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THE NATURE OF THE WEST

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The Fierce Urgency of Now

with Ana Maria Spagna

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

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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.

OUR TITLE *Camas* takes its name from the plant *Camassia quamash*, which is native to the American West. Camas has historically served as a staple food and medicine for Indigenous communities. Its harvest continues longstanding reciprocity 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 artists, and established voices to publish their work alongside each other.

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From the Editors

"We are now faced with the fact that tomorrow is today. We are confronted with the fierce urgency of now. In this unfolding conundrum of life and history, there is such a thing as being too late. This is no time for apathy or complacency. This is a time for vigorous and positive action."

—Martin Luther King, Jr.

These are truly strange times.

The theme "The Fierce Urgency of Now" takes on an altered meaning under the umbrella of COVID-19. For public safety, the Environmental Studies Department has had to cancel the celebration of a major milestone: its 50-year anniversary. We at Camas have had to cancel our spring reading event, Prairie Songs. We have all had to adjust to tackling what we can from the safety of our homes, if we are privileged enough to do so.

However, as we struggle to accept our new reality, many of us have turned to art in its many forms to help us escape from or make sense of the things we can't control. The Summer 2020 issue of Camas is one project that has given us a way to engage with creative excellence during a time of uncertainty.

The spread of disease does not take away the power of Dr. Martin Luther King's original words, although they now exist in a context he did not envision when he spoke them. Action is needed on many fronts. Human health is especially pressing at the moment, but our environment is also at the forefront of our minds, especially at this juncture that has the potential to alter the way our culture operates in major ways.

As the nation and the world continue to fight the spread of COVID-19 and care for those who have been affected, we thank the essential workers who are performing the toughest jobs, as well as the artists, who can provide whatever small moments of compassion, distraction, and hope we need most in times like these.

Be well, and thanks for reading.

Jackie Bussjaeger and Claire Carlson

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The Question of What To Do With a Body

NONFICTION | HARRISON PYROS

I am freshly twenty-one when I learn how loud the snapping of bones can be. It has something to do with the pressure and density, a sudden crumbling of hardened material in a vice grip that builds like an explosion. The soundwaves shoot through the muscle and skin and hair like an activated landmine, spraying the area with serrated auditory shrapnel. It is the loudest thing I heard in the moment—above the impact or screeching tires or sudden gasp—and it echoed in my head like a never-ending cave scream. Anna tells me later that it's what made her cry.

The drive from Seattle to Portland is both poorly lit and thickly populated with wildlife. The road meanders with the drifting Pacific Northwest feel of a stoner's slow saunter making for wide, loping turns and a divider line that is difficult to follow with the high beams of a car. I would claim this stretch of highway is more prone to accidents, but I haven't found the numbers to back that up yet. You'll just have to trust me.

I would like to say that I never saw the deer coming but that would only be partially true. We were busy commenting on Anna's podcast playing, tired from our trip, thinking we were more clever than we were, believing those empty roads would remain just that. I hit the brakes a second short and refused to swerve—the thought of my decade-old car spinning out, rolling, colliding with a tree was enough to keep the wheel straight. Instead, we listened to the sound of femurs, joints, fragile ribs crunching against my bumper with the small and selfish thought that it was better I didn't swerve, better the deer than us.

> Anna and I stayed with the body for a long time but didn't get back in the car. To do that would feel wrong in a way that I still can't describe.

We sat frozen in the car for a long time, long enough for my foot to start cramping from pressing down on the brake. The podcast was still playing, the voices of semi-funny comedians sounding far away, and even though she was crying, Anna reached over and turned on the hazard lights when I reached to put the car in park.

This isn't the first time Anna has heard bones snap in real time. She would later tell me of her junior year of high school when she watched a boy slip from the third story all the way to the ground floor. He had toppled over the railing in a freak accident of lost balance and landed on a table that collapsed like an egg shell beneath his weight. He would spend a week in the ICU before regaining consciousness, but in that interim, Anna and all the other witnesses had been ushered into councilors' offices in a knee-jerk reaction to suppress trauma. She only talked to the adults for a few minutes—she didn't have the right words. How do you describe the sound of a body caving in on itself?

In the time we sat still in shock, no other cars passed by. We watched the yellow hazard lights blink in front of us, the deer out of sight, and tried to ignore that the headlights had a red glow from splattered blood. I would like to believe the deer died instantly because by the time we were brave enough to look, it wasn't breathing, lying at angles that didn't make sense, its eyes turned away from us in a visage of shame.

The question of what to do with a body.

When I hit the deer, I am still twenty-one so I refuse

Little Pillar | SANDEEP SHETE

to cry in public because I am a boy and while boys can cry, I refused to be one of them. Staring at the deer, I should have cried. I wanted to, but I just choked myself instead. Two months earlier, my father had died just as suddenly as the deer—a heart attack on some mid-week morning lying next to my mother in a room they had shared since before I was born. At the funeral, I sobbed in a back room alone because I couldn't comprehend that my mother was now left to a bedroom too big for one person. I wondered if this deer had been a part of a herd.

Anna had to turn away—the broken body and silence of it all made her shake. Instead she looked at my red-webbed bumper and said we would need to wipe off the headlights somehow. I thought about the month following my father's death and how my mother tried everything she could to change and reclaim her space. She got a smaller bed and moved all of his clothes from their shared closet to my unused room. She switched the rug and painted the cream walls a soft shade of purple with an urgency that was breathless. My family has a tendency to subdue and erase before we can begin to cope—the older I get, the more I understand. It had to be a different room, it couldn't be the same bed, rug, walls where she had watched her best friend slip away with an EMT declaring time of death.

Without looking at it, Anna kept repeating we needed to do something with the body, that it was wrong to just leave it here for the coyotes. I was still refusing to cry, but couldn't look away, still thinking about my mother and her purple paint, trying to believe that I am more than a mass of meat and bones, that someone would pause with discomfort at the thought of abandoning me on the roadside.

"We stay with the body, or have bad dreams,"[1] are words from an essay I hadn't read in years, suddenly scratching at me like an innate social code. Words that said if we are raised right, if we are in essence a "good" person, then we don't leave a body to the elements and the scavengers. It is the basest, most primitive sense of morality. It is riding in the ambulance even though you know he's not coming back. It is the desperation to not leave those behind.

We hang on and refuse to let go until we must.

Despite the darkened roads and encroaching trees, Anna and I still had service. We had to look up who we needed to call and a few minutes later we were on the phone with the police. Don't worry, they said in a way that was too nonchalant. These things happen all the time.

From the same site that told us who to call, we learned what usually happened to the body. The carcass, the site called it. The cadaver, the specimen, John and Jane Doe scientists and researchers call a body. In most cases, the deer will be thrown into an incinerator—a mass of meat and bones reduced to ash, scattered or disposed of somewhere and somehow, the site didn't bother to specify.

My family prefers cremation—we have an aversion to corpses and open caskets to the degree we choose to be burnt and condensed to particles suitable for an urn or box. My grandmother, my aunt, my father—no one wanted a grave, instead they asked for a place on the mantle, the bookshelf, the old TV stand. It's the concept of anchoring yourself to your home in a way that is so quintessentially American, asking your loved ones to not let go, to keep you close in a way where photographs are not enough, a need that can only be fulfilled by the remnants of your physical body.

Anna and I stayed with the body for a long time but didn't get back in the car. To do that would feel wrong in a way that I still can't describe. We wiped down the headlights with an old beach towel I found in the trunk and waited for red and blue police lights to appear. I didn't want to leave the deer—its future as unclaimed ashes weighed on me in an illogical fear of untethered desertion.

I thought about my father neatly-placed on the TV stand in an oak box. I thought about holding on and letting go. I thought about my mother finally being able to do something with his clothes—she called me and my sister because she couldn't do it alone. She couldn't sift through his ties and shirts and shoes in a bedroom that was too big for one person. My sister and I came to her and stayed.

Anna and I leaned on one another, waiting for the red and blue lights. In the glow of the hazards, we sat down and chose to stay. Because we should, because we had to, because we refused to be abandoned on the roadside.

[1] Edwidge Danticat, "On Mothers"

Suppose the Rainy Season

POETRY | ROBERT KEELER

i.

If in Amazonia my grasping hand incites
a buzzing bee, will those recurring
feelings inscribe some dainty portraiture?
If so, my ragged soul begs off the firmament.

ii.

I go about my garden, I trim and straighten,
brighten; the while a covert snail inches slow
into sun. So then my sprinkling may glisten
his slipperiness of travel, just as rain slicks
my own evening's sacramental walk.

iii.

An armature of poignant flowers invites a new-
skinned monarch to tack across a just-mowed
lawn; at morning, a ruddy bug makes assault
on bulbs that limp to light through crusty larch.

Her | Tara Troiano

iv.

Vapors drift away off piled-high thunderheads;
like principalities of consciousness, they condense.
Beneath them, we finger-paint our thoughts—so
messy they can be, but brilliant; while at side,
our tinny cleaning cans slink toward inky gray.

v.

Those wild ocelots of thought propose, Deny
my frosty little penances? So, I scatter winks to
doubters that offset, even counter, their azured
gravities. Evenings glide to dark, swallows off to flit.

vi.

I'm like one who senses all frequencies a sinner's
heart may measure—a harmony of sound or sense.
Might some gift restore my inner peace? Or might a
child's compass, aloof in child's hands, swing around
the wintery earth below it, by force of ferrous needle?

Who | Erika Glass

Battening Down

FICTION | KAITLYN BURD

So-called farmhands hunker down under quilts I've made. If Rosie were still alive, she would have already announced her presence in the kitchen with the scent of sausage, but there is no sausage now. No children venture out of their rooms after daybreak. Chicken shits. I put the coffee on to boil— the stovetop unfamiliar and flat, not the one I grew up with. My arm jiggles from the weight of the full kettle, and when the water boils, I let the kettle keen for a long moment before shutting the burner off.

Though it is a gusty morning, I settle onto the hanging bench with my coffee, half-expecting to be mistaken for a ghost of my sister. They would ask for some final wisdom, and I'd say, Do you think it would be so easy?

To curtail confusion, when a niece finally does come out, I ask, "Is my shirt on straight?"

She's surprised, but what was the point of condoling if I have my Penny's tag sticking out?

"Your shirt's fine, Aunt Clara."

I slow the rock of the hanging bench so she can have a seat. I have to point my toes to do so. Used to, I could have set both feet on the ground.

"You doing all right?" the niece asks.

"I'm okay."

"Of course. But I know this must be a big adjustment all the same."

Rosemary died in her sleep at 95 with 10 children, 20 or so grandkids, and more great-grandkids than I care to remember, all of whom were conceived during wedlock, which is more prim than what my line can say. I've already counted sixteen hogs sleeping out in her pen, not to mention the chickens, and Rosie was the one who had Daddy's fiddle hanging on her wall. I only had two kids before my uterus unhinged from my insides — though that was probably for the best given that my husband was an American Standard Good-For-Nothing. Aside from which, I did not receive my daddy's fiddle but my mama's chipped wash stand.

"She lived a good life," I rap the hand that the niece has let rest on my coffee-sipping arm.

I know better than to elaborate. Normally, I go without much notice at gatherings now, but since Rosie died there has been heavy scrutiny on me. Back when I made decisions for my children and not the other way around, words whizzed from me like bullets they were so striking, and I was a pistol for them. Now, the pistol I still am wants to say, Frankly dear, it's not like we didn't see it coming—Rosemary and me, were it not for the fact that the family has already taken my Camry, and if I act too erratic, they told me it's the BB gun that will go next. I need it to keep the squirrels out of my garden. And I've already scratched Greta's name into it so she can get it when I die.

"I wanted to ask you," says the niece, "Would you like to say something at the funeral?"

"Probably not."

The bench's swinging halts. The niece looks at me like

I've offended her, but she's offended me by using the privilege of her long legs so freely.

"You know I can't read anymore," I tell her, though I can when I have my magnifying glass. "And what's the point in me rambling off the top of my head when that's the priest's job?"

"Well, you just knew her so well, I thought —"

"I was lucky. You can only brag about that."

"What about the Rosary. Would you lead the Rosary?"

The old folks' dilemma: to be senile or spiritual? Meanwhile, it seems this woman has staked her claim in sentiment. I want to tell her that where Rosie and I come from, life, like love, is attendance-based. As long as you are present, you've done good. And if you want to be useful, then carry a safety pin in your pocket. Instead, I agree to lead the Rosary.

Pete comes out onto the porch, flapping a sheet of "Hello! My name is . . ." stickers.

"We are simply too many," he says.

My name tag reads "Aunt Clara Lynn" like I'm a box biscuit mix. Still, I fix it to my maroon silk shirt, and soon enough there are cars pulling into the front field. Everyone claims to be family, arrived early to help with setting up or putting out food. There is a parade of mayonnaise-based salads and those little ham sandwiches, which I hope have been smattered with the good seed mustard even if it does get stuck in my dentures. After giving birth to the children that my American Standard husband seemed to forget, I took a vengeance on him by getting fat. To his complaints of my thickening waist, I pointed out there was no point in keeping a figure if all I had to do was run a vacuum, not a farm.

After a man's death, it was common that the wife donated his clothes, but no one questioned me when they came by with casseroles to find the piles of fabric torn to scraps.

My kids come from Louisville with their grown daughters. These few grandchildren of mine hardly ever saw Rosie—not that I saw much more of her after the American Standard moved me to that shoebox in the city—so I am surprised they've made the two-hour drive to attend the wake.

"How are you doing, Nana?" my youngest granddaughter, Greta, asks.

"All my family's dead now," I tell her.

"Aren't I your family?" she cocks her head.

"You didn't know me when I was beautiful."

"But I've seen pictures."

"It's not about how I looked. It's about how I acted."

"I'm told there's a family resemblance."

I told her that. When I was Greta's age, I always tried to behave like I wanted my flowers to grow—hungry for light and heedless of their own beauty. But I fear I've become more like a weed, obstinate in the face of adversity. Or maybe not totally obstinate—a weed that agrees to say the Rosary. A holy weed. Call me a crown of thorns.

Greta brings me ham sandwiches, and I eat them, leave the Dixie plate as evidence beside me, but still more people approach. They try to wait on me. As a sister-less woman, apparently I'm the space for their consolation casseroles, the place to stuff the labors of their grief. They bring unsweet tea, sweet tea, and strawberry pie made too early in the season, approaching me as the queen-mayor-archbishop-Virgin Mary of Jasper County. Rosie was usually the one I'd talk to at this kind of shindig. She'd point to the western fields, which are now being combed flat by wind and say, Remember when you were first pregnant and staying up here with me and mama, and Coleman came to visit for the weekend and flipped his car seven times in the cornfields?

She'd say it like she thought it was a miracle, how the American Standard hadn't had a scratch on him when he'd gotten out of the car he'd crushed like a beer can. What I remember is how our family took less of the yield that year because of all the crops he'd destroyed.

The sky looks ready to storm. When the undertakers arrive, they hasten to get the coffin inside, requiring Rosie's sons and mine to bear her up the stairs. A metal stand waits in the living room.

"My shirt on straight?" I ask my oldest son when he comes back from the task of putting Rosie down.

"Sure is, Mom," he responds. "Not that it matters much."

Margot and Greta, his daughters, summon him. There seems to be some dispute as to whether or not it was Margot or Greta's idea to play hide and seek in the cornfields when they were younger. Their father hoots. The two hadn't been ten feet from the edge of the crop, but they'd both thought they'd have to sleep under stars. The family is lost to me in their own amusement, though wasn't I there too, the day all that happened?

"You must be Aunt Clara Lynn," a slick-haired man approaches with two cups in hand.

"Call me Clara."

"Well Clara, would you like — "

I hold up a hand. "Give me more to drink, and I'll wet myself." I expect this to send the man away, but he shifts on his feet.

"I know this is a sensitive time and all, but I've heard all around that your quilts are the best in the county, and I just wanted to tell you that if you have any you're selling, I'd be happy to give you a fair price for them. I work at the auction house and — "

"There are no more quilts."

The words come louder than I intended. My son glances over from the other side of the porch to see if I've gone senile and nods my granddaughters in my direction. They approach in stride.

"That is," I temper, "there are no more quilts, save one."

After the American Standard's funeral, an event far enough

Face 2 Face | Jack Bordnick

in the past to make me a young widow, I smoked a whole pack of Carltons while emptying out his side of the closet, all the way back to the dress shirts he'd received as gifts and never cared to wear. The cigarette smoke overwhelmed the mustiness of him. After a man's death, it was common that the wife donated his clothes, but no one questioned me when they came by with casseroles to find the piles of fabric torn to scraps. The colors, dun, khaki, and charcoal, did not promise much in the way of loveliness, but I made a quilt from them anyway, my own version of the Dresden plate pattern. Instead of each wedge aligned to make a smooth turning wheel, though, I tore his old factory shirt into a long column that jutted out to dwarf the polyester of his poker playing polo. So his wedding suit rivaled his casual clothes. I patched and patched until every piece of fabric was caught in an impossible wheel, then I stuffed in batting and sewed deep into the ditches to fix the backing to it. Since then, I have used that quilt every year, once a year: I hang it on the wall of my kitchen so that, the day we do the corn, the quilt protects my wallpaper from getting sprayed while we scrub the cobs free of their husks' silks.

Margot stands to the left, Greta to the right of this stranger who seems to be under the delusion that quilts like mine can be bought by whoever could pay. As if I wouldn't have kept them all for the women beside him, had the American Standard not threatened to sell every stitch I sewed long ago.

"And you wouldn't consider making a new one for an admirer?" the stranger asks.

"Our nana's done quilting," Margot informs him, and when he turns to her, Greta sighs to his back, hamming up her accent, "Gone and danced her bobbins to her blindness."

"And you two are the ones who have all these famous quilts?"

"They're upstairs," Margot says.

"So other members of the family have them then?" he says. "I might ask if I can see them."

Once left alone with my granddaughters, I wish I knew what to say to them. Or I wish that I knew them, but truth is that they are as familiar to me as anyone else. Two sisters, two people, two jots of life: live long enough, and even what is supposed to be new and distinct proves reminiscent.

"Aunt Clara, would you come in?" a niece, name tag reading "Rita," calls. "People are wanting to do the Rosary."

I sigh. "Guess I should eat a snack beforehand."

I eat fish sticks without taking a plate, and then they set me in the Lay-Z Boy in the living room. From where I sit, I can't see into the open casket. I just see the big box and the fiddle on the wall. I let out an accidental, petite burp during the first decade. After that, things calm down. Fat raindrops speckle the windows while I recite prayer by rote, same rhythm as milking a cow.

When Rosie was seventeen, I was twelve and enamored with all her comings and goings. I once followed her into the fields in the afternoon when she and her beau Sly went out to the pond. She'd said she was going for a swim. This was before anything had ever been mentioned about engagement, so she omitted the Sly part because of course they'd be swimming naked. He turned away when she went to change, and I worried he'd spot me, but I was a beanpole and blended right into the vegetation. When he thought

she'd stopped rustling, he asked if it was okay for him to turn around. There was so much life in the pond that they both knew he wouldn't be able to tell her body from a tadpole's once she was in it. She said "yes," and he turned, and there she was, naked as Eve in the garden. Unabashed at the bank, she faced him.

I questioned her about the swim that night, while we tossed awake in the bed we shared, and she explained that it had been a test. If he'd have laughed or chastised her, Rosie would have left off with him then. But he didn't laugh or get mad. He looked at her. By the close of the season, they were married.

Years later, far afield in my own marriage, I traveled through Europe with the American Standard Good, who left me at a museum in a matchbook red dress because he said art bored him. I could find him in the bar, which eventually, surely, I must have, though I don't remember it. What remains is me posing before portraits, trying to repay the favor of beauty until finally I found myself before this canvas with a picnic. A curious scene, there were men in tailored old suits and a naked woman sitting on the blanket with them. She regarded the viewer, or the view over the viewer's shoulder. Behind them all was a woman with white fabric bunched up to her thighs, searching for something in the water. Everyone was oblivious to the spilled fruit, and as I looked I thought—So they knew us.

We haven't gotten to the last decade of the Rosary before we're interrupted. My oldest son walks in the room and says, "We have an issue."

"Pigs gnawing on the fence again?" Rust, Rosie's oldest, asks.

But then it comes, the unordained, deaf wail of the tornado siren.

"Jasper's under advisory," my son announces.

In the initial commotion, people forget about me. Setting my beads down, I go to the window, and I see the whole world simmer. Tree leaves flashing their undersides, looking pale, like they've given all their green to the lowering sky.

"Well we've got to get to the basement," says niece Donna.

"We've got to get the pigs in," Rust says.

For the next fifteen minutes, there is a lot of bustling. Those accustomed to working the farm go out to secure everything, relieved by quick movement. Rosie's great-grandkids take platters of food down to the basement—"no need for it to go to waste," Jenny, Rosie's youngest, approves.

"Aunt Clara, can you manage the steps?" someone approaches me.

"Is there a rail?" Margot asks before I can answer. "Then she'll be fine."

My trouble thus resolved, there is only one question left, which Marianne asks: "What about the coffin?"

Some doubt we can get it down. There is also the uncertainty of whether or not it's worth it.

"I will not have my mama whipped around like Dorothy to Oz," Rita announces.

"Maybe that's as close as she can get to Heaven," her husband, Billy, jokes.

Rita elbows him.

It is decided that the pallbearers will take her down, after everyone else is situated. I'm the last one to face the steps, and Margot is right that I can do it with a rail, but it is still slow goings. I'm not fully to the bottom by the time the boys come with the coffin between them, blotting out the hole with the daylight in it. I mind my footing. Down left, down right, down left, down right. Music comes to me, like this is some square-dance call I am following, and all of the sudden I stall.

"The fiddle!" I crow.

"What's that?" grunts my youngest son from the back of the coffin.

"The fiddle's upstairs on the wall," I holler. "Can you go fetch it."

"I'm trying not to drop your sister, Mom," he calls back.

Rust blows air from his lips. "If you'd kindly keep up the progress, Aunt Clara."

"Rosie'd want you to save the fiddle."

"After we get her down," my son says, so I keep moving.

Being that the men are generally taller than me, they ought to watch their heads on the last step, but, distracted by the weight of his mother on his shoulder, Chuck forgets.

"Cheese and rice!" he shouts—a swear no doubt instilled by the virtue of his wife.

By the time they get Rosie on the pingpong table, shuffling around some casseroles so there is enough space for her, blood has run its course into Chuck's eyes. He sits down on a dusty lawn chair that someone has unfolded, while one of the granddaughters who works as a nurse tries to check the injury without blocking the dim electric lightbulb.

There is canned sausage all along one wall, jam up another. The floor is cement, the walls the same but whitewashed and cracked. Most of the chairs are the fold out kind, though there is a couch, which I am offered a seat in. I decline.

This room has always been more of a cellar than a proper basement. There is canned sausage all along one wall, jam up another. The floor is cement, the walls the same but whitewashed and cracked. Most of the chairs are the fold out kind, though there is a couch, which I am offered a seat in. I decline. It's too low—if I sit in it after that number I just did with the stairs, I won't be able to stand for the rest of the day.

For all we've remembered the ham sandwiches, we've forgotten to bring down a first aid kit. One of the kids goes off in search of it.

"The fiddle," I remind mine.

They go up and stay up for too long. Some toddler is crying while a reedy young grandkid with a tucked in shirt tells Chuck about how he looks with blood on his face.

Chuck grunts. He hadn't been one to lobby for bringing Rosie down.

Jenny goes to re-open the casket, and because I am not

ready to sit, I can see in. Through the dimness, I can just make her out — Rosemary. She looks like my sister, after her death.

My sons come down the steps shouting, though I've spent the better part of my life telling them not to shout indoors.

"We can't get it off the wall, Mom," one says.

"Don't think we've got time to remove it without damaging it."

"You tried?"

"We tried our best."

I look at my sister. Her head has been pushed up against the padding because they must have taken the coffin down top first. It makes her hair look flat and pink from how the white strands reflects the color of the satin.

"I've seen you better."

"What's that, Mom?"

I sit down on the couch between to squirmy great-grandchildren. "I think those fish sticks gave me indigestion."

"Anyone mind if I light up down here?" married-into-the-family Billy asks.

"You will not smoke with children in the room," Marianne protests.

Pete turns on a paint-speckled boom box. It makes that one-tone sound of the future coming to claim us, and I feel myself being gobbled up by the couch while the child at my side flies a plastic plane into my thigh.

"Too bad we can't play ping pong."

"That's disrespectful."

"I'm just saying."

"And I'm just saying, shut your pie hole."

"Well can't you see the casket's tearing on the net?"

"With all this sausage, I'd be fine if we never go up from here."

"What about a television? We got time to grab it?"

"No."

"But I brought down the bourbon."

"Pete, will you turn that racket off? You'll scare the little ones," Donna cuts through the press of conversation.

Pete flicks the radio off, so that the cry of the siren above becomes more pronounced and leads to a cowed silence. Rita asks if I'd like to start another Rosary.

"Left my beads upstairs," I say.

"Well, here's an idea: Why don't we go around sharing fond memories of Mama—or Grandma—or Rosemary."

The misty-eyed let out their sighs.

"When God closes a door he opens a window."

"Or a pit into the ground," I say, not paying attention as to whether my sons look at me.

The great-grands go first, the least bashful, likely because they have nothing delicate to say. Listening to them, I could not be more depressed. How little they got to know Rosie. To them, she died as something between a pillow and a cookie. They thought "honey" was a term of endearment, though Rosie told me outright that it was because she couldn't keep their names straight. And why should she? In our time, names were like places—fixed, useful things. Now, it's like the hospital is handing out prizes for originality, the names that come out an alphabet

> Our pivots are stitches, and we turn with the belief that if we can just make this dance, then we can pin down our souls and save them. We are the last ones, and even when the music stops we do not let go of each other.

confetti.

"She had soft hands," the kid with the plastic plane says.

Shortly after he's done speaking, Margot ejects him from his seat and takes up a silent space beside me. A relief, though I have no idea what kind of face I'd been making to give the impression that I needed one.

I only start listening when Rosie's kids start speaking.

"Remember Mom's dog, Roger?" Hank asks, at which point my sons inexplicably starting guffawing.

"What about him?" Jenny asks, defensive.

"Well you know Ma was so torn up about the vet cremating him against Catholic customs," Hank begins, "And she tasked some of us boys to go out and give him a proper burial. Well —"

"Hank dropped his ashes in the pond!" Tony interrupts, cawing. "The boat rocked and the damn box just sprung straight out of his hands and into the water with a plop —"

"But, we stayed out for an hour more to make it seem like we'd said a whole mass or something," Hank finishes.

"Put pond water under our eyes to give the appearance of crying."

"You didn't!" Rita exclaims, and I strain my eyes against the shadows to see her smile. They all smile, even as Pete points out that Hank's story had more to do with him than Rosemary.

The light flickers, making some look up, as if they need to divine the cause for what this place has always been telling them: It's the wind. It's the flatness. It's the fate of homes we've built with no mind for turning.

Apparently the bottle of bourbon is being handed around because it makes it to me.

"What about you Aunt Clara Lynn?"

"Yeah, what about you, Nana?" Greta asks from where she leans against the opposite wall.

At first, I think they're asking if I will drink, but when they keep watching after I take a swig, I see they want a story. Didn't I, after all, know Rosie best? These people who could not save my father's fiddle want tales from the golden days.

I consider listing off pattern names, but the taste of the bourbon takes me back to my own wedding. Rosie, my mom, and I killed and cooked chickens for a full day leading up to it, and that was with the quick way, using two nails and a hatchet. I was nineteen, and they buttoned me into my clinging dress. I carried wild orchids in my hands. Our vows—my American Standard's and mine—were simple, and still we broke them, but we didn't

Desert Drifter | Dutch Dyer

think to worry about any of that yet. We celebrated. Everyone ate their fill at the reception—except for me. I was too busy smiling like a fool to spare time to chew, and that was before people owned cameras, much less hired people to bring them to weddings. I was happy, and I didn't want to be weighed down when it came time for dancing. All this in a barn with lanterns, as was necessity then but now is a sort of fashion. Picture it: the whole county of Jasper in two lines, me at one head, my daddy and his boys at the front of us all. My father gives the first saw of his fiddle bow over the strings, then a stomp, and he begins.

The lines peel and turn, gleaming, ingenious machinery. The time of the dance is truer than a wound clock's. So my daddy calls; the wonder of this quiet man is that his voice never flags. He's saved up for the occasion—a grace in the Depression, to save up for anything. My husband spun me, spins me, and I am a buxom bride, but he has his folks and the bourbon, so at the end of the night who is the last one to dance with me? Rosie. This is how we both had learned all the steps. Since she's the elder, though I'm taller, she always takes the spot of the man. My father, grinning, calls all the quicker—maybe to challenge us or maybe to tire us so that the party can finally end. In any case, we go so fast, the calls no longer feel like commands but a plan we're part of. Our pivots are stitches, and we turn with the belief that if we can just make this dance, then we can pin down our souls and save them. We are the last ones, and even when the music stops we do not let go of each other. We did not let go, that is.

When I finish, it appears I've gone blind, but really it's just that the lights go out with almost perfect timing, and up above we can no longer hear the siren wail, which means there is no more time to be warned. We hear the wind rip out the roots of the lives above us.

"Oh my," someone gasps.

Margot gets hold of my hand, and I give it. Metal clangs. Strained beams screech, upended rooms booming.

Someone starts to mutter a prayer, and others join in. It's a chant, a defiance, the one thing they know to say together at a moment where speaking pumps the fear out of them. They grow louder and louder, all their accents shot through with the pipe calls of little kids, and it seems they have won because the howling passes before they finish. For one astonishing moment, they continue shouting into the vacuum of sound, and then they all fall silent at different syllables as we take in the enduring darkness.

"Should we go up?"

"What if it comes back?"

"It's a twister, Marianne, not a vengeance."

The young ones hasten up the steps first, but when they can't get the door opened Rust and more experienced members of family rise to help them. This takes a while. Margot loosens her hand from mine—I'd forgotten it wasn't my own—and she generates a dim light. Still, I can't see anything.

"Prepare yourself," Donna finally calls.

I let the quick ones pass. The last one by the table, I fumble around until I find the lid.

"Can I turn around now?"

Yes.

I close it.

It's slow goings up the stairs.

"Thank god Mama didn't live to see this," Jenny says.

"We're all right," Rita holds her, while Marianne howls.

My son hands me up onto some wobbly surface, and for a moment there is too much light. I have to blink and blink, until it fades in slow. I clasp my hands to my chest.

"Oh there it is!" I exclaim, my voice higher than I'm used to, more girlish.

"The fiddle?" my son asks.

The fiddle I've forgotten. What I see now are shattered beams, still-papered walls, exposed piping. No house remains, no barn, no corn crops. The fields have been resown with the material of lifetimes, everything torn to scraps, to pieces. Bits of my own grandma's china are buried bones in the garden. A couch and a commode sit equally out in the open. Chickens cluck around scattered papers, impervious. The fabric that has been snagged into staying still ripples like the old wash despite the snapped line. Spotting the design is easy now that the whole farm's contents are laid bare before me. What I can't make out are the edges, where to seal the binding.

True Grits and For You, Wheaties

POETRY | WENDY WAGNER

Chiquita Banana takes off her mask.
Beneath it, tired lines weave
around ice blue eyes, her blond hair
mostly gray.

Juan Valdes slides a cup of coffee
across the table. They do not breakfast
together often but when they do,
it is always this:

coffee
eggs
bacon
a little fruit salad,
some pineapple,
bananas, of course,
and often
a dusting of coconut
over the top.

The food is purely symbolic,
as how every buffet in the Underworld
features pomegranate, despite
Persephone's
preference for jujube.

Their forks move without rhythm.
A secretary brings in the paper,
but they don't touch it.
Their assistant called them with stock updates

before the sun came up in Japan.
If Jimmy Dean wasn't in Minnesota
overseeing the construction of a slaughterhouse,
he would have commiserated.

Eventually Juan pours another coffee—
the same brand
you probably got
at the gas station because
you were out of coffee
at home
or you didn't have time
to fire up the Keurig because
you were too tired
after a long night balancing spreadsheets
or coding
or whatever it is you do.
Maybe you don't even have
a coffee pot because
you only drink it at work

and anyway
it's free there.

The whiskered leather of his lips draw up tight as he sips
like the top of a silk purse or the base of a sow's ear.
There is business to be done
and as you know, business requires coffee.

She sighs. "Sometimes I have to remind myself
It's not just breakfast, it's all of the Nasdaq."
He picks up the phone
and asks to talk to the president of Chevron.

Outside, another farmer signs away her fields and hopes
there is room for her in America.

Street People

FICTION | DON NOEL

"I hope you're not going to stop," Carol demanded.

Ahead of them, where the dirt road met the pavement, were two disheveled figures. Hitchhikers, apparently; a red pickup truck that had let them out was almost out of sight, headed east toward Nevada.

"Just to ask," Henry said placatingly. At seven thousand feet, Cedar Flats was high enough to be cold on even a summer night. "It will be dark soon."

"You suppose they're headed to the bristlecones?" Millie asked from the back seat.

"That's a long way," said her brother. "How many miles is it, Dad?"

"Millie, Carl, just stay out of it, please," their mother said without turning her head. "It's none of our business."

"About ten miles," Henry said. "And four thousand feet higher."

"They'll never make it tonight," said Carl.

"Carl." Carol frowned over her shoulder. "Enough."

But Henry was already slowing. They were a man and a woman. He pulled alongside and rolled down his window. "You all right, folks?"

"Just headed up to see the pines. Thank you for asking, bub." The man's gray hair sprawled from a blue knit watch cap into an equally untamed beard. He appeared to wear two pairs of trousers, the second visible through worn patches, and at least two jackets, perhaps Army surplus. The woman, white hair stuffed into a shapeless gray fedora, seemed to wear several jackets, too, and two or three long skirts. They were as lumpy as Michelin men. Both wore faded lace-up boots.

"It's a good piece up," Henry said. "Farther than you can walk before dark."

"Not a problem," the woman said. "We're used to sleeping outdoors." She looked up. Brushed with jet contrails, the sky was pale but cloudless. On the horizon, across the Owens Valley, the High Sierra glacier fields were fading to blue. "It ain't going to rain." She looked old enough to be his grandmother.

Millie rolled down her window. "You don't have a tent or bedroll or anything."

"No, missie, we don't need one," the man said.

Carl leaned over his sister. "You don't even have very big knapsacks."

"Thanks, sonny. We're come a long way like this," the woman said.

"Enough, Henry," Carol muttered. "We'll be late for drinks and dinner." She stared deliberately out her window at the Sierra skyline.

Millie rolled down her window. "You don't have a tent or bedroll or anything."
"No missie, we don't need one," the man said.

"How far have you come, then?" Henry asked the man.

"We're from New York. Got one of those see-America bus tickets."

"No, I meant today. Where from today?"

"Manzanar," the woman said. "Where they kept the Japanese."

"We stopped there," Millie broke in from the back seat again. "They interned them, during the World War."

"Imprisoned 'em. We found a place to sleep in what used to be a barracks."

"The tourist center people let you?" Henry asked.

"No one bothered us."

"That's forty miles. Outside Lone Pine. Down near Mount Whitney."

"There wasn't a bus until noon," the man said. "But we stopped at a grocery to get some grub for breakfast, and a fellow brought us to Big Pine. Thumbed a ride up from there." He wagged his head in the direction of the disappeared red pickup.

"We want to see them Bristlecone Pines," the woman said. "One called Methuselah."

"Exactly." Carl leaned over his sister again. "We've just been up there. That one's almost five thousand years old."

"Older even than us," she joked.

Carl and Millie laughed appreciatively. Carol turned to scowl at them. "Enough, I said."

"The point is," Henry said to the man, "it's a long way. Steep road up. It's taken us a half-hour in the car, coming down."

"It'll be cold," Millie added. "There aren't any motels or anything."

"Can't afford motels anyway, missie," the woman said. "Just a little shelter under a tree is enough."

The sagebrush mesa was thinly populated with piñon pines and junipers, as short and squat as tall shrubs. "I'm not sure you can get under any of those," Henry said.

"We're expected in Big Pine, Henry." Carol turned to face him, obviously to be sure they heard.

"Aw, Mom!" the kids groaned.

"Only by the motelkeeper," Henry muttered at her.

"That's all right, bub. You go along. We're all right."

"There's a park entrance booth a little way back." Carl leaned over to Millie's window again. "Nobody's there, but there's a little

roof.

"That will do us fine," the woman said. "Thank you, sonny." She turned to Henry's window. "Thanks for stopping, sir. You go along now."

"Good luck." Henry rolled the window up and pulled out onto the highway.

"That was exciting, Dad," Millie said. "Who do you suppose they are?"

"Probably criminals," Carol said.

"I don't think so, Mom," Carl said. "They said they're from New York. They look like homeless people."

"A distinction without a difference."

"I'll bet they sleep on those steam grates," Millie said. "We talked about them in social studies." She was in ninth grade, her brother in eighth.

"You see, Henry?" Carol said, as though the children were backseat furniture. "You insist on getting them into your 'magnet school' with diversity and all that, and they get fed a diet of progressive pap."

"Please, Carol," Henry said. The road now pitched steeply down through a narrow, winding canyon; he kept his eyes attentively straight ahead.

"Maybe we could come back up in the morning and give them a ride," Millie said.

"We will do absolutely nothing of the kind," Carol said. "There isn't room in the car, for one thing. They must smell, for another. And they'd probably rob you. Now drop it."

They drove in silence the rest of the way to Big Pine. As on the first night at LAX and last night in Lone Pine, they would be in a single large room with pull-out sofa beds for the kids. Henry had planned the trip, a tour of the West's parks, panoramas and places of history. Carol had insisted on managing the accommodations. He'd didn't realize until the first night that she hadn't booked separate rooms for Millie and Carl.

"They can't share a room at their age. They're teens," she'd said. "Two more rooms would cost a fortune."

"We can afford it. You were ready to send them to private school, for God's sake. Give them more privacy, and us, too." He had hoped romantic vistas might inspire love-making, although he wasn't sure there was enough love left to be inspired.

"So they could come and go all night? Explore the temptations of places we know nothing about?"

"Carol, they're good kids. You have to trust kids. That's how they grow up."

"She's fourteen. Puberty. Raging hormones and all that."

"You think I don't know about adolescence?" He was vice principal of a junior-senior high school back in Connecticut.

"Not as much as you think. And Carl's only a year younger. We'll keep an eye on them, thank you very much."

Considering how little adult passion she shared with him, he marveled at her fixation on impulsive juvenile ardor. After a few months of what he'd thought marital bliss, she'd apparently concluded that sex was mostly a necessary step toward procreation. That once accomplished, her interest became no more than dutiful. In picking motels for this trip, she had insisted on king-size beds like theirs at home. Minimizing any risk of stimulated flesh, Henry thought.

At the motel, they had to take turns in the bathroom before going to dinner. "Dad," Millie said while Carol was thus occupied, "Mom always sleeps late. If Carl and I can get up early, can we go back up to see how they made out?"

"Sure," he whispered. "First one up wakes the others. No lights; dress quietly."

As predicted, Carol didn't stir; they were on their way by 5:30. "Dad," Millie said, looking back as they snaked up Westgard Pass. "The Sierras are pink."

"It's called Alpine glow." Just ahead was an historic toll-booth site; Henry stopped to give the kids a good look at the dawn light. He imagined opening a picture-window curtain to display the mountain glory, wakening Carol to snuggle and savor it. He brushed the thought aside. "It will be gone by the time we get up to where those folks are."

By the time they reached the park entrance, the pinkness in the peaks had indeed faded. A nascent sun slanted across Cedar Flats, casting long flat shadows behind the piñons and junipers.

The woman was still curled up like a pile of flour sacks under the overhang. The man was several yards nearer them, brushing his teeth with a canteen and folding cup. He spat and turned a gap-toothed smile at them. "Why, good morning, bub. Didn't expect to see you again."

"We didn't mean to intrude," Millie said. "We came to give you a ride up to the bristlecones."

"That's thoughtful. Give us a minute to get organized." He walked back to the shed, and got down on his knees to kiss the woman. Henry felt he ought to look away from their intimacy, but couldn't. She started; he put his arms around her and whispered in her ear. A tender moment. With obvious difficulty he got back to his feet, and gave her a hand up.

She nodded to them, mouthed "good morning," took the canteen and toothbrush and disappeared behind a bushy piñon. She was back in a few minutes, tugging her skirts straight while the man stuffed a few things into their little knapsacks.

Henry leaned out the window as he popped the trunk. "Why don't you put those in back? There's not a lot of space inside."

Millie was already out of the car to help the man. "You take the front seat," she said.

"Thank you, but that's not right."

"No," she insisted, "we saw it all yesterday." She and Carl

made room for the woman to squeeze into the back with them. The man held the door for her, and closed it gently.

"Thank you," the woman said. "I'm Daphne. He's Apollo." She giggled. "Daphne's my real name. We looked it up at the New York Public Library one bitter cold winter day, and decided to change his name from George to Apollo. He's been that ever since."

Henry couldn't remember how much ancient mythology the kids had learned yet; he glanced in the mirror. Millie had gotten it. "Then we'll call this his sun chariot," she laughed. "I'm Millie, and this is my brother Carl, and our Dad is Henry."

"Glad to meet you," Daphne said.

Apollo half-turned from the front seat to offer handshakes. Turning back, he waved a high-five hand at Henry. "You keep your hands on the reins, bub."

The road was as slow as Henry remembered from yesterday, switchbacking upward through a thin montane forest that became even sparser as they climbed. Nearing the ridge, they began seeing the naked craggy bristlecones, as stark as skeletons. He stopped, as they had yesterday, at the place marked Sierra View Overlook. Apollo heaved himself out to open the door for Daphne.

"Oh, my!" she said, looking across the Owens Valley at the snowcapped peaks. She reached for Apollo's hand.

"That's Mount Whitney," Millie said, pointing south. "Forty miles away. We looked at a map yesterday."

"That's where we were night before last," Apollo said. "We're trying to see all the important places in the West."

"This is the best," said Daphne. "Absolutely the best. I'll bet we're seeing a hundred miles up and down that mountain range. I wish I had a picture."

"I'll take one," Carl said. They'd taken most photos so far with Carol's sophisticated camera, but Carl had a point-and-shoot in the car. "Sit on the stone bench," he said as he came back. Henry watched approvingly as his son politely posed the two against the chain of peaks. Good kids. He was proud of them.

"Thank you," Daphne said. They sat close together and aimed smiles at the camera. "Can you get Mount Whitney behind us? To remember where we were yesterday?"

Carl edged sideways to frame them. The smiles had not left their faces, but he said "Say cheese, please," anyway, and clicked.

"Take another, please, sonny, with your daddy and sister in it with us," Daphne said. Henry and Millie got behind them. "Aim it straight across the valley this time, please. I don't think I've ever seen a glacier."

Carl cheesed them and clicked again. "We'll send you prints when we get home. "Can you write your address in my journal?" He set the camera down on a boulder and went to the car, coming back with the leatherbound diary Henry had bought for the trip.

Apollo let him open to the right place and then set the diary on his knee to write. "Apollo and Daphne Jones," he said as he wrote. "Just a post office box." He handed the pen and diary back. "Thank you, sonny. I mean, Carl."

"Carl and Millie and Henry," Daphne said. "You've been very kind. Everyone has. So far, people have taken our picture in Las Vegas, where we began, and Death Valley and down there at the Japanese camp. I hope we'll have a lot waiting for us when we get home."

They started to get back in the car. "Wait," Apollo said. He pointed to a sign at the edge of the parking lot: Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest Visitor Center, ½ Mile. "I guess we'll walk from here," he said, backing out. "Take in the view. You'd best get back to your missus. I'll bet she's having a conniption fit."

Graffiti and Mental Illness Collide | Brendan Praniewicz

Henry shrugged, and got out to join the kids in farewell high-fives from Apollo and hugs from Daphne. "Thank you, thank you," she said. "You enjoy the rest of your vacation. I know we will." They stood holding hands as Henry backed the car around to start down.

He looked in the rear view mirror just before a bend in the road ahead would take them out of view. They were both waving vigorously. "Open your windows, kids, and give them a big wave back." He waved, too, and then they were gone.

"Those are nice people, Dad," Carl said.

"Did you see how they held hands while Carl took their picture?" said Millie. "And they didn't smell at all."

Carol was in the coffee shop. "I found your note, Henry. 'Going for a hike,' it said."

"Sort of. I hoped you'd see the note. Didn't want you to worry."

"Hike, schmike. I know exactly where you've been. You're lucky to be back alive."

"It was fun, Mom," Millie said. "They were nice."

Mouton | Dave Petraglia

"I took their picture," Carl said, "and they gave me a post office box address to I can mail them a copy."

"Hmmph. Order yourself some breakfast." She held her cup up to get the waitress' attention. "I'll have another cup, thank you."

The AAA TripTik said it was only an hour and half from Big Pine to Mono Lake, but they took longer. The highway up the valley paralleled the ridge; Bishop appeared to be almost at the foot of the spot where they'd left Daphne and Apollo. "How about we stop for a few minutes?" Henry suggested. "The map says there's a little airport east of town. We might be able to see the Bristlecone Forest."

"That's the Ancient Bristlecone Forest, Dad," Millie corrected him. "Let's do it."

"Neat," said Carl. "I can take a picture from down here to match the one I took up there."

"If we must," said Carol.

The airport was little more than a paved landing strip in the midst of sagebrush flats, but there was an unimpeded view up to the mountain chain. Carol sat in the car while Henry and the kids got out, taking the binoculars, to peer up.

"It's pretty far," Carl said. "I can only imagine I'm seeing bristlecones."

"Too bad we don't have a spotting scope like the one in science class," Millie said. "Let me have a look."

"I'll take a picture anyway," Carl said. He went back to the car.

"Are you going to be much longer?" Henry heard Carol ask.

"Just a minute more, Mom," Carl said. "Funny, I can't find my camera."

Millie went back to help him rummage through the back seat, with no luck. Then she remembered. "You set it down on a rock up there, Carl, after you took the pictures. When you went to get your journal."

"Damn!" said Carl.

"Watch your mouth, young man," Carol said.

"Sorry, Mom. You're right, sis. I'll bet I never picked it up after that."

"I told you," Carol said. "Those vagrants stole it. You're lucky they didn't steal your wallet and car keys, Henry."

"Wait a minute!" Millie said. "Remember how hard they waved this morning as we drove away? I'll bet they'd found Carl's camera."

"Never mind," Carl said. "It was a cheap one. And I have an address sticker on it. Maybe they'll send it back."

"Wonderful," Carol said. "So now they know where we live."

"Carol," Henry said, "please drop it."

"They'll know anyway, Mom," Millie said. "We got their address, so we could mail them prints, remember?"

"They live near Grand Central Station," Carl said. "They have a post office box there."

"Anyway," Henry said, "it wasn't an expensive camera. We'll buy another in Bishop."

"Thanks, Dad. Meantime, Mom, can you take a picture with your good camera?"

"From here? There's not much to see except a shapeless mountain. I can't see any trees at all up on top."

"That's okay. You can take a picture of us with the mountains behind us."

"Oh, all right." They posed, arms around each other. Carol snapped a photo. "Okay, let's get started."

"You took it already?" Carl asked. "We weren't smiling. Take another."

"Take another, please," she said.

"Please. And tell us to say 'cheese' this time, please."

It was only ten minutes back into Bishop, through a few blocks of single-story houses with horse trailers in the yards to a long main street of shops, none taller than two stories. Henry found what looked like a general store for tourists, and they went in to buy Carl a new camera. Carol stayed in the car.

"It's just desert," she said as they got back on the highway headed north again. "Nothing but worthless sagebrush."

"Cattle eat sagebrush," Millie said. "And the mountains are spectacular."

"All right. Very pretty."

It was another hour to Mono Lake. "Let's keep an eye peeled for Daphne and Apollo," Millie said as they walked down to take pictures.

"Who?" Carol hadn't heard the names until then.

"Our friends up at the bristlecones, Mom. That's not his real name, but it's hers."

"Your friends? Wonderful."

It never got much better. The kids marveled at the Tioga Pass, and Yosemite, and the broad fertile San Joaquin Valley. Henry stopped to let Carl take pictures; Carol took one now and then. Carl and Millie learned not to say they were looking for Daphne and Apollo, but Henry knew they were. The kids loved The Presidio, the Golden Gate Bridge and the redwoods. Henry saw them peering into the crowds of tourists, hoping to recognize a face. Carol made no secret of her relief when they boarded the airplane home from Portland.

McGowan Lakes | Ben Erlandson

Two weeks later the camera arrived by parcel post from New York City.

"Thank you," said a penciled note. "We took a few more pictures. Hope you don't mind."

Carl took the camera to the drugstore and had all the photos printed: The family when they landed at Los Angeles, and at Manzanar, and then the old couple by themselves, the High Sierra behind them, and with Millie and Dad. And then more: The two of them in Yosemite with the Half Dome behind them; at the Golden Gate, Point Arena, Redwood National Park and a few others without place names.

"Isn't that cute?" said Millie. "They're holding hands in every picture."

"They went almost everywhere we did," Carl said. "Too bad we missed them."

"But they saw the West," Henry said. "I'm glad for them."

"Me too," said Millie. "They were awesome. I'll write about them in school.

"You're lucky they didn't kill you and steal your fillings," Carol said.

"Give me the picture of us together on the mountain," Henry said. "I'll find another magnet and put it with all the others on the fridge."

"No," said Carol. "You won't."

Duel with Subconscious IV

POETRY | E.E. GREER

stumbled upon a fatal prophecy.
a currant bush, a circle of swans.

while climbing claims,
courting each convex pause.

sweat out suspicions,
snip the tulip from your ear.

want to slit wrists and
see orchids spill out.

to spring through a prairie
stitched with lemon silk

to harvest noise
into a handsome vessel

to drive through
the viscous night.

please list your rarest paradox.
explain the fragrance that claims us,
tobacco and pheromones and phlox.

exhale a halo of heady verbs,
clean between your claws.

wrap me in peach leaf and legend,
drape this age in riches,
riddles, semi-precious.

provide a private courtyard to cry in.
collapse into tall grass and hyacinth

look after your vigils,
houses of chlorophyll of skin.

Untitled | THOMAS GILLASPY

Desi in Her Mother's Dress | Ann-Marie Brown

The Color of Keening

NONFICTION | KRISTEN ARENDT

The day I spend in the field is blue. First the pale, early morning blue of freshly woken flax, the 5:45 sky a light to dark gradient of morning. That's when I meet Rosemary Schiano at the U.S. Forest Service Natural Resource Center just outside of Salida, Colorado, in a tidy gray building with a green lawn. The front walkway is lined with blooming dark blue lavender that looks almost purple in the shade. The morning is perfectly still, and I don't know what to expect, but I feel the need to spend the day in the field with this woman I have never met.

Rosemary is a wildlife biologist who works to protect endangered raptors. We have only spoken once on the phone about online information published by climbers on a community-built website that I help manage. I expected the call to be tough. I braced myself for her to be angry. But she wasn't. She was strong and insistent, but she was able to direct her frustrations away from me. On that call, she invited me to spend the day with her. To come see the places and learn about the impacts of recreation. To let her show me the birds that she so clearly loved.

Rosemary is a compact, powerful woman, and she wears the sage-green, scrub-like uniform of a USFS ranger with a wide-brimmed, white cowboy hat and a pair of sturdy Keen hiking boots. Her shoulder-length white hair is pulled back into a low pony-tail. Meeting her around the back of the building, we head over to her white two-door USFS pickup truck. Hopping up on the bench seat, I notice a blue hard hat with a quote taped to the side:

THE TIME TO PROTECT A SPECIES IS WHILE IT IS STILL COMMON.

-ROSALIE EDGE

In the summer, Rosemary works for the Salida Ranger District, part of the San Isabel National Forest, specifically monitoring and documenting the nests of raptors such as prairie falcons, peregrine falcons, and golden eagles. Her district is located in Chaffee County in the heart of the Colorado Rockies. Nearly 80% of Chaffee County lands are public lands. In recent years, Buena Vista and Salida have been touted as a mecca for hiking, mountain biking, climbing, camping, rafting, and off-roading, and these public lands have seen a dramatic increase in tourism and outdoor recreation. And with increased use comes increased risks for the raptors Rosemary monitors.

"Welcome to my nightmare. And my dream." Rosemary parks the truck below Castle Rock Gulch, a mounded rock formation rising like a lumpy shoulder from the grassy hillside, our first stop to observe a prairie falcon nesting site where the chicks Rosemary monitors are about two weeks old.

On the drive along a dusty, washboard dirt road, Rosemary points out where people have been illegally camping, driving over the delicate riparian landscape to park their RVs and trailers off the road. Small "no camping" signs set out by the Forest Service don't seem to deter them. A few hundred meters up the road from where we park, she points out a large RV, truck, and trailer holding two ATVs tucked in a small aspen grove about 150 feet off the road. "I'll come back to deal with that later," she tells me.

We walk up a loose, gravel slope full of wildflowers—white yarrow and yellow sweet-peas, sky-colored bluebells and amethyst locoweed. The sun is reaching toward ten, and the Colorado sky is a crisp, fresh blue. Rosemary uses hiking poles and takes frequent breathers, telling me she struggles with an autoimmune disorder, which she feels with certainty is the result of several years working on a ranch where she lived above open chemicals stored below her loft apartment without her knowledge.

As we hike up the gradual slope, we talk about the accelerated losses she has seen in the last five to ten years. She notes how people are always pushing the boundaries—how the signs, blockades, barriers, fines, and threats do nothing for people who seemingly don't care or who claim ignorance when caught.

Rosemary sets up the tripod and mounts her viewing scope. While getting the scope focused on the ledge with the nest, she describes how to spot a nest site by looking for "tailings" or the white poop smears from the young chicks. We are about half a mile away from this nest, on a ridgeline, tucked between two larger rock formations. She lowers her voice, and I follow suit. Noise easily disturbs the raptors,

something I never thought about. Across the valley, Rosemary points out a rock face not far to the right of the nest where two climbing outfitters guide regular tours for groups. It's easy to imagine how much noise would echo in this little valley from a group of excited teenagers out for an afternoon of climbing.

As she is setting up the scope, a large bird leaves the ledge and wings straight overhead taking a line like a diver, not a single flap of its wings as it passes overhead. Rosemary says it's likely the male prairie falcon—perhaps he has heard us and is doing some reconnaissance or perhaps it's time for a breakfast run.

She focuses the viewfinder and lets me take a look. I can see two of the three chicks in the nest. They are blurs of white fluff with brown and gray accents that make them blend in with the rock face behind them. If you tossed one into the blue sky, it would look like the faintest puff of a cumulus cloud blowing by on the breeze. I find it remarkable that without knowing where to look, I would never know they are there. I find it disheartening to realize that without knowing where to look, I would never know if they were gone.

Rosemary knows where to look. She has been monitoring wildlife, specifically raptors, in the area for years, keeping careful paper records (yes, paper records that are hopefully input into a digital database somewhere) of all her known nesting sites.

In recent years, she's seen mated pairs abandoning their nests due to the impacts of recreation. Eagles often return year after year to the same nesting site. But in the case of one pair of golden eagles on Marmot Peak, climbers bolted a route up the face of the granite rock and the eagles moved away, disturbed by the noisy and unwelcome neighbors. Rosemary doesn't know where they went. They've moved on, and now she only has an abandoned nest to show me.

In the winter, Rosemary leaves the animals she monitors in the Rocky Mountains to head south to the Sonoran Desert in Arizona.

As a three-year old child, she found a photo of the desert, a place she had never been or seen, and asked her parents why they had taken her away from where she belonged. A prescient vision for a toddler. Rosemary's heart is in the desert.

During her months in the Sonoran Desert, she observes and records human impact, specifically at the border. Rosemary is a veteran, and she talks with a measured cadence as she speaks of finding human remains, dealing with drug runners, escorting journalists, and carrying a Glock. At the border, she sees the true highs and lows of humanity on all sides of the issue. She doesn't get paid by any agency to do this work. She lives here on her own means and with the help of those who believe in the importance of the work she is doing.

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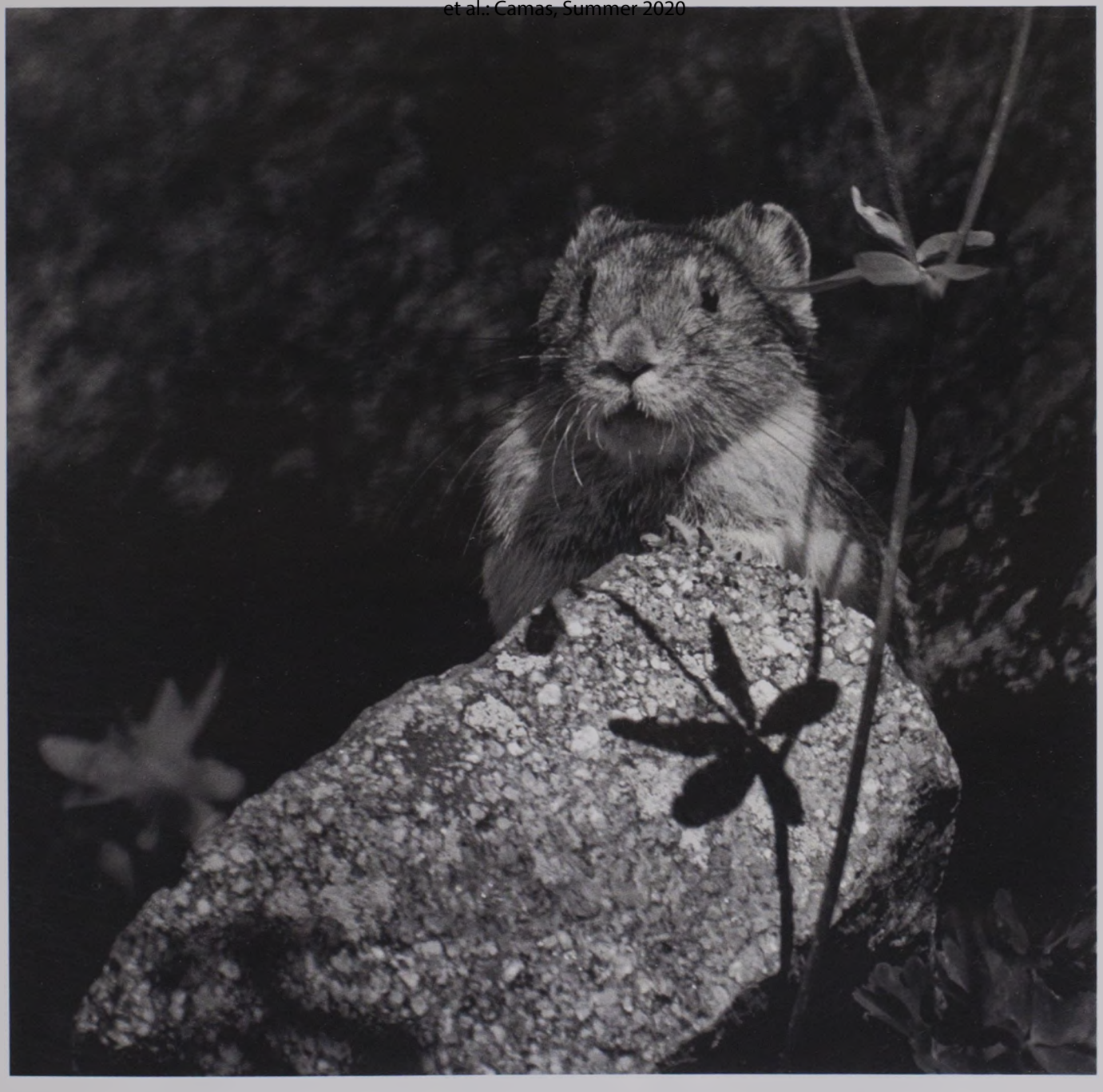
This is the first time I actually understand habitat fragmentation in a comprehensive way. Rosemary specifically talks about the border wall, but she draws the parallels to all the other "walls" we create in nature—roads, trails, climbing routes. Even in the winter, our tracks in the snow fragment a world I never knew existed—the subnivean world, a world of mice, voles and shrews that scurry in a slender cavern beneath the snowpack and above the ground. The weight of human impact can be found in the blue steel of a border wall in the desert. It can be felt in the ice blue of a winter in the Rockies.

Rosemary's life is one of complexity. She is houseless—which she points out is different from being homeless ("It's a choice"). She cares deeply about her work and can get frustrated by the selfishness of people. She once set up a GoFundMe for her work in the Sonoran Desert. Her project received $800; meanwhile, a local guy made $3,000 to fund his effort to find women to date. She sighs with some exasperation, "What does that say about our priorities?"

She doesn't love outdoor recreation and feels that it is forcing the hand of land management agencies at the expense of wildlife. She doesn't believe climbers should be bolting routes, but rather that they should have to "earn their skill" or go climb indoors. She doesn't support UTV or ATV use or mountain biking or trail running, only hiking as a means of travel through wild areas, for the sake of protecting wildlife habitat. She's not impressed by peak-bagging or thru-hiking, telling me, "You can't run away to solve your problems on the trail."

Her dream is to build a wildlife rescue to service the greater Chaffee County area and HWY 285 corridor. She dreams of a rescue that also has lodging where people can stay, the income helping to keep the rescue running, helping to fund the saving and rehabilitation of injured wildlife. She aims to save the animals she loves while educating people about their impacts. But it is clear that she doesn't do this work for the people. She does it for the animals. Once she drove an injured crow to a wildlife rescue in Colorado Springs. The crow didn't survive.



Pika | Matt Witt

Near the end of the day as the sky darkens to a velvet evening blue, Rosemary tells me a story:

There was a young man who grew up on a ranch in the Midwest. All his life, his family had taught him that if you see a coyote, you shoot it. Rosemary asked him why. His answer was simply, "Well, that's just what we do."

So then Rosemary told him a story about one of her observations in the field.

One afternoon, in the dusty hills of Chaffee County, a mother coyote was killed by a truck. Her young pup found the body, blood-covered and stiff in the ditch among the rabbitbrush. The pup started keening, crying for its mother. The young coyote cried until the stars started to poke through the blue evening sky. And then, chilling and unforgettable, the other coyotes, shadows in the hills, took up the song of lament. Rosemary sat and listened for nearly an hour as the band cried together for this lost mother. The keening was communal.

To her own surprise, the young man sat quiet for a minute before he looked at her. "You know what, Rosemary? Next time I see a coyote, I'm not going to pull the trigger."

She pauses the truck on a top of a small knoll where we look out over the valley toward the towering slopes of the Collegiate Peaks. The sky is an all-over blue like the zenith blue at sunrise. Rosemary turns to me, and I think she can sense the hope I am trying to find in all this grieving. "All it took was 45 minutes to change someone's mind."

Regarding the End of Days

POETRY | CONSTANCE WIENEKE

On a walk into last Saturday's March wind
an informed friend says the world will end
in 2020, and as penance for what's troubling,

    the doctor says three months to live, the burden
    a tumor of the parietal lobe, cancer both lungs,
    sticky valves, an array of misaligned meridians,

and so she no longer takes baths, have to question
her solution, the doings of two adult children,
this first world's quandaries, what's to be done,

    tally up unaccomplishments, from the unclean
    toilet bowl to planning next year's sojourn
    in Antarctica or the once-imagined migration,

on balance how worth the effort for possible things,
until that physician's terrible words, that friend's
friendly Nostradamus forecast, you didn't think—

    to Puglia, to muscle up to a practicum—
    swing dance lessons, an online course for Italian,
    the grace for one middle-of-the-room handstand—

instead, you release the ancient frog from his indoor prison,
sick of This Life, fat as he is on flies, wings broken,
after two months you rise up from bed, no concern

    about heaven or hell, and now it's hibernation
    beside your husband, this answer of naked skin
    that comes to mind, after letting loose the hens,

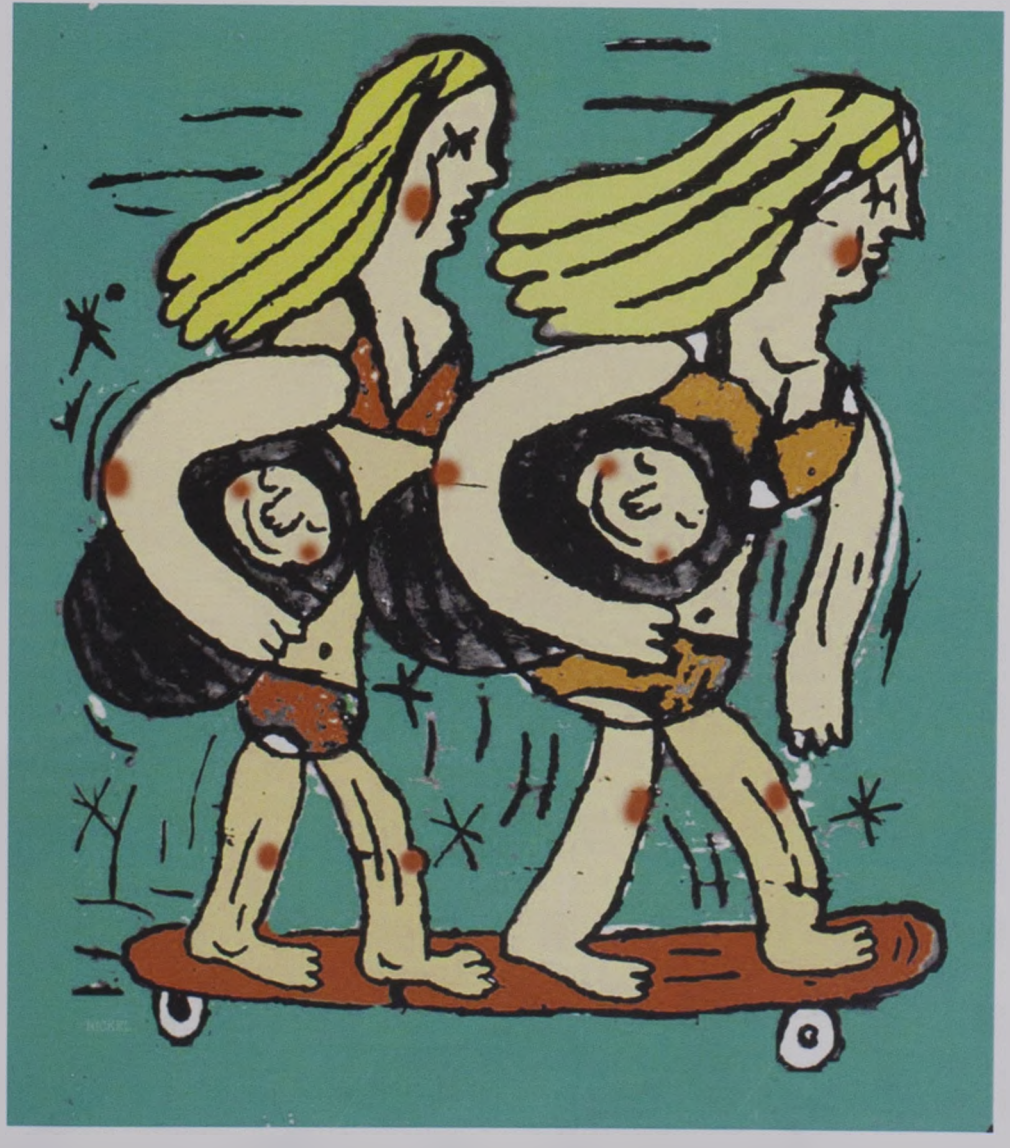
the hornet-drilled apple tree no clue you've been gone,
the hens roosted without you, carried on with being,
breaking eggs, missing some for your future collection,

    leaves needing raking the same, morning and evening,
    and the weathered stained cloth, not looking as solemn
    as shrouds or faded prayer flags, but like something

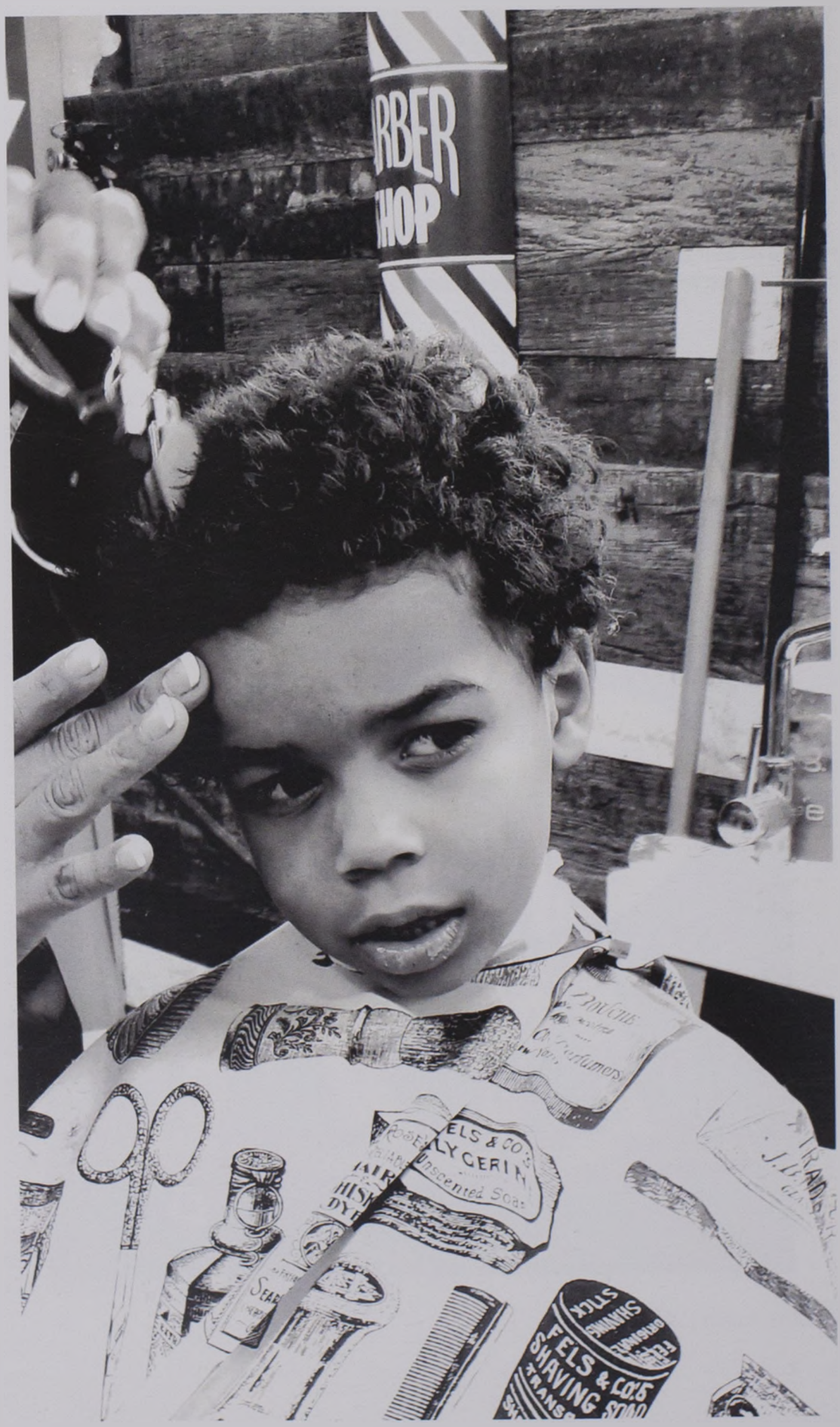
just there, high in the tree where white webbing clings,
your husband's secure anchors, one more preparation
for pruning that sun-blocking weed willow, gold-fallen

waiting to understand what, all along, you had meant
to prove when you lay down, under duvet, twining and
twining and the frog now gone missing, the blue heron

having speared it, another vestige of your life, the pond
where you had let him go, no doubt, it seems certain
that bird, in those last moments, mind and belly content.



Chomdley Ladies | Rick Nickel



Barbershop Suspense | Afton Holland

Shepherd's Pie Recipe

POETRY | Melinda Jane

Shepherd's Pie Recipe

Ingredients:
1 tonne of sun flares and oil
1 Amazon, chopped
2-3 medium mangroves, chopped
500 tonnes of plastic wrap
purée sewage out to sea
splash denial
beef overstocked
900 potato head people, talking rot
80 million barrels of petroleum per day
belch 90 million tonnes of carbon

Method:
Heat the planet earth with petroleum oil in an atmospheric saucepan, then soften 1 chopped Amazon, 2-3 mangroves chopped, fry for a few decades of decadents. When overheated, turn up the heat more by crumbling in beef overstocked, brown, tipping off any excess carbon. Add purée rubbish, splash the lies sauce and simmer.

Meanwhile, heat the surface up by 1 to 3 degrees higher and mash. While boiling 900 potato heads, garble for forty years. Drain, then mash the barrels of petroleum and tonnes of carbon. Put the earth into an ovenproof dish, topped with extinction, ruffle with a fork of doom. The pie, scorched, millions of years ahead, leaving no one to stand. Serve Shepherd's Pie, delish!

Out of the Box

NONFICTION | ANA MARIA SPAGNA

Any real change implies the breakup of the world as one has always known it, the loss of all that gave one an identity, the end of safety.

-James Baldwin

Early last December my wife, Laurie, had to attend an all-employees meeting on the west side of the North Cascades National Park, many miles from our home on the east side, the kind of meeting she usually weasels out of. She's an orchardist for the park, a field worker, allergic to meetings, but she showed up at this one, and because she did, we got a heads up—something like a hot tip—that landed us on a wet and rutted logging road, fifteen miles off the pavement, giddy with excitement, more excitement than I'd known I could muster in the wake of a week we'd spent camping on the carpet at an assisted living facility helping her parents move.

The attraction: fishers. A fisher reintroduction.

Not that I knew much about fishers. I knew they were members of the weasel family, the mustelids. Back when I worked trails, we'd sometimes recite a list of the creatures by size: ermine, weasel, marten, mink, otter, fisher, wolverine. Or was it mink then marten? This passed as entertainment since we sometimes spotted a mink or a marten. Never a wolverine. Never a fisher.

Fishers once roamed the Cascades, but had been largely hunted out for their furs. Now remaining populations face threats from climate change and habitat loss. Same old story.

Fishers once roamed the Cascades, but had been largely hunted out for their furs. Now remaining populations face threats from climate change and habitat loss. Same old story. I'd known vaguely that an interagency team had been reintroducing them, starting down south near Mount Rainier, but I hadn't paid much attention.

When I say we helped Laurie's parents move, we actually didn't do much. Or didn't feel like we did. We spent three days hand wringing and painstakingly wrapping dishes and one day speed-tossing items in oversized moving boxes: pillows, books, winter coats, remotes. We watched the movers load the big truck, drove an hour north to the new place, and waited for hours while the truck broke down on the interstate. Eventually, the stuff arrived, the folks arrived, and we all settled in for the settling in: unpacking, arranging furniture, finding a welcoming residents' table in the dining room, or even semi-welcoming. We hung around for three more nights—me on the floor, Laurie on the couch—and while I suppose this sounds like self pity or a humble brag, it's actually a kind of desperate self-disclosure. I felt miserable, near useless, and stayed awake at night fretting about anything fret-able. In the end, my most useful moments consisted of setting up the TV, then watching football with my father-in-law, drinking beer, offering overloud commentary, and wouldn't it have been more efficient if I could've just shown up at game time, then gone home to write, say, or call my congress people?

But that's not how it works, is it? You put yourself where you need to be. You hang out and wait. You do what you can.

The road got rougher, the rain heavier. We did not see another car until we caught up with a large government pickup we presumed carried the soon-to-be-free fishers, which only added to our excitement. Was there one fisher? More than one? What was its name? No, no, you mustn't name wild animals, we knew this, but we made up names anyway. Stevie? Celeste?

When we reached our destination, a primitive campground, with moss and ferns and big tall trees, big around as a trash barrel, and so tall I couldn't wager a guess (later I'd say 300 feet tall, but Laurie tells me that's exaggeration), there were perhaps twenty people loitering in rain gear. They introduced themselves by affiliation: park service, forest service, conservation groups, tribes. I introduced myself as a "spectator," which could be suspect, I realized too late. They don't advertise the locations of these releases for fear of too many spectators (or naysayers or god forbid trappers-to-be) but the vibe was too upbeat for anyone to worry or judge. Plus we knew some of the people since we worked on this forest service district more than twenty years earlier.

Phyllis Reed greeted us as though we only left last week. A wildlife biologist and veteran of the spotted owl wars in the '90s, Phyllis has the humor of a survivor—at the fisher reintroduction she wore a red Santa hat with her forest service uniform. The spotted owls have largely been crowded out by barred owls, she explained, but the good

they accomplished, all of them—the owls, the biologists, the activists, the reluctant politicians in the Clinton years—is undeniable. These big tall trees, for example, outside of wilderness, would almost surely have been harvested.

The fisher carries no such weight. Not an entire region of ancient forests, nor the health of an entire ecosystem like the Yellowstone wolves. They do, at times, have an image problem, starting with their name, fisher, which suggests they eat fish, which they do not. (The name comes from fitch, the name for a European polecat, a creature which the fisher apparently resembles.) Though they are omnivores, they prefer meat, and frankly, they are badasses. They're famously the only effective predator of porcupines, for one thing, able to eviscerate them in mere seconds. A few weeks later when trying to impress a docent at a Connecticut nature preserve, I told my fisher reintroduction story, only to have her flinch. Fishers, she said, eat house cats, ravage gardens. Pests, not pals. Same old story. I thought to mention that hominids aren't exactly good neighbors ecologically speaking, but I held my tongue.

At the campground, Laurie and I volunteered to help carry the boxes—the fishers!—from the back of the pickup. There were five of them—five!—and they were indeed named, with names from the Harry Potter books. The boxes were white, the size of a microwave oven from the 80's or a child's bike trailer. Not too heavy for one person to hold (an adult fisher weighs only about eight pounds) but far too awkward. So we carried them one human per side, two fishers per box, duplexes of sorts. Or you could say "crates" or even "cages." Little fisher motels, temporary homes. Or hellholes. We have no way to know. Just as they, the fishers, had no idea what was about to happen next. Though surely they had an inkling: some desire or desperation, terror or fury, or even, dare we imagine, hope? Surely they could smell the forest smells. Maybe they could smell human excitement. Maybe they wished to eviscerate us straight up, we the way-worse-than-porcupines.

We lined the boxes up on a tent pad, and stepped back.

By January we'd landed in Missoula where each night in the studio we rented or in the car as we headed off to explore the astonishing wilds all around us, impeachment played on the radio, and as it did, outrage seeped in uninvited, and indignation, too, at this world awash in outrageous lies and wrongdoings and denial. The situation—by which I mean not just divisive politics, but the dire state of our entire fast-heating species-depleting planet—felt urgent, yes, and constipated, strangled, ripe to explode. It infuriated me. It paralyzed me.

In response—this is embarrassing to admit—I turned to Twitter. I refreshed my feed (is any word creepier?) when the news was too slow or too staid, too repetitive, too predictable. I turned to this cacophony of once-met acquaintances and once-famous tennis players and (probably) left-leaning bots to tell me what is real or important. Like so many of us (anyone? anyone?) I became addicted to wasting time, in part, because—god help me—I did not know what else to do. It hadn't always been so.

Elements of the Motherboard | Marieken Cochius

Several years ago, I ran unopposed for elected office, a fire commissioner in my small rural community, and quickly learned one lesson. If you want to get something done, you work super hard and mind the details, be persistent and persuasive and maybe, just maybe, it will get done. On the other hand, if you don't want something done, all you have to do is say no. That's it. Say no. When I told this to people, good earnest people who had cheered my public service, they were appalled. This explains a lot to me about the world, I'd say. And my friends would shake their heads.

Still, I stayed with it. A dozen years of very hard work. We made some progress. We scheduled weekly fuel reduction work parties. We worked on radio communications and evacuation plans and acquired used fire engines, painted them with the district motto, trained volunteer firefighters. But over time, we lost nearly all the support of our constituents, our neighbors, friends even, because they believed we weren't doing enough to stop the big fires. (Who could? Who can?) I wanted to say: I get it. I yearn for big change, and I despise futility. Incremental change drives me batty, but incremental change is all we've got. Instead, I quit

the fire district. I couldn't do it anymore. I am not proud, but I had to let go.

My mother, for her part, shared little of my angst. She was too busy running the food pantry at her church, a full-time unpaid position, where a converted garage stores enough food to feed an average of 3,000 people a month. Some of the clients at the food pantry were also volunteers; some lived by the river bottom, which is to say, they were homeless. They'd ride bikes, old clunkers, functioning, refurbished river-bottom style, and they'd lift the heaviest boxes and break down the cardboard for recycling, and my mom bantered with them, thanked them, enjoyed their company. Mom has lived alone now for decades. It's hard to say, without sounding church sermon cliché, but she benefited as least as much as they did.

Laurie and I stopped in to help just before Christmas when donations fly in. We unpacked grocery sacks filled with dozens of cans of green beans and corn. (Why so many? Do the people donating also eat gobs of green beans and corn?) To be fair, we also stocked tuna and Progresso soup and day-old pastries from Starbucks, salads from Trader Joe's, and if you had told me fifteen years ago when we were nursing my mom back from the edge of a cancerous death that today she'd be interrupting our weekly phone chats to take calls from someone needing to get rid of 800 pounds of ham, well, wonders never cease.

Back in the drippy forest, Jason Ransom stepped forward. Jason leads the reintroduction team. A hard task from the start, the process got a whole lot harder after the 2017 mega wildfires in British Columbia. The fires diminished "source populations" so in order to keep the project alive, he had to build new relationships between wildly diverse stakeholders: fur trappers, conservation groups, First Nations, and the Calgary Zoo. In other words, Jason had earned the right to pull the first door open. I held my phone at the ready, hoping for a photo, maybe even a video. But I was not fast enough.

The first fisher, whose name may have been Hermione or Minerva, scampered out fast as she could, so so fast. We only caught a glimpse of her fur, a rich calico cat color, orange brown or rust with some black, fuzzy and if I didn't know better, cuddly, and did I mention fast? An orange brown swish over matted moss and downed logs, under the brush, up a steep hill. Out of view.

She'll be fine, probably. So far, Jason and his team have released 26 fishers in the North Cascades and Mount Baker-Snoqualmie National Forest and 73 in the Mount Rainer and Gifford Pinchot National Forest, and they've seen very little mortality. They insert radio trackers under the fishers' fur, then they track them via aircraft. Biologists climb aboard a fixed wing to listen for the unique sound each fisher transmits through its collar. (The sound changes when a fisher dies, at which time they'll land so a veterinarian can perform a necropsy to determine cause of death.) The fishers have roamed for miles, many many miles. They cross interstates and swim major rivers. You can tell this one could—or will—just by the way she speeds out of that box like a thoroughbred

Her | Tara Troiano

trained for the starting gate. If there's any trepidation among her fellow fishers or us, the watchers, you can't feel it in the air. Everything, for these three seconds, is pure euphoria.

There she goes!

I admit that when the biologists described how veterinarians at the Calgary Zoo surgically inserted the radio trackers, I cringed. My knee jerk never-been-to-vet-school reaction is to think: Why hurt the animal this way? Just leave them the hell alone! I am hyper-trained to judge each necessary trade-off: the huge carbon footprint, all that jet-A fuel, not to mention all of us driving up this rain-rutted road.

But it's easy to shut the monkey brain off. Because here comes another!

Lickety split, she's out, and climbs a tree—the tree I'd later called three hundred feet tall—because boy howdy did it seem tall. If she decides to stay, Jason tells us, she'll nest in the hole of a pileated woodpecker because it's big enough for her to fit with her babies but not big enough for the male who will, if allowed to, eat his babies. (More badassedness, yes.) This fisher climbed to the highest limb, higher than my neck could crane to see. Even the guy with a camera lens long as my forearm couldn't see her. I'm not sure if she was hiding, but if she was, who could blame her?

Urgency has two definitions:

1. importance requiring swift action
2. an earnest and persistent quality, persistence

They butt up against each other clumsily. I have always believed in patient persistence, but patience can be a kind of hiding. I have aspired to act swiftly, with courage, to make "good trouble" as John Lewis always says, but I have not wanted to be shackled to the idea either, since this peculiarly American brand of hot-blooded desire—big fast change!—has so often spawned what we might call bad trouble: economic mega-growth, expanding empire, bloody revolution. Or when it's not achieved: disappointment, discouragement, apathy. At worst: despondency.

Which brings me to what had been the biggest challenge in our lives, Laurie's and mine, for several months preceding our move to Missoula. Neither aging parents nor the incompetent president and his heinous cronies, but Laurie's apple trees. They are dying. To be clear, they are not actually Laurie's trees; they are yours. They belong to the National Park Service, all 400 or so of them. Most are nearing a hundred years old, and over time, as they have slowly begun to die, Laurie has planted and nurtured new trees, and now it's the young trees that are afflicted by a fungus, Botryosphaeria, which is, yes, killing them. The fungus may have been invited by global warming, too much wet weather in the winter, or by overwatering or by pruning in cold weather or by replanting in the same place. At night Laurie blames herself. She's planted these trees in succession for twenty-five years. She wanted them to replace the old trees, to grow and thrive long after her own death. Instead she watches them wither. The usual treatment for this fungus is to remove affected branches, but in these trees the damage is on the trunks, so removing the fungus means cutting them down, and Laurie has had to do that again and again. Talk about cause for despondency. She saw a therapist who suggested radical acceptance. Laurie understands the need to let go. She is trying. It is excruciating.

I have aspired to act swiftly, with courage, to make "good trouble" as John Lewis always says, but I have not wanted to be shackled to the idea either, since this peculiarly American brand of hot-blooded desire — big fast change!—has so often spawned what we might call bad trouble: economic mega-growth, expanding empire, bloody revolution.

Another fisher is released, and one more, until only one remains. The final fisher is named Delores, and this seems auspicious, since Laurie once had this nickname. When they asked for volunteers to open the sliding door, Laurie raised her hand. Now Laurie slides the door up and... nothing happens.

Delores comes to the door, sniffs the air, and stops cold. Phyllis, in her Santa hat, kneels to blow into the air vent, hoping to annoy Delores just enough. Will she choose to escape or endure this eternal huffing? We're waiting, and on my phone recording, you can hear me urging her out. Come on Delores. Go Delores, my voice uncharacteristically high, as though I'm sweet-talking a kitten, not a creature that can rip the guts from a porcupine. Laurie kneels down to spell Phyllis. This is the moment I return to in my memory, over and over: the door sliding up, the crowd expectant, the needles dripping...

And then.

Midway through my time in Missoula, midway through writing this essay, Covid-19 arrived. I moved back home to the woods, a place that has always felt safe, but no longer does when no place can be. Over the mountains at the assisted living facility where we moved Laurie's folks (why? why did we move them?) a patient tested positive. In California, Mom closed the food pantry since all of her volunteers are over 60 and therefore high risk. I call her daily and we play Boggle online. A friend's father dies, and I buy a gift card. Tom Petty plays on repeat night and day: the waiting is the hardest part.

Call of the Tiger | SANDEEP SHETE

This is where we stand, for now, all of us everywhere, while I write and before you read: pre-scamper the door open, breath-held, wide-eyed, waiting to see what will happen next.

Later, after the fishers were released, Laurie and I hung around and tried to make small talk, but it was hard, honestly, to make the small talk big enough. How cool was that? we said over and over. We talked about the old days with Phyllis. We chatted with the biologists, giddy with exhaustion, up since before dawn, who still had to pack their empty boxes and drive many miles back to headquarters or god knows where. Later still, I sent my short shaky fisher videos to my friend Julie who teaches elementary school in Southern California, and she showed them to her thirty third graders. Her excitement, near weepy, echoed and redoubled my own. Kids who knew nothing about fishers, now knew about fishers! How cool is that?

As I wrote about the reintroduction, what moved me to tears, besides the fishers, was the sheer effort of all these people fighting so hard, day after day, until a seemingly small thing became a big thing: the meeting attendees, the paper pushers, the helicopter pilots, the pickup truck drivers waiting at the border crossing, the vets with their probes and scalpels. Did I wish I lived in an era when fishers were just allowed to be fishers, and never had to be relocated? Hell yes. I also wished I lived in a country where people didn't have to live in the river bottom and line up for grocery bags of peanut butter and canned green beans. But. But. Even though it sounded like yet another church sermon cliché, I felt grateful for everyone who showed up on Tuesdays or Fridays. The battle against inertia, I concluded, is not a solitary effort. The answer to the first definition of urgency, I wrote, importance requiring swift action, lies in the second, earnest persistence.

That was six weeks ago. A lifetime. I knew nothing. I could not imagine a time when earnest persistence would require staying home to distance ourselves from loved ones, to watch death counts and wait for a flattened curve. Make no mistake: small acts of goodness continue apace. The quarantine for Laurie's parents has eased because the lone case was properly isolated and treated. My mom's pantry remains closed, but other local agencies have recruited young volunteers who deliver donated food to drop- off locations. But it's impossible not to note that the urgency feels way way more urgent.

I realize now that every time I thought about the fishers, I saw myself as one of the benevolent god-like liberators when, in fact, we're all creatures at the mercy of the universe. We're in boxes—the boxes of our homes, yes, yes, crates or hellholes

depending on the situation or, sometimes, the time of day—but that is not what I mean. My box is everything I used to believe, how I moved in the world, all that gave me identity and safety. I know I need to let go. I am trying. It is excruciating. How is it possible that, in the urgency of now, much of what's asked of us is radical acceptance?

And what about when it's time to be liberated? Who will we be? What will we do? Will it be enough to care for elders and apple trees, to manage a food pantry, to nurture fishers and teach kids about them, to practice kindness? Or will anger serve us better? Should we spend our empty hours nurturing fierceness like contagion aimed to eviscerate injustice and greed?

To fight or not to fight? The answer is yes.

I mean, what would a fisher do?

Sometime in winter, I posted the Delores video on Facebook. I couldn't help it. Now, whenever I return to the cyber-hellhole—which has become, more than ever, a lifeline and a pall, chockfull of stories of heinous incompetence and spontaneous grace—I can watch again as Laurie pulls up the door … and nothing happens.

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Delores is stubborn, uncertain. She weighs the danger of what lies ahead, the unknown versus the relative comfort of her temporary home. Laurie pulls a hank of hay away from the door, and Delores sticks her head through the small round opening, gives the world a looksee: newness everywhere, challenges galore. Nah, she retreats inside. She's been through a massive ordeal—trapped and jostled and incised—and she longs for the way things were before any of this nonsense, back when she was comfortably connected, easily mobile. The past is gone for good, and Delores hasn't quite caught on. I get it. I want to go back, too. But we can't. The wild unknown beckons. What the hell do we do next? How will we respond? Watch Delores to see how it's done. She comes to the threshold once more, hesitates, and just like that, she's out like a shot.

SUMMER 2020 CONTRIBUTORS

KRISTEN ARENDT is a native Coloradan with an affinity for blue sky days and putting in dusty miles in running shoes or hiking boots. She is currently a candidate for Western Colorado University's MFA in Nature Writing and enjoys exploring issues at the intersection of recreation, stewardship, compassion, and caretaking in the West and the wider world.

JACK BORDNICK is an industrial design graduate of Pratt Institute in New York. He has been a design director for numerous company, corporate and government projects. These have included a children's museum for the city of New York. He has also worked on projects for IBM, The J.C. Penney Company, and many other institutions.

ANN-MARIE BROWN is a Canadian painter currently hunkered down on the west coast in the company of rain & bears.

KAITLYN BURD is originally from Louisville, Kentucky, but she currently lives in Central Texas, where she teaches and works as the Fiction Editor for *Porter House Review*. Her writing has been featured in *Atticus Review*, *Cleaver Magazine*, *Map Literary*, and elsewhere. She has been awarded an artist's residency at the Chulitna Lodge in Lake Clark, Alaska, and her writing has been selected as the third-place winner of the Atticus Review Short Fiction Contest, a finalist for the Great Midwest Fiction Prize, and longlisted for the 2018 Best Small Fictions Anthology.

MARIEKEN COCHIUS is a Dutch-born artist who has lived and worked in New York City since 1987, and in the Hudson Valley since 2013. Her work encompasses drawing, painting, sculpture and printmaking. Cochius' work has been exhibited in numerous galleries and institutions across the world, including the U.S., Japan, Germany and the Netherlands. Her work was recently featured on the covers of *Willard and Maple Magazine*, *Sun Spot Journal*, and inside *Tiny Seed Literary Journal*, *Esthetic Apostle*, *FLAR*, *DeLuge Journal*, *Alluvian Environmental Journal*, and *Raw Art Review*.

HOLLY CORBETT has a Masters degree in English and has previously published prose in *Tulane Review* and photography and poetry in *300 Days of Sun*. Most recently, her work appeared in *Sandstone & Silver: An Anthology of Nevada Poets*.

DUTCH DYER is a high-tech cowboy with deep roots in the rural South and now calls Reno, Nevada his home. When he's not delivering Cisco technologies he's out exploring, camera in hand, everything that is or was the American West.

BENJAMIN ERLANDSON is a skeptic, longitudinal thinker, brewer, gardener, photographer, designer, and writer. Shooting for more than twenty-five years and writing for more than thirty, he spends quite a bit of time switching gears between fiction, nonfiction, and photography. Ben currently resides in Glade Valley, North Carolina.

THOMAS GILLASPY is a northern California photographer. His photography has been featured in numerous magazines including the literary journals: *Compose*, *Portland Review* and *Brooklyn Review*. Further information and additional examples of his work are available at: http://www.thomasgillaspy.com www.flickr.com/photos/thomasmichaelart.

ERIKA GLASS is a Pennsylvania native who strives to illuminate the wonder, despair, and complex energy of the everyday in her detail-oriented portraiture works.

E.E. GREER is a poet, filmmaker, and hybrid-genre artist. When not writing she can be found eating, reading, smelling flowers until she sneezes, or dancing at a show with her eyes closed.

AFTON SINCLAIR-HOLLAND is a mother of three charismatic children. Her father was a photographer, and she aspires to continue with the same passion for moments. One such moment is the suspense inherent to childhood haircuts. Timeless reactions, suspended in the present time: that was the inspiration behind this picture of her son.

MELINDA JANE is the author of the poetry book *Nature's Nuptials* and the children's book *The Currawong and the Owl*, as well as fifty individual written works published in international anthologies and literature journals.

ROBERT KEELER was born in St. Paul, and grew up in the jungles of Colombia. He has a BS in Mathematics from NCSU, MS in Computer Science from UNC-CH, MBA UCLA, and a Certificate in Poetry from UW. He is recognized as an Honorman of the U.S. Naval Submarine School, Submarine Service (SS) qualified. He has received the Vietnam Service Medal, an Honorable Discharge, and a Whiting Foundation Experimental Grant.

RICHARD NICKEL is an active artist, educator and writer who has exhibited both nationally and internationally. He has been published in several books on contemporary ceramics and art journals. As a ceramic sculptor, he has pieces in numerous private collections. Richard is also an active public artist, having designed and painted murals in Rochester, NY; Niagara Falls, NY; Norfolk, VA; and Virginia Beach, VA. And Hampton , VA.

DON NOEL is retired after four decades' prizewinning print and broadcast journalism in Hartford, CT. He received his MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University in 2013.

BRENDAN PRANIEWICZ is an amateur photographer studying at Grossmont Community College, and resides in San Diego, California. He has placed 2nd in the Del Mar Fair Photography Contest. He's also had photos featured in *Wanderlust Journal* and *Hey, I'm Alive Magazine*.

DAVE PETRAGLIA has published his photos, fiction and nonfiction in magazines large and small for over 30 years.

HARRISON PYROS is an English and Economics student at UC Santa Barbara. He is originally from Los Angeles, but spent time all up and down the west coast, including the Pacific Northwest. His writing focuses on satire, social commentary, and quiet dramas, and his previous work has appeared in *The Santa Clara Review*, *The Ilanot Review*, *The Roadrunner Review*, and elsewhere. His work can be found at harrisonpyros.com.

SABYASACHI ROY is a self-taught amateur photographer and artist. His work has been selected for "Photo of the Day" on the National Geographic website.

SANDEEP SHETE ("SandyVisual") is a self-taught visual artist in India who creates digital artworks and single-panel gag cartoons in his free time. His work has appeared in publications in the U.S.A. and India such as *The Esthetic Apostle*, *Chaleur Magazine*, *Rumble Fish Quarterly*, *Reading Hour*, and some corporate magazines. In March 2019, Sandeep won an artwork competition on Instagram sponsored by Chaleur Magazine for artists around the world. Sandeep is also a hobbyist photographer, a published and prize-winning short-story writer, and an avid traveler. Social media: Instagram.com/sandyvisual; Facebook.com/SandyVisual.

ANA MARIA SPAGNA is the author of seven books including *Uplake: Restless Essays of Coming and Going*, *Reclaimers*, stories of elder women reclaiming sacred land and water, *Test Ride on the Sunnyland Bus*, winner of the River Teeth literary nonfiction prize, and two previous essay collections, *Potluck* and *Now Go Home*. She lives with her wife, Laurie, in the North Cascades and currently serves as Kittredge Distinguished Writer in Environmental Studies at the University of Montana in spring 2020.

TARA TROIANO is a poet, musician, photographer, and sophomore at the University of Texas at Austin. Her photography aims to draw the viewer's attention to movement and textures within the natural world. Through photography, Tara hopes to inspire appreciation and observation of the natural world. Her work can be found in *TeenInk Print* magazine, *Sediments Literary-Arts Journal* and *Edify Fiction*.

WENDY N. WAGNER is the author of *An Oath. of Dogs*, an SF eco-thriller, as well as two novels for the Pathfinder role-playing game. She's published more than forty short stories, and currently serves as the senior/managing editor of *Lightspeed* and *Nightmare* magazines. She lives in the suburbs of Portland, Oregon, with her very understanding family.

CONSTANCE WIENEKE spend a lot of time out of doors, both in her yard and in the backcountry. She is always struck at how blithely we move through the world, mostly unconcerned with how we affect everything around us, from creatures to the landscape. She also feels there is much for us to account for and that it isn't The Other Guy or Gal that is the problem.

MATT WITT is a writer and photographer from Oregon. His photography and blog may be seen at MattWittPhotography.com. He has been Artist in Residence at Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness Foundation, Crater Lake National Park, John Day Fossil Beds National Monument, Cascade-Siskiyou National Monument, Mesa Refuge, and PLAYA at Summer Lake, Oregon.

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