Welcome, to those of you who might be new to Camas; and welcome back, to those of you who’ve seen us before. There have been a few changes here, but not all that much change, we think. You’ll notice that this issue is a little thicker than the previous ones, thanks to the generosity of the University of Montana’s Environmental Studies Program, which increased its support in a tight year. And our thanks too to Freddy’s Feed and Read Bookstore in Missoula for its generous support of Camas and the hospitality its staff has extended to the Writing Wild Reading Series.

You’ll notice some changes on the masthead, too. The new Camas staff would like to thank our founding editorial board — Jenny Flynn, Kurt Menning, and Christian Sarver. You will see in this issue some of the splendid work that their commitment to this journal has previously kept from your eyes, and soon, audiences beyond the Northern Rockies will be treated to the work of all three. Christian’s essay “In the Flyway” will appear in the May/June 1994 North American Review. For her essay “Loss Is The Great Lesson” Jenny received the prestigious Merriam-Frontier Prize for 1994; that essay will appear next year in Jenny’s first book. In the autumn, Kurt will continue his work with the conservation possibilities of GIS Mapping in the Ph.D Program in Forestry at the University of California at Berkeley. We wish these three all the best, and we’re certain that you will continue to see in these pages the legacy of their contributions to Camas.

As always, Camas aims to publish work that will help us discover new relationships with the nonhuman world. We are pleased to offer in this issue of Camas a diversity not generally found in what the pigeonholers call “nature writing” — there is humor here, fiction and personal narrative, and philosophy and memoir too. Camas is privileged to be able to provide a forum for regional writers and artists who are working at creating such a diversity of “environmental art.”

We hope you’ll enjoy the diversity in these pages. But since you’re interested enough to be reading this journal, we’re sure you’re already mindful that there’s more diversity — at least for now — out there among the draws and canyons, in the swales and creeks, and under the cottonwoods and larches, than there is in the pages of any journal. And we hope you’ll get out to enjoy that diversity — that is, all the beings leaved and shelled, winged and scaled, and four- and six- and eight-legged — this summer...

Jeff Smith
— for the Camas Editorial Board

Camas is a free publication and production costs are met solely by donations. The journal is organized as a non-profit group under the umbrella of the Associated Students of the University of Montana. If you would like to support this forum for new artists please send a check payable to Camas, John Dillon, Treasurer to the address listed above.
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Spring

The boy stands between two saplings and shakes them.

Rain falls from green clouds, and dark pieces

of wood within me stir.

—Alec Cargile
My mother loved to buy sports cars. Especially yellow ones. She liked to drive them places like her waitressing job or the dry cleaners. Once my goat Lucy climbed up on the Porsche, denting the polished metal with her hooves. Mom had a man steal the car from a parking lot and drive it across the border. I think it was our neighbor. He liked guns. He ran around the place barefoot, helping me chase down the cow with a rope and a bucket of alfalfa. Once he shot all our animals. Mom took a serrated knife with a plastic handle into the bathroom. The lime tree scraped against the house, the whole tree moved back and forth in the wind. It felt as though the house was moving. Even now I feel the moving inside me. My sister says we carry thirty pounds of black tar in our colons. She thinks rotting is the cause of all illness. She thinks a lot because she fell off a cliff in high school. Her forehead smashed into seven pieces and her femur pushed through her pelvis. She was brought home in traction after three months of being in the hospital. It was just the two of us, and I left her quite often. Whenever I got home she really needed to use the bathroom. I was still the maid for her boyfriend's family and went to school in the mornings. Once I turned the knives in the wrong direction. My mother told me on her death bed how embarrassed this made her. She thought I should shave my armpits. She thought my sister and I were trying to kill her. She's dead, and my sister lives in Texas. We had a garden with summer squash and tomatoes. I grew sunflowers in a crowded clump at the center. When I think of my mother, I think of yellow. My mother and I were the gardeners, but we had other things in common. I taught school with her in Stockton after the second divorce and the first mastectomy. She married a man who went on to make the plastic pails for McDonald's to put their pickles in.

This is what you call America. He made a lot of money and proved it by buying a Ferrari. There were stray bullets coming from the freeway and children whose parents were dying. I spent most of my free time walking along the levee. "She didn't go to the doctor till her whole breast was purple and hard," my mother's best friend told me. She wore a blue terry cloth robe and little scuffling slippers because she always had the right clothes for every occasion. "Where's my miracle cure? I'm so young. Who will take care of me?" My sister and I made jello. Then we held teaspoons of sugar water up to her mouth, feeding her like a bird. One pill counteracted the side effects of another. The dosage kept changing. She thought we were trying to kill her. She wouldn't lie down for fear of falling asleep and dying. Her feet pooled up with blood and turned black from all that sitting. A student of mine called this summer to tell me she had tried to cut her own breasts off. I try to draw a red picture of a flower, but I have a hard time concentrating. "May I get you a soft drink, a blanket or a pillow?" My mother worked a first class flight with James A. Michener as the only passenger. She got his address to write a letter. All I can remember is that the book was one thousand and eighty-eight pages, and for years after I had a keen desire to be an archaeologist. I like to keep track of things. I used to have a collection in my head of license plate numbers: 688-KQQ, 592-RJZ, 372-URP. By the time I was twelve I had memorized quite a few numbers. When I went with my mom in the car, I would lift my toes as we drove across bridges. It was like jumping over the river. I remember being truly happy we didn't live in the dry, sandy desert.

Karin Schalm
Christian Sarver

—a letter from home

My mother's garden is small but bountiful. We have a riding arena in our backyard, a relic from a childhood—mine—spent on horseback. My mother is afraid of horses, and since they, and I, have left, she's let the arena go to wildflowers and planted a garden. She loves the color of it, I think: eggplant, carrots, beets, spinach. In the winter she gives me presents: jars of rosemary, dill, mint, tarragon, that she has grown; a cruet filled with balsamic vinegar, lemons and figs floating inside. When I call her, she tells me what she has for dinner: baby red potatoes rubbed with sage and olive oil; eggplant roasted with red peppers and garlic. If I am home visiting, we make cranberry scones and eat them with strong tea and cream on the back porch.

My mother grew up in a very German, very Lutheran community in northern Indiana. She went to parochial school, though I think her sense of God is very different from what her teachers and family intended. She remembers, in the third grade, asking her teacher why she was blamed for her 'bad' behavior, but God got the credit when she was good. At the look on her teacher's face, she realized such questions were not the way to get the Citizenship Award. As a child, these things seemed important to her, and so she let similar statements hang silent in her head.

On her eighteenth birthday, which was also the day of her high school graduation, my mother's father died. The Sunday before, in church, the pastor had been discussing the story of John the Baptist, who lost his head to the whims of a capricious dancer. Early in the first morning of her nineteenth year, as she was going to commencement and trying to put off thoughts of a father who would never see any of the direction her life might take, someone asked her what she wanted for her birthday. To the horror of her classmates, she shrugged, echoing Salome, "Bring me the head of John the Baptist."

My mother is unusual in her family. She left Indiana, when she was young, and moved to North Carolina with a boy whom she was not married to. She did, eventually, marry this man who would become my father, but her family was confused. They approved of him—but the brashness of eloping shocked them. Her family was more careful, more sedentary, less inclined to sudden motion. They didn't understand why she hadn't waited, in Indiana, for him to come back.

She never went back. She moved to Utah, she raised three children, she quit nursing, which she hated, and got a degree in archaeology. For six years now she has lived next door to the boy with whom she escaped Indiana. Their marriage has been long—almost thirty years—and turbulent. The faith she gave him when she was young has twisted and grown hard—the inexorable glaciation of infidelity. The commonplaceness of it embarrasses her sometimes, I think. She had read the Brontes, Emily Dickinson; she had envisioned that her life would assume more tragic proportions.
Instead, her husband betrayed her in predictable ways, and she looked aside, as she was supposed to, while he courted other women. A sacrifice meant to ennoble them both only wore her out, and he never noticed.

I was in high school when I watched the bird die. Walking into the living room one night I could see, through the glass door of the wood stove, flame quivering and breathing, throwing liquid shadows on my father’s face where he sat reading. I remember the orange seemed unnaturally bright, the billow of flame unusually wide. I recognized the shape of flight, the shape of a bird inside, even as I moved towards the door to open it, to let the bird out. I wasn’t thinking, of course. She was on fire. She was dying. Set free, she would have danced her macabre steps, and set the house to flame. Fortunately, my father, looking up from his book, intercepted me.

Holding me back from the stove door, he told me that it was necessary, sometimes, to let some things die to protect others. He said the bird must have set up a nest inside the chimney stack, and fallen down into the stove with the suffocating smoke of a wet-wood fire. Putting an arm around my shoulder, he squeezed lightly; he understood, too, that “for the best” could be “hard to watch.”

My mother set herself a pyre one night—took twenty-one years of journals and put them in that same wood stove and watched the flame grow bright with her life. She told me about it years later; she said she had been afraid one of us would read them after she was dead, and we would see how unhappy she had been. Perhaps she hadn’t wanted children; perhaps she had imagined for herself a life of poetry and solitude. I asked if she had read the pages, before they lit, and she said no, and I wondered then whom she was protecting, and whom she was killing.

I believed my father, when I was younger, about fire and sacrifice. He was right about the bird: If we’d let her out she would have fluttered into the eaves, bringing our house to a swirling crescendo of flame. But I’m twenty-seven now, two years older than my mother was when she had me. I’ve learned that fire isn’t the only way to burn a house down. And I can’t help wondering what fury might have been set loose from the stove, what phoenix may have risen from the ashes. I can’t help wanting that part of her, that I never knew, back. I want to read the journals.

When I was young, I knew my mother didn’t believe in God. We went to church, whenever we were in Indiana, because it was easier than standing against the flood of familial expectation. I remember liking church, because I got to dress up, and because I liked the seriousness of the service, and communion. I played Mary, once, in the Sunday School Easter play. Still, I thought of church as ‘playing house’: pretending a life that other people had. My brother and I were baptized Lutheran; by the time my sister, the youngest, was born, my mother had given up even the pretense of belief. I asked her once what she and Dad thought of God. She told me, “Your Dad doesn’t believe in God. He thinks of himself as the center of the universe.”

I knew, too, that she wasn’t happy. My parents never
fought in front of my brother or sister or me, but I remember Sunday mornings when she would wake up screaming. She would go through the house and throw everything—clothes, shoes, camping equipment—off the back deck. Sundays were one of the few times my father was home—the only time she seemed so frantic. While she stormed, he would sit us children down and talk to us about picking up our toys so Mother wouldn’t have to work so hard. She told me, years later, that it was terrifying to have lived with someone for most of your adult life and realize, finally, that he didn’t know you at all.

She is more peaceful now. They live on a four-acre piece of land—next door to each other, and in separate houses. They are still married. She doesn’t feel compelled to explain that part of herself. She has placed him where she can live with him, where she can be happy. There are things she has lost, I am sure, in this composition of herself. She does not tell me when she cries. She doesn’t believe in God, but she has enormous faith in ritual, and she knows the importance of mornings spent watching sunlight gather in the corners of her room. She tends her garden; she sends me a sweater that she thinks looks as if it were knit of my hair.

I told her once that I had learned from her a cynicism that was its own form of religion. I am an observer, by nature, more than a participant. I will stand on the edge of life, and watch others respond. But I will not play the fool myself. I learned young that salvation—whether it comes from gods or mortals—is short-lived and messy at best. The capacity for faith is inherent, I think; I know that there is some force, grand and unifying, which holds me to the world. But faith is a skill as well—one I haven’t yet acquired. I would give myself to god, I would revel in that messiness, because I think there is something appallingly small in a life held tight to one’s chest, only as I fling myself into the abyss I already know how far I have to fall before the ropes will catch me. It’s a belief, lukewarm and controlled, that would never see me tied to a stake, wailing as the flames licked my ankles.

Together, my mother and I go on pilgrimages. We have walked for miles the banks of the Escalante River, in southern Utah. The country is slightly foreign to me; I’ve grown more accustomed to the Ponderosa Pines, the craggy granite peaks of the Northern Rockies. She talks about getting lost, if you move away from the river, and how she’s imagined herself disappearing into the unbroken sheaf of sage. She prefers to let me set up the tent or start the campstove, but she knows more than I do about flash-floods. She hears birds and speaks to them by name, and shows me petroglyphs where I would not have guessed them. Her presence here has no agenda; mine seems edgier, in comparison, and I am restless to travel specific distances, to take photographs. Hers is a familiarity come of time spent, of an eye attentive to detail.

We sleep in the afternoons, when it’s hot, in the shade of thrushy willows. We wear wide-brimmed straw hats, and wish that we had cotton sundresses so we could feel the breeze—cooled as it crosses the water—wrap around our legs.

My mother thinks Our Lady of the Rockies looks like "the thing on top of a wedding cake." The first time I saw the statue I stood with her on the edge of the Berkeley Pit; she hummed "The Wedding March" as we walked through the mine shaft to the Pit platform. We had driven two hours, away from a conference on "Women in the American West" that bored us. We thought a woman imprisoned—alone, in the wind—at 8,000 feet might be more illustrative of women's place in Western America history than any of the dry, academic lectures we had been hearing. While we were eating in Butte, our waitress told my mother that you could, for a small fee, light up Our Lady of the Rockies in specific colors on "special days." She wanted to give me the statue, ablaze in pink, for my twenty-fifth birthday.

We couldn’t go into Our Lady’s house while we were there—it was a Sunday, and the chapel is closed. My mother wasn’t disappointed, really, she got as much satisfaction from the irony. She asked me to send her a rosary from Our Lady, but only after she found out they were pink, and plastic.

I was born, nearly, on Christmas Day. In North Carolina, ‘Christmas babies’ are sent home swathed in a red stocking. People have thought that might have something to do with my name—Christian Marie. My mother’s explanation is different: she saw a Steve McQueen movie, "The Cincinnati Kid," the night before I was born, and in it Tuesday Weld played a woman named Christian. "Your father liked Tuesday Weld," she shrugs, "he had wanted to name you Sheila. What a terrible name for a child." My siblings’ names are equally Catholic—Francis Edward, Mary Heath. I would make this fact significant, if I could, but she won’t let me. Though her gestures sometimes recall the religion she was handed as a child, she doesn’t think “Heaven” is a useful concept. When I ask her why she wants to visit Our Lady of the Rockies, she says it’s because she “likes to think about lies.”

She sent me a postcard one spring. On the front was a stylized photograph of a woman in ‘harem’ attire. She is playing the lute, one breast nearly exposed beneath her robes. The caption reads: “The convent was not totally as Beatrice had envisioned it. The convent was not totally as Beatrice had envisioned it." The first time I saw the statue I stood with her on the edge of the Berkeley Pit; she hummed “The Wedding March” as we walked through the mine shaft to the Pit platform. We had driven two hours, away from a conference on "Women in the American West" that bored us. We thought a woman imprisoned—alone, in the wind—at 8,000 feet might be more illustrative of women's place in Western America history than any of the dry, academic lectures we had been hearing. While we were eating in Butte, our waitress told my mother that you could, for a small fee, light up Our Lady of the Rockies in specific colors on "special days." She wanted to give me the statue, ablaze in pink, for my twenty-fifth birthday.

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I hate to feed your cynicism, but it’s my duty. You'll have to find your faith somewhere else. My peas have sprouted. Take heart.
In Flight

Cloud on mountain
or mountain through cloud?
I have stood below, and gazed up
to the mountain mystified by clouds.

I have walked above them, so soft,
cradled by mountain, firm
under my feet.

Today both entwine.
I touch neither.
So it is with mind and body
while soul observes, flying high.

Sunlight across the ocean,
grace flowing across our hearts.

Clouds flowing overhead,
water beneath.
Sunlight permeates all
So also Spirit!

Shadow, leaf fall or
butterfly...
What dances on the rockface?

Morning Star
On day six I go back down the beach and start taking apart the plane. Or taking apart what I can, anyhow. I find a small tool kit under the pilot’s seat. It’s pretty worthless, but it contains a little miniature crowbar-type thing. I use this to rip out the seats. I’m heaving the second seat out onto the sand when Jane comes stomping down the beach. She’s been down to the water, washing up. I had figured that she’d be busy, too busy to notice what I’m doing.

She doesn’t say anything at first. She just stands there and watches me take out some door panels, her arms crossed, a half-empty bottle of Pert in one hand, her Nikes dangling from the other. Hair blowing over her face.

I toss a door panel out onto the sand.

“That plane is worth twenty-five thousand dollars,” she says, pulling hair out of her eyes.

I crowbar out another panel, toss it on the sand, and stare at her. We’re not communicating very well.

“Who do you think is going to pay for this?” she says. I look at the crowbar in my hand, then out at the assorted interior furnishings lying in the sand.

“Nobody’s going to give a rat’s ass about the plane,” I say.

“Oh, I guess I missed it when you were signing the insurance paper. I guess I was in the bathroom or something.” She is bouncing on her toes a little.

“Forget it. Just forget it. The plane is trashed anyhow,” I say, jumping out of the cockpit.

“You and your goddamned flying lessons.”

“It was vapor lock or something.” She makes a snorting sound.

“It wasn’t my fault,” I say for the hundredth time. I wave the crowbar in the general direction of the cockpit. “We’re lucky to be alive. And we could use this stuff. Look.” I turn a seat upright in the sand and pat it. “And look at this.” I hold up a little tape recorder that I found in one of the door pouches. Jane looks at me like I’m going out of my mind. I hold out the tape recorder and click it on.

“Say something.”

She looks down at the tape recorder, then up at me. “You’re going to pay for this,” she says. She turns and strides off down the beach. In a minute, she is waist deep in the water, furiously soaping her hair, mucking up a virgin stretch of ocean with sodium lauryl sulfate.

“Bloody hell,” I say. Bloody hell. We were moving to New Zealand. I’ve been practicing saying it for months.

The island is small, really small. On day ten, I talk Jane into going exploring. See what we can find. I pack some granola bars, water, and the camera into a small gym bag and we take off down the beach, following the line of hard sand near the water. Jane walks in front, her shoes tied by their laces and slung over her shoulder.

“I’ve been this way,” she says. She has gone running down this stretch of beach every morning since we’ve been here. She’s a nut for that sort of thing.

“Well, now we’ll both see it,” I say. She gives me a vicious tiger shark look over her shoulder. She’s not adjusting well. I can’t say that I blame her.

By noon, we’ve seen lines of palm trees, white sand. Blue water. Breakers out on the reef. A little stream. Hundreds of little crabs scrabble around in the mud where the stream meets the ocean. They are the first moving things that we’ve seen.

At about three, a line of white clouds sneaks over the horizon.

“Look, clouds,” I say. By four o’clock, they’re gone. We walk head down, single file, Jane in front. I watch sweat drip off the end of my nose and down into the sand. I find myself looking over my shoulder every ten minutes or so. Looking at our footprints in the sand.

At six o’clock, we spot a wrecked plane up on the beach

“Jesus Christ,” she says. Tears are getting ready to spill. Tears, I think, of frustration. She unslings her Nikes and hits me listlessly on the chest with them.

“Jesus Christ,” she says again. She sits down in the sand and cries a small pond.

In Auckland there’s a bank, and in the bank there’s a certified check made out to Jane for twenty-eight thousand dollars. Our life savings. I sit under the little canopy that I’ve made out of Cessna parts, watch the moon creep, rub Jane’s sleeping back and think about that check. I picture it sitting in an envelope in some junior officer’s ‘in’ basket. He is well groomed, nice sport coat, little moustache. Once or twice a day, he picks it up and taps it lightly against his finger tips and looks over at the door.

“Bloody hell,” he thinks.

Lucky for me, the tip of one of the wings got ripped off of the plane when we ‘landed.’ On day fourteen, I seal up the open end with a poncho that was in the plane. I wrap it up really tight with some of the plane’s expensive and complicated wiring. It makes for a pretty suitable raft, about twelve feet long. I drag it down to the water and go paddling around for a while. It leaks a little, but not too bad. I get brave and stand up. The breeze pushes me along.


She doesn’t even look. She’s busy dragging driftwood around on the beach. While I stand there on my airplane wing, she spells out HELP in twenty-foot letters. By the time I get the wing back to shore, she’s gone running. Nike tracks stretch down the beach and out of sight. She comes back at sunset, out of breath, her feet bleeding in her shoes.

There are coconuts. Coconuts, coconuts, coconuts. Nearly every tree on the island over ten feet tall is full of them. Also there is something that I think is what they call breadfruit. It is like a giant light-green potato. It grows in little groves in the center of the island. It tastes like its name. All the granola bars are long gone. At least I think so. Jane may be holding out on me. At any rate, we’ll never starve. We suffer though. Coconut four times a day.

On about day thirty, Jane leaves me. I’m sitting in the sand up by our little canopy pounding coconuts with the small crowbar when Jane comes screaming out of the water, her hair full of shampoo. I expect to see a big fin circling just off shore, but there’s nothing but rippling water, calm and turquoise blue. Jane runs up and sticks her leg out for me to see.

“Look at this!”

I take her foot in my hand. There is a razor-sharp cut on the side of her ankle. I turn her foot and it oozes fresh blood.

“Look at that,” I say.

“I’ve been bit. Something bit me.”

I let go of her foot and get to my feet. “What do you mean, you’ve been bit?” It doesn’t look like a bite to me.

“Right there. Right there in the water.” She is pointing over her shoulder at the water that is as calm and harmless looking as a farm pond. “Something bit me, right there in the water. Look at this.” She points down at her foot. Blood is spiraling down around her ankle, over her foot, and down into the sand. I stand there rubbing my chin and staring at her foot, trying to think of something appropriate to use for a bandage without ripping up what precious few clothes we have. She gets this strange look on her face. I think she is about to cry and I reach out to take her by the hand and she starts beating me on the shoulders with her fists.

“You wanted this! You did this on purpose!” she screams. She really pummels me, head down, shampoo flying out of her hair. “You bastard. You and your fucking New Zealand. You and your get-away-from-it-all.” She backs me up. I reach for her wrists and she starts kicking me. Blood flies. Bright red blood. I stumble over a coconut and fall over on my back in the sand. She stops and stands over me, chest heaving, a dark silhouette in the sun. She takes a deep breath. “I had a GOOD job,” she says. “I had a LIFE.” She says it as if she’s spitting out a bug. She steps over me and grabs her shoes and a small gym bag with some of her things and runs off down the beach. I lie there in the sand and watch her go, feeling stunned, sweating in the sun, sucking on my lower lip, which is getting fat and tasting of salt.

She doesn’t come back by sunset. I wait for the moon to rise then take off down the beach, following her tracks down by the water’s edge. It is bright as all get-out, the sand a luminous grey, the water black, a thin white line of breakers on the reef offshore. Her footprints are etched in dark shadow in the sand. They remind me somehow of pictures of astronaut’s footprints on the moon. Stark and lonely.
She has run for about a mile or two, toes digging in the hard sand, then slowed to a walk. A little ways further, there is a mark in the sand where she has stopped to put on her shoes. There is a broken piece of shoe lace lying there. I pick it up and put it in my pocket. Nike tracks go on down the beach for another mile or so. I follow them, and come across another mark in the sand. I stand over it and scratch at my beard. It looks for all the world like a snow angel, a human form printed across another mark in the sand. I stand over it and stare up at the moon.

She did have a good job. She was happy. Most of the money in the bank in New Zealand is hers. This was all my idea. It was me who was sick of things. Me who wanted a fresh start, wanted to get away. I guess, if I had to stand before God and tell the whole truth, I wanted to go where we didn't know anybody, where we were back on equal footing. I wanted to find a place where I could stave off, maybe for a while, maybe forever, the inevitable fact that Jane was going to die. I can picture her lying there, waving her arms. I lie down on my back in the print and stare up at the moon.

I learn to fish. I make a hook out of a cotter pin from the plane and these nylon threads out of the seats. For bait, I go down the shore. A makeshift lean-to of odd sticks and palm fronds is beside it. A makeshift lean-to of odd sticks and palm fronds is tucked up against the trees that line the beach. Nike tracks head down the coast in the firm water's-edge sand. She has gone running. Who knows how far. Who knows when she'll be back.

I leave the fish by the fire and go.

The sun goes down and the fire dies to a dribble of smoke. I pile more coconut husks on, then some driftwood, using up the H in Jane's HELP sign. It climbs back to life. It is ridiculous to sit by, it makes me sweat, but it has a nice homey look to it. The crackling of the wood is pleasing to listen to. Down the coast, I can see the furtive blinking of Jane's fire. I sit under the canopy and wonder if she's looking this way.

In the morning, I go back out and catch some more fish. Half a dozen at least. I learn to bite them above the eyes to keep them from flopping off of the raft. They go limp with a cruel crackle and I spit scales out into the water. I gut them up on the beach, and turn a shoelace through their gills and, slinging them over my shoulder, take off down the shore.

About noon, I come across the blackened sand and chunks of ember where Jane has been making her fire. The little gym bag is there, open and keeled over in the sand. Her bottle of shampoo, nearly empty, sits beside it. A makeshift lean-to of odd sticks and palm fronds is tucked up against the trees that line the beach. Nike tracks head down the coast in the firm water's-edge sand. She has gone running. Who knows how far. Who knows when she'll be back.

I leave the fish by the fire and go.

The floor of the ocean inside the reef is like an endless desert submerged under water. I lie on my stomach on the raft and cup my hands over my eyes and peer down while the sun scorches my back. There are little ripple-like dunes down there, coaxed up by the gentle action of the water. I drift for hours over this desert, a time-standing-still afternoon, imagining I see little miniature horsemen riding across the sand, silver-bangled halters flashing, muslin robes rippling in the wind. They pull to a stop at the top of a dune, draw their sabers and go crashing down with a great hurrah.

Jane has been gone for ten days.

I find her tracks in the sand one morning. She is shoeless. She has been to the plane and taken out the radio. It is hopelessly broken, but I give her credit for trying. I stand in the doorway to the plane and scratch my head. It must have been awfully hard pulling out that radio in the dark with no tools. She's been eating the fish. I find some bones in the cockpit. I take that as a crude thank you.

All the granola bars are long gone. At least I think so. Jane may be holding out on me. At any rate, we'll never starve. We suffer though. Coconut four times a day.
In the Bottom of the Canoe

That eagle hunched into his feathers  
on the branch of the lonely tree  
on the only island  
must have heard it:  
\textit{Don't look, you said, because you know me,}  
and then  
the dull thump of the blunt end of your knife.

But I did look.  
I watched the round of the trout's eye  
as it died, the memory of its life dulling into  
a slick mound of scales and bones and flesh,  
curled, fetus-like, in the belly of the boat.

That's not all I remember of that day:  
I recall the water took on the color of shadows  
and the sky, a bruise;  
I recall how the eagle, bound low,  
pierced the skin of the water with his sharp feet;  
I recall a dream of flight, the fish he speared lofting  
tail arched to head - an O - an opening - a mouth -  
struggling to learn the language of the air.

Dry inside the \textit{slap slap} of the water,  
covered in shadows like scales,  
I too dreamed:  
Pressed between the current's cold hands  
my bones flattened to rods of ice;  
I swished the darting thinness of my tail.  
\textit{Bright arrow—}  
I learned the shape the lake would take,  
if only it could swim.

I remember that you rowed me back to shore.  
You blew on my cold hands and you touched  
my bones beneath my clothes until I woke  
with the memory of something bright  
melting  
to a puddle  
in the bottom  
of the canoe.  
\textit{Jenny Flynn}

On about day fifty, she comes back. I wake up one morning  
and she's lying there under the canopy with me, snoring  
lightly. She has charcoal smudges on her cheeks and her knees.  
Her hair is blonder than it was before. The Nikes and the gym bag are gone. I never see them again.

The shampoo has run out. So has the toothpaste. Jane has  
freckles on her cheeks, splashed across her nose. Her feet,  
like mine, are scarred and brown and hard as iron. Her fingers  
scrape my skin when she touches me. We lie together under the  
palm trunks on the edge of the treeline and watch grey  
thunderheads march across the horizon and descend on our  
island, damping out the sun. The first breath of wind lashes  
into the trees, the rain comes down like nails, and we crawl  
under the canopy and make love in the cool dampness.

After the storm, Jane gets up and goes down to swim  
in the ocean. She gets out and stands on the water's edge and  
I watch her toss her hair in the evening glow, sending sea water  
cascading onto the beach. Silhouetted in the dying light, I can  
see the curve of her back, arched like the trunks of the palms,  
the roundness of her breast, the smooth line of her shoulders.  
They are lines like the lines around us. The rolling backs of  
waves, the sweep of the coast, the horizon. The not-quite-  
perfect sphere of the coconut. There are no rectangles. No lines  
are perfectly straight. Nothing is absolutely round. Yet  
everything is beautiful.

About day sixty or so, I take the tape recorder that I found  
on the plane, and my watch, and go down and lie on my  
back on the raft. It is late March by my calculations, and the  
NCAA basketball tournament is on back in the real world. I  
have nothing better to do.

I click on the tape recorder and, carefully timing with  
my watch, do a play-by-play recording of a Georgetown-  
Indiana game while the raft drifts around in the breeze. I make  
up names of players that I don't know. Commercials, I leave  
out. They're too complicated.

Georgetown wins by three, on late foul shots and a  
jumper with three seconds to go. Jane sits cross-legged up on  
the beach, her chin in her hands, and watches.

When the game is over, I rewind the tape and lie with  
my hands behind my head on the hot skin of the raft, and listen  
to it. The tiny voice of the tape bleats out over the water, the  
noise of the breakers swelling and fading in the background,  
ersatz crowd noise. A fat puff of cloud crawls over as Georgetown  
is bringing the ball up the court. I watch it make its way across  
the sky. Georgetown scores. The noise of the tape recorder  
radiates out from the raft, drifts across the water, up the beach,  
over Jane and our meager pile of possessions, is lost in the palms.  
It makes its way out to the breakers and out to sea, traveling...
forever out into that blue horizon, growing weaker and more diffuse, getting swallowed up by the sheer space, blown around by the wind, until it disappears altogether.

The tape clicks off. The breakers rumble. Wavelets plink against the side of the raft. I lie there for a while and stare up at the sky. Then I roll over on my stomach and hold the tape recorder out over the water, let it slip out of my hand. The watch follows. The water takes them without comment.

Jane doesn’t bitch me out for losing the stuff. She doesn’t even look up, just sits there with her chin in her hands staring out to sea like she’s watching T.V.

The palms along the edge of the shore don’t grow straight. They curve out onto the beach, nearly horizontal to the sand, then sweep up into the sky like the beseeching arms of holy rollers at prayer. Palm after palm is like that, all the way down the beach. When the wind blows, they sway in unison, and drop their coconuts like a heavy-handed rain. I sit on the beach and watch them sway, dropping their ripe children in the sand to wait for the occasional big tide. They have been doing this for centuries, I think. Maybe millennia. They sit in the sun, dip their heads to the breeze, drink water from the rain, and wave a gentle goodbye to their offspring bobbing out by the breakers.

It has been one hundred days or more. Twelve or thirteen rains. Three new moons. Jane has taken to weaving palm fronds. She weaves them into headbands, into anklets. She has woven a cover for our canopy, to weaving palm fronds. She weaves them into headbands, into baskets to hold fish. It is sturdy stuff.

The check sits on the desk in Auckland. The plane is across the sky from the beach. She had lain here for awhile, probably fallen asleep for a minute, her hands behind her head. I sat down on the grass. I began to feel at ease over her being gone. She was off on her own walking in the forest. She would be back. Nothing could happen to her out here. She would come back this same way, following her path back to the water. We would walk back together, maybe hand in hand. I lay down on the grass and went to sleep.

I woke up, the sun still up in the sky, the wind picking up in the treetops, a wind that might or might not be the first taste of a storm. Palm tops swayed above my head, making their languid swishing sound. In the wind was another sound, a sound that didn’t seem to come from the island itself, but from somewhere far away. Or sometime long ago. I lay in the grass and listened to it rise and fall with the breeze, a tiny screech, like the call of some little animal bleating in time with the wind. No, like the scrape of something, the scrape of a branch against the roof of a house. The scrape of a branch against the roof of a house made of metal.

I got to my feet and there off in the trees-peeking out through the green and the tan, the curved, the soft, the pliant-was the corner of a roof, a roof made of corrugated metal. I found Jane there, among the corrugated tin. Brown hair streaked by the sun. Palm anklets. She stood in a doorway, hands spread away from her side, a look of calm bewilderment on her face.

I click on the tape recorder and do a play-by-play recording of a Georgetown-Indiana game. I make up names of players that I don't know. Commercials, I leave out. They're too complicated.

The palms along the edge of the shore don't grow straight. They curve out onto the beach, nearly horizontal to the sand, then sweep up into the sky like the beseeching arms of holy rollers at prayer. Palm after palm is like that, all the way down the beach. When the wind blows, they sway in unison, and drop their coconuts like a heavy-handed rain. I sit on the beach and watch them sway, dropping their ripe children in the sand to wait for the occasional big tide. They have been doing this for centuries, I think. Maybe millennia. They sit in the sun, dip their heads to the breeze, drink water from the rain, and wave a gentle goodbye to their offspring bobbing out by the breakers.

It has been one hundred days or more. Twelve or thirteen rains. Three new moons. Jane has taken to weaving palm fronds. She weaves them into headbands, into wastebands, into anklets. She has woven a cover for our canopy, to weaving palm fronds. She weaves them into headbands, into baskets to hold fish. It is sturdy stuff.

The check sits on the desk in Auckland. The plane is across the sky from the beach. She had stared up at the clouds from here, I thought. The same clouds that I had watched inch across the sky from the beach. She had lain here for awhile, probably fallen asleep for a minute, her hands behind her head. I sat down on the grass. I began to feel at ease over her being gone. She was off on her own walking in the forest. She would be back. Nothing could happen to her out here. She would come back this same way, following her path back to the water. We would walk back together, maybe hand in hand. I lay down on the grass and went to sleep.

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I got to my feet and there off in the trees-peeking out through the green and the tan, the curved, the soft, the pliant-was the corner of a roof, a roof made of corrugated metal. I found Jane there, among the corrugated tin. Brown hair streaked by the sun. Palm anklets. She stood in a doorway, hands spread away from her side, a look of calm bewilderment on her face.
“Look at this,” she said. Her hands spread to encompass the whole compound, ten or twelve tiny buildings slowly getting swallowed up by trees and grass.

“I know.” I took her by the hand and we went door to door, stepping over undergrowth, ducking through doorways of sagging metal into midday gloom that seemed unnaturally dark. There were cots, moldy canvas and wood. A mirror hung on a wall.

“Oh, my god.” Jane rubbed the glass and pulled her hair back, cocking her head to the side.

A broken cardboard box spilling nails. I took a handful and jingled them in my palm.

“Come see.” Jane motioned me to the mirror. I went over and took a look. I was brown, browner than I thought. And creased. Lines radiated out of my eyes. Streaks of blond flowed through my beard. It was godawful long too. Longer than I had thought. I touched my hand to my face. My fingers looked long and thin, brown and scarred. There was dirt under my fingernails. I could see it in the mirror.

“Wow,” I said. I turned to Jane. She was also brown and creased. And naked. I had known that already. But then again, I hadn’t. I hadn’t thought about it. She hadn’t looked naked before. She had only looked like Jane.

We went outside, explored some more. There was a flagpole, a tattered piece of lanyard fluttering at its top. A small radio tower of spindly girders, guy-wired upright. I gave one of the guy wires a twang. This made Jane giggle. Oil drums lay rotting in the undergrowth, their rusty bottoms pierced by grasses. USN was stamped on their sides.

“Asmall cot lay collapsed in the corner, its canvas filling the room with a smell of decay. It was the only thing on the floor. The walls, though, the walls were filled, every last inch, with palm. Neatly plaited, delicately woven, hanging on the wall on little nails. Anklets, headbands, little palm people, their hands and feet of carefully frayed leaf-ends. Fans, mats, hearts, animals, little palm trees, a little cross. All made with agonizing care, hung on the wall, and then left. Jane moved from one to another, running her fingers over them, carefully lifting them off of the wall and turning them over in her hands. She lifted off a braided hoop and placed it on her head.

“This is beautiful.”

“Take it with you.”

She turned her head for me to see. “I think I will.” She took off a smaller hoop and slipped it over her wrist. She held out her arm and admired it. “I wonder who did all of this.”

“The guy who lived here, I guess.” I leaned over and gave one of the wall hangings a little tweak. “He sure had a lot of time on his hands.”

“Yeah.” Jane looked at the wrist hoop again, then let her hand fall to her side.

We stood there for a while and admired that stuff. Stood there without talking. I rolled those nails around in my palm and thought of all the long and patient afternoons that went into that weaving, all the hours of deep shadows and steady tanned hands, all the cool and breezy evenings spent stripping leaves in the forest. I thought of the simple pleasure of it, the pleasure that time lays on the hands, the pleasure of the content.

And then he had gone away. And he left it all behind, whoever he was.

I found myself thinking about him, wondering where he was now, in what living room he sat. I wondered about his hands. I wondered if they ever remembered, remembered the smooth feeling of palm.

When we got back to the beach, I realized that I had lost those nails somewhere. Somewhere on the path back through the forest they had slipped out of my hand and disappeared into the undergrowth. I didn’t remember dropping them. All that was left was this little patch of rust sweated into my palm.
Drowning Days

"...measurable rainfall fell every day except September 2nd..."
Juneau Weather Service 10/1/91

Each day I walk through fine downpours, hard drenches. Under soggy trees I inhale mist, seeds, spores. Toadstools and mushrooms bloom in my lungs. At night I sink into wet gales of sleep; wake gasping in damp morning air.

My skin grows slick, translucent, blue-white; my blood turns sea-bottle green. Red lines appear beneath my ears; vertical slits to my shoulders. Soon they will thicken, open and breathe; call for the taste of the sea.

That day I will walk down to the shore, into the tide. My mildewed hair will float on the water. My toes will be mollusks, my eyelids the shells of clams. The bones of my fingers will fall, white and small, into the mouths of whales.

Sharon Brogan
Once all this flourished
with grass
Camas in the spring
maybe a stray
bitterroot
might bloom
but now the concrete
trucks
idle
as the pump truck
moves mud
and the finishers
work their trowels
this slab
will be
headquarters
for a trucking outfit
when the last bolt
is tightened
the final
nail set
the blank screen
of the Go-West Drive-In
obscured
by fog

all this November morning
a frosty chilly finger and toe
biting fog
now just after lunch
the sun
burns through
high up Snow Bowl
it's bright
blue sky
down here
fog drifts
along the fresh
graded dirt
of yet
another parking lot
off in the
distance
huge steams
of the Frenchtown mill
a faint smell of sulphur.

Dave Thomas
**Matt Houghton**

**Edge Effect**

"The boundary is the best place for acquiring knowledge."

- Paul Tillich

We are drawn to edges. They are, after all, the places between two differences. Consider the beach, and the allure of the shoreline— the Amalfi, the Big Sur, the Riviera. It is no coincidence these places are associated with romance; they remind us of the most challenging edge of all, the boundary entwining intimacy. Edges are well known to ecologists. The areas with the richest biodiversity lie between ecosystems and are called 'ecotones.' And within our emotional landscape, what richer ground can compare to love and intimacy?

Most edges have no distinct lines but rather a transition from one zone to another. This can be as abrupt as oil and water, as a river’s shore or a clearcut’s margin, or as gradual as love and acquaintance or as between a forest and a field, or skin. The transition between ecosystems is the ecotone. Species that occur within each ecosystem as well as those obligate to the ecotone can all occur together in such a setting, hence more species occur here than in either ecosystem. This increase in species richness is called the edge effect.

In Montana is an ecotone with a list of superlatives like none other. Locals call it 'the Front.' It is the ecotone where the Great Plains and the Mountains meet. The mountains rake moisture from the prevailing western winds creating a ‘rainshadow’ — the resultant aridity downwind — creating an edge with the dry plains to the east. The mountains cast forests down onto the prairie in long fluted fingers, and village sized meadows run well into the mountains here.

Some federal officials have a relationship with this place. They are in charge of allowing a few developers to make roads and drill for natural gas. That they are allowed to drill this public land is more important than the 2% chance of finding gas there. It’s more important than the fact the same officials all know the Front has the highest Wilderness Quality Rating of anywhere in America (a rating system they themselves devised). Officials are confident they can mitigate damages. They like that word — mitigate. Mitigate — from the Latin ‘mitigare’ — to soften, or literally, to make less severe or hostile. It is not apparent whether it is the place or the development they are mitigating. Certainly development will soften the edge. Dull it. Make our relationship with it safe — like a child’s knife. There is nothing in the definition of ‘mitigate’ that means ‘inherently humble’ or ‘with utmost respect.’

The Front’s skyline is dramatically punctuated by east-facing cliffs called ‘reefs’; they literally are upthrust Pre-Cambrian shorelines. Each mountain-sized cliff band may extend for many miles north and south, and together make up an area about 200 miles long, between Roger’s and Marias Passes. Here, whether you are going to the Great Plains or coming from them, you know you are going from something into something else. It is a sensorial passage. In places, the reefs just so high as to cause a rain shadow short enough to walk from blizzard to sun in a mile. Like all shadows it changes; one morning we sunbathed and the next we awoke to six inches of snow and raging wind beasts.

We spent 10 days living here. Ostensibly we came to get baseline data about what an unroaded area is like. On our seventh day the arms of Mt. Poia held us in the cleft of a hanging valley. There, white goats watched nonplussed. It was no coincidence we spoke of death that night, and cried, and knew each other so much more. It was no coincidence we walked all 10 of those days on 500 year old shorelines. We left having each become lovers with the place. For instance, now we feel longing for this place, we care greatly for its well being and our hearts would be broken were we to lose this place — were it to die. And what of our fidelity?

If emotions were species and people ecosystems (and aren’t we?), then passion is the edge effect. Think of the emotional richness the edge effect can have in a relationship with another. As two become intimate the boundaries between them become permeable. The allure and the fear along this mutual edge grows; there is fear of losing oneself into the other, and there is the allure of exploring the novelty of the other as well. Similarly, if the two ecosystems along an edge aren’t big enough to support their own species, there is not enough to replenish the edge effect. The relationship between lovers or ecosystems is, in Pattinng Rogers’ words, both “splitting and binding.”

It is daunting to embrace our relationship with Nature. The deeper I am in the wilderness the greater the chances I could die. What we are dependent on — the landscape, the weather, water, air, Nature itself - could easily kill us. How close are we willing to get? To be fully present as another’s lover is similarly daunting; even the French word for ‘orgasm’ is ‘petit morte’— small death. Entering a relationship with such intentions means to split, to give up some of the isolate self, so as to bind with the other.

This urge to split and bind, to merge at the edge, must be primitive in us. Imagine, too, how primitive survival is in us, and how primitive and base is risk — the edge of the cliff is dangerous but if you risk the edge the view ties you to place, there with the spectacular and the peripheral. These urges towards the edge go beyond the evolution of humans. They are in our cells.
Extraction

A cloudy mist
Wisps through Wingate spires,
The rim ringed with snow.

We walk among Spooky Uranium Mines,
Relics from the fifties,
Gaping holes like missing teeth,
In the Chinle cliff face.
(Green and purple like a Patagonia jacket)
"Violated," you say.
In a collapsed mining shack,
Filled with cowshit,
You find, tacked on the wall,
A mining claim statement,
Sworn and signed by Robert Acrebree,
Of Bicknell Utah - notarized,
That $100 worth of improvements
Were made to this claim dated

At nightfall the sky clears,
A bright fertile crescent moon,
Ignites the twisting juniper branches.
A bright handful of stars thrown skyward,
We pick out Orion, the Big Dipper,
Leo - the easy ones,
Drinking hot chocolate and rum
By the dying fire.

A thick layer of morning
Frost covers the tent, the
Shady side of
A dead juniper.
Frost flowers decorate the windshield,
Quickly defoliated by the sun rising,
Above the canyon rim.

Green shoots poke through
Red Moenkopi clay.
A single line of footprints
In the mud.

Greg Gordon
The yarrow umbels are punching through the threadbare blanket of snow.

They are astringent; it is their property to draw up wounds.

There is a slender root pink, the color of the inner ear,

of the yarrow that gives pain-ease. Where they stand

the light curls around them like shavings and falls across the slope, a lattice work

of darkening while my heels drink at the late winter braille

like two porcupines lapping water. Just before the ridge I recognize I have stood in this place before.

It was a dream that began in an ice cave. The whole world was frozen

and I slipped out through the smokehole to stand on miles of road

facing north. I believed it was the property of nothing to heal.

There were immense grain warehouses standing empty with their grey slatted sides falling away

keeping watch on nothing, thinking nothing, no longer containing the idea of home
March Thaw

Juneau, Alaska 1992

The first bear came down from the mountain today. Porcupines graze by the trail.

The air tastes of the forest trying to bloom. Icicles melt, quick percussive drip off the eaves.

On the high New Mexico desert, your ashes and bits of bone rest pale in the red dirt.

I bring home hot-house daisies, tulips, daffodils in green buckets. Rain falls, falls.

Sharon Brogan

June 1992

to a single blade
of wheat. And I pressed on

past them
into the growing envelope of winter.

Then, somewhere before the border
I turned back.

I was afraid that if I stopped
the sinew of my stride would unravel into a shredded web.

Leaning into my days like a broken
post on a sagging line

gravity would throw its arms up
and I would begin the final plunge.

Waking
I find myself high above an unfreezing river.

I have come to a stone and I want to ask it its story.

I want to watch the yarrow umbels break
and the leaves beneath

burst open. I want to reconsider
how I would delight my soul

the way the crows
stoop, plunge, and horseplay

over the larch. In this way
I come to the ridge by a road

of ninebark and tangled mock-orange
I never dreamed I could follow. Tracking

the daylight left in my life
by a crow's shadow on the snow.

Alec Cargile

et al.: Camas, Spring 1994

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Molly Miller

Geese

We called them Canadian Geese. Years later my mother, who by that time worked at the State Department of Natural Resources and knew all the proper names for things, told us they were really Canada Geese, not Canadian. But in my growing-up years we didn’t know any better.

When the geese first came, they were as strange to me as peacocks falling out of the sky. It was 1969, and I was six. On the shores of our lake in the middle of the city, the wild geese ambled over the lime-colored grass of May on black stalks of legs, grazing and napping and eyeing passersby with a wary spitefulness. They had thick black necks and sooty backs and resplendent white undertails like bloomers, and their black faces and slanted white jowls made them look crafty. We walked the one block down to the lake to feed them old crusts of bread. That was before we were told not to feed wildlife; we didn’t know it would turn them into feathered thugs. We just liked to watch them gobble and hiss.

People came from all over to see the wild geese. They loved the geese so much that they convinced the City to clip the geese’s wings to prevent them from bolting off and flying somewhere else. The City installed a pump in the lagoon to keep a circle of water open over the winter so the geese would have a place to swim. Throughout that first winter, as the flightless geese paddled in circles on that small disk of water, or huddled together out on the ice, everyone hoped that come spring, the geese would have lots of babies.

In fact, the geese had so many babies that they have gotten out of hand. That is what the City says about them, anyway: that they are “out of hand.” Of course, it goes without saying that the people had lots of babies too. But nobody says the people have gotten “out of hand.”

The geese did have lots of babies: yellow puffs darting about on the grass and zipping after their parents over the banks of the lake into the water: plink, plink, plink, plink. In fact, the geese had so many babies that they have gotten out of hand. That is what the City says about them, anyway: that they are “out of hand.” Of course, it goes without saying that the people had lots of babies too. But nobody says the people have gotten “out of hand.”

entirely. There is only so much space to go around, there in a park in the middle of a city, and the geese are hogging it. Their musty green droppings violate the walking path and soil the stylish, outdoorsy shoes the people like to wear on their sporty jaunts. The people circle the lake in droves, snapping, “Shoo!” at the birds and flicking their hands daintily. The geese hiss back through parted beaks lined with fine, delicate, file-like teeth, their wet tongues outstretched and quivering like taut pink slugs. The people stare at the geese with fear and loathing. “Those birds are a nuisance and a menace,” they say, backing away. So the City herds the geese into cages and takes them away in trucks. They say that they take them to places that don’t have any Canada geese and would like a flock of their very own, but I’m not so sure.

But this is not what I meant to talk about; I’ve gotten off track. What I meant to talk about is the year the geese first came, and how strange they were, and how my brothers and I walked the one block down to the lake to feed them old crusts of bread. I should say that it was my younger brother, Thomas, and I who liked to feed the geese. My older brother, Charley, preferred to throw rocks at them. That was the kind of boy he was.

Yes, what I meant to talk about is how Thomas and I walked down to the lake, plastic bags filled with crusts clutched in our small hands, and fed the geese, shyly, and breathed in their fusty scent, and watched and listened to them—listened to the low, sweet, harmonica grunts they made as they shuffled about on the sweet, fringed grass of May.
Untitled

Do you see the hard ridge
to the mountain, moving against the mountain,
The silent mountain moving against the sky?
To see this you must not stand still...
The way the upper fringe of trees
brush the clouds in deep green paint,
The way the air slides around you...
You must be in the wandering medium of motion...

The world alive is in flux and flow
and you commence the current dance
You are not walking
and everything pulls around you
steadily straining on the oars of perception
as you slip through the ocean of landscape

Sometimes we can get lost in still life,
We are still born
but if you kick and thrash,
gasp for breath
the whole world resumes turning...

It is no great mystery
that this blue sphere is spinning,
just easily remember
it is your motionless body
gone liquid,
your racing heart
that holds the planet in whirling emotion
that sends stars
shooting across a breathless universe.

Matthew Cochran

Las Cajas

White fan-tailed blackbird
bodysurfs the wind currents
over heaving folds
of scrub-carpeted tundra.
She carves an air sculpture
over wind-roughened lakes
sunken in the laps of mountains.

Wild horses zigzag a careless single file
sewing a line of brown, roan, brown and white,
threading their way down the hillside
then freeze
for a sniffing, watching moment
then relax back to shambled order
clomping nowhere in particular.

Helen Wagenvoord

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Jenny Flynn

Killer Marmots in the Alpine Jungle of Death

(The author extends her apologies to Aldo Leopold, Annie Dillard, Edward Hoagland, Barry Lopez, Lewis and Clark, Adolf Murie, and, as always, the National Park Service.)

I know what you’re thinking: Killer Marmots? Those fuzzy little black-footed alpine sunbathers? Those roly-poly rodentious hibernators?

Come on—they wouldn’t hurt a fly! They might chow down a field full of globe flowers; they could easily take on a fistful of Cheez-it; in fact, no bag of potato chips carelessly left above treeline is safe from their ravages—but they’re not violent or anything.

Sometime, oh so long ago, I thought that too.

This story begins far away, in the wild country of Alaska, where I entered my rangering career with the National Park Service. That’s where I learned all the secret ranger stuff—how to place the government-issued stick in the rear portion of your uniform pants, where to buy the fake smiles to stick on your face, code words like the ones for “fat tourist swine”—and where I was issued that in-valuable government handbook, Seven Hundred Ways to Goof Off and Get Paid Overtime For It.

And it was there that I had the first intimation of the marmot’s true, wild soul.

I was driving over Polychrome Pass on one of those low-slung government sedans so perfectly designed for riding on Denali Park’s well-groomed gravel highway, when I decided to stop at a comfort station.

I stood there for a moment in the parking area, perched alone in a world of iron-streaked rock, bright green tussocks, and the cream-flecked rumps of caribou. I took a deep breath of tundra air, filling my lungs fuller and fuller with the clean bite of heather (the comfort stations have a lingering odér I prefer not to breathe). There was so much that enchanted me in that spare, silent place that I moved softly so as not to break a spell.

After a couple of steps I gave up on that. Moving softly is great if you don’t have to pee, and I did—really bad. I rushed to the outhouse, my bootsteps ringing out across the tundra like the tolling of the drinks-on-the-house bell at Slim Jim’s Half Way Inn. When I came out, I found that my unintentional offer of a drink had been accepted: underneath my car, sucking on my radiator hose like an alcoholic on a whiskey bottle, lounged a splendid specimen of a marmot.

Aw, I thought. On the tundra there’s always some creature going about its beautiful business. But it was cold out there, my business was done, and my favorite country music show was on the radio. Oops—I mean I was on an important patrol duty and couldn’t waste the taxpayers’ valuable money standing there watching my radiator fluid disappear down a marmot’s gullet.

I tried “shoo.” The marmot made a rude sound—I swear it was a belch—and continued to guzzle.

I tried stamping my steel-shanked boots. All I received for my trouble was a glare out of its beady eyes.

I tried flinging my Stetson at it with a practiced frisbee flick, but I missed.

The creature paid me no mind, but went on enjoying its horrible repast.

I picked up a big ol’ rock and was contemplating using it when a bus load of visitors (that’s ranger talk for “fat tourist swine”) drove by.

They waved.

I waved with one hand, rock carefully concealed behind my back.

I would have to try something else. As I got into the driver’s seat and started the car, I thought I heard a faint cluck of annoyance. I drove a few feet forward and got out. Luckily—or so I thought at the time—the marmot had stayed behind when the car moved, and I hadn’t even run over it. Of course I was thinking about that embarrassing incident when another ranger inadvertently acquired a porcupine in the wheel well of his truck and had driven all the way to the Regional Office in Anchorage with it. The porky biologists reintroduced it into the wild the next day, unharmmed, but still—such a thing doesn’t look good on the old record.

But here I was, just me and the marmot. All around us, the tundra quivered in the faltering light. I approached The Beast. I got down on my hands and knees, and then bent over a little further, so that I could look my adversary in the eyes.

It looked at me.

I looked at it.

I realized then, and have known ever since, that there was something new to me in those eyes—something known only to the marmot and the mountain.

It was a look I’ll remember for the rest of my life, should I live so long.

The marmot belched again, and sauntered off. A chill of recognition passed through me. In those eyes I had seen the reflection of my own animal soul.

...underneath my car, sucking on my radiator hose like an alcoholic on a whiskey bottle, lounged a splendid specimen of a marmot.
Lewis and Clark first heard of the marmot from the Indians of western Montana in 1805, "They have coats made from a beast they call...moonax. They shrink away at talk of its terrible & slathering jaws..." In the early 1950s, the great naturalist Adolf Murie reported that he "watched three marmots sunbathing on a rock until a huge shadow passed over their forms and they scattered. The shadow-maker seemed to have crawled out from under the same rock, but I never saw it, for the lenses of my binoculars went black..." Those were the last notes he ever scribbled in his field journal; after that, he mysteriously disappeared and his body was never found.

Today, marmot biologists recognize two distinct subspecies: *Marmota caligata cutus* ("cute booted marmot") and *Marmota caligata horribilis* ("horrible booted marmot"). No two animals could be less alike. *Marmota cutus* lounges about during the summer, waddling off its rocky bathing mat only to nibble on alpine grasses and flowers. It can reach weights of forty pounds before it retires into its den in autumn to sleep off the summer’s accumulation of fat. Its greatest enemies are the golden eagle, which sometimes swoops in from above to carry off its struggling prey, and man, who sometimes swoops in from below, camera poised, trail snack offered as a bribe.

*Marmota horribilis* is another creature entirely. Boars can weigh up to four hundred fifty pounds; sows, over three hundred. They use their strong rodent’s jaws to gnaw their victims to death. It is said they enjoy the chase, and will torture desperate prey with their raspy tongues and tickling noses.

Biologists have long speculated about how such a subspecies could develop. Their most plausible theory is that certain marmots, exposed to environmental pollutants (whether radiator fluid, radiation, or acid mine drainage, nobody knows for sure), have subtly mutated into the giants that stalk above treeline.

That theory certainly has some compelling evidence behind it. Perhaps the marmot I saw on the road in Denali was moving towards such mutation. But mysteries remain. What about the “terrible & slathering jaws” that Lewis and Clark heard about in 1805? And what about the “shadow-maker” that Adolf Murie saw just before his disappearance in the 1950s?

We know only one thing for sure: *Marmota horribilis* remains a mystery to science.

Many Western biologists appreciate the mystery inherent in the animals they observe. They comprehend that, objectively, what they are watching is deceptively complete and, subjectively, that the animals themselves have non-human ways of life. They know that the worlds that animals perceive, their Umwelten, are all different.

But how many of them know what it’s like to be stared down by a marmot drunk on engine coolant? Not many, that’s my bet.

Continued on p. 24
I might have taken seriously my realization that this was no ordinary rodent; I might have turned in my Stetson, right then and there, and lived out a peaceful old age in Columbus, Ohio or Tampa, Florida, far from the alpine slopes where those beady, bloodshot eyes awaited me.

I might have, but I was young then, and full of trigger-itch, and I thought that more rangers on a mountain meant fewer tourists, and that a mountain without tourists would be paradise.

So back I went the next summer into the welcoming arms of the Department of the Interior. I took a job at Glacier National Park and was stationed at Logan Pass, right in the heart of Marmot Country. If only I knew then what I know now, I would have begged to breathe carbon monoxide all summer in the entrance station box; I would have walked on my knees from Montana to the Denver Regional Office, pleading for a desk-job sinecure.

But I was young then, and foolish, and so the story travels to its inevitable, gruesome end.

The sculpted, glaciated peaks right outside the Visitor Center window are shrouded in a veil of cloud; my weather station informs me that it's 22 degrees with the wind out of the east at 42 miles an hour. Outside, a mountain goat wanders through a crowd of tourists, nibbling on a camera here, a package of postcards there, before settling on the ear of a near-hypothermic bicyclist.

It's a fine June day on Logan Pass. Or so I think. But while I stand upstairs, peacefully distributing information on where to find eagle nests and how to gently lift the chicks as you take their photographs, downstairs in the comfort station a woman screams.

"Ahhhhhhhhhhhh!!!!!!!!!"
She comes running to my desk, her dress tucked in around her panties, her plastic shoes flapping, hysterical, mumbling about something "warm and fuzzy" in the toilet.

"Get a hold of yourself, woman!" I shout, slapping her briskly across the face. This seems to bring her around.

"It was fuzzy," she says, more clearly this time. "I was sitting on the toilet when I felt it...." Here she trails off.

"Now Ma'am, I say. "You don't have to feel embarrassed around me. I'm a registered ranger. Just tell me what happened. I won't repeat it."

Finally, she spits it out. She was sitting on the outhouse john when she felt something wet and slightly furry touch her, never mind where, and then she jumped up off the seat. Before she came running upstairs she glanced behind her and spied, peeking over the bowl from inside, the bucked-tooth grin and beady red eyes of a Creature.

"You're sure about the beady eyes?" I ask her.

I'm starting to make some connections.

"Yes, yes indeed I am," she says. "I'll remember that look for the rest of my life."

"Should you live that long," I mumble.

"What?" she asks.

"Nothing. You just wait here while I call for reinforcements."

"Oh by the way! Everyone!" I yell. Heads turn my way.

"This woman just had her **** nuzzled by a **** in the ladies' bathroom! Nobody'd better go in there for a while."

I stroll over to the radio. A crowd is beginning to gather around the semi-hysterical victim.

"Tango Charlie Six-niner come in, Roger. This is Ranger Flynn."

"Roger, Tango Charlie. This is Ranger DeFonzio. Zulu Niner Hotel Indigo Jukebox Kickboxing Lulu Mariachi."

"What?" I say.

"Nothing. This is Pete. Just practicing my alphabet," I hear through the static.

"Listen, Pete. We need you up here at Logan Pass, stat. We've got a report of a Seventeen Washbasin Foxtrot in the Lipstick Bongodrum." (That's ranger talk for Wet Fuzzies in the ladies' bathroom.)

"What?" says Pete.

"Wet Fuzzies in the ladies' loo!" I shout. Then I lower my voice. "I think it's a marmot. A big one."

"I'll be there, stat. Don't let anyone go in there until I arrive. Over and out," he says.
Now nobody could say that Pete DeFonzio, official Park Service Ranger Technician, isn’t a brave man—he was one of the original Pink Berets. Though his belly has begun to protrude over his belt buckle at about the same rate that his hair is receding into his head, his courage is unaffected. He’s been known to live-trap grizzlies just to wrestle them to the ground. He’s been known to spear depredating mountain lions with the point of his moustache. Although technically not a Marmot Ranger, he was the best man to call in for the job.

He arrived at the Visitor Center with his moustache freshly waxed, as ready as any man could be.

“I’ve been calming the troops,” I say to him first off when he bellies up to the counter. “We almost had a riot until I distributed rolls of toilet paper and pointed the ladies in the direction of the tall beargrass.”

“Good thinking, Ranger Flynn. Now here’s the plan,” he fingers his moustache with the blunt fingers of one hand as he talks. The other hand spasmodically clutches at his hip holster, where he keeps his pistol, his can of Counter Assault pepper mace, his baton, his hand grenades, and the clips for his Uzi. “You and I will go downstairs. I’ll go in there alone, but we’ll keep in radio contact at all times. I’ll find the critter and stun it with my club, and then drag it out. Are you clear?”

“Clear,” I say. I don’t have a good feeling about this, but I’ve got to trust Pete. He roamed the battlefields of ‘Nam wearing a pink beret. He’s wrestled more grizzly bears than I’ve ever even thought of. His moustache is registered as a lethal weapon.

We go downstairs. A wary crowd surrounds the outhouse. Pete adjusts the strings of bullets crisscrossing his bare chest.

“What are those for?” I ask in a low voice, gesturing towards the bullets.

“Nothing, they just look good,” he growls. He gives me a final salute. I salute back. “Good luck, Ranger DeFonzio. I’ll be here when you get out.”

He flings open the outhouse door, and suddenly, he s

I rush into the outhouse. Pete is lying on the floor, his clothes in shreds, his bullets scattered across the floor like so much loose change.

“What happened!” I cry. I have to shake him before his eyes focus, and even then he doesn’t really seem to see me. His moustache has drooped and flops around his trembling lips.

“Pete, oh Pete, talk to me,” I beg.

With my ear almost to his mouth, I can just make out the words, “Wet Fuzzies must be stopped” before he loses consciousness.

Pete survived, although barely. I’ll say this for him, he wasn’t a quitter. He launched a full-out offensive, complete with swat teams, helicopters, and logistical support from the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, and Firearms. But to no avail: the Beast had retreated too deeply into its wilderness home.

Pete retired shortly after, a broken man. He couldn’t face his failure. Worse yet was the effect of the experience on his prized facial hair—although he tried hot oil treatments, punker’s hair gel, and even superglue—from the day of his encounter forward, his moustache never stood erect again.

Except during mating season, the Killer Marmot is a solitary creature, unlike its gentler cousins. It goes by many names: Widow Maker, Wet Fuzzy Giver, The Alpine Sasquatch, The Rodent of the Apocalypse, Whistle Pig of the Outhouse, or simply, among the people of the mountains, The Beast.

Few see it, and those that do rarely survive. Anyone who walks or crawls away with his or her life has a tale to tell. I’ve heard of marmots spiriting themselves away in sawtoothed canyons. I’ve heard that, when conversing with their mates, they coo like pigeons, sob like women, emit a flat slight shriek, a lic scream functioning as a kind of hunting cry close up, to terrorize and startle the game.

Oh, wait a minute—that’s mountain lions.

But I’ve heard stories more terrible yet about The Beast. Stories too terrible even to repeat. I’ve also learned my lesson: if I’m walking an alpine trail, alone, at dusk, the clouds casting a bleak shadow on the peaks, and I hear a faint snorting sound or belch ripple through the air, I take no chances: I turn tail and run back down the mountain, where the tourists are, where it’s safe, where the worst that the beady eyes and twitching whiskers can do to me—and this is horrible enough—is stalk my dreams.
The Group to Which People Belong

It doesn't matter if we ever see a wolf or not. What does matter is the possibility

Tommy Youngblood-Petersen

It was Thanksgiving 1971, in Rocky Mountain National Park, sixty miles northwest of Denver, and I was staying in a small log cabin celebrating the holiday with solitude and deep snow. While out taking a walk, I became suddenly lost in a “white-out”: blinding, driving snow in which I could see no further than twelve inches from my face. After walking for a minute I stopped, and just downstream from me, twenty feet away. It stood there motionless looking at me, making no sound.

I stared back.

It was bigger than any German Shepherd or Husky, standing almost two and half feet tall with thick legs, and six feet long. Its nose was broad, ears rounded, but what I most clearly remember is the color and luster of its coat. It was a brilliant silver, mottled with a rich gray and black, and thick. It looked warm and winter-ready. We stood there looking at each other for what seemed like minutes, but was probably only ten seconds.

Then, effortlessly, it leaped high across the stream as gracefully as deer float over ranch fences, and landed with no sound on the opposite bank. Wind and time had completely stopped. I just stood there, and after fifteen minutes it did pass.

T t doesn’t matter if we ever see a wolf or not. What does matter is the possibility

Animals are not just one of the things with which people amuse themselves, like chewing-gum and water-skis, they are the group to which people belong. We are not just rather like animals; we are animals.

Mary Midgley
“The Concept of Beastliness”

To some people, whose ancestors sanctioned their extirpation across the United States from the first settlers’ time through the 1930’s, a learned fear of wolves has worked itself into a fierce hatred. Today, some of that fear and hatred continues, sparked by the wolves’ renewed presence in the Northern Rockies and a highly controversial plan to reintroduce the predator back to Yellowstone National Park.

I am intrigued as to why this animal still generates, after centuries, so much controversy and evokes so much passion in
people. I wonder why some people aren't equally angry towards the mountain lion or grizzly bear, two other large, powerful predators on the continent. The negative feelings are there for the griz and lion, but I don't know, it seems there is something different — maybe it's that feelings can be so intense, so extreme — about people's attitudes towards wolves.

I want to see how, and especially, why, these age-old attitudes, shaped by mythology and the history of the wolf, are still very much present today.

According to Diane Boyd, a wildlife biologist with the University of Montana's Wolf Ecology Project, 27 of 32 wolf deaths in the Northern Rockies over the past 10 years have been human caused, animals killed illegally even though protected by the Endangered Species Act since 1973. And on April 18, 1994, it was reported in The Missoulian that a wolf education program for school children, which features the appearance of a wolf, was cancelled in Lander, Wyoming, due to a few ranchers' calls to school board members.

"It was more political than anything," Schools Superintendent Wayne King conceded. "We've got a bond issue coming up and we don't want to rile people up over this."

Finding our way in this story of wolves involves a circuitous route, a swirling vortex of concentric rings: of ranching, of a 'way of life,' of class struggle, of control, of darkness, and fear. It is a difficult route, a complicated route. But by taking it we just might find at the end, or possibly along the way, a piece of ourselves waiting there, waiting to be rediscovered, waiting to be reborn wild.

I want to try to answer some of these questions — of why people still feel so passionately about wolves, of why we are connected (or not connected) to the living world — through the story of one wolf. It is a story that I believe reflects many of the voices that speak to and through us about our relationship with the non-human world. It might, too, contain part of a new mythology; this wolf certainly gained mythic proportions in her long life. Wolf researchers called her the Matriarch.

She was the first wolf to den in the Western United States in more than a half century. She littered at least three sets of pups in her lifetime; Montana biologists say most of the wolves now in the state are her descendants. They also say she 'kept her nose clean': she had no record of livestock depredations or other conflicts with humans, a behavior typically passed on from mother to pups.

Nicknamed 'Phyllis' by researchers, she was a distinctively creamy-white wolf, wandering in and out of the Glacier/Waterton National Park protective boundaries for the past ten years, flirting with trappers, hunters and biologists. But they only caught her twice: once to collar her, once to shoot her. On December 19, 1992, she was shot and killed by a hunter in southwestern Alberta, Canada. She died twenty miles outside the park boundary.

Because she was in Canada where there are presently no restrictions against hunting wolves, it was a legal killing.

It was a shot heard 'round the world.

News of Phyllis' killing made its way from researchers in Montana, to Glacier Park officials, to the AP wire service to newspapers including The Los Angeles Times and The British Tribune. Headlines ran like this: "Predator Hunter Kills White Matriarch", "Matriarch Downed in Canada", and "Canadian Outfitter Slays Matriarch". The stories treated the killing as a tragedy. This was especially true in The British Tribune. A Canadian predator hunter has shot and killed the first wolf to den in the Western United States in more than half a century, shattering research efforts at wolf recovery in the States. A wolf with no history of livestock depredations or human conflict, she was miles from any ranch. Because of their dwindling numbers, wolves are federally protected in the contiguous United States. But across the border in Canada, wolves are fair game and can be shot on sight.

Ever since reading the newspaper article about Phyllis, I have carried a three inch, .243 cartridge around in my pocket. It was the same type the hunter used. It was a constant reminder of these sharp, steel-hard projectiles that twice ripped through her body. The first
shot exploded through her hindquarters, blasting a hole the size of a grapefruit. She tumbled down a shallow hill-side, red blood pouring on white snow, white fur. The second shot was at close range, through her chest, finishing her off.

I’d reach in my pocket to get change and there she’d be. The matriarch is gone. I will miss her.

This story is a journey towards understanding this wolf’s life and death. I have heard many versions of the story: from the local and international media whose coverage did more harm than good; from the Canadian Fish and Game Department who may have issued a kill order; from Piegan Indians who gave her food and shelter; from the biologist who tracked her; from the hunter who killed her.

So this is a story of voices.

February 15, 1993. The news articles had just come out, and I call Glacier Park officials for more details. They refer me to Jan Allen, a Canadian Fish and Game agent in Pincher Creek, Alberta.

“It’s not a major issue,” Allen growls a little defensively over the telephone, referring to how most Canadians feel about the killing of one wolf. “We’ve got four thousand wolves in Alberta alone. But the media sure made it out to be a big deal, and let me tell you, the hunter is pissed off about it.”

“I’m not a reporter, could I talk with the hunter? I just want to hear him out,” I say.

“Well, I guess,” Allen says reluctantly. “You seem like the type who would listen. Yeah, his name is Brent Sinclair.”

February 18, 1993. I drive north from Missoula to meet Diane Boyd in Columbia Falls, Montana. I throw my gear in the back of Boyd’s truck, and climb in for the six hour drive northeast to Pincher Creek, Alberta. It is the home of Brent Sinclair, and although Diane and I have both briefly talked with Sinclair on the phone, we have never met him. We are making the trip to talk with him further about the killing. There are still a lot of unanswered questions.

Boyd has worked for the University of Montana’s Wolf Ecology Project as a wildlife biologist for the past fourteen years. She was one of the first to gather data about the wolf’s return to the western U.S., and is now doing research on wolf dispersal — those wolves who break off from a pack to form new packs of their own — for her Ph.D. She has worked with the highly respected wolf biologist David Mech in Minnesota, she has trapped wolves for research in Canada and the northwestern U.S., and she knows the location of almost every one of the sixty wolves now in the state of Montana.

She also knew Phyllis better than anyone else.

We check the road conditions at the Columbia Falls police station. “Bare and dry,” the officer says of the roads on the east side of Glacier and Marias Pass. Perfect.

No sooner do we pass the city limits of Columbia Falls...
Sign of Spring

Slowly it melts
into the anxious
soil
this moist
leavening of hope
with parched
experience
muscles
relax and thought
extends
toward
the tactile
the scent
of new veins
about
to leaf
a fresh
celebration
of chlorophyll
dancing
across tiny
rainbows
of sun
charged
snow
melt.

than it starts snowing; heavy, wet stuff. By the time we're at the
south end of Glacier Park around Essex, forty miles from Columbia
Falls, the roads have six inches of fresh, wet snow. Diane and I look
at each other. "Bare and dry," we say to each other, laughing at the
Columbia Falls P.D. and the prospect of five hours of blizzard-
offering it, and talks of some of the questions she wants answered by Sinclair.

The wolf is her passion and it's obvious: yellow-eyed
wolves art-drawn on her black sweatshirt; her conversations roving
constantly around wolf behavior, wolf sightings, wolf recovery. But
the clearest sign is the empathy in her voice, the full light in her sea-
green eyes, when she talks about wolves. And especially when she
talks about Phyllis.

Diane tells me that Phyllis was born in April, 1982,
probably somewhere deep in the woods of southern British Colum-
bia or Alberta. No wolves were known to have been born in the
western U.S. for over fifty years, so it's safe to say Phyllis was
Canadian born.

The dominant male and female of a pack, the Alpha pair,
have one litter a year. They breed sometime in February or March,
and sixty-three days later, usually in April or May, the pups are born.
A lot die. Mortality rates can be as high as 60 percent due
to scarcity of food, disease, or fighting among each other.

"But Phyllis lived," Diane says, "probably a combination
of luck and skill that she seemed to carry all her life."

I like to imagine Phyllis' parents, an Alpha pair, and the
rest of the pack that assists in rearing the pups, during that early time
of feeding and then teaching them to kill. Far from ranches of catde
and sheep, deer, elk and moose would be their major prey. I imagine
the older wolves - pups anxiously looking on - tearing into a fresh
kill, nuzzling the steaming warm meat. Wolves are thought to
imprint place and behavior early in their lives, and because Phyllis
had no record of livestock depredation, I see her imprinting the way
of the wild.

As Phyllis got older, I imagine the white wolf's elders
teaching her another lesson: how to avoid trap lines. Although
trappers still use leg hold traps, most are now without teeth, as
toothed traps were outlawed in Canada (but not the U.S.) over
fifteen years ago. Trappers also use noose snares, a steel cable that
causes death by strangulation. Diane says researchers in the U.S.
have modified the old hunter's trap - a 5 1/4 pound toothed trap,
the Newhouse #14 — by offsetting the toothed jaws, making these
leg hold traps relatively harmless to the wolf.

This research trap is based on the original design by Sewell
Newhouse in 1843. Newhouse was convinced that those early traps
went along with axes and rifles as tools of civilization, and says in his
Trappers Guide that the trap causes the wolf to give way "to the
wheatfield, the library, and the piano."

Diane stops talking, as the truck bends a snowy curve, and
it slides to the steep outside shoulder. There is no guard rail. Diane
reacts, and doubles-back the steering wheel bringing us in line
again. We glance at each other. Bare and dry.

In May of 1985, at the age of three, Phyllis was caught for
the first and only time in British Columbia, just north of Glacier
Park.

Dave Thomas
“Fortunately for her — and here’s where her luck first appears,” Diane adds, smiling, “it was a research snare designed to hold its prey with little harm. In fact, it was a foot snare for bears.” The bear researchers who found her put a wolf radio-collar on her that they just happened to acquire up the road from the snare — at Diane’s cabin. (She was not home at the time.) “They were not looking for wolves,” Diane says.

Researchers could now trace the wolf’s steps, and soon discovered a month-old litter of pups, her first, in this same area of British Columbia north of the park.

Phyllis had established herself as the Alpha female of her own pack. Mike Fairchild, another biologist for the Wolf Ecology Project, and a member of the team that first tracked her, said they never caught her again — and not for lack of trying. Fairchild once set a series of three camouflaged research traps in shallow holes along a mile-and-a-half stretch of road. Phyllis was known to be in the area, and there was strong circumstantial evidence that she excavated all three of these traps without setting any off.

Phyllis started to gain a reputation as curious and elusive, with a tinge of the mystical that’s been assigned in the past to other elusive, wary wolves, many of which were also, curiously, white: the Snowdrift Wolf of Judith Basin, the Ghost Wolf of the Little Rockies.

“She maintained her status as Alpha female,” Diane tells me, “and her pups formed what we called the Magic Pack. That’s when we named her ‘Phyllis’, but scientifically she was numbered 8550: ‘85’ for the year they collared her, the ‘50’s, assigned to females.”

In 1986 she denned near the North Fork of the Flathead River on the west side of Glacier and gave birth to her second litter of pups. This second litter made history, thought to be the first in Glacier Park — indeed, in the Western United States — in over fifty years.

“After her third litter, her radio collar failed,” Diane says.

Sometimes I imagine collared wolves slipping the collars over their necks with their paws, like an executive frantically pulling off his necktie at the end of the day, freeing himself from the civilizing yoke.

During the winters of 1989-1992 there were constant reports of a white wolf running with at least two other wolves near a minimum security camp in southern Alberta. Phyllis was close to ten years old when she was killed in 1992.

So Phyllis was special,” Diane continues, as we head up and over 5200 foot Marias Pass. The snow has stopped but the wind is strong, swaying Diane’s pickup from side to side.

“Phyllis was only trapped that one time, we just couldn’t get our hands on her, and that was probably part of the attraction. She was giving us tons of information on denning habits, pack behavior, and travel that researchers never had. You have to remember, she was the first Alpha female ever radio-collared out West, so tracking her was extremely important. We saw her a couple of times from the air, but almost never from the ground. She was pretty mysterious, so all those sightings at the minimum security camp in her later years kind of puzzle me.”

Diane looks to her left as we drive past the eastern peaks of Glacier Park, glowing a soft vermilion in the day’s remaining light.

“You know I never trapped Phyllis,” Diane says, “but I’ve trapped quite a few other wolves, and a kind of strange thing always happens before I go out to check the traps.”

The road along this northeastern side of Glacier Park is a ribbon of curves, and we hear the tires crunching coldly as Diane slows the truck through the ice.

“I have these dreams the night before I go out to trap,” Boyd continues. “I dream that I trap a wolf, and sometimes I dream everything — the color and sex of the wolf, the situation and habitat — and the next day I check the traps and I find the wolf I’ve dreamt about. Now there are nights before when I don’t dream, and we get a wolf. But every time I do dream, a wolf is there. It’s like I’m living out the dreams.”

Diane pulls the truck over and shuts it off. We get out and try to stretch the road miles off. It works for the moment, and we see last light illumine 9080 foot Chief Mountain on the northeastern edge of the Park. The flat-topped mountain has for centuries been an important vision quest site for the Blackfeet and other tribes. It continues to be a sacred site, and as we watch the scarlet light steal from the uppermost points of Chief Mountain, silence falls, ringing with those vision ghosts.

Diane is on a roll now, and she doesn’t even drink coffee. Maybe it’s that one pound bag of M&M’s that has been shrinking on the seat next to her.

“But I wasn’t talking about dreams, I was talking about Phyllis. The one thing I need to do is reconcile the elusive nature of Phyllis with all the sightings reported at the Minimum Security Camp in Newcastle, near Pincher Creek.”

Diane is laughing now, throwing her head back, slapping her gloved hands on her thighs. “I mean, those guys at the camp spotted her all the time in the winter. And we barely got to see her down here.”

Diane was puzzled that Sinclair shot her because she supposedly bothered people.

“We’ll have to check that out,” Diane says. “I never knew Phyllis to get that close to people. Except for one time.”

“That one time I got close to her, actually, that she got close to me,” Diane continues, “was one early morning at my cabin.” Diane is looking at Chief Mountain, recalling her own “vision”.

“I went outside to grab some firewood and there she was, in an open field coming towards my cabin. I knew it was Phyllis,
There was no doubt it was her. The same tracks out of the field, went right back out the way she came by this point, and sure enough, no signal came from the receiver. I grabbed my receiver. We knew Phyllis' collar had stopped working probably only thirty seconds, but it was eye-to-eye, wolf to human. Diane is facing Chief Mountain, staring, trance-like.

"Then Phyllis turned right around and followed her same tracks out of the field, went right back out the way she came in. What's strange about that is that I've had wolves pass by my cabin on the way somewhere, I can see their tracks as they swing by, but it seems Phyllis wasn't going anywhere. I feel she walked in close just to check us out. It was great, and it was kind of eerie too, part of her mystery. I never saw her that close again."

Diane and I climb back in the truck.

"We're near the U.S. - Canadian border, but still a good three hours from Pincher Creek.

A bald eagle floats the steel cold sky high above us, and we follow it up the road in silence.

We arrive at Jean and Dave Sheppard's log house fifteen miles west of Pincher Creek at 7:30 that night. The Sheppard's usher us into their warm home and immediately welcome us with a turkey dinner and trimmings. Incredulous, Diane and I thank them, but the Shepards insist they were having turkey dinner anyway this night, and we just got lucky at our arrival date.

Diane excuses herself from the table for a moment to call Sinclair and set up a time to meet with him. He knows we're coming, but is out in the field a lot these days: the three month cougar hunting season has begun and we'll need to talk with him between tracking sessions. It's 8:30 p.m., and he's not home. The voice on the other end says he will be out tracking cougars tomorrow morning too, and will be back later that day. We get the feeling that we might be low on his priority list.

February 19, 1993. Trailers. The Newcastle Minimum Security Camp is a small set of old, bleakly tan trailers that look like they were dumped in the middle of the Canadian outback. Phyllis was seen here over a span of three winters, and it was just up the road from the camp that she was killed. Diane and I drove out here the next day in her cinnamon-red pickup, about twenty miles southwest of Pincher Creek, following back roads, winding through lodgepole and aspen foothills, to see why this once elusive wolf came around here so much.

We drive up to the first trailer we come to — it looks like it could be the office with the Canadian flag whipping at the flagpole — but no one is there. We drive around some fuel tanks to a small parking area and park by a sign: "Visitors Par"; the last letters broken off by some errant driver or mad inmate. We finally spot the trailer marked "Office" and knock.

"It's open," is the reply from inside.

Two native Americans, both with long, straight black hair tied in ponytails, are sitting in brown metal chairs. One is wearing a black leather athletic jacket with "Redskins" stitched in red across the front and back. The other leans on a desk, with a black baseball cap drawn tightly over his forehead. They stare at us.

"Hi," Diane speaks up, smiling, breaking the awkward silence. "I'm Diane Boyd with the Wolf Ecology Project in Montana, and this is Tom Youngblood-Petersen, a graduate student from the University of Montana. We know there used to be a white wolf that hung around the camp here for a few winters — the one that was shot and killed not too far from here last winter — and we want to see if there is anyone around here that saw her or knows anything about her. Can you guys help us?"

The two men stir in their chairs and glance at one another. The guy behind the desk is the first to speak.

"I saw her some, but he knows more about her than I do," he offers, pointing to the other man. "But look, I gotta go. Gary can tell you about her if he wants."

"So," Diane says turning to the man in the Redskins jacket, "did you see this wolf a lot around here, or just sometimes? I mean, we were tracking her, she had a radio collar on, but it had stopped working, so we really don't know much about her after 1988."

The man has still not said a word. Diane and I had pretty much just barged in their office unannounced and I was getting the feeling that we were, justifiably, being checked out.

"Y...y...yeah, I...I saw that wolf quite a bit," the man says, stuttering, and I relax some, understanding his initial silence.

"She...she was here during th...three winters; she k...kinda hung out with two p...pretty wild dogs that I h...had brought here."

His voice becomes more animated and as he looks up at us I notice a shine in his eyes. He likes the subject. After awhile, I no longer hear his stutter.

He introduces himself as Gary Morning Bull. He and his colleague are members of the Piegan tribe, a northern branch of the Blackfeet, who settled all along the Rocky Mountain Front of what

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Continued on p. 33
Muse

That might be I
the grey-maned poet
with brine in slow words passing.
From down in the blue
beneath the waves
I, Poet,
bring out to myself
each new light
shattered in the deep
and reconstructed in my eye.
Like an oyster
my mouth makes pearls:
strands and songs.
And if one ear should pull a head to turn,
like a glimpse of a mystery,
the sound of a word
heard in a moment of
inattention,
like a scent
can bring twenty years of passing
to a pause,
my song will always be sung.
If that pause,
nurtured and full,
can grow
to parent
an open-eyed child
A Bather in the New Sea,
then my harp, though rusty
and ancient
and sometimes out of tune
will have played a melody
for that babe's old age.
And wizened and withered
the tune I'll hear again
when the child seeks me out
and itself sings
Songs of the Sea and Sky.
And our harmonies
will join the chorus of ancients
New dead and long gone
And we will echo the song of the spheres,
the voices of god
as the eternal ballad spirals off into forever.
Yes, that might be I
the grey-maned poet,
with brine in slow words passing
bringing runes from the deep sea,
offering to the sky.

Andrew Horwitz
is now northern Montana and southern Alberta. They work as counselors at the camp, contracted by the Alberta province from a counseling service the Piegan operate.

Morning Bull and some of the other natives working at the camp saw Phyllis regularly, and at night would often leave her a bowl of scraps by the kitchen door. The scraps would always be gone in the morning, but sometimes Phyllis wouldn’t be.

“We’d see her right out there,” Morning Bull opens the trailer door and points around the corner to a small building where their furnace is housed. “She would just be under the building, getting warm I guess. It was pretty neat to see her there. We named her Princess.”

“Wow,” Diane lifts up when she heard the name. “That’s a real coincidence, Gary. We named her Phyllis, and the names are kind of similar.”

Morning Bull and the other Piegan counselors would knock on the doors of the trailers, excited that the white wolf was around, wanting the inmates to get a chance to see her. The inmates would come out to see the wolf with clubs in their hands.

Morning Bull shakes his head. “I don’t know if they were afraid or what. We never had any problems with her. I just thought they’d want to see her.”

Morning Bull offers to show Diane and me a few more places where Phyllis was regularly seen. We walk across the road from the camp through a field with an old sign tacked to a fence: “Ball Park.” Morning Bull explains to us that on the other side of the inmates’ softball field is a sweat lodge that he and the other native counselors built.

“We’d come back after a sweat to see if everything was all right, and there she’d be, curled up in the sweat on our blankets. She never bothered us, she’d just jump up and run when she’d see us. We’d find her there a lot.”

“Let me show you this storage shed over here,” Morning Bull points to a small corrugated steel shed. “We’d see her in there a lot too.”

We shuffle through the foot-high snow over to the shed and peer in. It’s empty except for two pieces of heavy chain hanging on a wall and three blankets stacked in a corner. Morning Bull gestures inside.

“She was in here quite a bit. So much, in fact, that we got to proppin’ the door open for her and leaving some of those blankets on the floor for her. I guess it got her out of the wind. You say she was getting pretty old then?”

Diane is laughing now, and Morning Bull for the first time allows a smile to crease his face.

As we walk back towards the camp, Morning Bull tells us that although he knew of no problems with the wolf, the two wild dogs that she sometimes ran with did get into some trouble. He says the two dogs were part wolf, part Doberman, part German shepherd and were pretty mean animals. More than once did the camp get calls from the Fish and Game Department about complaints they’d received from distraught campers at the Castle River Campground up the road. Apparently these half-wild dogs would come across a camper’s pet dog, team up on it, and rip it to shreds. Then the dogs upped the ante.

“The dogs went north of here a little ways,” Morning Bull explains, “pulled down a rancher’s eight hundred pound steer and killed it.”

We all stop. Except for the wind brushing snow against our pantlegs, there is no sound.

“Was Phyllis with them that day, was there evidence that she was a part of that killing?” Diane asks.

“No,” Morning Bull replies, “I think they pretty much caught the dogs in the act; no one saw the white wolf around. But after that happened, Fish and Game told us we’d have to get rid of those dogs. I think it was soon after that the wolf was killed.”

“Why was the wolf hanging around here?” Diane asks Morning Bull as we walk up to the trailer. “Why did she come around in the winters?”

Morning Bull says maybe she felt some sort of maternal instinct when she first met those part wolf-dogs as pups. Or maybe as the dogs grew older they could do some hunting for her — he says they would find legbones of deer and elk around the camp sometimes. But maybe she was just following deep instinct and desire to return to a place where her ancestors might have lived and hunted decades ago. Morning Bull goes on and says that the Minimum Security Camp sits right on the site of one of the Piegan’s sacred, ancestral hunting grounds.

“My grandfather told me stories about hunting elk and deer here, and his ancestors before him. The Piegans have hunted right in this area for centuries. And now,” Morning Bull adds, smiling again, “I am here too.” He looks off into the pined foothills, narrowing his eyes as if seeing ancestral Piegan ghosts gliding through the trees in pursuit of game.

“Maybe Phyllis felt the same way,” he says softly. “Maybe she felt an ancestral pull. Maybe she had wolf reasons.”

February 20, 1993. I awake to wind buffeting against the windows of the log house. The wind always blows around Pincher Creek and this morning is no exception. The Sheppards say
today’s wind is not bad. They call it a light breeze.

Over breakfast, Diane and I talk with the Sheppards about Sinclair, the hunter. The Sheppards say he is a well-respected outfitter not only in Pincher Creek but all along the Rocky Mountains down into New Mexico.

Sinclair saw Phyllis three times around Pincher Creek. The first two times he saw her, he knew by her radio collar that she was a U.S. research wolf and put his gun down. His third sighting was December 19, 1992, the day he shot her.

Brent Sinclair is coming to meet Diane and me here at the log house to talk about the killing. From the window we see him pull his pickup into the drive, his three hunting dogs scrambling around the snowmobile in the back. I am telling myself to stay open to his reasoning, to withhold judgment, and to listen to his side of the story.

But I can’t help feeling that Diane and I are about to face the perpetrator of a major crime, a killer condemned in newspapers from Los Angeles to London.

If Sinclair is a criminal, he certainly is a friendly one. After warmly greeting the Sheppards, he shakes hands with us, takes off his crumpled brown cowboy hat, and pulls up a chair at the kitchen table. Dark-haired, mustached, with a blue bandanna wrapped around his neck, he looks to be in his late thirties.

Sinclair has been in the outfitting business for fourteen years and probably spends two hundred days of the year out in the backcountry, tracking, setting traps, and guiding elk, deer, and cougar hunts. He describes himself as a “conservationist sport hunter.” He says in his nine years as an outfitter he had the opportunity to shoot five or six wolves but didn’t.

“I’m not against wolves,” he declares.

“So, why exactly did you shoot Phyllis?” Diane asks bluntly, not missing a beat.

Sinclair says he saw the white wolf in 1988 in the backwoods of southwestern Alberta. He had a clear shot at her then, but saw her collar and didn’t “take her”. But in 1992 he heard that others had spotted the white wolf running with four feral dogs and three wolves near the Castle River Recreation Area, about 15 miles southwest of Pincher Creek. Sinclair says Castle River has the highest concentration of summer recreationists in the area, and people were concerned at the appearance of the wolf-dog pack.

Biologists say that wolves running with feral dogs can lose their fear of humans. These “packs” can take on unnatural behaviors, killing what and where they shouldn’t. Sinclair says he and Fish and Game were concerned for the safety of families vacationing at Castle River.

And, since the pack had been chasing elk and deer, Canadian biologists worried they would push the elk from their prime winter range nearby, perhaps driving them to starvation.

Sinclair says Canadian Fish and Game had tried to trap the white wolf before him, but were unsuccessful. A lot of people then tried to shoot her, to disrupt and split up the ‘pack’. For him, shooting her was the last resort.

“Fish and Game told me that if I saw those dogs, or the wolf, I should shoot them, because if I didn’t, they would. If I did, they said to give them a piece of the skull for DNA analysis. I said that would be no problem.”

“Like I said, I believe in research, I think it’s important. I had known from talking with Fish and Game that her radio collar wasn’t working anymore, and she was gettin’ on in age, so if I didn’t harvest her, then she could just crawl off somewhere and die, nobody would know where, and any possibility for genetic research would be gone.

“Then one day I just happened to see her, and the dogs, on the road near the camp.”

He pauses.

“It’s a sad thing. I didn’t kill her just to kill her.”

Sinclair steps outside to check on his dogs, and Diane and I look at each other.

“I dream that I trap a wolf, and sometimes I dream everything — the color and sex of the wolf, the situation and habitat — and the next day I check the traps and I find the wolf I’ve dreamt about.”

There are tears in her eyes.

“I’ve got one more story for you,” Sinclair says, back at the table.

“Here I tried to cooperate with the research in the U.S. — you see, I called Fish and Game and told them I shot her, and gave them the skull for the genetics — and then the whole thing gets turned around in the media to make me look like the bad guy. I got all kinds of angry phone calls from wolf supporters, from liberal conservation organizations telling me what a horrible thing I had done.”

“But I got a different kind of phone call a few weeks after the news articles started appearing,” Sinclair says.

“I answer the phone and this guy says, ‘This Sinclair?’ and I say, yeah, it is. And then he says, ‘You were in the paper, weren’t you?’ Yeah, I say, and I still don’t know who this guy is, I mean, I don’t know if he’s another reporter, or what.

“So then this guy says, ‘Well, I just shot this wolf north of here away and it had one of those goddamn collars on it. If you were me, you wouldn’t turn it in with all the shit you got, wouldya?’”

Sinclair continues. “I thought about that for a moment, and then I said to him, I got more than I deserved on that one, but you know, this wolf research program in the States is important. Just give me the number off the collar and I’ll call it in. Or put it in a phone booth somewhere and I’ll have somebody pick it up. Look, I said, I don’t want to know your name or the circumstances or anything.

“There was silence on the other end; then the guy hung up.”
Sinclair pushes back his chair, stands up and stretches. He is tall, about 6'1", and he moves his slender body with an assured strength. We have been talking for five hours, running Phyllis’ history up and down from Glacier Park to Pincher Creek. Diane and I are moved by his evident sensitivity. But it is hard for me to reconcile that with his world view, and with the different stories we had heard at the minimum security camp.

“You know,” he says, “I’m getting her mounted; I mean, I’ve already got a wolf rug.”

The story of Phyllis still differs from voice to voice. The difference is part culture, part undying misconceptions, and it is hard to know the truth. There are still unanswered questions that lie at the heart of why some people don’t like wolves, and why some people kill wolves.

One of these questions might be an example of the bigger picture of wolf-killing: why Sinclair killed Phyllis and not the half-wild dogs instead.

From all the talking I’ve done with various Canadian Fish and Game officers, Sinclair, Morning Bull, and other Pincher Creek residents, it seems that indeed the dogs were creating most if not all of the problems around the Minimum Security Camp and the Castle River Campground. Sinclair told us that people said he should have shot the dogs, but he didn’t because their owners were on the same road and present when Sinclair saw Phyllis, and he felt he couldn’t shoot the dogs in front of them.

But that reason is hard for me to swallow. Instead, I offer the obvious possibility that Phyllis was a scapegoat for these feral dogs, a scapegoat, like many misconceptions about wolves, firmly grounded in history.

Barry Lopez, in, Of Wolves and Men, cites one precedent-setting example concerning none other than Gen. George Washington.

Apparently Washington, concerned with wool production in the new colonies, exchanged a series of letters with agricultural societies and Thomas Jefferson, lamenting the attacks on sheep by feral dogs and wolves. But few could tell the difference between wolf and dog tracks and therefore, because the wolf carried a black name through its long contorted European history, most predation was blamed on the wolf. As a result, wolves were killed, and began to disappear in the Northeast by the end of the eighteenth century. The amount of damage to the sheep industry by feral dogs — in great numbers in the colonies — was largely ignored by historians of the period, who were content, like the colonists, to blame all canine predation on the wolf. As a result, wolves were killed, and began to disappear in the Northeast by the end of the eighteenth century. The amount of damage to the sheep industry by feral dogs — in great numbers in the colonies — was largely ignored by historians of the period, who were content, like the colonists, to blame all canine predation on the wolf.

That some, including Sinclair, could be a carrier of this scapegoat tendency that has continued into contemporary times, should be no surprise now. Misconceptions like this continue to cast a dark shadow on the wolf, and refuse to fade with the softer light of new knowledge and story. I would guess that Sinclair would deny his role and dissent from being implicated in such flighty reasoning about the unconscious. But I suggest that we all must admit to being transmitters of the wolf’s dark history, and release the misconceptions, these shadows, to the cool eclipse of new understanding. And we must see to it that the new story is heard by young, untainted carriers, our children. They, and wolves, deserve no less.

Epilogue

Hamilton, Montana is one in a series of small towns that sits on the western edge of the Bitterroot Valley, at the foot of the seventy to eighty million year old granite of the Bitterroot Mountains.

It is there outside of Hamilton in the Bitterroot Valley that Pat Tucker and her husband Bruce Weide live. Koani lives there too. Koani is a wolf.

Evan and Campbell are my two sons, ten and four years old, respectively. One clear fall Saturday morning, the shorter rays of autumn light giving the cottonwoods that line the Bitterroot River a sharp, pure clarity, we decide to drive down to Hamilton to help Tucker and Weide build a new fence for Koani’s enclosure.

None of us had “met” Koani yet, and I especially wanted to give Evan and Campbell the experience of seeing a wolf up close. During the hour drive south from our home in Missoula, I explain to Evan and Campbell how Koani came to be with Tucker and Weide, and what it might be like to see this animal at close range.

Koani was born in captivity in Kalispell, Montana in 1991, and came to Tucker and Weide after a film was made about wolves in which Koani was a part. Tucker is a forty-two year old wildlife biologist who worked for the National Wildlife Federation for seven years. Weide is a writer and documentary film-maker. Tucker was asked to serve as the wildlife consultant for the film, and when the filming was finished Tucker and Weide decided to take Koani and serve as her caretakers. Knowing that Koani could never live in the wild — having being raised in captivity, she had never learned to kill big game on her own— Tucker and Weide established “Wild Sentry”, a wolf education program using Koani as an “ambassador wolf.” The trio travels around the West meeting children in schools and on the reservations. Tucker and Weide give an interactive program exposing children to what real wolf behavior is like — citing the occasional stock killed by wolves, but also citing the extreme rarity of attacks on humans — hoping to dispel some of the fallacies surrounding wolves that have, unfortunately, become an integral part of the wolf’s history.

Seeing Koani is the highlight of the program, probably giving the children their closest look they will ever have at a wolf.
I’ve seen the Wild Sentry program, and the children’s eyes double in size when Koani enters the room. It’s amazement and wonder, not fear or hatred, that most of these children seem to feel.

I know I don’t experience the hatred for the wolf that some ranchers and hunters carry with them — certainly the product of wolves sometimes biting into their livelihood, but also, I believe, the product of ages of misconception about the wolf. And I thought I didn’t carry the subtle, unconscious fear of the wolf either. I thought, in a rather presumptuous way, that I had gotten “beyond” that fear, due to my experiences and research. I was wrong.

When we arrive at Tucker and Weide’s cabin on fourteen acres, a dozen others are already working on the one acre fenced enclosure. We can see Koani lying down inside the fence, and both Evan and Campbell scramble out of the car to get a closer look.

“Hey, Hi! Thanks for coming,” greets Weide as we walk towards the enclosure.

“Who are these guys? Hi, I’m Bruce, what are your names?” Weide extends his hand to Evan and Campbell, a broad smile on his moustached face, and a warm look in his eyes. Evan and Campbell shake Weide’s hand shyly, looking around him, anxious to get closer to Koani.

“So, you want to meet Koani,” Weide says. “Well, let me tell you how we’re going to do this. Tommy, I want you to go in first. Koani will be very curious about you coming into her space and will immediately come over to you. Kneel down to get on her level, and let her greet you. Wolves greet each other, and people, by nuzzling with their noses and licking faces.”

Evan and Campbell glance at each other and at me with a wild-eyed, ‘this is going to be an adventure’ look.

“You’ve got to stay kneeling and let her do this to you,” Weide continues, “and you can cover your face with your hands if you’re not comfortable with a big ol’ wolf tongue all over your face. You see, to a wolf, this licking and nuzzling is like shaking hands. Weide continues, “and you can cover your face with your hands if you suddenly get up before Koani enters the room. It’s amazement and wonder, not fear or hatred, that most of these children seem to feel.

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"So, you want to meet Koani," Weide says. "Well, let me tell you how we're going to do this. Tommy, I want you to go in first. Koani will be very curious about you coming into her space and will immediately come over to you. Kneel down to get on her level, and let her greet you. Wolves greet each other, and people, by nuzzling with their noses and licking faces."

Evan and Campbell glance at each other and at me with a wild-eyed, 'this is going to be an adventure' look.

"You've got to stay kneeling and let her do this to you," Weide continues, "and you can cover your face with your hands if you're not comfortable with a big ol' wolf tongue all over your face. You see, to a wolf, this licking and nuzzling is like shaking hands with a person. And, like suddenly withdrawing your hand with a person whose hand you're shaking, if you suddenly get up before Koani is through licking you, it will be, well, kind of rude, and Koani won't feel like she's really met you. So just stay still and let her lick you until she walks away. That means she knows who you are, and you can come into her space and do whatever you're going to do."

"Bruce, what about Campbell?" I point to my three foot high, tow-headed one. "Would Koani think of Campbell as just a large snowshoe hare, and maybe, out of pure curiosity and instinct, be too interested in him?"

"Yeah, I think that's right. Koani is what Pat and I call a socialized wolf, but she's not domesticated. That means she is used to people, is social with people, but she is definitely a captive wild animal. She still retains all of her wild instincts, and should Campbell get a little nervous around Koani and maybe start running away from her, maybe stumble on a rock and fall, well..." Weide pauses here to consider the consequences. "Well, Koani just might think Campbell is a big rabbit and go after him. She might not, but I just don't want to take that chance."

I glance at Campbell, and he is visibly disappointed that he won't get to go inside the enclosure to meet Koani. But, he does understand what Weide has said. As we walk closer to the fence and see the size of this coal black, golden-eyed wolf, I feel Campbell gripping my hand a little tighter.

I go into the enclosure first. Koani had been lying down, but as I enter she immediately gets up and comes over to me. I kneel and she nuzzles my neck and licks my cheeks and eyes with her thick rough tongue.

How can I describe what it's like to be licked so gently by an animal that has garnered such a bad reputation as a vicious killer? It is delightful, and I am totally without fear. Her black head is right up against mine and what strikes me is the size of her head. Her neck, head, and jaws are much bigger than a German Shepherd's, and much bigger than I had imagined. A wolf's jaws, designed for a predator that kills with its mouth, can crush bone, muscle, and sinew at a force of 1500 pounds per square inch, twice as strong as a German Shepherd.

Koani licks and nuzzles me for about ten seconds and then, possibly content that I am simply another human being that will be around for the day, she turns, walks twenty feet away, and lies down. Weide then motions Evan, my ten year old, inside the enclosure, and as Evan opens the gate and starts to walk in, Koani immediately jumps up and lopes over to him. As Evan kneels down and I see Koani's black head, now seeming even larger next to Evan's small blonde one, my stomach turns a notch. Koani is licking and nuzzling Evan enthusiastically, maybe, I think, too enthusiastically.

Evan is smiling and giggling, his eyes closed, and he is fully enjoying Koani's attention. Koani looks up at me a moment, her yellow eyes set deep in her black face, and they're piercing: they go right through me. As I see her one-inch canine teeth next to Evan's nose as she licks him, I'm struck with conflicting feelings: I knew, intellectually, that Koani will not hurt Evan, that she is just very interested in him probably because he is more her size. But I also hear myself saying, Evan is not only more her size, but he is also the size of a tasty little fawn. I can feel my heart racing, knowing that if Koani wanted to she could kill Evan on the spot, tearing into his face and throat. But, my other voice says, healthy wild wolves would very rarely attack a human. The imaginary and the real collide in full force.

Meanwhile, Koani continues to lick and nuzzle Evan for a full thirty seconds, three times as long as she greeted me. Campbell is standing outside the fence, looking on and delighted—and probably a bit jealous—at all the attention Evan is getting.

"Koani really likes Evan, huh Tommy?" Weide looks at me with a big grin on his face, sensing my consternation. I manage a small laugh, and feel myself relax as I see Koani finally walk away from Evan.

"Whoa, Dad, that was wild," he exclaims, and skips off up a hill to help clear some brush for the fence.

"Yeah, wild, really wild," I half mutter to myself, and turn to follow him up the hill.
It is spring again.
The river swells,
floods firmly rooted islands,
sweeps out to sea.
Restless, she searches.

She peers into my cupboards
moves the condiments in the fridge
saying, Mom I’m looking for something.
What are you looking for?
I don’t know, but I need something before I leave.
She shoves the canned goods
across the dark shelf.

Looming over me she flings her arms
around my now smaller body.
Overwhelmed, I find
strength in her swift currents:
I, anchored in rocks and habits
she, springing, dancing, lunging...
we embrace in the kitchen where the
lilacs spread their scent.

What do you look for, daughter?
Answers to unasked questions?
Conclusions to old queries?
Selves ripened, canned answers,
a tidy jar of morals, a bag of tricks
to pack before you leave?

The debris of my lifetime
my fertile topsoil, all my vegetation
is roiling in your blood and
tumbling from your surface to your depths,
to spill into the great sea
of your own life’s experience.
Rooting, it will grow,
nurtured, it will fruit.

Next season will you grace my kitchen
with new found truth?
I will have some special morsels
to share with you
in the spring,
when the river swells again.

Morning Star
I've read nearly 
every word
of the Sunday paper
the front door
stands open
and the air
while a bit cool
is welcome
and fresh
there's championship
basketball on tv
but the few people
here
pay it little heed

Charlie's Bar
The First Day Of Spring

and I sip my beer
with no intention
to hurry.

Dave Thomas