

Camas

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Article 1

Winter 2007

Camas, Winter 2007-2008

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et al.: Camas, Winter 2007-2008

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

Winter 2007/08

Poetry and Prose by
**Alison
Hawthorne
Deming**

Craig Rigdon

Thirty
Miles of
Lead Time

Chad Dundas

Boy Missing
Near Judith Gap

Poets

Melissa Mylchreest
Jennifer Johnson

Conservatory

M. Frost

i.

when the transformer blew,

you noticed, at first, disquiet
too much for the ear—wax melting, cat breathing,
noise of liquid in your throat.

you noticed a wounded silence,

what remains
after you strip away the overtones of power—
a complete symphony you never realized
you could hear.

ii.

what if you lived whole days like this,
bathing in the cold music of mountain water,
cracking wood to burn for heat, falling asleep
to the dimming hum of fireflies?

what if your language
could be wind and bird, earth and ant?
children as they dart through coffee fields,
their feet a reckless staccato?

you could spend a month this way
and not hear the voice of soil
the way corn does.

iii.

you notice, after such long quiet,
the moan of the Great Machine shuddering on,
the noise of its anger breaking forth, its terrible light unleashed,
its buzzing sun drowning the black,
but later, what you remember is the darkness.

what you take away is itself transformation—
the pressure of the moment before the power returned,
a heavy stillness—that cold, redeeming seed
from your short night of conservation.

Contributors

Camas, Vol. 16, No. 1 [2007], Art. 1

Jessica Babcock is buckling under the pressure of trying to make her bio witty and clever without sounding like she's trying to be witty and clever. Or maybe the pressure is from trying to finish her graduate degree by May. Either way, poetry keeps her sane. As does playing in the dirt.

Jacoba Charles is a writer, photographer and ecologist. Raised on a Northern Californian ranch, she later earned a botany B.S. and two masters degrees. Science and travel—from counting salmon in Alaska to plants in the Bronx—informs her work, which has been published in literary anthologies and the *New York Times*.

Danielle Chalfant grew up a Park Service kid, and is currently an environmental studies undergraduate at the University of Montana. She has lived in Yellowstone for the last ten years, but has always been in or around National Parks. She plans to teach environmental education and continue to explore art in the future.

Victor Charlo is the great-great grandson of Chief Victor Charlot of the Bitterroot Salish. Through lineage, he is recognized as a spiritual leader. He is a published poet, playwright and proud father of four children, and grandfather to four beautiful children. He lives in Dixon, Montana, and is currently featured in *Poems across the Big Sky*, an anthology of Montana poets.

Abby Chew completed her MFA at the University of Iowa in 2004. Currently, she teaches Humanities at Olney Friends School in Barnesville, Ohio. Also, she raises goats and has a dog named Alice.

Alison Hawthorne Deming is the author of three books of poems, *Science and Other Poems*, *The Monarchs*, and *Genius Loci*; three nonfiction books, *Temporary Homelands*, *The Edges of the Civilized World* and *Writing the Sacred Into the Real*. She edited *Poetry of the American West: A Columbia Anthology* and co-edited with Lauret E. Savoy *The Colors of Nature: Essays on Culture, Identity and the Natural World* soon to be re-issued in a revised and expanded edition. She is Professor in Creative Writing at the University of Arizona. Her new book of poems titled *Rope* will be forthcoming in 2009.

Chad Dundas' fiction has appeared in *The Beloit Fiction Review*, *Sou'Wester* and *The Sycamore Review*. A native of Missoula, he earned an MFA in creative writing from the University of Montana and works as a sports writer and columnist at the *Missoulian* newspaper. He is also at work on a novel.

When not writing, **M. Frost** studies environmental health and epidemiology in Baltimore. Her poetry has appeared in *Nimrod*, *Potomac Review*, *Philadelphia Stories*, and the *Healing Muse*. In 2006, Finishing Line Press published her first chapbook, *Cow Poetry and Other Notes From the Field*. She welcomes contact through her website: www.mfrostwords.com.

Gary W. Hawk is an adjunct professor at the Davidson Honors College of the University of Montana and a furniture maker. His love of literature and concern for the environment have taken him on several occasions to the Island Institute's Summer Symposium in Sitka, Alaska.

Jennifer L. Johnson is a native of Kansas. She earned her MFA in Literary Nonfiction at the University of Minnesota and has been a recipient of a Minnesota State Arts Board Grant. Her poetry and prose have appeared in *Crab Orchard Review*, *Borderlands*, *Isotope*, *Flyway*, and elsewhere. She lives with her husband in St. Paul, Minnesota.

Rick Kempa currently lives in Rock Springs, Wyoming, where he teaches writing and philosophy at Western Wyoming College.

Matt Larson was born and raised in the flat expanse of the Red River

along the border between Minnesota and North Dakota. He is a graduate of the University of Montana and currently works as a carpenter in Missoula, where he finds solace in the backroads and waters of its surrounding.

Mike Lommler is an itinerant photographer, writer, biologist, and wilderness ranger currently living in Missoula. Much of his work is focused on the American Southwest, which is not where he is from but is where he feels at home. His photography has appeared in *Camas* three times, and can be found on the web at www.flickr.com/photos/mike-lommler/.

Merrilyne Lundahl currently enjoys vibrant mental health, largely achieved without the support of psychiatry. Though she remains loyal to coyotes, corvids and condors also vie for her devotion. Her interests include writing and teaching for personal empowerment and social and environmental justice.

David Morris, a language arts teacher in Craig, Colorado, spends his free time exploring the deserts and canyons of Northwest Colorado, and the adjoining states. An avid outdoorsman and environmentalist, he is very concerned with the rapid pace of development in what he considers to be the last remaining "wild" country in his part of the West.

Melissa Mylchreest grew up in Connecticut, lived amidst the hardwood forests and along the Atlantic coast, and then moved to the Northern Rockies. She is a writer, artist, and chef, with a BA in poetry and an MS in environmental writing. She currently resides in Montana.

Roadkill, habitat fragmentation and invasive species fire up **Kylie Paul**. She spends her free time on bike, on ice, in cleats, or in the woods. Wherever she is, her camera seems to follow.

Craig Rigdon is a writer, woodworker, tree climber, and former firefighter who lives in Missoula, Montana. He is currently finishing a master's program at the University of Montana.

Staci Short was born and raised in Maine where she spent many hours exploring the forests and frolicking in the snow. She moved to Missoula in 2006 to pursue a Master's in Environmental Studies with a focus on education. Staci rarely leaves home without her camera or her German Shepherd, Bravo.

Jonathan Truesdale is a freelance photographer based in South Carolina.

Liz Williams grew up among redwood trees in northern California. She is a graduate student in the Environmental Studies program at the University of Montana, where she is working on writing a history of conservation in (where else?) northern California.

Paul J. Willis is a professor of English at Westmont College in Santa Barbara, California. His poems have appeared in *Poetry and Wilderness*, and his most recent chapbook is *How to Get There* (Finishing Line Press, 2004). He is the author of *Bright Shoots of Everlastingness: Essays on Faith and the American Wild* (WordFarm, 2005).

Cleo Woelfle-Erskine's essays on dams, greywater, and grassroots movements for water justice are collected in *Dam Nation: Dispatches from the Water Underground* (Soft Skull, 2007), which he co-edited. "St. Thomas" is part of a forthcoming book of photographs and essays investigating disaster and restoration. His ecological sanitation projects reside at www.greywaterguerrillas.com.

Contents

From the Editors

The Nature of a Literary Journal 4
by Dave Loos

Nonfiction

Thirty Miles of Lead Time 6
by Craig Rigdon

Coyote Medicine 12
by Merrilyne Lundahl

On Natural Beauty 16
by Alison Hawthorne Deming

Finding Numbered Days 26
by Matt Larson

Fiction

Ways of a Desert 20
by Jacoba Charles

Boy Missing Near Judith Gap 34
by Chad Dundas

Poetry

Conservatory Inside front cover
by M. Frost

Pegasus in Montana 10

Forest Time 30
by Alison Hawthorne Deming

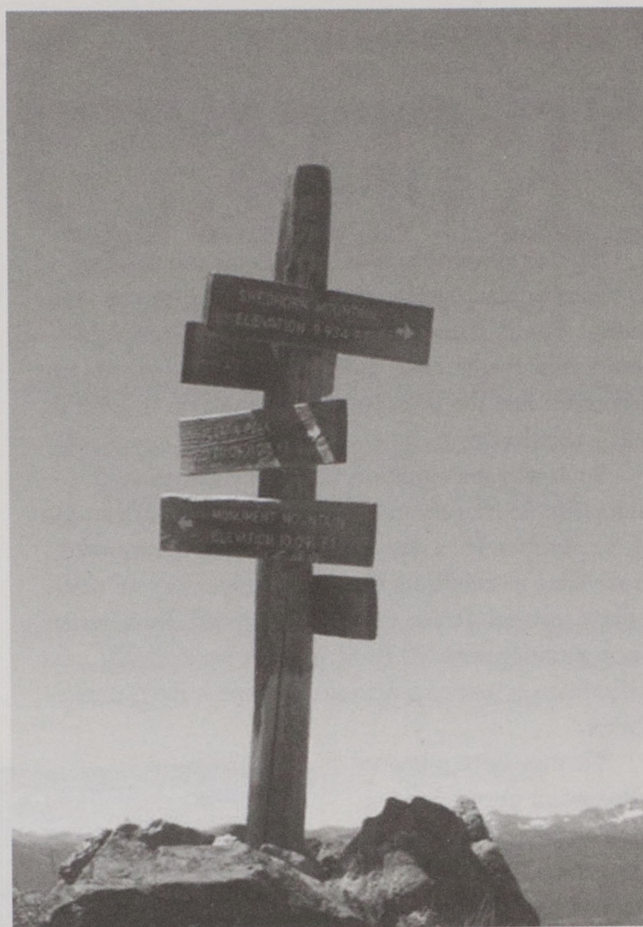
Uneasy With Montana 11
by Victor Charlo

On the Edges of Baranof 15
by Gary Hawk

The Window 15
by Rick Kempa

Manicure 22

My Hometown Farmer Men 32
by Jessica Babcock



Jen Browning

Devils Tower 23

Conservancy Pines 31
by Jennifer Johnson

Covenant 24

Vocabulary Lesson 39
by Melissa Mylchreest

Near the Base of Juniper Mountain 25
by David Morris

St. Thomas Reemerges from the Waters
of Lake Mead 29
by Cleo Woelfle-Erskine

Norman Clyde 40
by Paul Willis

Coyote's Relinquish Story Inside back cover
by Abby Chew

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Historic Park, Big Hole Battlefield, Montana

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First Person

The Nature of a Literary Journal

There's nothing you can do about the weather, so when it fails to cooperate on a day when you really wish it would, there are several options: Complain about your rotten luck, quickly make adjustments to accommodate the unexpected changes, or, if all else fails, start drinking.

Such was the situation facing the *Camas* staff and assorted friends and volunteers on the afternoon of September 16, a day we had planned for months in advance to celebrate the 15th anniversary of our literary journal. It was going to be grand: lawn games, book signings, catered food, a silent auction, all unfolding on a grassy field in Missoula's Rattlesnake Valley.

We may have joked at some point about needing tents in case of rain, but there was general confidence that a late-summer Sunday afternoon in western Montana would deliver sunny skies for the four hour event. Besides, Missoula hadn't received measurable precipitation in more than three months, evidenced by the smoky haze wafting above the valley. We all hoped the drought would end soon, just not that day.

So even when the thunder began about 90 minutes before the event, we shot each other incredulous looks and nervously laughed it off. Passing clouds, we said.

But the clouds hovered, more ominous by the minute, and by 2 p.m., as the first guests arrived, it started to rain. Five minutes later, rain had turned to hail. Depending on who you ask, there may have been some wet snow in the mix. It was, in a word, disheartening.

We had no backup plan, of course, resulting in several minutes of controlled chaos as organizers and guests alike scrambled to remove anything from the lawn that looked vulnerable to precipitation. In total, our celebration set-up existed as planned for less than 10 minutes.

We adapted on the fly, moving food and

decorations beneath the small porch awning. The band moved themselves under the narrow eaves and began to play. A bocce game commenced in the rain. Our hosts graciously allowed the use of their main floor for extra supplies and guest spill-over.

At some point in the midst of this damp undertaking, Option C became as clear as the day we had hoped for. We may not have picked the best day for this celebration, but we sure picked the right venue: Ten Spoon Vineyard.

Not to make this a blatant advertisement for Montana's finest winery, but we will forever be indebted to Ten Spoon owners Connie Poten and Andy Sponseller. Not only did they donate their vineyard and supply case after case of local wine at below cost, but they laughed and smiled as they weathered the storm with us. And when it's raining on your parade, nothing takes the sting out like a good glass or three of fermented grapes. We all imbibed, and as we did, the rain stopped and the sun strained over the next several hours to make an appearance. It eventually did.

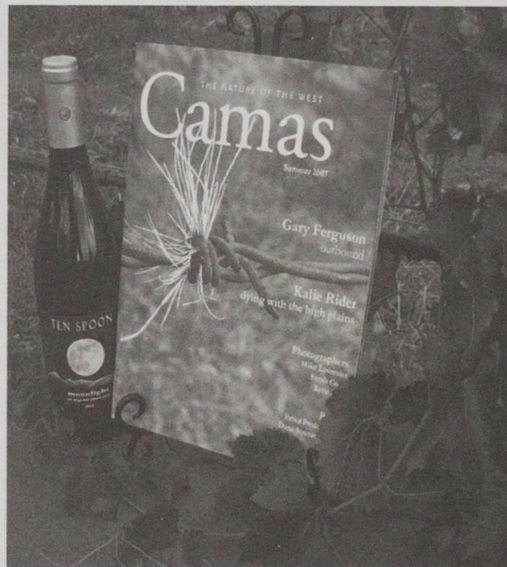
By then we'd been winging it for hours and, and thanks in large part to the wine, our collective stress level had subsided.

I think a lot about that day sitting here in front of a computer monitor in the *Camas* office, unsure of whether we have enough space for an essay or whether some person's subscription ends this year or next. Like event-planning, the nature of a graduate student-run literary magazine requires one to be in constant "winging

it" mode. That's not a bad thing, more an amused observation about how *Camas* is essentially always in a state of flux.

This is the result of both circumstance and design. Each year there are new editors, a new editorial board, new photographers and a new collective sense of being a little bit overwhelmed. It's like your high school yearbook if it was run by a bunch of semi-responsible 20- and 30-somethings. Really, the only consistent component of *Camas* each year is our intrepid faculty advisor Phil Condon, who oversees the annual budget meetings, deadlines and subscription database crashes with cool aplomb (or at least he hides his anxiety well).

An always-transitional endeavor like *Camas* is almost certain to produce slip-ups, though most (we hope) are small and unnoticeable to our subscribers. Every once in a while I'll flip through the complete set of 35+ issues, laughing at our inconsistencies



and bloopers. I have two favorites: The short-lived experiment of publishing four *Camas* issues per year, including the "Deep Winter" issue, and the ever-changing, sometimes-disappearing, always-a-surprise volume number that appears on the cover. According to our archives, "Volume 1" appeared around our fourth year of existence, and progressed from there – occasionally in the correct numerical order – as the years passed.

The chance that any of you noticed this is so small I hesitate even to mention it. But for historical accuracy, and of course for you, reader, we have correctly identified this issue as Volume 16, Number 1, a six volume jump from our last issue. You're welcome.

Looking back, it makes total sense that it rained on September 16. While the images of that day are mostly soggy, they are good ones. Given the circumstances, the event was a success. Above all, I'll remember Phil Condon, who in the midst of the downpour made the rounds with a bottle of wine in his hand, wide grin on his face, telling anyone who would listen that "*Hey, it's the nature of the West!*"

Happy 15th anniversary, *Camas*.

Dave Loos
November 2007

THE NATURE OF THE WEST *Camas*

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Camas is seeking submissions for our
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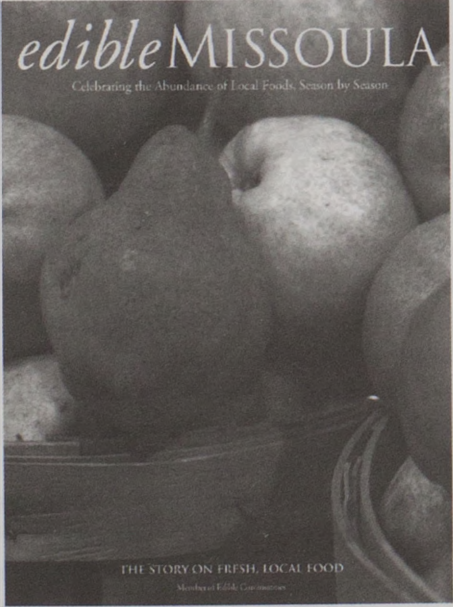
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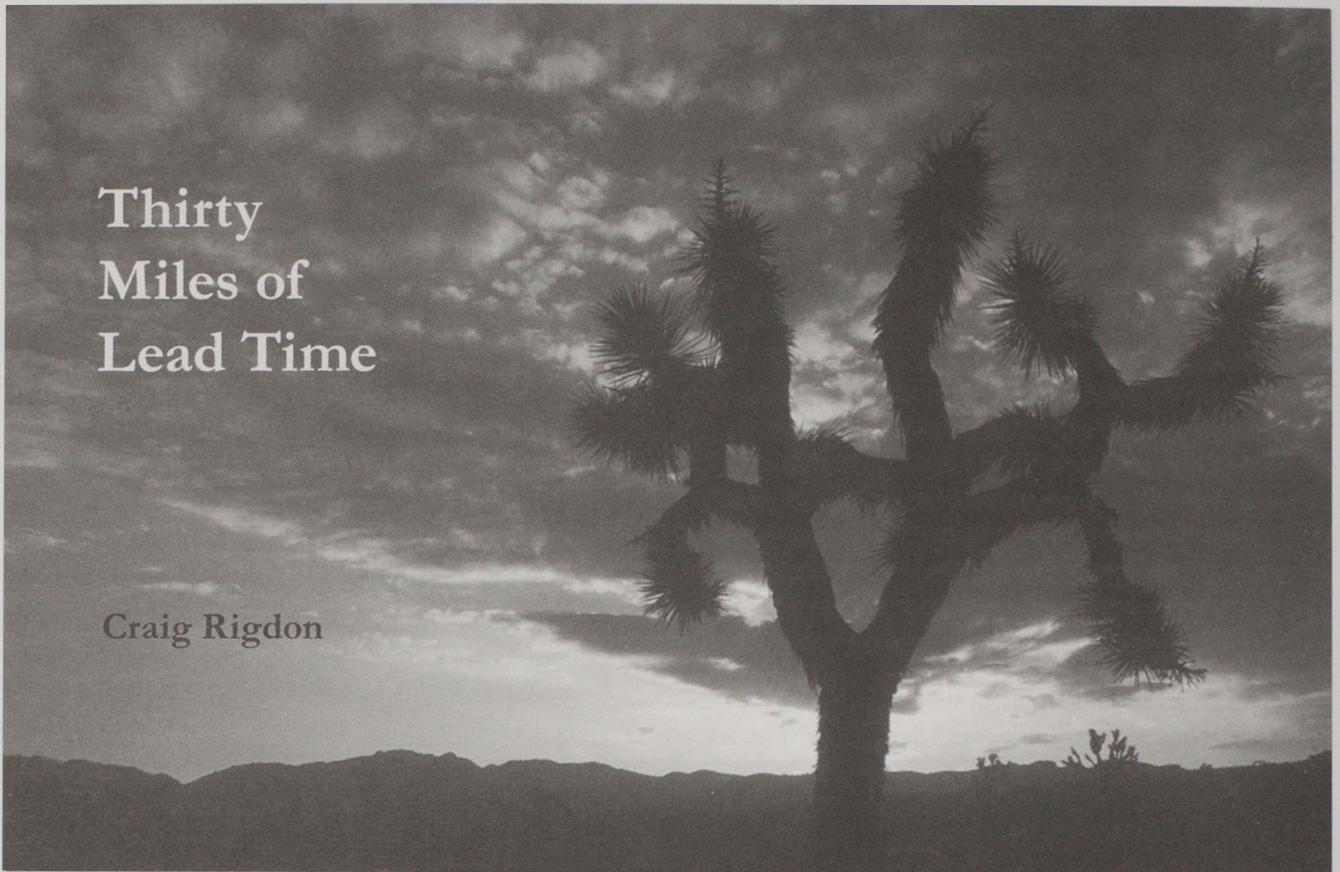
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Thirty Miles of Lead Time

Craig Rigdon



Derek Kanwischer

My eyes drag across the scorched landscape, surveying the endless sage, the desert varnished rocks, the cloudless sky, but they always return to the sign. Since coming over the last rise in this desolate basin, dust billowing behind me, my gaze has been locked on a tiny trace of color shimmering in this endless expanse of gray and brown. From this distance, it is nothing more than a drop of red in a sea of quicksilver. A trick of the brain, yet I move towards it with a vague sense of purpose.

Dimensionless, the mountains fuse with the sky. Jutting up thousands of feet above the desert floor in limitless shades of drab, the bands of rock transpire into azure. Twenty air miles away, the jagged ridgeline of an anonymous range marks the western edge of this basin. Somewhere behind me, hidden by my rooster tail of dust and the gentle swelling of the earth, lies the eastern border of this valley—I am corralled.

This is the fourth day of my journey into the so-called wastelands of Nevada, one taken in an attempt, among other things, to regain my bearings by completely losing them. The first day out, I scrambled up to the bristlecones on Wheeler Peak, a sky island in Great Basin National Park, and watched ravens ride the unbroken winds that forever blast the summit. Since then, I have been staggering through salt flats and alluvial plains, frying my brain under the white-hot spears of the sun, waiting for the relief that I don't feel yet. I have caught glimpses out of the corners of my

mind, but nothing more.

When I set out on this trip, my goal was to outrun the past two months of personal disaster. I quickly realized the impossibility of outrunning myself. Now, I am simply letting this dissonant landscape brand my eyes, soaking up the blank spots on my map. Rather than searching for an answer, in some shadowy way, I am seeking a bolt of lightning.

My gaze drifts back to the sign, still hovering above the earth, but definitely closer, and getting clearer. I can make out the crossroads that it commands. I can read its faded message.

Sitting in the shade of my truck, parked in the middle of the road, eating an orange, I can't help but think that this stop sign is a bit of overkill. Looking north, I can see about a thousand square miles. If I stood up and looked south, I could see another thousand. At least one other person, at some point in the past, has been here—my totem has been blown to hell with a shotgun. Sunlight skitters through the perforations and the post is bent at a tortuous angle to the ground. Of all the lines of travel one could take in this valley, some hapless soul ran smack into the only thing in a day's journey in any direction made of metal and taller than three feet.

These roads, meeting in the middle of nowhere and overgrown with brush, are little more than two-tracks. I find it hard to imagine the traffic ever getting heavy enough to warrant a stop sign. Even if two cars were

to meet, which seems to border on impossible, surely the thirty miles of lead time is enough to come to a complete stop. I wonder what the crew that installed it was thinking while they were mixing the cement, planting this thing out here. Perhaps, after lunch, when the cement had set, one of them pulled out a shotgun.

I walk past the sign, out into the sage. I hear chips and squeaks, the language of some species of sparrow, and try in vain to catch sight of them. It never works. They flit up to the top branches, teasing me with a great view, and then dive back down to the ground as soon as I can raise my binoculars to my eyes. I move a few steps closer. The scene is then repeated. Desert birding is much like making sense of a dream—I get just enough information to confirm that I don't have enough information. In the end, the birds fly away and I have grown thirsty.

I head back to the truck, knowing that I have to get moving soon. Beyond the idea of losing my bearings out here, I have to get to a wedding—I am the entertainment. Auburn, California, is the ultimate mid-point destination on this roundtrip from Denver. I now have less than one full day to traverse most of Nevada, cross the Sierras and arrive in time to take a shower and tune my guitar. In the meantime, I need to find the highway, which I am pretty sure is somewhere north of my present location.

My pickup starts on the third try. I edge up to the junction. Just for a laugh, I put on my turn signal and check for vehicles. Nothing coming, at least until sunset. I make the turn, heading north, slowly negotiating the rutted road, careful not to puncture my oil pan. By my estimate, I should find US 50 by nightfall.

I had followed a girl. Three years of cat and mouse culminated in my decision, made on a Wednesday and executed on a Saturday, to pack up and leave Montana in the middle of winter, and join her in Denver. It was a gamble—a new start with an old friend. Somewhere on that icy drive, while I was fishtailing through a Wyoming blizzard, she folded. Stranded in Denver, with no money and few options, I found a place, got a job as a tree climber, and for two months now I've been asking myself just what in the hell went wrong.

I rumble over a cattle guard and find the highway about where it should be. The relative smoothness of the road feels good after several days of bone-jarring travel. Through my bug-splattered windshield, I follow the setting sun, the high blue sky fading into a smoky wash of colors accented by flame-tipped peaks.

US 50, following the old route of the Pony Express, cuts a sinuous path across the basin and range country of central Nevada, all of which I have to get across tonight. It is known as the "Loneliest Road." A bold name when I consider that on the nameless two-track I just left, I didn't see a vehicle for three days. It's odd, but out there, in nothing but the heat and dust, I wasn't lonely. Now, back on the highway, I feel alone.

Impossibilities become inevitabilities gilded with a giddy euphoric certainty.

I fill my tank in Ely, the seat of White Pine County. In mining terms, this area is known as the Robinson District and is home to the largest open pit copper mine in the state. Over the last century, the earth around here has surrendered enormous amounts of copper, gold, and silver. The process has also produced mountains of mine tailings—a single wedding ring weighs twenty tons before the gold, about a third of an ounce, is separated from the rock. When the pits, some of which are miles wide and a thousand feet deep, are all played out, they will be reclaimed, using earth-moving equipment. Then, once the holes are filled in, cattle might graze the desert back to its original state.

Back on the road, the lights and the tailings of Ely are falling behind me. Ahead of me lies three hundred miles of mountain passes and open desert. I turn on my one working headlight and plunge into the deepening Nevada night.

Perception is altered in the desert. Thirst and starvation, common sensations in this bleak place, mix with distorted air to form vast cities of gold with palm-lined oases, or just about anything else the eyes will let themselves get fooled into seeing. The mind, unaccustomed to the sheer size and one-dimensionality of the visible landscape, with little or no way to reference the spaces between things, begins to fill the gaps with visual hallucinations and abstractions of everyday thoughts. Things like left or right, and up or down, become a matter of heavy deliberation. Simple decisions become bogged down in great, disjointed leaps of logic. Impossibilities become inevitabilities gilded with a giddy euphoric certainty.

Nowhere on Earth is the spectacle of warped reality more apparent than Las Vegas. Even halfway across the state, separated by miles and miles of unforgiving desert and shattered mountain ranges, its presence looms, casting its long shadow far into the silence. Referred to as the "Journey of Death" by early Spanish traders on their way to Los Angeles, the valley languished in scorching obscurity for hundreds of years. In the early 1900's, it was little more than a

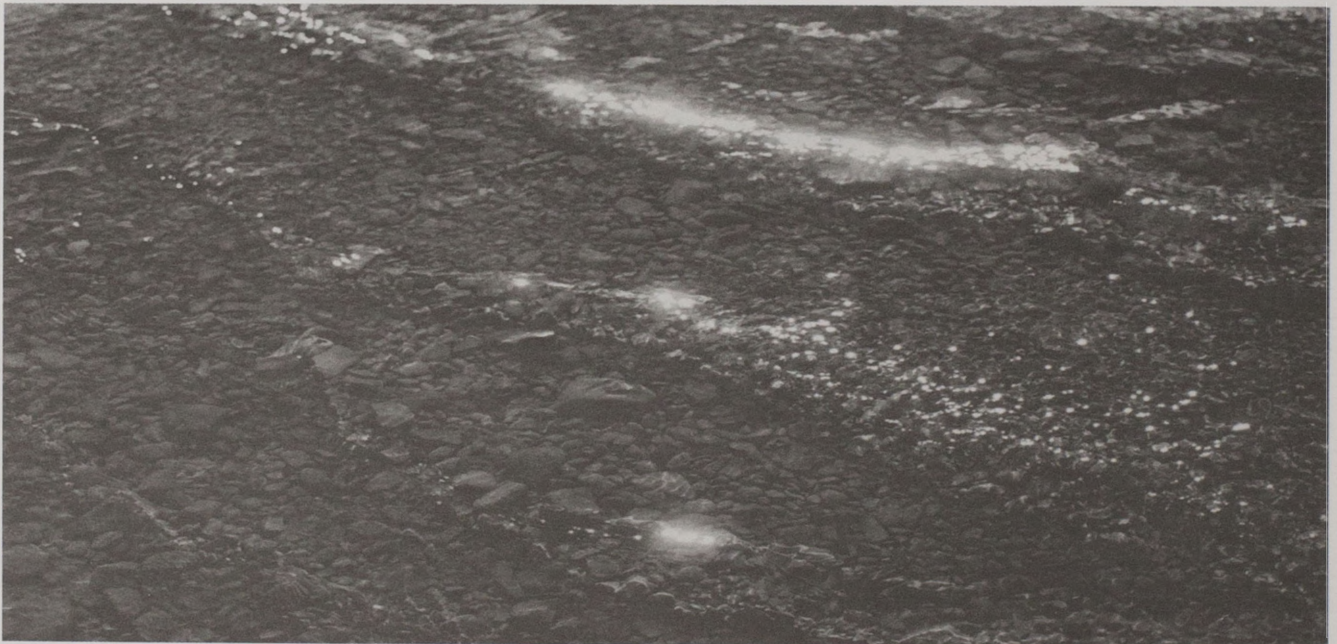
dusty railroad outpost with a population of less than a thousand: a grim stop on the way to somewhere better. The second half of the twentieth century has seen this reality transformed into the heroic artifice that is present-day Las Vegas. In all its glitzy excess, it sprawls out into the desert at a rate of two acres an hour. Over a million and a half people now live in Las Vegas and Clark County, with millions more visiting each and every year, drawn like moths to a flame by the gaming, the prostitution, the lounge acts, the cheap drinks, the theme shows, and the pure, uninhibited gluttony—in one particular restaurant, over one million eggs meet the skillet each year. Every pull of the one-armed bandit drives the machinery of an economic engine composed entirely of such disparate and nonsensical icons as Elvis and omelets. The valley gets less than 10 inches of rainfall annually.

Out here, as the balance of reality starts to tip, changes occur in the psyche that are, at first, unnoticed, but as the sun exacts its non-negotiable price, they become more and more apparent. I don't know how long I had been talking to myself, but at some dusty

that I have tried to make more graceful each and every day. Getting paid to take chances and climb trees—to learn from my mistakes.

On the other hand, Las Vegas, waking up from a 60-year drinking binge, its rhinestone pants down around its ankles and its back against the desert, is proposing to tap an ancient aquifer that underlies a large portion of the state, even stretching underneath the highway I am driving, just outside of Ely, 245 miles away. It is the most expensive groundwater pumping operation ever proposed. With technology, Las Vegas wants to slake its unquenchable thirst by pumping 58 billion gallons of water each year from this ultimately finite resource. Along the interminable web of pipelines and pumping stations, there will probably be complimentary drinks and a golf course or two.

The limited nature of the resource is not the only problem. Looming on the horizon is a related but separate issue. The Nevada Test Site, officially designated in the 1950's as the best spot in the United States to test nuclear weapons, has, since that time, been host to over a thousand thermonuclear detonations,



Mike Tommler

point between the stop sign and US 50, I noticed it. In much the same way that the mind can become so enveloped in a book that a ringing phone or a doorbell goes unheard, so it was with my own voice, struggling to fill a silence so deep as to have physical properties. Eventually, that concentration snapped, and my unconscious mind, caught in the act, was laid bare.

Now, as my unheard words meet the roar of an open window, I begin to see my recent past not as a series of failures, but rather as some sort of circuitous good fortune. It has been a chance to live with heartbreak while suspended a hundred feet above the streets of Denver, swinging from limb to limb in arcs

both above and below the ground. With the typical transport wind pattern being west to southwest in origin, the winds are channeled into the valleys north and east of the site. Each test has subjected huge areas of Nevada and beyond to enormous amounts of radioactive fallout. Today, radiation detectors bloom like desert flowers across Nevada. The scant rainfall that does hit the ground either evaporates or percolates into the ground, carrying with it whatever it may encounter on the surface.

In 1992, a U.S. moratorium on nuclear testing took effect, and the potential uses of this area have shifted. Located within the boundaries of the Nevada Test Site is the now infamous Yucca Mountain. Long utilized

to store nuclear waste, it will one day likely become the permanent home for all of the nation's radioactive offal. The Office of Civilian Radioactive Waste Management claims that the water supply of places such as Las Vegas will not be affected. Yucca Mountain lies only about 100 miles northwest of Las Vegas.

With the last embers of twilight fast falling into shadow, night comes flooding in from the east. The coming of darkness inverts the immensity of the Great Basin. In daylight, the vast and mostly barren landscape erodes at a geologic pace into an illogically distant horizon. The sun defeats all shadows. I am lost in the exposure. The same enormity that has kept the secret of my location throughout the day now closes in around me. What seemed infinite has compressed, and the space that during the day could be safely measured in years can now be measured in a stone's throw. The scant light of my truck provides nothing more than allusions to what lies beyond, but to the coyotes beneath the light of the stars, I am a jilted torch, burning westward through the void.

Visions of the day dance at the edge of my one headlight: beer cans, pull-tabs, no less, stuck in the brush, without a hint of rust, a coyote pelt tacked up on an ancient fence post, dust-devils writhing across the landscape. Above it all, ever-present, vultures orbit the earth, teetering on wings that never flap, looking for roadkill.

Life out here must be good for a turkey vulture. As anyone who has ever followed a double yellow stripe across the night knows, roadkill is a staple food source in the desert. Jackrabbits line this midnight highway, sometimes in groups, sometimes alone. Possessed by some esoteric madness, but more likely simply scared shitless by headlights, they wait until the worst possible moment to cross the road.

Sometimes they make it. It isn't hard to figure out when they don't.

Quite likely, nothing in the evolution of the jackrabbit has ever required such speed and split-second decision making as a vehicle barreling across the ground at sixty-seven miles an hour, but it is beginning to seem like some sort of self-selection process is going on. While I would never presume to know what thoughts might occur to a jackrabbit—indeed, the chances are very good that they are far more intelligent than is otherwise indicated by their leap of faith—as the night progresses, the tally rises, and I wonder if it is not some sort of lagomorphic rite of passage. Perhaps crossing the void is a doorway to a new perspective.

Clearly, I am falling back on what, to Ed Abbey, was the anathema of assigning human concerns and pursuits to animals. The obvious truth is that these creatures are dying because I am killing them. But I

can't help but admire the boldness I selfishly assign them while still cringing at the tiny booms that issue from my tires all too often.

Moving to Denver was like locking my keys in my car. My eyes saw them sitting there on the seat, yet my hand went ahead and slammed the door shut. I think, deep down, we both knew it would end like this. Neither of us could ever figure it out, so together we just kept on going, deliberately oblivious of the space growing between us.

When it finally came time to choose, I jumped. I didn't make it.

An invisible grade, rising to meet some distant pass, has dropped me into third gear. The shadows in the headlights tell me I am among trees. Pinyon and juniper mostly, though I can imagine the shady groves holding enough moisture for Ponderosa Pine and even some Douglas fir. Then again, I am blind. If only I had more time, I would wander off into the night, hooting for owls, hoping to get bit by a rattlesnake. Or go tumbling accidentally off a cliff. Hell, I'd settle for a spider bite.

Like the chill of a ghost, I can feel the depth of the desert. It isn't sinister, by any means, though it feels that way tonight. Whatever demons come creeping out of the darkness, I know I have brought them with me. The desert only serves to amplify them. My pride, my fears and doubts, echo in the silences of the cliff and canyon. They draw a bead on my mind, returning larger and less defined than before.

The Great Basin defies reason. It laughs at what we carry with us as we negotiate its borders, blindly feeling our way across a landscape that is both unflinchingly honest and brutally fragile. It is a land of patient change, where the folds of the earth simmer under a scorching sun and freeze beneath the silver glow of the moon. But our short-term victories pale under the steady gaze of the long-term consequences. The night has been rendered by the fission of our hubris, the sands of the desert vitrified. The story of the past, told by frost-wedged rocks on lightning-scored ridgetops, is now mingled with the half-life of our future.

At one time, these endless basins were the bottom of a vast inland ocean, the foothills grassy plains. Above it all, glaciers hung in cirque valleys. Those shores were long ago lifted into the sky and carried away on the wind.

The world has moved on. This land no longer holds communion with the sea. What comes in cannot leave without first changing.

I don't know if I'll make it to the wedding, but I will keep climbing.

Pegasus in Montana

Once I hiked with this man in the Santa Rita Mountains
south of Tucson. We'd gotten so high on the Josephine Saddle
that a red tail hawk flew under us edging the trail

then climbed the airspace above, coasting like a Frisbee
right over our heads, the burnt sienna of his wings
lit through with golden sun, quiet as the air itself.

It seemed nothing but wings though we felt its eyes on us--
just a curiosity in a place where people rarely walked.

Years later we walked on the campus in Missoula. Autumn

and colors gone from the burnt grass hills, my friend wearing
his green Woolrich shirt and telling me he hoped to get
an elk—"had a tag"—was that the phrase to say it was legal

for him to kill one to put in the freezer for his family.

All this is a digression from the story I meant to tell—
an incident he recounted, one that seemed so inscrutable

to us who are easy with the brute fact that life gives life,
that hunters occupy every niche on earth, raccoon dissecting crab,
osprey dive-bombing mackerel, red tail ripping pocket gophers

from their busywork, and all that our kind has taken, keeps taking,
the depth of grief we feel knowing what's lost.
But it was the deer I meant to give to this story.

How many were there? Five, six, seven.

Lost in Missoula, they entered the parking lot,
the concrete ramp cool and shadowed like a forest.

Did it draw them with its darkness? They mounted the slope,
climbed and climbed in the night
past the oily slots that cars would fill in the morning.

They climbed so far—then, no one can say why,
they leapt, why each followed the others,
the grace of its leap like Pegasus

calling the band to fly together those seconds
before gravity pulled them back, each deer falling
to the unforgiving ground. This story is about friendship

and grief—how the man's eyes held on to me like the hawk's—
no, like a man's, the sweetness of a gaze
that asks, do you understand the grief of the world?

Alison Hawthorne Deming



Staci Short

**Uneasy
With
Montana**

I should follow buffalo on this aimless
Monday in Missoula. We finally find them
in U.C. Bookstore, along with others waiting in arm.

**Victor
Charlo**

I look for different ways to be as I hunt truth
over other shoulders, knowing I'm not right.
My life, a life of excuse, bow and scrape,
knowing my world is not quite right. Go back.
Go back.

My best bet is to go back where bitterroot used
to sing food for Salish, yet Anapolis and I are
such an easy connection here, parking by fir
and animal so I can re-visit Hugo's old
home again: the kitchen sink between two Datsun
pick-ups, the worried lawn still not growing, even
though he had it cut one summer. Afraid to defrost
the refrigerator. Call it dramatic moment, call it
coincidence, call it luck, it does seem right.
May in Missoula with threat of rain all day seems
right. This scene, no borrowed buffalo, as river runs full for us
like ancient root.

Coyote Medicine

Merrilyne Lundahl

I no longer feel the need for sleep, but know I should try to get some. What I do get is shallow and light, with a superbhuman startle reflex. From forest floor to my feet instantaneously. Heard something. Coyote, that you? The moonlight shines brightly in my canine eyes. I wander through the forest, my fears—of darkness, night, predators, getting lost—evaporate. Barefoot, I am the animal I've evolved to be.

“IDENTIFICATION: The patient is a 20-year-old single, Caucasian female who has had several previous psychiatric hospital admissions and is now readmitted due to an exacerbation of her bipolar disorder in a manic phase, with psychotic features that are endangering her safety and well being because of manic agitation, impaired judgment, and impaired reality testing.”

I am flying in the body of a dragonfly. It hovers and swoops through the White Pine drainage of Logan Canyon, finally dropping us—the Cache National Forest trail crew for the 2000 season—into a wet meadow. We are bringing in stringers—huge beams weighing nearly a ton—and other materials to build a bridge. The bridge building won't begin for another month, but it's high fire season and this is the day a helicopter is available to us.

Hiking out after the helicopter ride in, the lithium gets to me. I am sweating, sweating, sweating and can't catch my breath and can't cool myself down and can't keep up with the crew. Erik, the crew boss, helps get me out. He tells me to relax, go at my own pace. Says he has some friends on lithium. Says it messes you up, physically. I think back to the “precautions” heading on my drug information sheet. Something about lithium interfering with sodium and water levels in the body, how it's easy to get dehydrated and the dangers of approaching toxic levels when that happens even though it's supposed to keep my moods from soaring and plummeting. I mutter under my breath, cursing the day I ever saw a psychiatrist, and push myself back toward the mint green Forest Service vehicles at the trailhead.

I started working for the government as an Americorps volunteer when I was seventeen years old. Two years later, for the 1999 season, I was elevated to what I thought was my dream job: wilderness ranger. Previously, I had followed the then-current wilderness ranger all over the forest. Now on my own, I felt confident and competent. I had my own government vehicle and four ten-hour days to wander the two designated wilderness areas—Mt. Naomi and Wellsville Mountains—near my home in Cache Valley, Utah.

As part of the job, I needed to be certified as a Forest Protection Officer. The training served mostly to make me terrified of methamphetamine users who make their labs in the forest. Or the marijuana growers who booby trap their growing sites. Essentially, I was



Mike Lommel

empowered to enforce laws while being denied the opportunity to carry a weapon. Not that a weapon would have warded off all that plagued me.

At first it was just The Presence. This sense of something outside myself that followed me, lurked around the switchbacks, threatened me whenever I was alone. I couldn't escape The Presence, couldn't get the feeling out of my head or, more importantly, out of my gut—that something was threatening to destroy me. It would have helped, I'm sure, if those 10-hour days were spent with a partner, even a dog. I hadn't spent much time alone previously. It didn't help that my mother worried about me being lonely "out there." I reassured her that with a radio, I was never really alone. That reassurance, however, didn't work for me.

I fought, alternately, the voices that suggested—no, demanded—suicide, and the voice that prayed for mercy.

I started carrying my Pulaski—a tool half-hoe, half-axe—without its sheath, considering it my weapon for fighting off foes. Not just the fed-hating, ATV-riding, gun-toting, beer-drinking public. The ones within. I fought, alternately, the voices that suggested—no, demanded—suicide, and the voice that prayed for mercy. I fought them too with utility knives and razors from the Forest Service warehouse. I cut. My left forearm. "Cut me some slack" I would silently plead to those voices. And then I took it literally, cutting my own delicate skin to relieve tension and anxiety. Still wear the scars, but I hid my wounds then, for the most part. "Nice arm," said Ron, my supervisor's boss, upon glimpsing scabbed over wounds. "Thanks," I cheerfully replied. It was the summer of 1999 and I was going down. Soon, I wrecked my government vehicle, then wrecked it again—two wrecks in two weeks as I tried so desperately to escape the forest that I drove into mountain maples. And this after being given the safety award.

I returned to the university that fall, not where I had intended on going—Humboldt State—but in the valley at Utah State University. The psychiatrist had told me I had a life-threatening disease, and he thought uprooting myself and leaving my support system was dangerous. So I stayed home.

By Labor Day weekend I was hospitalized in a psychiatric unit at the local hospital. I had gone to the psychiatrist with a simple request: put me to sleep for the weekend. Thoreau said "To be awake is to be alive," and that's precisely why I wanted to sleep. I needed a break from my own despair and anxiety. From the madness that crept up over the summer.

After the intensity of the '99 summer season

working outside, I found myself confined to a small hospital wing. I spent ten consecutive days locked up indoors. The psychiatrist-god determined I could brush my teeth for four minutes a day. The windows didn't open—not even a crack. There was a piano in the ward, but no angry music. Guppies swam hour after hour in their aquarium, a tank inside a tank. Inside, looking out, I saw the blue sky of early September. Eventually I earned walking privileges and got taken out at least once a day for the remaining month I spent in the hospital. Like your average dog and just as grateful. I got some diagnoses, and a lot of drugs, so that by the time the 2000 summer season of forest service work came I thought I was all set.

I worked for the trail crew during the 2000 season. The year

before, in uniform and with my own government vehicle and almost always alone, I had gotten "stressed." I was the face of the Forest Service and felt the push to be perfect. This season I no longer had to drive, could wear anything non-political, had the company of the rest of the crew and was under no pressure. As the season came to a close, I felt relieved, almost ready to go back to school and be inside and actually sitting instead of doing physical labor. It was then—at the end of August—that our bridge-building work at White Pine Lake began. We were staked out at an elevation just over 8,000 feet, four miles in from the main trailhead.

Glacially formed, White Pine Lake rests high in the mountains, surrounded by gray limestone cliffs. The lake never warms above about forty-four degrees Fahrenheit, even at the height of summer. People go there to camp and fish and—on especially hot days—swim. Our job was to reduce the impact along the route by building a bridge over a nearby stream with the materials brought in by helicopter the month before.

Since the day we had flown in and I'd had such a hard time hiking back out, I had become a little "noncompliant" in taking my medication. Lithium is an anti-psychotic agent. Though the exact way lithium works isn't fully understood, it is the oldest and most common drug used in the treatment of bipolar disorder—a neurochemical disorder that, for me, is defined by deep depression punctuated by periods of incredible mania. Without drugs, I can soar into mania, which can lead to psychosis—meaning I will see things that aren't really there or hear things the rest of the world doesn't seem to think are making noise.

The average age of onset for a first manic episode is twenty-one. At twenty, I was just learning that the first sign of mania, for me, is a decreased need for sleep. And as our time working at White Pine Lake continued, I found myself sleeping less and less.

The psychiatrist was kind enough in his report to say that the “exotic bird” I went in search of during one sleepless night was just that—an exotic bird, and not a cuckoo, because that is the bird I heard. It was then the trees took human form, shaped themselves into the people I was working with. People I’d known before. I yelled at them: “ERIK! What are you doing here?! Sherrie! Shouldn’t you be asleep by now?”

For several nights, my nights were like this. And then, one morning:

Fire. Smoke from across the West expanding in the sky. I can't breathe, but the sunrise! Four a.m. and cool at 8,000 feet. Air crispier than last night. Clouds and particulate matter engulfed by light; late August. LIGHT! It overwhelms me, consumes me, threatens spontaneous combustion.

“Call it/ whatever you want, it is/ happiness, it is another one/ of the ways to enter/ fire.” And it's in my blood. I am on fire. Water puts out fire. Dive in the lake!

I am on fire. Hot flashes. The lake calls to me. I float. I swim. I am brilliant -- my mind races -- brilliant -- everything in the universe is explainable; I get it! I get it -- I get . . . everything!

I don't remember the whole story, but was hiked out—some say, “evacuated”—later that morning by Sherrie and Erik after I'd passed out in a stream.

I am convinced that in the lead up to going crazy—what was a diagnosed psychotic episode—I went wild first.

Neither wildness nor craziness is endorsed by my culture. Without drugs, I experience a mania that makes me feel native to the earth, gives me back my animal nature. It is a feeling I love at its initial stages. It is me in the body of the animal that I am. It is Coyote.

Once, when asked what animal I would be, I responded without shame, “Coyote.” The instructor asked why, and recalling a recent *Audubon* cover, I said, “they are the ultimate survivors.” The instructor mumbled something about rats and cockroaches. The next student proclaimed that he couldn't think of

any animal he would be, and furthermore, “where I come from coyotes are shot at first sight.” Maybe so, I thought, but Coyote is a symbolic character of logical disorder in many American Indian world views. He is the trickster who stole fire and introduced death. He is creator and savior and devil, too.

Coyote is bipolar.

I would do well to appoint him as healer and mentor. Had I been listening, Coyote might have instructed me to trust neither drugs nor diagnoses.

Chances are high that I'll be encouraged to be on drugs—antipsychotic and antimanic and antidepressant agents—for the rest of my life. I am told that doing otherwise is not safe. So for now, I swallow them

regularly each night. It is an act of submission.

Emotions are adaptive. From fight or flight to empathy, feelings are part of human animals. Bipolar disorder is a range between extreme emotions, from deep clinical depressions to sky-high manias. Is it possible that this disorder is what connects me to the universe? It's true enough for Coyote.

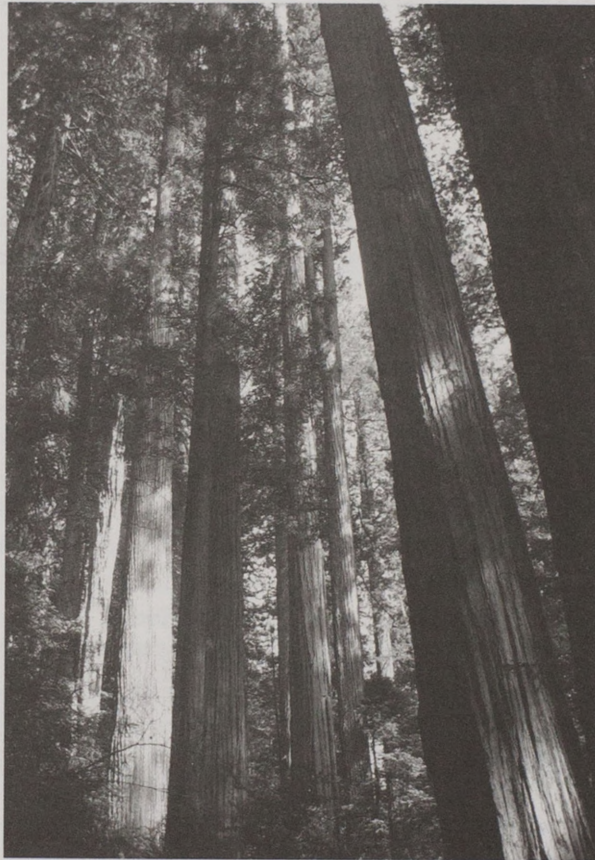
There has long been an effort to curtail the coyote population. They are given the status of varmint—they can be killed at anytime by anyone without any permit. Some states even have bounties. Yet despite all the pressures put on coyotes, their population and range

continues to expand.

In the suburbs they'll eat your tabby cat and toy poodle. Your garbage becomes an opportunist's elite dining pleasure. The clatter in the night that has you up in arms at the window is no criminal, just the ever elusive, surviving coyote.

If you're lucky, you'll be high in the mountains, camped near a glacial lake, and hear him yipping at the full moon on a warm August night.

I howl back.



On the Edges of Baranof

Gary Hawk

We swim in agitated circles at the mouth
of streams we seem to recall,
occasionally testing the height
of pointed rocks that bar the way.

We are ready to advance, pool by pool
until we can present our ripe
and swollen selves to riffles and runs
where we hope to place the future
in the open hands of the present
and then let ourselves dissolve
among the stones, or helpless with fatigue,
be carried into the forest
by eagles and bears foraging along the banks.
We want to make this passage now
but the way is not yet open to us;
only a skin of shining water
runs over a crowned alluvial fan.
We churn in the shallows waiting, waiting.

Meanwhile, out at sea the slack tide shifts
and on a rising hand of deliverance
we are gradually lifted above every obstacle
and with a few strokes pass into the way.



The Window

Rick Kempa

Ventana Canyon, Arizona

I can believe anything of water—
how the orange flood that peels away
the husks from the arroyo-banks
recreates the mysteries: galaxies
of gnats above the algae pond, frogs
in the crevasses ushering in the evening
with their bleating, hoofprints
blossoming in the mud—

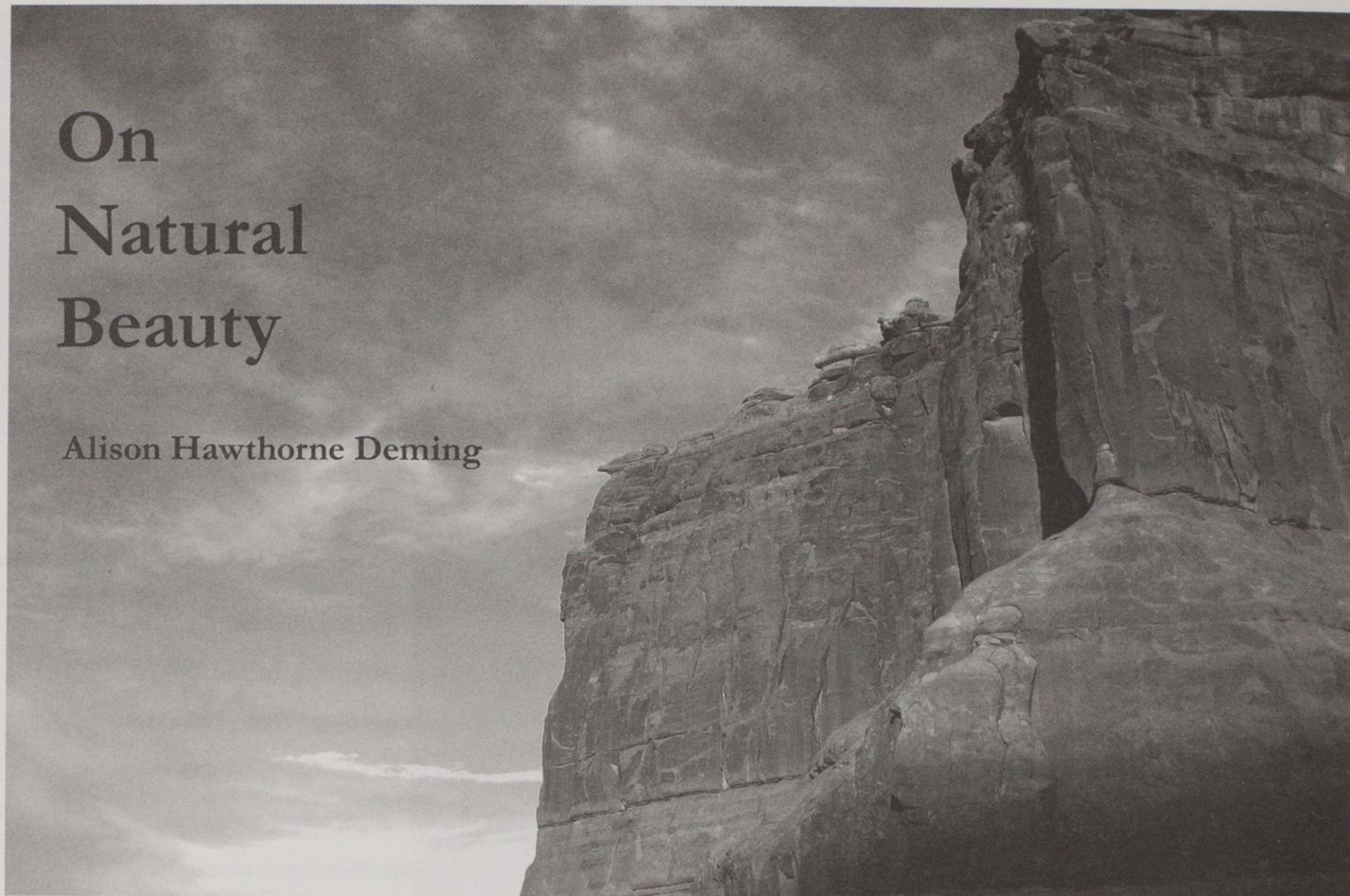
But the sands
that rake the backbone of this ridge
where water never pools identified
a fault, hollowed it into a cup, a bowl,
a drum; trillions of tiny finger-rolls
beat the drum until it opened out upon
the other side, ten feet deep and
thirty high, a window overlooking
what everything blows into—

Where is the
secret niche of seed, the kernel of faith
secure enough that the wind with
all its ghastly length can't strip
the earth from, grain by grain,
and desiccate?

Editor's Note: The previous two poems were published, but misidentified, in our Summer 2007 issue. Here, they are re-printed with the correct authors. Camas regrets the error.

On Natural Beauty

Alison Hawthorne Deming



Dave Loos

One bright June day I took a walk to Red Mountain outside Flagstaff, Arizona, chatting with my two companions, a father and son who share my need for the contemplation that wild places induce. We talked about the tensions of work, friendship, and family. Jacob might have been worrying that his course work in biochemistry wasn't as satisfying as he had hoped, and Malcolm, still in the long recovery from a head-on car crash, might have been testing how far his bones, pasted and screwed together, would carry him, and I might have been struggling to understand the recent suicide of a friend and colleague. It's hard to remember what we talked about. Tensions abound in every life. This was before the world fell into its latest madness, violence and good intentions going to war with each other for the umpteenth time in human history. Our worries may have been more personal in scope that day, but our need for relief, for the breath to go deep again, for our conflicts to be framed again by open spaces, was large. And as we walked, the experience of natural beauty poured into us, and we felt the pressures loosen from our bodies just as the highway sounds fell out of earshot and the ancient gnarled junipers began to boast their craggy endurance. Really old trees, Gary Snyder writes, "give up their sense of propriety and begin throwing their limbs out

in extravagant gestures, dancelike poses, displaying their insouciance in the face of mortality, holding themselves available to whatever the world and the weather might propose." Such a place is, in Snyder's words, "a temple where life deeply investigates the puzzle of itself." We stopped talking as we filed up the wash and entered the narrow canyon lined with ponderosas—grand old survivors, their bark split from ground to sky by lightning strikes, though the wounds did not appear to have endangered their longevity. By the time we reached the foot of the worn sandstone cliff, red rock oxidizing to black, we'd grown peacefully separate, each finding a space to lie back against stone or tree to drift in the stillness of the place.

From my berth on a grainy mound, I gazed upward to imagine what the air might feel like to the ravens living in the pocked cliffs, their whitewash staining the red rock beneath their nesting holes, their wings like exclamation points in the blue sky. Wind tunneled into the canyon, a sound that the Earth has known since long before human beings showed up, long echoes connecting my daydream with the whole bittersweet history of our species. The experience of natural beauty is the most ancient form of currency in the economy of the human spirit, and its value will never be understood on Wall Street or in the White House because they thrive on the currency of money and votes. To use those forms of currency to measure the

worth of natural beauty is like using a balance scale to measure the weight of an idea. Natural beauty creates a spiritual effect in the world, and the only mechanism we have for measuring spiritual effects is love.

Natural beauty calls us to the American West, all of us newcomers who wandered here from across the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans, down over the ice of the Bering Strait and then back up from the overheated lands to the south. We came to the West because our bellies and souls were hungry for natural beauty. The beauty of a landscape that looks too grand to be subdued. The abundance of its capacity to provide sustenance whether in the prehistoric heyday of the loping bison or in the agro-industrial new age. The transcendence of mountains scraping up past the treeline to make their pronouncements to the sky. The desert spanning into the shimmering edge of nowhere, creatures adapted to its harsh aridity with such inventive strategies that life seems so much smarter than death, though death in the end always finds its way. The mounds and caves and glyphs of the First People who lived in such handmade intimacy with their surroundings that we still can feel their touch. The solace of forests that harbor us when we need their deep green light and all the wild creatures living out their violent harmonies without staining anything with their waste and blood. The gorgeous nakedness of arid lands where eroded and stratified rock tells the big story of time, the beauty of that time-sense so deep it humbles us into gratitude for our thin existence. Natural beauty is our legacy and our hope in the American West.

In the summer of 1999 I went to Prague to teach and it proved an education for me. I have avoided Europe, intimidated by its grand legacy of art and war, wanting to know myself as an American, to pay attention to traditions on my own continent, to cultivate an American memory. But I went to Prague and fell in love with the city as passionately as I have fallen in love with the Canyonlands, Badlands, the Sonoran Desert, and the Sea of Cortes. As a naturalist flying into Central Europe I did not know what I was looking for. I had read that the salmon had been gone for half a century from the polluted Vltava, the sinuous river that defines the city's shape. The river attracts thousands of over-wintering birds—mute swans, little grebes, coots and cormorants—taking refuge on the river's banks and wooded islands after lakes freeze shut. A colony of kestrels nests at Prague Castle, black redstarts sing from chimney stacks and television antennae, and stone martens occupy urban attics and prowl the misty cobblestone streets at night.

But one does not come to Prague to see nature.

One comes for the beauty of its culture. To wander lost along the streets and alleys that Kafka said turn and turn like folds of the brain. To find houses marked with the sign of the sleeping swan, the golden ram, or Saint Norbert kneeling before the giant stag that was the instrument of his conversion. To worship at Strahov Monastery where white-robed monks have filled the cavernous space with holy music for a thousand years, while outside Hapsburgs and Nazis and Communists took their turns taking over. To see Don Giovanni performed in the theater where Mozart himself conducted the premier. To be a pilgrim on the city's streets finding one architectural epiphany after another—harnessed horses leaping from the pylons of the National Theater—and on every building, bridge and balustrade figures perched so that it seems all the old gods and angels and demons might descend into this city just for the enjoyment of flaunting their beauty to one another. Prague is a city that has known for a thousand years its legacy to the world is to be the cultural capital of Central Europe—the city of art and science and god. And its beauty is profound because it stands in relief against the twentieth century's nightmares. The ashes of the Holocaust will pepper the soil of Central Europe forever, far too much gray matter for the earth to assimilate.

One evening I went with some students for pizza at a basement place called the Coliseum. A young woman from Los Angeles had fallen in love with a man she had met in her salsa class, which was being taught by a Cuban ex-pat living in Prague. This was a very postmodern evening, cultures bumping into one another like passengers on the tram. We spoke about the pleasures of the pizza's local ingredients—Edam cheese and artichokes. The student couldn't keep her hands off her new lover, a young man with an accent I could not place, and I admired her unabashed appetite for him.

"Where's home for you?" I asked.

He shrugged and smiled, almost as if he didn't know the answer.

"Yugoslavia," he said. "But I left two days before the war."

His father had been a diplomat. Now everyone in his family was starving. Lost twenty pounds in the last month. He was sending money home, so that they would have food. I asked how people there felt about the NATO action against Milosevic.

"People hate the Americans, because of their power. I've watched CNN. The lies from both sides are terrible. The situation is much more complicated than the news makes it." He was certain that the U.S. had bombed the Chinese embassy on purpose "just to prove they could do anything and get away with

it.” I argued, No, it had been a terrible, stupid mistake. Military bureaucracy screwing up. Not intended. The other Americans agreed, though we sounded half-hearted, defending a high-tech war that makes killing seem as easy as a video game.

“How is it at home now for your generation?” I asked.

“They’ve all left. So have all the professionals. Only the peasants are left and they are so ignorant. But six or seven years ago I saw the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen. One million people in the public square protesting Milosevic. One million—circled by police. They came with their lawn chairs and drinks, and they stayed for a month. It did no good. But it was beautiful.”

When we parted after dinner, he kissed each of us goodbye, first one cheek, then another, then the first again.

“Serbo-Croatians always kiss three cheeks,” he boasted. And the young lovers, whose nations had been so recently at war, headed off into the night.

What stayed with me from that evening was his sense of the beautiful, so foreign to me accustomed to the American obsession with physical beauty. I took his words to mean beauty as collective conscience, collective hope, an answer to the ugliness that the fall of totalitarianism had released in his homeland. His sense of beauty was the moral aspect of human culture, a quality that makes beauty more than skin deep. I wanted to take that sense of beauty home with me, because it abraded against something I had been feeling about living in the American West. Seeing so rich a cultural legacy in Central Europe, and appreciating the risk and sacrifice people had made to preserve it, I had to ask whether Americans had done all we could do to preserve what we treasure about our place. Have those of us living in the wealthiest and most powerful nation on Earth done all we can to shape a lasting and beautiful legacy? Surely we have not. I’m not sure that we even know what our legacy should be. Entertainment? The all-fake, all-fun, all-the-time promises of Las Vegas? Our military hegemony? Won at no small cost to Western communities and landscapes, some of which have become National Sacrifice Areas so that we can enforce democracy around the globe. Shopping? That consumer joy to which every one of us—admit it—is so susceptible and for which the whole world hungers. An evolutionary psychology theory proposes that our

propensity to shop with such reckless abandon is linked to our genetic history as hunter-gatherers. A bison or mammoth offered itself occasionally, but roots and leaves and bark and berries might be gathered everyday. Eyes sharpened for small variations in color, shape and size became extremely adaptive. Our grazing through the marketplace recalls primitive neurological patterns in the mind: it feels right and necessary to get outside and forage, no matter that today it’s for distressed t-shirts and perfecting lingerie and fresh mozzarella swimming in watery broth. What, pray tell, is moral beauty to the American people of the early twenty-first century?

The Old Wild West was the place people came to leave the past behind, to risk the unknown and start over without the oppressive constraints of tradition. Wildness in the land was a thing to be feared; wildness in the man a thing to indulge. The Old Wild West summoned up what poet Thomas Hornsby Ferril called “the frantic restlessness of strength”—what was required to endure the hardship and danger of rugged territory. And the West’s abundant space and resources reinforced that pattern. The frantic restlessness of strength worked for a while through cycles of boom and bust. But all along we were leaving wounds on

the land and its people, wounds for which we rarely held ourselves accountable, because we could always walk away from them to the next new place.

What, pray tell, is moral beauty to the American people of the early twenty-first century?

Now we know there is no escaping our history, our mistakes, and our appetite. In the New Wild West the wide, open spaces expose the ugliness and wounds we create as frankly as they display natural beauty. The old equation is reversed: wildness in the land is a thing to be indulged; wildness in the man a thing to be feared. The power of the West as it lives in our imaginations—wild, magnificent, spacious and free—is challenged by the reality: careening development, degraded habitat, toxic waste, social inequity, and eruptions of violent hatred that haunt our best daydreams about ourselves. Much of our growth is shoddy, and the rest of it is pretentious and remote. Little is built to last or to enhance natural beauty as a shared possession. The shopping mall does not replace the village square, and greeters at WalMart do not replace friendly neighbors.

There’s little consolation for us in the West knowing that the problems we face are global. It just stings a bit more here, because we did not expect it to happen. We thought we had the space and strength and wealth to grow forever. We thought we could start over and over again until we got things right. But

consolation is not what we need. Good inventors that we are, we need mechanisms—morality and law, plans and paradigms—to restrain and gentle us. For all of our goodness, we are not benign animals. It is in our nature to dominate and exploit and control and succeed against the competition. We need to hobble the voices that make false promises about progress—the old forty acres and a mule shell game of campaign and advertising rhetoric. The only progress that makes sense is one guided by moral conscience—which Vaclav Havel defines as “the question of what is decent and what is not, what is morally acceptable and what is not; where compromise is possible and where it is not, where the moral limits of political action lie, and when the feeling that one has behaved properly is more important than any partial visible success.”

The West is a place where we come to feel we are part of a larger and more beautiful natural whole than human communities can provide. And natural beauty can inspire us to acts of conscience. “Beauty feeds us,” writes Scott Russell Sanders, “from the same source that created us.” We come to feel the force of the underlying order of things, the grain of the universe running through rimrock canyon, rattlesnake skin, and our own depths. And we are moved to imagine ourselves not only backward in time to our origins, but forward into a future in which the mysteries and beauties that have inspired us might inspire those who come after us.

Even beauty has its problems these days. Beauty lies: the giant red delicious apple entices with its visual appeal, promising pleasures of flavor and texture, but delivering mealy, tasteless mush. Beauty disguises: the gorgeous mango and watermelon sunset over Phoenix is an advertisement for natural beauty brought to you by particulate matter making the city one of the most accomplished in the nation at the production of filthy air. Beauty sells: the Jeep Cherokee perched on the hoodoo cliff promises that spiritual connection with the land (never mind that the Cherokee have no ancestral ties to red-rock country) can be bought with the keys to the SUV. Beauty excludes: the resortification of beautiful places exiles those who have worked the land and know the place through the labor of their hands. Beauty without a moral context is fool’s gold.

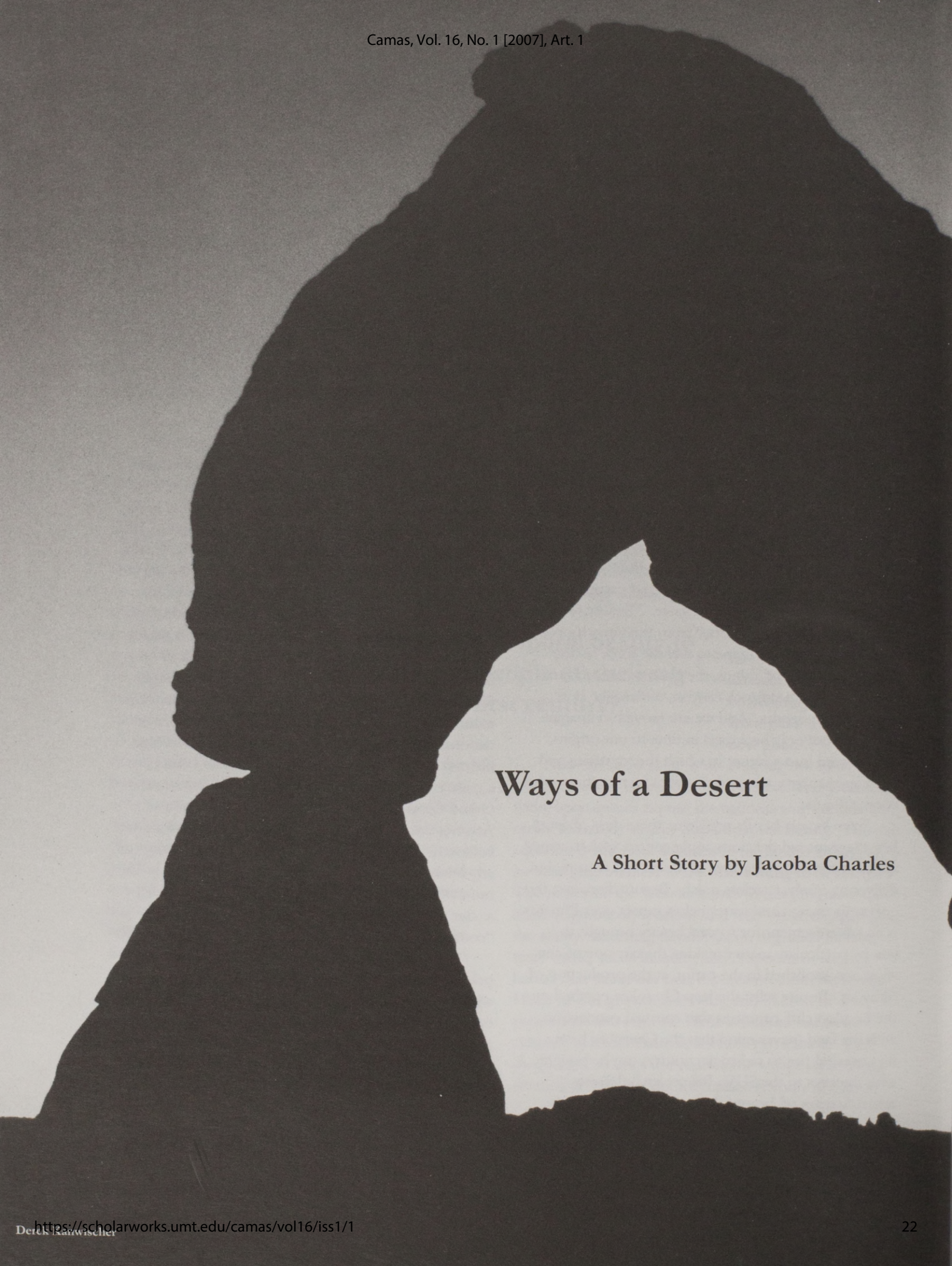
When I moved to Tucson on a 110 degree August day, a tenth generation New Englander, I knew I had



Derek Kanwischer

a lot to learn. Yes, there was sprawl—and a lot more of it now eighteen years later—but in the spaces between explosions of Sunbelt boom, the desert and mountains still set the tone for our region. And this is no accident. The West has vastly more public land than the eastern two-thirds of the nation. Almost 90% of the nation’s federal public lands (outside Alaska) lie in the 11 western states. A fifth of the interior West is owned by Indian tribes. The protection of public lands is one of the things our government has done right; it is our region’s greatest asset, because it both drives the economy by attracting people from all over the world to the West and feeds our spiritual hunger for connection with the larger order and mystery of nature. In Arizona we have a larger total number of national parks and national monuments and national historic sites than any other state. Stewart Udall cites a realtor’s sign on the highway from Williams to the Grand Canyon that reads, “Only fifteen percent of Arizona can be bought or sold.” That may be hard to believe if you live in Tucson or Phoenix or Prescott or any other of the hot spots for growth in the state. But most of the land in Arizona is owned by the public as our common wealth and is, in Udall’s phrase, our “common glory.”

The American West is a world heritage site for the preservation of natural beauty. In a world that bleeds with suffering and war, this may appear ancillary to the cause of peace and justice. It is not. Our species has a great deal to learn about living with our numerousness, but one thing we know is that natural beauty is a legacy the Earth has given us, and we still have the choice to protect it and give it to the future. Natural capital is the foundation of all human well-being. Beauty is its corporate voice.



Ways of a Desert

A Short Story by Jacoba Charles

There is a room, in a house, in a desert. Outside, the air is dry and smells of sand. The landscape is composed of sand, and of lizards. At night, the earth breathes up a cold chill breath, a sweet, dry, sand-smelling breath, and overhead, the moon spills from a teacup crescent into a melon.

At night, there are no lizards. Cold, they hide in places both dry and invisible. Towards morning, a dew collects on bits of dry leaf and cactus spine and rock. The sand is covered with an infinitely thin, wet layer of dew. The sky pales, the stars masked behind the pink and blue and, sometimes, fiery orange. It all depends on the morning. Before the light is a complete thought, a bird sings, invisible in the creosote bush or the saguaro. Do these grow in the same desert? It doesn't really matter. This is the desert, the archetypal desert. Everything grows here. Nothing does. This is where the bones of the earth come to undress, this desert.

The house is in the open. The house is in the shade of a cliff. The house is in a wash, an arroyo, where it gets destroyed by every passing storm. The pebbly earth shifts out from beneath this old house regularly. In the morning, the cool, mud-roofed rooms smell like coffee. In the morning, sunlight reflects off the glass of the trailer window. In the morning, the inhabitant(s) wake somewhere unfamiliar, and crawl from a bedroll, and pack it up to see what the day has in store.

There is a room, in a house, in a desert. The small bed has a mattress with rebellious springs, springs that threaten to become uncontained in the middle of any given night's rest. The room smells almost mousy, and the drawers on the small wooden dresser contain clothing that is mostly well-worn, and mostly of cotton. Old jeans, sun-warmed t-shirts. Who lives here? A poet, a scientist, a teacher. An old ranch hand who is stained with tobacco. A Mexican immigrant, an illegal who works many miles away down that long straight highway that ripples with heat all year round, works over the hill where the grass grows green and palm trees spring 'round the piped-in hotel oasis.

If only this desert were pristine, but we can't even write pristine into our fiction these days. This desert has been cracked to every corner with roads and tarmac, the inquisitive fingers of backpackers and vision seekers and ATV's. Probing its most secret places, its midnights, its watering holes. Intruders glisten in every pair of eyes. The shrike with his lizard impaled on a twig, the mouse come tentatively to a feeding hand. The thirsty, thirsty earth, satisfied in its dryness – all have been seen, uncloaked. Not tamed, but touched. The first step taken. Come; come closer. We won't hurt you.

This is the good part, the gravel track, the trammeled trail. The flower only glimpsed from a long way off, a hot air balloon, a telephoto lens. The petals fall almost unheard. Eyes have been in every corner of this desert, but just barely. (Or have they? Perhaps not. Perhaps not in this story. Perhaps in this story there is a ledge in a canyon, one with a sharp corner and a precipitous edge, and this ledge - with the small plants that grow there, the occasional rain that falls – these remain entirely unimagined, unvisited, unconceived by anyone. Perhaps there is this and much more in our tarnished and perfect archetypal desert.)

There are hard things here. Harder things, harder places. There are the salt ponds and the industrial waste. Industry creeping in around the edges, battling globalization and sand. Rusted iron, toxic lakes, but these are outnumbered. Dwarfed by the bones and spines of the desert. There is the hotel, the travesty of irrigation and transportation and false ideals. Such falsity piped in to this oasis! Carpeting the bones in green, clothing them, sculpting them. As if we weren't here to see the rawness, the gritty edges. Silicon padding, unsubtle curves, it all reflects and reflects back on the reflection here trying to recreate an imagined landscape, a shivering projected image on the desert. The unwary could fall into it, could get lost, this could go on forever. But it won't.

There is a room, in a house, in a desert. The man who lives here rises, cold in the morning. Breath steams cloudy in the pink shadow of dawn. The shower is small and stained yellow, with a plastic door that is hard to open. Curtains have been pulled back, the coffee crackles and pops in the machine. While showering, the resident worries about work and the health of his parents and whether he will ever find love. He doesn't have anywhere to be that morning. He goes outside, turns on the tap, waters the few sorry plants there in pots under an awning. Water hisses down through the cracks in the decking, falls into the pebbly ground like it is falling through a sieve. A lizard waits nearby. It will be getting hot soon, a new day blazing up the valley.

Manicure

In the winter my fingernails grow long
and feminine. They prevent me from knowing
what to do with myself.

I have no reason to cut them and no reason
not to. They keep me counting the shivering,
slivered days that hang frozen in the air
between here and my return
to the tropics of the greenhouse,
the full, satisfied bellies I plant
with each seed.

January light shapes me different
than June, and snow is the only thing that keeps me
from joining
with the day-to-day city panic
that squats hungrily
at my edges.



Jessi Schott



Dave Clark

I am most a woman
with my hands in the dirt, the earth the dough
I cup and crumble, kneading
out the lumps and the weeds. Long nails get me lost
and painful. Men that I have farmed with
stop seeing me as a woman and start looking at me
as a lady. I am no lady.
Of femininity—I have no need.
I am already,
at all times,
a woman of the earth, scarlet zinnias
in my hair and the blush of beet juice
gilding my lips.

Jessica Babcock

Devils Tower

Jennifer Johnson

Down here I walk where I must, through prayer
flags, bundles knotted to the branches of pines,
bark shavings from a porcupine's meal, arranged
nightly into neat piles, sheaths of rock column,

shattered like overturned buses, all this vital debris.
No one climbs today, and the lodge stands empty
except for the spiders, who always arrive early.
It is October and raining. The rain falls

in answer to nothing. The mind thinks a prayer
to vanish the people. Leave the shifting edge,
it says. Leafy spurge, Canada thistle, heavy
boot, houndstooth. The truth is we are

interlopers, every last one. I hear voices
on the ridge, but it's too long since I knew
how to listen. Not from the sky in silver ships,
but wild plum, chokecherry, bacteria, rain-flushed

earthworm, the breathing soil. Those voices,
what do they call this place? *Mato tipila*,
bear lodge. *Mando wakupe*, bear's hat.
Wax?ank?sija tibi, place where bears live.

I want to tell the ones whose presence
I feel like a palm around my heart
that I will not take anything, that I will leave
no sign of having been here at all, but

the truth is (and I know it) I would pillage
every last water-smoothed stone in the Belle Fourche
for my collection. What promise can I make
that no seed of some new destruction rides with me,

shaken like a tick from my sleeve? When night comes,
I lie awake, haunted by the drumming footsteps
above, the insistent shoulder to the door, one
voice above all others, asking to be let inside.



Covenant

No moon, but memory
stays so still we hop rocks
across the head of Ender's Falls,
scramble down granite and loam,
stain our palms
with the pitch of snapped saplings. Below
we brave thunder and spume,
crawl across moss to slip
beneath the black tongues lapping:
flesh like specters
in churned-up silt. This pool
is a great kettle, scraped where
stones stuck in eddies whirled for ages
while the world shook off glaciers,
showed the rivers beneath.
Two slight creatures in the gloaming,
we crouch on the edge to dry.
I watch stars dive
and resurface in small swells,
you gather pebbles, stash them
in the cup of your hand,
and I can hear when you scatter them,
tiny round sounds pricking
the roar. It's like silence now,
that grumble of water;
on any other night
I could have reached up,
touched your arm, brought us
easily to talking over it, but know
we're deeper in now, carved down
to a place bereft of words.

Melissa Mylchreest



Near the Base
of Juniper
Mountain

David Morris

A row of three
bags of bones
wrapped
in dried hide
ribbons of sinew

hang
like marionettes
on the barbed wires
of a tight fence

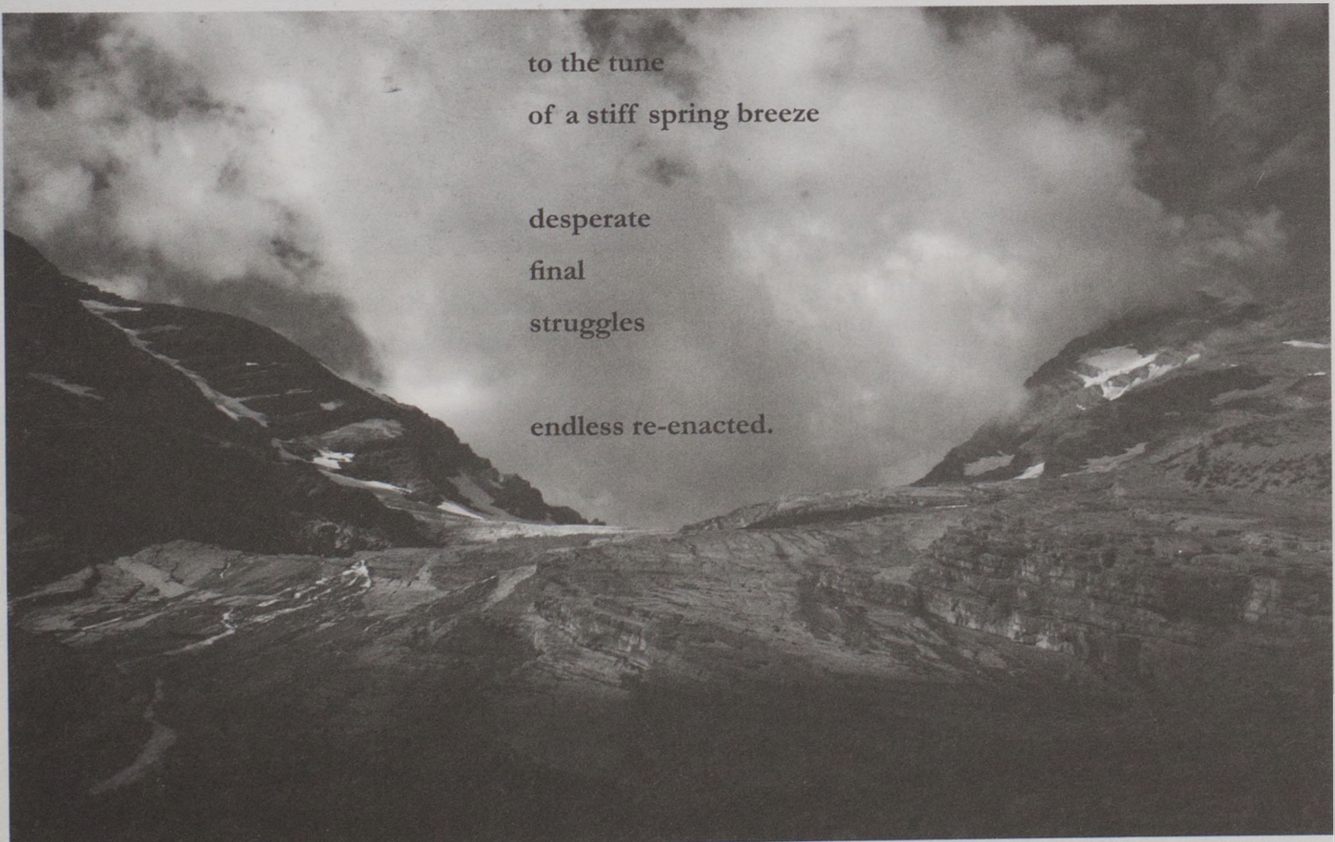
each the victim
of a miscalculation
of too little leap.

The remains
clatter
rattle
spasmodic dance

to the tune
of a stiff spring breeze

desperate
final
struggles

endless re-enacted.



Liz Williams

Finding Numbered Days

Matt Larson

You can smell it through the broken pane of the back door. The dry musty odor of mold and mice. Dust and abandonment. Fleeing the swarms of mosquitoes, following our curiosity, we step slowly through the doorway as glass snaps and crushes beneath our feet. The bright beam of the headlamp illuminates a small narrow path in front of us and a snowstorm of dust moves slowly through the corridor of light. There are silhouettes of piles stacked at the edges of the beam's definition. We yell loudly and listen to our question resonate through the dilapidated hallways. My breath is short and my heart bounces, half expecting a person or a monster to fly out of some unseen corner or behind any number of walls or doorways. I stop and simply look around, feeling safer by not moving, listening to Jared gasp in amazement as he begins to rifle through one of a hundred piles of forgotten things.

A dictionary from 1913. A calendar from 1947. Letters, pictures, catalogues. An inter-Ocean Almanac from 1898. Newspapers, magazines. A New Years greeting from 1935. This is the first of a thousand boxes. As Jared continues to rattle off his findings, my thoughts begin to swell. I'm flooded with questions. They're all too big to fit in my tired head and I begin to feel something less than comfortable in the dark. I turn around, my shoes clicking on the hardwood floor, and stare at a dresser filled with clothes, topped with an array of trinkets and papers. A giant, gothic looking book rests alone on one end. I run my finger across its front, wiping dust from the title. Holy Bible. Opening the cover it reads "To the Campbell's, Merry Christmas, 1893." There are oil pastel illustrations, protected by a thin wax paper. I stop at one depicting the resurrection of Jesus, a halo of white light surrounding his floating body. Glancing to the floor in the next room I notice a mound of black books growing white with mold. And back to the halo. I flip to a dog-eared page and mumble aloud "So teach us to number our days; that we may apply our hearts with wisdom. Psalms 90:12" The verse is striking, too appropriate, and I read it again to myself. I look up, still expecting the monster. "I don't think this stuff is going anywhere. We should go eat."

On the way outside I pause at an antique pump



organ covered in broken glass and scores of music. Brushing them aside, I give a couple thrusts with my foot and place my hands across several dirty ivory keys. No matter which ones I play it bellows the same eerie mess of chords. A shiver runs up my spine.

We seek shelter in the barn. The heavy wooden door creaks and rumbles, wrapped in a thick rug of grass and thistle. There is hay in the loft, but no ladder to get there. Tools still hang from rusted nails and rafters. The stale air smells of dried grass, manure, and machinery. There are stalls, long empty, backed into a wall. A row of doors lying unhinged. We move one and find our beds beneath a large open window overlooking a corral buried in weeds. We lean our backs against the stall wall, sip whiskey, and listen to the mice twitch and scurry along the weathered



Derek Kanwischer

floorboards above us. There is a stretch of starless southern sky beneath the white smear of the Milky Way. Then lightning flashes yellow against its outline and the billowing heads of clouds are revealed. A thunderstorm miles across the prairie. Flash. The storm is silent. Another flash.

I watch the storm quietly from my sleeping bag as nineteen days of biking settle on my body. My mind drowns itself in thought. I feel the endless rolling of South Dakota highway build up in my legs. The incessantly strong winds on my sunburned face. The curiosity of the old couple who told us we could find sleep here with the mice. The brilliant orange of July dusk that accompanied the last miles of the day. The

highway lined on both sides by enormous power lines sagging off into the horizon. The itch of a million mosquitoes that upon our arrival began a frenzy on our sweaty skin. My friends and family who may never understand the things that have taken us in, spit us out, or drove us crazy and to bliss at the same time. I watch the random strokes of white light miles away and brood over the ultimate finality of my trip and my life. What would happen if I disappeared? What would be left for strangers to ponder, to wonder about me? What if my life were left only to the mice and the ravens roosting in the oak trees. In my numbered days how will I resurrect myself? How will I rise to live and know them? Perhaps, I have left my life, or parts of it, to grow thick with dust and mold. I feel as if I've entered a time warp, swept back to something

ancient or forgone. But then I realize that this is now. Not yesterday. Not tomorrow. Now. It's somehow disheartening, yet utterly fascinating. What if it were my family's bible collecting dust on the mantle? Maybe it's good to leave things, to start anew, to wander off in unknown directions. My mind continues to walk, continues to follow the outline of the thunderhead illuminated only by the lightning strike. In a land so open and big, in a place so dead and deserted, I am hopeless in feeling anything but small.

So teach me to number my days, that I might find the joy and meaning in all of them. To apply my heart with wisdom that I too could disappear, forced into abandonment. Did the inhabitants here vanish? Did they heed the advice dog-eared in their bible? I wonder if they'll ever come back or if I could re-establish life here. I wonder if water still floods the dry banks of Goodham, Campbell, or Medicine creeks. I wonder if the storm is always so silent.

The sun streams through cracks and knotholes. It takes me a second to remember where I am. The sky to the south is blue, showing nothing of last night's outbursts. A brief instant of muddled dreams and consciousness. A barn swallow darts through the open window, the deep orange of its belly and the shimmering scarlet of its back flash lightning as the morning sun bounces across their sheen. It makes several circles above us before I notice the mud laden nest clung to a rafter overhead. Another swallow is cut by the sunlight as it passes through the window. They fly so close to me I could grab them from the air. Then, without slowing, one catches the nest, the other a ledge high on the stall wall. Three featherless faces appear, open their beaks and let out a flurry of squeaky begging. It's time for breakfast.

After eating with the swallows, we open the creaking barn door and allow the sun to pummel the sleep from our eyes. Today there is a slight breeze from the north and the droves of mosquitoes have disappeared. Last night as the sun dripped from the sky and we came to stop here in the overgrown driveway we were seized by a million of them. I remember breathing them and spitting them out. You can see our path through the grass as we ran first in circles, then towards the house, up to the locked front door, and around the side. The white paint of the house is everywhere falling off. The shingles are

mostly missing. On the north wall an oak tree has crushed the roofline. On another side a maple grows upwards through a small alcove of the house. We come again to the broken panes of the back door; it still smells and it still opens. The house seems more real, less dreamlike with daylight soaking the floor and lighting the walls. Jared begins immediately where he left off. I walk straight to the organ to make sure its wreckage was not simply a product of the night. Once again it moans a broken tanglement of chords, although not so ghostly as

**Perhaps it is all for the
moment, to help fully absorb
whatever it is I am doing.
Perhaps it helps to number
my days.**

before. I walk back to the Bible, still open to Psalms. I can't understand what could make someone disappear. For someone to leave their family Bible. Or a dresser full of clothes. A trumpet. A maroon typewriter, new and shiny in its case. But they did. They left journals and family photos. Toys and toilets. Telephones and bottle caps. Coolers and linoleum. Flower pots, canning jars, paintings and a grandfather clock. They left the title and deed to the house and the farm. They left the homestead papers and certificates signed by President Benjamin Harrison, 1889 and 1892. But what did they bring?

We stand outside in blowing grass, not saying anything. I look around trying to burn the picture in my head. To remember the smells and the great pools of emotion. Ultimately, I know it's futile. I know that it won't be crisp in my memory. Perhaps it is all for the moment, to help fully absorb whatever it is I am doing. Perhaps it helps to number my days.

Before riding east again, we climb to the top of the metal windmill that slowly sways with the gusting breeze. We look west at the miles we've already traveled. To the rolling highway and the endless hills we'll ride today, dead straight into the horizon. We look at the falling house and the musty barn. We look south where we remember the storm and see only endless blue sky and an ocean of blowing grain.

Missing:

Horse that pulled the rusted harrow.

Farmer. Harness, bit, and reins.

Field.

Currents strong enough to carry silt.

Rills. Ripples. Rapids.

Wildflowers flung across the braided tributaries—golden, purple, and orange sparks against the sand.

Rain enough to fill the reservoir.

The confluence's complexity: Quick floods building bosque and cutting it. The red surge that dropped fertile soil or swept fields away.

A bridge. Was there a bridge? Or a ferry and a ferryman to take them to temple and back again?

The barns and houses, drowned. Who knows now what lies silt-buried under their fallen walls.

Grit that reddened lips and stuck to teeth and tongues.

Found:

Metal 65 years rusted.

Bits of colored glass lined up on a ruined wall.

Names scratched into a cistern: Sarah Ellen Mary. Date: 1911.

Ozone. Thunder. Cold rain spatter on cracked mud.

Bottles and cans tossed from boats. Sunken, recently revealed.

Orchard trees black as if burned. Black crust left by anoxic embalmment under deep water.

Hills striated with gray cobble like tailings from a glacial flood.

Fine sediments robbed de los esteros y las cienegas of the distant Delta del Rio Colorado. The water the vaquita, the regal totoaba, and the desert pupfish swam in.

Tamarisk. Miles of impenetrable tangle of limbs and smoke-blue needles. Trails hacked to cul de sacs or turned back on themselves.

Tracks in the mudbank: raccoon, mule deer, bighorn, coyote, kangaroo rat.

1 flock of white pelicans. Wary.

Taken:

Bones of ancestors, neighbors, and babies who died on the trail. Reburied named or unnamed on a windy hill, just out of sight of the high water line.

Back:

Clump of willow and cottonwood where two rivers meet, a bright yellow-green blur against smoke-blue and cobble-gray.

Standing:

Hoover Dam, miles downstream. Built to make the desert bloom.

St. Thomas Reemerges from the Waters of Lake Mead

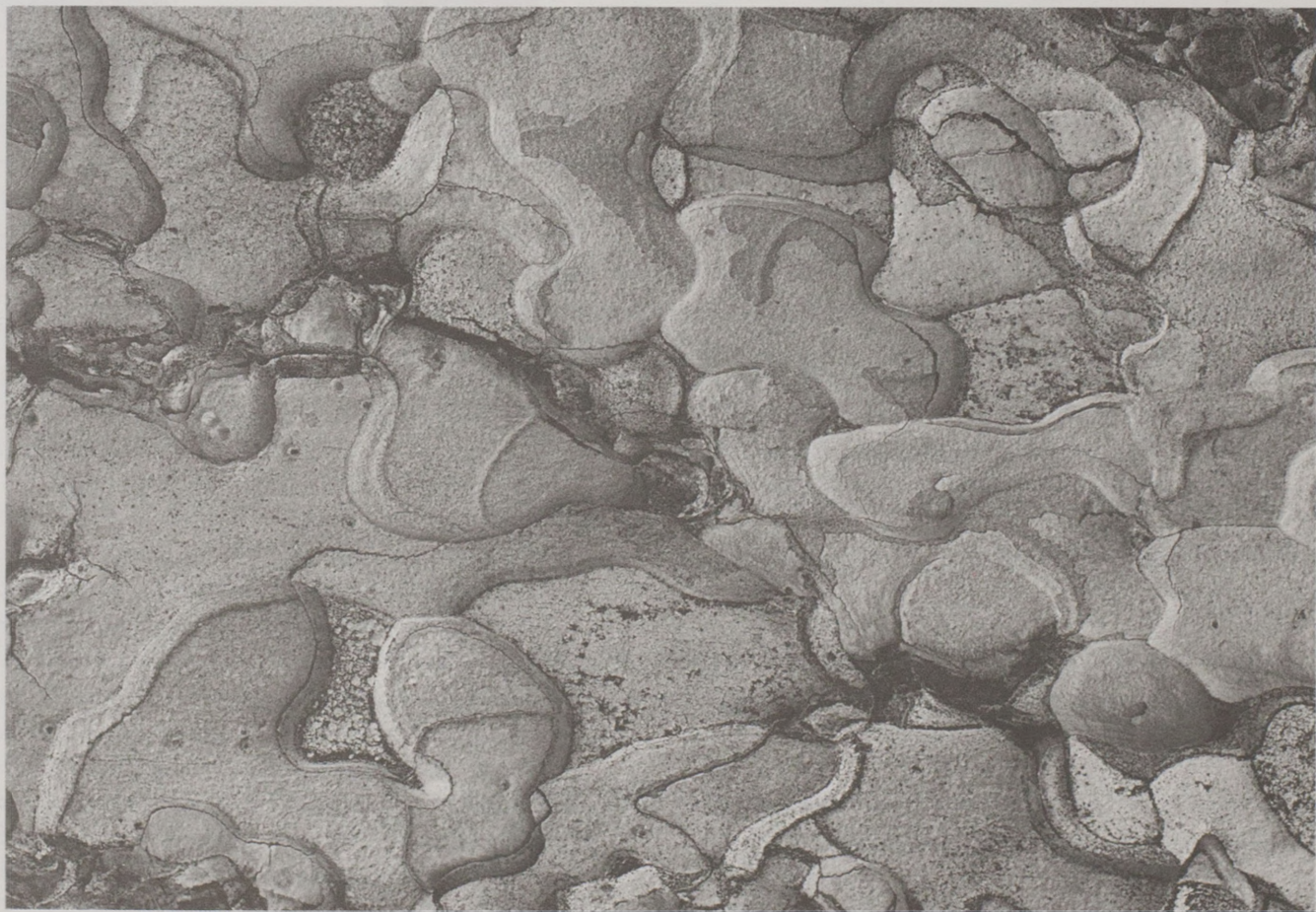
Cleo Woelfle-Erskine



Forest Time

Alison Hawthorne Deming

Forest Road 1510
curves up the flank
of Buck Mountain
into the zone of mist
road canted like a shelf-fungus
though no roots hold it in place.
Mountain works at
softening its sides—
windthrow, cutslope slide,
hillslope slide, slump,
gully and earthflow,
its tools, workday,
ten million years long.



Mike Kautz



Mike Kautz

Conservancy Pines

I have never seen light like this, splintered
vertical sheets illuminating every vein of leaf,

webs like fine fires, each particle a spark
suspended, spinning. Two centuries of remnant

pinetrees cross each other, leaning from the fingers
of their deepest roots, bark transient as loess

against the dissolution of one brilliant star.
It looks like heaven, Daguerre's silver plate

laid bare before angels of moss and lichen,
wind an intonation, a singing through slenderest

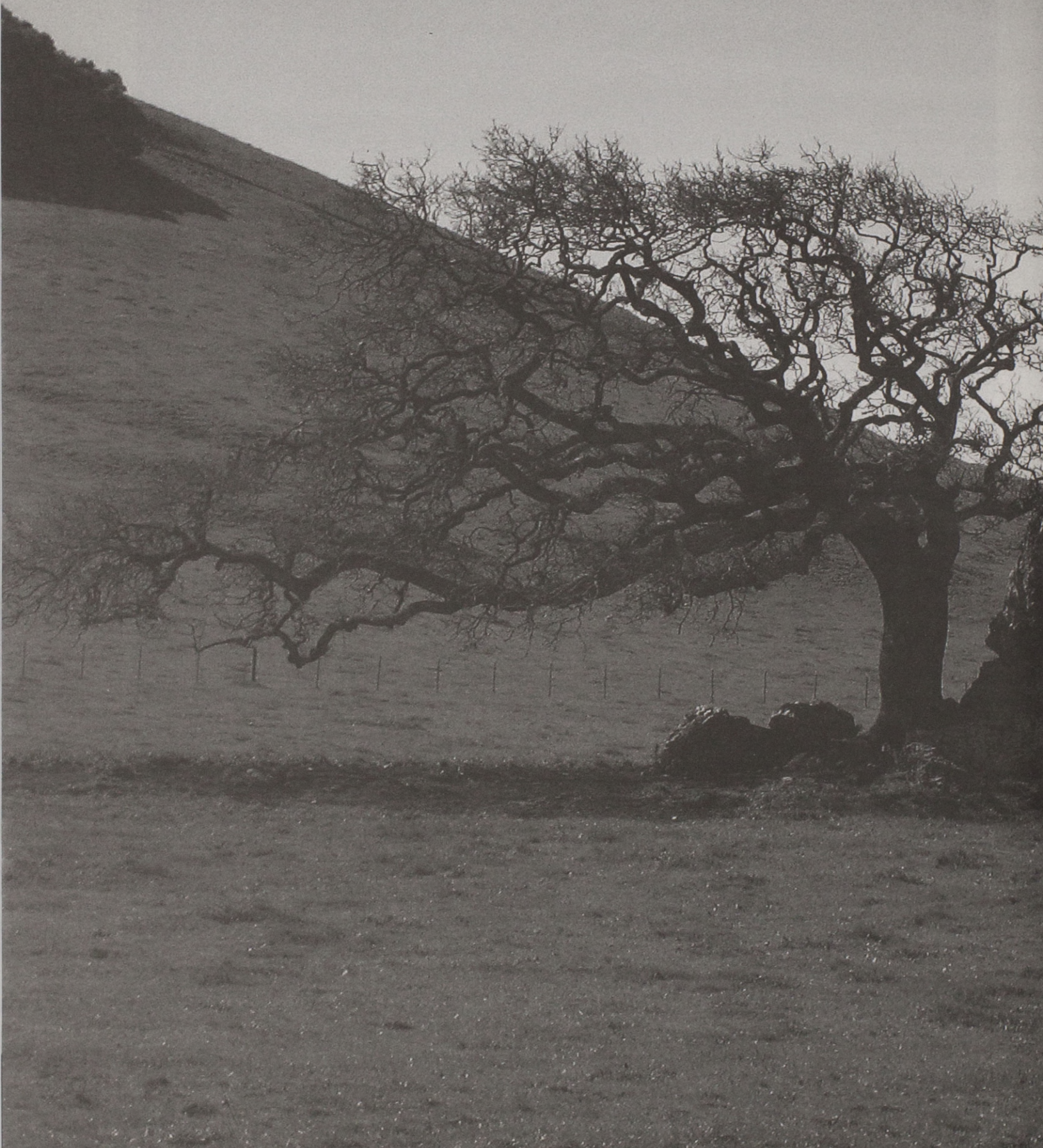
hollows. You say the light has a sound like a train
passing over your body, or a voice that speaks

when no one is listening. What flames might
catch here, marking the faces of Norway pines.

You lift your palms in ascension, as if you could,
as if in rising, burn this image into lasting.

Jennifer Johnson

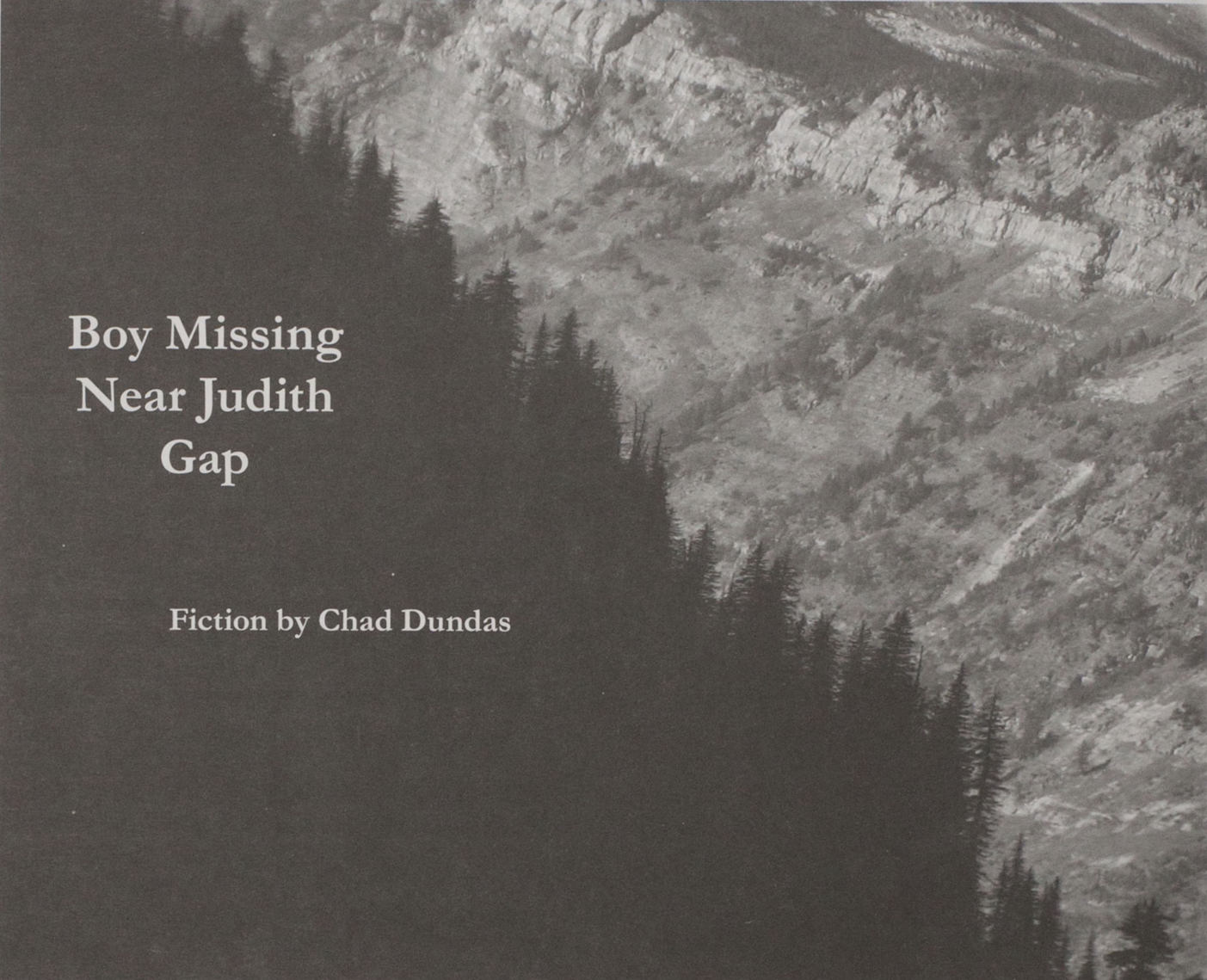
My Hometown Farmer Men



Most men I know would shrug their shoulders,
arms thrown into the air, or out to their sides
like Jesus saying Come to me.
Or like the Statue of Liberty, whispering her jade-painted lips
Give me your tired, your poor. But these men
are the poor. They are
the weary huddled mass. Their slouch and the shuffle
of their feet has its own mantra.
Who knows about these things?
It happened when more of them than not
realized that there was no place left to go. The fields
were not their own, and then there was the poison—
so much poison as strong as the family

Jessica Babcock

in their blood.
Most of the men who grew me up grew me
too big and sad for home
to hold me. There is no holding—me
or them. We cannot be comforted.
We are many pieces and we slip
through any fingers that try. There is no field, no
woodlot, pond, horizon.
They have all gone, and the men—
they too are going.



Boy Missing Near Judith Gap

Fiction by Chad Dundas

Kylie Paul

The governor had to call off his fishing trip in the middle of the holiday weekend to meet with the parents of the missing boy. It chapped him, but the party insisted he go out to Wheatland County and settle things down. A five-year-old was missing two days and two nights after wandering off during a family camping trip in the Little Belt Mountains and the media had the whole state caught up in it. People were flooding the local 911 dispatch with crazy tips and false-alarm sightings. Dogooders and ambulance chasers were coming from all over and getting in the way of things. It was a borderline hysteria situation. The governor had spent the last month tying up stoneflies and dreaming of cold, clear water rushing around his waders, maybe drinking a beer by a campfire. Now this.

On the three-hour drive from the capital the governor rode shotgun in the state Suburban, with his aide driving and the first lady chatting with the governor's bodyguard in the backseat. Even breathing through his mouth the governor could taste the bodyguard's shitty cologne. He thought he could tough it out but the smell parched his throat and his head began to throb and soon

the governor announced he needed to take a piss. The aide checked his watch and said they were on a schedule; he was going to have to hold it. The governor groaned. The first lady leaned forward in her seat and told the aide again that the governor needed to pee. She used the aide's full first name in the way she had of ending a conversation.

They stopped at a gas station. The governor went to the men's and then found the first lady out back by a picnic table. Dark hair and green eyes and a chin a little too blunt. It nearly stopped his heart how much he loved her.

"You look like shit," she said, smoothing his eyebrow with her thumb. "You look like nobody came to your birthday."

There were whispers inside the party that she could be a good candidate someday, if the governor scored the cabinet position he was hoping for from the new president. During the ride, he'd been thinking about the first lady and his bodyguard, who was really just a state trooper in a sport coat. He was pretty sure the two of them were sleeping together.

"I'm fine," he said. "The fishing trip I guess."



He felt stupid saying it like that. He knew this thing with the missing boy was important. It was only May, still freezing at night and there was a storm forecast for the end of the holiday weekend.

The aide showed up with the county sheriff on the cell phone and the governor walked away to talk. Straight off, the sheriff said law enforcement was pretty sure the missing boy wasn't really missing; that the parents killed him and dumped his body somewhere in the woods.

"You're dry-fucking me," the governor said. He watched the first lady walk back to the state Suburban, where the bodyguard leaned against the hood with his hands in the pockets of his slacks. "Are you sure?"

"That's how these things go," the sheriff said. "Generally speaking."

The governor pinched the bridge of his nose and took a breath.

The sheriff said, "We're waiting on you at the Knights of Columbus."

Back in the state Suburban, the governor tore his aide a new one. He sat in back with the first lady and the bodyguard sat up front. Gripping the aide's

seat with one hand, he poked him in the shoulder with a finger to underscore his points about the right and wrong way to shape their message and get it out to the people. The wrong way, the governor said, included but was not limited to commiserating with the perpetrators of infanticide. When he was done the aide looked at him over the top of his glasses.

The aide said, "Alleged infanticide."

For the rest of the drive, the governor buried his face in the dossier on the missing boy, which was just a folder of news clippings that his aide put together for him. Snapshots of the parents and the kid's school picture. They all looked normal enough.

Steel wool clouds took over the sky and the wind battered the wheat fields that pushed in on the highway. Twice, gusts pushed the state Suburban into the rumble strip and the governor grabbed the door handle and said, goddamn it. They made the county line and the Judith Gap wind farm appeared on the horizon. The governor folded his dossier and bent his head to get a better look out the window. Almost one hundred 90-meter wind turbines cresting the ridge like giant skeleton fingers, triangular blades spinning in the on-coming storm. From the distance there was something ancient looking about them, like they might've been there for centuries, though the wind farm was only a couple of years old.

One of the governor's biggest campaign pledges was to put the state in the energy production business. Ethanol plants, clean-burning coal-fired generation facilities all over the eastern half of the state. The wind turbines were just the first step. Seeing them now stirred his belly and he squeezed the first lady's hand until she took it away and went after her nose with the pad from her compact. They'd been out this way two years ago, for the dedication of the wind farm.

"People ask me what the weather's like in Judith Gap," the governor had said in his speech. "I say to them, 'I don't know, I'll tell you when it clears up.'"

It got a pretty good laugh.

Outside the Knights of Columbus a herd of reporters smoked cigarettes and somebody must've had a pack of gum, because they were all chewing when the governor got out of the state Suburban and held the door for the first lady. He kept his head up and smiled, but didn't respond to any of the questions about the missing boy before they ducked in through the building's big glass doors.

The sheriff turned out to be a young guy with glasses and a dirt-farm mustache who hitched his gun belt up around his gut when he saw the governor. The only other people in the lobby of the Knights of Columbus were the parents of the missing boy. The governor recognized them from the pictures in his dossier. The father was tall, almost as tall as the governor, and had a belly on him. He was wearing a flannel shirt tucked into jeans.

The mother was skinny and looked finicky in the face. A long nose. They stood up from naugahyde chairs, cups of coffee in plastic holders sitting on a glass end table and the governor gathered them both up in a big, rough hug before shaking their hands. He introduced himself by name and asked them if they were hungry. He was hungry.

"Can we get you folks something to eat?" he said.

The governor did a lot with food. Casual luncheons, breakfast buffets, black tie fundraisers for the party. He was at his best when he had a full plate in front of him. A big appetite, the bolo tie – that stuff played.

The father said he could eat. The mother didn't say a word. They were both bleary and pale and the governor told the aide to run out and pick them up something. He looked at the first lady and she said she just wanted black coffee. She took his arm when he offered and he felt his mood start to lighten. He glanced at the bodyguard, who stared straight ahead.

The four of them all sat down at a big meeting table in the back office and the first lady touched each of the parents on the hand. She said they were all so sorry. She said that the state's top people and best resources were one hundred percent dedicated to resolving the situation. That was a good way of putting it, the governor thought, not too committal over guilt or innocence. Slick and smart. She still had the nose of a prosecutor.

The food came and they all ate, except the mother, who just pushed it around in the Styrofoam container with a plastic fork. The governor reassured them that everything that could be done was being done to locate their boy. He asked them some questions, whether the boy was into sports, what he'd been wearing the day he disappeared. The parents didn't say much. Finally the father sighed and said they were pretty anxious to get back to the base camp and help out with the search. When they all stood up from the meeting table, the governor noticed the boots on the father of the missing boy. He had the smallest feet the governor had maybe ever seen on a grown man.

Back out in the lobby, the governor put his lips close to the sheriff's ear. "They're guilty as grave robbers," he said. He made sure to shake hands with everybody and hugged the parents one more time before they went out and piled back in the state Suburban.

At the motel, the first lady set up her laptop on the round table by the window. The governor sat on the bed with the TV going and stared at her back. He wanted to say something to take away the distance he felt between them.

"They didn't even have the Internet here a few years ago," he said. "It's the wind turbines bringing the whole area back."

She didn't look. "You think you'll be really late?" she said.

He hoped not. He didn't want to be out in those woods much after dark. He said: "I told you the sheriff said the kid's dead already."

She turned in her seat. "You don't really believe that," she said. It was her courtroom voice, the kind that could cut either way. It chapped him, but he didn't say so. The first lady went back to her computer and the governor sat looking at a baseball game with the sound down. After a while he got up and changed into a plaid Woolrich shirt and a stiff pair of carpenter's jeans. He checked himself in the mirror and asked the first lady how he looked.

"Gubernatorial," she said. She stared out across the parking lot where the aide and bodyguard were unloading bags from the state Suburban. It looked like rain.

"I'm taking John with me," he said. John was the bodyguard's name.

He watched her for a reaction, even though he knew there wouldn't be one. She nodded and kissed him on the cheek, then went into the bathroom and closed the door. In a minute he heard the shower running.



For the volunteer search they were split into two-man teams. Each man got an orange cap. Some of the guys passed out rifles and the bodyguard handed the governor a double-barreled shotgun and he broke it over his arm. There were a bunch of police cars and TV satellite setups and trucks from the Forest Service and Fish and Wildlife. Somebody spread a topo map out on the hood of a cruiser and they got instructions from the state trooper who'd charted out the search. They would walk a loose parade line and the teams would get separated, the officer said, but they all had GPS units and radios, so it wouldn't be a problem. The whole time the guy talked, the media stood around taking pictures of the governor with his cap and gun.

It didn't take long after they set out before it was just the governor and his bodyguard alone in the hills. They hiked and he studied the man from behind. Thick through the shoulders, but shorter than the governor and with a bald spot showing above the adjustable snaps on his hat. Big, meaty hands swinging at his sides. They shared a canteen of water and talked about their prospects of finding the boy, which they both agreed were nonexistent. They talked about football and whose colors the governor would wear when the two state university teams played each other in November. It surprised the governor how well they got on.

The forest got thick and mossy and they found bear tracks in the mud as big as the governor's head. The two

of them squatted by the tracks and rested and then the bodyguard nodded at the shotgun and the governor made sure it was ready to go.

They came to a ridge that looked out into a valley of soft yellow wheat. In the distance, the wind farm, propellers spinning in the jet stream. The bodyguard glassed the valley with his binoculars. The governor stood and drank from the canteen. His face felt hot and he was sweating from the hike. He wondered if he could push the bodyguard off the ridge and say he fell. The drop was a ways, but it might not kill a man.

The bodyguard put the glasses down and reached for the canteen. "What's funny?" he said.

"You think I could really kill a bear with this thing?" the governor asked. He shouldered the shotgun.

"Scare it maybe," the bodyguard said. "Or just piss it off." They both smiled and the governor nodded and they set off back toward the base camp.

The storm hit full over night and in the morning there were tree branches and tumbleweeds lying in the streets. The governor stood at the window of the motel room watching teams of men clear the parking lot while the first lady tapped away at her laptop. She'd quit her job as a county prosecutor to be the first lady and now she earned twice as much as the governor doing consulting work for big firms.

He touched her shoulder and she smiled at him without really looking up from her computer and her coffee cup. It made him feel like something had broken loose inside him and for a minute he forgot to move or even breathe. When he found his bearings he went into the bathroom and called his aide and they met in the lobby of the motel.

The aide carried the date book that controlled the governor's life. The governor asked him what was in the book for next week. A meeting with the mining board, the aide said, and then the ribbon cutting at the new high school that would open in the fall.

The governor said to cancel it all. He said he and the first lady were taking a vacation, maybe to the lake or to that ski resort she liked. They needed a week or so and would pick it all up again when they got back. The governor talked in a rush. He looked the aide in the eyes and said please. He tried to keep the desperation out of his voice.

"Not a chance," the aide said. "I'm not canceling on the mining board."

"You're fired then," the governor said.

"I'm also not fired," the aide said.

The mood at the base camp shifted from rescue to recovery. Even the reporters smoked their cigarettes and wisecracked under their breath with an air of grim acceptance. Still, they drove out there for one last walk. This time the bodyguard carried the shotgun. It was hard going over the wet ground and it drizzled on and off, but they managed to cover more ground than the first day and still found nothing. Near dusk, the bodyguard said they'd better turn back and the governor grunted his approval. He was tired and his legs and hips ached.

They found a clearing with a flat rock for the governor to sit on and tie a boot that had come undone. The bodyguard stood with his back to him and pissed against a tree. A breeze came through and the governor took off his cap and tipped his face back and sighed.

After a minute, the governor asked the bodyguard if he was fucking his wife. The governor had a small rock in his hand and said it without looking up, running his thumb over the rock and concentrating very hard on the texture of it. When the bodyguard was done, he zipped up and came back across the clearing and took a second to think before he said: "If I were, I wouldn't tell you."

"I want you to stop," the governor said.

"It's not really up to you," the bodyguard said.

The governor stood up too fast and it made his head wobble, the colors of the woods swelling around him. He dropped the rock and said: "Now you listen to me," but trailed off. He was very close to the bodyguard, smelling his cologne, his body tensed and shaking.

The bodyguard spat into the weeds. "What if I was in love with her," he said. "Then what?"

"The whole state is in love with her," the governor said. "Have you seen her?"

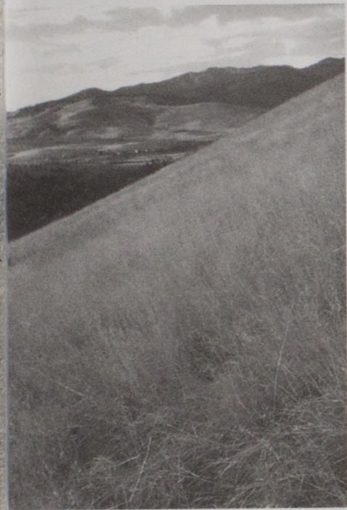
The bodyguard still had the shotgun crooked in his arm. Now he shifted it from one side to the other. "She's going to leave you," he said. "She told me she was."

But as soon as he said it, his face went slack and the governor saw the anger drain out of his eyes. He could tell it was the first time the bodyguard had said that out loud and he was just now realizing how ridiculous it sounded. The first lady of the state running off with the governor's bodyguard. The state trooper in a sport coat. His lips went thin and colorless and he had a look of such complete, pitiful sincerity that the governor had to shake off a wave of aching sadness for him.

"Jesus," the governor said. "Do you have any idea the things I could do to you?"

The bodyguard sneered. He said: "Don't bother," and pushed past the governor into the trees.

The governor asked him where he thought he was going, but the bodyguard just kept walking. Soon the governor couldn't see him, could only hear the sound of his boots crunching in the dirt and the leaves and he yelled for him to stop. The bodyguard had the GPS and the radio clipped to his belt and the governor didn't know



if he could find his way back to camp on his own. He yelled again but got no answer. It was getting dark in the clearing and the breeze was turning to stiff wind. It would storm and freeze again overnight and the governor felt a rush of panic at the thought of being alone out there. He picked up the gun and started into the woods after the bodyguard, calling out for him to stop. He listened for the sound of the bodyguard's footsteps, but the woods were silent except for the wind.

The governor thought of firing the shotgun into the air. It was getting dark fast. He checked the shells in the gun and then snapped it shut and put the butt to his shoulder. He was about to pull the trigger when he heard the bodyguard yelling his name and he put the shotgun down and ran. He found the bodyguard in a small gully, a place where a thick stand of trees partially hid a sharp dip in the ground. The bodyguard was crouched at the edge of it and the governor came and stood behind him. The missing boy was down in the little hole, curled in a ball with one leg twisted out away from his body. The boy was blue and dead.

The two of them stayed there a long time without moving or saying anything.

The boy must have wandered in through the trees, maybe in the dark, and fallen in the hole. He'd broken his leg in the fall and was trapped down there and died, from the cold or from hunger or shock. Whatever it was, it probably took a while. The governor caught his breath and then said every curse word he knew. The bodyguard stood and asked him what they should do. The bodyguard said the state troopers would want to come out and tape off the area, run an investigation, but the governor said no.

"He just fell and died," the governor said.

He stumbled down into the hole and wrapped the boy's body in his jacket. The body was light and hard and smelled of stale urine and pine needles. The bodyguard took his hand and helped pull him back up into the trees. He carried the body across his chest and it was cold without his jacket, but the governor did not put him down or stop again to rest. It was full dark when they reached the camp and the big temporary light towers brought in by the highway department were blinding as they came out of the trees. The flock of reporters rushed to meet them, toting cameras and extra lights and shouting questions. The bodyguard stepped up to head them off and the governor took the boy's body to the medical tent and made sure the EMTs wrapped him in a sheet and put him in the ambulance before the reporters could get any more pictures. Then he went to see the parents.

They set up another tent in the rain for the press conference and when the first lady showed up she made them turn the stage and the podium so the cameras would pick up the wind farm in the background. The governor stood in a line with the parents, the first lady,

and the country sheriff, all of them squinting in the glare of the cameras and the portable light towers. There were not a lot of questions and nobody had much to say, but the governor had to stop talking a couple of times to clear his throat and wipe his eyes. The reporters tried to ask the parents some things, but finally the governor said to give them a break.

It was after midnight when the press conference finally wrapped. They were on their way back to the motel in the state Suburban when the cell phone rang and the aide said it was the new president. The president said he'd seen what the governor had done on the television and said he was still keeping him in mind for that cabinet position. The governor said thank you, Mr. President and that was it. The governor hung up and the first lady smiled and squeezed his hand.

At the motel, the first lady went into the bathroom to brush her teeth. The governor was standing by the window again, watching the first glimpses of purple light start to play above the mountains, when she came out and slipped an arm around his waist.

"I'm sorry about fishing," she said.

He leaned into her and they kissed. Underneath her jacket she was cold and the governor slipped it off and pushed his face against her neck. They sat on the bed and he rubbed her hands until they were warm. She stood and faced him and took off her clothes and the governor put his hands together on the small of her back and kissed her belly. Her fingers went into his hair, pulling him closer and he bit the point of her hip bone, her stomach tightening in little quick beats, and he moved his hands down and around her thighs. She undid the first two buttons on his shirt and he did the rest.

He slid her down onto the bed and got on top of her. There were two small moles just below one of her breasts and he kissed them for a long time before he inched down her ribcage and between her legs. She sucked in a breath and held it. In a minute she pulled him back up and helped him inside her. The governor kissed her nose, moving as slowly as he could until she rolled him over and got on top.

She braced herself against his chest with two hands pushing. Her hair fell around her face and he watched her. "I love you," she said, shifting her hips back and forth on him. "I love you."

He knew he was going to lose her. Not to the bodyguard or anyone else, but to the rest of it. She would never leave him, but he would go to Washington with the new president and the party would make her governor and then senator and then who knows what. She was better at all of it than he was and he was damn good. Someday they wouldn't be like this. Someday he would forget how she looked when they woke in the morning and how she tasted when they made love. He would hate her for it. Someday, he thought, but not today.

Vocabulary Lesson

Melissa
Mylchreest

I.

et al.: Camas, Winter 2007-2008

I.

Summer Beam – a major beam that spans between girts or plates

In June the hemlocks came down from Barkhamstead, huge trees hewn to save them from a useless end: the wooly adelgids' burrowing death. We plucked them up at the season change, sliced them to last past those fallen in the forest. A whole stand lay in the yard, pale and stinking of pitch.

II.

Bent – a truss that makes up one cross-sectional piece of the frame

II.

We leaned into this work early, rose up from it to find the sun westing, pressed palms to kinked backs, learned to move quickly out of the frozen moment of watching a chisel fall, how it does what it does to flesh so sharply that there is no blood.

Knee Brace – a small timber framed diagonally between a post and a beam

Shoulder – point of intersection at the joint of two assembled timbers

A day's labor: boots buried in blond curls and shavings cut from fickle grain, an arm that goes on pounding long after you've stopped, and defeated left thumbs bound.

Stub Tenon – tenon that stops within the timber it joins

III.

Beetle – a large wooden mallet weighing 15 to 20 pounds.

III.

Cicada weather, and sweat mixes with chips in the troughs of mortises, working past dark under moth-light and bat-shadow.

Bird's Mouth – a V-shaped notch cut in the bottom of a rafter to receive the plate

Then finding one daybreak our breath hung up before us, a wedge of geese beating down into the pond as the last purlin is finished, the final splinters slicked out.

IV.

Plates – major horizontal timbers that support the base of the rafters

IV.

Raising day: a dozen hungry men in denim leaning into timber, hauling pulleys, pulling rafters roofward, hollering and hammering.

Butter – a pike pole; a long sharpened pole used for raising frames

Stew, corn bread and coffee as the leaves fall into the refilled clearing bumping sawdust into our bowls burning our mouths to be back at it sooner,

Tongue and Fork – a type of joint in which the tongue of one timber fits between the two prongs of the other

V.

King Post – a central vertical post extending from bent plate to the junction of the rafters

V.

watching my father at the end of the day nail the pine to the peak, raising my glass with the rest and when they have gone, pausing within the tangle of joints to test the floorboards for a barndance.

Strut – a short timber designed to act in compression along the direction of its length

Norman Clyde

by Paul Willis

Back in the sixties a friend of mine
surprised him in the High Sierra,
stumbling into his hidden campsite.

Clyde must have been 80 by then,
well finished with his first ascents.
Stacks of kindling lay about,

and Greek and Latin classics flapped
on slabs of granite. Norman turned,
one eye a red socket, his hands

having a small, glass sphere. What he held
flashed quick in the sun like mountain summits,
earth's fire, Prometheus still unbound.

Coyote's Relinquish Story

by Abby Chew

I am waiting in the highest peak of a golden elm.
This is fall, and I know what it means to wait out the drop. I have a
paw, but I told you it was a hand. I've lied
before. I lied about my age once. I've lied
about car insurance and where I was last night
when I came home and Papa was waiting
on the porch and the ruff around my neck
smelled of whiskey and smoke and something more,
something musky and rotten.
It was the cave I was lying about then,
for the hell of it and for the safety. You guard
a place like that with the bruises on your body.
You do it. I did. You will be glad.



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