

Where Rain Goes

by

Charles Frode

“Well, I remember this girl. I am not whole without her. I am not alive without her. When she was with me I was more alive than I have ever been...At the time I didn't realize how important it was, but I do now.”

John Steinbeck *Cannery Row*

“My thought is clinging as to a lost learning slipped down out of the minds of men, labouring to bring you back into my soul.”

Black Marigolds Bilhana Kavi

“The rapid, soaring blissful burning of desire, its brief, longing flames, its rapid extinction—this seemed to him to contain the kernel of all experience, became to him the image of all the joys and sufferings of life.”

Hermann Hesse *Narcissus and Goldmund*

There, far over there, rain clouds accumulate, scud and scuttle along the tough scrub foothills below the Irrigon Highlands. Higher up above the tree line, beyond stunted mountain pine and spruce that lean and strain against wind, cold, and ice, round granite boulders massive and schist outcroppings flood and overflow the edges and precipice with rainfall from coal grey clouds that surrender their burden gathered up from the steep flanks of the Irrigons, far, far to the other side of my desolation.

Winds there thrash the stubborn trees and low bushes, and dark green needles and leaves tremble and wait, as invisible storm forces imbalance and squeeze the air ahead, and the foothills' slope deflects storms up to the alpine peaks where rain is thrashing the ground and flattening the grasses and low wildflowers. Gusts buffet and batter the hillside, and water continues to find the ancient places worn low where before, waters found their way down and into the welcoming flesh of our earth. The waters rush down rivulets into creases worn smooth and greened by seasons of storm and wash. They hurry and gather into streams that slow and widen onto highland meadows where the water eases into low places in the earth. Small pools form, shaded glens green and darken here and there, protected from the afternoon sun. Alpine lakes regenerate and repopulate with trout that emerge again and again. Hidden here and there, between the wide smooth base of craggy peaks, a deep lake remains itself, out of sight but for our eyes.

We stood on the edge of that lake and plunged in without caution or wonder. The skin we thought our bodies glided through the surface of the water, and the one we thought we were dissolved in the water's openhearted embrace and welcome. Around the hidden water ancient guardians of granite still absorb the warmth

of the sun, and the imperturbability of the moon cups its nighttime reflection on the lake surface where we are unrecognized and gone now. Who here before has lain upon these boulders to feel against their skin the burning deep within, once Earth magma overflowing red hot and searing, now warm with the heat of the Sun, so that when we stretched out upon those days, the history of that passionate exchange flowed into the memories our bodies once layered down moment by moment?

We climbed the massive granites, felt their warm surfaces worn smooth by eons of wind and water, let our hands feel a way along the uneven irregularities of the stonefaces where we scabbled and crawled up upon the silence and heat of their presence. From that place we looked out over wide watershed stretching across our field of view where we recognized the valleys we once walked and found shelter and refuge. Small out-of-the-way glens, hollows, and clefts where something primordial and luminous had pulled us deep into the silence of each moment. Nameless brooks and meandering streams that follow down from unknown headwaters where we sat and merged midstream with the sibilant burbling patter and rush of water on stone, water on stone, the mind of the mountain. You, my earth.

There are waterfalls we saw where currents had gathered, filled, and overflowed, familiar watercourses we walked together once, across paleolithic ley lines we recognized without a word or gesture. On our way we passed cool artesian springs that bubbled unexpectedly through the loam and clay and rock surface, and we touched each other's face with fingers anointed with that sweetness. In places here and there, we stopped, taken aback, to witness the mystery of a secluded grove of small oaks abandoned and contorted apparently by unseen magnetic distortion, vestiges of mayhem from dark agitated crevices in the Earth. We felt a pressure and imbalance of forces quickening in the chaos of electromagnetic repulsion and attraction. My fingers sought yours as we wondered unspoken troubling thoughts. We nodded towards grey steam hissing and erupting from shocked vents deep back into the misshapen oak grove. There, there would be scalding water freed and pooling from the traumatic crust of the planet. We approached no further. We turned and walked on upon the Earth, companions in our awareness, and the soles of our feet felt the waters layered just below us.

We followed the river as it widened down into the valley I knew so long ago as Salishan, where the first clans once gathered to find a place, forget perhaps, look back in wonder across the images arising in their minds from before, inhabit their vision across the panorama below them. Wildflowers, camas, huge hostas and day lilies,

chamomile, clover, fennel, thymes, marjoram and rosemary, gardenias and hollyhocks, blue and white lupine, graceful mallow, sweet narcissus, primrose and yarrow. Wild roses everywhere. Summer grasses overgrown and lush. And here and there along the riverbank were groves of cottonwoods, bays, camphors, willows, river birch, and the redwoods.

“We will stop here and make a small camp,” you said, remember?

In those thousands of years of distant past, the *Sequoia sempervirens* maintained their hold as beacons of life, selflessness, and awareness. The old growth redwood canopies had flourished and filled with hundreds of varieties of epiphytes, lichens, mosses, rhododendrons, orchids, and ferns never seen by most hominid eyes, and scores of species of creatures never to touch the deep leaf and needle strewn forest floor—mites, copepods, salamanders, beetles, bumblebees, earthworms, and voles. We roamed for a long time the shaded enclaves of giants to find a place of welcome and rest, the camp you would make for us among the spreading and intermingling roots of the silent trees.

“This will be the place,” you stopped and gestured with a slow sweep of your arms. “I feel water close to the surface here, the energy from these trees...” You paused, I remember, closed your eyes, and I watched you absorbing the forces of life connected and teeming there where you said we would make camp together and rest.

“There is a family of trees here,” you opened your eyes and pointed to a huge old growth redwood so tall I could not see the top of the tree, “and that mother tree is connected to all the other redwoods around here...under the ground, through the roots and the fungus net in the ground. This is good,” you whispered.

I knew something about trees being connected and the fungal web in the ground that nourishes plants and trees, but you, my dear Faleen, you could feel it all, sense it like you sensed me when we first saw each other at the spring trade gathering many many seasons before. You were fingering tourmalines and crystals one of the diggers was offering, and I was on the other path across the way trading my dry herbs and plants for obsidian points. You looked up and into my eyes, and I could not break eye contact with you until you looked away and nodded your head. I finished my trades and made my way to where you were still bartering for the deep blue and green crystals.

You are tall in my mind still now, Faleen, your lanky arms and legs like a deer, your brown hair the color of redwood bark tied up with thin sinew, widely set eyes the color of the tourmalines you were trading for, and your sun burnished high cheekbones and hands. You stood with your feet slightly apart, with heavy undecorated hide

moccasins, and the blue tanned skin robe fell to your ankles where you had decorated the hem with small limpet and cowrie shells sewn close together with thin sinew all around the hem.

“We will travel together,” you smiled as if it had been discussed and decided already. And so, we did.

But we were making camp now within the circle of the redwood family you had found. We had been traveling many seasons now, and I had become accustomed to your habits and rituals, your personal needs and proclivities, and the objects you carried and attended to in your pack. I had seen the skein of sinews, the coiled braided grass fiber rope, a woven net, the bag of dried fungus and herbs, another small bag containing bits of charcoal, several small birch bark containers I had not yet seen your open, the obsidian knife and flint scraper, a small bag of flint and pyrite for making fire, clusters of dried roots and rhizomes, and two gourds for water. You kept your fox skin cape tucked into the top of your pack, and you carried several tourmalines in that small bag I noticed hidden in the leather belt you wore around your waist.

When we make camp, we work quietly and carefully, as has always been our way, to clear an area for a small fire, gather wood and stones for the fire ring, and prepare a sleeping area where the soft forest floor deep with leaves and bark fallen from the redwoods would make a soft and welcome place to sleep and enter the dream world we knew this ancient forest would invoke. We filled our gourds in the nearby stream and struck fire.

We have not seen other fires in this valley forest. We did not know when we walked away from the people that day that we would be traveling further into unknown parts of the land deep into the hidden valleys here. We listen to the spirit voice within and follow. The following is everything. And I followed you, my Faleen, to strike fire between us, to smell bitter-sweet smoke from our bodies, to see our past and future in the light we kindle between us, not be alone on the land, not be lost and forgotten among the people, be everywhere with you, and be here.

You gave me dried elk meat and berries. I found white and orange mushrooms we roasted over the fire. We drank cold water from the stream. I put more pieces of wood on the fire, and we laid back on the soft forest floor. We listened to the soft burbling sound of the stream, and a solitary owl signaled his hunt nearby. We waited to hear the howl of wolves, but we did not have to touch the two spears leaning against the tree behind our heads. We looked at the star families through the thick tree canopy, and we repeated their sacred names to each other. We

remembered where we had come from, and in our closeness we dared to say where we thought the spirit voice would lead us.

Our words mingled, our breaths merged. We felt the web of life under us vibrate with what we never knew then was the endless altruistic exchange of neurotransmitters, ions streaming through the fungal networks under and between the trees. We felt the pull and upwelling of the waters hidden below between layers of rock, earth, gravel, sand, the ancient alluvial waterways where rain goes. And we let go of our individual grasp of awareness and will as our primitive words lost their voice. We gave ourselves to the fleeing and return, the questioning and understanding. I gave you everything I ever thought I could not be, Faleen, and you showed me the foot and handprints where your heart had traveled before we met.

I remember your arms and the light that came off your fingers and into my body. You put the beautiful green tourmaline on my throat and spoke to me in a strange language about how this story would end. I saw a picture in my mind's eye, and I drew the map with my finger deep within the white valley between your shoulders.

“You and I are forever in this place which is my body,” you said again and again.

I am inundated now with these memories of that time before, My Faleen, when surely we must have traveled this coast and inland valleys of this land people now call California into the still unexplored exile of the redwoods. I have driven to these settlements, Crescent City and Arcata, time and time again, walked into the deep forest there trying to find you, perhaps a fire ring covered with leaves and pine needles I would certainly recognize, a place still warm with our scent in the soft forest floor where two people slept so long ago, a circle of old growth *Sequoia sempervirens* where I would hear our spirit voices speaking to us again.

Faleen...where are you?

For Paula