

I'M WITH THE BEARS

MARGARET ATWOOD

PAOLO BACIGALUPI

T. C. BOYLE

TOBY LITT

LYDIA MILLET

DAVID MITCHELL

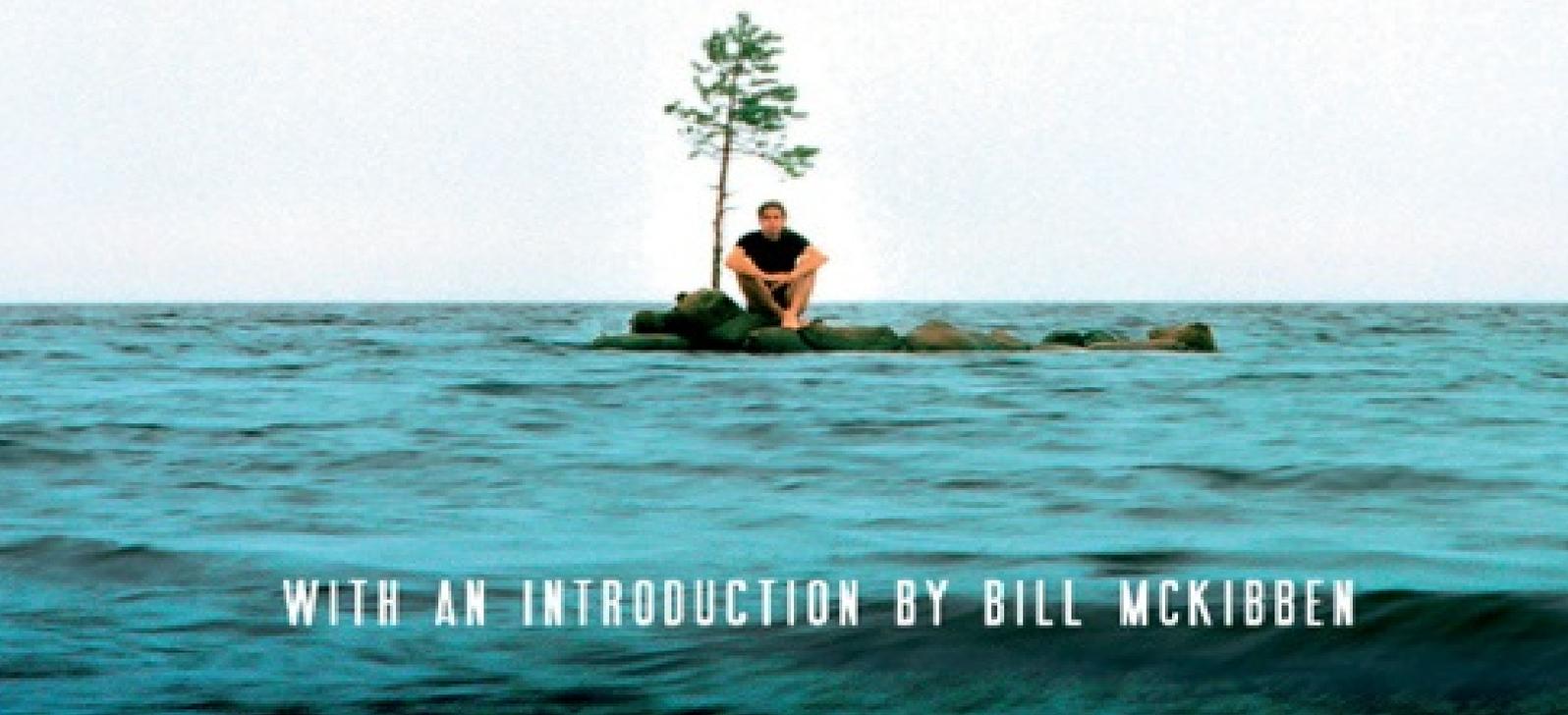
NATHANIEL RICH

KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

HELEN SIMPSON

WU MING 1

SHORT STORIES FROM A DAMAGED PLANET



WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY BILL MCKIBBEN

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Introduced by Bill McKibben

Edited by Mark Martin



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~~—John Muir said that if it ever came to a war between the races, he would side with the bear.
That day has arrived.~~

—Dave Foreman

“Strategic Monkeywrenching”

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INTRODUCTION

by Bill McKibben

The problem with writing about global warming may be that the truth is larger than usually makes for good fiction. It's pure pulp. Consider the recent past—consider a single year, 2010. It's the warmest year on record (though not, of course, for long). Nineteen nations set new all-time temperature records—in Pakistan, in June, the all-time mark for the entire continent of Asia fell, when the mercury hit 128 degrees.

And heat like that has Technicolor effects. In the Arctic, ice melt galloped along—both the northwest and northeast passages were open for the first time in history, and there was an impromptu yacht race through terrain where even a decade before no one had ever imagined humans being able to travel. In Russia, the heat rose like some inverse of Dr. Zhivago; instead of the Ice Palace, huge walls of flame as the peat bogs around Moscow burned without cease. The temperature had never hit a hundred degrees in the capital but it topped that mark eight times in August; the drought was so deep that the Kremlin stopped all grain exports to the rest of the world, pushing the price of wheat through the roof (and contributing at least a portion to the unrest that gripped countries like Tunisia and Egypt).

And in Pakistan? Oh good God. Here's how it works: warm air holds more water vapor than cold, so the atmosphere is about four percent moister than it was forty years ago. This loads the dice for deluge and downpour, and in late July of 2010 Pakistan threw snake eyes: in the mountains, which in a normal year average three feet of rain, twelve feet fell *in a week*. The Indus swelled till it covered a quarter of the nation, an area the size of Britain. It was the first of at least six mega-floods that stretched into the early months of 2011, and some were even more dramatic—in Queensland, Australia a landscape larger than France and Germany was inundated. But Pakistan—oh good God. Six months later four million people were still homeless. And of course they were people who had done literally nothing to cause this cataclysm—they hadn't been pouring carbon into the atmosphere.

That's our job—that's what we do in the West. And it's why a book like this is of such potential importance. Somehow we have to summon up the courage to act. Because here's the math: everything that I described above, all the carnage of 2010, comes with one degree of global warming. It's a taste of the early stages of global warming—but only the early stages. Scientists tell us with robust consensus that unless we act very soon (much sooner than is economically or politically convenient) that one degree will be four or five degrees before the century is out. If one degree melts the Arctic, put your poetic license to work. Your imagination is the limit; as one NASA research team put it in 2008, unless we reduce the amount of carbon in the atmosphere quickly, we can't have a plan "compatible with the one on which civilization developed and to which life on earth is adapted."

So far our efforts to do anything substantial about that truth have been thwarted, completely. The fossil fuel industry has won every single battle, usually with some version of this argument: doing anything about climate change will cause short-term economic pain. And since we can understand and imagine the anguish of short-term economic pain (think of the ink spilled, and with good reason, over the recession of the last few years) we make it a priority. Since global warming seems, almost b

definition, hard to imagine (after all, it's never happened before) it gets short shrift. Until the changes, we'll take none of the actions that might ameliorate our plight.

And here science can take us only so far. The scientists have done their job—they've issued every possible warning, flashed every red light. Now it's time for the rest of us—for the economists, the psychologists, the theologians. And the artists, whose role is to help us understand what things *feel* like. These stories are an impressive start in that direction, and one shouldn't forget for a moment that they represent a real departure from most literary work. Instead of being consumed with the relationships between people, they increasingly take on the relationship between people and everything else. On a stable planet, nature provided a background against which the human drama took place; on the unstable planet we're creating, *the background becomes the highest drama*. So many of these pieces conjure up that world, and a tough world it is, not the familiar one we've loved without even thinking of it. Those are jolts we dearly need; this is serious business we're involved in.

But to shift, of course, the human heart requires not just fear but hope. And so one task, perhaps, of our letters in this emergency is to help provide that sense of what life might be like in the world past fossil fuel. Not just a bleak sense, but a bright one; a glimpse of what a future might look like when a community begins to replace consumption. It's not impossibly farfetched—even in the desperate last decade, the number of farms in the U.S. rose for the first time in a century and a half, as people discovered the farmer's market, and as a new generation started to learn the particular pleasures and responsibilities that most of mankind once knew on a daily basis; in that sense, we've had writers like Wendell Berry who have been working this ground for a long time.

Of course, in the end, the job of writers is not to push us in some particular direction; it's to illuminate. To bear witness. With climate change we face the biggest single thing human beings have ever done, so big as to be almost invisible. By pointing it out, the world's writers help pose the question for the final exam humanity now faces: was the big brain adaptive, or not? Clearly it can get us into considerable hot water. In the next few years we'll find out whether that big brain, hopefully attached to a big heart, can get us out.

by T. C. Boyle

This is the way it begins, on a summer night so crammed with stars the Milky Way looks like a white plastic sack strung out across the roof of the sky. No moon, though—that wouldn't do at all. And no sound, but for the discontinuous trickle of water, the muted patter of cheap tennis sneakers on the ghostly surface of the road and the sustained applause of the crickets. It's a dirt road, a logging road in fact, but Tyrone Tierwater wouldn't want to call it a road. He'd call it a scar, a gash, an open wound in the body corporal of the forest. But for the sake of convenience, let's identify it as a road. In daylight, trucks pound over it, big D7 Cats, loaders, wood-chippers. It's a road. And he's on it.

He's moving along purposively, all but invisible in the abyss of shadow beneath the big Douglas firs. If your eyes were adjusted to the dark and you looked closely enough, you might detect his three companions, the night disarranging itself ever so casually as they pass: now you see them, now you don't. All four are dressed identically, in cheap tennis sneakers blackened with shoe polish, two pairs of socks, black tees and sweatshirts, and, of course, the black watchcaps. Where would they be without them?

Tierwater had wanted to go further, the whole nine yards, stripes of greasepaint down the bridge of the nose, slick rays of it fanning out across their cheekbones—or better yet, blackface—but Andre talked him out of it. She can talk him out of anything, because she's more rational than he, more aggressive, because she has a better command of the language and eyes that bark after weakness like hounds—but then she doesn't have half his capacity for paranoia, neurotic display, pessimism or despair. Things can go wrong. They do. They will. He tried to tell her that, but she wouldn't listen.

They were back in the motel room at the time, on the unfledged strip of the comatose town of Grants Pass, Oregon, where they were registered under the name of Mr. and Mrs. James Watt. He was nervous—butterflies in the stomach, termites in the head—nervous and angry. Angry at the logger in Oregon, the motel room, her. Outside, three steps from the door, Teo's Chevy Caprice (anonymous gray, with the artfully smudged plates) sat listing in its appointed slot. He came out of the bathroom with a crayon in one hand, a glittering, shrink-wrapped package of Halloween face paint in the other. There were doughnuts on the bed in a staved-in carton, paper coffee cups subsiding into the low fiberboard table. "Forget it, Ty," she said. "I keep telling you, this is nothing, the first jab in a whole long bout. You think I'd take Sierra along if I wasn't a hundred percent sure it was safe? It's going to be a stroll in the park, it is."

A moment evaporated. He looked at his daughter, but she had nothing to say, her head cocked in a way that indicated she was listening, but only reflexively. The TV said, "—and these magnificent creatures, their range shrinking, can no longer find the mast to sustain them, let alone the carrion." He tried to smile, but the appropriate muscles didn't seem to be working. He had misgivings about the whole business, especially when it came to Sierra—but as he stood there listening to the insects sizzle against the bug zapper outside the window, he understood that "misgivings" wasn't exactly the word he wanted. Misgivings? How about crashing fears, terrors, night-sweats? The inability to swallow? The heart ground up like glass?

There were people out there who weren't going to like what the four of them were planning to do that road he didn't want to call a road. Bosses, under-bosses, heavy machine operators, CEOs, power lunchers, police, accountants. Not to mention all those good, decent, hard-working and terminal misguided timber families, the men in baseball caps and red suspenders, the women like tent houses, people who spent their spare time affixing loops of yellow ribbon to every shrub, tree doorknob, mailbox and car antenna in every town up and down the coast. They had mortgages, trailer bass boats, plans for the future, and the dirt-blasted bumpers of their pickups sported stickers that read *Save a Skunk*, *Roadkill an Activist* and *Do You Work for a Living or Are You an Environmentalist*. They were angry—born angry—and they didn't much care about physical restraint, one way or the other. Talk about misgivings—his daughter is only thirteen years old, for all her Gothic drag and nose ring and the cape of hair that drapes her shoulders like an advertisement, and she's never participated in an act of civil disobedience in her life, not even a daylight rally with minicams whirring and supporting cast of thousands. "Come on," he pleaded, "just under the eyes, then. To mask the glow."

Andrea just shook her head. She looked good in black, he had to admit it, and the watchcap, riding low over her eyebrows, was a very sexy thing. They'd been married three months now, and everything about her was a novelty and a revelation, right down to the way she stepped into her jeans in the morning or pouted over a saucepan of ratatouille, a thin strip of green pepper disappearing between her lips while the steam rose witchily in her hair. "What if the police pull us over?" she said. "Even think of that? What're you going to say—'The game really ran late tonight, officer'? Or 'Gee, it was a great old-timey minstrel show—you should have been there.' " She was the one with the experience here—she was the organizer, the protestor, the activist—and she wasn't giving an inch. "The trouble with you," she said, running a finger under the lip of her cap, "is you've been watching too many movies."

Maybe so. But you couldn't really call the proposition relevant, not now, not here. This is the wilderness, or what's left of it. The night is deep, the road intangible, the stars the feeblest mementos of the birth of the universe. There are nine galaxies out there for each person alive today, and each of those galaxies features 100 billion suns, give or take the odd billion, and yet he can barely see where he's going, groping like a sleepwalker, one foot stabbing after the other. This is crazy, he's thinking this is trouble, like stumbling around in a cave waiting for the bottom to fall out. He's wondering if the others are having as hard a time as he is, thinking vaguely about beta carotene supplements and night-vision goggles, when an owl chimes in somewhere ahead of them, a single wavering cry that says it has something strangled in its claws.

His daughter, detectable only through the rhythmic snap of her gum, asks in a theatrical whisper that could be a spotted owl, "I mean hopefully, by any chance?"

He can't see her face, the night a loose-fitting jacket, his mind ten miles up the road, and he answers before he can think: "Don't I wish."

Right beside him, from the void on his left, another voice weighs in, the voice of Andrea, his second wife, the wife who is not Sierra's biological mother and so free to take on the role of her advocate in all disputes, tiffs, misunderstandings, misrepresentations and adventures gone wrong: "Give the kid a break, Ty." And then, in a whisper so soft it's like a feather floating down out of the night, "Sure it is honey, that's a spotted owl if ever I heard one."

Tierwater keeps walking, the damp working odor of the nighttime woods in his nostrils, the taste of it on his tongue—mold transposed to another element, mold ascendant—but he's furious suddenly. He doesn't like this. He doesn't like it at all. He knows it's necessary, knows the woods are being raped and the world stripped right on down to the last twig and that somebody's got to save it, but still he doesn't like it. His voice, cracking with the strain, leaps out ahead of him: "Keep it down, will you? We're supposed to be stealthy here—this is illegal, what we're doing, remember? Christ, you'd think

we were on a nature walk or something, *And here's where the woodpecker lives, and here the giant forest fern.*"

A chastened silence, into which the crickets pour all their Orthopteran angst, but it can't hold. One more voice enters the mix, an itch of the larynx emanating from the vacancy to his right. This is Teo Van Sparks, a.k.a. Liverhead. Eight years ago he was standing out on Rodeo Drive, in front of Sterling's Fur Emporium, with a slab of calf's liver sutured to his shaved head. He'd let the liver get ripe—three or four days or so, flies like a crown of thorns, maggots beginning to trail down his nose—and then he'd tear it off his head and lay it at the feet of a silvery old crone in chinchilla or a starling parading through the door in white fox. Next day he'd be back again, with a fresh slab of meat. Now he's a voice on the EF! circuit (*Eco-Agitor*, that's what his card says), thirty-one years old, a weightlifter with the biceps, triceps, lats and abs to prove it, and there isn't anything about the natural world he doesn't know. At least not that he'll admit. "Sorry, kids," he says, "but by most estimates they're down to less than five hundred breeding pairs in the whole range, from BC down to the Southern Sierra, so I doubt—"

"Fewer," Andrea corrects, in her pedantic mode. She's in charge here tonight, and she's going to rein them all in, right on down to the finer points of English grammar and usage. If it was just a question of giving out instructions in a methodical, dispassionate voice, that would be one thing—but she's so supercilious, so self-satisfied, cocky, bossy. He's not sure he can take it. Not tonight.

"Fewer, right. So what I'm saying is, more likely it's your screech or flammulated or even your great gray. Of course, we'd have to hear its call to be sure. The spotted's a high-pitched hoot, usually in groups of fours or threes, very fast, crescendoing."

"Call, why don't you," Sierra whispers, and the silence of the night is no silence at all but the screaming backdrop to some imminent and catastrophic surprise. "So you can make it call back. Then we'll know, right?"

Is it his imagination, or can he feel the earth slipping out from under him? He's blind, totally blind, his shoulders hunched in anticipation of the first furtive blow, his breath coming hard, his head hammering at the walls of its cage. And the others? They're moving down the road in a horizontal line like tourists on a pier, noisy and ambling, heedless. "And while we're at it," he says, and he's surprised by his own voice, the vehemence of it, "I just want to know one thing from you, Andrea—did you remember the diapers? Or is this going to be another in a long line of, of—"

"At what?"

"It. The subject of stealth and preparedness."

He's talking to nothing, to the void in front of him, moving down the invisible road and releasing strings of words like a street-gibberer. The owl sounds off again, and then something else, a rattling harsh buzz in the night.

"Of course I remembered the diapers." The reassuring thump of his wife's big mannish hand patting the cross-stitched nylon of her daypack. "And the sandwiches and granola bars and sunblock too. You think I don't know what I'm doing here? Is that what you're implying?"

He's implying nothing, but he's half a beat from getting excruciatingly specific. The honeymoon is over. He's out here risking arrest, humiliation, physical abuse and worse—and for her, all for her, because of her, anyway—and her tone irritates him. He wants to come back at her, draw some blood, get a good old-fashioned domestic dispute going, but instead he lets the silence speak for him.

"What kind of sandwiches?" Sierra wants to know, a hushed and tremulous little missive inserted into the envelope of her parents' bickering. He can just make out the moving shape of her, black against black, the sloped shoulders, the too-big feet, the burgeoning miracle of tofu-fed flesh, and this is where the panic closes in on him again. What if things turn nasty? What then?

"Something special for you, honey. A surprise, okay?"

“Tomato, avocado and sprouts on honey wheat-berry, don’t spare the mayo?”

A low whistle from Andrea. “I’m not saying.”

“Hummus—hummus and tabouleh on pita. Whole wheat pita.”

“Not saying.”

“Peanut butter-marshmallow? Nusspli?”

A stroll in the park, isn’t that what she said? Sure, sure it is. And we’re making so much racket w
might as well be shooting off fireworks and beating a big bass drum into the bargain. What fun, huh
The family that monkeywrenches together stays together? But what if they are listening? What if th
got word ahead of time, somebody finked, ratted, spilled the beans, crapped us out? “Look, really,” he
hears himself saying, trying to sound casual, but getting nowhere with that, “you’ve got to be quiet
I’m begging you—Andrea, come on. Sierra. Teo. Just for my peace of mind, if nothing else—”

Andrea’s response is clear and resonant, a definitive non-whisper. “They don’t have a watchman,
keep telling you that—so get a grip, Ty.” A caesura. The crickets, the muffled tramp of sneakered feet
the faintest sougning of a night breeze in the doomed expanse of branch and bough. “Tomorrow night
they will, though—you can bet on it.”

It’s ten miles in, and they’ve given themselves three and a half hours at a good brisk clip, no stops for
rest or scholarly dissertations on dendrology or Strigidae calls, their caps pulled down tight, individual
water rations riding their backs in bota bags as fat and supple as overfed babies. They’re carrying
plastic buckets, one apiece, the indestructible kind that come with five gallons of paint at Dunn
Edwards or Colortone. The buckets are empty, light as nothing, but tedious all the same, rubbing
against their shins and slapping at the outside of his bad knee just over the indentation where the
arthroscope went in, scuffing and squeaking in a fabricated, not-made-for-this-earth kind of way. But
there’s no talking, not any more, not once they reach the eight-mile mark, conveniently indicated by
tiny day-glo EF! sticker affixed to the black wall of a doomed Douglas fir—a tree that took root here
five hundred years before Columbus brought the technological monster to a sunny little island in the
Caribbean.

But Tierwater wouldn’t want to preach. He’d just want to explain what happened that night, how
stuck in him like a barbed hook, like a bullet lodged too close to the bone to remove, and how it was
the beginning, the real beginning, of everything to come.

All right.

It’s still dark when they arrive, four-fifteen by his watch, and the concrete—all thirty bags of it—
there waiting for them, not ten feet off the road. Andrea is the one who locates it, with the aid of the
softly glowing red cap of her flashlight—watchman or no, it would be crazy to go shining lights on
here—and the red, she explains, doesn’t kill your night vision like the full glare of the white. Silently
they haul the concrete up the road—all of them, even Sierra, though sixty pounds of dead weight is
real load for her. “Don’t be ridiculous, Dad,” she says when he asks if she’s okay—or whispers
actually, whispers didactically—“because if Burmese peasants or coolies or whatever that hard
weigh more than I do can carry hundred and twenty pound sacks of rice from dawn to dusk for
something like thirty-two cents a day, then I can lift this.”

He wants to say something to relieve the tension no one but him seems to be feeling, something
about the Burmese, but they’re as alien to him as the headhunters of the Rajang Valley—don’t some
of them make thirty-six cents a day, the lucky ones?—and the best he can do is mutter “Be my guess
into the sleeve of his black sweatshirt. Then he’s bending for the next bag, snatching it to his chest and
rising out of his crouch like a weightlifter. The odd grunt comes to him out of the dark, and the th
whine of the first appreciative mosquitoes.

In addition to the concrete, there are two shovels and a pickaxe secreted in the bushes. Without

word, he takes up the pick, and once he gets his hands wrapped round that length of tempered oak once he begins raising it above his head and slamming it down into the yielding flesh of the road, he feels better. The fact that the concrete and the tools were here in the first place is something to cheer about—they have allies in this, confederates, grunts and foot soldiers—and he lets the knowledge that soothe him, his shoulders working, breath coming in ragged gasps. The night compresses. The pick lifts and drops. He could be anywhere, digging a petunia bed, a root cellar, a grave, and he begins to think he's having an out-of-body experience when Andrea takes hold of his rising arm. "That's enough, Ty," she whispers.

Then it's the shovels. He and Teo take turns clearing the loose dirt from the trench and heaving it into the bushes, and before long they have an excavation eighteen inches deep, two feet wide and twelve feet across, a neat black line spanning the narrowest stretch of the road in the roseate glow of Andrea's flashlight. It may not be much of a road by most standards, but still it's been surveyed, dozed, cleared and tamped flat, and it brings the machines to the trees. There's no question about it—the trucks have to be stopped, the line has to be drawn. Here. Right here. *Our local friends have chosen well*, he thinks, leaning on the shovel and gazing up into the night where two dark fortresses of rock, discernible now only as the absence of stars, crowd in over the road: block it here and there's no way around.

They're tired, all of them. Beat, exhausted, zombified. Though they dozed away the afternoon at the Rest Ye May Motel and fueled themselves with sugar-dipped doughnuts and reheated diner coffee, the hike, the unaccustomed labor and the lateness of the hour are beginning to take their toll. Andrea and Teo are off in the bushes, bickering over something in short, sharp explosions of breath that hit the air like body blows. Sierra, who has an opinion on everything, is uncharacteristically silent, a shadow perched on a rock at the side of the road—she may want to save the world, but not at this hour. He can hardly blame her. He's sapped too, feeling it in his hamstrings, his shoulders, his tender knee, and when he tries to focus on anything other than the stars, random spots and blotches float across his field of vision like paramecia frolicking under the lens of a microscope. But they're not done yet. Now it's the water. And again, their comrades-in-arms have chosen well: shut your eyes and listen. That's right. That sound he's been hearing isn't the white noise of traffic on a freeway or the hiss of a styler clogged with lint—it's water, the muted gargle of a stream passing into a conduit not fifty feet up the road. This is what the buckets are for—to carry the water to the trench and moisten the concrete. They're almost home.

But not quite. There seems to be some confusion about the concrete, the proportion of water to mix it in, and have any of them—even he, son of a builder and thirty-nine years on this earth—ever actually worked with concrete? Have any of them built a wall, smoothed out a walk, set bricks? Teo once watched a pair of Mexican laborers construct a deck round the family pool, but he was a kid then and it was a long time ago. He thinks they just dumped the bags into a hand-cranked mixer and added water from the hose. Did they need a mixer, was that the problem? Andrea thinks she can recall setting fence-posts with her father on their ranch in Montana, and Tierwater has a vague recollection of watching his own father set charges of dynamite on one of his jobsites, stones flung up in the air and bang and bang again, but as far as concrete is concerned, he's drawing a blank. "I think we just dump the bags in the trench, level it out and add water to the desired consistency," he concludes with all the authority of a man who flunked chemistry twice.

Andrea is dubious. "Sounds like a recipe for cake batter."

Teo: "What consistency, though? This is quick-set stuff, sure, but if we get it too runny it's never going to set up in two hours, and that's all we've got."

A sigh of exasperation from Sierra. "I can't believe you guys—I mean three adults, and we come all the way out here, with all this planning and all, and nobody knows what they're doing? No wonder m

generation is going to wind up inheriting a desert.” He can hear the plaintive, plangent sound of his bony hands executing mosquitoes. ~~“Plus, I’m tired. Really like monster-tired. I want to go home to bed.”~~

He’s giving it some thought. How hard could it be? The people who do this for a living—laying concrete, that is—could hardly be confused with geniuses. “What does it say on the package? Are there any directions?”

“Close one eye,” Andrea warns, “because that way you don’t lose all your night vision, just in case I mean, if anybody—” and then she flicks on the flashlight. The world suddenly explodes in light, and it’s a new world, dun-colored and circumscribed, sacks of concrete like overstuffed brown pillows, the pipestems of their legs, the blackened sneakers. He’s inadvertently closed his good eye, the one that sees up close, and he has to go binocular—and risk a perilous moment of night-blindness—to read what it says on the bag.

King Kon-Crete, it reads, over the picture of a cartoon ape in sunglasses strutting around a wheelbarrow, *Premium Concrete. Mix Entire Bag with Water to Desired Consistency. Keep Away From Children.*

“Back to consistency again,” Teo says, shuffling his feet round the bag, and that’s all that can be seen of him, his feet—his diminutive feet, feet no bigger than Sierra’s—in the cone of light descending from Andrea’s hand. Tierwater can picture him, though, squat and muscular, his upper body honed from pumping iron and driving his longboard through the surf, his face delicate, his wrists and ankles tapered like a girl’s. He’s so small and pumped he could be a special breed, a kind of human terrier, fearless, indefatigable, tenacious, and with a bark like—but enough. They need him here. They need him to say, “Shit, let’s just dump the stuff and get it over with.”

And so they do. They slit the bags and let the dependable force of gravity empty them. They haul the water in a thickening miasma of mosquitoes, swatting, cursing, unceremoniously upending the buckets atop the dry concrete. And then they mix and slice and chivvy till the trench is uniform, filled with something like cold lava, and the hour is finally at hand. “Ready, everybody?” Tierwater whispers. “Teo on the outside, Andrea next to Teo—and Sierra, you get in between me and Andrea, okay?”

“Aren’t you forgetting something?” This is Andrea, exhausted, but reclaiming the initiative.

He looks round him in the dark, a wasted gesture. “No, what?”

A slight lilt to the tone, an edge of satisfaction. She’s done her homework, she’s seen the movie, memorized the poem, got in touch with her inner self. She has the information, and he doesn’t. “The essential final step, the issue you’ve been avoiding all week except when you accused me of forgetting it—*them*, I mean?”

Then it hits him. “The diapers?”

Eighteen per package, at \$16.99. They’ve had to invest in three different sizes—small, medium and large, for Sierra, Andrea and Teo, and himself, respectively—though Andrea assures him they’ll use them up during the next direct action, whenever and wherever that may be. Either that, or give the money away to volunteers. They’re called, comfortingly enough, *Depends*, and on her advice they’ve chosen the Fitted Briefs for Extra Absorbency. He can’t help thinking about that for just the smallest slice of a moment—*Extra Absorbency*—and about what it is the diapers are meant to absorb.

There’s a moment of silence there in the dark, the naked woods crepitating round them, the alertness of the birds already calling out for dawn, when they’re all communally involved in a very private act. The sound of zippers, the hopping on one foot, arms jerked out for balance, and then they’re diapered and the jeans rise back up their legs to grab at their bellies and buttocks. He hasn’t worn diapers—pads, as the professionals euphemistically call them so as not to offend the Alzheimer’s patients and other walking disasters who have to be swathed in them day and night—since he was an infant, and he

doesn't remember much of that. He remembers Sierra, though, mewling and gurgling, kicking his shit-besmear'd legs in the air, as he bent to the task on those rare occasions when her mother, who performed her role perfectly, was either absent or unconscious. They feel—not so bad, not yet anyway. Like underwear, like briefs, only thicker.

And now, finally, the time has come to compete the ritual and settle down to slap mosquitoes, slumber fitfully and await the first astonished Freddie's (Forest Service types) and heavy machinery operators. They join hands for balance, sink their cheap tennis sneakers into the wet concrete as deep as they'll go, and then ease themselves down on the tapered bottoms of their upended buckets. He will be miserable. His head will droop, his back will scream. He will bait mosquitoes and crap in his pants. But it's nothing. The smallest thing, the sacrifice of one night in bed with a book or narcotized in front of the tube—that, and a few hours of physical discomfort. And as he settles in, the concrete gripping his ankles like a dark set of jaws, the stars receding into the skullcap of the silvering sky and even a bird alive in every tree, he tells himself *Somebody's got to do it*.

He must have dozed. He did doze—or sleep, would be more accurate. He slumped over his knees, propped his head to rest and drifted into unconsciousness, because there was no sense in doing anything else, no matter his dreads and fears—nothing was going to happen till seven-thirty or eight at the earliest, and he put all that out of his mind and orchestrated his dreams to revolve around a man in bed, a man like him, thin as grass but big across the shoulders, with no gut or rear end to speak of and the first tentative fingers of hair loss massaging his skull, a man in an air-conditioned room in blissful deep non-REM sleep with something like Respighi's "The Birds" playing softly in the background.

And what does he wake to? Is it the coughing wheeze of a poorly tuned pickup beating along the road, the single mocking laugh of a raven, the low-threshold tocsin of his daughter's voice, soft and supple and caught deep in her throat, saying, "Uh . . . Dad. Dad, wake up?" Whatever it is, it jerks him up off the narrow stool of the bucket in one explosive motion, like a diver surging up out of the deepest pool, and he tries to lift his feet, to leap, to run, to escape the hammering in his chest. But his feet are locked in place. And his body, his upper body, is suddenly floundering forward without support, even as the image of the burnt-orange pickup with its grinning bumper and the swept-back mask of the glassed-in cab comes hurtling down the road toward him, toward *them* . . . but the knee joint isn't designed to give in that direction, and even in the moment of crisis—*Jesus Christ, the shithead's going to hit us!*—he lurches back and sits heavily and ignominiously on the bucket though even now is squirting out from under him. "Stop!" He roars, "Stop!" against a background of shrieks and protests, and somehow he's on his feet again and reaching out to his left, for his daughter, to pull her to him and cradle her against the moment of impact . . . Which, mercifully, never comes.

He wouldn't want to talk about the diapers, not in this context. He'd want to address the issue of the three intensely bearded, red-suspended timber people wedged into the cab of that pickup, the scorching orange Toyota 4x4 that comes to rest in a demon-driven cloud of dust no more than ten feet from them. And the looks on their faces—their seven-thirty-in-the-a.m. faces, Egg McMuffins still warm in their bellies, searing coffee sloshed in their laps, the bills of their caps askew and their eyes crawling across their faces like slugs. This is the look of pure, otherworldly astonishment. (*Don't blame these men—or not yet, anyway. They didn't expect us to be there—they didn't expect anything other than maybe a tardy coyote or a suicidal ground squirrel—and suddenly there we were, like some manifestation of the divine, like the lame made to walk and the blind to see.*)

"Oh, God," Andrea murmurs, and it's as if the air has been squeezed out of her lungs, and they're all standing now, erect and trembling and holding hands for lack of anything better to do. Tierwater cuts a swift glance from the stalled pickup to the face of his daughter. It's a tiny little dollop of a face, shrunken and drawn in on itself, the face of the little girl awake with the terror of the night and the

scratchy voice and the need for reason and comprehension and the whispered assurance that the world into which she's awakened is the ancient one, the imperturbable one, the one that will go on twisting round its axis whether we're here to spin it or not. That face paralyzes him. What are they thinking? What are they doing?

"Christ Jesus, what is goin' on here?" comes the voice of the pickup, the unanimous voice concentrated in the form of the pony-tailed and ginger-bearded head poking through the open window of the wide-swinging driver's side door. "You people lost or what?" A moment later, the rest of the speaker emerges, workboots, rolled-up jeans, a flannel shirt in some bleached-out shade of tartan plaid. His face is like an electric skillet. Like a fuse in the moment of burning out. "What in Christ's name is wrong with you? I almost—you know, I could of—" He's trembling too, his hands so shaky he has to bury them in his pockets.

Tierwater has to remind himself that this man—thirty-five, flat dead alcoholic eyes, the annealed imprint of a scar like a brand stamped into the flange of his nose—is not the enemy. He's just earning his paycheck, felling and loading and producing so many board feet a year so middle-class Americans can exercise their God-given right to panel their family rooms and cobble together redwood picnic tables from incomprehensible sets of plans. He's never heard of Arne Naess or Deep Ecology or the mycorrhizal fungi that cling to the roots of old growth trees and make the forest possible. Russ Limbaugh wrote his bible, and the exegesis of it too. He has a T-shirt in a drawer at home that depicts a spotted owl in a frying pan. He knows incontrovertibly and with a kind of unconquerable serenity that all members of the Sierra Club are "Green Niggers" and that Earth Forever! is a front for Bolshevik terrorists with homosexual tendencies. But he's not the enemy. His bosses are.

"We're not letting you through," Teo announces, and there he is, a plug of muscle hammered into the ground, anchoring the far end of the human chain. All he needs is a slab of liver.

The other two have squeezed out of the truck by now, work-hardened men, incongruously bellied, looks of utter stupefaction on their faces. They just stare.

"What are you," the first man wants to know, the driver, the one in faded tartan, "environmentalist or something?" He's seen housewives, ministers, schoolchildren, drug addicts, drunks, ex-con jockeys, ballplayers, maybe even sexual deviates, but you can tell by the faltering interrogatory lift of the question that he's never in his life been face-to-face with the devil before.

"That's right," Tierwater says, radicalized already, gone from suburban drudge to outside agitator in eight months' time, "and you ought to be one too, if you want to keep your job beyond next year or even next month." He glances up at the palisade of the trees, needles stitched together like a quilt, the sun stalking through crowns and snags in its slow progress across the sky, and then he's confronting those blunted eyes again. And this is the strange part: he's not in bed dreaming, but actually standing in the middle of a concrete trench in a road in the middle of nowhere, wearing diapers and giving a speech—at seven-thirty in the morning, no less.

"What are you going to cut when all the trees are gone? You think your bosses care about that? You think the junk bond kings and the rest of the suits in New York give the slightest damn about you or your children or the mills or the trees or anything else?"

"Or retirement," Teo puts in. "What about retirement? Huh? I can't hear you. Talk to me. Talk to me, man, come on: *talk to me.*"

He isn't one for debate, this man, or consorting with environmentalists either. For a long moment he just stands there staring at them—at Tierwater, at Sierra, Andrea, Teo, at their linked hands and the alien strip of concrete holding them fast at the ankles. "Piss on you," he says finally, and in a concerted move he and his companions roll back into the pickup and the engine fires up with a roar. A screech of tires and fanbelt, and then he's reversing gears, jerking round and charging back down the road in the direction he came from. They're left with dust. With the mosquitoes. And the sun, which

has just begun to slash through the trees and make its first radiant impression on their faces and hands and the flat black cotton and polyester that clothe them.

“I’m hungry. I’m tired. I want to go home.”

His daughter is propped up on her bucket, limp as an invertebrate, and she’s trying to be brave, trying to be an adult, trying to prove she’s as capable of manning the barricades as anybody, but it isn’t working. The sun is already hot, though it’s just past ten by Tierwater’s watch, and they’ve long since shed their sweatshirts. They’ve kept the caps on, for protection against the sun, and they’ve referred to their water bags and consumed the sandwiches Andrea so providentially brought along, and what they’re doing now is waiting. Waiting for the confrontation, the climax, the reporters and TV cameras, the sheriff and his deputies. Tierwater can picture the jail cell, cool shadows playing off the walls, the sound of a flushing toilet, a cot to stretch out on. They’ll have just long enough to close their eyes, no fears, no problems, events leaping on ahead of them—bailed out before the afternoon is over, the EF! lawyers on alert, everything in place. Everything but the sheriff, that is. What could be keeping him?

“How much longer, Andrea? Really. Because I want to know, and don’t try to patronize me either.”

He wants to say, *It’s all right, baby, it’ll be over soon*, but he’s not much good at comforting people, even his own daughter—Bear up, that’s his philosophy. Tough it out. Think of the Mohawks whose captives had to laugh in the face of the knife, applaud their own systematic dismemberment, cry out in mirth as their skin came away in bloody tapering strips. He leaves it to Andrea, who can encourage in a voice that’s like a salve. Numbed, he watches her reach out to exchange Sierra’s vampire novel (which, under the circumstances, hasn’t proved lurid enough) for a book of crossword puzzles.

Teo, at the opposite end of the line, is a model of stoicism. Hunched over the upended bucket like a man perched on the throne in the privacy of his own bathroom, his eyes roaming the trees for a glimpse of wildlife instead of scanning headlines in the paper, he’s utterly at home, unperturbed, perfectly willing to accept the role of martyr, if that’s what comes to him. Tierwater isn’t in his league, and he’d be the first to admit it. His feet itch, for one thing—a compelling, imperative itch that brings tears to his eyes—and the concrete, still imperceptibly hardening, has begun to chew at his ankles beneath the armor of his double socks and stiffened jeans. He has a full-blown headache to the kind that starts behind the eyes and works its way through the cortex to the occipital lobe and back again in pulses as rhythmic and regular as waves beating against the shore. He has to urinate. Even worse, he can feel a bowel movement coming on.

Another hour oozes by. He’s been trying to read—Bill McKibben’s *The End of Nature*—but his eyes are burning and the relentless march of premonitory rhetoric makes him suicidal. Or maybe homicidal. It’s hot. Very hot. Unseasonably hot. And though they’re all backpackers, all four of them exposed regularly to the sun, this is something else altogether, this is like some kind of torture—like the sweat box in *The Bridge on the River Kwai*—and when he lifts the bota bag to his lips for the hundredth time, Andrea reminds him to conserve water. “The way it’s looking,” she says, and here is the voice of experience, delivered with a certain grim satisfaction, “we could be here a long time yet.”

And then, far off in the distance, a sound so attenuated they can’t be sure they’ve heard it. It’s the sound of an internal combustion engine, a diesel, blat-blatting in the interstices between dips in the road. The noise grows louder, they can see the poisoned billows of black exhaust, and all at once a bulldozer heaves into view, scuffed yellow paint, treads like millwheels, and the bulbous face of determination and outrage at the controls. The driver lumbers straight for them, as if he’s blind, the shovel lowered to reap the standing crop of them, to shear them off at the ankles like a row of dried-out cornstalks. Tierwater is on his feet suddenly, on his feet again, reaching out instinctively for his

daughter's hand, and "Dad," she's saying, "does he know? Does he know we can't move?"

It's the pickup truck all over again, only worse: the four of them shouting till the veins stand out on their necks, Andrea and Teo waving their arms over their heads, the sweat of fear and mortal tension prickling at their scalps and private places, and that's exactly what the man on the Cat wants. He knows perfectly well what's going on here—they all do by now, from the supervisors down to the surveying crews, and his object is intimidation, pure and simple. All those gleaming pumping tons of steel in motion, the big tractor treads burning up the road and the noise of the thing, still coming at them at full speed, and Tierwater can't see the eyes of the lunatic at the controls—*shades, he's wearing mirror shades that give him an evil insectoid look, no mercy, no appeal*—and suddenly he's outraged, ready to kill: this is one sick game. At the last conceivable moment, a raw-knuckled hand jerks back a lever and the thing rears like a horse and swivels away from them with a kind of mechanized grace he wouldn't have believed possible.

But that's only the first pass, and it carries the bulldozer into the wall of rock beside them with a concussive blast, sparks spewing from the blade, the shriek of one unyielding surface meeting another, and Tierwater can feel the crush of it in his feet, even as the shards of stone and dirt rain down on him. He's no stranger to violence. His father purveyed it, his mother suffered it, his first wife died of it—the most casual violence in the world, in a place as wild as this. He's new at pacifism or masochism or whatever you'd want to call what they're suffering here, and if he could free his legs for just half a minute, he'd drag that tight-jawed executioner down off his perch and instruct him in the laws of the flesh, he would. But he can't do a thing. He's caught. Stuck fast in the glue of passive resistance, Saiyama, Mahatma and Rosa Parks and James Meredith flashing through his mind in quick review. And he's swearing to himself *Never again, never*, even as the man with the stick and eight tons of screaming iron and steel swings round for the second pass, and then the third and the fourth.

But that's enough. That's enough right there. Tyrone Tierwater wouldn't want to remember what that did to his daughter or the look on her face or the sad sick feeling of his own impotence. The sheriff came, with two deputies, and he took his own sweet time about it. And what did he do when he finally did get there? Did he arrest the man on the Cat? Close down the whole operation and let the courts decide if it's legal to bulldoze a dead zone through a federally designated roadless area? No. He handcuffed the four of them—even Sierra—and his deputies had a good laugh ripping the watch-caps off their heads, wadding them up and flinging them into the creek, and they caught a glimpse of the curtains parting on redneck heaven when they cut the straps of the bota bags and flung them after the hats. And then, for good measure, smirking all the while, these same deputies got a nice little frisson out of kicking the buckets out from under Tierwater and his wife and daughter and good friend, one at a time, and then settling in to watch them wait three interminable hours in the sun for the men with the sledgehammers.

Andrea cursed the deputies, and they cursed her back. Teo glared from the cave of his muscles. Tierwater was beside himself. He raged and bellowed and threatened them with everything from aggravated assault to monetary damages and prosecution for police brutality—at least until the sheriff, Sheriff Bob Hicks of Josephine County, produced a roll of duct tape and shut his mouth for him. And his daughter, his tough, right-thinking, long-haired, tree-hugging, animal-loving, vegetarian daughter—she folded herself up like an umbrella over the prison of her feet and cried. Thirteen years old, tired, scared, and she just let herself go. (*They shuffled their workboots and looked shamefaced then, those standard-issue badge-polishers and the Forest Service officials who drove up in a green Jeep to join them—they probably had daughters themselves, and sons and dogs and rabbits in their hutch—but there was nothing any of them could do about my little girl's grief. Least of all me.*)

Grateful for a day's reprieve, the Pacific salamanders curled up under the cover of their rocks, the martens retreated into the canopy and the spotted owls winked open an eye at the sound of that thud.

disconsolate wail of human distress. Tierwater's hands were bound, his mouth taped. Every snuffle, every choked-back sob, was a spike driven into the back of his head.

Yes. And here's the irony, the kicker, the sad, deflating and piss-poor denouement. For all they went through that morning, for all the pain and boredom and humiliation, there wasn't a single reporter on hand to bear witness, because Sheriff Bob Hicks had blocked the road at the highway and wouldn't let anyone in—and so it was a joke, a big joke, the whole thing. He can remember sitting there frying like somebody's meal with a face, no ozone layer left to protect them from the sun, no water, no hat and no shade and all the trees of the world under the axe, while he worked out the conundrum in his head: If a protest falls in the woods and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?

ZOOGOING

by Lydia Millet

The zoo was on the edge of a wide desert valley, with a view of cactus-dotted hills above and, in the flats spread out beneath, flocks of small white houses. He went there after a meeting in Scottsdale, to fill an empty afternoon. He was restless in his hotel and had seen the zoo in a tourist brochure, with a picture of a wolf.

In a series of arid gardens connected by pathways there was a hummingbird enclosure and an aviary, a beaver pond and a pool for otters; there were Mexican parrots squawking, bighorn sheep on artificial cliffs, an ocelot curled up in a rocky crevice and a sleek bobcat pacing restlessly. He passed a lush pollinator garden and a series of low and inconspicuous buildings; an elderly, white-haired docent stood with a watchful bird perched on her hand, waiting for interest. He wandered over and looked at the bird closely. It had large eyes in a beautiful face, and was compact but fierce looking.

“American kestrel,” said the docent. “One of the smaller raptors. This gal is almost nine inches long, but weighs less than four ounces. Beautiful, isn’t she?”

A few minutes later he stood bracing himself with his hands on a low wall over a moat. Across the moat slept a black bear on a sunny ledge. This was a zoo of animals native to the region, and though bears did not live in the hot flatlands a handful of them still roamed the piney mountains that rose above the desert floor. He had read that every so often a bear was found dead atop a power pole, where it had climbed suddenly in terror, escaping from a car or a noise, and been electrocuted.

He watched the bear sleep, and in the lull of the sun and the heat and the stillness felt like dozing off himself.

Then the stillness was disturbed by yelling boys, hitting each other in the face. The father, in shorts, stood at T.’s elbow, looking down into his camera and adjusting a ring on the lens. A projectile—someone had lobbed a balled-up piece of litter. It hit the bear a glancing blow on the ear and he stirred, disoriented, turned around once and then settled down again.

“Too soon, I wasn’t set up yet. Missed the shot,” said the man, shaking his head. “Go again.”

The wife looked around for something else to throw and T. felt heat filling his face. A tension bowed in him: he felt a rush of fury.

“Are you kidding?” he asked, turning to the wife. She wore large mirrored sunglasses. “You’re throwing garbage at the bear? For a *picture*?”

“What’s the big deal?” said the family man.

“Don’t do it,” said T. His shoulders were fluid and nervy, his face shining. He was enraged. Content excited. But all here, he thought: and *I will kill them*. Even though he knew it was a posture, he felt the anger and relished it.

The man shrugged and the wife began rifling through her purse, apparently ignoring him; a few feet away one of the flailing children, a thin boy in khaki camouflage pants, was already lofting a second missile, a foam cup half-full of brown slush. The cup missed the bear and fell into the moat below and the slush slung out of the cup as it arced past and dimpled the bear’s dark coat. The bear reared up again, doubly confused.

The thin boy jeered.

T. turned to the father, who was still fumbling with his zoom lens. A split second of hesitation. “You let your kid do that again, I swear to God I’ll grab that camera and break it open on the cement,” he said.

He realized his molars were grinding. He had never done this, never. Never anything—. He was thrilled and at the same time he hated the man, hated his wife and even his children.

“Mind your own business,” said the family man.

“I’m dead serious. I’ll smash it to fucking bits.”

“I’ll sue you!”

“What are you thinking? Seriously. What does someone like you think? Do you think?”

“Stupid bear!” jeered the camouflage kid.

“Mind your business,” said the family man again.

“It is my business,” said T. “Just like it would be if you threw garbage at my sister. What don’t you get about that? Is there an argument for what you’re doing?”

“Let’s just go, Ray,” said the wife.

“I got a squirt gun,” said the kid, and pulled it out: the size of an assault rifle, bright pink.

“Don’t even think about it,” said T., and looked at the father. His neck tensed, his hands flexed.

“Tell him to put that thing away. I’ll punch your face. I mean it.”

The man was squaring off, his eyes narrowed. He let his camera rest against his chest, the dangling lens cap swinging.

“Tell *me* how to handle my kid? He can squirt his water gun at the bear if he wants to.”

“You disgusting. Piece. Of shit,” said T.

The wife tugged urgently on her husband’s sleeve.

“Come on, Ray.”

After a moment the family man turned, his wife beside him and the kids ranging around them both. As they turned a corner the kid in camouflage pants whipped around and sneered, sticking up the middle fingers of both hands before he disappeared.

T. felt the adrenaline surge fade but still he burned. He wanted to hunt them down and punish them. But he did not. He did not utter a word of complaint to the zoo’s management. He was flooded with elation.

He was elated. This was who he was, he thought; he was a person who would defend, who would swear and threaten and feel the heat and the cliff-edge of opinion. He felt good—better than good. He stood there for seconds, or was it forever?—stood there partway in rapture, struck.

On its flat rock the bear was still turning blearily round, tossing its head as though trapped in a nightmare. Finally it resettled itself and laid its chin on its paws to go back to sleep.

He went back that night when the zoo was closed, thrilled, as if he was lightly drunk, at the illicitness in himself. It was new. What arrested him in the zoo was the wildness it contained—how far this was from the realm of his competence. He wanted to meet it. He knew the zoo animals lived in cages but nothing more about them except that they were alone, most of them, not only alone in the cages, often but alone on the earth, vanishing. Their condition was close to what he was trying to grasp, like somehow at the base of his growing suspicion that the ground was no longer fixed, was shifting beneath him.

Empire only looked good built against a backdrop of oceans and forests. It needed them. If the oceans were dead and the forests replaced by pavement even empire would be robbed of its consequence. *Alone*, he thought—a word that came to him more and more, in singsong like a jeer. In the zoo the rare animals might have been orphaned or captured or even born in captivity. He had no

idea where they came from, could not know their individual histories. But he knew their position, he knew his own: they were at the forefront of aloneness, like pioneers. They were the ones sent ahead to see what the new world was like.

Would they tell what they saw?

The rarest animal in the zoo was a Mexican gray wolf, the one pictured in the tourist brochure, a animal that was apparently frail and aging. Its fur looked mangy; it had been asleep when he was there earlier. The wolf's pen, as the sign posted on it told him, was a temporary setup during construction of a new exhibit. It was nothing more substantial than a chain-link fence near the road, with barbed wire curling along the top.

He looked at his shoes: round toes. He should be able to wedge them into the holes. He shoved his flashlight in his pocket, hooked his fingers through the mesh and pulled himself up, kicking forward with purchase. His feet flailed against the fencing and his fingers were already bruising, imprinted with purple lines. Speed was the key, he thought, move quickly. He always had reasons for each singular action, but he had no good reasons for doing this. Was he irrational? But it lifted him. He would follow the question to its resolution, even if the question was unconscious.

He was not even all the way up the six-foot fence when he regretted his tactics. He had to get down from here, the pressure on the pads of his fingertips, which he feared were going to be sliced clean through. In a scramble he grabbed the metal frame the wire was stretched on and went up and over, catching barbs on his chest and thighs. His leg, halfway over, was tangled in the wire, and struggling he lost his foothold. Falling he tried to launch himself forward, away from the barbs.

When he recovered, on the ground with an aching neck and shoulders, he had a sharp pain in his leg. Sitting up he saw he had grazed his calf on a cactus as he fell. Through the thin cotton of his pants his leg was bleeding, and in the dark he could see white spines sticking through the fabric. He stood unsteadily, bracing himself against the fence; he could make out almost nothing. He walked around the cactus, lifting his flashlight. In the dark he could imagine not only wolves but almost anything, a secret menagerie. He was filled with the rush of this, with the idea of myriad creatures materializing from the blackness. Their coats glowed, their faces were both benign and predatory. The faces of the animals were amazing in that, tongues of velvet and claws of ice. What were they?

There was a gate, padlocked; a metal box built into the base of the fence; a dry log, a thin tree trunk. Doves rose suddenly from the tree, a flurry of hysterical wingbeats. He jumped.

His leg was aching.

He began to point his beam at bushes and the bases of trees, where holes might be tucked. Finally he flicked off the light and squatted down. Without the glare his eyes adjusted and finally he apprehended a shape that was not a bush or tree, hunkered down against the fence, low and dim.

He got up silently and picked his way closer, still without the flashlight on, his eyes on the ground while he threaded his way between bushes. Closer and closer till he pointed the flashlight toward the ground in front of the wolf's hunched shape and touched the switch with his thumb. A quick yellow flicker of eyes and then the wolf moved fluidly, fleeing along the fence. It went away from him, into a corner where it remained.

He would not get closer. The wolf would not allow it.

* * *

The next morning he removed the small spines from his leg. The wound was throbbing, but he did not mind; there was something he savored in it, pinching the hair-thin fibers hard between the tweezers' edges. The sensation was fine and sharp as a grass blade. It satisfied him.

He took two aspirins and showered. In his socks and his shirt, standing in front of the in-room coffeemaker, he thought of the old wolf again. Animals were self-contained and people seemed

hold this against them—possibly because most of them had come to believe that animals should be like servants or children. Either they should work for men, suffer under a burden, or they should entertain them. He had strained against the wolf's aloofness himself, resenting the wolf for its insistence on distance. He had felt it almost as an insult, and inwardly he retaliated.

But then he was self-contained too: he had a private purpose, a trajectory, and no one had license to block it. It might be obscure even to him, but that obscurity was his own possession. The old wolf's unwillingness to be near him was fully forgiven by the light of day and in fact the joke was on him. Wariness was simply its way of life, having nothing to do with him. It had not been robbed of that quality, though it was caged and it was solitary: it retained its essence. It did not attempt to ingratiate itself. It did not have diplomacy.

He thought he recalled feeling, in the flash of its eyeshine, a similar flash in himself—a fleeting awareness that in the wolf's gaze there was a directness unlike the directness of men.

Wolves were gone, the educational sign on the cage had read, from most of the country. They were the villains of fairy tales, and there had been vast campaigns to exterminate them all across the continent. A slaughter of the wolves, along with the buffalo. Long before that in the late Pleistocene according to the sign, the Clovis people had caused the extinction of the cave bear, the giant beaver, the saber-tooth tiger, the horse and the mastodon.

He buttoned his shirt without looking at his fingers, eyes on a weather map on the television, smiling weatherman pointing and gesturing. He had wanted the old wolf to come close to him, head down, softening. As though all wild animals could one day be tamed—as though this was an aspect of all of them, this one-day-tamable quality, and their wildness was nothing more than coyness or mannerism. As though other animals should not only submit to people but behave like them, comport themselves with civility.

Privately, he thought, at the heart of it, you wanted animals to turn to you in welcome. It was a habit gained from expecting each other to do this, from expecting this of other people and only knowing other people, not knowing anything beyond them. That was another kind of solitude, the kind where there was nothing all around but reflections.

And what about the endless differences of the animals, their strange bodies? Many legs, stripes, fiery orangeness; curved teeth or tentacles, wings or scales or sky-blue eggs . . . instead of looking at the wolf as an animal he never knew and never could, as with the sacred and the divine, he had fallen into the trap. He had wanted it to lick his hand and lope along beside him.

* * *

The animals were very busy with dying, not only one at a time but in sweeps and categories. This he found increasingly distressing. He began to comb newspapers for the latest word about animals vanishing; he began subscribing to magazines. In magazine pictures he saw animals far away, in the places where they had been born and either continued to live or began to die off. Some were on backgrounds of green, others yellow, others a bright turquoise. White now and then, Siberia or the Antarctic. These were the places of the animals' origin, warm green, dry yellow, the wet deep blue.

Then there was the gray of human habitation. The blue places were turning to brown, the yellow places to dust, the green places to smoke and ashes. Each time one of the animals disappeared—the went by species or sometimes by organizations of species, interconnected—it was as though a mountain were gone, or all lakes. A certain form of the world. But in the gray that metastasized over continents and hemispheres few appeared to be deterred by this extinguishing or even to speak of it. No one outside fringe elements and elite groups, professors and hippies, small populations of little general importance. The quiet mass disappearance, the inversion of the Ark, was passing unnoticed on this hot globe, a third of all species would soon be gone. The flocks of passenger pigeons that had

once darkened the sky, Teddy Roosevelt on safari shooting hundreds of animals from a train . . . I saw a list from one of Roosevelt's trips to Africa in 1909. Five hundred and twelve animals shot including seventeen lions, eleven elephants, twenty rhinos, nine giraffes, forty-seven gazelles, eight hippos, and twenty-nine zebras. George V of England had killed a thousand birds in one day for sport. In a year the Roman emperor Titus had nine thousand captured animals killed in popular displays.

He soon learned to recognize the signs of an animal's imminent disappearance. Some were tagged or collared or photographed, some monitored by bureaucrats. Sometimes a group or individual took up the cause of an animal or a plant and could muster the rationale for a lawsuit, and often the courts favored the victim; but the victim remained a victim and for each victim whose passing was noted, thousands more slid away in the dark. From where he stood they succumbed with great ease; from where he stood they had always been invisible anyway.

Animals in the outside were far from his life, but zoos were close at hand. Zoos would be his study.

His practical lessons took place at nighttime, which left his days free for commerce. At first he read mail-order manuals but soon they left him at loose ends and he hired a locksmith to teach him. The locksmith, a Brazilian, came to his apartment twice a week and brought his full toolkit: hooks, rakes, diamonds, balls, tension wrenches. They practiced on T.'s doors and cabinets, on a variety of locks the locksmith installed for the purpose.

After the lesson the locksmith would often stay for a nightcap; T. had assured him that he would not use his hard-won knowledge to commit crimes against persons or property, and though he had the impression the locksmith could not care less whether he used his powers for good or for ill the friendly assurances served as a bridge between them. Criminal trespass would be the limit, he said jokingly. The Brazilian stayed to drink with him on Fridays and sometimes played a few hands of cards.

His nights were not always free, however. He was still not delivered of Fulton, his investor, despite the fact that he had professed bursitis to get out of playing racquetball; Fulton's wife had taken him under her wing. As a young man with no clear defects or blemishes, with his health and his wealth and a full head of hair, he was apparently eligible and became an object of desire for many women newly introduced to him.

It was Janet's calling to bring him and these wanting women together. Janet did not believe it was feasible to be single; to Janet a bachelor eked out his living on the margins of society, orbiting the married couples wild-eyed and feral as a homeless man at a polo party. A single man, to Janet, was superior in the social hierarchy only to a single woman—this last a life form that was repellent but fortunately short-lived, naked and glistening as it gobbled its way out of its larval cocoon.

Because Fulton was an investor T. could not refuse his hospitality on every occasion, and so at least once a week he found himself a dinner guest at Fulton's house in Brentwood. It was an article of faith with Janet that when men brought wealth to the table women must bring good looks; and since there was Los Angeles there was always someone sitting across from him—not too much older than he, for Janet had imposed a limit of thirty to allow time for courtship, engagement, and a brief honeymoon followed by reproduction—whose hair had been bleached, breasts lifted, or nose pinched in the narrowness above delicately flared nostrils.

Janet was a homemaker by choice, a Texas debutante whose father had gifted her with a dowry that had made her attractive to a legion of Fultons; what distinguished her own Fulton was chiefly that he had beaten other suitors to the punch. So the women she brought to meet T. were seldom burdened by such useless accessories as an academic record or a sense of social purpose. They tended to be certain of their attractiveness and accustomed to admiration; they were eager to begin a conversation with him but not always sure where to take it. One of them asked him what he did for a living and then, after he told her, smiled, twirled her hair around a finger and gazed at him glassily, as though full.

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