

also by TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS

Pieces of White Shell

Coyote's Canyon

Refuge

An Unspoken Hunger

Desert Quartet

LEAP

TERRY TEMPEST WILLIAMS



Pantheon Books ♦ New York

We must follow the vein of our blood.

—Federico García Lorca, *Blood Wedding*

Contents

NOTES

267

BIBLIOGRAPHY

315

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

329

PERMISSIONS

337

*Hieronymus Bosch's Garden of Delights
appears on the gatefold following the
last page of this book.*

I

PARADISE

The new can bear fruit only when it grows
from the seeds implanted in tradition.

—Paul Tillich, *The Dogma of the Trinity*

I once lived near the shores of Great Salt Lake with no outlet to the sea.

I once lived in a fault-block basin where mountains made of granite surrounded me. These mountains in time were hollowed to house the genealogy of my people, Mormons. Our names, the dates of our births and deaths, are safe. We have records hidden in stone.

I once lived in a landscape where my ancestors sacrificed everything in the name of belief and they passed their belief on to me, a belief that we can be the creators of our own worlds.

I once lived in the City of Latter-day Saints.

I have moved.

I have moved because of a painting.

Over the course of seven years, I have been traveling in the landscape of Hieronymus Bosch. A secret I did not tell for fear of seeming mad. Let these pages be my interrogation of faith. My roots have been pleached with the wings of a medieval triptych, my soul intertwined with an artist's vision.

This painting lives in Spain. It resides in the Prado Museum. The Prado Museum is found in the heart of Old Madrid. I will tell you the name of the painting I love. Its name is *El jardín de las delicias*.

The doors to the triptych are closed. Now it opens like a great medieval butterfly flapping its wings through the centuries.

Open and close. Open and close. Open. Hieronymus Bosch has painted, as wings, Paradise and Hell. The body is a portrait of Earthly Delights. The wings close again. Open, now slowly, with each viewer's breath the butterfly quivers, Heaven and Hell quiver, the wings are wet and fragile, only the body remains stable. The legs hidden, six. The antennae, two. The eyes, infinite. The artist's brush with life, mysterious. Close the triptych. The outside colors are drab. Black, grey, olive blue. The organism is not dead. Hear its heart beating. After five hundred years, the heart is still beating inside the triptych. The wings open.

I step back.

Red. Blue. Yellow. Green. Black. Pink. Orange. White. Gold.

Paradise. Hell. Earthly Delights.

As a child, I grew up with Hieronymus Bosch hanging over my head. My grandmother had thumbtacked the wings of Paradise and Hell to the bulletin board above the bed where I slept. The prints were, in fact, part of the Metropolitan Museum of Art's series of discussions designed for home education. The Garden of Eden to the left with Christ taking Eve's pulse as Adam looks on—opposite—Hell, the bone-white face of a man looking over the shoulder of his eggshell body as the world burns: these were the images that framed the "oughts and shoulds" and "if you don'ts" of my religious upbringing.

Whenever my siblings and I stayed overnight, we fell asleep in "the grandchildren's room" beneath Truth and Evil.

Standing before *El jardín de las delicias* in the Prado Museum in Spain, now as a woman, I see the complete triptych for the

first time. I am stunned. The center panel. The Garden of Earthly Delights. So little is hidden in the center panel, why was it hidden from me?

The body.

The body of the triptych.

My body.

The bodies of the center panel, this panel of play and discovery, of joyful curiosities cavorting with Eros, is not only a surprise to me, but a great mystery.

I stare at the painting. My eyes do not blink. They focus on the blue pool of bathers standing thigh-high in the middle of the triptych.

Bareback riders circle the black and white women bathing in the water, the black and white women who are balancing black and white birds on top of their heads. Cherries, too. Faster and faster, the bareback riders gallop their horses and goats and griffins; bareback riders, naked men, riding bulls, bears, lions, camels, deer, and pigs, faster and faster, circling the women.

The triptych begins to blur. My eyes begin to blur. I resist. Focus. I rein my eyes in from the pull of the bodies, the body of the triptych, the bodies bare, bareback on animals, circling, circling, circling them, circling me, black and white bodies, my body stands stoically inside the Prado determined to resist the galloping of my blood.

I feel faint. I turn from the painting and see a wooden chair shaped like a crescent leaning against the wall. The wall is white. I sit down, stare at the floor, the granite floor, and get my bearings.

I begin counting cherries in Bosch's Garden. I lose track, they are in such abundance. I stop at sixty. Cherries are flying in the air, dangling from poles, being passed from one person to the next, dropped into the mouths of lovers by birds, worn on women's heads as hats, and balanced on the feet as balls.

In Utah, my home, cherries are a love crop. They are also our state fruit. They grow in well-tended orchards along the Wasatch Front. Cherry picking was a large part of our childhood. Our parents, aunts, and uncles would load up their station wagons with kids and drop us off in one of the orchards alongside Great Salt Lake with empty buckets in hand. Sometimes we were paid by the pail or given bags to take home for our families. Once we were up in the trees, out of view, we could eat as many as we wanted.

One day, my great-uncle was standing on a ladder picking cherries with my cousin and me. We were perched on sturdy branches above him, ten-year-old girls unafraid of heights.

"What principle of the Gospel of Jesus Christ means the most to you?" he asked, filling his bucket.

Mormon children are used to these kinds of questions practiced on them by their elders, who consider this part of their religious training.

"Obedience," my cousin replied, pulling a cherry off its stem.

"Free agency," I answered, eating one.

It is early morning on my way to the Prado. Pink camellia petals cover the path inside the Real Jardín Botánico adjacent to the museum. I love coming here first before watching the painting. Flocks of white butterflies appear to have lit on bare branches. Up close, I recognize them as magnolia trees in bloom.

It is difficult not to touch everything. Blue hyacinths line the walks. Daffodils and narcissus tower above them. Red and yellow striated tulips are now cups holding last night's rain.

The gardener's hand is evident. There is an overall narrative to be followed, nothing is random. Each hedgerow, each bed now flowering was an idea before it took root in the land. The leaves of each plant express themselves rhythmically. Iambic pentameter. Blank verse. A sonnet. The arrangement of leaves can be read as poetry.

The miniature rock garden stops me. Sage grows next to verbena. I bend down and rub its blue-grey leaves between my fingers and smell the Great Basin of home.

Paradise.

The Tree of Life stands behind Adam. Vines of raspberries wrap around its trunk. Christ, who appears to be staring outside Eden, is dressed in a pink robe. He holds Eve's wrist. Eve kneels. Adam sits. Neither is clothed.

Focus on Eden. Remain in Eden. Today it is Christ's hand on Eve's that holds my attention. Eve's head is bowed. Her eyes are closed. Her knees are tight against each other. Eve's obedience becomes my own baptism and confirmation.

I am dressed in white and descend into the warm waters of the baptismal font accompanied by my father, also dressed in white. We stand in the center of the pool and face family witnesses. My father raises his right hand to the square, fingers pointing toward heaven. He delivers a prayer, then holds my wrist as I hold my nose and with bended knees, I am leaned back into the holy waters. With one quick swoosh through the process of immersion, I am happily declared a Mormon.

I am eight years old.

The following Sunday, I wished I had not worn the white headband to keep my bangs out of my eyes. Even before the confirmation began, the weight of the men's hands on top of my head was forcing the plastic teeth to bite into my scalp. I opened my eyes seconds before the blessing to see the varied shoes pointing toward me around the circle: wing tips, Hush Puppies, and boots. I recognized the black polished cowboy boots as my father's, the wing tips belonged to the bishop, the slip-ons were his counselor's shoes. I couldn't wrap my eyes around far enough behind my ears to see what shoes my uncle or the remaining priesthood bearers were wearing.

The pressure of the warm hands on my head increased. I quickly closed my eyes. My father began, "Our beloved daughter of Zion, by the authority vested in me . . ."

And then the words "Receive the Holy Ghost."

The hands lifted. My eyes opened. I stood up and faced the congregation as the bishop congratulated me on becoming a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. All the men in the circle shook my hand. My father put his arm around me as we walked back to where my mother and her mother and her mother's mother were sitting.

I sat down on the pew. My grandmother took my hand and patted it.

"I am possessed," I thought. "I am possessed by the Holy Spirit and protected from evil. I am a clean slate. There are no sins on my record before God."

The Paradise of childhood.

"Bosch is rubbish," I hear a British guide say to her group. She is wearing a brown wool suit just below her knees. "He ate rye bread that was rotten, which most certainly brought on the cruelest of hallucinations."

My view of Paradise is often blocked by other visitors. I have no choice but to watch them interact with the painting.

"What we have here, ladies and gentlemen, is a massive orgy. It is rumored Hieronymus Bosch belonged to a religious sect that believed in purification through gratification."

Some of the visitors cluck their tongues.

"Notice the preponderance of strawberries and other fleshy fruits, symbols of lust. It is true God said, 'Go forth and multiply,' but we are not supposed to enjoy it like we see here. Bosch presents a perversion, ladies and gentlemen. I ask you to note the clear references to bestiality as men and animals prance around the pool in a state of arousal."

The guide points to the naked women cavorting in the pool that the cavalcade circles.

"And here, please witness Chaucer's 'Wife of Bath' who, as you recall, possessed a libido much too strong for her own good. *'A likerous mouth moste han a likerous tayl. In wommen vinolent is no defencie, This knownen lecchours by experience.'*"

As the matron of arts begins to lose herself in Chaucer's tale, her group are showing their own signs of arousal. Suddenly aware of her own titillating vocabulary, she quickly shifts her analysis to Hell.

"I must say, I find great comfort in Bosch's depiction of Hell. We will pay for our bloody sins if we cannot control our bodily obsessions. Here we see the lovely, dreadful sophistications of the Middle Ages. Each sin has its appropriate pay-back. Rightfully so; if you are gluttonous, you will be eaten gluttonously."

A man who seemed to be preoccupied with one section of Hell in particular raises his hand and points to the panel. "Might these be vats of semen?"

She lifts her arm high over her head. "Follow me, please."

. . .

My view of Paradise returns. Why has Bosch's panel of Paradise evoked the religious teachings of my childhood? Eve kneels before Christ with her eyes closed. Meanwhile, a world of exotic flora and fauna surrounds her. White-robed salamanders evolve on shore.

Minerals. Gemstones. Jewels. I stand up and walk past my own species toward the fertile mound that supports a tall pink fountain where water cascades into a clear pool. I wade in, dig my hands into the rich black soil and bring up emeralds, sapphires, rubies, and bloodstones, my body sinking under the weight of what I have found.

I leave the Prado. I am surprised to see it has been raining. Clouds seem to be traveling quickly down Calle Alcalá. The gold-winged messenger on top of the Metrópolis building is flying. Madrid is glistening. Blue skies are breaking. Elongated shadows walk down the sidewalks and appear more real than the silhouettes of pedestrians caught in the glare of the sun as it sets over the Puerta del Sol.

The clarity of light, the perfection of this moment, this very moment, seems to be winter passing its mantle to spring. What is the date? I've forgotten the date. The month, I know, is March. I squint. The sun is directly in my eyes about to disappear behind the skyline of black iron crosses and red-tiled roofs. I wrap my black shawl tight around me as I pick up my pace and turn left.

Before going to sleep, I open *The Waves* by Virginia Woolf:

I hold a stalk in my hand. I am the stalk. My roots go down to the depths of the world, through earth dry with brick, and damp earth,

through veins of lead and silver. I am all fibre. All tremors shake me, and the weight of the earth is pressed to my ribs.

I cannot stop reading. It stays my hunger for words, for my own language.

Let us now crawl . . . under the canopy of the currant leaves, and tell stories. Let us inhabit the underworld. Let us take possession of our secret territory, which is lit by pendant currants like candelabra, shining red on one side, black on the other.

Did Virginia Woolf visit the Prado? The old ones who remember her at the Hotel Inglés say they have never met anyone so enthralled with Madrid. They say she was a woman who made people tired. I wonder if she ever stood before *El jardín de las delicias*?

This is our world, lit with crescents and stars of light; and great petals half transparent block the openings like purple windows. Everything is strange. Things are huge and very small. The stalks of flowers thick as oak trees. Leaves are high as the domes of vast cathedrals. We are giants here, who can make forests quiver.

It is Monday. The Prado is closed. An old woman dressed in a turquoise sweater and a black skirt with black stockings and shoes is breaking bread for the pigeons. There must be fifty pigeons cooing and circling around her. I see her every morning. She finishes her sacrament for the birds and always leaves with a couple of loaves under her arms.

I watch her walk away, legs bowed, toward the Plaza de la Cibeles, Madrid's great fountain named after Cybele, the

goddess of caverns, who stands in the center of the city on a lion-drawn chariot. A fast-moving river of traffic flows around her. They say that during the Spanish Civil War, citizens risked their lives protecting her, sandbagging the monument while General Franco's army bombed Madrid.

Ten pigeons pick up the remaining crumbs left by their patron. A sudden flap of wings, they rise, bank, and return.

*While of these emblems we partake,
In Jesus' name and for his sake,
Let us remember and be sure
Our hearts and hands are clean and pure.*

*For us the blood of Christ was shed;
For us on Calvary's cross he bled
And thus dispelled the awful gloom
That else were this creation's doom.*

I think of all the years I have taken the formal sacrament in my church and the beautiful hymns sung with solemnity prior to the blessing given on the bread and water; the communal silence that permeated the chapel as silver trays were passed; the silence I loved and how I was taught to use this time each week to honor the broken body of Christ and His spilled blood. *Oh God, the Eternal Father, we ask thee in the name of thy Son, Jesus Christ, to bless and sanctify this bread to the souls of all those who partake of it, that they may eat in remembrance of the body of thy Son . . . that they do always remember him, that they may have His spirit to be with them. Amen.* I hold these moments of reflection dear, and I wonder how I too have come to a sacrament of birds.

And then I remember standing on the edge of Great Salt

Lake as a young girl, watching hundreds and thousands of birds fly over me, feeling the wind of wings, the songs of a world in motion.

Yes.

Yes, I would partake and participate.

Yes, I would break bread for the birds and say a prayer for safe travel, each one a cross against the sky.

On this particular day in the Prado, I begin my observation of the triptych with binoculars. I want to see what birds inhabit the Paradise of Bosch.

The cradle chair in the corner of the gallery is empty. I sit down and begin bird-watching.

A mute swan floats gracefully in the pond behind Eve. It has an orange bill with a black knob. The knob is greatly enlarged in the male in the spring. This bird would have been familiar to Bosch in the Low Countries. This swan is not mute but makes a formidable hissing sound. In its wild state, it frequents remote wetlands. Why not Eden?

Mallards and shovelers float nearby as three white egrets stand in shallow water perfectly still, eyes intent on fish. Their long, sinuous necks and spearlike bills are mirrored in the pool alongside a unicorn bending down to drink. Their feathers form an elegant cloak easily unraveled by the wind.

Close to them is a spoonbill. I walk slowly toward this long-legged bird, a standing grace in the water. It swings its peculiar beak side to side in the white marl for crustaceans. The quivering nerve endings that line the interior of its mouth are feeling for clues and will send messages of what is below. Adam and Eve would do well to pay attention. Life is to be touched. The bill snaps shut, a crayfish struggles. It is decided: the crayfish

becomes the spoonbill, who continues walking in Eden, seen or unseen, it does not matter.

North of the wading birds, flocks of swifts are swirling like smoke through a furnace-like mountain, transforming themselves from black to red to white, the colors of alchemy.

I sit down on the grassy hillside near the congregation of birds below the stone furnace. Wild geese fly in the formation of an arrow. If we follow their migrations will we better understand our own spiritual genesis?

As a child I remember believing that if I could ride on the backs of Canada geese they would deliver me to the future because they had arrived from the past. When I would bear my testimony before members of my own congregation, I would say I believed in God not because of what I had learned in church but because of the geese I watched each spring and fall, the fact that they knew their way, that they always returned. My parents said it was a sweet analogy. Not knowing what that word meant, I said, "No, they are not my analogy, they are my truth."

Rooks. Ravens. Crows. True conspirators. They converse in pairs while sitting on the rims of Bosch's canyons. One by one, they drop like stones only to recover in a joyous upswing. Back on the rim, they sit as bards disguised as birds and listen to everything being said. At night, they will enter Adam and Eve's dreams as subversive thoughts.

In Eden, I continue my search for birds.

Below Eve, there is a kingfisher with red legs, two toes forward, two toes back, syndactyl, speaking to a three-headed phoenix while a grey bee-eater fans its short broad wings and bows. Pheasants in courtship strut on the bottom margins of Paradise, a female opens herself to the approaching male, the

spurs on her tarsi are exposed should she need to defend herself.

I turn around.

There, inside the eye of the pink fountain, sits a yellow-eyed owl, possibly Tengmalm's owl, distinguished by its round head, deep facial disks, and chocolate plumage. It nests in the cavities of trees. I kneel behind the thicket and watch. I have never seen this bird before. It scarcely moves. Were Hieronymus Bosch's acute skills as a naturalist appreciated? Were there medieval ornithologists who caught the painter's sardonic humor in Paradise, knowing this particular owl's call is a rapid, musical phrasing of *poo-poo-poo*?

I take down my binoculars and let them dangle around my neck. The guards are staring. I open my notebook and make a checklist of all the birds seen so far in *El jardín de las delicias*.

Swifts
 Scarlet Ibis
 Great White Egret
 Little Egret
 Wagtail
 Blue Rock Thrush
 Cuckoo
 Spoonbill
 White Pelican
 Night Heron
 Blue Heron
 Stork
 White Ibis
 Jackdaw
 Stonechat

Leap

Redstart
Rook
Brambling
Pheasant
Jay
Mallard
Gadwall
Hoopoe
Green Woodpecker
Kingfisher
Robin
Magpie
Goldfinch
Great Tit
Long-eared Owl
Tengmalm's Owl
Tawny Owl
Pygmy Owl
Little Owl
Widgeon

I look up. The guard nods. The Prado is closing. Who knows how much time has passed in the country of Bosch? I tuck my binoculars into my bag with my notebook and leave.

Walking up toward the Parque del Retiro, I hear the tapping of typewriter keys. There is a window open on the ground floor of an apartment building. I stop and stand quietly to the side of the open French doors. Looking in, I can see only a woman's hands. No jewelry. Rounded, short red nails. A wall of books from floor to ceiling ascends behind her. White woodwork,

Paradise

white walls, wood floors. I suspect a Persian carpet comforts the writer's feet.

The woman takes a break, her right hand reaches for a cigarette. She strikes a match with her left, lights it. The smoke curls around her hands, shaping words, crafting sentences. I covet this stable desk where a black leather container holds the blood instruments of pens and pencils.

A large door, very tall, is ajar to another room. I stretch to see. The woman's dog, a schnauzer, gives me away, yet the writer is so deep in trance she is oblivious to another writer imagining her life outside.

On the corner of Calle de Ruíz de Alarcón and Calle de Felipe IV there is a flower vender. He tries to sell me a bouquet of tulips. I would have loved to have left them on the steps of the writing woman with words from Virginia Woolf, "Some people go to priests; others to poetry; I to my friends, I to my own heart," but I do not have enough money in my leather pouch to buy them. I savor their extravagant beauty without ownership, an interlude of color, simply that. The tulips will move and arrange themselves in someone else's arms, in someone else's vase.

I am simply a traveler, a voyeur who casts no shadow.

There is a Japanese woman who is painting *El jardín de las delicias*. Her name is Mariko Umeoka Taki. She has been working on her reproduction for four years. Placing the triptych on an imaginary grid, she has divided it into eight squares, each one three feet by three and a half feet, two canvases for each of the wings and six canvases for the center panel. She has her easel set up to the side of the triptych and is working on the bottom center quadrant of the Garden of Delights. A bluejay is

perched on what looks like a red coral tepee, dropping berries into the mouths of the hungry.

I introduce myself to the painter. I ask her why she has chosen this particular painting to copy.

"Because I need it," she replies matter-of-factly. "I feel it from the inside." She searches for the correct words in English. "I was an attorney in Japan. I came to Spain on vacation and visited the Prado. I became obsessed with this triptych. I couldn't sleep. It took me over. I knew I had to paint it, to learn what it had to say."

And what do you think Bosch is trying to say?

"Now that I am here, I don't think about it. I just paint what he painted."

The artist steps out from behind her canvas. Both arms are in splints. Carpal tunnel syndrome. She looks at what she has done and shakes her head.

"For many years," she says, "I could not paint. Nothing came to me. I mean I could paint what people wanted me to paint—floral arrangements, still lifes—but nothing gave me pleasure. I gave up my art for a legitimate profession. El Bosco is teaching me how to paint again. I am learning to paint from the inside, from what I feel, not just from what I see."

She opens a tube of paint the color of flesh and squeezes a small dot on her wooden palette.

"I have so much left to do, each expression, each face, each set of eyes."

Returning the next morning, I expect to find the artist again; instead only her canvas remains. I look at what Mariko painted from the day before. Half a shell, that is all I see, a blue flame

flickering on a tongue of mother-of-pearl. She has not added the bodies yet, nor closed the shell. I am allowed to peek inside. Blue, white, turquoise—colors as mesmerizing and hypnotic as the sea itself.

I check the colors and precision of image against El Bosco's mussel. The copy lacks the confidence of the original; the complexity of the psyche is missing, the depth of the painter's hand, but through its innocence and authentic intention, something else is translated through the copied fragment.

What is it? I am searching, searching for something and no one can tell me what it is or where to find it.

My eyes move back to Paradise and settle on the grove of trees that separate Adam, Christ, and Eve from the pool with the mound of gems and pink fountain.

Through the trees, I see a young man kneeling in the darkness of the woods. A shaft of light falls on his praying hands. His voice is audible. He is pleading God to deliver him from his questions, to tell him which of the churches are true. Suddenly, a blinding light unfolds from Heaven. God appears, accompanied by Jesus Christ. What the young man hears is that none of the churches are true, that he must reclaim the true and living faith to this Earth. In the sanctity of this sacred grove, he is given a vision of restoration.

On another occasion, he holds a green seer-stone to his eye; what he sees inside frightens him. He receives a second vision.

While I was thus in the act of calling upon God, I discovered a light appearing in my room, which continued to increase until the room was lighter than at noonday, when immediately a personage appeared at my bedside, standing in the air, for his feet did not touch the floor. . . .

that ye may be in, even until death, that ye may be redeemed of God. . . .

These were beautiful passages, passages that stirred my soul within the language of my own sacred texts, yes, I could feel the presence of God *in all things* and *in all places* and then as the full, broad light of morning came forward, I would digress from *The Book of Mormon* and turn to the Psalms. I read these scriptures from the Old Testament not so much for theology as for the elegance of language, the beginning of poetry. Hours would pass. I would put away my books, realizing the work I had not yet done, then dash into the cabins and change beds. I would note the sheets with drops of matrimonial blood and look for the newly married.

During the afternoon, after my chores were complete, I would walk to the lake and fish. Worms, not flies, were my bait, pulled out of the rich soil where we worked. I kept them in wet thimbleberry leaves inside a little wicker basket on a leather strap draped over my chest. I was aware of the worm's sacrifice as I wound its long maroon body around the metal hook until it pierced its skin. I pinched small weights onto the line. With my finger on the reel's button, I would cast across the lake and wait for the worm to sink. The line, evident by a clear bubble half filled with water, would bob for what seemed like hours until a strong nod acknowledged that the worm had been taken by a trout. Reeling the fish in was always a surprise. More often than not, a rainbow appeared with pastel scales glistening on its side.

My father taught me what to do: reel the fish to shore, take it in my hand, cut the line with the other, then quickly hit its head with the bone handle of my knife. Next, turn it over on its back and slit its pearl-white belly from vent to gills, then slip my bloody fingers through its scarlet gills and rip the guts out,

throwing them in the bushes for weasels or magpies to eat. Finally, I would run the nail of my thumb down the trout's spine to clean the fish thoroughly, which is exactly what I did.

Returning to the ranch for dinner, I would be shunned by the fly fishermen, who thought me less pure having caught my fish with a worm. I entered the kitchen, cooked the trout, and ate the sweet flesh by myself. I was healthy and strong and sun-tanned, so tan that when I bathed before bed and removed my silver bracelet, I wore another bracelet of white skin.

Toward the end of the summer, I made the decision that I would take Moroni up on his promise. I took time off from work and fasted for two days, drinking only water. I walked to a favorite place of mine, studied and prayed, felt the sun on my face, listened to Clark's nutcrackers calling each other from lodgepole pines, and watched an osprey fish, hovering high with a crook in each brown-and-white-checked wing, eyes down, wings pulled back. The fish hawk dropped like a bullet, feet first, splashed, rose with a trout in the grip of her talons, then sailed across the lake to her perch, a dead snag, secured the fish, and flew to her nest.

I read more, returning to favorite passages.

Let the mountains shout for joy, and all ye valleys cry aloud; and all ye seas and dry lands tell the wonders of your Eternal King! And ye rivers and brooks, and rills, flow down with gladness. Let the woods and all the trees of the field praise the Lord; and ye solid rocks weep for joy! And let the eternal creations declare his name forever and ever!

I pressed petals of wildflowers between these pages, blue penstemon, scarlet gilia, and yarrow. The day was long and luxurious. I felt a humility rise out of my own hunger.

That night, in the solitude of my cabin in Idaho, I prayed. I prayed I might know of the truthfulness of the Gospel in my heart.

The words of Isaiah spoke to me:

*In horror of my darkness
in terror of inhuman space
exposed to private death*

*totally vulnerable on the surface
of earth's
material matter . . .*

*Then one of the seraphim
flew toward me
a live coal in his hand*

*a fire from the interior
of the earth
the core of my being*

*it was a burning stone
under the fire
on the altar*

*With the priest's tongs
he reached in the holy altar
and took it*

*and touched my lips
with it
and he was saying*

*you are seeing
the purifying fire of creation
burn up your past*

I lay in my bed trembling.

The next morning, I telephoned my mother and grandmother to tell them I had had a vision. I told them a figure draped in a white robe of light had stood at the foot of my log bed. I was still shaking from the terror, the wonder, the awe, the fire in me still burning. Neither one of them said much, they listened. I hung up the receiver and walked back to the ranch house. By the time I had arrived in the kitchen to join the others for breakfast, my mother had called and left a message. "Kathryn and I are on our way up. Love you, Mother."

This was no small gesture. It was a six-hour drive from Salt Lake City. At four o'clock, they arrived at Elk Creek Ranch. I was leaning against the buck n' rail fence waiting for them. When I saw them coming down the dirt road, I began to cry. They both held me and one of them said, "Let's go."

We drove to Mesa Falls on a narrow, winding road through the lodgepole forest, parked the car, and walked to the overlook. The force and volume of the cascading water articulated my own spiritual free fall. I tried to follow single drops all the way down to the catch pool like a specific thought but failed; how does one speak coherently about a thundering in the heart?

The three of us watched in silence; a rainbow arched over the falls. We found a place to sit in the shade.

I told them my story all over again.

"I knelt down by the side of my bed and told my Heavenly Father that I had sincerely read and studied the scriptures, that

I had a deep desire to know if the Church was true. On my knees with clasped hands, I prayed and listened to the emptiness of my soul. After a fair amount of time, I got up and climbed into bed.

“Suddenly, a small, narrow figure, surrounded by light, as though it was being seen from a great distance, stood at the foot of my bed. It was—”

“What, dear?” my mother asked.

“It was—I don’t know—I don’t know if I was seeing things or if it was real. Something moved through my body like a current. Heat, warmth, I can’t describe it. And then the figure disappeared. I couldn’t stop shaking, I just lay in bed awake until dawn. Then I called you.”

And then as a young woman of seventeen years still unable to trust what I had just shared, I asked the women in my life who mattered most if they believed me, if they thought this apparition meant the Church was true.

“Nobody can answer that for you. The question isn’t really whether or not the Church is true—” my grandmother Mimi said, pausing.

My mother reminded me of the patriarchal blessing I had received from one of the Brethren shortly before I left home. She brought the typed copy with her and read a passage:

Live in tune with the Holy Spirit. Seek the truth always. Be not afraid to learn the truth of anything, for no truth will be revealed to you as such that will be in conflict with God’s kingdom.

“It’s all true,” my grandmother said, looking out at the great expanse before us. “All of this—”

We sat on the edge of Mesa Falls in silence, mesmerized,

hypnotized by the rushing water, the seemingly endless water, and I wondered about the source from which this water falls.

The vision I had in Idaho after fasting and praying in the wilderness was the same vision I had of the osprey fishing at the lake—wings folded in a free fall—the surface of water breaks, holy food is within our grasp.

I emerge from El Bosco’s woods exhausted and walk to the edge of the clear pond and splash my face and arms.

Back on the streets of Madrid, I cross the Paseo del Prado, walk past the Palace Hotel and up to Calle de Echegaray, where I am staying.

“Freedom,” I whisper to myself as I make my way through a crowded sidewalk. “No one knows my history and I do not know theirs.”

A man and woman arm in arm walk by. I am hungry and make a quick detour across Cedaceros down Alcalá and over to the Paseo Recoletos to the Café Gijón.

Once inside the smoky establishment, I stand at the entrance and wait for a table. In a few moments I am seated by the window and handed a menu. I read over the choices slowly. The waiter disappears.

The waiter returns.

“*Merluza a la riojana, por favor,*” I say.

“*Muy fresca,*” he responds.

He disappears again and I watch people as I break off a heel of bread. The café is full at four o’clock in the afternoon. Men are leaning over tables whispering to women. Women are talking loudly to each other. Round tables occupied by what look like regulars are engaged in lively discussions, with

cigarettes being lit, waved, smoked, and scrunched over and over again. Limber conversation is the most bewitching of lures. Eyes held. Minds caught in the promise of new ideas. For that moment, those engaged in the aerial dance of words are held in the dazzling light of possibilities. Most *madrileños* are wearing black. No one is rushed. For as long as one chooses to sit, *esta es su mesa*, this is your table.

I clear my table of crumbs with the side of my hand and note the cold, smooth surface of marble.

Three elderly men are sitting near, huddled around each other. One begins to sing in a quivering voice, a melancholy voice, his left hand rising and falling with his voice. The other two men close their eyes, clapping their left hands into their right.

Their coffee comes. It does not interrupt them. The man continues to sing his *cantos* largely unnoticed by the crowd conversing around him in the Café Gijón.

My hake arrives covered in red chilies. It is so tender. If one can swoon over fish, I do. I am both a participant in my own meal and an observer of others.

The *cantador* stands up and turns his chair around so he can sit on it backwards, his arms resting on its back, legs spread. He continues to sing, his eyes focusing on the ceiling fans, his left hand accepting the lyricism of the right, where the second and third fingers are joined leaving space for the sound to travel. His eyes are yellow. Can a man's eyes be yellow? I look twice, he catches my stare. The singing ends.

He lights a cigarette and listens to his friends.

Profiteroles con chocolate. My tab keeps rising with the musicality of the collective voices. Two hours pass. I lean back against the window absorbed in the theater before me.

The three men stand up. They help each other put on their green wool jackets, touching each other's arms, patting one another's backs. Two leave. The singer moves to another table and taps his hand on the marble. He buttons the top button of his orange shirt and then holds his first two fingers with one hand as if to quiet his impulse.

"¿Le ha gustado la comida, señora?" the waiter asks.

"Sí, la comida estuvo muy bien, gracias."

Today I decide to walk through the Bosch Room and pretend not to notice the triptych. But the painting is my lover's stare and I cannot resist. A side glance. My eyelids lower. I turn and walk briskly toward Dürer's *Adam*.

The return. Always the return. I am living inside my own triptych. Love is a triangle of desire, a movement of three: lover, beloved, and all that circulates through us, another person, another landscape, another home away from home. The geometric problem of Eros. Do I see Pythagoras in the corner of El Bosco's Garden?

Stay in Paradise.

For the first time in Paradise, I notice a white giraffe and an elephant posing in the background. A monkey sits on top of the elephant's back. A lion devours a deer. A boar chases a hyena. A porcupine turns with his quills exposed. And in the foreground of Eden, a cat carries a rat in its teeth.

What are we to make of death in Paradise? Does Hieronymus Bosch portend what is to come?

Have we never been comfortable with our place on Earth

because we have never been comfortable with death? Earth has never been the Christian's soulful inhabitation. Earth is to be endured. Hell is to be avoided. Heaven is what we seek.

El Bosco's Eden is the menagerie before the Flood.

With a map in hand, I find my way to the Museo Nacional de Ciencias Naturales. It takes several minutes for my eyes to adjust once inside the museum and when they do giant insects rule the dark interior. *Oruga de papilionido*. A caterpillar devouring a leaf. *Cucaracha*. Cockroach. *Escarabajo atlas*. Two rhinoceros beetles fighting on a log. They are the size of Volkswagens. *Saltamontes*. Grasshopper. *Hormiga*. Ant. *Mosca*. Fly. *Mariposa*. Butterfly. *Pulga*. Flea. *Langosta de desierto*. Lobster of the desert. We call them Jerusalem crickets at home. *Mantis oratorial*. Praying mantis.

I push a button that sets all the insects in motion, buzzing, hissing, biting, sucking, and flying.

Beyond the Hall of Insects, one moves through a long, shadowed corridor of heads, horns, and skulls, a death walk through Africa: six leopards, two rhinos, two crocodiles, two zebras, two warthogs. India: nine tigers. The Arctic: three walrus, four seals, a musk ox. And a pastiche of antlers: moose, elk, deer.

This trail of trophies leads to a room that contains the tools of a naturalist: a microscope, magnifying glasses, leather-bound books with engraved hand-watercolored plates of flora and fauna; jars, some empty, some filled with fetuses floating in formaldehyde. There are bird eggs blown dry; shells; black boxes with glass windows where the backs of beetles and butterflies are pinned to beds of cotton; and a myriad of natural

curiosities: a rabbit with four arms, a frog with five legs, the spiraled horn of a narwhal, flying fish.

I look closely at these perversions of wonder. Hieronymus Bosch painted them. He created a world of hybrids and hypotheticals, alongside actual marvels of the natural world. Flying fish swim through his skies. Duck-billed seals read and moth-bodied, bird-headed humans climb ladders in Hell. Evolution in nature may simply be the evolution of an imagination.

Suddenly, I find myself staring at two human skeletons in a glass case. The sign reads, *Adán y Eva en el Jardín del Edén*.

Adán y Eva en el Jardín del Edén? Adam and Eve are standing in front of a potted ficus tree in a natural history museum in Madrid. Adam is looking directly at me with his jaw open. Eve, standing behind to his left, is watching him. Her bony right hand is open as she offers him an apple with a leaf still attached to its stem. They stand on a mound of dried moss. A red parrot is perched on Adam's shoulder like a pirate's. A barn owl presides in the tree, its braided trunk reminiscent of a serpent.

Behind Adam is a small table with two glass jars resting on top. One jar contains a coiled rattlesnake yellowed by formaldehyde. The other jar contains apples. These are not simply specimens, they are evidence that Eden was a place, the temptation of Eve was real.

Stalagmites and quartz crystals are embedded in the moss with a rat scurrying across. In El Bosco's Paradise, the rat has been stopped by the cat and is carried away.

A great horned owl stands directly behind Eve. A black and white sloth has climbed a stump and a pink flamingo in the corner stares at her. A scarlet ibis stands behind the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. All are attendants to the Mother of Creation.

