

Camas

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Summer 2015

Camas, Summer 2015

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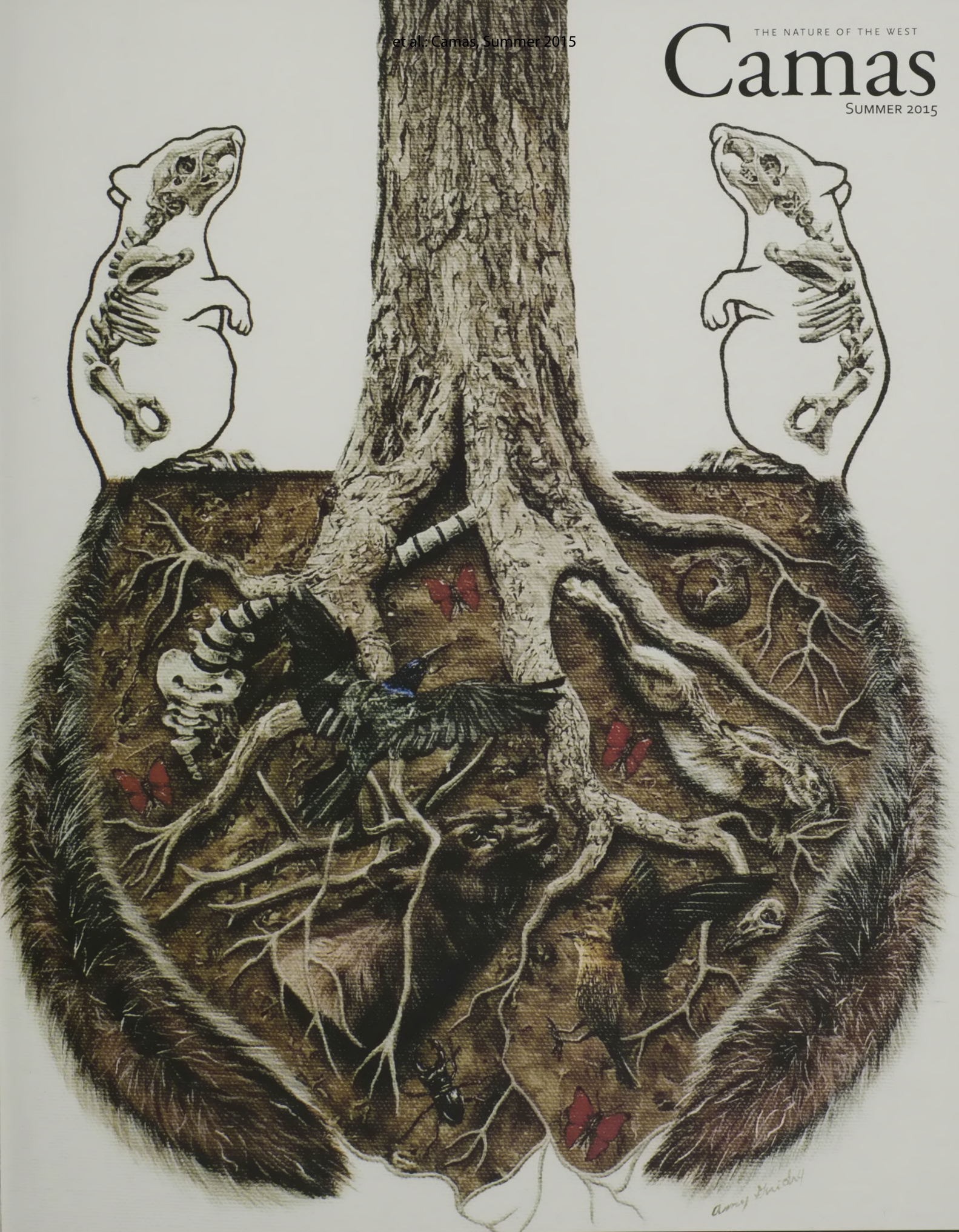
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Camas

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

VOLUME 23 NUMBER 2

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Camas Magazine cultivates a community of writers and artists dedicated to promoting ecological and cultural diversity and resilience in the American West.

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OUR TITLE *Camas* takes its name from the plant *Camassia quamash*, which is native to the American West and has historically been used as a staple food and medicine for local indigenous communities. The practice of harvesting camas continues a longstanding, reciprocal relationship between land and people.

OUR HISTORY Founded by Environmental Studies graduate students at The University of Montana in 1992, *Camas* provides an opportunity for students, emerging writers, and established authors to publish their work alongside each other.

OUR FRIENDS *Camas* received support for this issue from the Associated Students of The University of Montana, the Clark Fork Coalition, the Wild Rockies Field Institute, the Missoula Writing Collaborative, Northwest Connections, the University of Montana Environmental Studies Program, and donors.

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COVER ART: *Symbiosis* BY AMY GUIDRY
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/camas/vol23/iss2/1>

Ram BY TREVIAN STANGER



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TREVIEN STANGER is a writer, photographer, and tree planter from the lush forests of New England. He is currently completing a book about hitchhiking and is just beginning another about planting trees along streams.

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DANIEL WINTHROP was raised in the mountains of Colorado and has since moved north where she spends her time writing and working with her hands on the land.

From the Editors

On a warm afternoon this April, Emily and I stood talking at a backyard barbeque and gathering. Our palms balanced plates piled high with food, and we talked about our families, both of which were experiencing some turbulence. Above us, two Asian plum trees blossomed with white flowers, while the evening turned the hills of Missoula from gold to purple. Below us, Emily's two young daughters ran around the yard, weaving through our legs beside the chicken coop and garden. The two girls belly-laughed and stopped occasionally to pant for air. Dozens of friends mingled in the yard, picking up second helpings of food, listening to the live music, and playing games.

This evening made us both wonder: as our planet enters such unpredictable chapters of ecological crises, how can we even think to move forward without the increased support of others? And how can we feel confident venturing out into the wilds for inspiration if we have no vital human community in which to return? It became clear:

We simply can't do this alone.

The submissions we received for this issue of *Camas* confirm this. We encountered themes of rediscovery through the interaction and reclamation of wonder. By the end of this issue, you'll feel at times self-reliant, then ultimately incapable of going it alone. Each selection, in its own way, tells a story about how our personal perceptions might help us understand the necessity for our communities and our families.

In Bryce Andrews' "Open Letter to a Grizzly," we tumble down a hillside with a bear and a steer, coming out the other side humbled. In "I-70" and "Yellow Jacket," we viscerally feel the ways the world can break us. Then we experience the opposite; "The *Daoine Sídhe*" embraces a childlike vulnerability to love and magic, and "The Wilderness Act Turns 50" teaches us how to fall in love with place.

Whether reading of individual encounters ("Bull Elk in October," "Monte Sereno," "History of Western Movements") or of moments together with loved ones ("Helping with Food," "Conversations about Bees"), the writing in these pages helps us attune our eyes and hearts to see the Earth and have it see us back, to feel that the Earth "loves us in return" (Review of Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*).

The barbeque ended and Emily and I retreated to our separate lives, relishing in the simple beauty of the gathering—food, friends, music, kids. Communities are made of individuals—vulnerable, permeable, and shaped by his or her environment. If that environment is degraded, buzzing with fewer bees, tumbling without grizzlies or elk, or void of water as a mirror to our own inner strength, we might be in trouble.

To revivify this love for interaction, with what Barbara Kingsolver once called a "newborn wildhooray," we need both individual experience and a strong social fabric. We hope the new issue expresses this tension, from a mysterious planet that calls on us from both sides—singular and plural—to inhabit our home in the most intimate and creative ways possible.

Nick & Emily

Freezeout Lake BY A. ANDIS

Table of Contents

NONFICTION

- 6 Open Letter to a Grizzly
Bryce Andrews
- 14 A History of Westward Movements
Kaity Teer
- 24 The Wilderness Act Turns 50:
Celebrating the Great Laws of 1964
William deBuys
- 30 Conversations about Bees
Dionisia Morales

FICTION

- 12 Kula
Daniel Winthrop
- 16 Yellow Jacket
Gregg Kleiner

POETRY

- 5 On Alces Lake
Sarah Aronson
- 9 Stains
Allison Linville
- 11 I-70
Brendan Jordan
- 23 Monte Sereno
Amy Miller
- 29 Helping with the Food
Bette Husted
- 37 Bull Elk in October River
Chris Dombrowski

BOOK REVIEW

- 38 *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Kimmerer
Trevien Stanger

CODA

- 40 *The Daoine Sídh*
Brian Doyle



Waterfall in Ford's Terror BY A. ANDIS

ON ALCES LAKE

SARAH ARONSON

A bundle of lupine.
A morning without that insistent rooster.
A clean look at a woodpecker.
But of all the things I've wanted to gift you,
none more so than that silvery trout.
Half-hooked it slipped from your hands off
the stern of your canoe. We watched it sink,
meter by meter—helpless and belly-up—on
Alces Lake.

The glint of scales fresh on your palm,
you paddled us back in silence.
Not wanting for anything.
Not
a thing.



Open Letter to a Grizzly

BRYCE ANDREWS

REMEMBER, BEAR, WHEN I FIRST MOVED HERE—a rank amateur? The sunset was so beautiful and the ensuing darkness so ripe with stars that I forgot to close the garage door. While I slept you moved through that good darkness, slipped between the backhoe and tractor, shredded the seat of the four-wheeler I'd used all day, and left by a different route, stamping plate-sized tracks through the mud and spring snow. You went across my concrete stoop that day—stood on my actual doorstep—before walking south along the gravel road for the steep shins of Sheep Mountain. I rose and found the pugmarks. Auspicious, I thought.

I grew to believe that you were mine among bears and I was yours among men. Was this a conceit? Perhaps. Many of your kind walked through the barnyard that May. There were more of you in the Basin than there ever were of us. I was not the only one among the ranch crew to brush close with the ursine world. I was not alone, either, in having my tools gnawed or my porch dirtied with outsize tracks.

Maybe it doesn't matter, Bear, if you chose me, because

I sure as hell chose you. I knew you from the first by the way you dragged your left hind-foot in the trail mud. I knew you from a distance: the darkness of your coat betrayed you. I liked the way you chose to sit in a bluebunch park halfway up Sheep Mountain, flipping rocks in search of grubs and looking down at our little cluster of buildings with unsettling persistence.

I sat on my porch and stared back through binoculars, peering hard in the grainy light of dusk until the curtain came down or you slipped away through timber. You came to the meadow for six evenings running, and I began to think it meant something. I waited on the seventh night, too, but you never showed.

We had our near misses. Once I rode a winter-sour horse into an aspen grove and you loped out the other side, shockingly light-footed and quick for your size. And then there was the day when I hiked up an elk trail, stayed a little while at an unnamed lake, and descended to find my bootmarks overlain by the ovals of your pads.

It seemed inevitable that we'd meet, and when I

thought of how that might go, a fine sense of trepidation settled in my stomach. It seems strange to say it now, but I walked high paths through thick forest with the same feeling I used to get when asking pretty girls to dance.

There was one place I didn't want to see you—down in the swales of the Reed Meadow. We never hayed it that year. The grass, left for late-season grazing, grew Serengeti tall. I changed irrigation dams all through the summer, parting waist-high stems with a shovel on my shoulder and my heart in my throat.

You haunted the Reed, coming night after night with your shambling cousins to dig for Yampa roots that smelled like black licorice. Every day I stumbled through fresh excavations. I set the dams as quickly as I could, tipping the ditchwater downhill, looking over my shoulder all the while.

It was our fault that you had to visit the Reed at all. But for our timber sales and the creeping malaise of climate change, you would have been up in the highest country, prowling the forests and daylighting the whitebark pine-nut caches of luckless squirrels.

With those forests barren, or worse, gone, you looked elsewhere for your living. Led by that prodigious nose, you walked the periphery of the cattle herd en route to night-till the meadow, caught a whiff of the only thing that matters to a scavenger, and knew what would happen to the steer before I ever did.

Though he arrived haggard and unwell, the steer wasn't the worst of our yearlings. In fact, if I'd had to lay bets against the reaper that first day, I'd have picked him to live and a gaunt, roan heifer to die. I doctored him for the first time off the hay wagon—dropped a loop around his neck, snubbed my rope around the bale spike and reeled him in like a gargantuan, thrashing fish. Pure white, he bled vividly where I pricked him with the hypodermic needle.

I gave him antibiotics, and boluses of different sizes, colors and shapes. I did everything I could within the confines of ranch medicine. Though I dosed, poked, and prodded, he died. When he went I was ready with a plan, and drove the ranch's old side-by-side four-wheeler into the pasture. After skidding the steer onto a little rock outcropping, I rolled him into the Bobcat's bed.

I hauled the carcass up a long, bumpy fire road. The way was rocky, and in some places time had stolen entire switchbacks. It was slow going, but when the tires lost their grip and the whole rig skittered sideways through cobble, I pressed on toward Sheep Mountain and the dark-pine steeps. It was late in the afternoon, and though the sun had only just slipped behind the mountains, I could see that the eastern sky was turning—bruising dark before my eyes.

I drove with the steer's deadweight sliding back and forth in the Bobcat's plastic bed. When I goosed that little, yowling machine through hairpin turns, the wind yawed around and brought me the reek of death.

I knew the right place when I saw it—just below the ridgeline, nearly to a switchback turn, a single Douglas fir stood out from the tan crew-cut of the hillside. Not far from the tree was a little drainage with the sort of thicket that I thought might hold a bear.

So I stopped, tipped the bed up and let the steer fall in a pile. With a pry-bar for a lever, I rolled him toward the road's edge until the pull of gravity took over. He wanted to run, that steer, but I held him back, and the two of us skidded downhill to the base of the fir tree.

Now here's where I should apologize, Bear, and maybe set the record straight. You're wondering, maybe, why I didn't just leave the steer for you and quit the woods—why I didn't drop the meat and skedaddle home to my hearth and bright-lit windows.

The thing is, I had to see you. I could not stand the thought of waking in the morning to find nothing but a tree on that hillside. I had to watch you take the gift I offered—and so I scrambled back to the Bobcat, pulled a coil of wire and pliers from the jockey box, and went to work.

First I tipped the steer into a sitting position. It took some doing, but with the pry-bar, good luck, and gravity, I got both sets of his legs wrapped around the fir.

Then I wound the wire tight around hocks and hooves, handcuffing the steer into an awkward coniferous embrace. I doubled and cinched the loops, feeling a little guilty that you'd have to dismember the carcass to get it loose. I even worried for a while that you might smell man's reek on the wire and disappear hungry into the dark.

The following morning, I went to gather horses in the half-light of dawn. Sheep Mountain and the sky were two shades of murky blue. The geldings stood together in a little copse of aspens. They spooked from me and loped away uphill, bucking and backbiting through the fescue and sage.

I followed, climbing until the Basin spread out like a cupped hand and the sun's bright rim showed above the mountains. Just below the hilltop where the horses milled, I turned south and lifted my binoculars to see what I could see.

I set my eyes to the lenses at precisely that strange and revelatory moment when color returns to the world. What started as a leak—a bright few daubs and flecks, a glint or two on the highest snowfields—became a flood. Night burned off like a fog, rising to dissipate in the deep bowl of the sky.

*You haunted the Reed,
coming night after night
with your shambling
cousins to dig for Yampa
roots that smelled like
black licorice.*



Winona and the Big Oil Windigo BY JASON CLARK

The far side of the Basin snapped into focus. I followed the zigzag line of the old logging road in its course up the shin of Sheep Mountain. I saw the tree, with the steer white as a cotton ball at its base. By some serendipitous miracle, I timed things well enough to watch your low, dark shape emerge from the timber.

You walked to the steer and sat up on your hind legs. The two of you were the same size—a saltshaker, a pepper grinder—a perfectly matched set.

You reached for the steer, tentatively at first and then with purpose. You took him in your arms the way he held the rough-barked tree. From my great remove it was bloodless, even tender, how you two nestled together while the peaks blazed yellow with new sun.

And then, dropping your head to his shoulder, you began to dance, rocking side to side in time with my heartbeat. The bright skirmish line of dawn crawled down the mountain. When it reached the tree, you stopped moving. For a moment I lost you among the other jet-black shadows.

You danced, paused, and then without fuss or hesitation, plucked that steer from the tree as easily as I'd pick an apple. I'll never know whether it was wire or sinew

that snapped, but something gave and the two of you went downhill together.

It was a slow tumble: I saw a mottled sphere, flickering from dark and light as you rolled over the top of the steer and he, in turn, sprawled across you. Splaying out, you dragged your quarry to a stop and began tearing at his belly. The distance hid nothing. I saw the way you worried him, shaking your head as though you disapproved of something, until he changed from white to red.

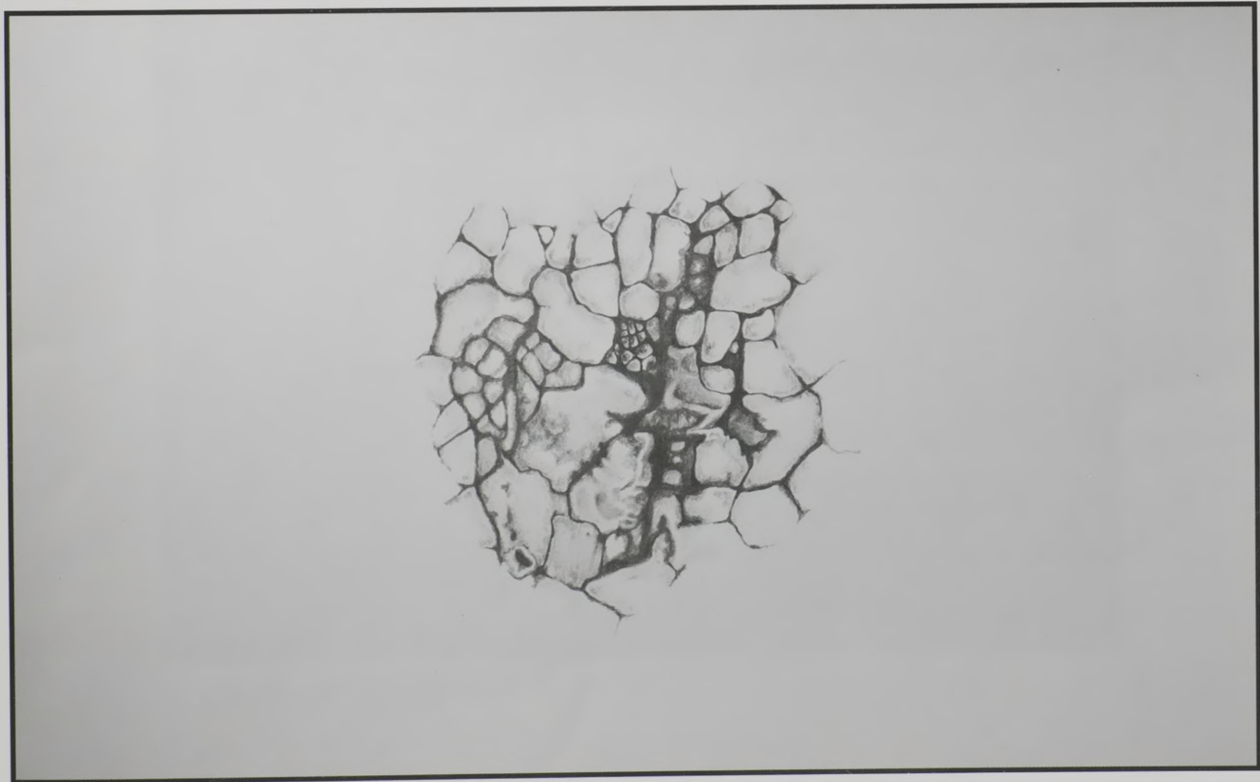
Down in the low country between us, cattle fanned out along the course of a quick little creek. Two heifers raised a ruckus, dropping their heads to shove each other back and forth, trampling a swath through the high, green grass.

When I looked back at the mountain you ripped him in half—wallowing in the viscera as you did it—and I understood the concept of a blood sacrifice for the first time. As you tore that steer to pieces it seemed certain, if not logical, that he went in lieu of me. I watched until the kill joy burned away and left you spent in a ring of grisly bits. Seeing you sated, I went to gather the waiting horses. I drove them downhill toward the barn, feeling safer than I had since early spring. 🐾

STAINS

ALLISON LINVILLE

I can't even tell you why it's blue. Bring the collard greens back toward the street. Dye it red with raspberry blood on your hands. There are days when you cannot clear your fall and orchards, apparently, will take in a passerby to grow into their trunk. Grow the plums with them, producing a fruit for the child you lost. You will take that home with you. Hold tightly to every organ in your body and tell me again.



Drought BY KATE LUND



Death Valley BY DOV WEINMAN

I-70

BRENDAN JORDAN

West of here, the clover lines up its delicate battalion
before tractor blades, before the frost peels red petals from
stem, like hands opening a fist.

West, pinecones—licking flame—scatter
their seeds under the Pleiades.

West, further, anemones coil their blue curiosity
back into the brine before nightfall.

Somewhere, a marmot nests in the left glove
I lost. Somewhere, a bull snake basks
on the logging road.

But here, America drapes its lawns
with dollar store stripes and stars.
Coal cars march like shackled oxen to the empire's edge.

I dream myself a thousand ways to fall into a darker house
than loneliness; I dream of a blue room where I lie
immobile, and the radio mumbling next-door lights a
thousand fires that bow and vanish.

It is still October, 1999,
watching birch leaves dry their gold on the windy tips of
branches: it is still me walking between the dark reeds
searching for my lost glider plane. I am still
waiting for the heron to come back, and take up
his muddy mouthful of fish,

for drive-through windows to shutter,

IKEA to retreat, trailing its carpets behind.

I am still hanging my head over the railing
of that wooden bridge, finished with summer, listening
as the owl sings arias to the slough.



Against Forgetting BY NINA MONTENEGRO

Kula

DANIEL WINTHROP

MY FULL NAME IS SILA TEHTOH GALUUNAGBOH. This name was given to me by my father the day I was born and it comes from the names of the dogs that pull his sled. When I tell people this they often think it is funny that I am named after dogs, but in our culture it is a sign of high respect. We think of all humans and animals as people. The strongest person, we think, is the dog, and the Kula between a human person and a dog person is the strongest Kula that can exist.

To help you understand, let me first tell you the story of

Kula. Kula is what my people believe to be a community of the heart that exists between all of us. In our tradition, there was once a great hut at the center of our ancestor's village where Bear lived. This hut had a sacred window that Bear watched over, and through it we say he could see the Kula. You would call this knowing truth. Long ago, two young men in the village had an argument over a beautiful young woman. They could not decide who should be allowed to give this young woman a bouquet of tiny white globe flowers from the high alpine meadows. In their hatred they became

wolverines and fought viciously, injuring the woman they both loved. Bear took the woman back to his hut to heal her, but before the sun rose the woman died. Bear roared and split the posts of his great hut and pounded the earth shaking it violently, and as he did, dawn broke. The sun pierced the edge world, the night snakes slid away, and the seeing window shattered into billions of pieces. The villagers had heard what happened and gathered around Bear's great hut during the night. When the window broke there was a tremendous wind from the hut and pieces of the sacred window flew into the eyes of the villagers.

Bear told them they would not be able to see until the next morning when he would be gone from their village. He said he would send globe petals back to the village each year, but the petals would be frozen and would bring icy winds. This would remind them to cherish the gift of each other's warmth. To keep warmth among them during this time each year, they would have to settle differences and come close to one another. Bear also promised to send his four-legged friend with thick fur called Dog. This is how our people were given Kula and how we were taught to survive the white time called O-Osha.

NOW, LET ME TELL YOU ABOUT THE DOGS OF MY father for whom I am named. Tewe and Tolu are oldest and always in the back. They do not mind following the others because they like to be closest to the sled rider. They will never let the other dogs stop until they do, and their spirits are a fiery perseverance like a thick log burning on a fire through the night. Galesh and Uurd are next in line. They are goofy with one another and it is joyful to watch them trying to decide whether they are leading Tewe and Tolu or following Nag-yhet and Bogshi. They are the only dogs who do not fight occasionally and they are the only dogs I have ever known to sleep side by side rather than alone in their own snowdrift. The spirits of Galesh and Uurd are like the grand-fir log on the fire constantly popping and playfully spitting embers at you. Nag-yhet and Bogshi

are the youngest and strongest and focus more on ways to wrestle in the snow than on pulling the sled. Their spirits are like pine boughs that burst rapidly into a brilliant dance

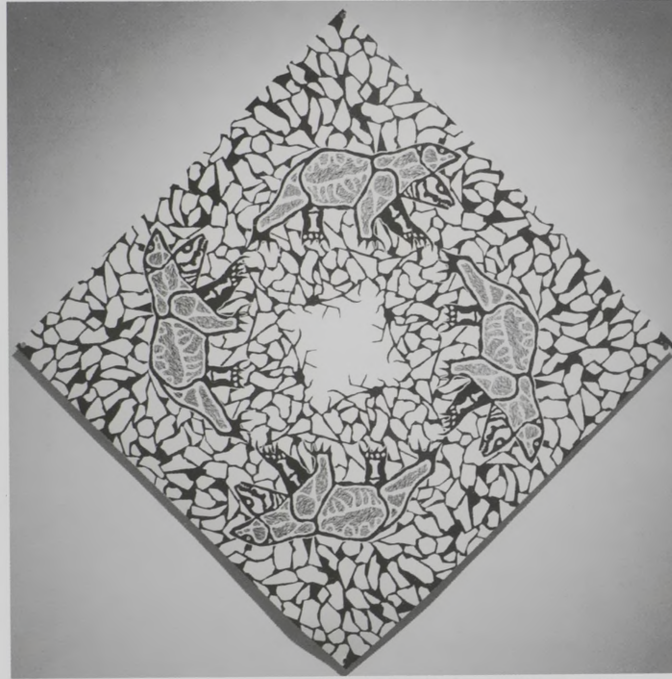
of warmth. Sila never barks and my father tells me she has only bared her teeth once. She leads the team with a ferocious calm. She can quiet Nag-yhet and Bogshi with her eyes. She points to Galesh and Uurd with her muzzle, and flattens her ears to humbly ask for wisdom from Tewe and Tolu.

So my father took the names of his dogs to make me a name. Naming is very important in our culture. All of the family members related to a woman who is making a child help her. When the woman first starts making a child, the man who has helped her must go and be

away from any other human persons and he cannot come back until he has a name for the child. The man goes out and sits so that he is still enough to feel the currents of Kula.

The child's name must bear respect to all of the man's dogs. Most importantly, and this part I am still trying to understand, the name must make the sound that the love between the man and the woman would make if their love were a string that could be plucked. When the man returns for the first time with a name, all of the woman's relatives leave the hut and the man gives the name to the woman by singing it. Then the woman is either silent and the man knows she has said no and that he must go out again and try again to make a name, or she smiles a big smile that the child she is making can feel and she sings it back to the man.

Before I was born, my father was out with the dogs, and one night when many globe flowers were coming down, he awoke just before dawn to yelping from Tolu. When he found Tolu he was badly hurt and as my father crawled on his hands and knees, following red tracks through the snow, he found Sila. Her teeth lashed at the throat of a wolverine. My father told me that when he went out to make my name he remembered the stories of our ancestors and what Sila had done, and he knew that he would use Sila's entire name in mine. ❧



Bye Polar Bear BY JASON CLARK

A History of Westward Movements

KAITY TEER

CIRCLING

When we moved to Washington, I felt wobbly. Around and around we went as I learned the contours of unfamiliar coastal roads, circling through the roundabouts that dotted the route north from the city to our new home. Motion sickness settled in, and I couldn't fully recover my equilibrium. Even when I sat very still, I braced myself against unpredictable forces; a hard, fast stop might fling me too far forward, send me hurtling into the future, beyond the bay, suspended for a moment between the sky and sea, lost at the world's end.

Instinctively, I shifted my weight away from the continental edge, leaning back into the east. Though my toes touched the coastline, my shoulder blades sought reassurance in the certainty of my past, as if I might conjure against my back all the warmth and security of a sun-warmed brick wall during recess; its rough comfort bracing me with steadiness in a world whirling, dizzying in its frenetic motion—the swish of glittery hula hoops orbiting bony hips, the rhythmic slap of a jump rope's slack striking burnt asphalt, the whack of a yellow tether ball before its fierce downward spiral, becoming with each revolution a tendril curling ever more tightly to its pole.

SPOTTING

Irecalled from *pirouette practice* that it is beneficial to find a focal point, a place where constancy balances, offers comfort even in the circling. At each turn, my eyes sought a familiar mark, spotting a crack or stain on the wall. As my neck and torso followed the curved line of my arm, I looked for the spot, fixing my eyes upon it as my arms flared outward, then skyward, then inward, propelling me into a tighter, faster spin. My arm was a centrifugal force drawing my body out. Then the inward tightening of both arms intensified the centripetal force pulling me to the center. Unmoved, the spot on the wall knew nothing of my spinning.

For many years, a peeling green water tower leaned over my comings and goings. I looked up to it through the skylights of our sunroom. When driving home, it was an easy target on the horizon. When I moved, I learned to orient myself instead around Mt. Baker, to look at it steaming in the east, to let it become the basis for determining north and west in the midst of my circling.

SWIMMING

The strangeness of living in the northwestern corner of the country caused me to fear I might lose my balance and topple over into the steely waves of the bay, which are gentle but exhausting in their own subtly persistent way. When I pictured the bay I felt sure I'd struggle at first, only to eventually acquiesce to the water's demands upon my body and the shoreline, insistent. From my vantage on the boardwalk, with a latté in hand and a scarf to warm my neck, sinking looked peaceful. But the prospect of drowning meant I would have to let the sea breathe for me. It meant I would have to inhale salt water, to exhale, to find fewer bubbles fluttering from the nostrils and the lips of my body. It meant that my eyes would watch the seagulls circle above, cutting sharply through the slants of light that riffled on my pale skin, elbows akimbo. It meant my skin would tingle when I sensed the skittering of tiny black sea crabs darting sideways below me in the dark.

I have never been buoyant. Unlike other children, I could not float peacefully on my back. I did not see how treading water could be a game; instead, in my shivering and frantic arm strokes, I learned something about the work of survival. I became adept at dodging my turn and the shrill orders of the instructor's whistle by quietly slipping out of place, to reappear elsewhere in the line of children dripping behind the diving board, always moving nearer to those with the wettest swimsuits, hoping to go unnoticed. My lips became chattering bruises; I fidgeted with my sagging swimsuit bottoms and rubbed out the bumps of my alert flesh.

WALKING

As a young woman, newly married, I WAS AS drawn to the beauty of the sea as much as I was threatened by it. I was still making saltwater's acquaintance, having met it for the first time while in college. Now that it was my neighbor, the salty air of the coast made me tender. In a place where everything felt slick with rain, with moss, with waves, I walked around raw, skin flayed, curling into myself within the layers of my rain jacket. I longed for sure footings, deep roots that searched the depths of prairie dirt, limestone buildings that sheltered long-dead presidents, the way cornfields crack open at the roots in late August.

I felt that in order to protect myself from dangers unseen, yet sensed, I ought to stay home; or, if I must venture out, then I should learn to duck my head when I walk, or else risk striking it on a prickly evergreen, rocky mountaintop, or the claustrophobic sheet metal sky. Sharp objects seemed to abound, rising up on all sides, where before I knew only how the sky globed, bowing spaciously over uninterrupted, straight roads and flat, orderly fields.

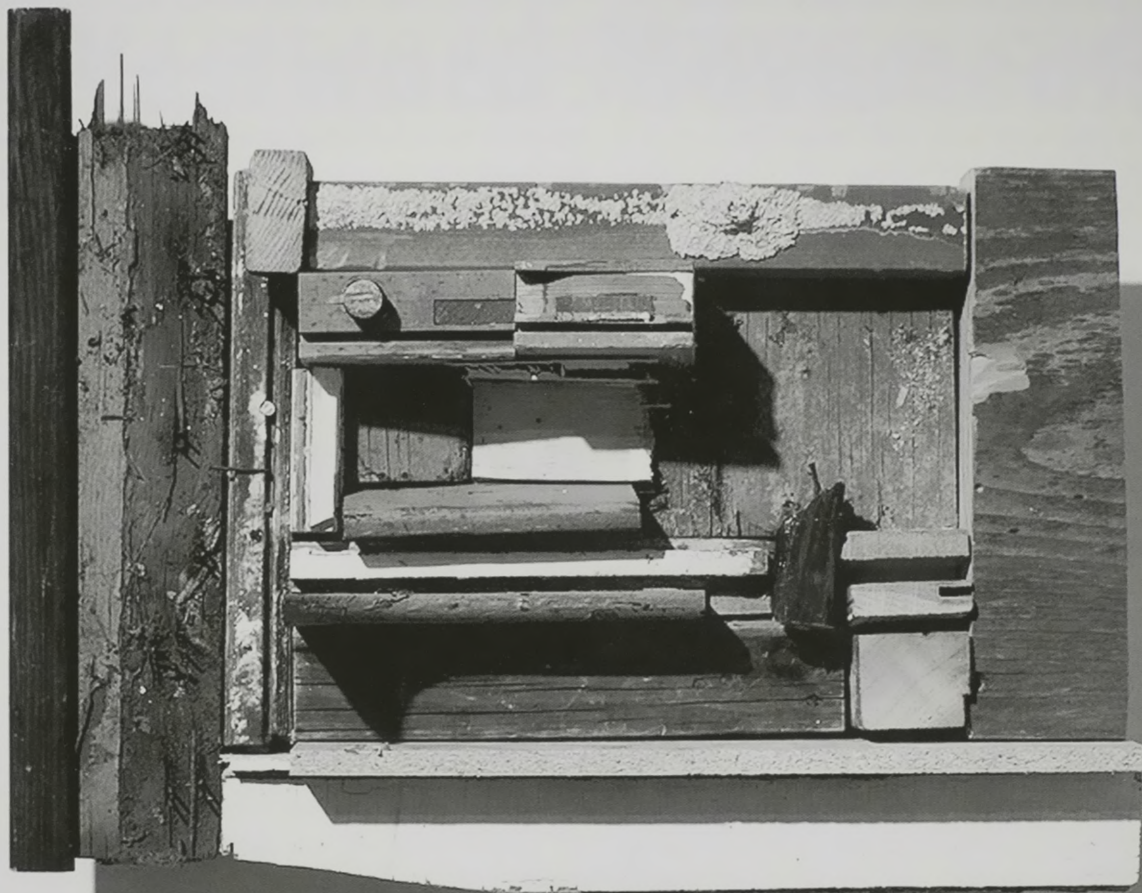
PADDLING

When spring finally came, I stepped into the cold water of the lake. I walked on slick pebbles and my shins bumped first into the reflection of clouds upon the placid surface of the water and then into the edge of my paddleboard as I fumbled to fasten its leash to my ankle. Assured by an inflatable life jacket belted around my waist, I climbed onto the board and paused to kneel before standing. I watched a pair of ducks graze the surface and take flight. The deciduous trees that rimmed the shore still looked bare at a distance, though I knew a closer look might reveal tight green buds still damp from the morning's rain. Just beyond the empty branches, a forest of evergreens encircled the lake.

I was surprised to gain an easy sense of balance with my paddle, cutting into the water and watching ropes of air swirl below the surface, eddying in my wake. I plied my way to the center of the lake. I focused just beyond the tip of my board, dipping my paddle into the blur of rocks below and reflection of trees above, and when I finally looked up, was surprised to find the distance I had come. 🌿



Collapse BY JAMES LOUKS



Yellow Jacket

GREGG KLEINER

I SEE IT FIRST—THE COP CAR COMING TOO FAST down our long, twisty driveway. Sleek and low like some weird white limo or hearse splashing through potholes. But I can't hear the cop car on account of the rain beating the hell out of the tin roof twenty feet up. Then Dad sees it, too, straightens, squints, drops the ratchet. The ratchet handle rings on the concrete slab, the socket shooting out through the open shop door and across the greasy gravel. Dad doesn't say a word. He climbs down off the bumper, walks to the rust-spotted fridge, takes out an Oly, then moves over to the doorway and stands there, watching—his back and legs and ears black against the gray light outside. Dad twists off the bottle cap. I don't hear the hiss. He flicks his cap, spinning it out into the rain where it lands in the gravel yard without a sound. Another dot of silver in all that oily black.

I hang the trouble light from the propped-open hood of the Peterbilt and climb down, the light swinging and twisting behind me, spinning shadows all over the walls. I stand in the doorway next to Dad, both of us watching the cop car coming, wipers going full bore, rain falling gray in between, falling past oak and madrone, down through piles of log truck parts all growed over with blackberries and tansy and morning glory.

A fuckin' county mounity is what my brother Jake would say right about now. That's what Jake calls them. Jake should know. He's wound up over at Clackamas County three or four times since he quit school a few months back. Dad drives off in the middle of the night to get Jake. Jake shit-faced drunk. Dad driving away with his dinnertime six-pack of Oly sloshing in his gut.

About an hour later Dad and Jake always come back, headlights sweep across Jake and my bedroom window, engine shuts off, one door slams, then the other. Feet scraping, but no talking. I always fake it like I'm sleeping when Dad helps Jake across our bedroom floor, puts my brother into bed with his clothes still on, the sound of two men breathing and brushing against each other in the dark, the smell of whiskey and burped beer, the sweet-sick stench of puke, nobody saying a word.

But it's been at least a month or more since the last time that happened. Maybe Jake's finally through it, like Mom always says. Mom's been calling it a phase for years. She's probably said five-thousand Hail Marys just for Jake alone.

Then I remember: Jake didn't come home last night.

The rain goes cat-fight loud up on the roof. The concrete floor bulges and bows. Now I know why this cop car's coming fast down our driveway. Because Jake's through. Not just a phase. Jake's done this time. Gone for good. Dead. My knees give. I grab for the doorway and a splinter shoves up under my thumbnail. Dad hocks a wad of chew out into the rain.

They always come in person when somebody's been

killed. I know this, because just the other day a trooper showed up at Driver's Ed class and told us. The trooper said the toughest part of his job's knocking on a door in the middle of the night and telling somebody their son or daughter's dead. Killed in a car crash.

For the first time, I don't believe a single one of her whispered words about Jake being different. Jake's dead. All the Hail Marys in the whole world won't change that.

But it's not quite night yet. And this cop hasn't knocked. So maybe I'm wrong. I swallow air, breathe out through my nose. The trouble light's still swinging behind us. The cop car's closer now, rain splattering off all that white paint, making the whole car kind of fuzzy, running lights burning orange in the dusk. Dad sets his empty beer bottle inside the chrome bumper of the Peterbilt, steps out into the rain, and goes limping across the yard toward the cop car that's slowing down now, wipers still going nuts. The oily gravel's got washers and bolts and crushed bottle caps pushed into it, the newer bottle caps here and there shining a little. Olympia, Dad's brand. *It's the Water.* Jake drinks Wild Turkey. He told me one time. A funny name. I wonder what Dad's thinking walking through the rain away from me, knowing his oldest boy's dead, and now he's got only me and my four little sisters, and the woman he married. Maybe Dad's a little glad, or relieved somehow. Dad and Jake have been at war for as long as I can remember.

And I've been a shitty brother, pretending to be asleep, always being the good boy, making Jake look worse. Letting Mom talk to me about Jake late at night. But it's too late to change any of that. Jake's never coming back home now. The concrete floor rolls again. I squeeze the door jamb. My thumbnail throbs cinder hot.

When Mom talks to me about Jake, her voice is always low, just above a whisper. She says Jake's a little different, that Jake's got a learning disability. LD she says. Mom talks to me about stuff like this late at night, when Dad's gone off with his buddies, and the girls are in bed. Mom says it was the forceps, or else the pneumonia medication. Or both. She claims that's why Jake's teeth are stained, too. Rust spots on the white enamel. Why life's so hard for Jake. Won't I pray for him? A couple Hail Marys?

Maybe that's why I've been such a shitty brother. And why Dad's always on Jake's ass. Because Mom's right. Forceps and pneumonia medication and not enough prayers by me. But right now, watching Dad going across the gravel toward the cop car glowing out of the rain, I don't believe Mom. For the first time, I don't believe a single one

of her whispered words about Jake being different. Jake's dead. All the Hail Marys in the whole world won't change that.

I step out into the rain. My knees hold, my boots taking me toward the white car, away from the corrugated tin screaming, the trouble light still twisting.

But it's not Jake the county moun'ty's here about. It's the Jacobson boys, upstream.

"One of 'em rode a pony into the river and fell off," the cop says through the window. He's rolled it down an inch or two so he won't get wet, stretching his neck up to talk at us through the gap, making his voice loud so we can hear him over the rain. "The other one went in to save him, but the current swept 'em both away." The rain's splattering on the white paint, running down the glass. The red and blue plastic lights on the roof are as big as coffee cans, the siren shiny. The emblem on the cop's door looks kind of like the horseshoe and barley on a can of Olympia beer, except on the door it reads, *Keeping Clackamas County Criminal Free*, instead of *It's the Water*.

I haven't ever thought of Jake as a criminal, until right now, looking at those words on that shiny door.

The cop keeps talking, words and warm air coming out between the edge of tinted glass and a chrome strip at the top of the door, Dad and I trying to hear the words over the rain and the cop's radio squawking and screeching inside the car. "Their old man saw it from his wheelchair on the porch and called." The cop says he wants us to go down to the river and look for the Jacobson boys. "I'm alerting everybody downstream, just in case they float past." The cop shifts into gear. "Take a rope. Pull 'em out, if they're still alive. One's eight, the other's ten. One of them's wearing a yellow jacket." The cop rolls up his window and the car pulls through the yard and heads back up our driveway toward the highway going fast.

Dad grabs a rope and his hip waders out of the shop and we hurry across the hayfield to where the blackberries and cottonwood grow thick along the river that runs along the back of our place. Starting at the north property line, we go downstream, neither of us saying anything. I try to keep from tripping, keep my eyes on the water, looking for yellow. The air's full of cold rain and both of us breathing, Dad's beer breath coming out in clouds. Getting through takes forever on account of the blackberries—cat claws tearing at my wet jeans. Once, I slip off the bank, grab blackberry vines to keep from falling in, pull myself back up. I hurry after Dad, picking thorns out of my hands with my teeth and spitting the thorns into the rain.

We get to the south line without seeing any yellow. But some people are standing on the bank downstream a

ways, just up from Indian Bluff. Old man Totland's there, and I recognize Mr. Tiffy, Ted Stanton, and the Dows. The fuckin' county moun'ty's there, too, his yellow rain slicker too bright in all this gray, the badge on his hat flashing as he nods. Dad and I squeeze through the barbed wire fence and walk down to where everybody's standing in the rain.

Mr. Tiffy's saying something about a yellow blur and pointing half way out. The Dows are rigging up an orange rope to an alder tree on the bank. The rope's the color of Orange Crush around the white bark. The river's moving fast, but the water's pretty clear.

"Musta got hung up," old man Totland says from under his hat, the brim dripping. "Snag, or chunk of rebar probably." A puff of white smoke comes out from where his face should be.

Then I see it, a yellow smear in the current. My heart starts knocking up into the roof of my mouth. My fingers are freeze-ass cold. I make fists, squeezing the splinter and broken-off thorns.

Downstream forty yards, where Indian Bluff comes straight up out of the water, the current slows and the river goes flat and green. You can't touch bottom in front of the bluff, not even in summer when the water's low. We tried, Jake and I, but you can't hold your breath that long. Your lungs

catch fire. Bottle caps wink as they sink out of sight. Jake and I have pushed long cottonwood saplings down, way down, shoved them hard like spears. But the saplings never touched. There's no bottom below the bluff. Those spears came back up, slow, nosing up out of the water and floating off downstream. I wish it were summer right now, and hot. I wish Jake were here so I could start being a half-way decent brother for a change, before it's night and some trooper knocks for real. Tells us the Wild Turkey got Jake, wrapped his Camaro around a power pole up on the S-curves. Fuck the forceps and medication and rust spots on his teeth. There's nothing wrong with my brother.

Ted Stanton's got the orange rope tied around his waist now, a cigarette pinched in his lips the way he always does. Nobody's hurrying, because the yellow smear isn't moving.

"If it's one of 'em," old man Totland says slow. "He's dead sure as hell." More smoke comes out from under his hat.

I've never seen a dead body before and I don't want to now. I want to get the hell out of here, back through the blackberries and up to the house where Mom's making dinner and the woodstove's burning hot. But I don't want to hear Mom whispering about Jake anymore. I also don't want to see Ted Stanton pull one of the Jacobson boys out of the river either. Red hair and white skin, yellow jacket all soggy and dripping.

"That hole below the bluff, she's so deep them boys

Fuck the forceps and medication and rust spots on his teeth. There's nothing wrong with my brother.



Sea Tangle BY ELLIE DUNCAN

could spin around down there till hell freezes solid,” old man Totland says. “Never find ‘em. Unless the fall rains flush ‘em out.” He blows out more smoke. “Course by then there wouldn’t be much left, what with the crawdads.”

I want to vomit.

Ted Stanton’s got a pitchfork and is out in the current up to his waist now, squinting into the water, shading his eyes the way you would if it was bright and sunny and hot, but it’s not. The clouds are greasy, everything’s gray. Night’s coming on fast. And it’s freezing cold. The Dows higher on the bank shout to Ted Stanton, directing him toward the yellow. One of them throws a rock and hollers, “Right under the splash!” But the splash floats off downstream and disappears.

Then Ted Stanton works his way out farther, steadying himself against the current with the pitchfork. Then he stops and points down. “Found it!” He spits out his cigarette. The butt floats off, bobbing on the ripples.

My fingers are sticky inside my fists. My thumb burns.

Ted Stanton bends over, working the fork under the water with both arms, keeping his face just above the surface by twisting his head to one side. The orange rope goes tight, drops of water hanging all along it, tiny white Christmas lights falling into the current, a row of little splashes floating away. Ted Stanton tries several times, the rope going slack and dropping into the water, then snapping tight again,

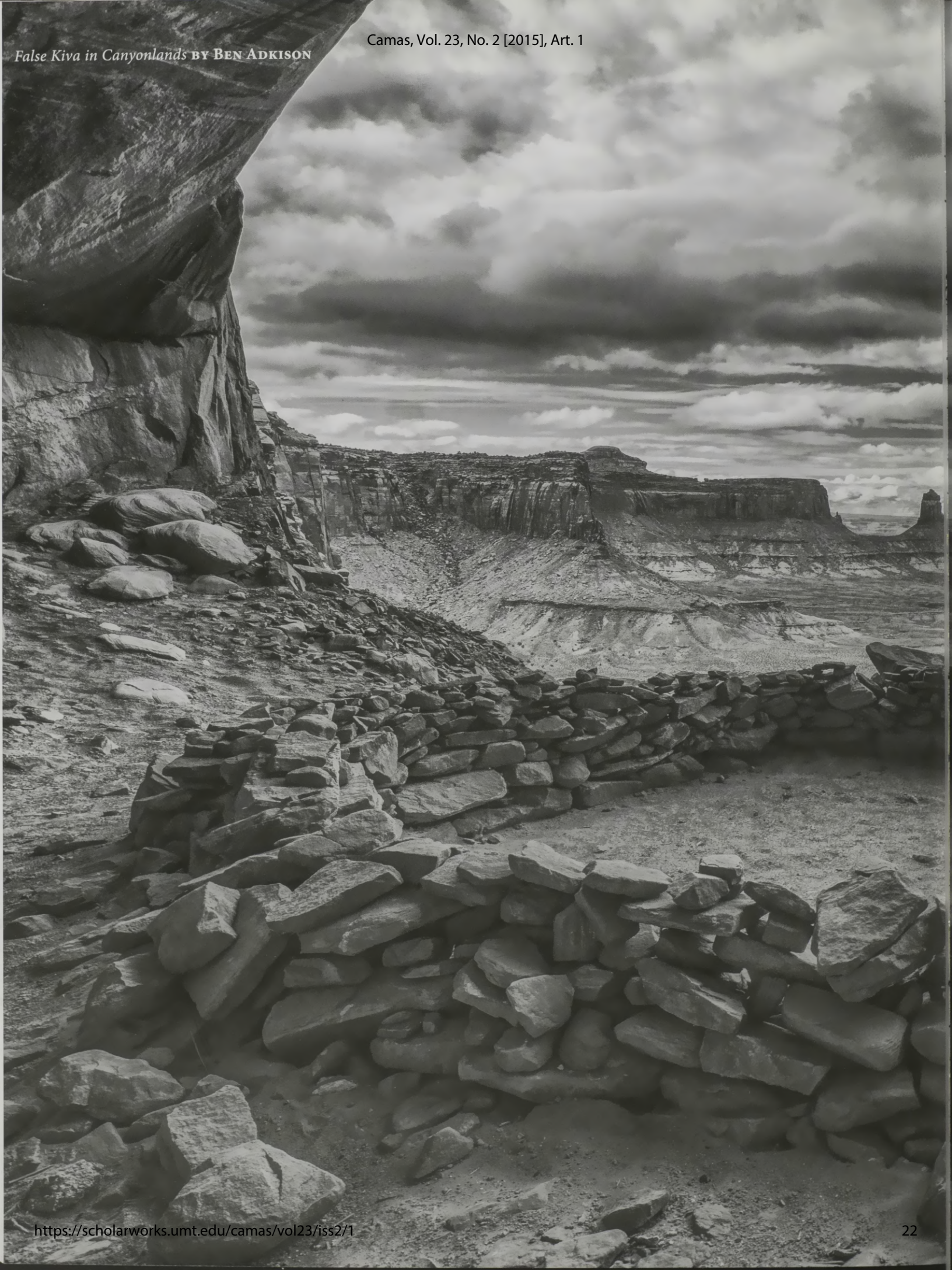
spraying light bulbs. Then Ted Stanton grunts and I can see the yellow blur coming to the surface, getting brighter and brighter in the darkness. I want to shut my eyes, pretend I’m asleep, but I can’t.

I’ve heard people weigh more when they’re dead. When they’re full of water, they must be heavier than water-logged wood.

But it’s not one of the Jacobson brothers Ted Stanton lifts to the surface on that fork. It’s a goddamned highway sign with an arrow on it. A black snake with a triangle for a head. S-curves. School-bus yellow for caution. 25 M.P.H. That snake stares across the current right at me standing on the bank.

Up on the highway above the bluff, headlights sweep through the falling rain, then taillights go around the next turn, then the next. Two red eyes getting smaller. Ted Stanton lets go of the sign and the yellow sinks again, winking once, a huge bottle cap.

A few days later, they find the Jacobson boys a couple miles downstream, one of them hung up under a log, the other washed up on a little beach—the two of them not more than fifteen feet apart. I wonder if those two red-headed brothers floated down together, hanging on trying to save each other. Or both of them dead, but still hanging on. Or one dead, the other alive, trying to save himself. ☘







Monte Sereno

AMY MILLER

When I had two spoons,
the kitchen was a bathroom,
the closet was a cupboard.
The fridge tuned its fork,
lonesome in the shed. In rain,
the roses splayed and bricks
forgot their mortar. I had

one knife, a saw,
and somebody's old hammer. Rats
made feast of the rafters,
frost brought the moon
and the brown moving
shapes of coyotes. I had
two bowls and a steel
teapot ticking,
ticking on the warm
burner in the dark.



Summitville Storm BY RICHARD ERNST

The Wilderness Act Turns 50: Celebrating the Great Laws of 1964

WILLIAM DEBUYS

LET US NOW PRAISE FAMOUS LAWS and the year that begat them: 1964.

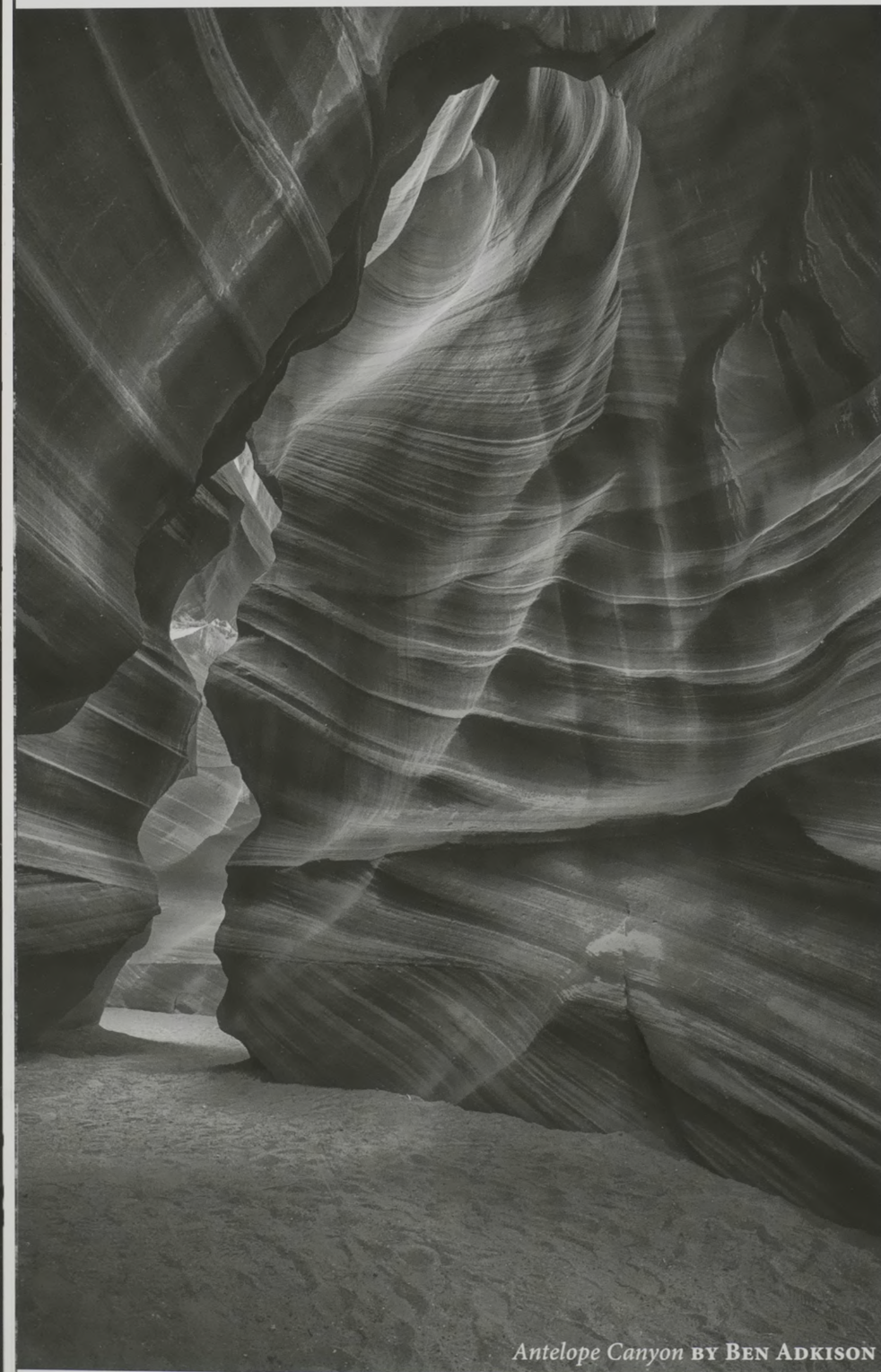
The first thing to know about 1964 was that, although it occurred in the 1960s, it wasn't part of "the Sixties." The bellbottoms, flower power, LSD, and craziness came later, beginning about 1967 and extending into the early 1970s. Trust me: I was there, and I don't remember much; so by the dictum variously attributed to Grace Slick, Dennis Hopper, and others (that if you can remember the Sixties, you weren't part of them), I must *really* have been there.

1964 was a revolutionary year. It was a time when Congress actually addressed the people's business, and it gave us at least three great laws.

One was the monumental Civil Rights Act, which aspired to complete the tragic and sanguinary work of the Civil War and achieve the promise of the Thirteenth Amendment.

The least known of the three was the Land and Water Conservation Fund Act, which, by drawing on revenue from offshore oil and gas leases, provided the means for the federal and state purchase of all kinds of recreational and wild lands, from inner-city parks and playgrounds to habitat for grizzly bears and mountain lions. President Johnson signed that bill into law on September 3, 1964, 50 years ago this month, mere moments after the more famous ceremony that went with his signing of the Wilderness Act.

Like the Civil Rights Act, the Wilderness Act legislated justice. I don't mean to equate the two laws—no one went to jail or was attacked by police dogs or shot or killed to get the Wilderness Act passed, but it did embody a revolutionary act of justice, nevertheless. It legislated compassion toward the planet by insisting that we humans must stop and leave certain lands alone and not take anything more from them. That third great law of 1964



Antelope Canyon BY BEN ADKISON

made a down payment on giving Earth its due. It was that kind of justice.

In 1964, I had only the vaguest inklings about these matters. That summer I was more concerned with the Barry Goldwater literature I was sticking behind my neighbor's screen doors. Barry Goldwater? The right-wing Republican candidate for president whom the Dems famously branded as trigger-happy with the nuclear arsenal? Yes, that Goldwater. My father, a Republican, was for him, and so I was, too. Could my dad have been wrong? Hell no, not for at least another 10 teenage minutes, after which the old guy seemed to be wrong about nearly everything for the next decade, but that's not the story I want to tell.

Instead, I want to talk about sex, or at least about seduction, which many people agree is the better part of sex.

Opposition to the Civil Rights Act had a sexual undercurrent. The law itself focused on equal access to buses, trains, drinking fountains, restaurants, restrooms, and hotels; it aimed to end racial and gender discrimination in education and employment. Ultimately, it concerned itself with the promise of the entire American project, for its goal was to honor the "self-evident truth" that "all men are created equal," as though the nation, after nearly two centuries of equivocation, had finally agreed with what the Declaration of Independence said.

As segregationists had done since before the Civil War, opponents of the bill raised the specter of racial mixing—miscegenation—as a way of rallying white resistance to integration. Racists warned, for instance, that school integration would lead to hanky-panky between young whites and blacks, and *didn't you know where that would lead?* The hypocrisy in this, given that rape of black women by white men had been a constant of the plantation world, was of course monumental, but the demagogues, in public and private, ranted on. Ultimately, the Civil Rights Act would stop short of guaranteeing an individual's freedom to marry or cohabit with whomever he or she chose, but it prepared the way for the 1967 Supreme Court decision in *Loving v. Virginia* that rendered unconstitutional the anti-miscegenation laws then in force across the South.

In this way—and not just because (in one of the great political surprises of the era) it outlawed discrimination on the basis of gender, as well as race—the Civil Rights Act concerned sex. As the trolls who fought its passage feared, it helped to enlarge the range of socially and legally acceptable seduction.

So, in a way, did the Wilderness Act. But this will take some explaining.

LOVE STRUCK IN THE WILDERNESS

Flash forward to 1976. In that year I was a skinny kid, 25 years old, living in an isolated village in the Sangre

de Cristo Mountains of northern New Mexico (where I still live today). After a big meal and long drink of water, I might have weighed 150 pounds. Thanks to a "Your-Weight-for-a-Dime" machine on San Francisco Street in Santa Fe, I learned that my backpack weighed nearly half of what I did. It was loaded with macaroni and other near-foods. I was headed into the Pecos Wilderness, a high mountain fastness where 12,000-foot peaks circle the headwaters of the Pecos River. I would be gone for two weeks, and I would be alone. My plan was to walk home, to my village, taking the long way.

All that first day and the day after, my worries rattled inside me like cans in the back of a pickup. Did I pack enough food? Did I bring the right stuff? Would my strength hold out? Would I get desperately lonely with no one to talk to? What if I got hurt?

Relief came when I topped a sharp ridge above the timberline, nearly colliding with a six-bird flock of band-tailed pigeons. Only yards away, they wheeled as one, tails spread, air seething through their feathers. I think I felt the soft breath of their wake. "Six-bird flock of band-tailed pigeons": I wrote down the phrase in my pocket notebook. The words had rhythm; they scanned. Suddenly, the whole world seemed made of poetry.

On the second night, I camped in a dark, still forest, waking repeatedly from shallow sleep, aware of small creatures skittering around me. In the morning, I found that wood rats had chewed off chunks of my camp moccasins. They showed the good judgment, however, to ignore my food.

On the third day, a snowstorm caught me at high altitude in open country. It was only late September, but I should not have been surprised. Winter comes early above timberline, and the storm blew in unseen from behind the mountain I was climbing. Soon, everything was blowing snow, shrieking wind, and a whiteout so thick I could scarcely see the ground. There was no question of seeking better shelter; I stumbled into a copse of wind-tortured, nearly prostrate spruces and pitched my tarp, low and flat, among the gnarled trees. Then I crawled under the tarp to wait out the weather.

The storm seethed for the next 18 hours. Most of the snow flew by horizontally, so fast it may have landed in Texas. In the end, eight or more inches covered the ground. The wind never quit. In the night, when moonlight briefly broke the overcast, I crept out and hiked to the top of the divide. Cumulus clouds, as moist as the spray of waterfalls, boiled up from the Rio Grande Valley. They broke like surf and tumbled across the tundra ridge, their swirls visible in the angry air. Today, I can still see those malevolent, ghostly shapes, all turmoil and beauty. I watched them billow eastward into darkness until cold drove me back to my sleeping bag.

Next day, postholing through the snow, I began to feel different. Something had changed, but I didn't know

what. It was nothing dramatic or decisive, but it mattered and it didn't go away. Days and miles rolled by, days of camps made, meals cooked, trails lost and found, and the feeling only grew. The first week yielded to a second that was better than the first. Mentally I was in a groove, a zone of my own. Nothing troubled me, not successive storms, short rations, cold, or fatigue.

A day or two from the end of the trip, having set course for home, an explanation came to mind. Somehow the tempest had taught me that moods are like letters. If you can't mail them, you don't write them. Since I was alone and had no one to deliver my moods to, I let them go. When I did, I found myself in a frame of mind that was new and different from the mind I'd had before.

You might say that the discovery was a small one, but a lot of growing up consists of small revelations, and understanding that moods are letters was one of mine. As it happened, something else was going on, too.

All of us change when we fall in love, and part of the intoxication of romance is the way we come to love the changes our new relationships cause in ourselves. Up there in the high country, something like that was happening, and I was falling in love.

The Pecos Wilderness was seducing me. I was entering an irrational state of love-struckness as irrational, more or less, as any other.

LIGHTING OUT FOR THE TERRITORIES

I later learned that the Hopis have a pretty good word for this. Like most of the entries in the Hopi-English dictionary, this one begins with a *k* and is about seven syllables long. It translates, as best I remember, as "walking hand in hand and looking dreamily into the eyes of the desired one." Which describes how I was feeling as I walked home, gazing dreamily into the scenery after two weeks in the embrace of the federally designated Pecos Wilderness Area.

I've never gotten over the experience. Years later, having read some anthropology, I came to understand that, notwithstanding my distinctly non-tribal upbringing, I had cooked up a rite of passage for myself, and the wilderness had been its arena. Various friends, I've since learned, had similar experiences, which they've never gotten over. It doesn't stop there: if you read much history, you'll come across others who entered the wilderness and fell the same way.

A few examples:

- In 1806, John Colter, having wet his moccasins in the Pacific Ocean, was traveling back to St. Louis with Captains Lewis and Clark. In present-day North Dakota, however, he had a change of heart: he decided he liked it better in

the woods. He asked the captains to discharge him, which they did. Then, he did an about-face and headed west again, plunging into the deep wildness. Eventually, he made it to the country we now call Yellowstone. He'd heard of geysers there and thought he would check them out.

*Up there in the high country,
something like that was happening,
and I was falling in love.*

- George Bradley, Billy Hawkins, Andy Hall, and John Sumner barely survived their harrowing 1869 descent of the Colorado River with the indomitable explorer and one-armed Civil War

veteran John Wesley Powell. Three of their campmates didn't fare as well: the Howland brothers and William Dunn elected to walk out of the Grand Canyon rather than continue to test the river's fearsome rapids, and they died in the attempt. When, after three months of exertion, danger, and suffering, the remaining members of the expedition finally reached the mouth of the Virgin River near present-day Las Vegas, Powell and his notably unstable brother, Walter, returned to civilization via the Mormon settlements. But not Bradley, Hawkins, Hall, and Sumner. They were in no hurry to get to a town. In the expedition's remaining boats, they kept going down the river, Hawkins and Hall continuing all the way to tidewater, where the Colorado spills into the Gulf of California.

- On Valentine's Day, 1884, at 3:00 a.m., "Mittie" Roosevelt, mother of Theodore, the future president, died. Eleven brutal hours later and in the same gloomy house, Roosevelt's beloved young wife, Alice, having given birth only a few days earlier, died as well. In less than half a day, Roosevelt had lost the two most important women in his life. TR was a compulsive diarist. In the place in his diary where the entry for that wretched day should have gone, he drew a big black "X" and under it wrote, "The light has gone out of my life."

How did Roosevelt recover from such blows? His answer was quintessentially American. He put his newborn daughter in the care of relatives and, like Huck Finn, "lit out for the territories." In Roosevelt's case, the territory was North Dakota, where he found a new love, virtually as compelling as the two he had lost. An Eastern-raised son of privilege, he fell in love with the West and its wildness.

- And John Muir! Talk about love-struck! If you can read *The Yosemite* or *The Mountains of California* and not see in them a story of seduction and wildly reciprocated love, you should consult your cardiologist immediately.

- And then there are several centuries' worth of North American captivity narratives recounting the lives of whites who cohabited for extended periods with Indians, only to be recaptured later and brought back to white society. They rarely returned happily. Cynthia Ann Parker, mother of Quanah, the legendary Comanche chief, was typical. She remained morose for the rest of her life, as were many who



Tobacco Root Reflections BY BEN ADKISON

shared similar fates: they liked it better on the prairie or in the forest. Partly, they loved their adopted Indian families and the culture they adjusted to, but partly, they simply loved the freedom of the land.

ONE LAW, 110 MILLION ACRES OF LAND SAVED FOR US ALL

Hindsight is great. If we were creating the Wilderness Act today, we would write it differently. For starters, a rewritten act might acknowledge that much of what we now call “wilderness” is or was homeland to a broad range of native tribes. Also, half a century later, we know much more about how ecosystems work; we understand the importance of natural boundaries, as opposed to survey boundaries, and we grasp the need for buffer zones and refuges for rare plants and animals. Meanwhile, the fix we are in as a civilization is, frankly, so much worse than it was 50 years ago, and wild lands are more threatened than ever. Climate change is just the tip of that particular iceberg. We continue to transform Earth much more rapidly than we are learning to understand its workings.

Today, however, rather than tote up the peccadillos of the law that Howard Zahniser of the Wilderness Society and others crafted so brilliantly a half century ago, we should take a moment to appreciate the stunning success

of the Wilderness Act in protecting the integrity of nearly 110 million acres of wild lands across the magnificence of North America.

The Wilderness Act accomplished something no other law ever attempted on such a scale. Over the decades, it has invited us repeatedly to join humankind’s longest romance, which the Pleistocene painters at Lascaux and Chauvet understood well. It seduces us with the almost heart-stopping beauty of the Creation of which we are a part, a beauty that is the same no matter how you believe it came about.

The greatest thing about that great law, only one of three in 1964, is that it still invites us, even at times forces us (most of us being city dwellers), to fall in love with our beautiful blue planet Earth, the most singular and wonder-filled thing in all the universe. Think of it: *in all the universe*. If you believe that complexity is an element of beauty, then the complexity of life on this planet, expressed in billions upon billions of strands of DNA, makes it the most beautiful thing in the universe. Period. Hands down. No competition.

That’s our blue miracle of a planet, which the great Carl Sagan once described as “a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.”

Given half a chance—and the Wilderness Act gives us much more—who wouldn’t fall in love with that? 🌲



Helping with the Food

BETTE HUSTED

Everybody cooks—though it's the aunts, as always
back there in the kitchen. Hams and turkeys, deer meat,
salmon. Fry bread for the tacos. And my rolls
on paper plates, white heaps on every table,
what you said to bring. All day I stirred and kneaded,
punched down, pushed dough into shape
the way my mother taught me—
this wrist, this finger circle—all day the smell
of baking bread, my mother's hands
moving through me.

First, the giveaway: towels, a tote bag,
stacks of plastic bowls, we the living promising
to drink from this cup, take shelter from tomorrow's rain
beneath this plastic poncho, walk beside you
through this day, and the next.

Then gifts of buckskin, blankets, beadwork
for those who helped you in those first hard days,
friends who bought new beds after the burning—
the long, slow smoke, your sister's shoes and dresses,
her mattress and her jeans, her shawls—
the man who smudged the house with juniper,
the woman who pulled you back
from blackness.

Your voice, explaining, quavers.
Does not break.

When at last it's time to eat, I sit beside you,
daughter of my heart. You are silent, spent.
My mother's rolls are disappearing.
I take the long way home.



Conversations about Bees

DIONISIA MORALES

I said: I'm thinking about keeping bees.

He said: That's good, considering everything.

I said: Everything?

We sat in folding chairs on the terrace, my brother and I, one thick Manhattan summer night. The street pulsed like an illuminated artery twelve stories below us. We grew up in this apartment, and he took it over when my parents moved to live near me, on the other side of the continent, in a town that didn't have high-rise buildings, in a place where people considered putting beehives in their backyards.

He said: Yeah, I read the bees are dying.

I said: Well, actually they're disappearing.

He said: Same thing.

I said: Not really.

I was in New York City visiting from Oregon. Where I lived, in every direction the view is of trees—in yards, on hillsides, rising on ranges that divide the valley from the ocean. Drive through my town and here's what you won't see: three-hundred-dollar haircuts, couture, people lined up around the block to get into bars, into movies, or into anywhere. After a decade living in a state where three of the main industries are agriculture, forestry, and fisheries, I had an edge over my brother when talking about nature. I flashed my knowledge like a badge.

I said: It's called colony collapse disorder.

He said: What is?

I said: The disappearing bees.

He said: Oh.

My husband and I wanted to keep bees because our plum and cherry trees weren't as productive as they used to be. When I left on my trip to New York City, the cherry tree branches were weighed down with green stones, baskets-worth of aborted fruit.

I said: When hives fail, the bees leave and never come back.

He said: (Nothing)

I said: It's as if they forget what they're doing or where they belong.

He said: (Nothing)

I said: We don't even know if having bees will help our trees.

He said: Well, it can't hurt.

He was right.

My brother picked up his guitar and folded his body around it like an embrace. He strummed a few notes and let them mix with the rumble of the M10 bus as it lumbered up Eighth Avenue. His silhouette was lit from the lamplight on the other side of the glass terrace door.

It was one out of a million lights in our building, on our block, in the neighborhood, on this island of a city. I couldn't make out any stars, so I looked down instead of up. The street seemed far away. I wondered: Do bees even make it up this high?

Late in the afternoon, one day in mid-November, 2006, a beekeeper in Florida went to check on his four hundred hives and discovered them empty.

He said: I've had die-offs before, but nothing like this.

The bees had gone to forage and never came back. They'd left their queen behind. A philosopher poet might



Hoodoo Glow BY KIEL RUCKER



have stopped to ponder whether the bees had reconsidered their swarm regime to reinvent themselves by scattering into thousands of communities of one. But the beekeeper didn't waste time on such thoughts; he immediately called the agricultural researchers at the state university, looking for answers.

They said: Send in some specimens. Send in some dead bees from around the hives.

He said: I don't think you get it. There are no dead bees. The bees are gone.

A few months later, the beekeeper's story broke on the news around the country. He became Citizen X of the apiary world, the first one to report a case of colony collapse disorder.

He said: I knew something was wrong before I even opened the first hive.

No one asked how he knew. And since no one could explain what had happened, his intuition went unchallenged.

Millions of bees disappeared without a trace that day. The air was still when the beekeeper finally got the university researchers on the phone. Even if they had pressed their ears to the receiver, they wouldn't have heard a low-tone death hum in the background; ghost hives are silent. Within the year, other beekeepers made the news—and not just in Florida, but also in California, Oklahoma, and Texas. By 2009, cases of colony collapse disorder were reported in thirty-three other states where commercial



Fire BY KATE LUND

commercial crops are grown. Voices rose in an alarmed chorus.

They said: One out of every three bites of food you put in your mouth depends on pollination by bees.

They said: Food doesn't come from the supermarket.

But what they really meant was that if their bees had problems, then we all had problems.

I first learned about bees in first grade. My teacher gave each student an avocado pit that she'd skewered with toothpicks and suspended in a jar of water.

She said: It will sprout roots and then leaves.

I wanted to say: I don't believe it.

She said: And when it flowers, bees will pollinate it.

I wanted to say: This pit is too big to be a seed.

She said: Wouldn't it be nice to grow avocados at home?

I said: (Nothing)

Bees are the main pollinators of avocados. Maybe my teacher knew that or maybe she didn't. Without bees, avocados would be scarce and so would blueberries, strawberries, raspberries, or any berries. Kiwis, onions, broccoli, cauliflower, carrots, coffee, cucumbers, apples, almonds, and dozens of other foods would be also hard

to come by. I'm not sure, but I doubt my teacher knew that I lived on the twelfth floor. Maybe if she had known that, then she could have told me how high bees can fly or maybe she would have revised her idea of me growing avocados twelve stories up on my terrace. But the logistics didn't really matter because I couldn't even envision myself growing avocados on my terrace; I was too mistrustful of the experiment.

After three weeks, the skewered avocado pits broke open, and roots started to emerge from the bottom. In another week or so, a stem sprouted out of the top. I felt ashamed for having doubted my teacher. After all, up until that point in first grade, she had never been wrong about anything, as far as I could tell.

She said: See, it's going to become a tree.

I said: I see.

But I also saw something else. Each morning, when my teacher paced in front of our jars filled with cloudy, yellow water, I thought the rows of avocados seemed miserable on the windowsill, where they looked out at the park and saw real plants living real lives. Our classroom must have been like a prison to them, where they were trapped in jars, under constant observation. In two long perfect rows, they looked like an avocado chain gang, serving time and wondering: How did we get ourselves into this mess?

After a few weeks, my teacher replanted the sprouting avocados in plastic pots and let us take them home.

She said: Be careful.

I said: Okay.

She said: Remember to water it.

I said: (Nothing)

It's hard to say what happened to my avocado plant. Maybe I left it on the bus or in the elevator. Or maybe I gave it to someone as a present or, more likely, just forgot to take care of it until it died out on the terrace. Of course, it's also possible that my plant ran off in search of other elementary school botanical experiments. Maybe it wanted to start a forest far way from all the jars and toothpicks. Maybe thousands of avocado plants were wandering the streets of New York City after dark, stealthy stalks that had slipped through the hands of the city's school children, children who were just as happy to imagine them as underground urban orchards, where concrete streets muffled the sound of subterranean bees.

If you have bees, then you have food. Now that's some kind of magic. This is just photocopying.

Urban beekeeping became legal in New York City in 2010, and within two years there were more than two hundred registered hives. I had left the city long before that. The last time I lived in New York City, I rented an apartment with windows that looked into other people's windows. I kept the shades drawn and put a clock in every room because there was no other way to tell the time of day. I bought a ficus tree because I'd read it's healthy to have green, living things in the home. The week after I'd lugged it eight long blocks to my apartment, it was infested with mites. A month later, all the leaves fell off.

I said (to no one): Where did all these bugs come from, anyway?

I like telling people in Oregon that I grew up in New York City. Those three words—New York City—provide a ready excuse for bowing out of debates on things like curbside composting and the politics of pesticides. Although I might know a few pros and cons on such subjects, it's not enough to argue a strong point. If people don't make the leap of association from my childhood home to my occasional reticence, I give them a little more to go on.

I say: I didn't grow up with a garden.

But what I really mean is that, while I might be able to show off to my brother in a short conversation about the plight of the honeybee, I'm a city kid at heart.

It was different for my husband. He grew up surrounded by orchards and vineyards. When he was

a kid, the low-chord buzzing of bees was a springtime soundtrack.

I said: Is that why you became a horticulturist?

He said: No.

I said: I bet that's not true.

He said: I don't know what to say to that.

Before we married, he asked me to edit his dissertation. It was on intercropping systems. I didn't know what that was, so he explained how the food chain depends on plants, and that eighty percent of flowering plants depend on pollination, and that resources are limited, and that we need to find better ways of taking care of people and the land.

I said: Is that what your dissertation is about?

He said: In a way.

Really, his dissertation was a stiff analysis of using woody tree waste as fertilizer, but his passion was to teach people why they should care about how their food is grown.

He said: A lot has to happen before food gets to the table.

While I edited his dissertation, I worked as a grant writer for the Oregon Department of Education

in an office building that, as far as I could tell from my cubicle, had no windows. One day, as I raced around trying to finalize a proposal, a colleague photocopied and collated the lengthy appendices. The machine chewed on the pages. Error lights flashed. She made piles on the floor while looking up at the clock. We were getting close to our deadline. There was no time to spare. She knew it, and so did our boss.

He said: Jesus. How stupid are you?

She said: (Nothing)

He said: You're going to screw this up for everyone.

She said: (Nothing)

Tears rolled down her face as the copy machine beeped and wheezed.

I said: Hey, don't talk to her like that.

This got my boss's attention.

I said: You can take a seed and put it in the ground. Add water and add light, and it'll grow.

He stared at me. And because I didn't think he was following my meaning, I spelled it out for him.

I said: If you have bees, then you have food. Now that's some kind of magic. This is just photocopying.

I think he wanted to apologize or go back in time and erase how he'd behaved because it looked as though he was replaying the last few minutes over in his mind. But there was no time for any of that. If we worked together, we could still make the deadline.

He said: Okay.

My first garden was in our second house, the house with the cherry and plum trees. The same year the Florida beekeeper pulled back the curtain on the connection between bees and global food production, my husband and I were remodeling the house. We let the garden go wild while we spent nights and weekends hanging drywall and laying flooring. We'd fling ourselves into plastic lawn chairs after long days in dust masks and safety goggles, and look at our overgrown hedges, patchy grass, and neglected Rhododendrons. We dreamed about weeding and planting, and getting our hands in the dirt. The trees took care of themselves, blooming bright in the spring and bearing fruit in the summer. We weren't thinking about the bees then. My husband and I had other concerns.

He said: In a couple of days we can close the walls and start mudding the seams.

I said: Can you hold the baby for a second?

He said: And then we can install the floor.

I said: Okay. I can take the baby now.

He said: We'll seal the house just in time for winter.

Maybe the beekeepers on the evening news would have caught my attention if the video footage had been more compelling. But in the newscasts the bee yards were always empty. The ground wasn't carpeted with apian bodies; the cameramen didn't have to watch where they stepped. Without the discomfiting sight and sound of dead and dying insects, the newscasts didn't compel me to put down my drill, hammer, or paintbrush.

I didn't pay attention to the bees until we started having problems with our trees. The experts talked about the effects of climate change, pesticides, and the stresses on bees when they are trucked around the country to pollinate crops. When it came to our trees, I had my own theories. My horticultural husband indulged me.

I said: The problem is the plum tree is too eager for its own good. And the cherry tree is afraid to trust its instincts.

He said: Is that so?

My husband spends his days tilling, planting, harvesting, and teaching for a living.

He said: You'd never make it as a farmer.

I said: That's not the point.

He said: No, the point is that the trees aren't getting pollinated.

The first spring we lived in the house, our yard was an explosion of cherry and plum blossoms. We ate handfuls

of cherries while we watched our kids play in the cul-de-sac and invited neighbors to fill up bowls with fruit. When the summer months heated up, we noshed on plums and spit the pits into the lawn. The fruit in the high branches went to the birds, the deer ate what fell to the ground, and we took what we wanted and left the rest to rot on the tree. We were spoiled by thinking it would always be so good. But when we started getting less fruit with each passing year, I stopped being so generous with the neighbors. I brought them offerings instead of inviting them over to pick.

One spring my husband and I saw hardly any bees in flight. The trees were flush with showy flowers—eager, open, and waiting.

I said: It's like a Greek tragedy out here.

He said: We might not get much fruit this year.

I said: If only it helped to scold the trees or plead with the bees.

He said: Yeah, if only.

Pollination is the springtime synchronization of plants and the birds, animals, and insects that feed on the nectar and pollen they produce. It happens like a well-timed dance; the partners have to be in seasonal step with one another. In spring, plants shake loose from their winter sleep; they sprout, break buds, and flower. The greening of the landscape is so dramatic you can see it from space. Where I live, the spring signal for plants to flower has happened a half-day earlier each year, which means the best days for pollination have crept forward on the calendar. My husband thought the problem with our trees might be that they are out of sync with the local bees.

I said: See, the trees are either too eager or insecure.

He said: (Nothing)

I said: Even if we have a hive, won't the bees and trees still be out of step?

He said: Maybe.

I said: And if we have a hive, how can we be sure it won't fail?

He said: We can't.

I looked into my neighbors' yard and saw their fruit trees and summer vegetables. Our bees would forage not just in our garden, but also in their gardens, and in the gardens of our neighbors' neighbors. Our bees would connect our quarter-acre lot to a collection of lots that were surrounded by a community of farms in a region where local growers were part of a national network of food producers. You would have to soar miles above

the earth to begin to trace the web that would tie us all together. But you wouldn't be able to see our bees from up there; they'd be invisible from so high up. You'd only see them from down on the ground.

I said: We'll need to get the gear.

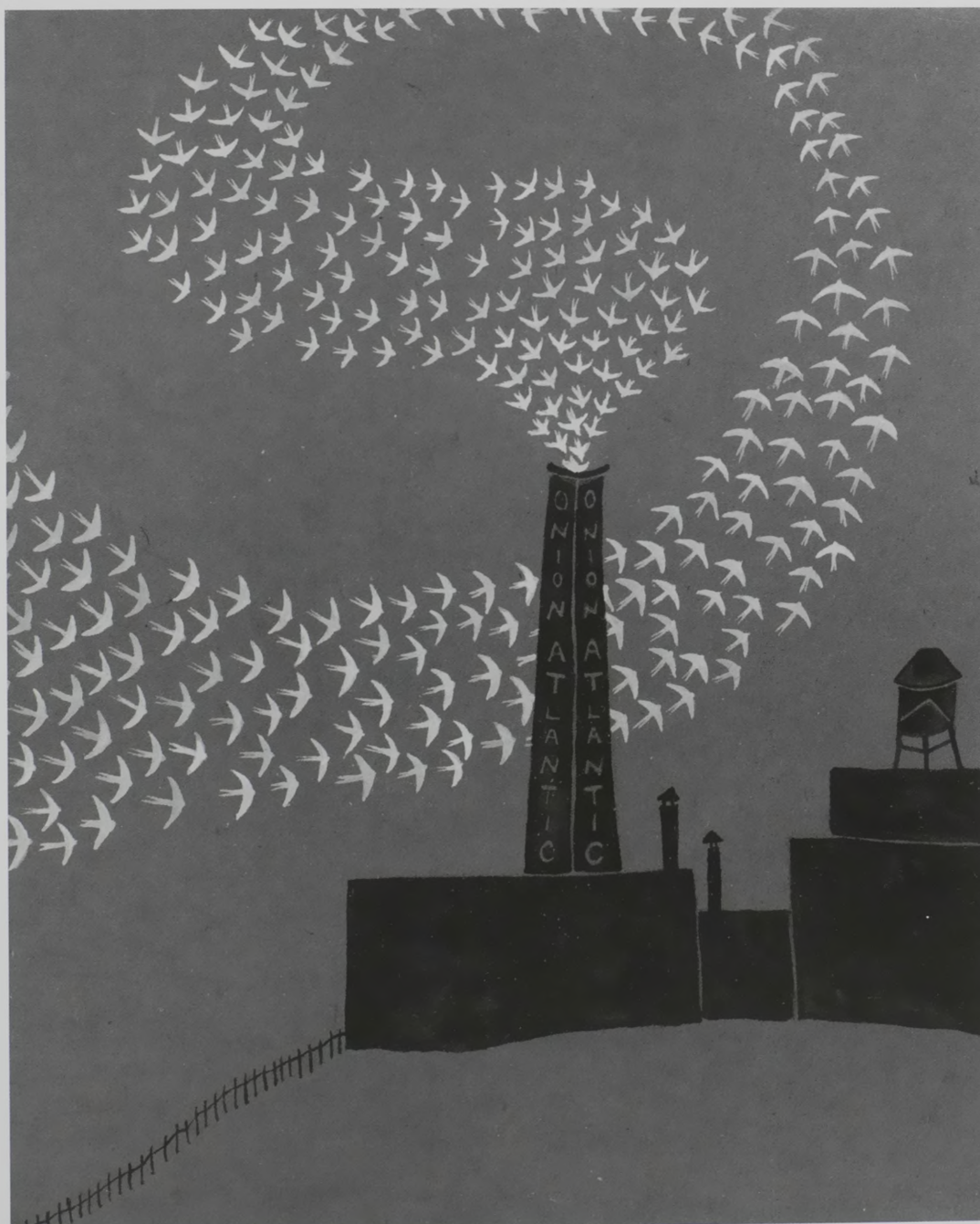
I looked at my husband and could picture him in a white smock and veiled hat, a smoker in one hand and

hive tool in the other.

I said: Actually, we'll need to get two sets of gear.

He said: I know.

I was glad the rudiments of our plan were as clear to him as they were to me. This wasn't going to be just his work. I wanted to get in there with the bees too. I wanted to see it all for myself. 🐝



Factory Swifts BY SONYA MONTENEGRO

Peaceful Rain BY SOPHIA VERNHOLM



BULL ELK IN OCTOBER RIVER

CHRIS DOMBROWSKI

The elk was a boulder the Blackfoot flowed around,
spooked granite with tines and steaming nostrils, musk
the water wept away.

Reflection of honeysuckle gone to seed,
morphing, albinistic, stirred silt-like downstream.

The light
smelled the way frost feels melting between two fingers
and a blade of timothy.

Whatever'd harried the bull slinked
through the kinnickinnick, more fearsome, hidden, than it
had been bearing fangs.

I scanned the aspen trunks for fur,
scanned quaking shadows through high-end optics, wagered
wolf duo pinning prey between banks, though it could have been
a cat, a camouflaged man in a stand.

In time the antlered
boulder walked ashore with dripping hide, its reflection
sinking, weightless as a worry, to the cobbles.

My own worry
remained vague though I left with it and it went with me
through winter, constant as current, though I had no name
for it, perhaps because I had no name for it.

Book Review

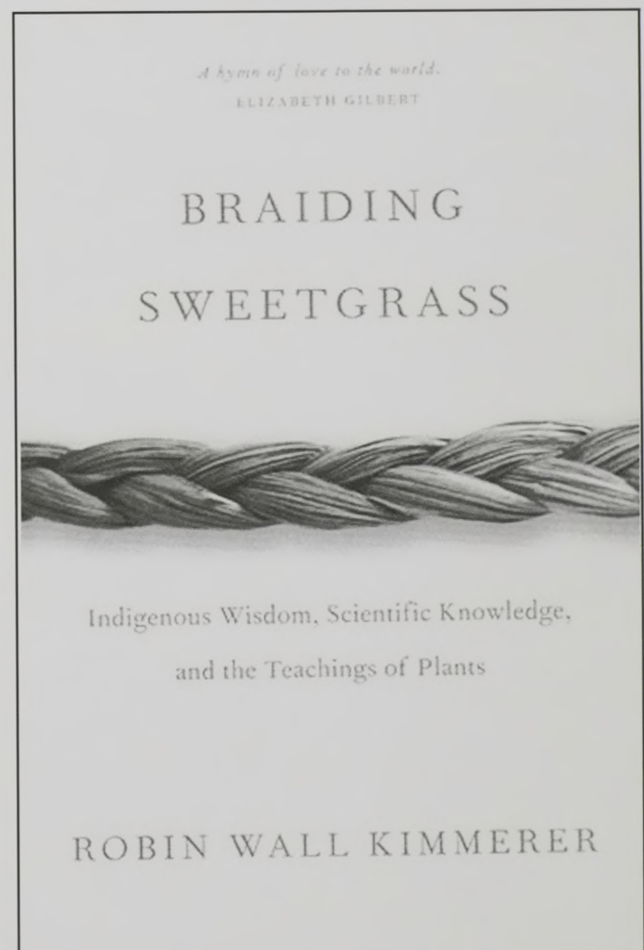
Knowing That the Earth Loves You Back: Robin Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass*

TREVIEN STANGER

WORKING WITH A GRADUATE STUDENT ONE year at SUNY Syracuse, Robin Kimmerer, a professor of botany, author, and citizen of the Potawatami Nation helped create an experiment that confirmed what many indigenous people have known for millennia—that the human hand can be a healing force in an ecosystem. Looking closely at the traditional use of sweetgrass, a plant rich in story, science, and sanctity for many tribes throughout the continent, the experiment revealed that when using the indigenous method of harvesting only small sections of the plant, humans were emulating the work of wild ruminants, with which sweetgrass had coevolved for millennia. Using this technique, the health of a sweetgrass patch benefits immensely from the presence of humans, whereas many other sweetgrass populations in Kimmerer's area that go untended are in decline. This story demonstrates a central thread of reciprocity between humans and nature that is woven throughout Kimmerer's book *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

Once harvested, sweetgrass has traditionally been braided into long, fragrant strands for use in ceremony and celebration. Using the weaving of sweetgrass as a central metaphor, Kimmerer threads her essays into an evocative braid. In some stories, Kimmerer shines as a scientist-writer, eloquently describing how the maple tree gives us sap each spring, or how the Three Sisters crops of corn, beans, and squash form a mutualistic relationship both above and below the soil. These sections suggest that Kimmerer could easily have written a new naturalist's classic that celebrates Earth through revelations of the scientific gaze.

Instead, Kimmerer leans into all of her topics with the weight of thousand-year-old traditions. Using indigenous science, often called "Traditional Ecological Knowledge" or TEK, Kimmerer illustrates how ethnobotanical relationships between people and plants help us create symbiotic relationships within a place. As she reveals,



TEK "is increasingly being sought by academics, agency scientists, and policymakers as a potential source of ideas for emerging models of ecosystem management, conservation biology, and ecological restoration." Kimmerer has decades of experience observing how TEK generates not only ecological benefits, but also how it engenders an intense gratitude and a sense of humanity's unique responsibility to care for creation. Readers might think of it as a practical,

ecologically-informed and spiritually-inflected set of instructions for living within the gift-economy of Earth. A way to see and treat the Earth, with reverence and respect, as a gift.

Make no mistake—as gentle and kind a guide that Kimmerer may be, this book is most certainly a polemic. Again and again we are asked to examine what happens when a people no longer perceive the world as a gift, but rather only as a collection of commodities whose value is determined by a consumer marketplace. Setting her older, traditional stories against the story of modern life, she offers this challenge to the reader: “One of these stories sustains the living earth on which we depend. One of these stories opens the way to living in gratitude and amazement at the richness and generosity of the world. One of these stories asks us to bestow our gifts in kind, to celebrate our kinship with the world. We can choose. If all the world is a commodity, how poor we grow. When all the world is a gift in motion, how wealthy we become.”

But how can we reimagine and reconfigure ourselves within these stories she’s offering? One way, Kimmerer believes, is for us to engage in restorative practices, such as those offered by the field of ecological restoration. But even this act is worthy of imbuing with cultural significance, as she encourages us to see beyond physical work at hand: “We need acts of restoration, not only for polluted waters and degraded lands, but also for our relationship to the world. We need to restore honor to the way we live.”

Restoring honor to our words, our actions, and our relationships is serious business, but for those who read Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass*, it is clear that this restorative work need not be dull. Through such concepts as the “Honorable Harvest,” which she implements at New York Superfund sites (“The Sacred and the Superfund”), within public schools while reciting the Pledge (“Allegiance to Gratitude”), or while restoring her back-yard pond with her daughters (“A Mother’s Work”), we get a sense that Kimmerer is by no means urging us toward doom-and-gloom environmentalism. Rather, this book points toward

practices that are at once playful, loving, invigorating, challenging, and altogether radical, in that they ask us to inspect the roots of our responsibilities as earth’s people. Perhaps to find, deep within us, a sense of sacredness based not on mere belief, but by direct experience.

As Kimmerer points out, the ecological restoration going on around us really can nourish us in critical, holy, and healing ways: “What if we could fashion a restoration plan that grew from multiple understandings of Land? Land as sustainer. Land as identity. Land as grocery store and pharmacy. Land as connection to our ancestors. Land as moral obligation. Land as sacred. Land as self.”

Perhaps, through some serious contemplation and action, we might work toward the ultimate challenge that Kimmerer presents us—like a braid of fragrant sweetgrass—the challenge to once again become indigenous to place. To no longer act as immigrants in a strange land, but rather as citizens of a land that you love, and to know that a land loves you back. For as Kimmerer suggests, this reciprocity is utterly transformative: “Knowing that you love the earth changes you, activates you to defend and protect and celebrate. But when you feel the earth loves you in return, that feeling transforms the relationship from a one-way street into a sacred bond.” Yes, circle that line. This book might well help weave us into that sacred bond, one braid at a time. 🌿

Robin Wall Kimmerer is a mother, scientist, decorated professor, and enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. Her first book, *Gathering Moss*, was awarded the John Burroughs Medal for outstanding nature writing. Her writings have appeared in *Orion*, *Whole Terrain*, and numerous scientific journals. She lives in Fabius, New York, where she is a SUNY Distinguished Teaching Professor of Environmental Biology, and the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment.

Braiding Sweetgrass is available from Milkweed Editions. \$18; 408 pages.

Coda

The *Daoine Sídhe*

BRIAN DOYLE



When our daughter was little I left notes for her from the *daoine sídhe*, the small people, the people of peace, the hidden people, the people of the thickets. I left those notes everywhere outside the house, on the porch, on the path up to our house, on exposed rocks, gummed to the trunks of trees with sap, slipped into the clefts of bark, folded into the quadrants of the fence. The *daoine sídhe* are not easily seen but they are there in the bushes, in the mounds and hillocks of fields, flitting among the trees, smiling in the web and braid of branches. The notes were written on the shells and hulls of nuts and the flanks of leaves and the smooth bark of white walnut twigs. The *daoine sídhe* acknowledge that the world does not believe they are alive and well and adamant and elusive and interested in the doings of all beings of every sort and shape. I would try to leave a note every other day at least, and whenever I had to travel and miss a day or two of notes I felt a sag in my heart at the thought of our small daughter searching the porch and the fence and the walnut tree for notes and finding no notes and thinking perhaps the *daoine sídhe* were no longer her close and particular friends. There are many theories as to who the *daoine sídhe* are and one theory is that once they knew larger stronger crueller people were inarguably taking from them the places they loved they retreated to the shadows and the hidden places, under the ground and into the thickets, into all the half-seen half-noticed places all around us no matter where we live. We see so little. I would scrawl the notes with my left hand so that my handwriting could not be recognized and I was careful never to use a pen that she knew to be her father's pen. I learned not to leave notes from the *daoine sídhe* exposed to the rain because then the message would be washed away leaving nothing but hints and intimations. Sometimes I would leave a message without words. Another theory of the *daoine sídhe* is that they are supernatural beings but I do not think this is so. I think they are as natural and organic and present as you and me. I think that mostly what people think is supernatural

isn't. I think there is much more going on than we are aware of and sensitive to and perceptive about, and the more we think we know what is possible and impossible the more we are foolish and arrogant and imprisoning ourselves in an idea. I think language is an attempt to drape words on things we sense but do not understand, like grace and the *daoine sídhe*. It is easy to say that the small people, the people of peace, the hidden people, do not exist, but you do not know that is so and neither do I. Our daughter used to write back to the *daoine sídhe* on the shells and hulls of nuts and the flanks of leaves and the nubs of cedar cones and on chips of bark. I kept every single note she ever wrote to the *daoine sídhe*. There came a time when I stopped writing the notes, because that time comes, and she stopped writing back, because that time comes, but the *daoine sídhe* wrote to her, and she would rise from her bed, and run outside, and search the porch and the fence and the walnut tree for notes, and until the day I die I will remember the headlong way she ran, thrilled and anticipatory and delighted, with a warm secret in her face, because the people of peace were her friends, and they wrote her name on the skins of this world, and left her little gifts and presents, and asked her questions about her people and her dreams, and the bushes and hedges and thickets and branches for her were alive with mystery and affection, and to those who would say I misled our daughter, I filled her head with airy nonsense, I soaked her in useless legend and fable and myth, I lied to her about what is present and absent in the world, I would answer, And how do you know what is possible and impossible in this world of wonders beyond our ken? Are you really so sure there is not far more than you can see living in the half-seen half-noticed places all around us? And to fill a child's heart with joy for any reason whatsoever, on any excuse whatsoever, for as long as howsoever possible, before the world builds fences and walls around her thrilled and fervid imagination, how is that a bad thing, how is that a bad thing at all? ♣

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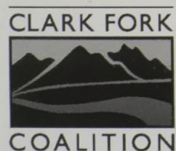
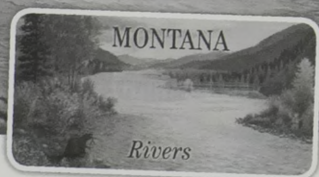
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