

with the spiritistic world and somewhat in fear of it. But after the planchette told us the story of Johnny's parentage, and after Plume kept Johnny alive all those hours in the cold waters of the bay, well, I swung around to trust in mediums, and the spirit world, and in the years afterward I have more or less lived my life by their advice. The truth is, I hardly ever got counsel from them that did me any good. It would be something I already knew, or purely bad information, or else something so murky I couldn't make sense of it. But once in a blue moon one of the spirits at a séance or a planchette reading would let loose with something shrewd, something bona fide, which kept me on the hook, and I would take another run at it, hoping the answer this time might improve my fortune. Hoping one of them might one day quit playing tricks and do me a modest good turn.

You might say my troubles are due to my own foolishness, and I might not disagree.

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Johnny had inherited a touch of the occult gift himself, being the son of a medium and a horoscopist—that's what I used to think. I always figured his luck, his fortunate career, all the close calls and heroism he'd written about, and the daring escapes from calamity, had come about with help from the spirits. I believed every word he wrote for truth.

I never told him that while he'd been sleeping off his drunken stupor on a north shore beach, I'd been searching the dark water in a widening eddy of guilt and despair. The water in that bay was so damn cold nobody overboard ever lasted long, this was something we all knew. When I tacked back to the Oakland docks at sunrise, I was shaking so hard from grief and hopelessness I couldn't get up the strength to walk over to Flora's to bring her the news. I told Heinold the story and he sent someone off to the house, and I just sat down on the pier and wept. And it was hours before we got word that Johnny'd been pulled from the drink alive. Hours more before he told us all about Plume and "the game is worth the candle."

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Before we split up for the night, I asked if he'd ever looked up the astrologer in Carquinez who might have been his

father. He took a while to answer. "Dead men rise up never," he said, in old Plume's spectral voice, which was just the sort of murky answer I was accustomed to hearing from the spirits.

Molly Gloss is a novelist and short-story writer whose work has received, among other honors, a PEN West Fiction Prize; an Oregon Book Award; Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Awards; the James Tiptree, Jr. Literary Award; and a Whiting Writers Award. Her work most often concerns the landscape, literature, mythology, and life of the American West. She writes both realistic fiction and science fiction. A fourth-generation Oregonian, she lives in Portland.

DAVID LIGARE

Man With Crow, 2015

Oil on canvas, 40 x 48 in



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