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THE NATURE OF THE WEST

Camas

WINTER 2012



WORK ISSUE | FEATURING "COME OR BLEED" BY RICHARD MANNING

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Camas

THE NATURE OF THE WEST

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OUR TITLE *Camas* takes its name from the plant *Camassia quamash*, which American Indian tribes from the Rocky Mountains to the Cascades honor as a staple of sustenance. Care of the camas prairies passes from generation to generation.

OUR HISTORY Founded by Environmental Studies graduate students at The University of Montana in 1992, *Camas* encourages a dialogue on environmental and cultural issues in the West; celebrates the people who work, study, write, and live here; and provides an opportunity for students, emerging writers, and established authors to publish their work alongside each other.

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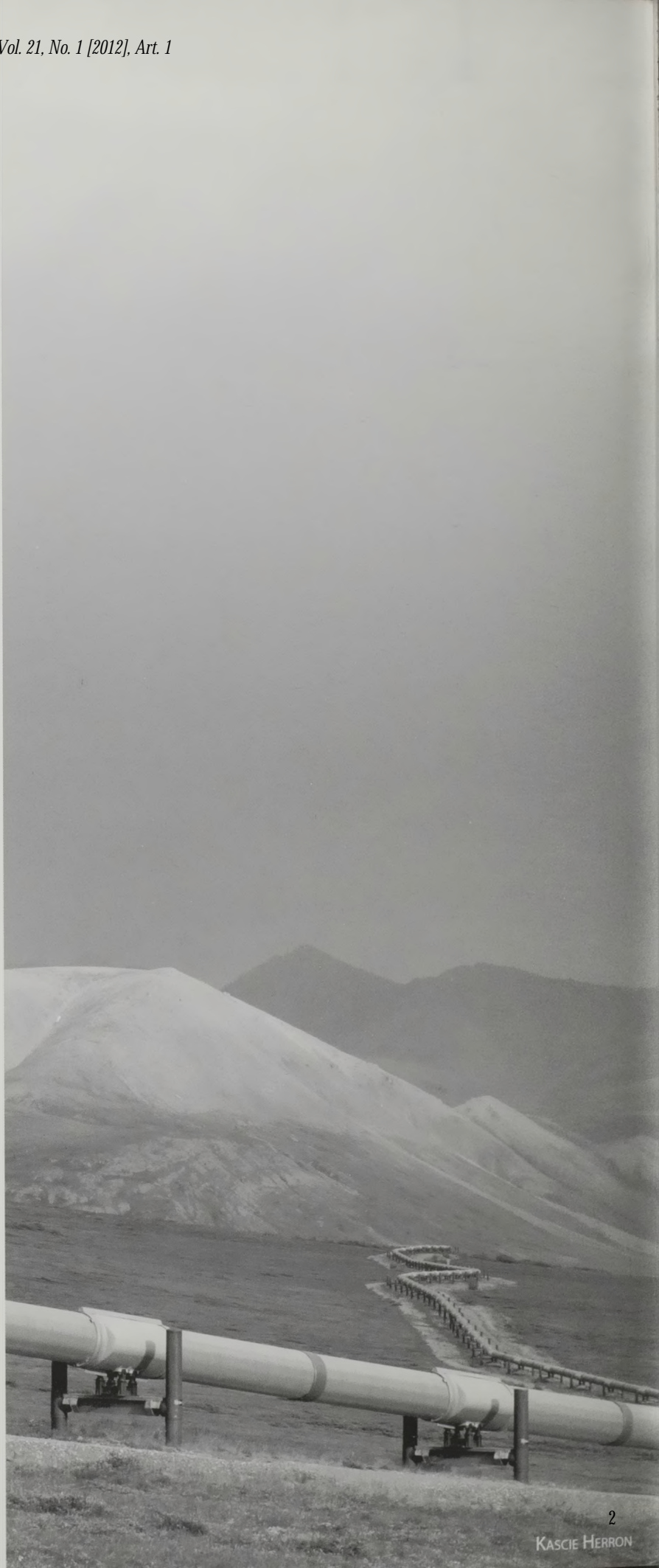
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COVER: LOGGER BILL DALLMAN OF BONNER, MT BY SAM BERRY



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almost bottom

Richard Vargas

out of work five months
standing at the checkout
buying a loaf of white bread
and a package of bologna
i'm paying with a pocketful
of loose change
a few quarters
a lot of dimes and nickels
a handful of pennies
stacking the change
making it easy for
the cashier to count
the line behind me
is getting longer and
i lose track of the amount
so i have to start over
feel like shit because
i've stood in that line
watching people like me
fumble with their food stamps
and jelly jars full of coins
fumed in silence while
they wasted my time
my hand is shaking
and i'm about to lose it
just walk out the door
make do with whatever
is in my cupboard
when the cashier
says "take your time
it's all right" and just
like that i calm down
and finish counting
he scoops up the change
then says
have a nice day





STEVEN GNAM

Anatomy of This Economy

M.R. Smith

Your flesh and my bones drone on and on,
too cheap to use the air in these last hot summer days.

Stacks and stacks of paperbacks in the bedroom at the head
of the stairs form the backbone of our home.

We own a chair with no arm, and rugs with thinning hair,
and still we have held them all together

with the spit of our dry mouths, and the brute strength
of two people pulling at the pages.



DOUG DAVIS

Twisted Music

Julia Corbett


AS THE PLANE ROSE FROM JACKSON HOLE, we crossed the Snake River plaiting its blue-green braids below, then cleared the white crowns of the Wyoming Range. I opened my book. But when I took one last glance out the window, I saw the site of the proposed PXP gas field on a series of sage-green hills near the upper Hoback River. My cabin lay just eight miles east.

Gliding south past towns I recognized from driving on the highway below, I began to see well pads. Dust-colored access roads stretched ruler-straight over plains and buttes, then turned in sharp right-angles when they encountered unseen boundaries or obstacles. From each

main road branched an assortment of short side roads. And from each side road, little stems led to roughly-drawn circles of well-pads, like quarter notes attached to a staff line. The notes lay in odd angles from each other like a sheet of twisted music.

I tried to count the pads, which was futile; there were too many, the plane too fast. Every time I leaned against my window, I saw another jumbled collection of notes, composed far below me. A blank stretch, then refrain, again and again, all the way to Denver.

ALMOST 26,000 NATURAL GAS WELLS OPERATE IN Wyoming, each producing 270 million cubic feet of methane daily. That's enough for each and every well to fill the Empire State Building seven times, each and



every day. My county of Sublette is the top gas producer in the state, a county without a single stop-light, and far more pronghorn and cattle than people. The handful of Pinedale citizens who speak up about the serious air pollution from the massive gas fields just outside of town not only face the usual regulatory obstacles, but also ostracism from fellow residents. “There are friends I can’t talk to now,” one woman told me, “and some of my neighbors fear retaliation from their employers if they speak up.” The mantra of jobs-jobs-jobs is so strong, so powerful, that it’s easier to charge that activists are “against progress” than to admit that the pollution is causing widespread respiratory ailments and three-day nose-bleeds.

What my aerial perspective made clear was how solidly this activity blankets the entire region. And how many of these wells lie just out of sight, out of earshot, like those along both banks of the Green River. When I drive along

this river to reach my cabin, I see small clusters of condensate well-tanks from the road, painted mocha or Army green to blend in. I had been oblivious to what lay beyond the road until I passed over at thirty-something-thousand feet.

As the plane crossed the interstate at Green River, Wyoming, where the river slows and succumbs to Flaming Gorge Reservoir, I tried to imagine the distance from the plane to the brown-green crust replicated just as far below the surface, turned in on itself, through sandstone and shale, past aquifers, fissures, plates, past dark and silent subterranean layers of brown, gray, black. The deepest producing well in Wyoming is almost 25,000 feet deep, five times deeper than mile-high Denver.

They don’t just drill for gas these days, they “frack” for it. Cement and steel are dropped mile after mile, and then tankers of water and vats of secret chemical slurry

are pumped down each borehole, thousands of feet into the earth. Then, the ancient bedrock is exploded for every last bubble of gas. Fracking now thunders across thirty-four states, tattooing note after note on the earth’s skin. If no one hears the explosions — driving the highway or from an airplane high above — do they make a sound?

THE SEATBELT SIGN WAS ILLUMINATED FOR LANDING in Denver. The air was thick and tan, tinting the bright white snow on the Front Range. As we touched down, I saw three oil derricks just beyond the tarmac, their see-saw arms silent and motionless, finished with their part in the fossil fuel foot-race.

It’s always seemed so easy and uncomplicated — jumping on an airplane, turning on the lights, driving in a car. Just sit back, relax, and know that someone is out there getting those fossil fuels for us. Just trust that it costs no more than what the ticket says, and that no animals (or humans) were injured in the making of this adventure.

Oil was once called Black Gold, a reference to the money made from it, and also to its rare and precious nature. But now? We want more, ever more; we want to pay less, ever less; we waste more, ever more. Gargantuan pickups are left idling in front of the Pinedale grocery while their owners shop. Doors are propped open (no matter the weather) in half the shops in Jackson — “so people know we’re open,” they say. Seven-thousand-square-foot vacation houses sprout from ridge-tops for mountain views.

A graduate student I advise recently asked people on the street where their electricity came from; they hadn’t a clue, and they didn’t associate it with fossil fuels, didn’t think about it at all — until it wasn’t there. Commodities so taken for granted, so seemingly cheap and benign, slip easily through the fingers.

As we taxied toward the terminal, I kept seeing the twisted notes on the earth’s surface, kept hearing explosion upon explosion rise up from the dark rock like screams, kept feeling as though I had pushed the arms of the derrick and fracked the well myself.

The jet stopped at the gate. Time to claim the baggage. ♪



JOSEPH MILBRATH

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Nevada Gold Boom

Barbara M. Smith

60 miles from town, holes gap,
mouths tell of claims cut
from these gold hills, abandoned
on the way to other places
when the seam went dry.

The road turns past warehouse trailers
neatly fenced, wired against lawlessness,
hoping for another boom, winds
around sand pile mountains
where dune buggies track
like tears the wind takes away.

A marker tells of pioneers
whose wagon broke and water ran out
one day too far away, little girls
remembered on metal the sand cannot erase.

Farther on, a town appears,
but red lights on the mountain tell the truth.
No one lives at ground level.
Pilots practice on this desert compound,
with tanks and jeeps carefully placed
beside silent white buildings.
Signal lights blink ready, set, go
for the whistle and sandblast of bombs.
A sign on the fence warns travelers
Stay away, don't be fooled by appearances.
There is no water here.

Before the turn to the ghost town
a new mine spreads, the color of sand.
Men crush rock, mix cyanide with water
pumped from a deep cold lake
pioneers could not reach.
The leach field waits for gold to rise
like the flash of a rainbow
in the uncertain light.



COME OR BLEED

Richard Manning

I FAILED IN MY FIRST ATTEMPT AT WORK. I was five, and we were still living in Flint, Michigan, then, probably 1956, but we had traveled 200 miles north for a work bee, picking rocks. Manning Hill, the tallest point in Alpena County, once my great-grandfather's farm, then my grandfather's farm, had been laid by glaciers, an esker. Eskers build from a glacier's internal streams of melt when water courses pile sand and gravel against an ice wall. Once in retreat, the glacier spits out a hump of a hill made of water-rounded rocks and sand. Time, life and decay apply a thin layer of topsoil, but tillage works the rocks to the surface. On my grandfather's farm, the spare time between planting, haying, cultivating and threshing was spent picking rocks. A crew walked behind a tractor, which towed a sledge called a "stone boat." We picked up rocks and dropped them on the sledge, then dumped the load at fencerows. Every farm had its stone piles; some of the more elaborate houses,

like the one my grandmother grew up in, still standing, were built of this same water-round stone split in half by men and sledgehammers to form one flat facet on each half, laid up in the wall face out.

It was hot this day I barely remember, and my uncles took frequent breaks to drink iced tea. There was no water, just tea, and they told me to drink some, but I refused, got sick of dehydration, and couldn't bring myself to tell them why. Only a few days before I had watched an episode of *Howdy Doody* on television in which Clarabell the Clown had drunk something that looked like tea, and, as a result, the clown had shrunk small enough to dance on the head of a drum. No doubt, the show offered this as a cautionary tale, in that tea and coffee were at the time widely believed to stunt a kid's growth, at least that's what my mother told me. I preferred dehydration to a life as a drum-dancing dwarf, so refused then to drink the tea, and I still don't drink it.

My failure that day didn't matter much, because boys were still judged pretty useless at five. A boy's time to put away childish things didn't come until he was ten or eleven, old enough and, with some luck, big enough to drive tractor (the indefinite article was always dropped in this phrase).

When we moved back to live on Manning Hill a few years later, my dad had by then somehow acquired



STEVEN GNAM

a hulking beast of a tractor, a tricycle front-end Farmall H, bright red once, but rust red when it came into our hands, a behemoth of the 1940s. It was top-heavy, ungainly and not all that powerful, a Model T Ford in comparison to the tractors only a couple of years in the future. By the time I was ten, I could set the choke and throttle, start it, slide it into gear, pop the clutch and drive. I did so standing on the thick plate-steel driving platform that stood maybe four feet off the ground. I was not tall enough to reach the pedals if I sat the hard, steel tractor seat, but there was no real shame in this. Many grown men drove tractor standing up, because those seats were unsprung and delivered a considerable ass-beating when the tractor was working rough ground. I remember only that on my first solo trip, the Farmall was at my grandfather's place, and my dad told me to drive it through the south gate and down the backside of the hill, then through the pasture to where we were then building our house on our land, sixty acres, land once a part of my grandfather's farm. So I did as I was told.

IN THOSE DAYS AND IN THAT PLACE, people who needed a house picked a plot on some favorite corner of family land, ordered concrete and a load of lumber, then brothers and uncles came and built it. I learned to mix mortar and tend mason, the mason then being my

Uncle Dale. It was my brother's and my job to drive every one of the hundreds of ten-penny rosin-coated nails into the one-by-ten hemlock sheathing that was the subfloor. I insulated and shingled and swung a shovel full days.

My dad was by then working more or less full-time on the house. He didn't have a regular job, and I didn't know exactly why. I knew we had moved back to Manning Hill because my dad had left his job at General Motors in Ohio to become an insurance adjuster for Farm Bureau Insurance across northern Michigan. The company was kind of a big deal then, not just because it insured the homes and pickup trucks of the many farmers, but it also attached to a social and political organization by the same name. Everybody belonged to a Farm Bureau group and met regularly at members' homes for cake, molded jello and coffee. But not very long into that job, my dad suddenly didn't have it any more, and it was the first time I remember hearing phrases that would recur throughout my parents' lives: "crooked lawyers" and "out to get your father" and so forth.

Even as a naïve kid, I still knew then there was not much money. The back shed of our temporary house in Long Rapids held a row of, at one point, nine hanging dead deer, frozen stiff in midwinter, our illegal meat supply. Michigan's deer hunting season was in November,

an annual, near-religious ritual, when sportsmen were each entitled to shoot one deer, a male, a buck. We were not sportsmen; we were “violators,” the local term for people who illegally killed deer. The practice was widely regarded as an egregious breach of the social code, if not deviant and immoral. It was believed to be the *modus vivendi* of “cedar savages,” people who lived in tarpaper shacks in cedar swamps, cut cedar fence posts and propagated vigorously, what we would today call “trailer trash.” And today they cook meth, not venison. We were not cedar savages, but my old man was an enthusiastic violator. He used a .22 caliber rifle because it made so little noise. He would drive around back roads at dusk and shoot whitetail does in the neck, pop them in the trunk of his Pontiac, then back into the garage after dark so the neighbors wouldn’t see. Once, as my brother and I looked on, he opened the trunk and a doe that had only been stunned by the shot jumped out and ran. He chased it around the garage and killed it with a hoe. We were, by then, six children.

We would go to work on the new house those cold winter mornings bearing a pot of venison stew. The house was closed in, and we were insulating and hanging sheetrock. We had set up an old pot-bellied stove in what was to become the living room, and would fire it up every morning with scrap wood, then set the stew on top to simmer while we worked. We marked our progress in tucking the studs in pink fiberglass insulating batts by the house’s increasing ability to hold the smell of the stew.

Presently the house was done and we moved in, and

**He would drive around back roads at dusk and shoot whitetail does in the neck,
pop them in the trunk of his Pontiac,
then back into the garage after dark so the neighbors wouldn’t see.**

there was a series of jobs for my dad, some I was a part of, and some not. I would nonetheless have more work to do in both cases.

Most of his jobs tended to be away, a lifelong pattern. He bought a weird little snub-nosed Corvair pickup truck and trowels, bull floats, and forms and drove every Monday four hours south to Flint to do concrete work, staying the week in a cheap rented house trailer

and returning home on weekends. In winter, we worked in the woods, an eighty-acre piece of ground my paternal grandfather had sold to my maternal grandfather. My dad cut cedar posts and after school, my brother and I loaded them on a steel-runnered dray we pulled behind an antique Oliver bulldozer. Once we’d loaded the dray, my brother and I would argue over whose turn it was to drive the little dozer over the iced haul road to the landing. Once a week or so, a truck would come to haul the posts away to the mill to make fencing. Last thing each day, we’d pile up a load of cedar boughs and throw them in the pickup, take them to our house and pile them in the basement. After supper, we weighed and bundled the boughs. A big flatbed truck would come to the house every week or so, and we’d pile on the boughs, to be sold to florists for flower arrangements at funerals.

The money came as cash. My dad wanted untraceable income to allow him to collect unemployment insurance, what he called “rocking chair” pay, although I never saw him sit in a rocking chair. He did not believe defrauding the government constituted fraud, and never would. The government was always the enemy and deserved what it got. He bragged about a lifetime of lies to the Internal Revenue Service.

Soon, he got more involved in concrete in summers and eventually tried to buy a little concrete supply business in Rogers City, thirty-five miles north of Manning Hill. By then, he had a pretty nice International pickup, which we painted blue to match the concrete trucks, and when there was no school in summer, my brother and I — I was then twelve or thirteen — rode with him to the

plant to put in a full day’s work. We delivered concrete blocks, unloading them by hand off the bed of an old ‘51 Chevy flatbed, and sometimes I drove it. We learned to run the front-end loader and the forklift and strip forms from pre-cast septic tanks.

My particular task, because I was still small, was to clean the residue of hardened concrete that accretes inside of mixer trucks. The giant mixer drums had a

small hatch, maybe eighteen inches in diameter, on the side. We'd unbolt the hatch so I could crawl through it into the drum that was spiraled with fins for mixing the concrete. Sometimes the concrete had built up a half-foot thick on the fins, making them less effective, so I used a little hand-held jackham-

tract or another he neglected to sign. And I heard more talk at the dinner table about "out to get your father" and "crooked lawyers" and then we didn't have the business. So my dad went back to construction jobs in Flint, was gone again most weeks, this time in winter.

**Winter was the hardest. Northern Michigan's winter cold is deep and complete at night;
no child is the equal of it.**

mer and chisel to bang away for hours on end. No one thought about earplugs then. My hearing is so damaged I needed hearing aids in my early fifties, and I suspect I got my start on the problem then.

My dad was always trying to think up some shortcut to a job, and had an idea about cleaning mixer drums. He told me to fill the drum with empty paper cement bags, then we poured about five gallons of diesel fuel on the pile of paper and touched it off. The idea was the heat from the burning bags and fuel would expand the metal fins and the concrete would crack and fall off. Nothing much happened for a few minutes, so I climbed up on the drum and poked my head into the hatch to have a look. About then, the flames inside had heated the fuel to a flash point, and it did indeed flash, sending a burst of fire through the hatch. It blew me off the side of the truck, and I fell about six feet to the ground, thinking the whole way down that I surely was a ball of flame. I had seen such things on TV and, in fact, had heard a fireman tell my school class that people who are balls of flame should not panic and run, but should roll on the ground. So I rolled, and after a few revolutions realized my dad was laughing at me and that I was not a ball of flame. I was merely bright red with first-degree burns and had no hair and eyebrows. The skin peeled off and grew back in a few days, hair and eyebrows in a few weeks. The fire did nothing to the concrete, so I had to crawl back in with my little jackhammer.

We seemed to be doing a pretty good business that first year. Maybe my dad had found a niche, but then something happened between him and the man from whom he was buying the business, some con-

tract or another he neglected to sign. And I heard more talk at the dinner table about "out to get your father" and "crooked lawyers" and then we didn't have the business. So my dad went back to construction jobs in Flint, was gone again most weeks, this time in winter.

When he built the house, he had equipped it with an old green Bryant hot water boiler, second-hand, that was forever breaking down. That and we ran out of fuel oil often, so I learned to take the boiler's fuel lines apart, bleed out air, and relight it. Sometimes it didn't work at all, and I'd fend off the Michigan winter by building a fire in the fireplace, always a problem, because my dad never cut enough wood. Winter was the hardest. Northern Michigan's winter cold is deep and complete at night; no child is the equal of it.

IN NOVEMBER OF 1961 — I WAS TEN — my school's principal came to my classroom, whispered something to my teacher, Mrs. Himes, then pulled me from class. Long looks all around suggested something bad had happened, and everyone knew what it was but me. My grandfather had died. Like every man I knew of that generation, he died of a heart attack, all of a sudden.

There had been some heart trouble before, and he was not supposed to work, so he no longer farmed, but didn't leave the farm either, choosing to live on in that brown Insulbrick house where he'd been born. Installing one's storm windows to defend against a northern Michigan winter was not really work, more of chore, and the doctor hadn't said anything about chores, just work. He had been hauling a window up a ladder to a north side, second-story window when the coronary hit him, and he fell off the ladder and died. He was 68.

They laid him out at Bannan Funeral Home in town — the Protestant funeral home, the place for all Manning funerals. My parents took me to see my

grandfather in his casket, so I would know what dead was. After, I hung out with my cousins in the parking lot and marveled at the elk. The Elks Club was next door, and the lodge kept a life-sized bull elk statue in the parking lot. I had never seen a real elk; they were gone from Michigan then, since returned, but the statue was impressive enough. The high school was nearby, and boys from there had taken it upon themselves to glue fuzz to the elk's realistic looking scrotum, a service maintained on through my high school years.

A few weeks earlier, my father had taken me to visit my grandfather after supper one night, the occasion being my first report card at my new school, straight As, a highly uncommon occurrence in family lore and

it. By that standard, I came of age when I was fourteen. One of my aunts, my father's older sister, Ellen, was married to a hardworking and respected German dairy farmer, John Behling, and the summer I graduated from eighth grade, he had Aunt Ellen call my folks and see if I might like to drive tractor for a couple of weeks at pay to help him haying. He milked maybe thirty Holsteins twice a day, but I would be spared that, much as I liked doing it. Milking was done before and after a full day's work, and he didn't want me up at five and in bed at nine like he was, so I was called down to breakfast after he was done milking.

He chopped his hay, as opposed to baling it, meaning he drove a tractor pulling a machine that ingested



JOSEPH MILBRATH

the township in general. My grandfather looked at the card, did not say a word (he seldom did) but dug into the pocket of his bib overalls, pulled out a beat-up coin purse, extracted a folded-up dollar bill, unfolded it and gave it to me. And he smiled, and I was no longer afraid to look at his one glass eye.

ONE'S RITE OF PASSAGE IN THAT WORLD that raised me came not from work but from getting paid for

windrows of hay, diced it up and blew it through a chute into a huge, high-sided, four-wheeled wagon behind. My job was to hook a tractor to the filled wagons, run them to the barn, dump the hay into a conveyor and blower that shot it up into the mow, then bring back the empty wagons. On days it was too wet to hay, I picked rock or shoveled shit out of the calf pens.

The work went on for a couple of weeks, then I got paid and it was time for me to start high school, a major

event in that I would no longer attend the little school in my community, but would be bused the fourteen miles into town, Alpena, to attend the county high school, then in the same building where my father and mother had gone.

But it was still a week or so before school started, and money was burning in my pocket, as I recall, the whole \$30 that was my two-week's wages. My mother took me to town in her hulking Pontiac station wagon, then I was on my own at Sidewalk Sale Daze, and I went to the J.C. Penney store, bought black peg-legged jeans, white socks and a shirt like men wore to church on Sundays. I went to Alvin Ash's music store and picked through the records, knowing exactly what I was after, the entire

privilege. I was raised among brute animals, tools, and simple machines. I was raised by people who were heroic.

When I was a child, "work" meant something more than minimum wage at a 7-Eleven, bundling sub-prime mortgages, or punching keys. Both Marxist academics and editorial writers for the Wall Street Journal fail to grasp this deeper significance of work and the people who did it. During the course of about a century, for better or worse, the people who founded our generation imposed the industrial revolution on a wilderness with not much more than muscle and will. I understand fully the objections of revisionist history to the frontier myth, even raise some of the same objections: capital, disease,

**"Labor" is from old French, a term imposed by Norman aristocrats.
"Work" is Anglo-Saxon from old German and Norse.
Labor is work seen from above.**

Roger Miller oeuvre, then on a single and newly issued album "Golden Hits." His hit "King of the Road" was getting major airplay on the sort of stations we listened to. Rock 'n' roll was well into its heyday by then, but for some reason it could not penetrate the airspace of northern Michigan, so I listened to Roger Miller. I had spent my head time on my uncle's farm making up new lyrics to his song, but an entire album opened a whole new world of wordplay, and I memorized every word, can still do "Dang Me," and "Do Whacka Do." These are my literary roots, but I at least knew I would enter high school in solid command of a cool body of work.

NOW I HAVE BROUGHT MY LIFE TO HIGH SCHOOL, a time of coming of age, and yet I have told but half of the story of what was happening in those years. I have spoken mostly of my paternal lineage and of work, which, in my mind and, I think in the minds the people of that lineage, were the same thing. I tell of work and Mannings first, because this is the easy part to tell. I understood them, and they are my foundation. I imagine many readers regard the details of my upbringing as troubled. From where we sit today, from our time, from the standards by which we raise kids today, some of this is indeed troubling. Yet I do not regard it so, not the work. The fact is, I believed mine was a life of great

greed, theft, racism, and violence all had much to do with bringing a wild and merciless landscape to heel in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in North America. Yet beneath the academic bickering over these matters lies an undeniable reality, and the bickerers miss it when they call it "labor" instead of "work." "Labor" is from old French, a term imposed by Norman aristocrats. "Work" is Anglo-Saxon from old German and Norse. Labor is work seen from above.

A close reading of the elemental detail in the record of day-to-day life in lumber camps, mine pits, rail grades and threshing crews does nothing so much as rehabilitate the adjective "heroic." These people who did this work were a different species, now extinct, for the very reason most species vanish: their habitat is gone.

In my life I knew a man, my Grandfather Manning, who was born in the nineteenth century and learned his work at the very height of this time of bloody-knuckled conquest. He learned from a man, a farmer and logger, born in wilderness early in the first half of the nineteenth century. There is nothing I would trade for this legacy.

As a child and young man, I was privileged to be present at a series of events, a type of event really, that boils this legacy to an essence. Through the years, the situation varied, but it always had essential elements:

a) something stuck that needed to be unstuck and b) a force for unsticking like a big, hard hammer — irresistible force or immovable object, but the gods to be tested by this ancient conundrum were just simple machines: lever, wedge and screw, and muscles, internal combustion, steam, and vocabulary.

Maybe it was a dray load of logs slid sideways on ice to wedge in the pinch between trees, maybe a tractor axle ass deep in mud and no help for miles save a hand-crank coffin hoist and some burlap bags for traction. Or maybe a live shaft broke on a combine cutter head, a rust-bound bolt and gathering clouds promising down-draft winds ready to smash flat a year's crop to lodged, worthless straw in minutes. Whatever. The nut has to come off, and the dray has to give. So maybe a frayed wire cable gets hooked to a full-throttled bulldozer, the front end chained to a tree to keep it from going airborne in the lurch. Then tracks dig and spin and engine roars and cable thins to threaten to part. Or maybe the worn box-end wrench on the frozen nut of the combine fails, so the two of you, you and a brother, slide a six foot-length of pipe on the end for leverage, then both sets of boots braced against anything that might not slide and heave for all you are worth.

Among the people I knew, there was a common battle cry reserved for such moments, an incantation set to the rhythm of the rings of progressively larger hammers. Breathless and face flushed full red, we commanded: "Come, motherfucker. Come or bleed."

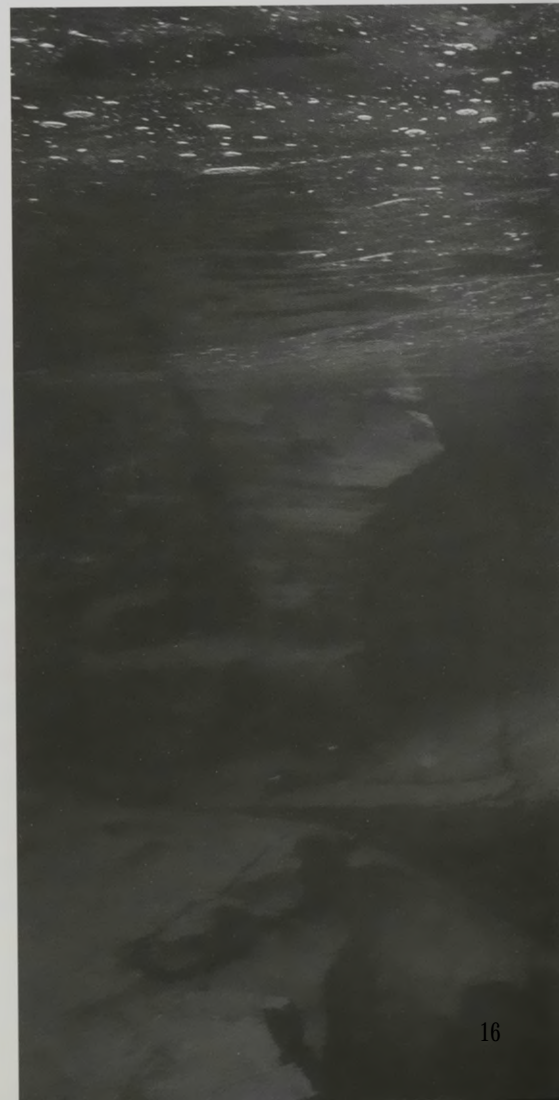
And mostly it came, whatever it was, and there'd be a story to tell over dinner. Or it wouldn't and there'd be busted knuckles, a lost field of wheat or an arm snatched off a kid in half a second because he didn't have enough sense to stand clear of cable's bight. Or the horse-drawn roller would catch the edge of a ditch. The tongue snapped and flipped 180 crushing the man at reins dead as a hammer, which is what happened to one of my great-grandfathers.

These mostly unrecorded and ordinary events made us who we are, a birthright, collective as a nation, but mine, too, personal. I think of both in context of who we are today. Yet in both general and specific cases, the birthright is not and was not inalienable. I did not realize what was happening then, what I was seeing as an adolescent. I understood only that I was living on a firm and unshakable foundation of family, land and work. So

was my father, and this had much to do with my deep, childhood attachment to him, this and a fact obvious to everyone around me but not to me, that I was more than most sons, his genetic echo.

I was a child, beginning to recognize my father was becoming dishonest, and by this, I mean something more than someone who fails to tell the truth. His dishonesty was less willful; it required self-deception, and I watched him acquire the skill. Good work, on the other hand, requires, above all, veracity. The work people did then daily measured itself against the demanding realities of the physical world, real and present. Mistakes were self-correcting. Either it worked or it didn't, and the sooner you faced that fact, the better it was going to be. There was an accounting at the end of every day. An action was right or not, and if wasn't right, whatever it was you'd worked on would break again, and you'd have to do it all over. ♪

"Come or Bleed" is an excerpt from Richard Manning's upcoming book It Runs in the Family, to be published by St. Martin's Press in July 2013.



Hands & Fingers

Sean Prentiss

In the black of dawn-night, stir oatmeal on the two-burner.
Spoon brown-sugar-sweet oatmeal to chapped & hungry lips.

Just after dawn, in the earliest hours of work, jam hands into soil.
Yank—& yank again—until the tree root snaps in half in your hands.

Wrap your fingers around the curved wooden handle of a Pulaski.
Feel the echo of the steel head bite into bark & cork & sapwood.

Noon, ache back into the cutbank of the trail, a sandwich in dirty hands.
A meal of cheap meat, commodity cheese, white bread, mineral soil.

After nine hours, walk home with the chainsaw stinging into shoulder.
Your palm rests on the hot bar, feeling the nibble of the cutters.

After work, draw a bastard file across the Pulaski's nicked blade.
The metal shavings sprinkle like today's rain—a shimmering mist.

During a campfire dinner, count the cuts & scabs on each hand.
Six on the right, four on the left—two ooze pus, the rest scabbed.

In late evening, draw a round file through the chainsaw's teeth.
Carelessly nick your index finger on a newly glistening cutter.

Stick your finger—dirtied for the work of today—in your mouth.
Taste the hot iron of blood—of this woods life—on your tongue.

The Night Shift

Jenner Harsha

IT IS MIDNIGHT AND I AM BOXING CHICKENS. The tricky part is the corralling, and while Jack & Diane may well be the best-trained chicken-subduing dogs around, our task involves a level of discriminability to-night. We are separating the fertile young hens from the house-bound clutch, simultaneously attempting to avoid confrontation with Silver, the rooster. Silver was a mean bastard, his only redeeming trait being his gender preference: he preferred to pick on men. In our small farming operation, that left only my older brother to worry about attacks from behind — you can imagine my fourteen-year-old delight at his victimization. Ruthless, in the most pragmatic sense, Jason quickly trained Silver to mind his distance after a few shoveled flights across the backyard.

The corralling and boxing ideally took four hands and went like this: corner a hen, wrap your arm around her silky down, wings tucked in, hand on her chest to calm her; set her in a wooden vegetable crate lined with cardboard, let your helper hold down the lid (sometimes forcibly) until you and Diane find the hen a traveling mate. Two to a crate, we filled the bed of the pick-up just like any other load of market bound veggies; spider-netted and strapped down for the ride out thirteen miles northeast to the farm, deeper into the Sierran foothills.

We transport the chicks from headquarters (Ren's house from a former, conventional life, now overtaken by a CSA operation, a living-room chicken ICU) to the farm at night to help ease the stress of the situation. Not a mile down the road, just passing the last lighted signs of downtown: Lucky Logger Liquor and the China Station Café, the chicks start cooing to each other in the most peculiar way. Ren and I roll down our windows to hear them better, we giggle in that irrepressible second-wind humor. Even Diane, her head rested on my shoulder from the bucket seats behind, is curious, her head cocked and floppy black ears perked at the sound. Cooing and gentle chuckling, I am too soothed by the sound, I close my eyes, Diane's damp breath ebbing against my neck, the warm summer wind my blanket.

I wake to braking, a deer in the road, then the whole herd crossing in front of us. My eyes continue to droop

the remaining five miles. It is nearly two a.m., our last trip for the night. We pull up to the farm; I hop out with the dogs and unlatch the gate, let it swing silently open, to butt up against the tool shed. We free the hens near a favorite nesting tree; some do not voluntarily get out — while once annoyed to be in new quarters, it seems just half an hour in the crates has made them home. Chickens. Jack and Diane have gone off after some shadowed critter of the night; from the neighboring orchard an owl calls 'who?' into the still summer night.

Ren and I break down the boxes, separating the soiled cardboard from the crates labeled zanahorias, chayote, lechuga. We work efficiently and in silence at this still, odd hour; we pile back into the pickup. The pups come not to our calls and whistles but to the bouncing red taillights as we cross the cobbled road out of the farm. Ren steers towards my house, just a mile up the road, she thanks me for my help; yawning, we haphazardly sketch tomorrow's game plan.

Suddenly, firm and pulsing hind legs bound up and out of the headlights radii — an unimaginably long golden, tasseled tail drawn out of sight. We have crossed the path of a puma on the prowl. Transcending some sense of security offered by the warm night air, her call shatters the starfield; like a wild woman's scream, the eerie song breaks the Sierran silence. In the pickup both flesh and fur tingle from the thrill.

MY BROTHER MAY CONTEST IT, but I have never been a crier. Yet, daily now, right about 1 o'clock in the afternoon, right about when I open the corner door to my shared 400 square-foot studio in the heart of the Tenderloin district, right about then I burst into tears. I slide down onto weathered wood floors and sob sorrows present, past and ambiguous. I am a slave to sleep deprivation; I am a slave to 32 floors of 44 Montgomery's quad-shot aficionados, stilettoed and brief cased. Our café tip jar divvies out the lowest pence outside east Oakland.

My shift starts at four a.m., but the tacit agreement I have with Hadi — a middle aged, hot tempered Turk — is that I'll be there at a quarter till. I wake within the witches' hour, quickly, quietly, pull on the same black trousers and one of two white polo shirts; I am out the door in 15 minutes. While each apartment complex in

this neighborhood has a locked gate, some additionally, employ guards through the night. Before crossing two sidewalk squares, the day's first salutation — "hola princesa..." — is slithered through steel bars.

My favorite strategy for navigating the streets at this hour—the last best hour for securing a suggestive friend of questionable gender, the last laissez-faire hour for inhaling chemical candy in the push till dawn — is to shadow the largest black man I can find for the longest amount of time. I head straight up, the idea being bums prefer the lowlands, before crossing northeast, over Union Square and towards the Financial District.

I am nineteen and rural fresh. I think I am asserting some post-adolescent independence. I am quickly learning city block geography and mass-public transit. But I am completely defeated after eight hours of pulling shots, feeding a calamitous caffeinated army of humorless drones, plugged in and pouting.

As it billows towards me with a fierce westerly force, yesterday's newspaper feels like an acute attack on my sense of humanity; I can hardly unlock the gate at 237 Leavenworth, I can hardly unlock the gate before my innocent ideals are again wrung dry, the salty crumbs I will follow again tomorrow before dawn.

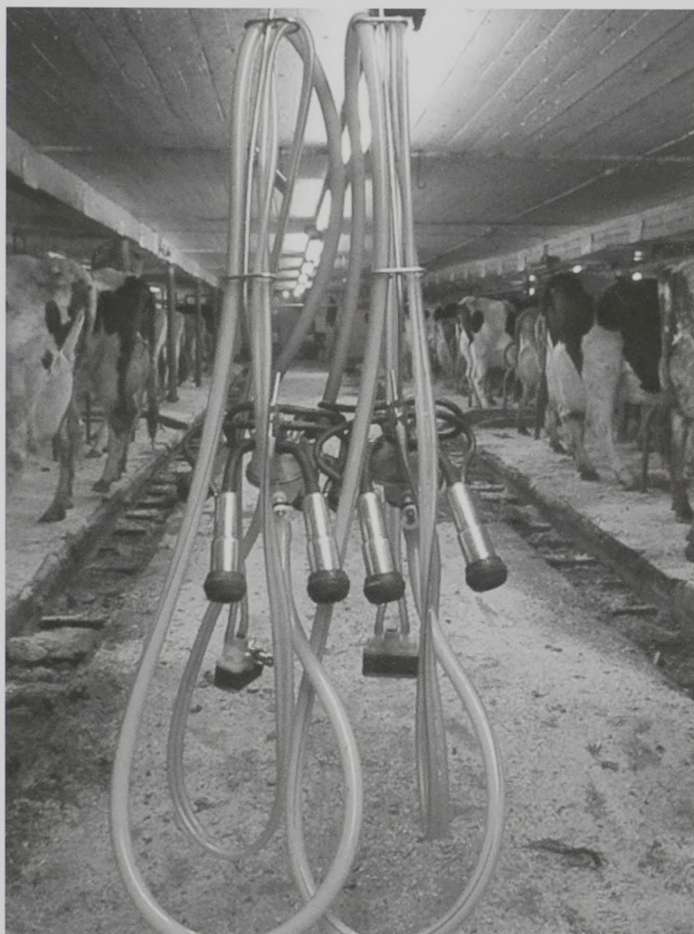
I AM GREETED BY CHEERY GOOD MORNINGS; it is just after four-thirty in the afternoon. This irks me. My coworkers are off in thirty minutes; they do not intend to rub this in...well, all but a particular sore and slanted middle-aged man. Mean beyond his years, he hates everything happy and beautiful, cute and cuddly, and

in particular, the giggle fits my coworkers and I often partake in. His name is Eeyore beyond earshot. When our season ended last year, a friend and I stamped his appropriately grey, rusty truck with a bumper sticker — a smiling stick figure bursting with red hearts; it read, "This is my brain on hugs!"

It is four-thirty in the afternoon and I've just clocked in — the bear shift. The bear shift this time of year, in summer's waning light, involves some visitor contact before nightfall, roving campgrounds and picnic grounds for improper food storage. In Yosemite Valley,

an infraction can be as seemingly trivial as popping into the men's room for a quick piss while the pasta water heats to a boil. Nothing to be left unattended for any matter of minutes — for these bears are stealth. But I do not like telling people what to do. I do not particularly like the sense of authority I generate capped with a flat-hat, and I do not like confrontation. You may think I am in the wrong profession. I often do too. Nonetheless, I hop up a ridiculous height to reach the driver's seat of a guzzling government truck, pop in my latest cassette find — a swingin' mariachi tape — crank the volume and head to the Pines Campgrounds.

Administration pressure is gone after five; at night, my Class A uniform is stylized by a retro jean-jacket, patched with my dad's name in cursive. I don my ball cap once the last light lingers pink high on the granite walls. I am offered hot dogs at least three times a night, and liquor much more often than that. I try to spend most of my time on foot over at the backpackers' camp, exchanging beta with those who camp sans coolers.



LAURA GINSBURG

As the night deepens, the kiddies head to bed and boozy laughter rises from behind smoky campfires; as the darkness darkens, the real work begins. My radio belches: bear in Upper Pines, bear in Upper Pines. "325 copies," I say — these bears have no privacy — and turn east towards the ruckus of pots, pans and 'hey bears' forming up the way.

Somehow, these bears know — whether White 388, Green 66, or Blue 75 (lovingly, 'Ol Fatty) — they know a ranger when they see one and this particular yearling barrels south when he sees me on scene. He plods along the lush fen, at the base of granitic Glacier Point. I follow behind, urging him deeper into the bush with my high beam Maglite. I prefer conversation to hollering. I like to think the bear does too. I encourage him, "get into the real wild bear. Get up outta here...just four vertical miles my friend and you'd be true blue outta tourist-ville. You oughta see it, the fertile meadows, the towering peaks — there still be some stocked Rainbow trout for you in that alpine dreamscape."

He gets tired of the trot or my ridiculous banter, and climbs an apple tree. The trees were planted a century ago, to appease early tourists' comforts and homestead-

ers' mind's-eye ideals. Now the trees own some sense of 'historical fidelity', they say, but the orchard only serves as a primitive parking lot. In early autumn, I get too much satisfaction when treetop bears, full of fermenting apples, drowsily unload the digested fruits on top of hot-rod rentals, and once — into the front seats of a Corvette.

Treed, this bear is now further subjected to my soliloquies, and I do intend to use this midnight session of bear-therapy. I sit cross-legged, within view and let my eyes adjust. "...Isn't this better, anyways?" I ask, "Just you & I, here chatting civilly? Otherwise, I'd just wind up chasing you around all night — like the fool you must think I am — up, down and across the river, from banging pot to car alarm till some sense of stillness recaptures the night. You are not nocturnal you know? Neither am I., You and I, we're crepuscular, a fancy word for enjoying afternoon siestas, the ephemeral light of dusk and the quiet chorus of day-break...creatures like us bear, we don't belong on the night shift. And frankly I think I just might explode the next time someone sings me a 'good-morning' at five o'clock in the afternoon... Are you asleep up there bear?" ♪

Driving to Montana, May 18th, 1980

Jason Hess

We could call you in Seattle. You could drive over here. But you might never make it.
– Pete Butkus, mayor of Pullman, WA

You called from Colfax in the dark by 3 PM.
One pack of Reds smoked since Seattle.
A volcanic fog outpaced your pickup,
choking on ash, you stripped your shirt,
wrapped it around the filter in Pullman.
Moscow by five, the bars by six, her bed
by midnight. The windows tinted with ash
so fine that your fingers printed silver
down her spine, from brushing off her coat
before coming inside. Leaving quietly early
to make Butte by noon, you stomped
soft silver tracks down her walk.







Internal Agricultural Admonitions for Early Spring

Josh Slotnick

"It is presumptuous and irresponsible to pray for other people." W.B.

Stare down a spot on the far fence and don't let go, you'll drive straight
enough

With the zeal of a believer
grease every zerck on every piece of spinning steel

Call your son, even if he doesn't have much to say

Put new transplants under the greenhouse tables, in the shade, till they bounce back

Keep the tractors under roof

Notice the changing patterns of snow in the hills, the volatile skies, the dog's pride
in you, this place, all that is hers to care for

If you think you need a hammer, think again
for most things
there's a better way

Jump at the windows of dry soil for field work
any day rain could fall, not stopping long enough for the soil to dry
before raining again

Change fluids and filters now, before you get too busy and deep damage
begins to grow

Put every tool and part you might need in a bucket
wrenches, confidence, sockets, stillness, wire cutters, drill, pry bar, doubt
Carry all to the repair job at hand
Walking back and forth
kills the day

Buy extra parts, if this one doesn't break again, another will

Don't let yourself get too thirsty

Listen
to the roaring engine, the implement behind, the clouds stacking to the southwest, your squawking
back, the phone messages, your best guesses



ALIA MULDER

Be soft on the throttle, take only the rpms you need

Backhaul

Remind your daughters of their breath stopping beauty, why keep that to yourself

Check the weather often

Do what's right for the weather today, tomorrow

Know that you contrive your plan for the week, but weather is real

Math is real

Squeeze a handful of soil; drop it from your hip, if it breaks into pieces

you're good to till

if it hits the earth and remains balled up – too wet

bursts into dust – too dry

Put yourself last, know that you can deal

Hug your wife, you will feel better

Understand

you will never work as hard, or measure up

get past that

Let diesels warm before using them hard, and never run 'em out of fuel

Trust - spend your mental energy on what the season, the conditions

your family

call for

Everything will work out

or not

Question your compulsions

Rootedness

Laura Farmer

WHEN HOYT FREEMAN WAS FIFTEEN, he woke up in the middle of the night and heard his parents. He couldn't make out what they were saying but they were yelling, they were laughing, they were so many voices all at once. He turned over in bed, his blankets and pillows in a tumble, and from this distance their voices sounded like they were underwater or, he thought as he drifted back to sleep, like he was underwater, floating further and further away.

"Your mom and I are leaving town for a few days." His father told him the next morning. Hoyt sat at the kitchen table, shoveling eggs into his mouth. His father had a split lip and the right side of his face was swollen. He held a rag and some ice up to it, but water kept running down his arm, staining his sleeve a dark blue.

"We need to go on a little trip. And when we get back, things are going to be better, but we've got to leave, just the two of us, so that can happen. You understand?"

Hoyt shook his head. Instead of clarifying, his father continued.

"Your mother's upstairs. She's going to help you pack a few things." His father looked around the kitchen, then back at Hoyt. "You're going to stay with your uncle Phil for a few days. Just a few days."

"What about Cherry?"

"Cherry too."

"Can I bring my books?"

"Bring 'em." His father waved his hand, then got up and checked his reflection in the glass cabinet. He turned to the side and pulled on his lip, making it bleed again.

"Why are you doing that?"

"Go on." He peeled the skin off. "Go see your mother."

THE FREEMANS LIVED THIRTY MILES FROM TOWN. After Hoyt finished the eighth grade, the only people he saw on a regular basis, other than his parents, were his uncle Phil and the mail carrier, Mr. Bailey. While his father farmed, Hoyt spent his days indoors, caring for his mother. His only respite was the family's twice-a-month trips into town to pick up supplies and check out books from the library. Hoyt filled a grocery sack full of books about sailing, whaling, and pirates and hauled them back

to the truck, keeping one out for the ride home. He could relate to these characters out at sea – he knew the loneliness of a consistent landscape and the excitement and fear that came from living in nature. Hoyt would never see the ocean but he would see fields and long stretches of prairie, with their high grasses rippling like waves in the wind. When his father would take the truck into town in the evenings, leaving Hoyt and his mother at home, Hoyt often felt like a man on an island, adrift against a vast landscape. It was a powerful, lonesome feeling.

PHIL WAS STANDING IN THE FRONT YARD when they pulled up. He walked over to the truck and let Cherry out of the bed.

"How long you looking at being gone?"

"Couple days," Hoyt's father handed Phil the suitcase. "Won't be long. We're just heading to Omaha. I've got a friend with a motel and he can cut us a deal for a few nights."

"Good," Phil said, patting him on the shoulder. "I'm glad she found out. Looks like she got a good hit in."

"I guess I am too," his dad said, looking over at his mother. She was standing with Hoyt, looking out over the land. "You need anything just charge it to our account."

"We'll be fine."

Hoyt stood next to Phil and watched his parents drive away, the gravel bursting into a big cloud behind them. His parents both kept one arm out the window, waving, until the truck turned on 185th, a good mile away, and headed north. Goodbyes were hard out here because it took so long to disappear. He wondered what they were talking about, if his mother had a map out or if they just knew where they were going. Years later Hoyt would wonder if his parents knew in that moment what they were about to do to him. Or if they had known it all along. They honked twice when they were just a little dot, and then they were gone.

"You hungry?" Phil asked, putting his arm around Hoyt. "I'm starving."

PHIL LIVED IN AN OLD FARMHOUSE that was full of things in the wrong place. There was a wrench on the sofa, bedroom pillows in the kitchen. Phil kept a small stack of black and white photos on the back of the toilet tank and Hoyt liked to thumb through them while he sat, making up stories about the blurry old women and



CASSIE NELSON

small children.

After breakfast Phil showed Hoyt how to help out in the garden. Phil didn't have a job in town; he kept a big garden and a few chickens and mostly lived off what he could grow or trade. Hoyt's father once told him there were some people who didn't have much use for money, and those people were usually the happiest. That was Phil.

They spent the morning outside weeding and after lunch and a nap Phil sent him on his way.

"Why don't you take that dog of yours for a romp?" He said, looking around the garden. "I don't have much left here."

"How far?" Hoyt asked.

Phil shrugged. "Come back when you get tired. Just tell me which direction."

Hoyt looked around. He pointed west.

"Good enough."

HOYT AND CHERRY TOOK OFF ACROSS THE FIELD, which was thick with golden rod and sticklers. They just ran – over rough bushes, through the grass – and the farther he went, the more the land spread out before him. He called out to Cherry, running after her.

He made his way in to some trees and he heard a stream, the same stream that ran past his parent's place.

He knew he wasn't far from home, but he felt like it, and seeing the creek was like seeing an old friend. He followed it farther into the woods and started singing as loud as he could. Songs from KOKZ, songs his mother used to sing when she hung laundry, songs from church that had good rhythms, like "Precious Lord." Sometimes he'd sing the same song twice to try out different harmonies. It calmed him. He picked up a long stick and hit trees, bushes, the ground to keep time.

OUT THIS FAR, the only thing familiar was the creek. The trees, the light, everything was different. He couldn't see Phil's house, the road, or any road for that matter. He climbed a tree and all he could see were trees and then, beyond them, more prairie. The whole world was spread out before him. He jumped down; he yelled; he chased after Cherry, waving his arms over his head. He didn't want to think about his mother, his father, what might happen to them all. He just wanted to run.

THE NEXT MORNING Hoyt went to the back shed, far off on the property, to look for another shovel. When he opened the door he was hit with the smell of standing water and dirt and something sweet he couldn't identify. The shed was full of small metal tubs, metal tubes, and

random bits of firewood. Some old clothes hung on a nail behind the door. No shovel. No gardening equipment at all.

Phil came up behind him. "It's all taken apart."
"What is it?"

"This is how I make my brew." He picked up one of the metal tubes. "Your daddy never told you?"

Hoyt shook his head. He started looking at everything more closely, like he was putting a puzzle together, but he still couldn't see it. The place was a mess.

A still, Uncle Phil explained, wasn't nearly as big a deal as it used to be, but it wasn't something he wanted to advertise.

"You have to have something other people want. That helps to get you by."

"Where is it?" Hoyt asked.

Phil smiled and looked up at the sky. "Garden first," he said. "Then we'll see."

THAT EVENING AT DINNER Phil brought over two jars – one was clear and the other was filled with Coke.

"You get some pop," Phil said. "It'll help. Now go slow. Just take a sip."

Hoyt wasn't sure what he was talking about. He'd had pop before. Still, he took a small sip and felt the liquid burn his throat and ignite in his chest. It was like something inside of him was waking up and trying to get out.

"You should see your face." Phil laughed. He took a sip of his own drink. "You know what I'm thinking we should do tonight?"

Hoyt didn't say anything. He held his glass with both hands, like it was warming him.

"You ever play pool? Your daddy ever take you into Sutland's?"

Hoyt shook his head.

"We got to do something wild before your folks get back tomorrow. We could go into town tonight."

Hoyt spread his hands out on the table and looked at his fingers. He traced the fingers on one hand with his index finger.

"That's where my dad used to meet his girlfriend."

"She's not his girlfriend. She's just something that happened," he said, putting his elbows on the table. "That happens sometimes to adults. You know what I mean? You read books."

Hoyt looked up at him.

"He loves your mama. He was just acting crazy because your mama was sick. We all do crazy things."

Hoyt nodded

"They're your folks, though." Phil said, taking a drink. "They'll figure this out. You'll see."

"Were you married?"

Phil shook his head, then finished his drink. "That wasn't for me," he winked at Hoyt. "Let's get that dog. Bring her along too."

AS THEY DROVE HOYT TURNED THE RADIO UP and the two men sang with the windows down. Hoyt drummed on the dashboard. Everything felt different; the world swirled and blended together around him. His head was light and his hands were heavy. Cherry stuck her head out the window and Hoyt joined in. He'd never felt wind like this. It woke him up, frightened him, and made him feel as though he were fast asleep, all at once.

"What's wrong with this wind?" he asked.

"It's not real," Phil said, smiling. "We're making it."

All Hoyt knew of bars he'd learned from reading books about sailors and ports and from listening in to his mother yell at his father for spending so much time there. Nothing good came out of bars, was his thought, and it made him nervous, and excited, that Phil was so casual about bringing him along.

Inside, the bar was just a large room with a few people sitting around drinking and a young couple playing cards. Hoyt looked around, expecting a man to come charging out of a back room with a broken bottle and a torn shirt, but he just saw some skinny farmhands playing pool. The barman smiled and drew up a bowl of water for Cherry.

"What'll it be?"

Phil looked at Hoyt, then back at the man. "A coke and a stick of jerky for the kid. We're living it up tonight. Put it on his dad's bill."

After the farmhands finished up Hoyt and Phil took over the pool table. He gave the basic rules first and then walked him through each step, from how to choose a cue to how to angle the shots. Phil had him do everything at least three times; after three times, he said, you're starting to get it. By the time they started playing an actual game Hoyt was confident he had some idea what he was doing.

Plus he'd stopped seeing double. Phil kept the cokes coming.

After two games his hands didn't feel so heavy. The

bar was getting crowded and Phil motioned to two girls who were waiting for the table.

"Now these two young ladies have been waiting. I'm going to ask if they want to play along with us, you okay with that? Just for fun."

"Okay."

Phil brought the girls over and Hoyt stood at the back of the table nervously passing the cue back and forth in his hands. He hoped Phil wouldn't introduce them. That they'd just start playing and he could take his shots and stand in the back.

"Hoyt," Phil said. "Come meet our competition. This here's Tasha and Georgia."

The girls were older than Hoyt but it didn't seem like by very much. It was hard to tell; it was dark and the girls had make-up on. Hoyt hadn't spoken to a girl since he finished school a year ago. He caught himself staring, but he couldn't stop. He had no idea what to say.

The young woman with dark hair, Tasha, seemed not to notice. Or she was polite enough not to say anything. "I've been watching you play," she smiled. "You're good. You probably got a table at your house or something."

"He has been playing for an impressive amount of time," Phil said, putting his arm around him.

"Is that your dad?"

"No. He's my uncle. That's my dog." He pointed at Cherry, who got up from underneath the table and came over.

Tasha stuck her hand out and Cherry licked it. The dog sat down beside the two of them.

Now instead of being anxious about the game Hoyt was concerned with the fact that now he had to stand here and talk with a girl. She was so confident; she joked easily with him and Phil; she leaned against the wall, sat in various chairs. She was the sort of girl who looked like she was comfortable anywhere.

Hoyt could hardly steady the cue he was so nervous. They managed a close game, but still narrowly lost. The girls cheered and put their hands in the air.

"Thanks," Tasha said, walking back to the bar with her friend. "It was nice to meet you. And Cherry!"

Hoyt sat down at a small table and Phil brought over a glass of whiskey.

"This isn't over yet," Phil said, taking a sip. "Have a little drink of this and go and ask that girl to dance. I put on the easy stuff." Phil filled the jukebox with Glenn Camp-

bell, Don Williams, knowing full well the only dancing Hoyt could do was two stepping. Hoyt's mother gave him lessons from the time he could walk, thinking that even if he wasn't the most social boy, there was still a chance he'd find a nice girl if he knew how to dance.

"You just say one word to her, and if she says 'no' you come back over here. Easy as that."

Hoyt took a sip. It burned his throat and cleared out his nose.

TASHA WAS SITTING AT THE BAR with Georgia, who was talking with a bearded man.

"Hi," Tasha said as he walked up.

"Dance?"

Hoyt stood just like Phil had told him, with his back against the bar. He made like he was perfectly content if Tasha didn't turn and speak to him.

"Can you dance, Kid, or are you just asking?"

He put out his hand. She took it.

His mother taught him not to be brash when he danced. No fancy swings and turns. It's more impressive, she said, leading him into a turn, to be consistent. "Don't focus on impressing the rest of the room. Just focus right here." She tilted his head up and tapped him on the nose. "Right here. Look at me."

So he did. For the first time that night he looked straight at Tasha. Dancing was something he knew, something he could do in his sleep. She looked over his shoulder, at the lights on the jukebox. Then, as the song kept on, she met his eyes.

"How long have you been playing pool?"

"Two hours," he said.

She laughed, a nice full laugh. He'd never made a woman laugh before and it felt good. It felt good to be dancing with her.

"How about dancing?"

"Longer." He spun her behind his back and she easily glided back in. "You?"

She nodded. "I love it but no one ever wants to dance with me except old men. You're just a kid."

As they spun around Hoyt felt the barman, the young couples, the old men in the back, watching them. These people had been there the week before when his mother stormed upstairs and found his father. They had seen, or heard about, how she shoved him up against the back door and hit him again and again and how he didn't fight

back. He was smiling. It was like, they told each other, he was a little kid and he'd wanted to get caught. He just wanted her attention again. These people kept feeding the jukebox because they knew about Hoyt, and they wanted him to keep dancing with a pretty girl.

HOYT SAT BETWEEN TASHA AND PHIL as they drove her home. Tasha shared the first floor of an old house with her blond friend and another girl, she said. The blond had left earlier.

"See, the lights are on. Melissa's home already."

"Melissa? I thought she said her name was Georgia," Phil said.

"You're not home yet," he said, getting out after her.

There was someone else in Hoyt's body now. Someone else was speaking for him, moving his limbs. He saw his arm go out and reach around Tasha's waist. He heard someone telling her he wanted to walk her to the door, to see she was home safe. Hoyt was somewhere deep inside – baffled, anxious, curious – along for the ride.

As they walked up the front walk, Phil got out of the truck and let Cherry out of the bed and into the cab. She was cold with the night air and Phil ran his hands up and down her coat to warm her.

"I would a never believed it," Phil said. "That's your man out there." He pointed out the windshield.



ADRIANNA ELY

"She wants people to call her Georgia. She thinks it's a classier name." She rolled her eyes. "I think it's an old fat lady name."

Phil laughed.

"Anyway, thanks for the ride." She opened the passenger's side door and Hoyt followed her out.

"What are you doing?" she said. She was smiling.

THE NEXT MORNING HOYT WOKE UP with an aching head. He lay in bed, looking up at the ceiling, thinking about last night. Did he really dance with a girl? And walk her to her door? He caught himself grinning. What would his father say? His mother would be proud, he knew. Today they were coming. There was so

much to tell them.

When he made his way downstairs he found a postcard of Mount Rushmore propped up on the kitchen table. There was a black mark smeared across the stone faces and Hoyt rubbed at it with his thumb. He flipped the card over.

Decided to keep moving west awhile and ended up seeing this. Beautiful. Will be gone a few days longer but will be back soon. Be good to Phil and try and be helpful. This number will be good for a few days if you would like to call. We love you very much. Your mother and father.

Hoyt threw the card across the room.

PHIL DIDN'T HAVE A PHONE SO after they finished the morning chores they drove into town to use the store phone. The men rode the whole way in silence.

When Hoyt first tried the number it rang and rang. He pictured the phone clattering in an empty motel room. He wondered if they had already moved on. After fifteen rings Hoyt hung up and listened to the quarters come banging down the coin return.

"Let's give it a few minutes," Phil said, handing him a paper. "Then we'll try again."

They read the news and talked with the store clerk. Phil smoked a cigarette.

"All right," he said, putting it out. "Try them now."

This time his mother answered on the third ring. She sounded out of breath, like she'd been running.

"Mom?"

"Oh, Hoyt! Honey, it's Hoyt. You doing all right out there? You being a help to Phil?"

"Yes. Mom,"

"That's good. Your father and I made it to Omaha and thought we were just so close to the Dakotas we'd just take a quick spin out. But you're all right, aren't you? You're with Phil and I'm sure you and Cherry are just having the best time."

She went on and on like that, not letting Hoyt get a word in edgewise. He'd never heard his mother this way. This was how he imagined she was when he was young, before she had gotten sick. With his parents not around, he felt out of place in a way he'd never felt. That he didn't belong. That he'd lost his sense of rootedness. Rootedness was a word he'd read recently in one of his books, and it

floated into his mind now. As she kept talking he pictured tall prairie flowers with their extensive root systems, the sort that keep them grounded and steady against the wind. He imagined pulling one up, pulling up those roots as long as the plant was tall, and throwing the whole thing into the wind.

He could still hear his mother talking as he handed the phone to Phil.

"Dahlia, just slow down," Phil said. "What is it you think you're doing?"

This time it was Phil's turn to talk. To tell Dahlia this wasn't any way to treat her son. When his voice rose, Hoyt could tell his father was on the phone. This phone call felt like the last tether on his root – or was it his parents' roots? – and once they hung up, it would all be loose. He didn't want to hear it. He already knew.

PHIL DIDN'T SAY ANYTHING as he climbed into the truck. Hoyt stared out the windshield. When they pulled free from town the land opened up and stretched to the horizon in all directions. Hoyt exhaled. He didn't realize until then that he'd been holding his breath.

"Your folks are going to be gone longer than they said," Phil said finally. He was still looking straight ahead.

"They're not coming back."

Phil shook his head. "Your parents are good people. They're good people and they love you, but they aren't thinking clearly. This isn't any way to treat someone." Phil put his hand on Hoyt's shoulder. "I could sure use your help with planting. If you're up for it."

Hoyt nodded.

"You'll stay here now. You'll stay with me." He paused. "Until they get back."

Hoyt put his hand up and touched Phil's hand. Phil grabbed hold of it and looked over at him. Hoyt could see his eyes were full of tears.

"You're a great kid." Phil let go of his hand and tousled his hair. "A real wonderful kid." He pulled out a handkerchief and blew his nose loudly.

WHEN THEY PULLED UP TO THE HOUSE Cherry came running over. She raced over to Hoyt and licked his hands.

"You know, the only downside to all this planting is we'll be out here for awhile. You won't be able to get in to see Tasha."

Hoyt shook his head. He hadn't thought about Tasha all day. It seemed silly to think about a girl right now.

"You ought to think about writing her a letter."

Hoyt shrugged.

"Ah, what's the harm?" Phil pushed open the back screen door. He never closed the house doors, let alone locked them. "If she doesn't want to hear from you, she won't write you back. You don't even have to see her. Besides," he kept on "girls love letters. It'll give her something to think about until she sees you."

"I'll think about it," he said. Phil smiled and let the door close behind him.

Hoyt sat on the stoop with Cherry, watching the sun fade into the edge of the sky. It took a long time for full on darkness to come.

THE NEXT MORNING Hoyt put a notebook in front of Phil's coffee.

Dear Tasha,

It was really nice to meet you the other night at Sutland's. I really enjoyed talking with you and playing pool. You are very pretty and nice and I would like to see you again but it will probably have to be after planting season, that's for the next few weeks. If you would like to write me I would like to hear from you.

X Hoyt

Phil smiled and put the notebook back down on the table.

"It's a start."

"A start?"

"This isn't a thank you note. Dahlia ever teach you to write a letter?"

Hoyt shook his head.

"Now." He turned to the next sheet of notebook paper and got out his pen. "Tell me what you've been doing lately."

Hoyt shrugged his shoulders. "Waiting around for my folks."

"Let's leave that for another letter. What else?"

"Planting. Weeding. I don't know, running with Cherry, talking to you."

"Good, good." He took some notes. "Have you been thinking about Tasha?"

"Yeah," he smiled. "I guess. I don't know."

Phil kept on like he hadn't heard him. "You got to tell her about yourself, tell her about your life, then you can talk about how you see her fitting into it."

"What?"

"Shoulders back," he said. "Confidence. What do you think about when you think of her? Put her in your mind."

And so they went. Phil continued taking notes and then turned the paper back to Hoyt. It was a list of phrases and words.

"Try it again. One paragraph about what you've been doing, then write about what you think of her. Try and mix some of these in there."

So he wrote. And he wrote it again and again until it was after twelve and the men were hungry.

"We haven't even been outside yet," Hoyt whined.

"Don't worry," Phil said, getting up to make some lunch. He was still in his slippers. "This'll get easier."

Dear Tasha,

The days are getting longer and I spend most of the time outside working. My uncle Phil runs a small farm, with chickens, and I've been learning the trade. It's good work and I'm glad to have it. Even though it's just the two of us out here, I feel connected to everything because I'm outside so much.

I've been thinking about you and you keep me company while I work. I would rather have you here, but the thought is okay for now. We will finish planting in two weeks. If you would like to see me then, please send me a letter. I would be happy to hear from you.

X Hoyt

There weren't any stamps in the house so Phil and Hoyt walked to the end of the driveway and put the letter in the mailbox with four eggs. "Now we wait," Phil said, putting the flag up.

PHIL DID HIS BEST TO KEEP HOYT BUSY. They planted in the mornings and in the afternoon Phil gave Hoyt driving lessons on the truck, starting first in the driveway, then moving onto the rarely-traveled gravel road.

After three weeks, the planting was finished and Hoyt could write a decent letter and drive stick shift. He and Tasha had a regular correspondence and now that planting was finished, they made plans to meet on Saturday

night. She wanted to see these driving lessons first-hand.

"You wear a cap when you're driving," Phil said. "You ain't supposed to be driving, you're too young, so you wear a cap. And no drinking. I'll be up when you get home and if you've been drinking you'll never drive this truck again."

"I won't," Hoyt promised. Hoyt nodded and shifted his balance from his right foot to his left. He'd stopped listening a long time ago.

"You're just about out of your skin," Phil smiled, handing him the keys. "Go on."

TASHA'S WINDOWS WERE OPEN and he could hear music playing. He stood outside of the truck for a minute, leaning against the door. Here he was, outside a girl's house, in town, with a truck he drove himself. He wanted to take it all in.

She met him on the front porch wearing jeans and a flannel shirt. Her hair was pulled back but a few strands were hanging in front of her face. She let them stay.

"C'mon," she said. "This way. I hope you got old shoes on."

The river wasn't deep but it was very cold, and when they settled on the sandbar they took their boots off to let their feet dry. Tasha lay back and let her fingers play in the water.

"I love this," she said. "This is my place. I found it last year when I moved up here. Did I tell you about it?"

Hoyt nodded.

"I forget what I write you and what I just think about telling you, you know?"

Hoyt didn't say anything. He'd never seen a river at night. The water looked like it was made of something else – ink, maybe – but when he put his hand in it was the same sensation as always.

"Did I tell you you're not that much younger than me?"

"Sort of," he said.

She kept looking up at the sky. Hoyt sat beside her and watched the river.

"I'm seventeen."

"That's older."

"Not much older." She turned her head to look at him. "Two years."

"You act older."

"You act older when you're out working on your own,

when your parents leave you."

Hoyt didn't say anything.

"If yours stay gone, you'll be my age in no time," she said, rolling back over. They sat like that for awhile, watching the night.

"Does it get any easier?"

"Like, do you ever stop thinking about them?" She kept her eyes on the sky. "I don't know. No. But at least yours left together. When you think about them, you can think about them being together. I never even knew my mother. If mine are still out there I know they're not together."

Hoyt imagined his parents camping, cooking food over a fire, huddled under a blanket. He always imagined them together. He had to admit there was, at least, some strange comfort in that.

She sat up suddenly and turned to him. "It won't get easier. But you're free. This little life is completely yours."

She got up and stuck her hand out. "Come on."

She pulled him up and, hand in hand, they climbed slowly out of the creek and up into a field. It was so black, so huge, it was like all the world's night was collected right here. It took him a minute of standing there, staring into the abyss, to realize she had let go of his hand.

He heard a whistling off to his right like a cardinal – high, low – and when he didn't respond he heard Tasha speak.

"Call it back."

He could hear her rustling through the prairie, but the sound was all around him. She could be right in front of him, or far away. There was no way to tell. She whistled again, and this time Hoyt returned the call. He couldn't see where he was standing, where his next step would take him. He started walking, then running in the direction of the last call. He ran with his arms outstretched. There wasn't anything in his way. ♣

Father of Two

Lucas Brown

My eldest child
calls himself an activist.
His tongue is spry at 6:30pm
when the mashed potatoes are set on hard oak
and his sister lilts into the room
with an expression of her inheritance.

As I serve myself a dollop the trial begins
and before the bowl reaches my son,
I, along with my daughter,
have been condemned.

He relishes the recitation of the case against us:

*Facebook and Google both claim data centers in North Carolina
They both rely upon Appalachian oil to run their machines
They both use over 300,000 gallons of fresh water daily
You Dad, and Lilly, are both active members*

I watch his last spoonful of mashed potatoes go into his mouth,
steaming, and from the very soil
that I have been nurturing for over two decades.
My daughter brushes off the castigation
and drives her fork into the asparagus.

Seldom are her words at the table,
where, since the death,
she practices her Vipassana
in company of those closest.
I haven't been able to share much with either of them.
They have their riddles, I mine,
and the in-house tropes
thinly veil our egos.

I want to tell them of my pleasures,
the subtle falling of leaves that give meaning to my rake (#1),
how I clock my neighbor Sisyphus
blowing leaves on windy days (#2).
I also cry, and I want to tell them why I do,
how the books I read salt my wounds
as they accentuate my failures.
(toss another log on the pyre of idealism)
yet I return to them daily for castigation,
on windy days as well.

When I shave (#3),
the mirror asks the question
Where do ideologues go after they die?
I never have an answer.
For the tragedy of isolation is the braille I feel on all surfaces,
and their mother, so affected by its lament,
gave way to its calling.
My son's twin (a Dogwood with two decades of rings)
stands firm in the front yard.
I can still see her holding them both
with oil-painted fingers.
Daniel in one hand, a Lowe's root ball in the other.
They were the few co-creations we had
outside of our private studios.
But the imprint of her hands
is now buried by foliage
and I'm left alone
to trim off any unhealthy branches (#4), though
now I leave it to my boy to prune himself.

Our daughter came as daffodils
furtively seeded by an omniscient wind
that passed between our skin one night after wine.
She has her mother's eyes,
pellucid puddles of rain on spring moss
that make you wish you were earth and nothing else.
As a baby I whispered her genus name
Narcissus...Narcissus...Narcissus
and looked at her mother for confirmation
as they lay enveloped in shaded summer hammock.
As Lilly aged I measured my worst fears
by the nuances of her sweet young face in growth
and the subsequent reduction of features
of my wife in atrophy.

Three years thereafter her paintings dried only in silhouettes.

Where do ideologues go after they die?

“Into the ground” she said.

These days I’m the one that is recommended literature.

He slips it above the bedside stand

then grows angry at my pace.

A note once read:

You have to read this Dad, as soon as possible.

If the insanity doesn’t stop then we’ll have nothing left.

I know you once thought the same.

I love you Dad.

The familiarity of his countenance is unsettling

for where has it gotten me?

Here? This day, where red n’ yellow leaves blow across a treated-plywood porch

that overlooks the final vista we decided to share together?

I weep and say thank you for what it’s worth.

Family dinner comes once a month (#5)

and I thank God (#6), aloud even,

“Thank you God”

before my children arrive.

At the table I listen,

I smile when called upon,

and coyly proffer fiscal responsibility when they least expect it (#7).

I also plan the next meal (#8),

(Sweet potatoes and venison)

for when my son tells me he’ll be home, Lilly too,

so we can sit and reconcile our differences.

A Seabird in the Forest

Nicholas Littman

Section 3(19) Endangered Species Act of 1973:

The term "take" means to harass, harm, pursue, hunt, shoot, wound, kill, trap, capture, or collect, or to attempt to engage in any such conduct.

Take Avoidance: No official definition found in ESA, CFR or Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) policies. However, take avoidance is promoted as the Official Marbled Murrelet Operational Policy of the Oregon Department of Forestry (ODF). This assures the worried public that ODF will use "reasonable and prudent measures" to "avoid direct take of marbled murrelets, and minimize the risk of any potential take incidental to management practices."

TAKE AVOIDANCE POLICY DID NOTHING TO ASSURE ME because, at the time, I was ignorant of ODF's official policy toward marbled murrelets. All I absorbed during a four-day training was how to properly survey for murrelets, why this finicky auk was hopelessly "threatened," and how to spot a shot-put-sized bird rocketing over a forty-square-foot section of sky at upwards of ninety-five miles per hour. In the predawn light, no less.

The training did confirm that my work would make a measurable difference. My employer, contracted to perform statewide murrelet surveys, dutifully explained that point counts conducted by surveyors would be used to develop "relative indices of abundance" and "inferences about bird-habitat relations." Although not directly used to gauge the fitness of the population, surveys would be essential to the Integrated Monitoring Program; the IMP, in turn, would guarantee protection for threatened murrelets.

Cursory mention of the "take avoidance" policy during training did not elicit any comments. Everyone was present to pass the training and become an official Marbled Murrelet Surveyor. If I processed the words at the time, they only provided assurance that all the necessary steps were being followed to advance the recovery of this unfortunately encumbered bird.

THE DAY BEGINS WITH THE WHISTLING WIZARD at 3:02 a.m. I imagine him as Dumbledore instead of

Gandalf — Gandalf would not whistle so pleasantly, so sonorously, nor would he have the patience to repeat the tune over and over and over until — up off the pad on the floor, dressed, cereal munched, coffee poured and in hand within fifteen minutes.

Driving now. Absorbing each hot sip of coffee into the belly. The fog has already engulfed my 1992 Silver Subaru Legacy into its heavy blackness. If the coastal lowlands remain clear, wisps soon dip into the headlights as I begin the ascent onto the backbone of the Coast Range.

From above, the car appears invisible, only a scruff, squeak, and grumble trundling blindly into a maze of roads. The maze halts at the designated borders of the Elliott State Forest, but the temperate rainforest proceeds, south to the Californian guardian redwoods, north to the Alaskan sentinel spruce, a continuous thread of wet, woody and variegated mass. Deep within the heat-soaked comfort of my Subaru the reach of shadows is infinite, the context overwhelming, the mission — daunting.

At the beginning of the trail reflective blue polka dots are spaced evenly on a brilliant white stripe hung to a roadside maple. Illumination of the pungent forest reveals polka dotted flags receding downwards into tunnels of moss-draped vine maples and waist-high sword ferns. Sturdy pants soak through quickly. Steps are guesses, trips, rolls, and improvised cartwheels. Footfalls are hardly delicate. Head is up and scanning for polka dots. Lose sight of all reflective plastic and the compass must be consulted. Meanwhile, precious seconds waddle away.

Mid-slope a choppy trill rises from the dark damp below. The tune gathers a wholesome and unpredictable complexity where the slope ends and the Millicoma River begins. A cadre of Douglas firs, western red cedars and western hemlocks tower around the meandering river, stalwarts of an ancient age. The fog's ceiling remains far above, clinging to the ridge tops.

A rock hop across the river and I arrive at the three polka-dotted flags, fastened together on a molding hemlock stump. Above the flags is a clearing in the trees. Of

course, that's why ODF picked it. And for the quality of habitat, too.

I'm one minute early for the survey so I swallow a few bites of PB&J. Neck rolls commence and exactly forty-five minutes before sunrise Pacific Daylight Time, my eyes swing attentively to the clearing.

"Start of survey," I announce into the handheld recorder. For twenty minutes, nothing is heard or seen but the rapid graying of a black sky. Whole silence. Neck already sore.

Whirring of the varied thrush comes first. Elemental — like an atom spun at incredible speed within a centrifuge, and then released in a hush. Now chirps, shrieks and songs layer quickly, peaking in symphonic brilliance five minutes before sunrise.

My watch indicates sunrise, but its rays rarely penetrate the shadowy glade. I attempt to accelerate time by avoiding glances at my watch. With my head still craning skyward, I stuff the Rite in the Rain journal, flagging, and the remains of my sandwich into my backpack five minutes early. At two hours precisely, my head drops. I follow the polka dot flags back to my Subaru and return to the pre-fab house by 9:00 a.m.

THE MARBLED MURRELET NEEDS MY HELP. This woe-ful, short-necked, long-winged, mottled-brown alcid — a relative of the puffin — evolved to build nests on wide limbs of old-growth trees. When mammoth firs, hemlocks and cedars blanketed the Coast Range such a life strategy was reasonable, even practical. They perched their nests high above the foxes and nestled deep beneath the mossy boughs — hidden from raptors' or corvids' glance. Parents dove for fish all day in the fertile waters off the Northwest coast. The nests required no parental investment; the platforms chosen were large enough to support a family.

Such adaptations only appear ill-informed when viewed from a perspective that resolves air, water, land and life into a rectangle of flat, pixilated color — in other words, a map.

Along the margins of the map we see the outline of the Elliott State Forest. A large tract of land bordering Reedsport to the north and Coos Bay to the south. Ninety-one percent of the Elliott's 93,000 acres are Common School Fund Land operated by the Oregon Department of Forestry. Their charge: to generate the

greatest amount of revenue for the state's public school system.

The splotches of dark purple scattered within the beige background are MMMA's — Marbled Murrelet Management Areas. MMMA's are patches where marbled murrelets have been spotted below canopy on multiple occasions. One sighting alone does not count. ODF officials must confirm these sites: If murrelets are flying below canopy, they are likely nesting there. And a known nest must be protected.

A perimeter is drawn around the occupied nests. The perimeter of the MMMA must be at least 200 acres — wait, a minimum of sixteen acres as of the 2011 Forest Management Plan. But make sure you include a buffer to those sixteen acres. "Buffers" are crucial — the State Forests Division makes a special point of that:

The MMMA also should include a buffer to the likely nesting habitat (see 1.1.G1.5.1) where appropriate...Several studies have noted a relationship between the distance from an edge and nest success. Researchers have found that nests located further from stand edges are more successful than those located closer to stand edges...

So they'd like to avoid edges. But I see an awful lot of beige touching purple. The only discernible commonality among MMMA's is a presence of murrelets and big trees. And you can't log — oh, wait, you can log in or adjacent to MMMA's, but only outside of nesting season. And murrelets do commonly reuse a nesting tree, especially where habitat reduction is significant. Of course, they can always fly to another patch; all together, the MMMA's cover 22,370 acres of the forest.

I DIDN'T HEAR OR SEE MURRELETS in the Elliott State Forest for the first month of surveying. Seeing the birds is a rarity — mostly they are heard sounding from the dense fog. In my first month, the sites I rotated through were all ensconced within the confines of MMMA's, enveloped by thick forest canopy. Perfect murrelet habitat, but no murrelets.

One day in early June, I visited a site outside my normal rotation. I drove for longer — well over an hour — twenty miles from the nearest coastline. The road led onto the apex of a high ridge. I parked where the small trees began. I walked down the spine for a mile, pushing through empty spaces between the colonies of firs and

wet spider webs. I stumbled into an untouched patch of firs and hemlocks. Three-hundred feet from the edge of the patch I found the triple blue polka dots. Here, I could look beyond the edges of this designated sanctuary. The typical shield of vine maples was absent, and as the light arrived I stole glances out past the trunks to the void below.

A strip of forest cascaded down the ridge before me. On either side, the strip saddled the ridge, but on the steep slopes below me there were only little, planted trees. And beyond? A quilt-work of deep green, thickly-blanketed trees interrupted by light green, thinly-sheeted, naked timber, stretching clear along the horizon from ridge to valley and back up to ridge. It was a land of gaping clearcuts and isolated patches.

Looking out on this landscape, I questioned my implicit culpability. I had already chosen not to use my voice to decry this scalping: I was not accustomed to hearing it, was ignorant to its power, and was content with my job. Who did I work for? The murrelets? The money? My own inflated sense of what was “good work”? I couldn’t decide if I wanted the murrelets to disappear from the Elliott State Forest. If they were gone from this patch-land, would the citizenry (or even the scientists — individuals like me who would rather describe a problem than solve a truth) have mobilized into a critical mass? Or would we have lamented a loss, conceded one more defeat, and turned our efforts to other problems?

As if on cue, the murrelets came “keer, keering” from above. A seabird in the forest. How odd. I looked up to see a pair whizzing low over my patch. They were mates chasing one another. They keered and careened over the valley below. Then they sheared through a wide curve and keered back overhead, returning to the sea.

I recorded “above canopy detection” and pondered how a murrelet would land. It was a rare sight. The first nest was not confirmed until 1974. Since then, only 160 have been cataloged in the written record. I imagined murrelets alighting with grace, hovering like a chubby hummingbird before touching down on their limb of choice.

That night, I slept beneath the big fragrant firs beside the melodious Millicoma, sheltered within a sacrosanct patch of forest. In the gray light far above the ridge, I watched that pair of murrelets emerge from

the forest. But now a volley of keering birds followed them, one after another until the sky was thick with angry beaked arrows. I shouted and waved them on. They alighted on every ancient tree within every corner of the forest, MMMA be damned. I hugged the nearest sentinel tree and murmured, “We did it.”

I AWOKE TO DARKNESS AND ANOTHER SURVEY. I did my job for the rest of the summer. I heard three more murrelets. At the end of the summer I still could not give a definition of “take avoidance” and I did not write ODF to lobby for a change in MMMA criteria. The next year, the 2011 Elliott State Forest Management Plan allowed the annual timber harvest to grow from 25 million to 40 million board feet annually. I did not write in outrage. I did recall clearly the keer-keer, the swoop, the turn, and the return of the murrelet to the ocean. My summer became more than time spent bumbling through the woods, searching hopelessly for a seabird. It became a realization that staring at the sky would not save the murrelet, that my actions were futile within a system that described a living bird as a “take,” and that I could not sit quietly and watch these birds disappear. Their existence is too unexpected, too mysterious, too necessary to let their keering vanish from the fog. ♪

Heaven on the Point System at the Petro Truck Stop

Jeffrey C. Alfier

The pulse of a clock blurs the borders between any two days of the week. Mumbling becomes shorthand that gets a bloodstream warm mercy in a stoneware cup that could be the very one you held in tired fists on any coast behind you.

My waitress is Kat, an avatar from somewhere else, bringing plates of breakfast no matter the hour, because truckers who sleepwalk from counters to washrooms and back mean it's dawn somewhere in the world.

Even storm clouds today wear the beleaguered faces of truck stop men. Families from town are here on rumors of the cheapest buffet about. I order the same meal each time, counting how many ways light can fall across my toast.

A trucker near me speaks of his commission and his grand cut of the payload. He calls Kat a good girl for not forgetting to bring his ketchup, and I know that's a trucker's way of falling in love this far from home.

She just lets those words slide off her smile – for she's the truck stop's 'Daymaker of the Month.' I hear the drizzle start to lessen on the roof, squint at the sun breaking on the streets outside, catch the wind-shadow of a child running past my window.

On Working in the Woods

Stephen Thomas

WHEN I FOUND THE BABY RACCOONS I was destroying their home. The mother had run off, I suppose, and there they were: two frightened, helpless animals — two raccoons, predators whose populations have been inflated by the presence of human trash and blackberry vines — two sentient beings with needs and desires of their own. Two lives, now cut short as I cut away the tangles of Himalayan blackberry that had sheltered them. I signaled my crew to head twenty yards downstream, reactivated my brush hog and got back to work.

HIMALAYAN BLACKBERRY, *RUBUS ARMENIACUS*. "Native" to Armenia, its range now covers much of the continental United States. It is particularly well-established in the Pacific Northwest, where it outcompetes native *R. ursinus* blackberries and just about every other native plant it encounters. In Oregon, where I was working that day, the blackberry winds its way along the length of streams in what we are pleased to call "disturbed" areas, choking out native elderberry, ninebark and Douglas spirea, leaving no room for young alder, oak, and ash trees. Nor are riparian habitats alone in their vulnerability. Dense blackberry thickets appear in lowlands and in the mountains, anywhere the land has been — here's that word again — "disturbed."

And it's not just blackberry. Scotch broom is as great a problem, and even more difficult to remove with its thick taproot and habit of scattering hundreds of seeds every time it is pulled. In areas where the "disturbance" consisted of herds of cattle, canary grass often takes over when blackberry is removed. In the serpentine formations of the Coast Range, yellow star thistle, seeds arriving in the wheels of logging trucks, takes over, leaving no room for native wildflowers like the extraordinarily rare and delicate cat's ear.

On the coast, European beachgrass outcompetes native Oregon dune grass. The first I heard of this, I was working for a youth conservation corps, leading a crew of ten in yet another invasive species removal project. "Grass is grass," I thought, and I was wrong. Oregon dunegrass grows in such a way that flowing dunes ap-

pear, creating habitat for rare species such as the western snowy plover. But beachgrass, when it dies, piles up on itself, creating dense hills of organic matter. That matter becomes soil, as matter does on this planet, thick hills of soil in which the root structures of shore pine and Sitka spruce become established. And thus the forest crosses the dunes and reaches the sea, the dunes fade away, and the forest's denizens — native foxes and raccoons, invasive cats and Norwegian rats — have that much easier a time getting to the slow moving plover. The plover is now endangered. I watched a woman of my acquaintance, an employee of the Bureau of Land Management tasked with protecting plover habitat — a large, strong woman, whose employment history includes teaching martial arts to police officers — break down in tears as she described her decades-long and ultimately futile efforts to keep the deadly forests at bay.

I WAS WORKING FOR A YOUTH CONSERVATION CORPS when I discovered the raccoons. There are dozens of these organizations in the country, with names like Northwest Youth Corps (Eugene, OR); Southwest Conservation Corps (Tucson, AZ); Mile High Youth Corps (Denver, CO); Vermont Youth Conservation Corps (Richmond, VT). All are descendants of the Civilian Conservation Corp, one of the most successful of Franklin Roosevelt's New Deal programs in the 1930's. They vary, but the basic model goes like this: A crew of ten young people (usually 18 to 24) heads out into the woods, led by one or two leaders in their late twenties or early thirties. There they carry out tasks assigned to them by their contacts in Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, building hiking trails, restoring habitat, or (the most common) clearing invasive species.

And in the process they learn and grow together, and the young people who come Back From The Woods are not the same as the ones who left their home six or ten weeks ago. They have endured hardship and privation. They've had to sleep on the ground, work long days, and wipe their asses with rocks. They've seen the beauty of the natural world on high mountain peaks and remote valleys, and endured nature's wrath in sudden storms and punishing heat. They've gained confidence in themselves, a new respect for the natural world, and an unshakable bond which often leads to lifelong friendships. As their crew leader, you witness and shepherd

this transition, and participate in it yourself. You don't make much money, but the work you do is valuable, and you can answer with pride the next time someone asks you "So what do you do?" Indeed, that conversation usually ends with the other person expressing their jealousy and their wish that they could "go do something like that" someday, if only the cable company, the mortgage lender, and Sallie Mae would just start paying themselves.

It's the ideal sort of work for the ideal sort of transplanted East Coast refugee that populates America's Western lands.

WHO HAS THE RIGHT TO DETERMINE LIFE AND DEATH? In his reinterpretation of the myth of Genesis, Daniel Quinn suggested that the Tree of Good and Evil represented just this sort of knowledge. Adam and Eve, mythical hunter-gatherers, ate of the Tree of Knowledge, and thereafter, imbued with the ability to choose who may live (cows, chickens, barley) and who may die (wolves, foxes, cedar forests) promptly invented farming and herding, urban settlement patterns, scientific forestry, the Haber-Bosch process and the Bureau of Land Management.

From its origins in the Fertile Crescent, the story goes on, agricultural civilization spread across the Earth. Over seven thousand years every wild ecosystem and every wild people civilization encountered was conquered, until today in North America hardly a square mile of forest, mountain or field, hardly a stream or lake exists which is not managed by one sort of bureaucracy or another. Officially, "wilderness" in the United States consists of 100 million acres of designated wilderness areas under the management of the United States Forest Service. Hundreds of millions of additional acres of coast and oak-land, river and mountain are under the direct management of the Forest Service or the Bureau of Land Management, whose goals are both economic and ecological.

THE BLM, THE FOREST SERVICE. The Department of Fish and Wildlife. The Park Service. The United

States Department of the Interior. Modern, centralized, highly rational bureaucracies, every one of them, every one dedicated to the organization, regimentation, codification—to the scientific management of the land under its control. I say "the land," but of course there is no such thing as land. When we say "land" we are referring to thousands, millions, billions of living beings, sentient beings with feelings and desires all their own, who inhabit a place and interact with one another in a million diverse ways, producing the communities we call "ecosystems." When we talk about "land management," we're talking about the forcible control over living beings.

And this has been the point from the beginning. The state, and its tool, the bureaucracy, has from its inception had as its goal the conquest of additional land and the management of land — "land" meaning humans, animals, trees, farms, streams, forests, and meadows — already under its control. "Land management," then — the conquest and forcible control over living beings, human and nonhuman — is the goal and essence of statecraft, and has been from the beginning.

In *Seeing Like a State*, an in-depth exploration of how state bureaucracies control land, cities, and populations, anthropologist James Scott explored the evolution of state land management in the form of "scientific forestry." "The early modern European state," Scott writes "viewed its forests primarily through the fiscal lens of revenue needs." Forests, from the viewpoint of the state (and of modern corporate bureaucracies) are not living communities hosting myriad diverse life forms, including human beings. Indeed, in this view, the needs of humans are excluded as much as are the needs of bears, or fir trees, or raccoons.

"Exaggerating only slightly," Scott continues, "one might say that the crown's interest in forests was resolved into a single number: the revenue yield of the timber that might be extracted annually."

The difference between that time and this time is only this: Today several additional numbers have been added to the calculations of the state bureaucracy.

In the techniques of the land-managing bureaucracies, we see the application of administrative technology to wild ecosystems and wild beings. Himalayan

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blackberry, European beach grass, and Scotch broom, are “invasive,” bad, and must be eliminated. The western snowy plover is good, and may live — no, must live — but only in this thousand acre enclosure set aside for it. North of the enclosure dune buggies are permitted. Two miles away is the elk viewing area, also under BLM management, where elk must live. Ten miles east of that is the Elliott State Forest, where two hundred year old trees must be sold to timber companies and clear cut in order to prop up the county's education budget.

Some must live and some must die. Some must live because the Endangered Species Act mandates their protection. Some must live because they are native species, and must be preserved. Some must die because they are invasive species, and must be removed. Some must die because their flesh is valuable timber, and must be sold. This place is for the plover, that place is for the dune buggy, and a third is for the elk. Live where you are told to live, die when you are told to die.

The all-seeing state decides.

“**E**VERYONE FAN OUT, form a line from the ridge to the trees,” I order. And my troops, teenagers dressed in blue shirts and orange hardhats, do as they are told. “We're going to sweep along the dunes and get every scotch broom we can.”

We spend the next eight hours forcing our way through a scotch broom thicket that has covered the dunes here on the North Spit, just north of Coos Bay, Oregon. At the end of the day we've covered nearly a mile. We're weary, sore, but proud of the work we've done. That night, our contact at the Bureau of Land Management visits us in our camp. She thanks us for our work, joins us for dinner and teaches us about the long term efforts to save the western snowy plover, and it's there that she breaks down in tears as she contemplates this bird disappearing forever from the Earth.

We clean up dinner and head to bed, my co-leader and I staying up a bit to finish some paper work. In the morning we'll head back out. It isn't his first time here on the North Spit, nor mine either. Every year the youth corps sends at least two crews here, to work with the BLM. The scotch broom, the beach grass—they're here to stay. And so are we.

In a few weeks the season will end. My crew will disperse, and I will head back home. On the train, someone will ask me “What do you do?” and I will swell with pride as I tell him. And I am proud. I teach young people to appreciate the natural world and to have confidence in themselves. I help the western snowy plover and the cat's ear flower. I sleep on the ground at night and wake with the sun in the morning. I work with my hands and my mind, and I see beauty that those confined in the city never experience.

And I am a tool of the state. The state decides, and I act — I, and a thousand others like me: idealistic, often young, ecologically conscious, even radical. We look for jobs working “in the woods,” jobs as conservation corps crew leaders and backpacking guides and seasonal Forest Service employees. We do it because we want to escape the urban society into which we are born and its burden of human rules and laws and state authority. But the very existence of the conservation corps and wilderness therapy organizations, of the BLM and the Forest

Service and of such legal entities as designated wilderness areas are, as Thomas Birch wrote in “The Incarceration of Wildness,” an “attempt to bring the law to wildness, to bring the law to the essence of otherness, to impose civic law on nature.”

Instead of escaping civilization, we bring civilization with us — but even that is too kind; it implies we could have left it behind. In fact, we are there, doing what we do, because civilization, the state, has already conquered the wilderness, and we are there to impose the edicts of the conqueror. This one must live, that one must die. Here a trail, there a clearcut.

I'm not saying I have a way out. In fact, I sent my resume to Southwest Conservation Corps just last night. Soon enough I'll be back out there, digging hiking trails and teaching young people the value of team work. Perhaps you will too, and I don't blame you — it's good work. But let's not pretend it's anything more than what it is. Let's realize that we're tools of the state, whose reach extends across the surface of the earth. Let's understand how pervasive state control is, how state control really works —

After all, you need to understand how a thing works if you're going to destroy it. ♣

After all, you need to understand how a thing works if you're going to destroy it.

JEFFREY C. ALFIER has work appearing or forthcoming in *Connecticut Review*, *Dos Passos Review*, and *South Carolina Review*. His latest chapbook is *The City Without Her* (Kindred Spirit Press, 2012), and his first full-length book of poems, *The Wolf Yearling*, will be published in 2012 by Pecan Grove Press.

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DOUG DAVIS is a conservationist, filmmaker, and photographer who inspires people to connect with the natural environment. For his most recent documentary, *Connecting the Continent*, Doug biked from Mexico to Canada along the spine of the Rockies to raise awareness for wildlife corridors. His work can be viewed at www.dougdavisphoto.com.

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JENNER HARSHA is a fourth-generation western wanderer. She seasonally migrates into the finest American mountains; as the skies shift, she may be found attempting domesticity over a gas-range in a sunflowered apron, procured at the local craft bazaar, circa '96.

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SEAN PRENTISS used to use his hands and fingers to build trails and chain-saw trees. He now uses his hands while teaching at Norwich University in the Green Mountains of Vermont. The anthology he is co-editing on the art and philosophy of creative nonfiction, *The Far Edges of the Fourth Genre*, is forthcoming from Michigan State University Press in 2013.

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