



EarthSpeak Magazine

Issue 3
Spring 2010

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Presented by EarthSpeak Press
(An Imprint of Seven CirclePress)

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Published 2010 by EarthSpeak Press (An Imprint of Seven CirclePress)

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Buff Whitman-Bradley

Buff Whitman-Bradley is the author of two books of poetry, b.eagle, poet and The Honey Philosophies. His poems have appeared in a number of print and online journals. In addition to writing, he produces documentary videos and audios. His interviews with U.S. soldiers who have refused to fight in Iraq and Afghanistan can be heard at www.couragetoresist.org. He lives with his wife Cynthia in the San Francisco Bay Area.

Horses

Every evening
When the horses
Walk back
To the barn
They leave
Their shapes
Standing
In the pasture
As the night
Slowly turns
Violet indigo
Black
On clear
Midnights
If you lie down
Among those shapes
In the fragrant
Alfalfa timothy
Clover
And look
Through them
Up at the sky
You can see
Horses
Filled with stars

Teresa Chuc Dowell

Teresa Chuc Dowell teaches English literature and writing at a public high school in Los Angeles. Her poetry has appeared in journals such as *Ascent Aspirations Magazine*, the *National Poetry Review*, *Verse Daily*, *Babel Fruit*, and *miller's pond* (online) and her creative nonfiction has appeared in journals such as *Memoir Journal*, *Sugar Mule*, and *Mosaic*. Her poetry chapbook, Danaus Plexippus Plexippus, was published by Victorian Violet Press, 2010. Teresa earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and is currently a candidate for an MFA in Creative Writing (poetry) at Goddard College in Vermont.

Photosynthesis

for my son -

How can I convince you
that you do have chlorophyll,
that you can take the sun's
energy and turn it into sugar?
Produce something sweet inside of you.
Take the waste people breathe out
and make it into something that
will keep you alive, that will keep
those around you alive, create oxygen.

Why do you say that this metaphor
doesn't work, that you don't have
the powers of a plant, that nature
didn't intend you that way?

Look, how you twist and turn
towards the light.

Roger Real Drouin

Roger Real Drouin is an MFA student in creative writing/fiction at Florida Atlantic University. His short stories have been published, or are forthcoming, in the print journals *The Litchfield Review* and *Leaf Garden* and online at *The Smoking Poet*, *Canopic Jar*, *Offcourse Literary Journal*, and *Green Silk*. He was a journalist for seven years before coming to FAU in Fall 2009. His Web site is www.rogerdrouin.com. Roger also writes an outdoor blog at www.rogersoutdoorblog.com.

Encounters with a Ghost

Two birds bob down for insects, long, slender bills turning over the rich marsh soil. Night seeps in, and coldness, colder than the nights before. Instinct prepares them for the beginning of a journey, the long flight east to coastal Canada for one final rest in Labrador before three days of nonstop flight. Due South-southeast, then straight south, two thousand miles over the open ocean, nothing but water and sky.

The Eskimo Curlew is a powerful flier, fattening up on blueberries and insects every August before flying to South America. Every year, this arctic shorebird makes a 20,000-mile roundtrip migration from tundra to wintering ground in Argentina and Uruguay—across Canada and then south over the Atlantic Ocean. The Eskimo Curlew, which up until the 1870s was one of the most common shorebirds in North America, has a soft, melodious call: *tee tee tee or tee dee tee dee*. It is slightly larger than a pigeon, has a slender, down-curved bill, and stands on long, stilted legs. The bird is mostly brownish with a lighter tan and white chest and abdomen, a dark-brown eyebrow buff, solid-brown crown, and cinnamon under-wings.

The only known photos that exist of this shorebird were taken in 1962 by Don Bleitz. He took four photos of a pair of what is believed to be Eskimo Curlew on Galveston Island, Texas, a coast known as a staging area for the species along its flyway back north to tundra. Some ornithologists believe one of the curlews appears to be a young male, while the sex of the other one is unknown.



Bleitz's sighting was the last confirmed report of the species on the books. Several years later a group who say the Eskimo Curlew is extinct disputed the authenticity of the photos. They vehemently accused Bleitz, a professional wildlife photographer, of staging the whole thing. The dispute continues even today, fourteen years after Bleitz's death. This group argues the photos were that of a stuffed specimen—not a live bird. In two of the photos, one of the bird's stilted legs appears planted in the ground, and this group uses this foot as evidence that a stuffed bird was stuck firmly in the soil and then photographed from several different angles. The most damning evidence was one color photo that looked eerily like an altered copy of a black and white photo. Another group of birders and ornithologists say even if Bleitz was guilty of doctoring a color photo, it does not make him guilty of entirely fabricating the photos in the first place. The most telling evidence for the believer's camp is the way the bird held his wing, folded tightly against the tail, in a way that shows he was alive, and not stuffed. It is impossible, they say, to duplicate this posture in a stuffed specimen.

The Eskimo Curlew is one of a handful of what have been called "grail birds," a species teetering on the edge of extinction and that may or may not exist. Another grail bird is the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, which was last documented in 1944 and thought to be extinct until a birder spotted one in a remote nature preserve in Arkansas, February 11, 2004. This famous sighting occurred when a kayaker looked up and saw (or didn't see, depending on one's take of the increasingly-controversial encounter) what he thought was the red crest, white wing patch, and the ivory bill of the rare bird. Several others ivory bill sightings have been reported, including one along the same river, but searchers have been unable to find undisputed evidence of the species' existence. As it turns out, "undisputed" evidence of such a species can be a tricky thing to come by.

As for the Eskimo Curlew, even experienced birders know only very little about this species. A recent updating of The International Rare Birds database lists the Curlew as "extremely rare/possibly extinct," and by many accounts, the species disappeared as early as the first half of the twentieth century. Every so often, someone claims to have spotted what they affirm is an Eskimo Curlew among Nova Scotia's vast fields or resting along its return migration route in Galveston. Other birders and experts who scoured these locales have been unable to verify these sightings. The last Eskimo Curlew nest was found over a century ago in Canada. And the only decent-quality photograph of the bird that exists is the subject of accusations that the photo is a fake. It is for only a brief moment that the random sightings offer a spectacular possibility: the return of a

species that was decimated by humans. These sparks are soon extinguished by the official state birding committees that vote to leave the sighting out of the record books in the name of a lack of supporting evidence.

The encounters remain a dance with a ghost. In this essay, I will detail two separate glimpses of the ghost, two encounters that give a splinter of hope that perhaps this species is in fact still hanging on.

As early as 1910, ornithologists ominously predicted the imminent extinction of the Eskimo Curlew. After four decades of slaughtering by commercial and sport hunters (the bird became a delicacy that replaced the extinct passenger pigeon) and the loss of the bird's main food staple, the species was barely hanging on. In the time it takes for rust to eat through sheet metal on an old car, what was once one of the most common shorebirds was nearly decimated. The widespread conversion of open, tallgrass prairies to agricultural farmland also contributed to the species' decline. In the U.S. Department of Agriculture Biological Survey No. 35, 1910, W.W. Cooke wrote of the species in the past tense and stated that it was "rapidly approaching extinction, if indeed any still exist." The species chances of survival only worsened. In 1954, Canadian naturalist and newspaper reporter Fred Bosworth wrote the book Last of the Curlews, a fictional account of the life of the very last of its species.

After a sighting of a rare bird such as the Eskimo Curlew or Ivory-billed Woodpecker becomes public, a wave of incredulity follows. Sometimes it takes a while for the wave, but it always comes. The comments on bird forums or letters to the editors of local newspapers defend improbability and can often be cruel to the alleged sighter. It can get so ugly that some naysayers force biologists to lose their jobs over the issue of a rare-bird sighting. A few birders may opt not to make such a sighting public.

Confounding the Does-the-Eskimo-Curlew-exist? debate is the fact that the species shares numerous similar characteristics with the more common Whimbrel. From a distance the Eskimo Curlew can look similar to a Long-billed Curlew, or a Stilt Sandpiper. Non-believing birders often argue that a possible encounter was really a Whimbrel, or they portray the sighter as someone who does not have the expertise to distinguish between a Whimbrel and an Eskimo Curlew.

Kathleen Elizabeth Anderson was banding shorebirds along the western shore of James Bay in Canada with renowned ornithologist Joseph "Archie" Hagar, when they saw what they were convinced was a pair of Eskimo Curlew flying towards them just above eye level. The date was August 15, 1976. "In the birding world, if they haven't seen it themselves they question it," Anderson

said. “And then there are those who see it the same as a flying saucer. There are so many people who haven’t seen it, and certainly don’t think the Eskimo Curlew exists. They are going to feel the same way about my flying saucer, if I claim I saw one.”

A May 5, 2005 article in *The Guardian* of London classified the recent sightings—including in addition to Anderson’s sighting, an unconfirmed report of 23 of the birds in Texas in 1981 and a handful of other unconfirmed sightings from Texas, Canada (1987), Argentina (1990), and Nova Scotia (2006)—this way: “In the four decades since (1962), several other sightings have been claimed, but none has totally convinced the authorities whose job it is to pass judgment on records of rare birds.”

Anderson has no doubt about what she saw.

I spoke to her during three different phone interviews from her farm in Duxbury, Massachusetts. Anderson, 87, is as sharp as any 27-year-old I know. Something about serious birding—the combination of hiking twenty miles through a marsh, using the keenest of perceptive ability, and growing even more intently patient—keeps one young. I’ve spoken to and met several birders over sixty that are models for how I want to age over the next thirty years. They are smart and have an athletic stamina that you can’t get from even the most vigorous routine of elliptical machines and treadmills.

Mrs. Anderson recalls nearly every single detail of August 15, 1976, starting with the weather. It was a clear, sunny, cool day. Anderson and her colleague, Archie Hagar, were sitting on a large driftwood log in the marsh along the west coast of James Bay. This isolated stretch of tidal marsh was a few miles from the camp where they were staying, a post that could only be reached by seaplane. Anderson and Hagar were out to trap shorebirds, including Whimbrels, that would be branded and released. Because of the tide, they hadn’t had much luck trapping birds in the large net they were using. Since they were having a hard time of it, the two decided to pack up and head back north to camp, a hunting post in winter that was managed by the Canadian Wildlife Service during the summer as a staging area to study shorebirds and other wildlife.

They headed back to camp. It was now four o’ clock. Their path, lying first along the backside of a low sand ridge, now turned to the west across half a mile of level salt meadow. They spotted a pair of shorebirds flying towards them. “They were flying towards us at eye level,” Anderson recalled during our first phone interview from her home. “Looking out at my stone wall, I would say they were maybe sixty feet away. Yes, about sixty feet.”

The birds were flying very fast from left to right, or south to north. Anderson's initial thought was, look at those "runt Whimbrel." Archie whispered, "Oh My God," and Anderson drew her 8-power binoculars up from her neck to get a closer to the birds. The birds flew past. About a quarter mile away, the small curlews dipped down, as if to land, but then picked up again, flying off. Now the Hagar and Anderson talked about what they saw. Both noticed the smaller size of the curlew, vivid details about the bill, and the way the birds flew. At this time, Hagar suggested that birds were Eskimo Curlew—not runt Whimbrel. The pair had the marking of Eskimo Curlew. In his field notes, Hagar noted the distinguishing marks that set apart the Eskimo Curlew from the Whimbrel: pale-cinnamon colored under-wing; a smaller, shorter, only slighter downcurved bill; and the dark brown eyebrow buff. The birds were nearer the size of a Black-bellied Plover, than of Whimbrel, which are nearly twice as large. Hagar, who was a prominent ornithologist, was particularly struck by the rapid direct flight with quick deep wingbeats—a flight more like that of the plover than of the Whimbrels they had been seeing all afternoon.

"I've seen a lot of shorebirds, but I am not the expert Archie is," Anderson said. The two went back to their cabin. Hagar immediately jotted down additional field notes, while Anderson went to find another biologist, who was in the process of cooking dinner, to tell him what they saw. Could it have been a pair of Whimbrel and not Eskimo Curlews? "There was no question" it was Eskimo Curlew, Anderson said. "We were looking at Whimbrel all afternoon. Whimbrel look almost like chicken with a long curved beak and long legs. They are a big bird. The Eskimo Curlew is smaller, like a pigeon, and has a less curved bill."

When I first started writing this, I was fascinated by the Eskimo Curlew, but less optimistic about its existence. That was before hearing Anderson's story.

I thought to myself, it would be much (very much) less plausible to believe a flying saucer sighting than Anderson's report of the pair of Eskimo Curlews. It was brief encounter, but a convincing one. Anderson's report was meticulous, even more than three decades afterwards. This seemed to be the result of the keen observations of two experienced, keen, and conservative birders—and not some wild glory hunters. Anderson's father was one of the first U.S. Forest Rangers, and he would take her out to see a Bald Eagle he spotted or hike to a fox den to see the little cubs come out to play. She began going to the local library to take out books on birds when she eight, starting a trend of triggering the ire of the librarian who would keep close track of which books were overdue. Hagar, in his seventies at the time of the sighting, was an experienced ornithologist, a man who has camped with the Cree Indians for weeks at

a time to get closer to shorebird roosting area, and an expert when it comes to the Whimbrel. Hagar shared camp so often with the Cree Indians in certain areas that he had become close friends with many of them. “To say he is a brilliant ornithologist is an under-statement,” Anderson said.

In a paper co-authored by both Anderson and Hagar in American Birds, March 1977, the duo writes: “Neither of us had mentioned or even considered the possibility of seeing Eskimo Curlew—we were in no way pre-conditioned.”

For Anderson, the Eskimo Curlew still exists in a remnant population, one that is difficult to observe because of its arctic breeding grounds that are accessible only by seaplane and those who have permission of the Canadian Wildlife Service. While the bird is known to stop in Labrador and sometimes New England, in late summer, and Galveston, in the early spring, it would require weeks of waiting—and an abundance of good luck—to observe the bird in these locales. The very small size of the population makes the bird nearly invisible. A large flock of dozens or even hundreds of Lesser Yellowlegs would be much easier to track than say a pair of Eskimo Curlew during migration. For these reasons, it is difficult to record and study this shorebird, to fully understand how many exist, if any.

All of this means that just because they are invisible to us, doesn't necessarily mean this species is gone. Anderson's account made me susceptible to what I'd describe as a swelling of hope for this “probably extinct” species. After doing some more research and a ton of coffee-enhanced reflection, a slice of that hope has eroded. I would not be surprised if tomorrow there was a bona fide confirmed sighting of an Eskimo Curlew. Paradoxically, I would also not be surprised at all if all of the hoopla has been one big mix-up resulting from a strange combination of sheer optimism, confusion, and the effects of decades of seeking out rare birds has on an individual. However, darker realities of the matter tugged at my consciousness. I can't help think about how even if the Eskimo Curlew does exist in some remnant population, as Anderson suggests, this species is very likely doomed—being in the situation where there is little conservation effort because most wildlife agencies are not quite sure it does exist. This thought is what makes it difficult to be optimistic about the eventual outcome for this species.

As dark moods tend to spread, I began to ask myself do we as a modern society deserve to get the Eskimo Curlew, or the Ivory-billed Woodpecker, back? If so, why? So these species can struggle in extremely small populations, constantly on life support, as the world chugs ahead—drilling and sawing—impervious to anything that may slow the planned, appointed, and inflexible course. Can we learn from our past? I do not expect to answer these

questions, nor solve the mystery of the Eskimo Curlew. As a novice birder at best, fascinated by the mystery of this species and my journalist curiosity to sort out the facts, I am not the one to determine if the Eskimo Curlew does in fact exist. I'm not sure if anyone is ready to answer the other questions.

Cheri Gratto-Trevor, a research scientist immersed in the lives of Canada's shorebirds, acknowledged she didn't know much about the Eskimo Curlew and pointed me to Canada's Species at Risk Public Register for more details. This register highlighted the history of the bird, its historic range in Canada, and other facts. Most endangered species listed in this Species at Risk list will come with a detailed "Recovery Planning" strategy, including conservation of breeding grounds or banding birds to identify the birds' migratory paths, also known as fly-ways. For the Eskimo Curlew, I came across this line: "Recovery activities were suspended in 1995, pending the verification of the existence of the species in Canada."

It's illegal to kill an Eskimo Curlew. But besides that there is not much being done in the ways of conservation.

The Audubon Society Master Guide to Birding describes the Eskimo Curlew's call as "a soft, melodious whistle: *tee-tee-tee*." According to a first-person account in *Birder's World Magazine*, a very similar whistle is what stopped Randy Hoffman in his tracks on a clear day in Peggy's Cove, Nova Scotia. Randy's wife, who was with him that day, September 24, 2006, asked why he was stopping. Hoffman, a natural-areas management specialist and past president of the Wisconsin Society for Ornithology, told his wife he just heard call notes from a bird that he did not know. He stopped, among the granite boulders and wind-polished bedrock, knowing that movement can distort sounds. But couldn't hear anything.

Hoffman stopped a little further along the trail, and here he heard the sound again—which he described as a *tee-dee* or *tee-bee* call. He stopped, looking in the direction of the call, and he heard it again. Soon he saw the bird, three hundred yards out and flying towards him and his wife. He got a good look at the bird head-on and then as it flew overhead. Hoffman has seen many Whimbrel and observed a Little Curlew at close range in 1994 on the California coast, and he has no doubt this bird seen on September 24, 2006 was an Eskimo Curlew.

Perhaps in the end this is a mystery that will show us that this species is more than a ghost. Perhaps for a change we can protect something delicate. Let us hope that right now a young pair of Eskimo Curlews is wading through the marsh of James Bay, bills reaching down for small insects in the dark soil.

Just maybe, this species can prove Kathleen Anderson and Randy Hoffman correct.

Don Lago

Don Lago has published three books of creative nonfiction, including Starchild: The Human Meanings of the Big Bang Cosmos and On the Viking Trail: Travels in Scandinavian American (University of Iowa Press, 2004). His essays exploring nature and science have been published for nearly thirty years in *Astronomy*, *Sky & Telescope*, *Orion*, *Earth*, *Isotope*, *Antioch Review*, and many more. They've been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and widely anthologized in college textbooks.

Earth to Earth

Perhaps it was the potsherds that inspired me to make new potsherds, to return my broken flowerpots to the earth.

I lived atop a pile of potsherds nearly a thousand years old, a midden, which is the fancy scholarly word for a garbage dump. Over many years, the Native Americans who had lived on this spot had tossed their garbage over the side of the hill. This garbage would have included broken pots, broken tools, food scraps, cooking ashes, and worn-out clothing, but the organic portion of this garbage had long ago turned back into earth, leaving only the potsherds. Now this hillside was the pathway between my cabin and where I parked below. Every time we received a solid rain, the bare dirt of the pathway eroded a bit more, exposing more potsherds. You could almost measure the intensity of the rainstorms by the number of potsherds that were exposed. I picked up most of these sherds and took them inside and placed them inside a modern Hopi pot that had been made by a member of the legendary family of Hopi potters, the Nampeyos. Unlike the Nampeyo pot, which was elegantly painted, the potsherds bore no decoration. I had showed one of these sherds to an archaeologist and he had given it a date and said it was a basic utilitarian storage ware.

I had never found a stone tool in the pathway, although once I found a nodule of obsidian, which is the best raw material for making very sharp projectile points. Geologically, obsidian didn't belong here, so this piece must have been carried in from many miles away. I had also found a few bone fragments, which might be the remnants of ancient meals. Then again, nearly a century ago this same land had served as a guest ranch, no doubt with many cook-outs, and I had found various bone chunks nearby that hardly seemed a millennium old. The guest ranch must have tossed their garbage over the same hillside, for alongside the potsherds, I found chunks of old bottles and rusty hardware.

When most Americans think of Native American pottery, they are most likely to think of it as an art form, and indeed some collectors will pay thousands of dollars for one pot. Thinking of pottery as art is especially true of the Puebloan pottery of the Southwest, where tribes and traditions that have endured for centuries can meet a major tourism traffic. Hundreds of Puebloan potters are now making a living from their clay, although "a living" by Native standards can be rather modest. But some potters are internationally famous. Sometimes

when I pick up a potsherd from my pathway and place it in my Nampeyo pot, I wonder what those ancient potters would have thought of the prices being paid for modern pottery across the highway from me at the Museum of Northern Arizona. This museum was founded in 1928 by Dr. Harold Colton to study the past and present tribes of northern Arizona, and it was Colton who gave the name and identity "Sinagua" to the Natives who had lived here and made my potsherds. Colton's first archaeological excavation had been right here on the old ranch where I live, leaving revealed the stone base of a Sinagua pueblo. Considering the midden next to me, it was quite possible that there had been another homesite right where I live, but if so its rocks may have been borrowed by whites to build the ranch house and the assorted structures that went with it. My own cabin included a base of rocks that were just the right size to have been Sinagua building blocks.

For the Sinagua, pottery was first of all a practical necessity. It was used to carry water and to cook food and to store food for next week or store seeds for next spring. The main artistic touch the Sinagua gave to their pottery was its color, which they selected by controlling how much oxygen reached the pot during firing. By preventing any oxygen from entering the firing, they could have produced black pottery, such as that of Santa Clara pueblo today, but instead they allowed in enough oxygen to produce red. The Sinagua must not have been entirely indifferent to art, as they actively traded for the decorated pottery of the Puebloans to the east. I've found a few pieces of Puebloan pottery in my pathway. It seems that the Puebloans were not interested in Sinagua pottery, for it seldom turns up in Puebloan sites. The Puebloans were so vigorously artistic with their pottery, evolving many variations in place and time, that archaeologists can use their sherds as reliable historical markers. Yet even for the Puebloans, pottery was first of all a practical necessity. As soon as whites showed up with their steel buckets and plastic containers, Natives quickly abandoned pottery for most uses. There was just too much grief in spending a whole day making a pot only to have your kids drop it on the floor and smash it to pieces. The Puebloans even began to alter their pottery-making techniques to enhance their artistic qualities at the expense of their practical qualities, so that pots could no longer withstand water or a cooking fire.

There is one practical realm in which pottery has continued to thrive. Actually this isn't entirely a practical realm, since people who enjoy plants and flowers must be motivated by aesthetics. But when these gardeners select pots for

their plants and flowers, they are usually motivated by practicality as much as by aesthetics. You don't see much expensive art pottery, Native or otherwise, sitting on windowsills as flowerpots. Then again, there are much cheaper plastic alternatives to ceramic flowerpots, but people continue to demand ceramics. Even people who live disconnected from the earth, whose only bodily contact with it may be the flowerpot soil on an apartment tower balcony, seem to recognize that only a vessel made of earth can most fittingly nurture the further hoisting of raw earth into form, into green sails.

Thus a thousand years after this spot of earth was turned into pottery to grow life, Sinagua life, pottery is still here and growing life in the form of the flowers on my porch. My pottery serves a larger purpose, for every spring when the time comes to plant new flowers, I buy one new pot, its rim as round as an orbit around the sun. My pots serve as a miniature Stonehenge that aligns me with the larger circles of time and sky and living, counting up the years I have grown more rooted in this earth. Sometimes I forget exactly how many years I have been here and I have to count my pots: eleven, twelve, thirteen. Bringing home a new pot and filling it with earth and planting it with flowers feels like a ceremony, a rooting of my life not just in this land but in the lives of those who lived here long ago and turned this land into not just plants but into their bodies and their consciousness and their ceremonies.

I would never be so thoroughly made out of this earth, for the plants I ate came from California and Iowa. My annual planting ceremony reminded me of how difficult it must have been to survive as farmers at this elevation, 7,000 feet, where the growing season is less than half a year. My first year here, I had attempted to plant flowers from seeds, but this only reduced my flower season by more weeks. Now I buy already-growing flowers. It seemed I had major company in overestimating the Flagstaff climate, for when the big retailers like Target first arrived here and set up a garden shop, they tended to start too early and freeze much of their inventory, and they trucked up plants that might have belonged in the Phoenix desert but which stood poor chances here. Another concession I had to make was not to buy hand-painted pots from Mexico, for the paint and then the clay itself soon started cracking off, perhaps from our combination of winter cold and high altitude sunlight. Now I buy plain brown pots with only modest ornamentation. I looked for sturdy thick pots or bowls, but sometimes they were not sturdy enough.

I lined my pots up beneath the edge of the roof, which had no gutter to distract the rain from draining onto my flowers. This strategy actually didn't work very well, since the two months after flower planting were the driest months of the year. When the rains did come, they were Southwestern monsoons, cloud-bursts that were further concentrated by the grooves of my corrugated tin roof, sending jets of water to excavate holes in my potted earth and to batter my flowers, sometimes tearing petals off. Still, I liked the idea that my flowers should earn an honest living from the sky and not from my faucet. The name Sinagua, after all, meant "without water". The Sinagua had endured without the reliable springs and the Rio Grande River that had supported the Puebloans, so if I was invoking the Sinagua, maybe I should be willing to let my plants tough it out. The Sinagua and other desert tribes had built ingenious water catchment and storage systems, including large pots strategically placed beneath the lip of natural pour-offs, and probably roof pour-offs too, so centuries of tradition was the gravity aligning my pots. On the other hand, the Sinagua had benefited from a wetter climate, and when this region became too dry for farming, the Sinagua moved out. I was not trying to invoke this history, so virtually every day I became the sky for my flowers, a raincloud such as the Sinagua must have tried to invoke with ceremonies. What ceremonies were my flowers performing to so successfully summon their rain god? It was at least a Beauty Way ceremony, but perhaps it was also the unforgotten bond between earth that had once lived and earth that now possessed the hands with which to pull earth through the magic circle into life.

My flowerpots were not sturdy enough in the wintertime, when snow sometimes piled up on the roof so thickly that it became a glacier. Flagstaff gets over 100 inches of snow a year, at least historically, more than Minneapolis or Denver or Buffalo. But here the high altitude Arizona sun is out soon after the snow stops, and within a day, with a little help from snow plows, the roads are clear. The same cannot be said of roofs. A tin roof like mine receives enough warmth out of the house that the bottom layer of snow starts to melt, and the top layer receives enough warmth from the sun that it starts to melt, but when there is a foot of snow in between, the whole mass shrinks only slowly. At night, the melting ceases, and the next morning you have an ice sandwich. Fresh snow turns this into a geological stratum of ice layers. Gradually each groove in the tin roof grows an icicle, sometimes quite thick and reaching two or three feet downwards. When these icicles become too heavy for their own grip, they fall off and bayonet my flowerpots. But this isn't what does the

damage. What does the damage is when the entire glacier slides down its tin Yosemite and crashes down on the pots.

The first time this happened, I was away for awhile and came back to find a pot broken in half, its soil spilled out. Since the ice was now gone, I supposed that the pot had cracked due to the mere cold, or due to some flaw in its manufacture. I should have thought that if ice can carve miles of granite bedrock into giant bowls, it can certainly dispatch a small clay bowl.

For the next ice age I was home and watched the glacier develop and begin to slide down the roof, a berg of Damocles over my flowerpots. I finally imagined what had happened to that pot last winter. When this berg crashed down and broke another pot, my theory was confirmed. Now, you may be wondering why, if I saw this fatality coming, I didn't move the pots out of the way. This is a good question. It would have been easy enough for me to slide them forward on my porch. Only a foot's difference probably would have saved the clay. But I left them right where they were, and two winters later another pot was smashed. And still I left the pots lined up like clay pigeons. This was certainly not because I didn't care about my flowerpots. In truth, I was rather annoyed when they were broken, for they had ceased to be mere pots and had become symbols of my living, like birthday candles. The smashing of these pots had some of the feel of a personal negation. Yet I did not feel violated in the way I would have if a trespasser had vandalized my pots out of malice. Instead, I felt it as a lesson in humility. The flowerpots were here to mark the cycles of nature, and winter was a cycle of nature, and if winter needed to use this space, if winter packed an inhuman punch, then there was something ceremonial about my accepting it, about watching the roof glaciers grow and follow their destiny, just as ice ages had once swept humans aside and droughts had swept the Sinagua aside. Compared to the whole societies smashed by climate changes, a pot was a small sacrifice.

Yet before you start admiring this noble attitude of humility before nature, it should be noted that the Sinagua would have regarded me as an idiot. Only a fool would allow a perfectly good pot to be broken when you could easily move it out of the way. Perhaps I was merely a member of a rich, spoiled society where you could casually drive down to a store and buy a pot that would have taken the Sinagua all day to make, indeed a pot made by the descendants of their Aztec neighbors for trivial wages that still reflected the legacy of conquest. Like many gestures of well-intentioned white Americans to define their appro-

prate role in nature, my little Aztec sacrificial altar to nature was loaded with paradoxes. But you have to give some credit to spoiled, technologically-cocooned whites for at least trying. The Sinagua didn't have to try hard to feel humility before nature; they probably felt this far more than they preferred. For us conquerors of nature and of nature's people, even small gestures to honor them both are honorable.

I did not go so far as to allow the ice to have the final word. The next spring when it was time to buy my annual flowerpot, I also bought a replacement for the one that had been broken. Thus the circle went unbroken.

My fondness for my flowerpots was enough that I found I could not throw the broken ones into the garbage. At least, not into the modern industrial garbage-plex of Cheops pyramid landfills, of diesel-snorting trucks, of giant dumpsters overloaded with last week's Christmas presents. The Sinagua had a simpler way of discarding their garbage: just toss it over the hillside. Admittedly, this attitude would not work well for modern society, and even for the Sinagua it must have had its drawbacks, such as the odor of decaying food, and the rats and bugs attracted to it. But when it came to pottery, this seemed the most honest, and even poetic, solution. Pottery had come out of the earth and deserved to go straight back into it. My earth was already a certified recipient of broken pottery, and now it welcomed more. Perhaps I even owed this earth some potsherds for all the ones I had taken from it.

After letting a broken pot sit for awhile, perhaps until spring, I carried it down my hillside and selected a spot not far off of my pathway. The pots usually broke off into two or three slices, the smallest of which turned out to make a handy sharp spade for digging, as if the pot was sponsoring its own burial. I started to dig, and I watched to see if I unearthed anything. I had never actually excavated this land before, having allowed that role to the rain, but now I had become an archaeologist. This was not always a good relationship to have with vanished peoples, for it could define them as merely the raw material of scientific research and career advancement. But I was here first of all to give something to the land, almost like an offering. Thus I did not feel invasive in my digging, merely curious about how far the midden extended, and hopeful that I might be adding something more to it. For a moment I thought I had turned up a sizable sherd, but then I realized I had simply broken off the tip of my ceramic spade.

My pottery did not appear to be very strongly bonded. Out of curiosity, I picked up the next pottery slice and gave it a modest knock against a nearby rock, and the pottery broke into half and into lots of crumbs, even dust. I found that I liked the act of breaking up the pottery. This was not merely a destructive impulse, although in view of my complicity in allowing the roof glacier to smash the pot to begin with, I'm not sure I could convince the pot of my innocence. Breaking the pot was the solution to the practical problem of digging a hole big enough to bury a bowl over a foot across. Breaking the pot also suggested something that was far from practical, something involving the deepest religious impulses of humans.

I thought of how the Mimbres culture, which had thrived in southern New Mexico at the same time the Sinagua had lived here, had ritually pounded a hole into the bottom of the pottery they buried with their dead. Mimbres pottery bore elaborate designs, at least geometrics and often animal or human figures, figures which sometimes seemed to depict a story, and the "kill holes" pounded into in these pots usually marred the design. This sacrificing of the pots led to the larger sacrifice of burying the pots. The Mimbres were hardly unique in breaking something that was buried with the dead. The tombs of the Pharaohs contained deliberately broken offerings. But the Mimbres were more consistent at this practice than other Southwestern tribes. Since religious rituals are often inexplicable even to those performing them, the anthropologists who come along a thousand years later are left speculating as to what a ritual meant. A standard theory about why the Mimbres "killed" their pottery is that they considered the pots to possess spirits and they were releasing the spirits to accompany the spirits of the dead to the next world. Another theory starts with the fact that the Mimbres placed bowls over the faces of the dead, and thus the bowls could have represented the sky, and the hole in the sky could have symbolized the entrance to the next world. In such a universe, the breaking of a pot first by winter and then by my own hand would gain a new dimension of meaning, of my taking a hand in the cycles of creation. But simply in a natural universe, my hand was now helping to turn the potter's wheel on which the raw earth was spun into elaborate forms of both clay and flesh, only to melt back into earth again.

I picked up the main ruin of the pot and knocked it against the rock and made further ruins. I picked up these pieces and sacrificed them. I dug the hole deeper, and then arranged the sherds in it. How long would these sherds last before they became wholly earth again? I doubted they would hold up as well

as the Sinagua sherds, but they would probably last for centuries, perhaps washing out of this hillside in a distant rain. There was a sad incongruity about the durability of human bodies compared with the forms we made to serve us. The bodies of the Sinagua had melted back into the earth a thousand years ago, yet a pot that had quenched their thirst for a mere summer was still holding onto its shape. The Sinagua sherds were still holding onto the order which fire had transferred to them from the melting order of wood. After a thousand years of rain, that fire still glowed in the red clay, that wood still proclaimed its architecture, that thirst was still unquenched, and that sacrifice was still winning favor.

I began pushing earth back over the sherds, and when I was nearly done, I found a Sinagua sherd in the pile. I picked it up and brushed it off. If I had been making some sort of offering to this earth, then it seemed this earth was giving me something in return: giving me some sort of gentle touch from a hand raised out of this earth by the fire of the sun, a hand whose gentle touch upon this clay had the authority to grant, across all this time and bitter human history, a blessing for my living here.

David W. Landrum

David W. Landrum teaches Literature at Grand Valley State University in Allendale, Michigan. His fiction has appeared *34th Parallel*, *Monday Night*, *Riverwalk*, *In Posse Review* and many other journals and magazines. He is also a widely published poet and edits the on-line poetry magazine, *Lucid Rhythms*, www.lucidrhythms.com.

Ferity

On a Sunday afternoon in late October, Gillian Adams and Calli Taylor arrived at a metal fence-gate in a remote area of southern Minnesota. Calli opened it. They started down a rutted dirt road. The Jeep lurched and bumped as they drove two miles and came in sight of a small frame house. The boards were not painted but it was neat and well-kept. A pile of hewn wood leaned against one wall. A metal stovepipe protruded from the roof.

“This is it,” Calli said, turning off the engine on her Suburban.

Trees towered around them. Gillian saw what looked like a small waterfall in the back. When they got out she heard the sound of a book.

“Is that a waterfall?”

“It is. Clearwater Creek runs just behind the house. It’s completely clean and drinkable. But there’s bottled water inside too.”

They got out and went inside. Gillian set down her traveling bag full of clothes and toiletries, and her yoga mat. She set the book she had brought on the table.

“This is your very rustic cabin, prototype A.”

Gillian looked around. A pot-bellied cast-iron stove sat in the middle of the room, a box of wood beside it. An iron-frame bed with a pillow, quilts, and olive drab blankets piled on it occupied one corner. In the pantry on the other side of the room she saw food and large containers of distilled water. A silver-blue metal tub sat in another corner beside a shelf and chair.

“That’s the bathtub,” Calli smiled said when she saw Gillian gazing at it with puzzlement. She pointed to shelves on the north side under two lattice windows. “There is a Coleman stove for cooking. Everything you need is here.”

Calli showed her where towels, extra linen, a first aid kit, matches, and provisions were stored.

“Where’s the lady’s room?” she asked.

Calli pointed. “Out back—a real, genuine outhouse—a piece of Americana that is rapidly fading from the scene.”

“This will be an adventure.”

“It will be. Now: you did not bring your laptop, right?”

“I left it at your place.”

“Cell phone is okay. You need it in case of emergency. And I want you to call me before you go to bed just to make sure you’re all secure and settled. But, Gillian, for Christ’s sake don’t start doing business on the phone, don’t let your boss call you and get you working remote.”

“I promise. I don’t want to start that.”

“Did you bring any books?”

“I did. You’re not going to tell me I can’t read while I’m here.”

“Reading is conversation. It’s a dialogue with the author. You came here to relax.”

“I’m keeping the book,” she said.

“Okay. But don’t spend all your time reading. What’s the book about?”

“Management.”

Calli rolled her eyes. “You just can’t drop the management thing, can you?”

“It’s what I do.”

Calli said she had to go. They shared a long, heartfelt embrace of friendship. She watched Calli drive away and leave her alone.

Gillian Adams worked in a brokerage firm. At age thirty-three she had risen to the status of junior partner and accumulated well over three million dollars of secure funds. Tall, pretty, slender and athletic, she was a woman other women envied—a woman who had it all, who had broken the glass ceiling, who had arrived. It had taken effort and long hours. Like a nun, she had left all other things behind and devoted herself with unbending duty to the litanies of her life in business. And her secular asceticism had paid off.

Of course, she told herself, it was not exactly like the life a nun lives. She had lovers—wealthy, handsome men with whom she took cruises and spent weekends in Paris, Maui, and Capetown. She owned a luxury apartment, a Jaguar and a BMW; she had a cabin in the northern part of the state; she had money; any material thing she desired was hers. Water-skiing, hang-gliding, and rock-climbing, often accompanied by one of her boyfriends as a companion, kept her in top shape and diverted her thoughts, at least for short periods of time, from the constant tension and mind-twisting stress of her high-pressure job.

But at the bachelorette party for Calli, a friend from management school, she became morose. Calli noticed and the next day she said, “I have something to suggest for you—something I think you need to do. I’ll tell you about after Tim and I get back from our honeymoon.”

Gillian was intrigued. She waited three weeks before she called. After giving some details about her new life as a married woman, Calli unfolded her plan for her friend.

“My family owns some land,” she said, “and I think you ought to go stay there by yourself for a few days.”

“I’m not into camping.”

“We have a cabin. It’s rustic—there’s a well, a potbellied stove, provisions—you’ll have a chance to get away and be alone.”

“I can do that anytime I want. I have a cabin on Lake Michigan.”

“With lots of people around it?”

“Yes.”

“You need solitude.”

“Why?”

“To get back to basics.”

“What basics are you talking about?”

“Nature. Womanhood. Your primal self.”

She laughed. “*Primal self?* Jesus, Calli! I didn’t know you were into the Earth-Mother thing.”

“I’m not—or at least not into it like you think. Growing up out here I always lived close to the land. When we were in college, the first month or two, I used to wonder why I felt so drained and exhausted all the time. After a while I realized it was because I needed to plug in again.”

“Plug into what?”

“To my primal self. Gillian, sometimes you just have to get down to basics. That’s why we used to go out to the boonies so much.”

Gillian remembered their frequent jaunts parks and wilderness areas. They were fun times, she remembered, but she also recalled how for Calli they seemed vital. When she could not take trips like these, could not get out for a while to a natural setting, she became lethargic and irritable.

“I remember.”

“You need to get out in nature, Gillian. You’ve got to be out where you can get *feral*.”

During a break she looked feral up on Wikipedia. She knew what it meant but wanted to see an official definition. She read: *A feral organism is*

one that has escaped from domestication and returned, partly or wholly, to its wild state. Such a state was called ferity.

As Gillian remembered these things, her cell phone rang. She checked the caller ID. It was Dwayne.

Dwayne Coleman, her boss, had precipitated the whole thing when he walked into her office a little more than a month ago. He always knocked then came into the office without waiting for an invitation.

“Ever been to Switzerland?” he asked.

“Once, yes,” she answered, though his question startled her. “Why?”

“You’re going tomorrow. You might want to go home and pack.”

“Maybe you ought to tell me a little more about this before I go pack,” she replied, trying to hide her irritation at his abruptness. “I need to know what kind of clothes to take—and it might be nice to know why I’m going.”

He smiled. She shuddered at his facile airs.

“Take lots of short skirts and tight-fitting blouses. We’ve been negotiating on a deal with some shares for six months with this firm. They’re willing to possibly sell to us now—and you speak German, don’t you?”

“I do. I’m a little rusty”—

Gillian studied German in high school and college and spent a year in Köln as an exchange student in high school and three semesters in Bonn during college. She did not have much occasion to keep up with the language, though she did rent German films now and then and watched them to keep up on the language. A friend had invited her to a conversation group but the demands of her job had prevented her from attending.

“Then get out your Pimsleur tapes. We’ll do a briefing for you at 4:00.”

He left. On the spot she decided she would take Calli up on her offer.

Her trip to Switzerland turned into a rousing success. She remembered the German language better than she thought she would and could rapidly, fluently converse with the executives she met—they all spoke English but were delighted to meet an American who could speak their language.

She returned in triumph, having secured a good deal from the firm. Dwayne and the others took her out to a dinner celebration but her chagrin at his sexist attitude—his crack about short skirts and tight blouses, which he repeated several times at the dinner—remained lodged in her mind. He further exacerbated her when he commented that the executives over there were impressed with her German and her good looks.

She called Calli in the morning.

“I want to take you up on your offer,” she said. “When can I come?”

“Late October is best. It’s cold enough that the bugs won’t bother you but still warm enough so you can get out.” She suggested a date.

“I’ll be there.”

She told Dwayne she was taking a week of vacation in two months.

“With these new accounts there’s lots of work to do,” he said.

“There’s always lots of work to do.” She added, realizing she could play this as a trump card, “The thing in Switzerland wore me out. It was very intense. I need some recovery time.”

She checkmated him. He agreed.

When the date rolled around Gillian booked a flight. She spent two delightful days in her old friend’s company—all the more delightful when Calli announced she was pregnant. Gillian rejoiced with her friend and felt herself relax, realizing how long overdue this vacation was.

“Marriage seems to agree with you,” she observed at lunch the second day they were together.

“I like it.”

“It fits you. So tell me about this place you have.”

“It’s about forty miles north of here—it’s maybe ten square miles, not huge, but completely isolated. It’s absolutely quiet there. It’s a great place to get rejuvenated.”

“You go there?”

“Hell yes I go there. Two or three times a year I go all by myself. It’s a ritual.”

“So what do you do to ‘rejuvenate’ yourself?”

“I enjoy silence. I hike.” She seemed to hesitate then added, “Sometimes naked.”

Gillian laughed so abruptly she spewed coffee on her plate.

“Naked?”

“Sure I do. What’s so funny about that?”

Gillian reached over and took her friend’s hand.

“Nothing. I’m sorry I laughed, Calli. I just pictured you walking around buff and running into hunters or a bear or moose.”

Calli leaned back in her chair. She seemed to ponder a moment, then spoke.

“When are you naked besides when you’re in the shower?”

The question, so pointed, took Gillian off guard. She stammered a moment.

“I don’t know. Not very often.”

“Maybe you need to be that way more.”

Gillian smiled. “Maybe. But tell me more about this hideaway you’ve got.”

“It’s about ten square miles or undeveloped land. No one goes on it. Everyone knows my Dad and they like him—he’s done a lot for the community—the people know he wants the place private and they know we go out there so no one intrudes. No hunters or anyone. We do have a few bear but they’re little black bear who won’t hurt you. And moose? Jeez, Gillian! There isn’t a moose within five-hundred miles.”

They laughed.

“I think it will be fun,” Gillian said.

“It will be more than fun. The woods are good for you.”

“I’m game then.”

After breakfast the next morning they climbed in Calli’s Jeep Land Rover and headed north.

Fall colors blazed in the morning light. Fog rolled off the ponds and rivers. They drove mostly in silence, both of them caught in the spell of the countryside. They encountered almost no traffic. Gillian dozed off. She started when she woke. Calli smiled.

“Tired?”

“Yes I am. I work too much.”

“You can sleep all you want on the property. You won’t believe how quiet it is.”

She looked down at her cell phone again. No, she decided: she would take Calli’s advice. No need to talk on the phone. This was her vacation

time. He had no right to intrude. And after he had acted like such a bastard with the whole thing in Switzerland, she did not want to hear his voice.

She looked around the cabin, made up the bed, and went outside to explore. The small, square building (it looked almost like the replica of Thoreau's place she had seen at Walden Pond) sat in a clearing. Trees spread all around it. Fifty feet from the house the creek babbled. Its water did look clear, the stones it ran over clean, the bed sandy and free of detritus. The water gathered on a rock outcropping just beyond the border of trees and fell probably three feet into a large, deep basin. She could see all the way to the bottom. Gillian listened to the splashing, churning current. It pleased her. Near the outcropping, a huge, ancient-looking oak tree spread its roots around a deep depression filled with leaves.

She glanced at her watch. It was eleven in the morning.

The prospect of a long day stretching out in silence dampened the mood caused by the natural beauty all around. Rather than be dismayed she went back inside, resolved not to answer the phone and begin consulting with customers in conference calls. She opened a bottle of water and looked around for her management book. It was not on the table where she knew she had placed it. She realized Calli had adroitly swiped it on the way out.

She laughed. "You little bitch," she said out loud.

Gillian finished her water and sat on the bed. She felt suddenly overwhelmed with weariness, burrowed her cheek into a pillow, pulled a quilt across her body, and fell asleep.

She woke at 4:15. The rays of the sun were long. She felt refreshed. Silence filled the cabin. Gillian sat on the bed, simultaneously charmed and disturbed by the quiet. She got up, went to the outhouse, and relieved herself. It reminded her of the outhouse at her granddad's when she visited there as a child: the smell of ripening feces and urine, the near-dead bottle flies sluggishly navigating in the cool October air, spider webs in the corners, old boards, darkness alleviated only by light shining through cracks in the planking.

She checked her phone again. Dwayne had called her five more times. It must be urgent, she thought, and turned it off.

She stood still, feeling the chill in the air. Not wanting to go inside, she decided to explore. Last night Calli had told her there were trails all through the property.

“And they’re marked,” she said. “They’re marked better than trails in state parks. My parents didn’t want us kids to get lost when we hiked out here, so you’ll find direction markers every half mile or so.”

She saw what looked like a trailhead and started down it.

The trees closed around her. The quiet stilled and disturbed her. The forest was mostly yellow—she thought of Frost’s “in a yellow wood”—the dry leaves whispering as the wind blew, patches of sunshine falling here and there on the path she walked. About half a mile down the trail she saw a large, hand-painted sign that said **CABIN** and pointed the walker in a certain direction. She went on, warming up, her blood stimulated by walking, her body seeming to synchronize itself with the silent rhythm of autumn.

After walking a long while, she glimpsed something and stopped. Gillian stepped quietly into the trees. It was a fox and she wanted to observe it. Quieting her breathing, she watched the blaze of red fur vivid against the fallen yellow leaves and the ash and birch trees that lined the trail. She saw she had come upon two foxes, not one.

They stood facing opposite directions. Puzzled, she noticed they had their hindquarters together. Then she realized they were mating. They moved their bottoms and made a sound like purring or like a soft growl. Then one of them—the male it had to be—turned, grasped the female with his front paws, and began to hump her.

Gillian watched, amazement filling her. Who, she thought, had seen such a thing as this? She stood absolutely still so as to not disturb the animals. The male vigorously but tenderly copulated with the female, who trembled and occasionally raised her head—in pleasure or in pain or for both reasons—she could not tell—until he shuddered and rested. After a moment the female broke away from his embrace, turned and bit him—though the bite was the sort

she had seen friendly dogs give one another as they played. It was a signal. The male responded. For a moment they growled and nipped at each other then pulled apart and disappeared like two quiet red flames into the surrounding trees.

She stepped out on the path and walked to the spot where the intercourse had just occurred.

Their smell lingered. It was disagreeable—a heavy, musky animal smell—but redolent with sexuality. She adjusted and appreciated the smell. The wind blew, shaking the trees, chattering the leaves. She stood still in the space of forest that enclosed her.

Wonderment stilled her. She could not go on. She felt obligated to stand there. The sacredness of what she had seen demanded reverence. To walk away would be like exiting a church service at the height of the sermon or the most sacred moment of the eucharist. The rutting foxes had been the holy text and she had to reflect on the word she had received.

What was to be said about it? she asked herself. Her feelings ran in many directions. She could not define her feeling. But why did she have to define them? Why did she have to even understand what she felt or translate it into expressible terms? After a while she turned around and walked back to the cabin.

The sun had sunk below the tree-line when she arrived. Gillian lit the Coleman lantern and searched the shelves. She felt hungry. Smiling, she opened a can of chicken meat and a box of corn muffins. The prepared food might not be the healthiest, she thought, but that hardly mattered here. She cooked happily on the small stove and dined on chicken, corn muffins and honey; she drank two Saint Pauli Girl IPAs. After clearing up, she called Calli.

“Everything okay?”

“Fine. I took a nap. I took a walk. I made dinner.”

“Did you find everything you need?”

“All at my fingertips. You thought of it all, Calli.” She paused then added, “On my walk I saw two foxes.”

“They’re all over the property.”

“They were rutting.”

“What?”

“Rutting—you know: mating . . . fucking each other. I got to watch them.”

“Wow. That’s really a sign.”

Gillian laughed. “Sign? Of what? That I should go out and get laid?”

“I don’t know. But it’s amazing they didn’t notice you or run off.”

“The way they were going at it I think I could have blown a trumpet and they wouldn’t have noticed me. By the way—did you take my book?”

“I confess.”

“You little twit!” she laughed. “I really wanted to read that.”

“If it had been a book of poetry or something like that I would have left it. But a book on *management*! Jesus, Gillian! Don’t think about managing anything. You can’t manage nature so just go along with it.”

“Okay, Zen mistress. I see your point. And I understand it now. You’ll be proud to know I did not answer my phone. My boss is already calling me. I’m not going to let him ruin this vacation.”

“Good. Great. I’m proud of you. And don’t think of it as just a vacation. Think of it as a pilgrimage.”

“That’s a good way to see it.”

They talked on more.

“You left beer and wine. I wish I had a little brandy or gin,” she said.

“There’s a bar right on the limit of the property. It’s called Hondscio’s. It’s about a six-mile walk. If you really want booze you can go there. But don’t break the atmosphere. Pretty as you are you can bet your sweet booty one of the pick-up truck crowd that hangs out there will start making moves on you.”

“All the more reason to go.”

They talked more. Gillian rang off, got out a bottle of wine, drank almost half of it, and then rolled into bed.

She woke, visited the outhouse, came back to the cabin, and made breakfast. She sat by the window eating eggs and toast and drinking coffee when five deer walked into the clearing.

Gillian sat by the window, not moving, not wanting to frighten them off, wondering if they saw her.

They stood and grazed. She saw they were eating fallen apples from a tree near the house (she had not noticed it up to now). Deer were odd-looking creatures, she mused, watching them munch on the apples: their narrow bodies, huge ears, long muzzles, big, glossy eyes. She watched them for a half hour. One must have caught sight of her through the window because she stood still, eyes fixed, then bolted. The others followed and the space in front of her window was suddenly clear.

Sunlight fell on the half-chewed apples. She went out. The air was crisp. Gillian wandered over and stood by the waterfall. Hawks circled above her. She heard unfamiliar bird songs. Wondering what she would do to fill the remainder of the day, she turned to the cabin.

Doing her breakfast dishes, she remembered dumping a boyfriend in college for boasting how he had killed a deer. Gillian had nothing against hunting. She knew certain animal populations had to be reduced to head off the starvation and disease that came with overpopulation. There were not

enough predators to do the killing so hunting served that purpose. She had eaten deer meat on more than one occasion. But Conrad had told about stalking a deer all day, losing it, picking up its tracks again and then finding it curled up, asleep in a scooped out place at the base of a tree.

“Did you shoot it?” she asked.

“Hell yes. I’d been after it all day.”

Somehow this exceeded the limits of what Gillian deemed ethical.

She remembered the deer from this morning—how they stood there, absorbed in the sweet apples they loved but all the time vigilant, eyes wary, ears slightly raised, nostrils twitching, ready to preserve themselves by the only resource available to them, their speed and stealth. These were all females. They fed, survived, a few times a year they mated with the bucks, got pregnant, had fawns, and cared for them. They lived in nature and followed instinct, living lives were harmonious and simple—and all the more beautiful for the simplicity of this

She wondered how she would do if she ever had to preserve herself—if she ever had lived on her own resources, without society to provide for her.

Breakfast over, she wondered what she would do for the day. She had planned to read before Calli’s confiscation of her book. She did want to spend all her time hiking, though she planned to hike later in the day. Her face got red—she thought this silly—when she thought of walking buff through the woods. It would be daring, and this might be the place to do it, but something about the idea repelled her.

She knew Calli liked to read and must have a book stashed away somewhere. It would give her something to do for the morning. She searched through drawers and shelves. She found an old, tattered paperback titled **Best-Loved Poems**. On the inside cover she saw **CALISTA TAYLOR, GRADE SEVEN, MRS. SIBERT** written in a firm, even hand. She lay down on the bed, opened the book, and began to read.

Gillian liked literature. In school she had enjoyed her required classes and still read novels, though she did not read a lot of poetry. This anthology consisted of familiar, well-worn pieces she had read many times: “The Road Not Taken” and “Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening,” by Frost, “Captain, My Captain” by Whitman, several Dickinson poems she knew, “How Do I Love Thee?” by Elizabeth Barrett Browning. She read through them with pleasure. The one that she paused on, however, was Gerard Manley Hopkins’ “The Grandeur of God.” She liked Hopkins. His words exuded a charm many other poets did not have. And the phrase, “nor can foot feel, being shod,” struck her. She decided that she would go walking naked this afternoon. She laughed that words written by a repressed Victorian Catholic priest could have persuaded her to cross the line and go *au natural*—but she vaguely remembered one of her literature professors remarking that once Hopkins told his students he regretted he had never seen a naked woman. If he were here this afternoon, she mused, he would see one. She would do it. She would cast off prudery along with clothes and go for a walk, bare as the day she was born, this afternoon.

She read all of the poems. Some of them she read twice or read out loud. They soothed her. When her mind drifted to the messages waiting for her on her cell phone, she felt like the poetry was a shield, a magical force protecting her from impingement. She drew a connection between poetry and silence and wildness. These things, taken together, constructed a space for her. She felt more secure within it each passing moment.

Gillian passed the morning doing nothing. Before lunch she got out her yoga mat and practiced for nearly an hour. She felt her body loosen up, her joints relinquish their tenseness, and her energy—the prana, the life-force in her—exert itself. She ate a light meal, rested a while and checked her phone. Five more calls from Dwayne Coleman. She also noticed one from her mother.

She felt a flutter of anxiety and responded to the call. Her mother answered. Her tone of voice did not indicate any sort of emergency.

“What is it, Mom?”

“Your boss called. He said he’d been trying to call you but there was no response.”

“I’m not answering his calls,” she said, her anger rising. “I’m on vacation. I know he’s calling and I’m just not answering.”

“He said there’s an emergency.”

“What kind of emergency?”

“A hostile takeover.”

Her pulse quickened. “He told you that?”

“He sounded pretty frantic.”

She pondered. After a moment she spoke.

“If he calls again, don’t answer. He has no right to bother you like that.”

“Are you going to return his call?”

“I don’t know. But screen your calls and if you see his name on caller ID, don’t pick it up. Tell Daddy to do the same. I’m a little ticked that he did that. I think it’s completely crass of him to use you to get to me.”

“But he sounded so concerned.”

“I don’t want him contacting me. This is my vacation, I just got back from an exhausting trip to Europe, and I haven’t had a vacation in two years. I’ve busted my butt at this job and now he wants to drag me away from it because someone’s threatening to kick the down door of his little empire.”

“But if someone takes over you might lose your job, Gillian.”

“I can take care of myself. You don’t have to worry about my job. Promise me you won’t talk to him again. Will you promise me that, Mother?”

“I guess I can.”

“I won’t be able to relax unless you promise.”

“I promise, honey.”

“Thank you, Mom.” Gillian started telling about where she was staying, the quiet, the natural beauty, how relaxing and soothing it had been. Her father came in and she extracted the same promise from him. After talking more than an hour, she clicked the phone off. She erased all the missed calls from Dwayne and turned the phone off once more.

Standing in the center of the cabin, she felt waves of anger course through her. She rolled up her yoga mat and thought about calm, detachment, the meaning of yoking body and spirit. She felt her anger ebb away. She could handle this, she thought. Her practice and the vast silence of the wilderness could help. She decided to take a bath.

It took most of the afternoon to gather water from the stream. Gillian puffed and grunted carrying buckets of water back and forth from the stream. She stoked the stove and heated water, poured it into the tub, and went back for more. Finally she cooled it down enough so she could get in. She stripped and carefully lowered herself. The hot water came about to her waist. She gasped in ecstasy, laughing at the silliness of feeling so much pleasure just from a hot bath. She soaped herself up and washed, the pleasure not diminishing and concluded it was not ridiculous to enjoy simple things. The sound of her splashing, the sobby noise of the soaped washcloth, sounded loud in the ever-present silence of the woods that enclosed her.

Gillian got out, dried off, put on shorts, a t-shirt, and sandals, dumped the water in the tub, and began to fix supper. The sharp October air had given her an appetite and the work of hauling water, feeding wood into the stove, and lifting buckets and tubs.

As she ate she tried to push thoughts of work out of her mind. A few months ago Dwayne had warned them that deals had transpired among the shareholders but dismissed the idea of a takeover. He did not own over fifty per cent of the stock but he owned almost that much—a great deal more than the paltry six per cent she owned. It would take a unanimous rebellion by his associates to turn him out of the company. But then, she mused, his rude, aggressive style of management might easily create such a mood.

She noticed the shadows were starting to lengthen. She remembered her resolve earlier in the day. Thinking of the complications with work, the unwelcome telephone calls, and the intrusion into the privacy of her parents and into her own privacy emboldened her and sharpened her resolve. She pulled off her shorts and underwear, shed the t-shirt, and stepped out the front door into the clearing around the house.

The cool air stung her buttocks and fingers. Her nipples immediately grew stiff. She hesitated, as if she expected to see someone. But the calm remained unbroken. The trees swayed slightly in the wind. The brook and waterfall sounded in the background. Gillian let herself relax. She surveyed the clearing. Nakedness made one feel vulnerable. Clothes, she thought, were human substitutes for fur and scales. We had hair on the vulnerable parts of our bodies and over our openings, the wet places where disease or parasites might enter. To be without the extra protection of clothing made the body uneasy.

She remembered what Calli had asked her about two days ago: *How often are you naked besides when you go in the shower?* She walked a few steps and wondered where she would go. After standing still a long moment, she headed down the path she had walked yesterday.

As she went on she wondered how it would be walking barefoot. Her feet were tender. But the leaves, the thatch of pine needles, and the soil were soft. She avoided tree roots and stones as she navigated forward. The wood, quiet and still, soothed her. The air felt good on her skin and the feeling of being unclothed, at first discomforting, soon became exhilarating. She quickened her pace and did not look down. Her feet seemed naturally to avoid obstacles that would bruise them.

Gillian walked, her excitement growing with each step. Soon she smiled and laughed. She wanted to run, felt silly to think it but then wondered why she should not. She broke into a jog. She felt her body—normally restrained by clothing—jounce and shake as she moved forward. She passed stands of paper birch, single pin-oaks, ghostly ash trees, ubiquitous maples. Birds flew across the trail, chipmunks skittered. She ran for a long distance and finally slowed to a walk. She laughed and threw her hands up in praise. She did not know to what her praise was directed but that did not dampen her

joy. She walked along, energy coursing through her, air cool against her skin. She noted that the hottest part of her was between her legs—the place of openings where so much of the body’s vital functions were gathered. Her heart pounded with frank health.

She wondered how far she had gone. The sky had turned dark blue. She could see Venus and a pale-washed shell or moon above the deepening shadows of the tree-line. She did not want to be caught in the wood in the dark but did not want to turn around and go back.

Gillian walked on another mile or so. Finally she turned and turned and started back. Every pore, every inch of her skin rang with life. She felt vital. She came to the place where she had seen the foxes. Stopping, she paused and listened.

Leaves rustled. Trees creaked. She sensed the life in the wood around her. It existed in a myriad of forms, most of them sleeping or dormant with the colder weather. Darkness crept on quickly and she hurried along.

Breaking into the clearing around the cabin she saw the orange glow of the setting sun through the apple grove. Energy pulsed within her. The air grew sharper and more biting. She could see her breath. But she did not want to go inside.

She walked through the gathering darkness to the edge of the brook. She noticed the huge oak tree, its roots and the leaf-filled declivity at its base.

Perhaps because she had been reading poetry earlier in the day, a passage from Homer’s *Odyssey* bubbled up from deep memory and broke into her mind.

Gillian had studied *The Odyssey* in detail in high school honors English and then in a four-hundred-level seminar as an undergraduate. The leaves reminded her of the part where Odysseus, half-drowned, makes his way to shore. He rejoices to have survived the storm Poseidon sent against him but barely has the strength to move—and he realizes that night is coming and if he does not find shelter he will freeze to death in the damp and cold from the foggy river. Despairing, seeing no cave, knowing he does not have the

strength to look for a warm place, he suddenly notices a hole in the ground between two trees (olive and wild olive trees, she remembered). He rejoices that he has found a place “warm enough to keep two men alive on a cold night,” crawls in, covers himself with leaves, and sleeps safely until morning.

She did not want to go back inside the cabin.

No, she told herself, *that would be ridiculous and foolish. What sorts of creatures are down in those leaves? Mites and chiggers? Snakes and leeches?* And, however much she liked *The Odyssey*, it was a work of fiction. Could a dirty hole in the ground and fallen leaves really keep a human being alive on a cold night? She stood looking down. She would freeze. It was idiotic.

The sun had set by now. The moon loomed over the trees, illuminating the scene in front of her—the brook, the rugged oak, the scooped-out place in the earth that could be her bed. She felt almost compelled. Her rational, safe, completely logical self protested; but the loud vociferations of her mind began to calm. Why not? If she got cold she could go inside. She took risks at her job, but of late she had tried to create safety. She had become timid and overly cautious. This was something that needed to end. After a final burst of objection from her familiar, security-craving side, she walked a few paces and stepped down into the pit.

It was maybe three feet deep. The bottom felt soft—it was leaf-mould. Its coolness caressed her bare feet. She stood a moment expecting to be bitten or stung. But nothing assaulted her. She felt the silt close over her toes, the cold on her shoulders blades and buttocks, and saw the moonlight.

Gillian carefully lowered herself, still afraid something might lurk in the leaf pile. Nothing molested her.

“What the hell?” she said out loud and lay down, rotating from side to side, working her body down into the loam. When she was half-sunk in the soft mould, she reached up and wildly flailed one hand, piling the leaves over the part of her that protruded from the soil. Then she lay still. The bottom, lined with soft compost, fine and powdery, held her firmly. The leaves rested over her like a blanket.

She waited, tensed. Then she relaxed. Her body settled comfortably. She remembered settling into her mother's lap as a child. It was silly, she thought, to be afraid of bugs or any other creature. The frost would have killed any mites, ticks, chiggers; snakes and lizards had burrowed into the soil or settled in trees or under rocks to hibernate. The mosquitoes and flies had lived out their short life spans and were dead.

She left her face open to the sky and air. She could see the moon, shining silver in the clear sky. A frost ring circled it. It would be cold tonight. If she got cold, she decided, she would just go inside. She would not freeze. And already she had begun to warm. She had made layers. Earth itself was warming her flesh.

She waited. She listened to her heartbeat. The brook made its constant noise. The scarred face of the moon presided in a sky shot with magnificent stars.

Gillian lay still, her body generating heat. Amazement filled her. She had thought this would be a silly lark—that she would dig herself into this temporary burrow, stay a minute or two, then get out, having a good laugh at her foolishness, and return to the shelter of the cabin satisfied that she had done something outrageous.

But she felt warm. She felt that she belonged where she was. She looked up at the moon. Sleep began to claim her. Something told her sleeping here was not dangerous. She felt enfolded. She felt protected in the lap of nature. She breathed in the air that smelled of dried leaves and soil and drifted off to sleep.

Noise and light woke her. It took her a moment to remember where she was. But remembered she noted she was warm and snug; she drifted back to sleep. She woke again. The light shone more brightly. She smiled complacently. She had not been as cozy since childhood. She did not want to leave the nest she had constructed. But her bladder throbbed. She stood up, shedding robe of earth and the blanket of leaves, climbed out of the pit, squatted and urinated, and then stretched.

Out of the corner of her eye she caught sight of the doe.

When it saw her it tensed as if to run. She stood still. Its nostrils twitched. Gillian realized she was not giving off the smell that humans gave to frighten deer: the smell of city and soap, deodorant and fabric. Naked, covered with dirt, she did not emit a scent that frightened the animal. They stared at each other. She noticed an apple on the ground. Slowly, cautiously, she bent to pick up. The deer jerked as if to run but did not bolt. Gillian rose slowly, slowly extended her arm, and held the apple out to the deer. For a long moment she stood there, pondering, deciding, her large eyes full of doubt, her full concentration on this odd animal that presented itself to her sight. Then she took a step forward, halted; took another step, and bent her head, her mouth fastening on the proffered apple.

Gillian watched as the deer crunched and slurped. She could feel its breath as it systematically ate the apple from her hand—all of it, included the core and stem. Its rough tongue licked the juice on her palm, coating her fingers with saliva. After eating, the doe stood there. Gillian, put out her hand, and touched its neck. It trembled and winced but did not bolt. She stroked it. It stared at her with curiosity then turned and walked unhurriedly into the tree line.

She stood there, nipples, fingers, nose, and kneecaps stinging in the cold. She noticed the ground was covered with frost. The sky above shone with clear, light blue, sun breaking through the trees. After the wonder of encountering a creature of the wild had worn off, she looked down at herself. She was dirty. Dirt and leaf-meal coated her body. Leaves and dirt lodged her in hair. She walked over to the creek.

She remembered reading how the select warriors of the Native American tribes would bathe in icy-cold streams every morning to sharpen their senses. The core of her body did not feel cold, though the sharp frost stung her extremities. She wondered if she should. Why not? Gathering courage, she walked to the edge of the basin under the waterfall and jumped in.

The cold water drove the breath from her lungs. A jolt of pain tore through her. But only momentarily. Soon her breath returned. And though she felt the cold she felt the inner warmth that went from her perineum to the top of her head: the inner core of fire that the Zen masters spoke of, the path

of the *chakras*, bottom to top, anus to mouth, the inner rod of energy and warmth that kept us living.

She stayed a minute or so in the water and climbed out. Now she was cold. Shivering, she returned to the cabin, running the last few yards. Once inside she dried off with a towel, stirred the coals in the stove, threw in two logs, and drank some water. She ate a muffin. She was ravenously hungry and also knew digestion stimulates body heat. The stove heated up quickly. She sat near it. Dripping water on the floor, she drank a bottle of liquid yoghurt and warmed herself.

The iron stove radiated heat. When she was sure she had regained the right body temperate, Gillian made coffee and fried eggs. Her amazement at what she had done—and its success—overwhelmed her with wonder. Had she really spent the night in a hole in the ground, out in the elements, naked? Had she slept like a baby in its mother's arms and awoke refreshed? Had she really fed and petted a deer then bathed in an icy stream? As she ate and felt the warmth of the fire, she marveled. Something had happened. Calli had been right. The wilderness had put its hands on her. She had begun to revert—no, to grow.

She finished her eggs and muffins and stepped to the window, a metal coffee cup in her hand. The sky had filled with heavy grey clouds. It would rain. The breeze had picked up too. She might see some violent weather. Oddly, the prospect of a thunderstorm that would drench the earth and shake trees did not dismay her.

She sat down at the counter for another cup of coffee. She decided to check her calls. Dwayne had called eight more times. She saw Calli had called and saw two other entries from Paul Doanen, a name she vaguely recognized then remembered as a major stockholder in the company for which she worked.

Realization struck her.

The hostile take-over—Dwayne held forty-five per cent of the shares. If Doanen had put together a coalition and managed to get the rest of, he probably had forty-nine per cent.

Her six shares would decide who got control of the company.

She sat there, staring out the window but seeing nothing. After a moment rain began with a violent thrum on the shingled roof of the cabin.

As the rain poured down she called Calli.

“Hi,” Calli said. “You okay out there?”

“It’s pouring but I’m very snug and dry in here.”

“How’s it going?”

“It’s fantastic—magical. Calli, thanks so much for suggesting I come here.”

“You’re welcome. Sounds like you’re enjoying it.”

“‘Enjoy’ is not the right word. I’m doing what you said—the things I laughed at you for saying. I’m got some stories for you.”

“Tell me.”

She opened her mouth to speak but stopped.

“Let’s wait till we see each other on Saturday. These are the kinds of stories that should not be told over the phone or by e-mail. I want to tell them to you with you there beside me.”

“Okay.”

The rain increased in its ferocity.

“I’m getting a real cloudburst here,” Gillian said. Then she asked, “Calli, why did you call me? You said you wouldn’t call till Friday.”

“I know, but—well, you’re a very popular woman these days.”

“Did Dwayne Coleman call you?”

“He did. He wanted to know where you were. When I wouldn’t tell him, he cussed me out.”

“That goddamned prick!”

“And then I got a call from a guy named Paul Doanen. He was very polite but said he urgently needed to talk to you on a business matter. Gillian, what’s going on?”

She explained what had happened at her firm.

“Suddenly my importance has gone way up,” she concluded.

“I guess so. What are you going to do?”

“I’m going to take the rest of my vacation. If either of those men call you again, don’t answer the phone. What did Dwayne say to you?”

“He called me a smart-mouthed little cunt. He seemed almost crazy.”

“That son-of-a-bitch. I’m sorry you got dragged into this, but Dwayne will be sorry he ever said those things to you.”

They talked on and she clicked off. The rain had diminished to a steady drum. The clouds were high and it looked like it could rain all day. She opened a new bottle of wine, pulled a chair in front of the window and watched the storm. Rain lashed the ground. Thunder rumbled. Gillian had always loved the security of buildings during a storm—the safety and repose as violence and danger surged outside. The deer she had fed would be in a safe place as well—under the shelter of trees, under a rock ledge, patiently waiting the end of the storm so she could range and feed.

After a while the rain diminished. She tried to keep her mind off the situation at work, though anger boiled up inside her when she thought of Dwayne swearing at Calli. She thought of retaliating by giving her shares to Doanan, but she also realized his words to Calli would give her more of an advantage in dealing with Dwayne. And she planned to work things to her

maximum advantage when she came back and plunged into the middle of this mess.

Gillian reread the poems she liked best and drank several glasses of wine. Slightly drunk she watched the clouds part and the sun emerge. She wanted liquor and . . . pursing her lips she thought of what else she might desire.

At five she toted water in for a bath then changed into shorts and a long-sleeved flannel shirt. She put on hiking boots and got out a map Calli had drawn for her. She traced the path to Highway 35 and Hondscio's Bar.

It was dark by the time she arrived (she had a flashlight in her backpack). She walked through the door and found an open stool. It was crowded for Thursday night. Cigarette smoke hung in clouds over the tables and pinball machines. Most of the men in the place wore cowboy hats. There were girls in miniskirts or short-shorts and halter tops. Music blared, people danced, and loud, raucous talk filled the place.

True to Calli's prophecy, Gillian did not sit by herself for very long.

A young man in a dark blue denim shirt, jeans, and a black cowboy hat sat down beside her.

"Hi," he said simply.

She assessed him and decided he was worth speaking to.

"Hello."

"I'm Bert," he said, putting out his hand.

"Gillian," she replied and shook his fingers.

"Nice name—like Gillian Anderson. I don't think I've ever seen you here before."

“This is my first time. I’m visiting here and wanted to get a drink—of liquor.”

She had almost finished her Bacardi’s and ice.

“Can I buy you another?”

She smiled. “I’d like that.”

He grinned, happy to have established himself in her territory. She finished the last of her drink. The bartender brought her another.

“You always drink your liquor straight?”

“Only when I want to get drunk.”

He raised his glass. It looked like whisky and coke.

“Well, a toast,” he said.

“You got one?”

He pondered, looking up at the ceiling. He lowered his eyes.

“May you always come more than you go.”

He sniggered at his own joke. Gillian, who had already drunk a large quantity of wine and beer and was halfway to being drunk, laughed loudly and clinked glasses with him. She drank, thinking he looked satisfied that he was getting somewhere with her. The cool rum tasted good.

“So you’re visiting? You got relatives around here?”

“Friends.”

“Where are you staying? I hope you don’t mind me asking.”

“Not at all. I’m staying at the Taylor cabin.”

When she said this he shrank back from her and looked as if he had made an obscene *faux pas*. She gave him an amused look.

“Something wrong?”

He recovered, forcing the smile back on to his face, again assuming his *nonchalant* manner.

“No. I just didn’t know you knew the family.”

“There was no way you could have known that.”

“How do you know Calli?” he asked nervously.

“We went to college together. We were roommates a couple of years. She kept telling me I needed to stay up here at her cabin, so I decided I’d stay here a few days.”

He looked at her, his eyes uneasy. His sudden deflation amused her.

“You want to dance?” she asked.

They went out on the floor. The jukebox played “Just About Right” by Blackhawk. Gillian did not listen to country a lot but knew this particular song and liked it. She sang along as she danced. The liquor made her lose her inhibitions and dance energetically. After three numbers they returned to their place at the bar. All the ice in her drink had melted.

“Tell me about yourself,” she said. “Where do you work?”

“Taylor Industries. Callie’s old man pretty much provides everyone around here with work. We appreciate that for sure. He hasn’t closed the place down and moved it to Mexico. Pays a good wage too. How about you?”

“I’m a stock broker,” she answered.

He whistled faintly through his teeth. “Well now. You from New York?”

“No. From Michigan.”

But now Gillian could tell he had given up on her. She did not want to lose him.

“What time is it?” she asked.

“Ten,” he said, glancing at his watch.

“I need to get back to the cabin. I walked here. I’ve got a flashlight but it would be a lot easier if you gave me a ride.”

He looked dubious.

“Well, I could, but no one is supposed to go on the property.”

“Calli dropped me off. I don’t have a car. If I say it’s okay, it’s okay. No one has to know. I’ll give you a tour of the place.”

This last remark was bait and he took it.

“Well, if you say it’s okay, let’s go.”

She bought a pint of whisky and left with him. They wound through country roads and finally came to the gate that sealed off the Taylor property from the community around it. She opened the door and climbed out.

“You want me to just drop you off?”

“No. I want you to drive me close to the cabin. It’s still about two miles.”

Gillian was so drunk she stumbled, but she got the gate open, waited for the huge Dodge truck to pass through, and closed it behind him. She climbed back in.

“Take it slow,” she said. “The road’s got some pretty bad ruts.”

They drove at about fifteen miles an hour. Finally she saw the house up ahead. It was surrounded by solar lamps that defined the walk up to it. They were still maybe a quarter mile away from it.

“Stop the truck here,” she said. “I don’t want to park it near the house. It might leave tracks.”

He obeyed, turning off the engine.

“Come on,” she said, digging the flashlight out of her backpack and switching it on.

They walked carefully on the rocky drive. Gillian shone the flash light. Both she and Bert concentrated on their steps and said little. Finally they came to the solar lights that lined the gravel walk up to the front door of the cabin like Christmas luminaries.

“You want to come in?”

“If it’s all right.”

They found their way inside. She lit the Coleman lantern and got out food for them. They were both hungry. After they ate they talked, kissed, and let things follow their course.

In the morning she went outside. She did not see the deer. Frost lay thick on the ground. The sun gave out an orange glow behind the trees. She dipped herself in the chilling water of the pool and then let the waterfall run over her hair. Shivering but exhilarated, she went back inside, dried off with a fluffy bath towel, stoked the stove, and threw in some wood. Then she rejoined Bert, pulling the blanket over them both, pressing her body against his for the sake of warmth.

As Gillian dropped off to sleep she wondered if he knew this had been her doing and her orchestration. She sensed perhaps he did but her mind—or her instinct—told her he did not meet her standards. He was could not be not her alpha male. He was not the lion for this lioness. She drifted to sleep and woke up when she heard his watch alarm. He jolted awake and looked around as if he did not remember where he was. Then he relaxed.

“Behind you,” she said.

He rolled over. Sunlight filtered through the windows and lay in warm squares on the wood floor. When she and Bert finished making love for a second time Gillian scooted over to one of the light squares and enjoyed the penetrating warmth. She lay there in the heat and brightness. Bert went outside and returned. He threw on his clothes.

“I’ve got to go to work,” he said, his tone almost apologetic.

“On Saturday?”

“I work as a security guard at the plant. My shift is ten to ten—twelve hours but it’s overtime today. I can’t be late.”

She got up, dug through her duffle bag and threw on an oversized t-shirt.

“You got time for breakfast?” she asked.

It was after nine.

“I guess so if it’s quick.”

She fixed eggs. He sat and watched her cook. After a while he spoke.

“Am I going to see you again?”

“I might show up at Hondscio’s tomorrow night,” she answered.

He spoke with caution because he knew the Taylor family.

“Can I call you?”

“I don’t live around here. I live a long way off. I don’t like distance relationships. They’re expensive and frustrating.”

“Then maybe tomorrow night.”

She was leaving that afternoon.

“Maybe,” she said.

They ate and then kissed for a while by the window. Gillian enjoyed kissing him and enjoyed the warmth of the sun through the latticed panes. The morning light and beauty had made her give him one more chance, but the same primal feelings she had sensed earlier again told her he was not the kind of man she wanted. He had filled a purpose, she reflected, and had been okay for that but would not do for anything more.

“I’ve got to go. I hope nobody sees me leave here.”

“I’ll go with you and watch the gate. We’ll make sure nobody knows you had your truck on the property.”

She put on sandals. They drove his truck to the gate. She opened it, looked both ways down the road to make sure no cars were in sight, and waved him through. He pulled out, blew her a kiss, and drove away. Gillian shut and latched the gate and began the two-mile walk back to the cabin.

Once there she drew water and heated it for a bath. By the time she settled into the galvanized tub it was a little past noon. Calli was coming to pick her up at three.

As she scrubbed and felt the water sooth her—noting how in this environment such a simple thing as bathing was luxurious—Gillian formulated her re-entry into the maelstrom that her working situation had turn into. She had cards to play. She had advantages. The only question was how she might maximize her advantages.

After bathing she put on sandals and walked outside to enjoy standing buff in the sun one last time. She vaguely wondered if she would see her deer. It had come to her like a messenger from the cool woods. The two of them had shared a space—not just physical but . . . what was the word for it? Was there a word for it? They had shared their existences. But existence was too much of a rarified, philosophical term. They had shared, perhaps, physical affinity: mammals, female, flesh and blood with hair and fur, needing food and

safety, both survivors sensing the rhythms of nature. The deer lived in those rhythms. Gillian had only just heard them. Compared to the creatures all around her she barely discerned them. But before this time she had not discerned them at all. Now she heard their song. She sensed their energy. Somehow she knew their song would become increasingly clearer.

The deer, she thought, would be lurking in the safety of the woods this time of day. She drew a deep breath, went back inside, and got dressed.

Gillian straightened the cabin and packed her things. Though hungry, she ate only an apple. She and Calli could stop somewhere on the way back. Checking the time—it was two o'clock—she went outside and made for the trailhead. *One more walk in the woods, she thought, before I return to the old routine.*

But the old routine, she knew, would never be the same.

Calli drove up exactly at three (she had always been prompt, Gillian remembered). They embraced but, as they loaded the Jeep, said very little. Gillian noted how understanding existed between them now—even more than it had existed before. They stopped at a restaurant outside of town. Gillian began to tell her everything she had experienced. She stayed with her friend two more days. The last day there she made phone calls to Dwayne Coleman and to Paul Doanen and arranged meetings with both of them. She would play one against the other to see who would give her the best deal.

It was raining as Gillian Adams walked out the parking garage—but a warm, gentle rain, the kind she had always liked as a child. It beat rhythmically on her umbrella as she crossed the street to the building the housed her company's offices. A distant peal of thunder rolled across the grey, cloudy sky. She entered the front door and took the elevator to the fifth floor. Stepping into the atrium—a spacious area, open, surrounded with office doors, and housing only a receptionist's kiosk in the center—she paused and looked around the open expanse of brown carpet. Outside the windows, she could see the clouds and the streaks of raindrops that clung to the glass and ran down it in tiny rivulets.

This was where she would establish her territory, she thought. This was her woods, her plain, her *veldt*.

Kendra, the receptionist, asked her how she had enjoyed her stay up in Minnesota.

Ricky Massengale

Ricky holds an MFA in English from Arkansas Tech University, teaches high school English in Morrilton, AR, and serves as youth pastor at the First Baptist Church in that town. His work has appeared in *Nebo*, *RE:AL*, and has been accepted for publication in *Everday Poets* and *Daily Flash*. In 2006, a small press published a chapbook of his experimental poetry, and he also spoke on the "Art of Poetry" at a regional Arkansas Writers' Conference. He and his wife, Chastity, are enjoying their son, Jaxon, and his first encounter with vegetables.

Autumn Leaves

I

As the wind rattles you and the chorus
You rain like a million golden sheets
Seesawing.

II

Boys in fields of endless echoes
Chasing lightning bugs--
White puffs of breath from their purple lips,
And they wonder if they could be dragons.
From dragon-boys, girls go screeching and laughing
Through the tall green tangle of Earth's fields.

III

You're endless ages bleeding over one another:
Creation and Ruin,
Undying echoes.

IV

There's an elderly couple
Moving to a dock where,
Feeling the cold breath of winter's jagged seed,
They huddle like creeping stones.
Aged. In Love.
Their time has moved past.
And so they gaze only,
Caught in Autumn's night.

V

You're eternity spiraling to humanity,
And I wait for your snowing lips with crucified arms.

VI

And you seesaw down,
A shattered canopy,
A deflated apple of the sun,
A golden shadow.

Kristen McHenry

Kristen McHenry is a resident of Seattle, Washington and is a poet by night, and health outreach worker by day. Among other publications, her work has been seen in *Wanderings*, *Breadcrumb Scabs*, *Boston Literary Magazine*, *Tiferet*, *Sybil's Garage*, *Big Pulp*, and several anthologies. She was a top five finalist in the 2009 national poetry competition "Project Verse". Her chapbook The Goatfish Alphabet was runner-up in *qarrtsiluni's* 2009 chapbook contest, and was recently published by Naissance Press. Kristen reads for Literary Bohemian, and is the creator and facilitator of the Poet's Cafe, a weekly poetry workshop for homeless teens at the New Horizons drop-in center in downtown Seattle. Kristen lives in the Ballard neighborhood with two cats, two firebellied toads, and one husband. She loves to sing, but only in the car with all of the windows rolled up.

Frog and Snake Together

In Southwest China, a snake with a limb protruding from its stomach was found in the middle of the night on the bedroom wall of a Ms. Qiongxiu. Subsequent autopsies showed that that snake had suffered a stomach rupture after swallowing a frog.

When she looked up
from her tea she saw Snake,
clinging to her bedroom wall
with the webbed limb of his last, amphibious
supper punched stiff as a flagpole
through his belly. It waved like a cornstalk, straining
against the lining of his stomach.

She thought,
that's what you get
when you swallow something whole.

As she nudged their bewildered
tangle towards the open window, she considered
Frog, rubbery and nourishing
in the debased intestines of Snake.
Once, she'd have taken this gawky
marriage as a sign, but at eighty-one she'd lost
all patience for prophecy.
Their ineptitude was just another fact,
an accident writhing on pansy wallpaper,
no more an omen
than her greasy teacup.
Besides, she'd seen
so many such mistakes.

Just as the whole
mess was near to tumbling
down the four-story abyss, Frog's oilskin
fist lurched open in offering.
She grasped its doll-palm,

and held it
for quite some time,
breathing in
the damp benevolence of night.

Tessa Micaela

Tessa Micaela is a poet, a bookbinder, a doula and Philly native. She is the co-founder of Hand Bound Press and the *Never On Time Journal* project. Her chapbook, CUSP, was released in January 2010.

What We Used to Call Silence

All around the house
are the kinds of noises
we are not used to;

birds at no real distance
spread wings and extend
to the winds. Limbs

of hemlocks are pronounced
unhurriedly, are shadows
in an exhaling sky.

A dance of white ashes,
clumsy dresses of yellow birch
join, finally, in this propelled gesture

toward nothing in particular.
In the afternoons,
we listen for fallen trunks groaning,

a painless respite from stillness,
more than a whisper,
but just as far off.

We wait for other things, too,
leave them untitled, careful
not to interrupt

the dialogue of trees. Music
we'd left on downstairs
stops. The house is quiet now,

filled with what we used to say
was silence, but now know
is more like insistent listening.

We've come from the city,
where our throats grew hoarse
and raw. Where before

as we stood on a grimy street corner,
she told me how she'd fallen,
how when her skin scraped

against the asphalt
the unpunctuated crowd
wouldn't stop,

her voice drowned
by rubber on concrete,
steel on concrete, everything

against concrete.
Something unspecific and green
catches in my chest.

The tea kettle begins
to whistle. Here, locusts call
from sugar maples,

last night's rain drips
from lilacs in the yard,
extractions from a clamor of hushes,

a soothing
we had forgotten
to offer ourselves.

Tiny fingertips in bloom
brush against
other budding hands,

We have brought with us
nothing as urgent
as desire. Still,

in all these thunderous
whispers, we become small,
triumphant shapes, resolute,

too close to wind
to want anything
less than flight.

Jared Pearce

With the exception of his hands, which have gone soft due to wearing gloves all winter, Jared Pearce has been priming himself to cut turf for his wife's flower beds: they're planning how the beds will curve around the apple trees and go geometric in the side yard. As soon as the ground thaws they'll put their plans in action, and he can forget teaching writing and literature at William Penn University by getting back to the soil.

Seeds

We've been watching a lot of *Dr. Who*,
and there she was, packing marigold seeds
into clean jars, when two refused

To fall and suspended on the invisible
bubble-ceiling that capped the jar;
and though we knew it was spider's

Web which eventually tore as the pregnant
future freighted it, for just a second
we were in a world where gravity stopped,

Where not everything falls, and those two,
male and female, almost saved the universe
from an open mouthed trap, ready to seal shut.

Still that fiction held me, working its root
into my mind's glass walls, my heart's created planet.

Songbird

The sky lowered in
last night, holding
slowly so our lights
have burned all day,

So the rain never
dried, so the dark
came early, though
summer's almost peaked.

And three doors down
a cardinal lay dead;
his mate's sharp pulse

cut through the trees,

Angled against the clouds,
and fluttered off—her
own breast a dreamy
mid-tone, difficult to hit.

You asked why it was.
Trees in deep greens wringing
themselves out the sky
was all I could find.

Cassie Premo Steele

Cassie is a Pushcart Prize nominated ecopoet, writer, and creativity coach who lives along a creek in South Carolina. She is the author of six books, including a forthcoming novel, about the themes of creativity, healing and living in balance with the natural world. She works with creativity clients in person and long distance. Her website is www.cassiepremosteele.com.

The Rock Speaks

I am a rock, the soil around me drowns my skin, I have known
the rise and fall of civilizations like ocean tides. They come. They go.
My hair is lichen, my hunger is a solid mass pulling gravity into me,
the longing for an end to worry. I am a table where poverty is served for lunch.
Underneath me is a child. She hides. She cries. I tell her to stand up.
Victory is not the same as winning, I say. Not the same
as wealth. Not the same as fame. Every storm has its beginning.
Abundance moves in clouds. Learn to praise the soil. Learn to praise the rain.

What Happens Outside When The Poets Read

Daffodils outside the window open dry mouths to the rain.
We know each other in this room. Out there we are making it all up.

Two birds land in a tree, the branches almost naked
in the waning day. The devil on my left shoulder is only

a shadow from my head. The two birds keep returning
as the poets keep reading. Their words are wings that take us back

to things that hold us through seasons, dry and wet,
naked and budding, bursting and letting go. Each breath is a death

that we allow. Our words are telling how many ways we have been
dying with devils and shadows on the way to this day. We are a moment

on a calendar but the birds out there are in their own timeless weather,
beyond symbol or sin or the setting of suns or the saving of oceans.

There are no words for what might save this earth. Still we keep breathing.
Still we keep seeing a reason to keep speaking word after word,

death after death. Happiness sleeps in the in-between of sunset and stop.
We do not know if we will make it through, and if we do, what we will be.

Our skin is fragile and yellow. We touch each other with the gentle pop
of yes, sister, world, sleep, awake, love, again, day, bird, tree, when, we.

Douglas Tedards

Douglas M. Tedards is a retired Assistant Dean and former Associate Professor of English at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California. He taught American poetry, California literature, writing in the disciplines, and has published poems in the *Georgia Review*, *San Fernando Poetry Journal*, and *Mind in Motion*. Articles have appeared in *California English* and the *Appalachian Journal* and a book chapter in Fulwiler and Young's When Writing Teachers Teach Literature (Boynton/Cook).

A Natural Childhood

It may have started with Mother
teaching us not to step on spiders,
to catch moths in our hands
and release them outside.
Teaching us not to be afraid of bees,
while standing still next to foxgloves,
honeysuckle and yellow jasmine,
listening to their quiet hum.

We lived out in the country
on a hill overlooking a two-acre pond
where we caught black tadpoles
and put them in Mother's red coat pocket
when she wasn't looking,
where my sister and I learned
to dog-paddle and watch for water snakes,
to look skyward for ducks and morning doves,
or curled up later in Mother's lap
learning to tell mallards from pintails
in Roger Tory Peterson's Field Guide to the Birds.

And we always had dogs around—
hunting dogs, retrievers, and Heinz 57's:
Scooter, Muffin, Truda the German Shorthair,
Ivan and Val, the first Weimaraners
ever seen in our neighborhood...
a breed so intelligent and high strung
that raising them called for an obedience training
the likes of which made us feel
darned lucky just to be kids:
kids who'd long forgotten the trauma
of potty training or how to say
we were hungry, cold, tired...or just bored silly.

We were brother and sister growing up,
learning the language of nature, of childhood,

and never having to question
that we were somehow all connected...
with the spiders, bees, birds, and dogs.

Theresa Wyatt

Theresa Wyatt is a retired teacher who worked with students at risk for many years in the Western New York area including the Seneca Nation of Indians. Her work has appeared in *CircleShow*, *Raving Dove*, the *Hektoen International Medical Journal* and *Blood & Thunder*, among others. Most recently, Theresa's poem honoring 9/11 widow and activist, Beverly Eckert, was included in the memorial anthology, *The Empty Chair, Love and Loss in the Wake of Flight 3407*.

Choices

Suppose the medicine cards are wrong
and the spirit of the great buffalo
never returns?

What then, will there be only silence
at heaven's gate when you kneel down
and cup your ear to the dry pale earth

where millions of them once roamed,
trampled, and stirred up dust so fiercely
that your eyes burn and your lungs strain
just imagining the scene?

Suppose again the medicine cards are right
and the spirit of the rustling buffalo
does return?

Will we sense the longing in their hearts
for a safer place, a more welcome sky,
away from the hunt,
free from the kill?

Or will latent sensibilities so often
dulled by history's many tellings,
never rise?

Leaving knowing each other
and sense of ourselves
down to honor
and remorse

stripped naked again,
vanishing in the void.

(Original poem inspired by the oil painting, "*The Buffalo Hunt*," by William Robinson Leigh, 1947, Collection of the Rockwell Museum of Western Art, Corning, New York)

Flock

Where are all these blackbirds going,
their wings flapping everywhere
beside, within and under blue?

like love letters
forming words excitedly
with repetitious strokes

soaring up and down,
pitch of wind shapes
I love you

both worlds
land and sky
covet these birds

do they treasure
how wanted
they are?

About EarthSpeak

EarthSpeak is a newly-founded online literary journal that hopes to open up a small but honest space where writers of various persuasions can pursue a dialogue concerning one of the most crucial issues of our times, namely the fitful relationship between humanity and the natural world.

It also hopes to support an array of different conservation/restoration organizations through its Donation Program, which aims to funnel some of the magazines modest proceeds into organizations which exhibit a strong sense of environmental stewardship and integrity.

EarthSpeak is interested in essays, stories and poems that explore a wide gamut of different issues and experiences as they pertain to nature and our own place within it. Submission deadlines follow a seasonal rhythm, further information for which can be found on the website's submissions page.

All submissions and inquiries may be sent to:
submissions@earthspeakmagazine.com.

www.earthspeakmagazine.com