

## CHARLES GOODRICH

# At Neskowin on Presidents' Day

Dingy green carpet,  
pink Formica countertops. Fragrance  
of mildew and sanitizer—I've always  
liked this motel. And what better place  
than a tsunami-doomed beach town  
at the westernmost edge of the continent  
on a faux national holiday  
a month into this new administration's  
deconstruction of reality  
to contemplate  
the erosion of democracy?

From the dinky balcony  
I listen to the waves hissing ashore  
until the maid starts vacuuming the unit next door.

Then,  
in rain bibs and parka with the hood pulled up,  
I slouch out into the mist.

One block over  
a big-old Sitka spruce  
has been completely uprooted. Last night's storm  
has strewn the narrow streets with branches  
as if some mean and destructive  
parade has marched through.

On the beach  
amid the storm wrack  
a party of gulls eviscerate a dead seal,  
pecking the pink and blue entrails  
like pundits dissecting  
the latest election.

With the tide coming in,  
and the drizzle thickening to rain,  
I trudge on, wondering  
What on Earth can be done?  
March. Send money. Undo the years  
of gerrymandering. Write poems.  
Spit in the ocean.

Now a rainbow congeals  
from the gunmetal clouds.  
I watch a tall, shaggy man  
shooting a video of his tiny daughter  
as she drags a six-foot-long bull kelp toward the waves.

No one can say  
where this country is headed.  
The little girl doesn't know how it works.  
But I'm going to adopt her  
brave, innocent attitude  
toward the future. Dressed in blue fleece,  
pink tights, and yellow rubber boots,  
she splashes into the shallows. "Dad," she yells,  
"I'm putting it back!" And she slings  
the long, slippery plant  
back into the surf.

**Charles Goodrich** is the author of three books of poetry, *A Scripture of Crows*; *Going to Seed: Dispatches from the Garden*; and *Insects of South Corvallis*, and a collection of essays, *The Practice of Home*. He has coedited two anthologies, *Forest Under Story: Creative Inquiry in an Old-Growth Forest* and *In the Blast Zone: Catastrophe and Renewal on Mount St. Helens*. For many years he supported his poetry habit by working as a professional gardener, and he recently retired from his post as director of the Spring Creek Project for Ideas, Nature, and the Written Word.

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