mention of drag racing in *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas*. His race, while in keeping with the theme of adolescent high jinks, amounted to little more than a drug-addled effort to provoke a car of conventioneers into a race on the Las Vegas Strip.

I've since learned that drag racing takes many forms, from the racing of hot rods engineered in neighborhood garages to illegal late-night races on city streets to high-stakes top-fuel races that command big purses. I watched the Saturday night drags at PIR, events open to any driver who can pay the thirty-five dollar racing fee. The cars are a mixed lot, from souped-up dragsters to family mini-vans to highly tuned Japanese economy cars. The drivers

share one goal, which is to accelerate the car to the highest speed possible in the distance of a quarter-mile. The goal of racing is to win—to engineer, tune, and drive a machine that defies gravity and overcomes inertia.

I can't quite say that I'm interested in cars. Rather, cars hum in my consciousness like low-level white noise. I'm a Baby Boomer, born at the mid-twentieth century, when automobiles carried the cultural freight of working and middle-class identity. Families defined themselves by their cars. Chevys or Fords. Pontiacs or Oldsmobiles. Mercurys or Chryslers. Lincolns or Cadillacs. And there were the quirkier cars: the Ramblers and Studebakers, Nashes and Edsels. I've been aware of cars since an early age, first recognizing their importance at age four or five, as I absorbed my mother's shame when our green Ford Ranch Wagon stalled at an intersection. I ducked behind the seat, confused by her embarrassment as she coaxed the balky engine into life.

These days the American love affair with street cars has soured. The household automobile has become a problem to be solved amidst the dysfunction of urban density and sprawl. Cars have become a symbol of technology gone awry, a choice for some, a necessity for most, and a source of identity for a few.

Given the dark presence of the automobiles in daily life, I struggle with my casual interest in cars. It's easier to repress an attraction than to reorder the continuum of identities by which I parse the world. Auto aficionados exist in one realm, and nature lovers, among whom I count myself, in another. Despite this, I appreciate old cars, the kind raced at PIR on drag nights, the cars of my youth—the Bel Airs, Malibus, Monte Carlos, GTOs, Dodge Darts, and the older classics—all refitted with

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powerful engines. Nostalgia exerts an allure, even as the scene is at odds with my reverence for the non-human environment.

I could claim to be an environmentalist, but my bona fides are shaky. I was backpacking before I could drive, and every back-country junket started with a ride in an automobile. Moreover, I came of age in California, where a love of nature and the wilderness was cultivated in tandem with an appreciation, perhaps mastery, of cars. Working people knew how to tinker with and repair engines. Drag racing emerged from and was fostered by that know-how.

I was raised in a household that valued self-sufficiency. My father paid no one for work he could do himself. Thus, he repaired (perhaps not well enough) the embarrassing Ford Ranch Wagon, and later, the red International pickup that carried us on camping trips to the Sierras and the Mojave desert. From him I learned a few survival skills—how to watch for scorpions and listen for rattlers. I also learned how to replace spark plugs, set points, and time the engine of our old Ford Mus-

tang. I understood brakes and master cylinders, coils and alternators, universal joints, and wheel bearings. It was useful knowledge.

That automotive knowledge now figures as an antipode to a more pressing knowledge about the impacts of transportation on our world. Cars collide in my consciousness with my better self, the one that thinks daily about the connectedness of human systems with a wider terrestrial cosmos.

On my summer evening at PIR, dueling narratives bubbled in my awareness as I sat on the hard aluminum bleachers. The narratives were amplified by a bittersweet, uneasy feeling that I eventually identified as nostalgia. Quiet ghosts lurked at the edge of consciousness. I barely recalled an early boyfriend tinkering on his truck, leaning into the cavity of an engine compartment. On another occasion, I remembered an odd moment in 2006 when two elderly uncles asked to peer under the hood of my new hybrid car, so curious about this automotive novelty that they reverted to a ritual of manhood formed decades earlier. I couldn't name what bothered me. It wasn't nostalgia, the memory of an earlier life, but the peculiar wrongheaded joy I felt when I arrived at the raceway on a warm evening.

I expected a busier scene. The name, Portland International Raceway, hints at grandeur, but the place is decidedly ordinary, defined by acres of asphalt pavement, cyclone fences, and tiers of bleachers that reflect white light in the declining evening sun. During my visit, we had our choice of seats. Perhaps fifty spectators had staked out their spots near the starting line, scattered among various levels. Some brought cushions and blankets. A few stragglers were positioned far down the track at the finish line, more interested in witnessing who wins than the explosive roar at the starting line.

For all the nostalgia, I soon discovered the reality of drag racing. Spectators needed patience as we endured boring lulls between races, lulls that granted the track crew time to prep the starting area with traction compound. That's a volatile mix of glue and rubber, which allows slick tires to grab the pavement. After the prepping, two drivers queued up side-by-side, revving engines, releasing clutches, and spinning tires. That's called the burn out. The logic of this maneuver wasn't clear to me. My husband explained that spinning heats the tires, which increases traction as drivers inch forward.

When the drivers were in position, we all riveted our eyes on the starting lights. Adrenaline surged in our blood as the lights flashed from yellow to green, and then, in a burst of deafening noise, the drivers peeled out in a cloud of toxic fumes, tires spewing smoke as they tore along a quarter-mile straightaway. For roughly ten seconds, exhilaration overpowered the crowd. All attention was focused on this automotive ritual, a throwback to a time when planetary temperatures were no one's worry, when families could buy homes on the pay from blue-collar jobs, and no one considered the ill effects of cars on the planet.

Beyond the finish line, the drivers surrendered acceleration to rumble slowly off the track to the paddock, where they tinkered with engines. Between races, spectators stretched their legs and awaited the next heat—a term whose irony wasn't lost on me. Some folks bought refreshments—a tray of nachos and beer. Others wandered among the cars to peer at the engines exposed under open hoods,

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I was curious about the history of PIR and found it in the public record. At almost three hundred acres, PIR occupies a tract under the jurisdiction of the City of Portland. The raceway and an adjacent golf course, dog park, and wetlands sit on a flood plain eight feet above sea level and well below the levees that hold the Columbia River in precarious equilibrium with Portland's low-lying lands. These features are zoned as open space. Their chartered purpose is to preserve and enhance natural pockets of urban land for recreation.

Considering this, the place is rife with environmental and cultural irony, challenging even a common understanding of the words *preserve* and *natural*. The entire 650-acre *natural* pocket is located north of a bluff-top neighborhood that emerged around a meat-packing plant. The plant is gone, but the neighborhood endures, now best known for a thirty-one foot Paul Bunyan statue that stands at the edge of town. Armed with a twin-bladed axe, Paul provides a subtext to place, an oblique homage to the loggers who cleared Oregon forests.

As for the natural spaces, the raceway and the nearby golf course include several waterways and ponds—what remains of the various sloughs that once dominated the flood plain. The sloughs are bordered with trees and shrubs—apparent landscaping efforts intended to approximate the native flora. One can find red cedar, cottonwood, Oregon ash, willow, and a smattering of Douglas fir along these muddy waterways. These features figure as the natural pockets characteristic of this open space. On a subsequent visit, I observed some wildlife—a few egrets and a great blue heron, Canada geese, placidly dispensing fertilizer across the golf course fairways, and crows. Lots of crows.

When Lewis and Clark travelled along the Columbia River in November of 1805, they camped to the east on an island roughly adjacent to the area now known for several freeways and a prominent, blue Ikea store. They commented on the immense numbers of water fowl "flying in every direction." They observed deer and elk grazing on the flood plains, animals that provided for the robust native population of the area. Clark counted fifty-two canoes along the river bank belonging to the estimated two hundred people. Nearby Sauvie Island was dotted with villages that supported more than two thousand residents.

The area now occupied by PIR, the dog park, golf course, and wetlands, was designated on old maps as the Wet

Prairie. It eventually was drained and nearby forests plundered with such vigor that Portland acquired the nickname Stumptown. The wet prairie was made dry, or at least dryer, by the installation of pumping stations. Marshes became farmland. River bottom was sucked up and redeposited to form foundations for cattle stockyards and various meat-processing enterprises: abattoirs, packing plants, and livestock arenas. The sloughs—the natural waterways—made convenient sewers for the slaughterhouse offal.

The farmland was transformed by progress. World War II brought accelerated change. Henry J. Kaiser, the shipbuilding magnate, recruited thousands of workers to build Liberty ships. They needed housing. Presto chango. Within a year, a town emerged from the land to house the diverse population of new workers. At its peak, Vanport would house nearly 40,000 people, a population served by several stores, a hospital, apartments for shipyard workers and their families, and racially integrated schools. All this had been erected on the same ground above which I sat as I watched the drag races.

Vanport came to an abrupt end less than a decade later. On Memorial Day, 1948, a heavy Rocky Mountain snowpack and a warm spring swelled the Columbia River to record-breaking levels, surging up the Willamette River and spreading into the marshy lands west of Vanport, eventually breaching the railroad levee at the western boundary of the town. Within a few hours, a wall of water submerged streets and washed houses and apartments from their moorings. Fifteen thousand residents were displaced. Many, including Vanport's substantial Black population, took refuge and later settled in Portland, a noteworthy moment owing to the racism that defines Oregon's history.

Vanport was gone for good. In the flood's aftermath, the remaining buildings and their component parts were sold for salvage and the land was scraped down to the mud, as if it were a canvas on which a new picture would appear. Only the paved streets remained as evidence of Vanport's former shape. By the 1950s, as city leaders mulled over the fate of the barren wet prairie, car enthusiasts took to the ghostlike roadways to stage street racing. The streets, Vanport's skeletal remains, became the bones of PIR. Cottonwood Street, which had been a main avenue, now serves as the straightaway where the dragsters race. Broadacre Street grants access to PIR and the dog park. A few retaining walls and landscape features can be seen at a nearby lake and along a slough. The levees persist.

Today, north of the raceway, a tract of old Vanport land became the Vanport Wetlands, a tract most likely resembling the old wet prairie. The parcel, reclaimed for postdeluvian reuse, was acquired by the Port of Portland in the late 1990s. They purchased environmental indulgences and undertook a restoration project to offset shipping-industry impacts along the Columbia and Willamette Rivers. Native grasses and shrubs were planted. The new quasi-natural wetland is bound by cyclone fences and barbed wire. Locked gates and the fence line are posted with No Trespassing signs that warn against human intrusion. The wetland is doing its work, flooding with area rainwater during the wet season. Beyond the ignominious railroad levee to the west, two natural lakes perform the same function, figuring as a buffer during periods of heavy rain.

No one I overheard at PIR was talking of a connection between the burning of fossil fuels and the rising heat of Northwest summers. As the sun declined and the track floodlights blinked on, families shared happy moments with their kids, drinking sodas and eating hot dogs. A trio of teens wearing black hoodies and skinny jeans chattered amiably. One girl boasted that she would ask to ride with a racer during one of his runs. The other girls ribbed her, hinting that she lacked the nerve. It was an ordinary summer evening. In all these ways, it was the stuff depicted in George Lucas's *American Graffiti*.

Admission to the spectacle was cheap at ten dollars. This purchased the bellicose roar of engines and the exhilaration of an adrenaline rush. Near the paddock, the cars queued up, inching toward the starting line with engines rumbling, surging like stallions straining at the bit. The drivers awaited their ten-second opportunity. Would they jump the light or wait too long to accelerate, release the clutch and spin their tires sufficiently to burn a stinking cloud of rubber to gain traction? In this moment, driving skill and mechanical craft merged.

The Environmental Protection Agency has sought to regulate air pollution in competitive racing. Their efforts have met with staunch resistance by the racing sector and its fans. In 2015 the industry rallied legislative and citizen resistance to an EPA effort to limit modifications to emissions systems—an effort many interpreted as a direct assault on the tradition of stock car and drag racing. That's not to say that the entire sector is unaware of the problems related to carbon emissions. NASCAR, the body that governs big-money stock car racing, has shifted from gasoline to ethanol, a gesture that rings hollow, but nonetheless represents a shift from the leaded gasoline that had been the fuel of choice for the industry. That same year, rumors circulated that PIR would invest in carbon offsets—an action that has not since been publicized.

One historian has suggested that drag racers grant more thought to the cost of the fuel they burn than to its environmental effects. This tendency isn't so different from the way many of us think about vacations to national parks or wilderness areas, or the way scholars of the Beat movement reenact Jack Kerouac's road trips. We focus on the cost of gasoline, perhaps considering in passing the effects of that combusted fuel. If we ponder the larger cost of carbon emissions, we're faced with the challenge of weighing one personal good over another, teasing out the myriad threads of connection among pleasures, necessities, and their environmental impacts.

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I was at PIR for entertainment, as were the other spectators. The entertainment derived from a sense of awe. I consider the archaic roots of the word *awful*—to inspire awe—and reflect on the irony of the scene, which was awful in several ways. That evening I experienced the stink, the acrid sting

of volatile hydrocarbons, yet was riveted enough to remain. I observed the delight of the crowd, and even as I understood the detrimental effects of the sport, I couldn't control my amazement or my racing heart when two dragsters accelerated like rockets from a dead stop to dangerously high speeds. Those ten seconds of speed were fraught with wonder and danger.

I recognize that our innately human traits are stronger than our conscious ability to master them. We prefer pleasure over pain, indulgence over restraint. We possess a capacity to revere the non-human world—nature, wilderness, and the environment on which we depend. And we also possess a peculiar capacity to isolate our actions—especially those that figure as sources of joy—from their wider environmental and social implications.

We can't stop being human. And, paradoxically, we implicitly agree that it's inherently boorish to address these obvious human foibles in polite company. I could no more question the spectators or drivers about the environmental impacts of their recreation than I could dinner party guests about the impacts of their air travel to vacation destinations where they bear witness to melting glaciers. Polite people don't raise the subject of global heating. Not at the dinner table, and not at the race track. In this habit, we indulge in a form of magical thinking, imagining a world in which our recreations are isolated from their environmental effects.

At PIR, I was suspended in cognitive dissonance. I wondered what thoughts would have shot through Lewis and Clark and their Corps of Discovery in 1805, had they imagined the future scene along the river where they camped. Would they have grieved over the genius that carried us to this moment? Or perhaps forgive an aging woman who carries the queasy shame of entanglement in the destructive technology, while also feeling a backward joy at the dragsters, cloaked in a cloud of noxious fume, as they hurtled along a speedway on a warm summer evening.



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William L. Spencer

An Actor Prepares



Cary Grant and Eva Marie Saint in *North by Northwest*, Alfred Hitchcock, 1959.

Stanislavski had his ideas. Here's another.

The party was all smoke and noise, seventy people, maybe ninety, mostly high, jammed into the second floor of an old clapboard house at the beach. Two big speakers hammered out bone-cracking throbs, a screaming rapper. Conversations bellowed, joints passed, a bewildering, deafening blur.

Nikki, her butt against a buffet, as far away from the speakers as she could get, a glass of wine in one hand and a cigarette in the other, scanned the room. There was a time when it would have been fun, a party like this. But they were all so young and, Jesus, she was only twenty-seven.

There was that, and then there was the darkness, as if a shroud had settled about her.

She eased away from the guy who'd been trying to talk to her. Not Benjamin. Benjamin was over on the other side of the room yelling in the ear of a dorky kid in rimless glasses who had invented some kind of app that was either big or was going to be big or was something else, she didn't know and didn't care.

The guy trying to talk to her was okay and actually about as out-of-place as she was, older if maybe thirty was older, clean-cut, tweed jacket, no tie. He looked like a professor at a girl's school. She couldn't hear a thing he was saying. She'd had it with this party.

"Gotta go!" she yelled, "Nice talking to you!" turning away, not caring if he heard or understood. Jesus, what a zoo.

Hands occupied with the wine and cigarette, she used her elbow to push open the sagging screen door and made her way down dilapidated wooden stairs. Wary of her silk dress, the flaking paint, she stepped gingerly in heels, watching for cracks between the boards. Following a narrow alley, she emerged onto the wide sidewalk that separated the buildings from the beach.

And there was the Pacific Ocean.

The sun had dipped below the horizon, and a swath of neon pink and fuchsia splashed across the sky. It looked like a set decorator's idea of a sunset, a wash of vibrant pastels on a pale blue scrim. Way over the top.

Nikki crossed the sidewalk, took the big step down onto the sand and after half-a-dozen clumsy strides, stopped and looked around to make sure no one was watching. A scattering of pedestrians strolled the oceanfront walk; some kids cruised on rollerblades, but. . . what the hell. She dropped the wine glass where she stood. Littering a California beach, a major felony, probably punishable by death.

I'm a naughty girl
You needn't sham
You know I am.

It came to her in theatre speech, that fake British accent everyone had to learn in drama school, so it must have been something she'd heard or even sung, but she couldn't remember where.

Standing on one foot then the other, she pulled off her shoes. The sand would raise hell with her pedicure, but Benjamin wouldn't be looking at her toenails.

Holding the shoes by the straps, she trudged down to where the beach slipped wet and compacted into the ocean, the waves dissolving in a foamy wash that rolled over her feet.

She turned and looked back, wondering if Benjamin would notice she was gone. The house, half-hidden behind a row of newer, nicer places, was a faded, sun-bleached green. The skinny kid Benjamin was shouting at wanted everyone to know he paid eight thirty-five for it, all cash, seven day close, and it was a teardown. As if eight thirty-five was a big deal.

She listened for the music but it didn't carry. No reach, no substance, no. . . what? Not worth thinking about. What difference did it make? None.

She tried to find what did matter: her desire, her ambition. It wasn't there. For the first time since she'd come to L.A., since way before L.A., it wasn't there. MIA. It was unnerving not to have that steady sense of it pushing her. It was the thing that kept her going. What had Vanick called it in Performance Practicum? *The little engine in your gut that keeps saying you know you can.*

The stupid little engine was off the rails.

All that was left were things she didn't want: she didn't want to be at this party, she didn't want to smoke a couple of joints, she didn't want to go home with Benjamin. Especially that. She knew if she did she'd end up letting him do it to her. Even if she didn't feel like it, he'd be endlessly yapping at her, and she knew eventually she'd give in just to get him to shut up. Then she'd end up with the shitty feeling of having done something she didn't want to. What had Vanick called it? Going against one's nature, a disenchantment.

But fuck it, what was the diff? Everywhere she found herself was somewhere she didn't want to be.

The only thing she wanted was to be away from it all. Particularly right now.

Benjamin.

Sooner or later he'd remember and ask her did she get the part. Telling him had been a huge mistake. When she'd gotten home that night, showered, scrubbed herself, washed her hair, wrapped herself in her fluffy robe, still buzzed from the drinks and the wine, she had to talk to someone. So she called him and told him about the movie, how she was sure she had the part.

She took a final drag on her cigarette and flipped it at the waves, realizing she'd left her clutch bag with the Parliaments and her Dunhill lighter on the buffet. She couldn't lose the lighter. Michael Brockton had given it to her two years ago when he'd taken her to the Oscars—he'd been one of the stars and she'd had two lines—*Sexy Cocktail Waitress*—in a nominated picture. Her wardrobe was four-inch heels, black net stockings, a tiny skirt and fitted top. He'd flirted with her on the set. It didn't matter that she hadn't seen him since. It was a souvenir from the Oscars, a Dunhill Pinstripe Palladium Rollagas, a goddamned five-hundred dollar lighter.

Shit.

She plodded back across the sand. When she reached the step from the beach up to the sidewalk, she decided to hell with the dress and sat down on the concrete, brushed at her feet. She couldn't get the grit out from between her toes. To hell with that too. She didn't want to put on her shoes anyway, and she didn't want to go back inside. She didn't want to do anything.

But she was hungry, she needed a cigarette. She sat there, her shoes in her lap, and watched the night fold out over the Pacific, remembering Michael Brockton and the Oscars and how the trades always mentioned his captivating crooked smile, weighing what she would have to do to get the lighter against how much she didn't want to put up with Benjamin.

Maybe it was the ocean, the sky, the sunset, the inexorable gathering of day into night, this perfect seascape evening sliding down the western slope of the world. Maybe it was a moment of lonely calm. From wherever it came, the awareness floated into her mind that she

probably had enough pills in her medicine cabinet. If she didn't want to, she would never again have to put up with anything. Never again, not ever.

It was appealing, the possibility of floating away into nothingness, letting go of the endless pretending; most of all never again having to look at her face in a mirror. But it was frightening: an icy feeling that curled around inside her.

It was fall-out.

Tuesday of last week she'd come out of the hotel room, the Ritz-Carlton Laguna Beach, the heavy door swinging behind her, the lock clicking into place with a steel-embedded-in-oak finality. It was like the last sound that echoes through a theatre at the end of a good noir picture. The audience is hushed, then the sound of that clicking lock breaks the tension and everyone can let out the breath they didn't know they'd been holding.

The door closed behind her and Nikki walked down the hallway—luxurious carpet, cream walls, tasteful paintings—buoyed by how he'd been afterward, how he'd smoothed things over, how affable and charming he became. But no hint of an apology. Yeah, that was a producer's skill, sticking it to the talent and then making believe everything was fine and dandy, and even, really, all for the best. Hey, what was the harm? Just something between friends.

She'd been tipsy, well, actually pretty piddly-eyed, but she knew what was happening every moment, saw it with the clarity that comes with enough champagne cocktails. You might not be able to drive too well—though actually she had driven herself home, no problem—but you could see the face and the eyes of the person you were with, see what was behind them.

He was the executive producer—he was always the executive producer on all his projects—and she could tell he wanted her for the picture; he'd made up his mind. Ensconced in that wonderful cocktail lounge, damask silk sofas that looked like French antiques, twenty-foot windows at the top of a hundred-foot cliff above an endless ocean, they'd had a wonderful conversation. He was completely delightful, and he knew everyone. His stories were so observant and droll; inside anecdotes that made her laugh, included her among his closest friends. He was a raconteur, the magazine stories said that about him, and it was completely true. After a couple hours, she didn't know how many drinks, he said he needed to give her the script; it was in his room.

He led her to the bed, his hand on her elbow, told her to sit. He stood in front of her, took her hand and put it on his boner. Told her to take it out.

And there she was. Jesus. Not a friend, not a colleague. He wasn't the worldly, virtuous man he seemed to be, above and beyond any tawdry bullshit.

Just another arrogant asshole with a boner.

She knew better than to get herself into this situation. She despised that it turned out to be this, so trashy, so crude, hated herself for being so stupid, letting down her guard, wanting to believe he was different, allowing herself to be lulled into this, sitting on the side of a bed, her hand on the front of his pants.

She knew she had a choice—it was clear in her mind; she wasn't some dumb kid, she'd been around the block—she pictured herself standing up, heading for the door, throwing a fuck you over her shoulder, even pausing with the door open, calling him a scuzzy piece of shit. But she couldn't bring herself to stand. The situation held her frozen: who he was. . . who he was. . . what the picture was going to be, her face on the poster, he'd told her that—her face would be on the poster—he'd said it twice, and how could she not believe it? She could see the poster in her mind's eye. If she walked out, told him fuck you, then she would be marked as an ungrateful little bitch, uncooperative, difficult to work with, maybe worse. The word would go out.

It's only because I'm drunk; it came to her as she slid his zipper down. I'm drunk and he'll like me.

And then it was, get it over with. He was saying something, his hands buried in her hair, but her mind was walled off, a metronome, get it over with, get it over with.

She could tell when he was about to finish and tried to pull away, but he held her tight.

When he finally released her, she ran into the bathroom, spit in the sink and used the Listerine until the little bottle was empty. She sat on the toilet lid and told herself to calm down, to stop thinking about it.

After ten minutes she went out, legs wooden, ashamed, afraid to look at him, the derision and condescension she might see in his face. She grabbed her purse and went back in the bathroom, washed her face where she'd cried, fixed her lipstick, reapplied her mascara, brushed her hair. She wanted to never leave the bathroom, but she couldn't put it off forever.

He was waiting, trousers fastened, shirt tucked in, hair smoothed, an amazing warm smile on his face. He took her hand, he was sweet, so kind, she had to admit. He'd opened the drapes in front of the window wall that looked out over the lighted swimming pool and tennis courts. He led her to a chaise and seated her as if she were royalty. He poured chardonnay from a bottle in a silver bucket, all iced and ready—yeah, he was a producer, all right—and handed her a beautiful fluted glass. Baccarat. He was so easy and gracious that by the time they'd finished the chardonnay and she walked out of the room, her head whirling; she felt like she'd come through it all unscathed. Well, almost.

The next day she called the studio, the number he'd written on the cover of the script. When she gave her name, the secretary took a minute to find a list then said, uninterested: "Oh, yeah, sorry, casting is complete."

The bastard.

She was such a dunce. She'd been so weak, so afraid the asshole wouldn't like her.

She spent the rest of the day at the gym, sweating like a stevedore, trying to find her way into a shell where nothing could reach her.

Sitting on the sidewalk, looking at the ocean, she considered what a fucking predator he was. How often had he done the same thing to other girls? Her humiliation was like a tide that carried everything before it. She'd flinched. She'd betrayed herself, breached something inside she hadn't really understood was there. An iron hollowness had coalesced in the pit of her stomach.

She shivered. It was darker.

Her clutch bag floated in front of her, and for a second she thought she was hallucinating, or a UFO had materialized in the sky. Then she heard his voice, realized who it was.

"You left your purse."

The clean-cut guy from the party, his shoes crunching on the sandy sidewalk.

She took the bag as he sat beside her.

"You're a lifesaver." She took out the Parliaments, fished for the lighter. "I was dying for a cigarette, but I couldn't stand the thought of going back in. I was sitting here feeling sorry for myself."

Was that what she'd been doing? Was that all it was, feeling sorry for herself?

"My name's Kenneth. Ken." He reached over and took the lighter, not letting her hand go, keeping it cupped with both his as he snapped a flame. It was a moment: she pictured how it would look on-camera—his strong, warm hands holding hers, the glow of the flame on her face.

She blew a stream of smoke out of the side of her mouth, examined him. "That was very smooth, very Cary Grant." He had a nice, open face and broad shoulders beneath his tweed jacket.

"I surprised myself. I'm not that cool, I mean, I don't even smoke. But. . ." He paused a second. "Can I tell you something?" he went on, not waiting for an answer, "I wanted to touch your hand, you're so pretty—"

She put two fingers to his lips, stopped him. He had a good jaw. She liked that too. And he had confidence.

"So Kenneth," she said, pulling back a bit, "you teach algebra at Marymount?"

"Hardly. I'm a resident at UCLA Medical Center."

"A doctor?"

He nodded.

"What are you doing here?"

"Jeremy, the guy who's throwing the party, I examined him this morning and he invited me. Actually he invited everyone on the floor but I'm the only one who showed up."

"He was seeing a doctor? What's wrong with him?"

"You want me to breach patient confidentiality?" He gave her a smile that seemed to say, maybe I'm serious and maybe I'm not.

"You have to." The cigarette made an orange streak as she waved it in front of his face. She tried for a flat tone like Obi-Wan: "You will tell the girl everything."

He held her eyes for a few seconds, she watched him decide, then, "He's losing his hearing."

They stared at each other, then both of them broke into laughter.

Her mood lifted, the doom and gloom were dissipating. A Cary Grant kind of guy, a doctor no less, the night coming down around them, she could play this—the vault of sky an immense proscenium arch.

But it wasn't a play, it had to be a movie, the crew scattered across the sand, the video village over there, big Softbox lights on stands, track laid, the craft truck somewhere on a nearby street, PAs on either end of the sidewalk holding back the rollerbladers.

She could almost hear Vanick's voice from the classroom, that quiet way he had of starting a scene: "*Begin*."

"Listen," her tone became serious, "I have to tell you something."

"You can tell me anything."

He was so open, his line so perfectly sincere. For a moment Nikki had an urge to confess, tell him the whole pathetic episode. Then she caught herself. She could never tell anyone.

"You followed me out here."

"You forgot your purse."

He was wonderful. His presence changed the quality of the darkness. Was it him or would anyone do? No, it needed to be the right sort of someone with a nice jaw, sincere brown eyes, and a tweed jacket. It looked like Harris Tweed.

She flipped her cigarette away, reached up to press her palm against his cheek, his beard bristly. She watched his confusion.

Men were so silly. When you touched them unexpectedly they got all flummoxed. He could be Cary Grant and she was Eva Marie Saint and it was *North by Northwest* if Hitchcock had shot it on the beach in Venice. She lowered her voice, picked up the deepening shadows: "It's enough that we've found each other." She watched him. It was right there in his face. He'd never met anyone like her.

Yes, this was real. This was who she really was. He would love her, and all the others out there on the other side of the camera lens, everyone in the world, all of them would love her too.

"Darling?" she let him know he'd missed his cue.

"Yes." He stammered, making it a half question.

"Listen, darling," she let fear come across her eyes, expanding the moment. It was such fun, she knew how good she was, showing the dread of Benjamin as played by the cruel James Mason.

She reached down and took his hand, pulling it up against her so that he would know how desperately she needed him. She turned—only her head, making sure she would stay in-frame because at this point it would be a tight shot only on her—and looked down the alleyway toward the green house.

"They're back there, at the party, planning the whole thing out." It was such a plot hole, as if anyone could make any plans in all that noise. But they'd fix it in post. She turned back to him, medium tempo. There would be a cut here to a two-shot favoring him, she would be in profile.

And he wasn't bad, considering. He had a hopeful look, not knowing what the hell was going on, but wanting to be part of it—hell, wanting to be part of anything so long as she was there.

"I've got to get away from here, darling," speaking quickly, the impending danger, Benjamin coming to look for her. "It's all too complicated, I can't explain." How often had she heard that line in a movie—skipping over all the stuff the audience already knew, moving the action forward.

A tilt of her head, not too much, as she let her shoulders fall. She knew how vulnerable she looked, how well she was selling it. "You've got to trust me." She looked up into his eyes. "Somehow, for some crazy reason, destiny has brought us together and you're the only one who can save me."

He was smiling, not understanding but up for anything. "Whatever you say."

It wasn't exactly great.

"We have to run, darling, we have to run to the ends of the earth." Even as she said it, so melodramatic, wondering where it came from, she realized how true it was, how she wanted to slip over the horizon with the sun, disappear to the other side of the world. She was through with Benjamin. She would close the door on Benjamin, banish it all.

"To the ends of the earth." He butchered it, but it didn't matter, he was wonderful!

"Oh, darling!" she let her eyes melt into his. She loved calling him darling, she could see the effect it had on him. "We have to hurry!"

He scrambled to his feet, took her purse and shoes, helped her up.

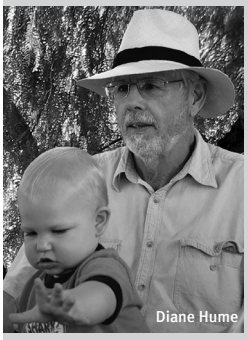
"My car's down there," he pointed.

As they started down the sidewalk she wrapped both arms around one of his, sheltering herself against him, feeling the tweed against her cheek. He would love her, this good, strong man. He would fall madly, hopelessly, in love with her. He was halfway there already.

She looked out at the western sky where night had fallen. Yes, it was time to move on, forget the past.

She pressed his arm, feeling it against her. She would have such fun with him. He might be the one. She imagined the two of them together, playing house, forever and ever, a lovely haze of infatuation and pretending. Yet even as she thought it she knew it wouldn't last—after all it never did—and then she felt a whisper of guilt, the merest brush, easily ignored, that came with the sneaking uneasiness that she would probably break his heart.

And that other? She'd try to forget it, though she knew she would only be trying, that she'd never be rid of it, not entirely. It would be down there somewhere, a touchstone deep in the darkness that she could reach out to if she ever needed it, if a certain sort of role ever came along.


Diane Hume

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Merry Christensen

Moderato


Daniel Jason Karjadi

Tempo marked his music. Antonio's variations! He could slow a passage down until time seemed to stand, then speed it again so it raced like a horse. *Moderato*, the beat of a heart, he would take its measure, retard then quicken, and his music would explode.

But I could never tell him. It would fill his head, and as God knows, his head was full enough already. He was called "The Great Vivaldi" even then. Though I used his Christian name, in private anyway. And he returned the familiar, but only when the Ospedale's girls were out of range. If they chanced by, we would revert to the formal: Fathers Vivaldi and Bonito.

The girls, I do not know what they called me in private, but amongst themselves, when they would whisper, they would call Antonio by his other name, Prete Rosso, or the Red Priest, because of his fiery hair.

The Red Priest indeed. He heard confession, and said Mass, but only for a year. Then he gave both up altogether. Ten years training for the priesthood, he is ordained, appointed to the Ospedale de Pietà, says Mass for a year, then stops to concentrate on music and to compose. Thereafter the directors had me speak Mass. There are priests, and then there are priests!

He said it was his breathing. Oh, I heard his story. Countless times I heard him say, "I could only speak parts, then the *strettezza* would constrict my chest and I couldn't finish the holy words." That was his version, but another spread, and the girls said he couldn't speak because of his music, and that he once stopped Mass three times to go to the inner sanctum to compose.

But then we must remember, Antonio didn't come only to speak Mass. He came to teach, and to make music. He had additional duties. And the girls, I think, were pleased and liked him well enough. All but Rosanna, she hated Vivaldi, but then he threatened her status.

You see, she was ten years older than he, and had lived at the Ospedale forever. She was one of the illegitimate. Oh, most of them were. Taking foundlings in, that

was our charge. Before the Ospedale, infant girls would float in the green waters of the canal. But with our advent gondoliers would ferry them to us and push them through a slot in the outer wall.

We had as many as a thousand at a time and Rosanna was only one, and a very plain one, if you must know. She had ugly, dark hair on her head and upper lip. Men, some of them, when they looked for a wife would come to the Ospedale. Convents produced good wives and men would seek them out at our cloister. But none came seeking Rosanna's hand. She was our St. Cecilia, and she stayed on past prime, teaching violin to hands smaller than hers.

And as God knows, everyone had hands smaller than hers, even Vivaldi. Monstrous hands, with long, hairy fingers. They produced the speed she was famous for. We had maybe fifty strings in our convent orchestra, mostly violins, and among them all, none had greater velocity.

And as God knows, how insufferable she was because of speed. I heard the stories, how she would pick the fastest passage—this was when she was a student still. Others would suffer through it, and agonize before passing it off, and in the most mediocre manner, but Rosanna could play it off any time, day or night, and would walk up and down the corridors playing fast and flawless, or so I've been told.

She developed her speed from playing as she walked. I have told you, *moderato* is the beat of a heart, but you see it is also a man's pace, and Rosanna would pace evenly, then play two or three times as fast as her step.

She took every solo part, fast or slow—until Vivaldi came—and would stand in the center of the string section playing the melody. She thundered too. Only men thunder as a rule; women have a soft tone, but she thundered, and could reach the farthest corners of our concert room.

And as God knows, our concerts, we were known for them, throughout all of Europe. Oh, travelers would pay to hear our girls perform. You notice I say "hear" because, in general, we would not let them see. The girls performed behind an iron grille made of intricate fretwork. Yes, we hid them, kept them like so many rare birds in a covered cage. What a delicious mystery.

Oh, the girls were our bread and butter, and why not? We took them in. Visitors would pay handsomely to hear them play and sing, and some might even pay extra to see them, but certainly we made enough from the hearing. That exquisite sound, that is why Vivaldi came, to improve the sound—make it more professional—and to give us new music. His compositions were more important even than his teaching, and Venetians would come to hear whatever he had newly written. But then Venetians would come to hear whatever Vivaldi did. When he wrote an opera, patrons expected to see him play, too, between acts. Oh, he was a wild man, and to see him go, and improvise on that fiddle. His cadenzas! Up and down the strings, fingers moving like hammers, the speed, but then his *adagio*. I do not play the violin, or any instrument for that matter, but I have been around enough to know, *adagio* is difficult, more so than *allegro*, or even *presto*.

"Speed covers every sin." I remember Vivaldi saying this to her. "Rosanna, speed covers every sin, but when you play slowly, you are exposed." I don't believe Vivaldi thought in terms of sin. I know I quote him speaking of it, but he spoke of it on that occasion only, to answer Rosanna's tirade.

You see, Rosanna taught the young girls, and had them up to the age of eleven, then Vivaldi took them and put them into the orchestra, but Rosanna had them when they were small, and would beat them if their playing went wrong. The violin was like a religion to her. At least speed was, and she would pound with her stick, and beat out a tempo and as God knows, if a girl could not keep pace, well, that was what Rosanna's stick was for.

That poor small thing, that was the day—the only day Vivaldi talked of sin. Rosanna was beating her, because she couldn't play *allegro*. And Rosanna was screaming her typical tirade, "How will you play *presto*, if you cannot play *allegro*?"

It was a moot question because it supposed speed was all. Well, Vivaldi happened by. She was beating the girl, and Vivaldi took the stick, broke it in two, spoke of sin, walked away and then had the child brought to him eight months before her eleventh birthday.

That started the campaign. He would weaken Rosanna's influence. I remember it well. He was at rehearsal the following day and Rosanna was playing, solo as usual, in his Mass, *Gloria*. He was preparing *Gloria* for presentation. The Bishop of Venice was coming, and the directors wanted it perfect. I remember the room. The grilles stood open for rehearsal, and the marble floors made a nice foil for Rosanna's sound. Her quick, sharp notes ricocheted off the stone and echoed back through the hall, but then she came to the first slow measures. She played them and Vivaldi—shame him—he took up her tack, and stopped her repeatedly with his baton. She would do that to her students and so he did the same. He struck the baton down onto her stand and said, "*Andante* is slow, exposed, and exquisite. Something only a virtuoso can play." And then he called for a different girl to come forward and play the part that day.

Rosanna and her tirades, she appealed to the directors, went early to plead her case, but not before Vivaldi asserted his. He could be the *prima donna* and said to the gentlemen, "Oh yes, she plays the *allegro* parts, who better?" Unless I myself could play. But *Gloria* has a violin solo that must answer a single human voice. It is fragile, and when done wrong, it grows hollow, not plaintive, as I wish it to be."

Dueling bows—Vivaldi won the first round and the directors gave him rein to replace Rosanna. But I believe he was now vexed. I do not disagree with his assessment. Rosanna couldn't play slowly like he wanted, and so much of *Gloria* was dependent on what she could only meanly do. Its crux, "Qui Tollis," is slow, the violin solo in "Domine Deus" slower still, and very difficult, for the violin anyway, but the piece has *allegro* too, and no one could play *allegro* quite so well as Rosanna.

But Vivaldi would find someone, and so he set to auditioning the girls. He looked first through the *figlie del coro*, or musicians in the body of the orchestra, but wasn't happy with any of their sounds. He wanted some shining thing to prove his point so he listened next to the *privilegiate del coro*, the privileged ones. They did our solo work, and he finally decided on one, Chiaretta. She was a teacher and could play the slow parts well enough, and wasn't bad with *allegro* either, but there was nothing brilliant to her sound, and it seemed for a time as if Vivaldi had made a mistake, as if he should have tolerated Rosanna's mediocre calm so as to keep her superior torrent.

But then one day, as we were walking together near the girls' private rooms, we heard the most delicious sound. A long bow, drawn slowly across a "G" string. It sounded as if it hovered, stayed almost still, yet moved, and I imagined a hummingbird staying atop a flower, seeming motionless, yet racing.

Vivaldi moved toward the sound, until I reminded him, "Antonio, you must not venture any closer toward their chambers."

He seemed to stop, then signaled me forward. "We essay together. You are my witness."

We advanced, following the sound until we came to a tiny cubicle hidden behind rooms where the *figlie di commun*, or non-musicians, lived.

We stayed to the left a little so we could observe without being seen. The girl's door stood open, a young girl really—she was nothing more—and she was running through her practice. First, long slow bows on open strings, then rapid scale work, *arpeggios* next, then the girl started into *Gloria*.

Her back was to us, so the sound came slightly muted, but still; she had Rosanna's bold tone and speed, but then had what Rosanna lacked, a graceful *adagio*, and the most beautiful *sotto voce* too. Her soft voice went right into the stone below.

Vivaldi stood transfixed through the child's practice and when she finally turned to put her instrument and bow away we startled her. She jumped a little and began such apologies.

"Fathers, forgive me!"—humbly bowing—"Pray, excuse me. I did not know you waited on me or else I should have stopped long ago."

"Ah," said Vivaldi, "never stop such play."

And then he was full of questions. He asked her name. It was Abetta. He then asked as to her teacher. It was Rosanna. And then, lastly he asked why she studied alone, and why she lived with the common girls rather than with the musicians.

"Rosanna wishes," was the girl's reply, and from it Vivaldi discerned that Rosanna wanted Abetta as her secret, but for what reason he could not say, so I was to discover the mystery surrounding the girl.

I asked a Sister, "Why have we never heard her? Has she been here long? When did she come? Where is she from?"

Sister Margarita was like me. She was not a musician and was there at the Ospedale only to administer to spiritual needs, but she knew

"Little Abetta," as the child was called, and especially remembered her infancy.

"She was the smallest thing," said Sister Margarita, "and could fit into a single hand, if it were large like Rosanna's, but mine, I had to cup both together and then Little Abetta could nestle there."

I wondered how the child came and Sister Margarita indicated, "by gondolier." And then I knew she was illegitimate, like the rest.

"Yes, oh yes," said the Sister, "but we always thought her nobly born because of the cloth she came wrapped in. It was silk, edged with lace. I am certain some noblewoman, hurrying the midwife, handed the cloth over, not thinking of the value involved. Thinking only of detection and preventing it, she shoved the rich cloth into the midwife's bloody hand and said, 'Here, wrap it in this and remove it.' Rosanna fell in love with the child—still loves her, and that is why she keeps her hidden. Abetta is ten, and Rosanna knows in another year she will belong to Vivaldi."

Oh, I heard other stories too. Rosanna might love the child, but no creature can change its spots, and Rosanna—I don't care how she loved—she could never be anything but cruel. She beat the girl into playing fast and loud, and from that came the child's sad, soft, slow, exquisite sound.

Expressionless, the child's face was always that. She filled her sound with emotion, but her face was always still, and immutable, as if something had been taken from her; her will, I suppose.

Vivaldi brought her forward, had her put with the privileged ones and she played *Gloria* like it had never been played before, or since, really, and from there on she did all the solo work, and gained something of a reputation for fineness of playing.

Our girls, especially the privileged ones, were given latitude. Suitors could call. Of course, the secret police watched. They had to. At times, not in my day, mind you, but there had been times when girls from the Pietà—how should I put this—had been "procured." The secret police sanctioned legitimate suitors and did not have to report such men to the Vatican. But procurement! You understand the need for a certain degree of surveillance.

Abetta joined the privileged ones and suitors came to call, in time, but not at first. As God knows, she was only ten at the start, but when she grew to be fourteen or so the suitors came.

I do not know—Vivaldi may have set on seducing her from the start. He liked ladies, and liked them green. Oh, as God knows, his latest, that singer, Anna Giro, thirty years younger. She lives with him at his house, which will come to no good, mark my word. But even then he liked the ladies and the young ones in particular. You could see it in his eye.

Yet, did he set on seducing her? He might have, but I like to think—because I still have regard for him—I like to think that the first touch was accidental. When you teach the violin contact is vital. You

must position the arm, or bowing grows crooked. And then finger placement is crucial. Posture, you must correct that, and so, yes, I think the first touch, and many thereafter were accidental, but somehow Vivaldi came to think that he and Abetta belonged to each other, as if a priest belongs to anyone but God.

Or, it might have been their duets and not a touch at all. Yes, their duets. That might have brought them together.

No one could match Vivaldi's skill except Abetta, and they played together often. In tandem, they would execute each new work, or they would refine the old.

Vivaldi had rooms he taught in; he never lived at the Ospedale—always had a house nearby, but he taught in rooms at the Ospedale and when a student wasn't there, Abetta was, and they played together. And how we would remark, "Abetta, your playing belongs to him, and vice versa." They fit together, although I don't know now if that was so much the case. Perhaps Abetta was simply, in womanly fashion, fitting her play to his. She had a fine ear and could melt her sound into another so that harmony was excellent.

But certainly we did not help when we would say, "You two sound as one." Yes, that must have brought Vivaldi to his amorous thinking.

He bought a violin. That was the first anyone talked of a wrongful connection. And of course it was Rosanna who first talked that way, but no one listened. Vivaldi bought Abetta a Stradivarius. I don't think Vivaldi had a Stradivarius even, but he bought Abetta one. Oh, procuring violins, that was part of his duty, so getting a violin for Abetta came well within bounds, but such a fine instrument? Rosanna complained, "Why so much for one girl?"

As it turned out, it was Vivaldi's gift. He was always reimbursed and violins never came from his pocket, but Abetta's did and Rosanna mentioned it to anyone who would listen, but you know sour grapes—no one listens long to teeth set on edge, and Rosanna's words weren't given credence. They were perhaps a warning and we should have listened.

It was Carnival in Venice, I remember. I love Carnival, even now when we can no longer take part. Cardinal Ruffo forbids it. No priests at Carnival now, but then, oh, then, we could take part. And how I loved it: the gondolas gliding along the water, their lanterns lit, lights glittering everywhere, the gaiety.

Vivaldi was a part of Carnival. He stopped teaching during it. Each winter from January to March he left the Ospedle and drifted through the canals, directing his operas, playing between acts.

Opera and Carnival were synonymous then. You couldn't have one without the other and what would Venetian opera have been without Vivaldi? He would don his mask, and in it he truly seemed to play the part of priest. Everyone was hidden behind a mask, inhibition nonexistent or at least suppressed, and oh, the passion. Vivaldi came that night in January, at the start of revelry, and took Abetta away. None of us

knew, not even the secret police. Rosanna later got that from the girl. I'm sure she beat it out of her.

Vivaldi took her—they were both hidden behind masks—and on many nights from January to March they would glide away.

We suspected nothing until summer came. Then Abetta's belly began to swell. She was at practice one day and I remember, it was Rosanna who saw it first. Abetta stood with her violin under her chin so that her stomach was exposed. Rosanna looked at the profile and said, "Abetta, you grow fat. See how your belly swells."

I think of that now, and knowing what came next, see what Rosanna hinted at, but the woman said nothing finite to me. She took the girl away privately, and probably beat the truth out of her.

Rosanna was expert with guilt—oh, as God knows—and could make a girl cower in shame for holding a bow wrong even, so you can imagine the scene. Abetta crying, Rosanna glowering, one of her tirades, the moral virtuoso towering over the small thing. Really, I shudder to think of it.

On the morning next, Abetta did not come to breakfast, or practice even. We sent Chiaretta for her, but Chiaretta—poor girl—she ran back screaming. We raced down the corridor, but she was gone. She was suspended, a stool kicked away. Strung up like she was, her neck snapped, she was without doubt dead. I remember Rosanna, when she saw, she clapped those monstrous hands together and laughed, long, delicious and slow, then walked away.



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Hannah Chee

The White Red Man



Edward Curtis, Canyon de Chelly, Navajo land.

Over the mesa shines the Elder Star, far too close, old baked brown, wrinkled 'round the clouds. My people smile, living in dark spaces between cracks, fissures in rock, where persistent, gnarled streams cut canyons. There, we have different sorts of ghost towns. Empty corrals, handmade by people who now have either no husband, no wife, or grand-persons left behind to listen to the wind.

My *Shinali*, my father's most beloved, my grandmother, looked at me but could never speak to me. Even at eight, I was separated from her by a linguistic chasm. I remember her sun-brown hands, the little one-room, dusty, dirt-floor house—dingy and dark, a cot, a few pans, and the fireplace—it was beyond modest, perhaps primitive.

I have the world at my fingertips: a slew of human souls picked and parceled into faceless words, frozen smiles; but I remember her home the best.

Without painting or photograph or words to remind me, I know her dining room table smelled of pine needles. Her home, unbound by walls or windows, was nestled in the shadow of a tree—the bark smoothed the wrinkles in her face. It was *her* tree, the tree where the wind murmured music set to the steadfast beat of her heart.

She was royalty, richer even than the other Navajos, the ones living below the mountain, where the wind settled the dust, but never the rain. Ida wanted to die in her kingdom, by her tree, in her home, with the sun and the pines and the wind.

We wanted her, but we took her to a nursing home for the few remaining years of her life, a forgotten flock of skeletons to replace her goats, brain dead, but left alive because of their still-bleating hearts. We loved her, but left her with them, they who were told to pick at life's last strands until their fingers were nail-less, bloodless stumps. We never wanted to let her go. She loved us, but in those last few months she wanted to go home.

The Navajos are filled with strong women. Grandmothers who raised generations beyond their own. My aunt, who never had children of her own, but loved everyone who stumbled over her threshold. However, love only feeds the heart, it can't satisfy grueling hunger. An infant can't suckle on the dried teat of her desperate mother for sustenance. No matter how long that mother works, she has only love to give.

My cousins, my uncles, my father, the Navajo children feel that systematic sickness.

We are a nameless people who live as immigrants on parceled land—parched and unwanted. Very few have kept their homes; many more have lost them and have been left to wander the highways.

My father is one of those Navajos, but he is a brown man who married a white woman. My father is a man of God who took on the mantle of a white man's religion. He looks more like Jesus than a blond-haired, blue-bead-eyed son of a white marble-god.

Grandmother was a good woman. She, to all intents and purposes, lived the Christian life—the religion born from the language they tried to teach her. But my grandmother was also made of the mountain. She remembered what it meant to be alone with only the earth and the voices spoken between the clouds—God, without words to mince or divide. She lived her life in direct communion with how small she was, how wide the love of the Creator.

As a child, my mother made me throw away a book. I can't remember the name. It's irrelevant but for the lesson it taught me about religious humans: A sense of belonging is imperative, and singular belonging is powerful enough to make enemies of faceless persons. This book told of a thread of truth, woven through the inconsistencies in humanity. Religions are bound together by truth and kindness. This book mentioned gods and God in the same breath, and my Christian Reformed Church was scalded. I was a child, and was only mildly curious. The scene was bookmarked, and I would later come back to it as an adult.

I've been to many churches, one for each year I've been alive. I've met swarms of young people my age who have only been to one. Sometimes I envy the safety, the home that is those stained-glass church families. But then, I remember my grandmother.

Each time I hear of hell, and of the unbelievers who harbor the key to that kingdom, I think of the Navajos. Those I've loved and lived with, those who chose Mother Earth and not God: my grandmother, and her white-red man son who became an English pastor. My father, who has unwittingly spread the seed of my particular conundrum into those communities tucked into the canyons.

I know what sadness looks like. I've seen it on the back steps of the churches in New Mexico. A "Christian" mother and her "traditional" son, both blood-red iron with native bones, fighting to the

point of damnation about who is going to heaven. That son, fighting for a people who lived before the white man. And I think of the book that my mother told me to throw in the trash.

They don't teach you about that in church. They invite you into their family, even if it divides your own. I have yet to see this struggle in the heart of my father. Maybe he keeps it tucked away, thinking about it only when staring at the last amber-drops in cheap, crystal tumblers. However, he has that small grain of hope I see lacking too often in religious folks—compassion.

When my father sees a Navajo brother, born of the same Mother Earth as he, hitchhiking along the highway, he pulls over on the side of the road. He waits, even when the drunk man shuffles forward, slowly, and missing his feet below him. Typically, he only helps them when he's alone, but once or twice, when I was younger, I was with him. Their bright eyes reflected in our headlights like wild animals—frayed hair and stooped backs, carrying all they owned in tattered backpacks.

They were frenzied with happiness at his brake lights and would stumble forward, desperate for even a small kindness. The drunk would come to the window first, try for the door. Maybe, if alone, my father would smile through their soured-smelling skin, invite them inside, and ask them their name.

But because of me, there was no smile, only a nod to have them climb into the bed of his pickup truck.

My father always told me, "Never do this, ever. These men are sick and you can't save them."

I wanted to ask, "Why? Why then, did you help them? Won't you also get sick?"

Later, when I learned how my father had spent his youth with people like that, how he was a man like those men, I understood. And I'm glad I never asked. Now I know he was being kind. He was already sick like them, but was suppressing the symptoms successfully, one day at a time. Before then, I used to think it was callous, how he told me I couldn't save them. I'd thought of my pastor-father as better than those believers in bootstraps, better than those that believe "poor people keep themselves there."

Before then, I'd thought he was smarter even than the part-time bigots, who, underneath good intentions, still lived in a pseudo-reality. Where people prayed over a succulent dinner to satisfy their tithe. Those who still believe that dollar donations can win the poverty wars. Perhaps my father also believed in micro-truths. He was an advocate of addicts, a brother who knew that, first, you must want to save yourself.

And perhaps, when our headlights reflected back from those road-walker's eyes, as they stumbled and kissed the gravel with bloody lips, my father would blink and see himself from before my birth. So he'd stop his pickup truck, and they would sit behind us,

back-to-back. They would breathe deep the cool air and watch the miles they would have had to walk alone shrink along white highway lines. To remember the moon and not the dirt, to ride home on a brother's compassion, to not think about how their feet hurt, and to not wonder why each passing car had no more soul than its driver.



Hannah Chee is originally from the Four Corners Area in New Mexico. Her upbringing on the Navajo Reservation provides inspiration for her work, which has appeared in *Grand Writers*. She supports local artists and musicians through her technical theater background. She currently lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan.

Terry Sanville

The Mexicans



The pink stucco house with white rocks on its roof glowed in the early light, across Calle Poniente from the Sanders' place. Both Elaine and Robert had watched with dismay as the split-level shanty took shape. Then, the house sat empty for a year and a half while the paint on its garage door peeled and the porch railing sagged.

"You'd think they could have asked *you* to paint that place," Elaine told her husband. "I mean, you're right here and could have given them a good price."

"Nah, that sleaze-ball developer has his own crew. It'll fall apart in five years."

"Maybe that's why nobody's bought it."

"Yeah, maybe. It's tiny. . . two bedrooms and a bath with no front yard, on a postage-stamp-sized lot."

Elaine sighed. "We should talk. Our home isn't exactly a palace. But in this town they'll shove a house anywhere just to make some bucks."

"Hey, I'm glad they do. If it wasn't for new projects, us house-painters would be outta work."

"Yes, but still. . . all I see out my window now is concrete and an ugly garage door. At least before I could enjoy the trees." Elaine pointed to the valley's ridgeline where the very tops of a row of eucalyptus peeked over the pink house and tossed in the morning wind.

They finished their coffee. Robert dressed in his work clothes and kissed Elaine goodbye.

"I'm finishing a duplex on Chino, then prepping a big place on the Riviera. So I might be a little late."

"Be careful."

He climbed into his paint-spattered step van, ground the starter, and motored away. Elaine's normal morning hustle followed—waking her daughter in time for Becky to catch the crosstown bus to Santa Barbara High. She watched

her girl walk downhill and out of sight. Becky was blonde, beautiful, obsessed with boys, with Elvis and rock and roll, and with getting her driver's license.

After picking up the house and vacuuming the front rooms, she watched an *I Love Lucy* rerun, poured herself another cup of coffee, then stared out the dining room window. With a roar, two pickups pulled into the pink house's driveway, one filled with furniture and household stuff, the other with people. Elaine counted four adults and five children. A knot grew in her stomach as she watched them climb from the pickups and haul furniture inside. The new neighbors sported glossy black hair and dark brown skin. The excited babble of their voices broke the morning stillness, none of it English.

Throughout the morning, the pickup trucks came and went, bringing more boxes to be ferried up the flight of stairs and through the front door. All pitched in, including the waist-high twin boys and even-smaller girl. The oldest girl wore ragged jeans and a sweatshirt but had a beautiful face and figure. The oldest boy had sharp features, flashing black eyes and slicked-back hair. Elaine thought, *that one's going to be trouble. Becky will want to make friends.*

The next morning, the neighborhood coffee klatch met at Janet Lockhart's house. Her living room filled with chattering women, the topic of the day—The Mexicans. Only Minako, the Japanese divorcee, stayed quiet.

"Well, I think there's just too many of 'em in that tiny house," Mrs. Hinton said.

Mrs. Osborne asked, "Doesn't the city have codes that keep people from cramming that many in one place? I can't imagine how the children will live like that."

"I'll tell you how," Elaine said. "The old ones, I think they're the grandparents, set up house in the garage. And I saw the men haul bunk beds upstairs."

Mrs. Hinton sighed. "I'll tell you, their girl is way too old to be sharing a bedroom with the older boy. How could they afford to buy that place, anyway? I thought it listed for eleven thousand."

"The seller probably came down. It sat vacant for so long."

"I just don't trust Mexicans. They say all the men carry knives and drink mezcal."

"And the women keep popping out babies. Good Catholics, all of 'em."

"Hey, I'm a Catholic," Elaine protested, "and I have only one daughter."

"Yes, but you have an excuse," Mrs. Hinton shot back.

Elaine felt her face flush and she bowed her head and shut up.

"Have any of you met them?" Minako asked. The women stared at her in silence. "I took them flowers from my garden. They are not Mexicans. They come from Costa Rica."

"Where the blazes is that?"

Minako smiled shyly. "It is south of Mexico."

Mrs. Osborne grinned. "It doesn't matter much. In my book, if they're brown they're Mexicans."

"I am yellow. Are all yellow people Japanese?"

"Don't be silly, Minako," Mrs. Hinton said. "It's. . . it's different. Besides, you speak English very well, while those brown monkey—eh, people, jabber so fast that nobody can understand 'em."

Mrs. Lockhart cleared her throat. "Well, I don't know about the rest of you, but I think the Christian thing to do is welcome them to the neighborhood."

Mrs. Osborne scoffed. "How do we do that? I can't speak Mexican."

"The older children speak English very well," Minako said. "We can ask them to. . . to translate."

"Yes, well we should let them settle in for a while," Mrs. Hinton said, "before we invite the misses over for coffee."

As weeks passed, Elaine learned the new family's routine. The old man and his son left early and returned in the late afternoon, their baggy khaki pants covered in what looked like concrete dust. They changed clothes in the garage before going upstairs.

The Mexican kids walked to school with the rest of the Calle Poniente horde. But they mostly kept to themselves. Elaine admired how well they seemed to behave, with very little in-fighting, the older girl acting like a mother to the young ones.

The exception to their segregation was the oldest boy and Becky. Elaine watched her daughter stroll downhill next to him. His smile flashed when he first saw Becky, and the girl added a bit more sway to her stride as they walked side-by-side. By the end of the first week, he carried her books on the way home and sometimes they'd be late.

"I. . . I see you've made a new friend," Elaine said.

Becky turned on her mother. "You've been watching us?"

"Well. . . I watch all the kids going to school. . . and I'm your mother. What's his name?"

"Javier."

"Does Javier go to your school?"

"Yeah, I have him in science and algebra."

"And he speaks. . . English?"

A look of scorn crossed her daughter's face. "Of course. He speaks better than most of the other kids."

"So you. . . you like him?"

Becky's look changed from scorn to impatience. "I don't know, maybe. He's really smart. . . wants to be a doctor. And he can help me with my science homework."

"He certainly is a handsome boy," Elaine said.

Becky tisked and shook her head. "Mother, relax. He's not my boyfriend or anything."

"Well, just be careful. We don't know any Mexican families and they may feel differently about, you know, making friends."

"For Pete's sake, Mom, they're not Mexican, they're Costa Rican."

"You know what I mean."

"You'll get a chance to meet him. He's coming over tomorrow night after supper so we can study for a test."

"Do you really think that's a good idea? We don't know anything about their family."

"Well, tomorrow you'll have a chance to find out. But no third degree."

"Okay, okay. But watch that tone with me, young lady."

"Sorry, Mom. I know they're the first. . . first Latin family on the street. But brown kids are in all my classes. They're, ya know, as cool as the rest of us. You just have to get to know them."

"Yes, that's what Minako has been telling me. But you're my daughter, and hot-blooded boys. . . "

"OH, MOTHER!" Becky stomped out of the room and stayed silent over supper.

The following evening, Elaine learned little from her meeting with Javier, Becky making sure their conversation stayed short.

"So have you lived in our country long?" Elaine asked.

Javier smiled. "Since I was five. My father and grandfather came here as *braceros*, ya know, farm workers. They got their green cards and now work construction."

"Does. . . does your mother speak English?"

"Enough to get by. I teach her new words every day."

Becky stood with hands on hips. "Come on, Javier, we gotta study."

The two spread out books and papers on the dining room table and spoke in whispers as Robert and Elaine watched TV. Elaine kept glancing at them, but Javier seemed to keep his distance from Becky and they actually seemed to be studying. She let out a deep sigh and watched *Maverick* while Robert snored softly in his Barcalounger.

As autumn unraveled and the winds grew cold, Elaine observed the street during the after-school hour. Through Robert's old binoculars, she saw Becky round the corner and climb Calle Poniente with Javier by her side. One day, they were holding hands, but quickly disengaged as they neared their homes.

"So how are you and Javier getting along?" Elaine asked as Becky pushed inside.

"Fine. He's really nice, a perfect. . . perfect gentleman."

"So. . . so is he your. . . your boyfriend now?"

"Would that be a problem?" Becky demanded.

"Watch your tone."

"Come on, Mom. I know you've been spying on us. We're not gonna do anything we shouldn't. You and I have talked, remember?" Becky's face reddened and she tried to escape to her bedroom. But Elaine blocked her path.

"So, has he kissed you?"

"Yes, Mother. That's what people do, they kiss. And before you ask, no, nothing else has happened."

"Look, Becky, you're my only child. I just don't want you wasting time on someone who's. . . who's so different."

Becky backed away. "How would you know how different they are? You've never met Javier's family, never once walked across the street to borrow a cup of sugar, never smiled at them. You won't even sit in the same church pew if there's a Latin family there." Becky dodged around her mother and slammed the bedroom door behind her.

After that incident, Elaine didn't push it, knowing that the stricter she got the more her daughter would rebel. She continued to watch the pink house, felt a stabbing pang in her heart when all the brown children played games together in their driveway, and the adults joined in.

Christmas week neared. Becky stayed in her room most days during the school break, listening to records, writing in her diary, or studying for the driver's test to get her license the day she turned sixteen. On Friday afternoon, someone knocked softly on the Sanders' door. Elaine clicked off the TV and opened it. Javier's mother stood on the porch, small, smiling, dressed in her going-to-church clothes.

"Hello, can I help you?" Elaine asked.

"*Mi nombre es Eva*. Would your *familia* please come to our *fiesta*, ah party, *mañana*, after. . . three?"

Elaine's mouth dropped open but she recovered quickly. "Yes, we'll. . . we will try and make it. . . and thank you so much for inviting us. *Gracias*, *Gracias*."

Eva dipped her head, turned and moved slowly down the front steps, lifting her long dress to expose low heels and stockings. Elaine watched from her window as Eva moved up and down Calle Poniente, knocking on doors. At the Lockharts' place, she entered and didn't leave for half an hour.

That evening, Elaine took Becky aside. "We've been invited to a party at the. . . the—"

"Their last name is Gutierrez, Mother."

"All right, all right, at the Gutierrezes' place. Has Javier said anything about it? Do you know what they're planning? Should we bring anything? Should we dress up?"

"I'm surprised you want to go."

"Of course we're. . . we're going. It would be impolite if we didn't at least drop by."

"Good," Becky said, smirking. "I was going whether you guys went or not. The party should be a lot of fun. They've been planning it for a long time."

They sat on Becky's bed as she went over the details, getting more excited as she rambled on.

"That sounds like quite a production," Elaine said. "And they'll be serving. . . alcohol?"

"Yes, yes. Don't worry, Mom. They'll have fruit punch and sodas for the kids. But if you can, try and get Dad to bring his old bass trombone. There'll be music."

"Your father hasn't played that thing in years."

"Yes he has. He keeps it in his truck and plays during lunch hours. You just haven't heard him."

"How do you know that?"

"It's a father-daughter thing. We all have secrets, Mom."

On the afternoon of the *fiesta*, Elaine hustled to get herself and Robert ready. Becky had gone across the street right after lunch to help the family set up the party. Elaine struggled to decide what to wear: should she show off for the neighbors—she still had the best figure of any of the Calle Poniente mothers—or should she keep it simple and casual, downplaying her effort to look good? She decided on a modestly cut emerald shift with a simple string of cultured pearls and low heels.

"Wow," Robert said when she emerged from the bathroom, her long hair cascading over her shoulders. "We should go to parties more often." He nuzzled her neck and tried to kiss her.

"Robert, don't. I just spent half an hour on the makeup." She grinned at him and grabbed her clutch purse. "I think we will be fashionably late if we leave right now."

"You sure we don't have time for. . . "

"Really, Robert, behave yourself."

Cars filled the pink house's driveway. As Elaine and Robert climbed the front stairs, the rumble of conversation—some in Spanish, some in English, some in something in-between—filled her with dread. *Will I be able to talk to the mother and grandmother; did anyone else on the street show up; did I dress right; and what is that aroma*? They entered the living room that stretched the full width of the house. Most guests sat on overstuffed chairs and sofas, the children on the floor or on folding chairs. Across an end wall, tables offered platters of hot and cold food, none recognizable to Elaine.

Eva moved toward her along with her oldest daughter. "Welcome to our home," the girl said. "My name is Sophia."

"Glad to meet you," Elaine replied. "Your home looks. . . looks wonderful, and the food smells delicious."

The girl translated for her mother and Eva smiled broadly. "Won't you please have a seat?" Sophia motioned to a vacant space under a window. "Can I bring you something to drink?"

"*Cerveza, por favor*," Robert said and the girl grinned.

"I will have one of those." Elaine pointed to Mrs. Story, the opera singer, who sat chatting with the Lockhart family while sipping something yellow-gold from a tall iced glass.

"Yes, that's called a Margarita. Have you had tequila before?"

"No, we're mostly a beer household."

"You should like it, but it's strong. And please help yourself to the food. Javier can explain what the dishes are if you don't know."

The couple joined a short line at the food table. Minako stood in front of Elaine, holding a plate already graced by her first pass at the cuisine.

"I have eaten more than a dinner for a family of four in Tokyo," she joked. "I must learn how to prepare those tamales. They are so special."

Javier stood in back of the table and helped with the serving. When it became Elaine's turn, she asked about the tamales. He smiled and described what they contained.

"My mother and grandmother have been preparing them all week. They're different from Mexican tamales because we wrap ours in plantain or banana leaves and not corn husks."

Elaine and Robert returned to their seats with loaded plates. Sophia served them their drinks. Robert smiled at the girl and watched her cross the room. Elaine dug him in the ribs.

"Eyes, Robert. Watch those roving eyes."

"Hey, she's beautiful. I don't care what color a woman is. Beauty is beauty."

More neighbors piled in: the Cochrans and their two small boys; Larry Wrightson dressed in a silk shirt and red ascot, as if he'd just climbed out of his Jaguar XK120. Even old man Sherman from Valerio Street arrived with a beautiful wooden TV table to set in front of his chair.

More of the Gutierrez extended family appeared, the men bringing guitars, drums, horns, and things to shake, rattle, and scratch. As the sun set, the music began, the family playing and singing with great gusto, sometimes sweet, sometimes boisterous, sometimes tragic. Robert slipped away, retrieved his bass trombone, and joined in the musical melee. Neighbors rose from their seats and, in strange pairings, danced to the rhythmic sounds. Mrs. Story sang harmony, her operatic soprano voice rising above the clatter. The food table was restocked. The Gutierrez children circulated through the crowd, taking drink orders, disposing of dirty dishes, and stopping to talk with kids and adults alike.

Three hours later, and exhausted from dancing with attentive white and brown men, Elaine watched the Gutierrez children tend to the departing guests. They retrieved coats and hats and packed left-over tamales to take away for future meals. Javier and Becky sat in the corner, holding hands and talking while Eva and the grandmother looked on, murmuring to themselves and laughing.

Elaine vaguely remembered downing her fourth Margarita, liking the smoky taste of the tequila and the tartness of the lemons and limes. Robert stood before her, swaying, one hand grasping his trombone.

"Come on, Hon. Time ta hit the road. Sure glad I don' hafta drive."

She nodded and struggled to stand. "Becky, it's time," she called.

Becky frowned but stood and gave Javier a quick peck on the cheek. "I'm coming, Mother."

The trio precariously descended the stairs, Becky with an arm wrapped around her mother's waist. After hours of loud voices and music, their own home seemed library quiet. Robert clicked on the TV, slumped into his recliner and fell asleep. Elaine sat at the kitchen table and felt the room spin. Becky fixed coffee.

"I haven't seen you like this in a long time," Becky said.

"What do ya mean? Drunk? How do I look?"

"You look happy, like you're having fun."

"Yes, that. . . that was a wonderful party. And the Gutierrez family are. . . are very special."

"Yes, they are."

Elaine bowed her head. When she raised it again to look at Becky, tears streamed down her face. "I. . . I watch their children. . . I watch how they play together, respect their parents and grandparents. It's. . . it's just so hard."

Elaine broke into sobs and couldn't stop. Finally, she sucked in a deep breath and continued. "You are the best daughter. But they have. . . the family I always wanted but can't. I'm so damn. . . jealous."

"I know, Mom, I know." Becky hugged her mother, rocking her in her arms as tears dripped down her perfect, pale cheeks.

After some minutes, she stood and filled Elaine's coffee cup from the pot on the stove. "Did. . . did you hear about Minako and Mrs. Lockhart?" Becky handed Elaine a tissue and dabbed at her own eyes.

"No. What. . . what are you talking about?"

"They were so impressed by the food that they asked Eva if she and Sophia would show them how to make tamales and some of the other dishes. They agreed, if Minako and Mrs. Lockhart shared their own family recipes."

"That sounds wonderful."

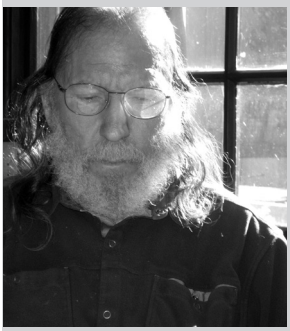
"I told Sophia that you'd like to join the party and share some of your mother's Polish dishes."

"Oh, I don't think my cooking could compete with—"

"Ah, come on, Mom. It's not a competition. . . and it'll be fun. You remember fun, don't you?"

Elaine managed a weak smile. "Yes, yes. And I won't have to get drunk to do it." She laughed and Becky giggled, sounding like the little girl her mother often missed.

Six months after Becky left for Notre Dame to study sociology and Javier to study pre-med at UCLA, the Gutierrez grandparents died, within days of each other. The massive wake at the pink house on Calle Poniente lasted until dawn. All of the neighbors attended, except for the Hintons and the Osbornes. They had moved away the year before, complaining that with Mexicans moving into the neighborhood, their property values would plummet—something that never happens in Santa Barbara.



Terry Sanville lives in San Luis Obispo, California, with his artist-poet wife and two plump cats. He has published hundreds of stories in various journals, magazines, and anthologies. Two of his stories have been nominated for Pushcart Prizes and one for inclusion in the *Best of the Net* anthology. Terry is an accomplished jazz and blues guitarist.

Pranesh Prasad

The Old Diaspora

Rain was pouring like tears from a courtesan's eyes when Beena came rushing home to her parents' house. Amrit Lal, her husband, had beaten her again. Beena, seeing her mother, Pyari, cried openly and loudly. Ram Karan, her father, cursed his fate as he did on sad occasions by saying, "too many daughters." He had had six. The eldest died young: drank kerosene from a lemonade bottle. The next, Lata—who was his favorite—had eloped with that good-for-nothing scoundrel Bhagauti. There were three daughters still unmarried. With hope he had made five trips to the Mission Hospital, but the promise of being the father of a boy deceived him. The sixth trip could be best described as a disaster of gigantic proportions. The matron in charge of the maternity ward had informed Ram Karan of Pyari giving birth to, finally, a son. The boy was taken home to the sugar estate. For a week at least, Ram Karan was the proudest father to have ever lived. Then the hospital staff arrived unannounced and accompanied by an anxious couple and a baby girl. It was raining that day too. Dr Vimlesh apologized for the mistake. The babies were exchanged, and as Pyari started to sing *A Little Fairy Has Come To My Garden*, Ram Karan sank his eyes towards the broken earth and in his parched voice treasured as much as he could the echoing words of the peasant song *King Crab, You Are The Ruler Of The Ocean*. And once he was done, he muttered, "I have simply no luck. I do not know what sins I committed in my previous lives to deserve this fate."



Indian sugar cane farmer, Shrinivaskulkarni1388, 2017.

It was pretty much around that time that Ram Karan turned into an alcoholic. As he listened to Beena's tale, which dwelt on her not being able to eat a single meal without Amrit Lal's miserly scrutiny, he poured another drink and then, while scratching his bony and scratchy old legs, thought of how destiny had cheated him. It was destiny that had turned him into a small sugar cane farmer on acres of leased land and forced poverty on him. And yet somewhere in his heart, he welcomed his misery. For misery had given him an excuse to think of Lord Krishna, just as the pious Queen Kunti had done during the age of the Mahabharata, and for this he felt particularly chosen and special.

The next morning, with the flawless sun slowly coiling itself in a cobra-like manner on the tropical and picturesque countryside, Amrit Lal arrived. He was a man of six feet. His face was pock-marked, his curved lips scarred, and he wore a distorted pencil moustache.

"Come outside, you whore. Wait till your folks hear of your infidelity."

From inside the house, Beena screamed, "Stupid man. What are you imagining now?"

Sensing mockery, Ram Karan yelled, "Too much fighting."

"Shut up, Beena, and you too, Beena's father," begged Pyari. Seizing Beena by the arm, she said softly, "After all, he is your husband. You must go back with him to your home. It is your duty. Look at me and your father."

Defeated yet again as women are in societies without much shape and meaning, Beena then made her way out of her parents' house to return with Amrit Lal. She had only walked a few yards when a stabbing pain in her abdomen forced her to collapse on the creeper-laden pathway. Amrit Lal knew when a child was due.

"Baby is coming," he shouted.

Pyari and the unmarried daughters acted as midwives. By the time Ram Karan managed to arrive at the birth spot, he was welcomed by the screams of a baby boy. Ram Karan's joy was boundless. "At last, a boy in this family, yes, a boy," he said. It was almost as if it was he and not Amrit Lal who was the father of the baby.

Ram Karan's natural and expected ecstasy was soon forcibly interrupted by the sudden crying from Pyari.

"Beena is dead, the baby has killed her."

Everyone except Ram Karan then stared accusingly and superstitiously at the baby.

Amrit Lal was certain that Beena's death was a just punishment for the supposed infidelity. He glanced at the baby and was adamant that the boy was not his. "Could not be that light skinned and good looking," he thought loudly. He then realized that Beena's death had given him a way out. He was relieved, for now he could remarry and obtain more goats and cupboards in dowry again.

"The baby is not mine," said Amrit Lal while looking at Ram Karan. And then he walked away just as bees do when their hives have become unusable, leaving Ram Karan, Pyari and the unmarried daughters wondering what to do with a dead body and, more importantly, an inauspicious baby.

The following day, Beena was cremated. Pyari refused to touch the baby until Ram Karan reminded her of him being their own flesh and blood and that he was a boy. On the baby's naming day, Ram Karan stood by the gate and announced that his grandson was henceforth to be called "Bharat."

Pyari knew that Ram Karan had satisfied his lifelong wish. She recalled how on that first night of their marriage Ram Karan had

told her that he would name their eldest son "Bharat." She thought of how she had failed him. Her heart sank and her head became bowed again. Ram Karan had tried to be a good and caring husband. The disappointment of Beena's birth had turned him away from her, like time that never returns, except briefly: as memories when captured in a photograph. Ram Karan surely returned whenever the sexual urge arose, but for Pyari the memories remained uncaptured, alone, and unblended, so much so that she herself never felt whole ever again.

The villagers did not help much either, for they continued to say every now and then to Ram Karan, "Working too hard in the fields, brother. Don't kill yourself in building dowry for your daughters."

Pride is necessary for those who are nothing and who remain nothing. The beatings began whenever Ram Karan's pride had been hurt. He would come home drunk, and at the slightest disagreement drag Pyari into the bedroom. He would only stop after she had collapsed into a heap on the bare floor.

With age she had learnt to tolerate him. The scars had ceased to be emotional. Prisoner she was, and freedom would only be achieved through death—either his or hers. What else could an illiterate woman and one with also a simple heart and ordinary thought comfort herself with?

Bharat was brought into the house after the naming ceremony with the constant chants of the *Hanuman Chalisa* continuing late into the night. Satisfied that the demons had been repelled successfully, Pyari placed Bharat on the wooden bed. Almost immediately the bed collapsed (the legs of the bed had not been put together properly), which left Pyari with a scar on her left knee.

"This baby is going to kill me, too," she said.

To everybody's amazement, Bharat emerged unscathed then.

"The baby has special powers," yelled Ram Karan. The unmarried daughters nodded their heads in support.

As Bharat grew, the Ram Karan household witnessed more mishaps where those around him would get injured but nothing ever happened to him. Soon it became known all over the sugar estates that Bharat was an inauspicious child with special protective powers for himself. Adults avoided him if they could, though deep down they were envious of his supposed benediction.

At home, his growing up was as regular as it could be. He would be forced to rise early in the morning when his aunts began their domestic chores. Whenever he took time to get up, he would get a whack on his bottom from Pyari's broom made up of dried coconut leaves. Pyari took pleasure in doing that because it was considered inauspicious to be hit by a broom on one's legs. That would also forestall growth. She wanted to see whether the inauspicious child's special powers prevented that from happening.

Bharat continued to grow and when he had reached the correct age, he was placed in the Arya Samaj Primary School located two kilometers from where he lived. Bharat had to walk to and from the school barefoot under the hot, belching sun and the humidity of the tropics. Despite this, he treasured school, for it provided him with freedom and, amongst children of his age, he was no longer responsible for his mother's death.

In school, however, he would often be punished by his teachers. Arjun Singh, a bald, ginger-mouthed, and short-tempered man punished Bharat whenever he could not remember his multiplication tables properly. He was made to stand on top of his desk for the remainder of the day. Once, while struggling to balance himself, he noticed that someone was watching him. Bharat stole a fearful glance towards his left and discovered Seema, a girl from his village, winking at him. Their friendship grew, like mangoes in the summer—ripe, tasty and alive. The boys in the senior classes started calling Bharat "Seema." The news travelled faster than wireless in those days. After coming home one day, Ram Karan called out, "Too many girlfriends." Pyari, as usual, put her own bit in, "His milk teeth haven't dropped yet and he is already behaving like his father. There is simply no luck for us poor people."

It could be said that Pyari's words were prophetic. The festival of Deepawali came on a Tuesday that year, a few months after the sugar cane fields had been battered earlier by one of the worst cyclones to hit the South Pacific. There was general despondency on the sugar estates, and the farmers were scrambling to make ends meet. This made the celebrations a muted affair, but Bharat was still tired the next morning and ended up at the beach. He contemplated missing school. It had almost been a fortnight since he last dressed in his school uniform. He recalled how perilously close to shame he had come. Badlu Nath, the deputy principal, was sitting on a large, rotting log with his new mistress. Bharat had seen them drinking from the same coconut with different colored straws. He had wondered why Badlu Nath had so many red spots on his neck. He satisfied his query by thinking that perhaps Badlu Nath slept in a mosquito net that had many holes. He knew being caught at the beach meant instant expulsion from school. And he was caught. The moment dawned on him as if the exam results had been announced and he had failed to top the class again. That very moment his concerns also lay with the disappointment with which Ram Karan would say "bad boy," and Pyari would blame his father.

To Bharat's relief, Badlu Nath had mercifully spared him. He was told to keep his mouth sealed. That silence stayed and lived in him and acquired a life of its own. Many would call it fear, but Bharat merely described it to himself as good luck, a luck that became heavy, noisy, and awkward. It was this intrusion and protest

that made him pack his bag and go to school despite being tired on that fateful morning after Deepawali.

The morning comprehension and grammar classes had left Bharat yawning. He spread his attentions around the class. The sight of Seema across the decrepit room brought feelings of innocent affection in Bharat's heart. Her eyes: wide, attentive and deep. Her face: ever so sparkling and mischievous. Her hands: as fair and expressive as her feet, but so much more elegant and personal, and so much more wonderful. Bharat felt like going across to her and detaching her from the seat. To take her with him to the world he had heard of that existed outside the endless sugar cane fields. The world where they would play, sometimes with dreams and sometimes with ideas—life after life they would stay together.

Well, dreams can die young without warning and preparation, and for Bharat that was about to happen. The entrance of Badlu Nath into the class caught everybody by surprise.

"Bharat, I need to see you outside," said Badlu Nath in a rather weak tone.

Bharat, hearing his name, was terrified. He wondered what the matter was. The entire class wondered what the matter was.

Biren whispered to Rajesh, "I bet he stole something."

"Is he going to be caned?" Shobha asked Pushpa.

Seema could only say, "Oops." She quickly said a train of prayers silently for Bharat's protection.

Once outside, Badlu Nath told Bharat, "I have an urgent message for you. You have to go home immediately. You can take two weeks off school."

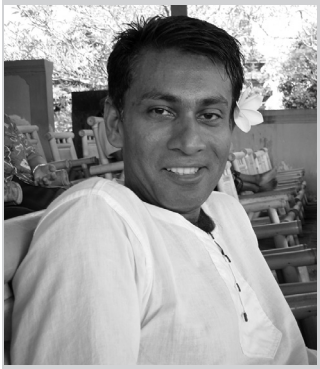
Bharat was exhilarated. "A holiday for me," he said loudly. He then rushed outside. He began to walk home in the hot sun. He could not wait to reach home. He pushed himself with strides—small and big, and huffing and puffing at the same time. He was joyful, thinking that perhaps some relatives had arrived; maybe from other towns, maybe some big-shot stall owner at the vegetable market with some gifts for him.

Arriving home, he witnessed a large crowd gathered in front of the porch. They talked in low voices, as if they were exchanging secrets and were afraid to be heard. Recognizing Bharat, they showered sympathetic gazes towards him. As he climbed the steps adjoining the porch, he detected the sound of sorrow. There was wailing inside the house. His lips turned dry. He saw some women were comforting Pyari. He had seen Pyari being consoled before. But this was not the comforting after a beating. Rather, this was the type of comforting that came after death, where the sound of the wailing was deep and lasting and where those women who were tasked with comforting encouraged the comforted to keep on wailing.

Ram Karan died while defecating. He had fallen into the pit latrine and drowned himself. He called for help as he fell, but no one heard him. His dead body, covered in excrement, was dragged out by their neighbor, Ramaiya Naidu, and his teenage boys. They had some experience in these matters, for some years ago, a few of their relatives from the city had taken turns to fall into the pit latrine. They survived. But the rich do, somehow.

The funeral pyre was lit soon afterwards. Ram Karan's cold dead body turned into ashes. Black smoke emanating from his pyre rose and disappeared into the sky. As Bharat stood by to collect his grandfather's ashes, he heard people say, "A heaven that distinguishes deeds, but pays no reward. A life has ended, and not a ripple in the ocean has been disturbed." Bharat, by contrast, almost precociously thought the people should be saying, "Ram Karan died in a world that had no place for him. Then again, it is impossible to belong when one's destiny has been shaped by an imperial power far away."

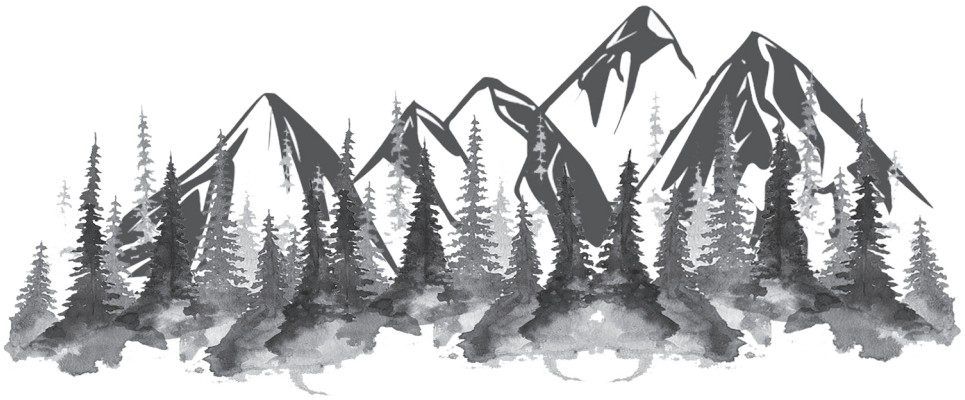
Bharat was devastated. The only person who had stood by him all these years was gone. He was missing him. He was scared too. Who would support an inauspicious child in his battles with Pyari? Returning home that evening, he helped himself to a bowl of lentils and rice. As he lay in bed, dreaming of a distant land, he knew that many things had changed. Notwithstanding his age, he now had responsibilities as the head of the family. The chain, the bondage had to continue. The very next day he was taken out of school. He had turned into a small-scale sugar cane farmer.



Pranesh Prasad's debut novel, *The Ultimate Laugh* (2011), launched at the Ubud Writer's Festival in Indonesia, explores issues of identity and terrorism. His second novel, *A Half-Baked Life* (2013), delves into the consequences of the 2002 Gujarat riots, human trafficking, and the recent whittling down of the right to free expression. His third novel, *The Hidden Imam* (2018), examines contemporary caste, religious, and gender inequalities. The current excerpt is from his forthcoming novel, *The Old Diaspora*, which centers on India's first war of independence and the indentured labor system of British India.

Maria Kochis

Timing Is Everything



When I found the note from my father, folded into an origami sailboat on my dresser, I told no one. Not Grandmother; not even Mindy Lou. "2 p.m. next Friday, Steps of the Library, Seven Days Gone," is all the note said. But the sailboat told me there was water in my future, so I packed for it: bathing suit, goggles, big tube of Coppertone, flippers (the flippers belonged to my mother; she had bought them for her honeymoon at Lake Mead, and they were pretty loose in the ankles, but my father, I knew, would have a solution for that). Lip balm, flip flops, badminton paddles, and I was ready.

I broke it to Grandmother at dinner that evening. I chose my moment, right after she closed her mouth around a spoonful of cactus jelly.

"Mindy Lou's family is going out to Great Basin for a week, camping. They asked me to come." The words rushed out on a single breath.

Her eyes went crafty before she even swallowed. "Is that right?"

She helped the jelly down with a sip of mint julep. "A whole week? Is that the family lives without electricity?"

"They *have* electricity, Grandma. They just get it from the sun is all."

"Well, we'll have to check with your mama about that. See what she thinks about a camping trip in God's country."

I stood up and cleared the table. Plates, soup bowls, silverware. At the sink, my joy got too big. I threw in the air my teacup, saucer, and soup spoon, in honor of my father, catching them all. Me! Mrs. Clumsyhands!

"Watch it there, missy. Nothing's been decided." A certain sharpness in her voice I'd do best to heed, but underneath it, causing it to crack, the tremor of her desire.

Close to midnight, I heard her on the phone to my mother, making Mindy Lou's family out to be the kind of model family she would want me to be spending a whole week of desert-time with, instead of the ramshackle-nutcase-

bunch that they were. "And you know she was runner-up for Miss Nevada back in the day. Mmm, hmm. Rode them ponies like no tomorrow."

My mother's voice was buzzing in alarm from Polynesia or Iceland, or wherever Delta International had dropped her for the night, and then my grandmother's soothing response. "Of course they'll be bringing a snake bite kit, Lara. What do you think, the Hornbuckles moved here yesterday? Their women have been blooming here for decades. Runner-up for Miss Nevada, and never even finished high school! Think on that. A proposal from the lieutenant governor when she was just sixteen!"

More buzzing came from my mother, but less like an angry wasp and more like a really annoying drone. I shut the door quietly so as not to interrupt the two, took stock of my suitcase one more time, and climbed into bed.

The Hornbuckles' purple Volkswagen, constellated with the Pleiades and Orion, encircled with the seven rings of Saturn, picked me up Friday morning. I squeezed into the backseat between Mindy Lou and Mr. Shackleford, the family babysitter and Great Dane, Mindy's five brothers plumped on sofa cushions in the way back playing with their Game Boys, and Mrs. Hornbuckle in the passenger seat trying to place me. We were twenty miles out of town when I confessed to not feeling well, stuck out my tongue to exhibit my white throat, fizzy from Honeydew. Melon is the only allergy I have, and that morning I made sure I ate a lot of it.

On the way back, I had a coughing fit and asked if we could stop by the drugstore to get some lozenges. By this time, Mindy, who I told nothing to, was looking suspicious. I took my time in the store reading the backs of boxes. I had brought some money with me and paid for the purchases in cash, counting out my loose change.

Nearly two hours had passed by the time their galactic van pulled into our driveway again, everyone inside glad to be rid of me, and by then, just as I knew she would be, Grandma was long gone.

Three hours later, my father drove up in a battered, red pickup. I ran down the steps of the library and catapulted into the passenger seat. He peeled out of the lot, tires screeching, laughing and gripping me around the neck, pulling me close and giving me a noogie, no hands on the wheel, the left tire of the truck bouncing off the curb.

"How's my girl?" He kissed my forehead, blew away my bangs, kissed it again. "My girl."

"You're late." I leaned away, looking at the man my mother used to compare to Tom Selleck and Burt Reynolds, TV slicks from the eighties. I'd had to Google them to find out they were real. My

father's hair was blacker, his eyebrows crazier, his smile white as snowfields on our dirty, desert mountains.

"Yeah, but I had to get snacks. Long drive to the ocean."

"We're going to the ocean? For real?"

"Damn right we are." He slapped my leg. "Buddy of mine has a sailboat docked in Bodega Bay. Said I could have a run of her anytime I wanted."

"One of your salmon fishing buddies?"

"That's right."

He was wearing a dusty black T-shirt, his knuckles were bruised, and the skin of his elbows looked scabby as gizzards. His forearms were even thicker than I remembered, veins like little snakes twitching up his arms.

"What?"

"Did you like it, fishing for salmon?"

"Did I like it?"

I nodded, pressing back on the window, really looking now.

"I liked the money. I liked Alaska. All the animals up there. I didn't like being away from you so long."

"You missed my birthday."

"I know I did, sweetheart." And when he pulled me in for another hug, and I fell onto his thigh, it was hard as a rock.

Motor Mouth, he likes to call me, Chatty Cathy, names no one would ever think of laying on me in ordinary life. Not that I'm quiet as a stone or anything, but I never talk the way I do with my dad, just back from one of his trips. I tell him about my crush on John Mahoney and troubles with math, and the way Ms. McKlusky kept confusing science with religion—telling us climate change isn't real and weather comes from God, storms and heat waves, floods and drought—until the Martinez family laid suit upon the school, and Ms. McKlusky was suspended. I tell him about a six-month-sub who teaches us evolution straight out of comic books, only he doesn't call them comic books, but graphic novels. Hairy mountain gorillas holding onto the pink palms of their bent-backed children in hidden forest valleys; otters that swam out of the sea and turned into bears. "Look hard," Mr. Reacher says, "Try and remember. Our own world is paling by the minute."

I talked until I ran out of words, my pretend sore throat suddenly turning real. I leaned my forehead against the window. My father massaged my neck. I knew he wouldn't talk much himself until we were out of the car, sitting on the beach somewhere or near a campfire.

After a while, he turned on the radio and found a station broadcasting baseball. Baseball is my father's only constant love other than me. He played in a minor league team for a couple of years out of San Francisco. Shortstop, then catcher. Crack hitter. They let him go, he said, on account of his bum knee. I believe him, even though usually it's the other way around—him letting things go.

First, his job as a welder, then as a machinist. A glassblower, then a worm farmer. It used to drive my mom crazy how his passions would burn so hot, then leave him so completely, stranding him for months, even years, in a grey, old man frame of mind, like a ratty bathrobe he couldn't take off. But even then, I could usually rouse him for an hour or two, enough for a round of crazy eights, or sharpshooting cans off the neighbor's fence. And those other times, when he was afire for something new, there was no stopping how much fun we could have.

My father blew smoke from the side of his mouth towards his open window.

"You tell your grandma I was picking you up?" He asked quietly.

"No sir. She thinks I'm on a family vacation with the Hornbuckles."

"And what do the Hornbuckles think?"

"They think I'm sick and staying at home."

He grinned to himself at how neatly I had arranged things, slipped the noose of everyone's knowledge, and I grinned too. There was nothing I liked better than being with my father on one of our secret adventures. The world was huge and full of surprises then, and the two of us alone together, ready to receive the gift of them, but looking out for each other too, getting each other's backs, in case the surprises weren't all good, or as good as they first appeared.

I dozed off. When I woke up, Carson City had come and gone and the landscape was greening, rearing up all around us. We took the next exit advertising food and gas and pulled into the parking lot of a log tavern next to a bunch of Harleys.

"Mind if I duck in here for a bit, finish the game?" The station was broken up by the mountains, coming in scratchy.

"Can I come in?"

"You better stay here, OK? People might get suspicious if I bring my ten-year-old beauty into the bar. Ten minutes is all I'll be."

He left and I took off my wristwatch and stuck it in the glove compartment, so I wouldn't be disappointed. After a while, I had to go to the bathroom. I thought about going into the bar, but what if there was someone I knew in there, and besides, I didn't want to piss my father off, especially not this early in our trip, so I left the car and walked into the forest. A few feet in was enough to hide me, but it was so beautiful in there, so different, I just kept walking, fascinated by the red-gold trunks of the trees, the bark-like pieces of a giant puzzle, beads of sap rolling down the cracks like so many sticky tears. A night-blue bird landed on a branch just ahead of me, flew off, and landed again.

When I finally arrived at a tiny opening, I couldn't see the parking lot anymore, but I could hear the highway, the roar of traffic. I

twirled and fell in the grass, lay there panting, and when I opened my eyes, for just a moment I wasn't sure which way to go, a down slope of pines in nearly every direction. Then, I saw the small slab of granite I stubbed my toe on earlier, the branch overhead like a fork in the road.

To my surprise, my father was out of the bar and whirling around the truck when I came out of the trees. I explained about needing to pee.

"Oh yeah! So pee in a bottle! That's what I do." He picked up the coke bottle from under the front seat, shook it in my face, then walked over to the trash can and with his baseball arm hurled it in. But when he turned around, he was grinning. "Christ, Francis. You really gave me a scare."

"Who won the game?" My voice could have been my mother's, when she's trying to hold everything back.

"Who gives a fuck?" And then I was picked up by my feet and shaken until all my coins fell out of my pockets.

A gravel road took us deeper into the heart of the mountains. My father sat me on his lap and let me steer. Sometimes, without any warning or reason, he pressed on the gas, and the truck flew up the road, slowed to a crawl, then roared down the other side. I was shrieking and laughing like some kind of night-bird, my legs so wobbly when I got out of the truck they couldn't hold me up. The campsite we spent all that time getting to was just a flat patch of grass beneath a kinked-up pine, but the campfire ring was a good one, big enough for a large fire, white rocks glittering in a near perfect circle. In the distance, one pale peak shone out from all the rest.

Our supper was cold chicken wings dipped in hot sauce, a big tub of potato salad, and the brownies I had made the day before as a special treat. While we ate, my father finally told me about Alaska, the long days working on the salmon boat under a sky where the sun never set, the uncanny sea lions and the swimming grizzlies. Finally, he asked about Her. How did Ms. Manners look these days? That's his nickname for my mother.

While my father's fantasy careers came and went, my mother's was constant. She had only ever wanted to do one thing: open a school of etiquette for all the depraved young women of Nevada. Las Vegas was probably her best bet, but she also considered Reno, and sometimes, in the sun-deviled summer months, Incline Village on the edge of Lake Tahoe.

"Why not in Atlanta, Georgia, or Charleston? Tuscaloosa? Places where *eticutlery* really matters." *Eticutlery* was my father's word, the nicer of the two.

"Those women already have it all. It's in the atmosphere around them, the very air they breathe," she explained. "Nevada women aren't so lucky."

"Sometimes they're lucky," my father said, winking at me. I frowned and shook my head. If my mother knew he took me to the casinos, taught me the hidden ways of poker, she would ground the both of us.

Sometimes, I considered those trips to be secret scouting missions for my mother. She wanted to embed the school in one of the casinos, raise it to a higher standard. The waitresses could benefit, the card sharks and the hostess. Not just, "please and thank you, sir," but a whole host of niceties. How to properly wield a fork, write a thank you letter, exit a room with sweeping grace.

"Don't forget the call girls. That's who you're really targeting for your *School of Eticunt*, isn't it, Lara? So they can go down on their High Rollers with a little more elegance, learn how to handle a cock with . . ."

My mother's hand smacked him before he could finish. It was not a light smack either. I can hear it still, all those smacks, ringing through my dreams. He never laid a hand on either of us, which isn't to say he was always in the right. I know he should never have sneered at her dreams like that, no matter what shape they took, no matter who she wanted to help. But that doesn't excuse her splitting us up the way she did, not in a lightening second. I was sent off to Christian summer camp, and when I got back, our trailer by the mountains had been sold and my father had received his papers.

"Other people's tests," my father was saying, when I zoned in again. "Other people's standards. That was always her biggest problem." He picked up another bottle, popped the cap off with his teeth. The shadows of the moving pine flickered on his face like the flames of a dark fire.

"Whaddya mean?" I asked in a bored voice. Once he started on my mother, the stars would come out before he stopped, the seasons pass.

"I mean you can't let other people make up the rules and then judge yourself by them. You have to live by your own rules, make up your own tests. Otherwise, it's not really your own life now, is it? Take me for example." His thumb jerked at his chest. "You know I made the biggest motorcycle in the world, don't you?"

I nodded. Other people might think he was lying, but I had seen photos. The thing was bigger than a camel, could fit up to six people, had massive tires. He welded it together at Burning Man over the course of three fevered days and it won all kinds of awards. But instead of leaving it be as art, he tried to cross the desert with it, and the damn thing blew up.

"What about my novel? You're looking at the only man to have ever written a whole novel in its entirety on one long train ride."

"It wasn't *one* long train ride."

"Well, no. But only because the Amtrak broke down for Christ's sake. Three times! There wasn't much inspiration in stagnant scenery. So I migrated to the Canadian line, and then the Starlight Express. The point is, I kept riding until I typed "The End" on that clacketty typewriter your mother bought me and sent it off to a publisher. It's in the *Guinness Book of World Records*." He winked at me so I'd know he was kidding about that last bit.

I looked around. That pale peak that drew my attention had just turned a deep rose, Venus shining just above it, bright as a Christmas star.

"I've got it," I said, mainly to move the conversation along, away from my mother and his distant achievements, and back to the present where it belonged.

"You've got what, sweetie?"

"My first test." I stood up and pointed. "I'm going to walk to that mountain."

He looked at where I was pointing. "Well now, that would be one hell of a long walk. How about we do it together one of these days?"

A surge of feeling filled me up and lifted me away from him. I felt pride and power, and a little leftover irritation from the way he'd treated me at the tavern. I crossed my arms. "By myself. Everyone has to pass their own tests."

He leaned towards me. "What if I agreed to carry everything?"

"I carry my backpack full of books to school each day. I wouldn't need you."

He laughed, one bright shout of laughter rising up on a cloud of breath.

"What if I picked flowers for you every day and rubbed your feet at night? Your feet might get awfully sore, doing all that walking. Wouldn't you let me come with you then?"

I shook my head hard. "Not even then."

"What if you got lost?" He asked, quietly. "How would I bear it?"

"I wouldn't get lost. I'd keep my eyes on the mountain." To prove it, I stared fiercely at the mountain without blinking for a whole minute. Unlike my father, I have a good handle on time. My mother always said so. Then I looked back at him, a sidelong look from under my bangs to see if I'd hurt him. He had a funny look on his face. His hands were slapping his jacket.

"My wallet. I must have left it at the bar."

"Uh oh."

"Fuck! I laid it down when I took out that photo of Cal Ripkin to show to the guy sitting next to me! Must have never picked it up again."

"We'll get it tomorrow."

He stood up, still palming his jacket, the back of his jeans. "Tonight, sweetheart. My whole life is in there—credit cards and bank cards, that sweet little photo of you with the turtle. Hopefully, the bartender's got it. Help me put the fire out." He walked over to the pine where our shovel was propped.

I looked back at the fire, his empty camp chair, the unfinished bottle of beer in the holder, and the bottles he already finished. His brownie was half eaten, no breeze in the air.

I remember feeling the earth through the soles of my shoes, the crackling wood like a language I was just on the edge of understanding.

"I think I want to stay here."

"No way. Not here by yourself."

"Why not? I'm not afraid. You told me fire keeps the bears away. I'll hold down the fort." I looked at him pleading.

His eyes took in the same scene I had, and I saw him waver.

"You won't go anywhere?"

"Nowhere. Not even to pee."

He came over to kiss me, of course he did, and I smelt the night on him—the smoke and the beer and the cigarettes, the cold mountain air and the tiniest whiff of sea. He scooped me up, cuddled me, then plunked me back in the chair, wrapped my sleeping bag around me, tucking it under my chin. I wanted to ask him something, knew I should ask, that someone should, but I felt too shy, and the words didn't come.

From the car window, he tossed me my backpack, one of the flippers sticking up through the zipper. "You got a flashlight in here, sweetie?"

"Sure I do."

"I'll be back in an hour, tops."

The gravel road was long and I stood watching him go for quite a while. Suddenly the truck lights disappeared. He must have gone over the pass. Ten minutes later, I saw them again, two tiny flares in the night, like the eyes of some ranging animal, and then they were gone.



Maria Kochis is a writer, librarian, and wilderness enthusiast who lives in California. Her short stories have appeared in the *Pisgah Review*, *The Arkansas International*, and the *Journal of Academic Librarianship*. She won The Arkansas International Emerging Writer's Prize in 2018.

READING THE WEST

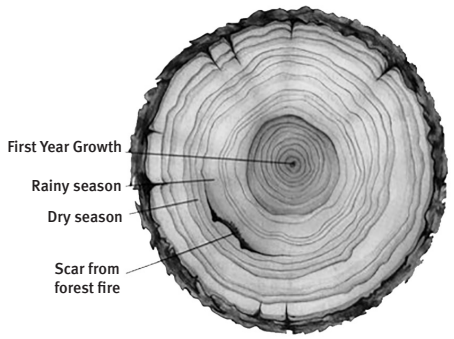
read-ing [from ME reden, to explain, hence to read] – vt. 1 to get the meaning of; 2 to understand the nature, significance, or thinking of; 3 to interpret or understand; 4 to apply oneself to; study.

WILDLIFE ARCHAEOLOGY

Archaeologists in New Mexico are analyzing tree rings, pottery, and blasts of light to argue that federal fire suppression policies are partially to blame for the raging wildfires in the West. As Stephen Nash reported:

Using dendochronology, or tree-ring dating, the team examined fire-scarred trees in and around Wabakwa [Jemez Pueblo] and found three distinct patterns. From around A.D. 1100 to A.D. 1650, small, patchy fires were common in the area. These fires, which often affected only one or two ponderosa pines, would have been set by the inhabitants as part of their subsistence and cultural practices, probably to manage plant resources and maximize agricultural productivity.

Once Native Americans left the region, those patchy fires stopped, and nature took over again. From the late 1600s through about 1880, according to the fire scars in the trees, there were widespread, low-level wildfires that affected larger numbers of ponderosa pines. This pattern is consistent with other ponderosa pine forests across North America, where wildfires occur naturally every 15 to 20 years or so….



(https://ell.stackexchange.com/questions/49850/how-do-you-say-that-tree-rings-are-will-be-closer-if-there-isnt-much-rain)

Finally, from the late 19th century up until today, coinciding with the period of federal fire suppression, as well as livestock grazing and logging activities (largely by Euro-Americans), the team found evidence of significant changes to the forest structure. With low-intensity fires no longer passing through the area, the forest became denser and overgrown, with lots of trees having germinated since the last recorded wildfire in 1893. The amount of combustible materials, such as leaves, needles, and branches—what scientists and forest managers call the "fuel load"—also increased significantly due to the lack of fires during this period….

Thanks to the work of archaeologists at Wabakwa, we now have convincing evidence that ponderosa pine forests that were once effectively managed by humans and natural wildfire cycles have become flammable tinderboxes.

It's going to be exceedingly difficult to rectify this situation. That said, collaborative research between various federal agencies, universities, and Native American tribes suggests that a return to Indigenous fire management practices can indeed prove effective in mitigating our current situation.

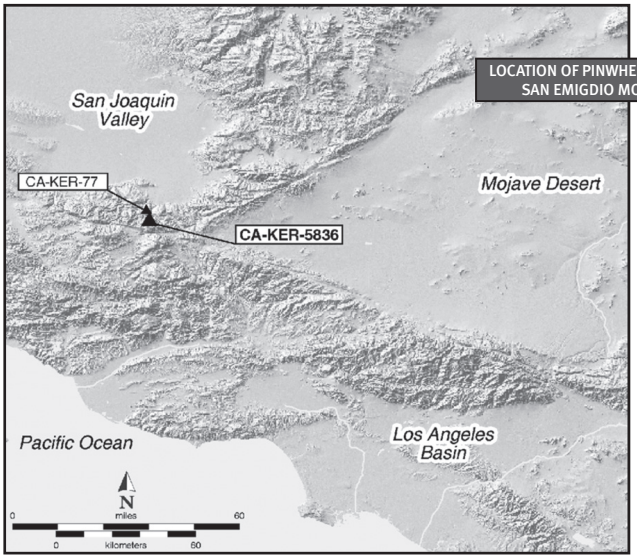
Source: Stephen E. Nash. "Wildfire Archaeology and the Burning American West." *Sapiens*, 9 Sept. 2020, https://www.sapiens.org/column/curiosities/wildfire-archaeology/

MIND-ALTERING

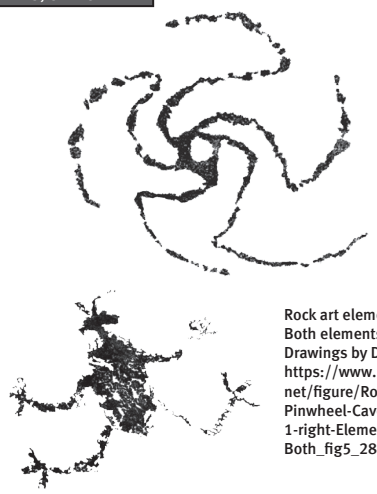
Researchers from the University of Oregon have been studying Pinwheel Cave, a Native American rock art site in California associated with the Chumash people. They discovered evidence of mind-altering psychedelics (among them datura, commonly known as jimsonweed or moonflower) dating from around 400 years ago.

Pinwheel Cave was named for a red pinwheel painted on the cave ceiling. During the summer solstice, sunlight travels across the pinwheel which was thought to suggest that the cave served for seasonal ritual celebrations. Excavations have now shown evidence of food processing, cooking fires, and other domestic activities, indicating that the cave was less a site for rarefied shamanic practice and more a community hub where datura ingestion occurred alongside everyday communal activities.

Source: "Mind-Altering Psychedelics Discovered in Native American Cave." 14 Dec. 2020, https://www.archaeology.wiki/blog/2020/12/14/mind-altering-psychedelics-discovered-in-native-american-cave/



Source: https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Location-of-Pinwheel-Cave-CA-KER-5836-in-the-San-Emigdio-Mountains-California_fig1_267865775



Rock art elements, Pinwheel Cave. Both elements in shades of red. Drawings by Dan Reeves, https://www.researchgate.net/figure/Rock-art-elements-Pinwheel-Cave-Left-Element-1-right-Element-2-105-x-17-cm-Both_fig5_284504174

HOMEWARD BOUND

From 1977 to 1983, Southern Illinois University Carbondale (SIUC) led a massive series of archaeological digs at Black Mesa in Northern Arizona where Peabody Energy leased land from the Navajo Nation and the Hopi Tribe to strip mine for coal.

Because Peabody was working on reservation land, it was required by the National Historic Preservation Act to search for, remove, and preserve Native American remains and relics.

As the mine grew, the project became one of the largest in the history of North American archaeological fieldwork, according to SIUC, employing hundreds of people, identifying nearly 2,500 archaeological sites across about 100 square miles of the mesa, and unearthing

several million Navajo, Hopi and ancient Puebloan and prehistoric artifacts, some as much as 8,000 years old, as well as the 200-plus skeletons.

The items were placed in the temporary care of SIUC. But their return to Native American hands has been slowed by politics and logistics….

Properly reburying the skeletons would require an extensive matching game, using field notes from the original excavations to pair each body with the ceremonial burial items that accompanied it.

Those burial objects remained in Carbondale, while the human remains had been transferred to a researcher at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas.

Representatives from both Navajo and Hopi traveled to Las Vegas to arrange for the skeletons' return to Arizona. They also visited Carbondale twice to retrieve the burial items, driving them back to Arizona in a U-Haul.

"SIU took really good care of the BMAP (Black Mesa Archaeological Project) collection," Begay said. [Begay was hired as the Navajo Nation historic preservation officer in 2007.] "They really did provide us with all the info we wanted and worked hard to make sure the Navajo and Hopi were happy with the process."…

A reburial ceremony was held in May. Together, Hopi and Navajo representatives picked a new gravesite as close as possible to the ancestors' original resting places within the mine's working area.

The reburial began early in the morning, with about 15 volunteers working all day. There was no media present, no videos or photographs. Each tribe handled the dead according to its own customs, and Hopi and Navajo spiritual leaders performed blessings on the remains and the workers.

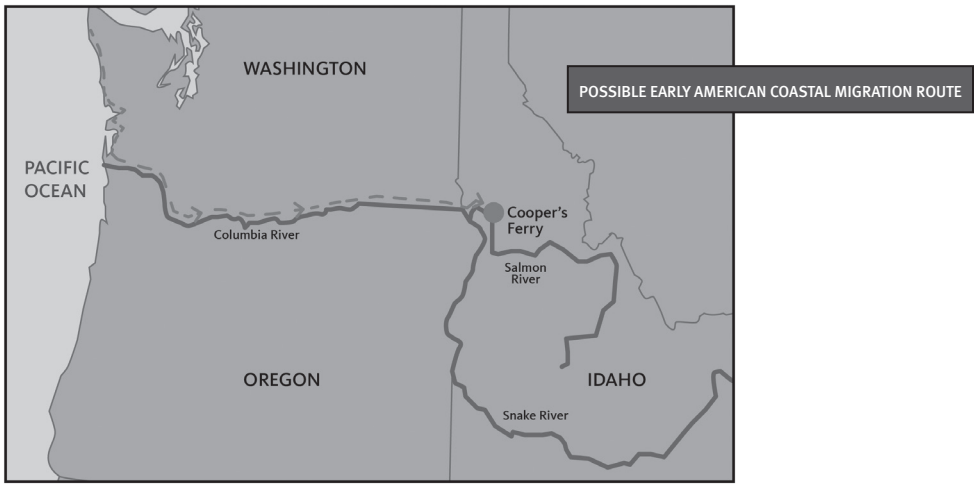
"It was satisfying," Begay said. "As unfortunate as it was that the remains were removed, it was probably a good decision to remove and protect them. They would've been completely destroyed otherwise."

Source: Neely-Streit, Gabriel. "Returning home: Sacred artifacts held by SIU Carbondale reburied with Hopi, Navajo ancestors." *The Southern Illinoian*, 2 Jan. 2020, https://thesouthern.com/news/local/siu/returning-home-sacred-artifacts-held-by-siu-carbondale-reburied-with-hopi-navajo-ancestors/article_198831a5-1552-5f21-be9f-1e88cba03eaa.html

OLDEST AMERICANS

Artifacts recently unearthed at a site in western Idaho called Cooper's Ferry indicate that humans were living there 16,000 years ago, pushing back the timeline of human habitation in North America which had previously been set at 13,500 years.

…[I]n recent years, archaeologists have found numerous sites and artifacts older than [the] migration timeline, suggesting that early humans didn't travel through the ice but followed the coast, likely using boats. A site called Monte Verde at the southern tip of Chile is at least 15,000 years old, a sinkhole in Florida recently yielded a knife and butchered mammoth bone more than 14,500 years old, and the Gault site in Texas has yielded thousands of artifacts that could be 16,000 to 20,000 years old.



https://www.ineffableisland.com/2019/08/first-people-arrived-in-north-america.html; Map by Teresa Hall, Oregon State University.

… The simplest explanation is that the earliest migrants to North America traveled up river to reach Idaho. "The Cooper's Ferry site is located along the Salmon River, which is a tributary of the larger Columbia River basin. Early peoples moving south along the Pacific coast would have encountered the Columbia River as the first place below the glaciers where they could easily walk and paddle in to North America," Davis says in the press release. [Loren Davis is an Oregon State University anthropologist and lead author of the new study.] "Essentially, the Columbia River corridor was the first off-ramp of a Pacific coast migration route. The timing and position of the Cooper's Ferry site is consistent with and most easily explained as the result of an early Pacific coastal migration…. One of the big questions remaining is just who the earliest North Americans were. Davis has speculated that the oldest artifacts found at Cooper's Ferry are similar in form to artifacts found in northwestern Asia, in particular Japan. He's currently comparing his dig's finds with Japanese artifacts and also has lots of other material queued up for carbon dating from a second dig site in the area.

Source: Daley, Jason. "Idaho Site Shows Humans Were in North America 16,000 Years Ago." *SmithsonianMag.com*, 30 Aug. 2019, https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/idaho-site-shows-humans-were-north-america-16000-years-ago-180973024/

EDITORIAL MATTER

ISSN 0891-8899 – Weber *is published biannually by The College of Arts & Humanities at Weber State University, Ogden, Utah 84408-1405. Full text of this issue and historical archives are available in electronic edition at https://www.weber.edu/weberjournal*

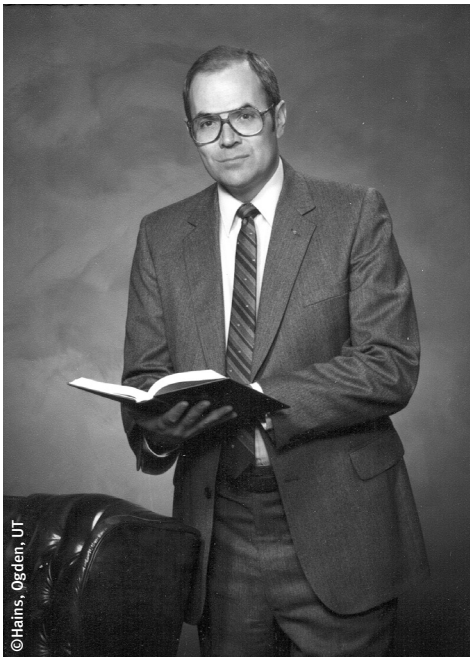
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Subscription Costs: Individuals $20 (outside U.S., $30), institutions $30 (outside U.S., $40). Back issues $10 subject to availability. Multi-year and group subscriptions also available.

Submissions and Correspondence: Editor, WEBER THE CONTEMPORARY WEST *| Weber State University*
1395 Edvalson Street Dept. 1405, Ogden, UT 84408-1405.
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