

BEVERLY SKY

Evolution: The Sands of Time, 2014
Fabric collage on canvas, 36 x 36 in



COURTESY: STEVE DUNWELL

JERRY MARTIEN

The Angels in Our Kitchen

The Legacy of the Californios

My mother had a dream. She tells me about it as soon as I walk in the door. She's on the couch in her blue robe and slippers, a tattered paperback in her lap. She must have dozed off. She says that in her dream she killed a rat.

I've been at a meeting and it's late. It was sweet of you to wait up, I say, heading upstairs. I'm not ready for animal dreams, especially if the animal is a rat.

"It was in the kitchen," she calls up the stairs.

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The root metaphor of ecology is housekeeping—where the *oikos*, the hearth, is in that greater dwelling place "out there." The house of nature, with all its rules and relations. But the literal meaning also holds true: nature's house begins at the cooking fire, and extends from our common everyday choices to the fate of the earth.

Now I'm learning that it also extends inward—to psyche and self, those dark chambers behind reason's freshly painted rooms. My mother has lived with me for a little over a month, long enough to demonstrate that my taking care of an eighty-year-old woman with dementia was a really dumb idea. But in another, unforeseen ecology—an unexpected dimension of caretaking—I find we're living in a house of spirits. And some of them are animals.

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When friends ask my mother where she came from, she always says: *California*. Then they look at me, as if to ask what state she thinks she's in. I would add, "She means *Southern California*."

But in many ways she's right. Our climate and life forms belong to the Klamath province, part of the Cascadia bioregion of the Pacific Northwest. In cultural and historic terms, Mission Solano, two hundred miles south, marks the end of her California. On most people's mental map the state ends at the north end of the Golden Gate Bridge. We have a hard-core secessionist movement that claims we belong with southern Oregon, in a state called Jefferson. You see rusty pickups with a snail-eaten bumper sticker: *US Out of Humboldt County*.

In spite of all that, our material life—and our dream life—still inhabit my mother's California. We've both had some narrow brushes with middle-class success. By going