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Immature Brown Pelican on Rocks, 2010
Oil on Linen, 39 x 29 in



courtesy: Winfield Gallery, Carmel

PATRICIA SMITH

Extinct

Kettle of One

Igor was a smart bastard. That's what Pete the trapper said. But Igor was also an only bastard, the last free-flying California condor on earth. Condors are sociable birds; they roost and preen and feed in groups called *kettles*, and by the spring of 1987, Igor was a kettle of one. No doubt he was lonely. That was about to change.

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Cassie was a smart little miss. That's what her father, the Colonel, said. Cassie was not an only: three brothers (all older), fifteen hundred high school classmates, six hundred thirty-nine thousand fellow citizens of Washington, D.C. (the census of humans and condors had gone precipitously in opposite directions). But in the fall of 1982, starting a new school in a new town where she knew no one, Cassie was lonely. That was about to change.

Nets

In the dark before dawn on Easter Sunday, at the Bitter Creek National Wildlife Refuge, southwest of Bakersfield, Pete began to dig. Not wanting to be seen, he worked quickly. Research shows that crows recognize individual humans for good and ill, and Pete knew this was true of condors as well. For five years, Igor had watched the Condor Recovery Project: the bait-and-shoot, the chases into caves. When Pete wrestled the second-to-last wild condor on earth, American Condor 5 (AC5), into a Sky Kennel six months earlier, Igor was watching from the crown of a nearby oak.

But they couldn't get him. Igor disdained the tasty bait. He was spotted only in the air, on distant ledges, or high in trees, and cannon nets tangle when shot into trees. So Pete resorted to the old Indian trick.

When the hole was big enough, Pete dragged a calf carcass within reach, laid his shovel in, and then got in himself. He piled dirt and straw over his body and settled a debris-covered basket over his head. Through the slits, he watched the sun travel across the sky as ravens went to work on the carcass.

Condors' sight is average, their sense of smell poor, and

Igor was the last one. A species faced extinction... does extinction apply to an individual soul?

they often find fodder by the shrieks of other scavengers. After half a day of watching the ravens have at it, Igor lit. Head tilted, he staggered across the scree. It took forty minutes, because the condor stopped and started and stopped and started and stopped. Finally, after one last suspicious survey, Igor buried his head and began to tear at the calf.

Suddenly, with an explosion of soil and straw, Pete leapt up, launched himself onto the six-foot bird, and wrapped his arms around the mammoth wings. Igor's fleshy head flushed deep red; he thrashed with his talons; he struck with his beak. Pete hung on, his face also red. It was desperate. Finally, suffering a few last painful bites for the preservation of a species, Pete managed to cram Igor, American Condor ♀, into the kennel.

* * *

After three grammar schools and two junior highs, Cassie was now the new kid at Woodrow Wilson High School. Tall, with pale features, a startled expression, and long, silver-blond hair, Cassie ate lunch, eyes down, at the table of silent loners. She did not play field hockey or volleyball, she didn't try out for cheerleader, and she dodged the basketball coach. An ardent, though muted, bedroom singer, she did inquire about the chorus, but then she never showed up for her audition. *Oh well*, she thought, *maybe Mama will let me sing in church choir*.

Then Cherie, the girl who had been kicked out of Catholic school, who sat next to Cassie in Latin II, invited her to go see E.T. Cassie didn't really want to. But she wasn't good at saying no, and Cherie seemed nice, and anyway, Mama had been urging her—gently—to make some friends. So on Friday evening, Cassie climbed into

Cherie's baby blue Cabriolet to be carried off not to the Admiral Theater, as it turned out, but to a bash down in Georgetown. Cherie hadn't wanted to walk in alone.

The living room of the brick row house throbbed with the Sex Pistols and screaming teens in slam-dance abandon. Cherie drifted into a back bedroom with some football player called Tank. Cassie drifted into a corner.

In the kitchen, a towering brown-eyed second-generation Italian boy called Buddy was pulling himself a brew while carrying on a conversation over his shoulder with four guys peeing off the back porch.

"C'mon, cock-hound!" they bellowed.

"Put *you* all to shame!" Buddy bellowed back. "You might want to hide those piddly little things."

"Bullshit!" Wild cackles. "Everyone knows it's the big bastards have the tiny dicks!"

Buddy guffawed, and beer streamed onto the linoleum floor. When he turned to right his cup, he spotted Cassie's gleaming hair through a doorway. He flipped the spigot and went to investigate, leaving the dicks on the back porch and his date in the den.

Cassie was reading album covers. She never saw him coming. Cassie was not exactly captured, she told Cherie, who became her first best friend, but the moment Buddy took hold of her arm, some irreversible thing happened. It was as if he had cast a net.

Igor was the last one. A species faced extinction.

There were a million girls like Cassie. Does "extinction" apply to an individual soul?

Species

Since the Pleistocene Era, roughly 1.8 million years ago, California condors (*Gymnogyps californianus*), the largest birds in the New World, have soared over the parched steppe, gorge-and-cliff, and oak savannah of western North America from British Columbia to Baja California, as well as parts of the American Southwest and Florida. In the early days, they fed on decomposing mastodons.

Genetically the condor is related to the stork, another hulking, ungainly bird, but unlike storks, condors are perfect air machines. They rise, circle, and float for hours without a flap. In a dive, they roar like biplanes. A condor can travel 140 miles in a day, and because they cannot car-

ry a carcass, either in their snub beaks or with feet adapted for walking on land, when they find food, they gorge. The overstuffed crop, like an enormous Adams apple (*laryngeal prominence*), can be seen from far below.

Condors keep clean by dipping in streams and flinging water everywhere, including on themselves. For mating displays or dominance squabbles, they use their bodies—flailing, prancing, bobbing, dancing—sometimes to comic effect. (Igor turned out to be a clumsy, but irresistible, dancer.) With heightened emotion, their skinheads change color and they make unbirdlike hisses, growls, and grunts. But condors do not sing. They have no voice box.

Like all New World vultures, condors form pair-bonds for life. They soar, roost, preen, sunbathe, play, and wash up with friends. They pick each other's nits. You would think people would find condors charming. Even admirable.

But no. They are vultures.

* * *

Humans (*Homo sapiens*), among the most abundant mammal on the planet, were in Africa evolving into their present form during the Pleistocene era. It was not until the Holocene, roughly ten thousand years ago, that humans appeared in the New World.

Genetically related to primates—they share almost 99 percent of their DNA with the chimpanzee—humans, like primates, like condors, are social animals. But humans are aggressive. To manage things, *Homo sapiens* developed courts of law, religious doctrine, and gossip.

Like all primates, newborn humans are helpless and require an extended childhood, so *Homo sapiens* also evolved a capacity for attachment. This capacity may facilitate pair-bonds and family groups—promoted through courts of law, religious doctrine, and gossip—as well as gangs, book groups, and Cubs fans.

As emotion and intellect developed, humans concocted not only spoken language but abstract reasoning and introspection. They developed an appreciation for beauty and a desire for self-expression, inventing music ("Monster Mash" to Beethoven's Ninth), art (*Velvet Elvis* to *Mona Lisa*), and literature (*Passion's Promise* to *War and Peace*).

With such a terrific brain, you would think humans would be able to anticipate the unintended consequences of their actions.

Not really. They are humans.

Names

People call condors buzzards, flying rats, no-good harpies, garbage-mouths, pigs with wings. Muddled up with their fodder—a strict scavenger, the condor eats only dead meat—condors are seen as filthy, smelly, repulsive. The smelly part is true.

Condor has never entered the popular lexicon, but the condor is a vulture, and when vulture comes into slang, we get culture vulture (an arts consumer), vulture capitalist (an opportunistic moneylender), money vulture (a greedy person), and vulture pie (a pizza so poorly constructed that it is unfit for human consumption).

Since this strict scavenger kills exactly nothing in the course of doing business, maybe we should call it Gandhi.

* * *

Cassie's mother called her Panda—Cassie had a halo of bone-white hair as a baby—Cass-Cass, and Sugar. Her father called her Sister. Her three older brothers called her Casper the Friendly Ghost when they were being nice and Golem when they weren't, but usually they just called her Cassie.

Buddy, one of those guys who bestow nicknames on everyone, bestowed upon Cassie M.J. and Mary Jane because of the time she smoked marijuana with Cherie, which he did not approve of and did not forgive her for, more for going behind his back than for using an illegal substance. Also Rosie, Rosalinda, Rigatoni—his Italian heritage—and Pudge. She came to understand that his "endearments," like his "teasing," were tiny timed-release darts. Objecting would activate the poison.

Her name is Cassiopeia Rose. Her mother named her after the stars and her favorite flower. No one called her Cassiopeia Rose. In Cassie's mind, this was because this beautiful name, like the name of Yahweh, must not be spoken. But she called herself Cassiopeia Rose in her mind.

Maybe we should, too.

Decline

In 1890, the first official count estimated the condors' numbers at six hundred, but over the next ninety years this number declined until, in 1982, the population had dwindled to twenty-two. Twenty-two California condors in the world.

Why? Because condors produce roughly one egg every other year, and this only after they reach six years of age. This stately rate of reproduction could not keep pace with the loss of habitat, let alone the new sources of lethality brought by the settlers of European descent.

Poison in the dead coyotes and wolves baited by ranchers was ingested by condors.

Lead bullets in dead bear, deer, squirrel, armadillo—you name it—shot for sport and left to rot were ingested by condors.

Power lines, tricky for a ten-foot wingspan, electrocuted condors or broke their wings so that they died on the ground of starvation or predation.

And there was rampant pilfering of condor eggs. (A condor's nest is often the stone floor of a cave.) Perhaps people ate the large, greenish, oblong orbs, but more likely it was just another pinecone for the mantel.

And the shotgun. Hunched black vultures with unkempt ruffs, beady eyes, rubbery heads, and thick black beaks—like snub-nosed revolvers—do not excite appreciation in some people. Of course, people shoot eagles too.

Because he was smart, curious, and cautious, Igor had managed to avoid the net. It was just dumb luck that he also avoided the poison, lead bullets, power lines, collectors, and shotguns to become the last, proud symbol of his clan.

* * *

Cassiopeia Rose was the youngest of four, the longed-for girl after three boys. She started out as the easiest baby anyone ever saw, a perfect little doll, but it seemed that people—strangers—felt compelled to touch that silky white baby hair, and she grew clingy. “Every time I turn around, there you are,” her mother said. “Like Mary’s little lamb.” It took her a long time to adjust to each new home.

Cassie’s father, the son of a drunk and a Bible-reading Baptist from a poor homestead in northern Mississippi, had a brother who died in prison; the other was a homo-

sexual. The Colonel was driven by the pressure of being the last hope for the Baggett clan. After washing out of Major League baseball, he took up the only other thing he was good at: doing his duty. In the army.

His wife, from a plain, well-tended cottage on the Gulf Coast, was the daughter of a fifth-generation shrimper and a seamstress. She was sympathetic enough, and soft, but her little brother had died of leukemia when she was thirteen, and she carried a heavy load of sorrow. She just wanted to raise the kids, tend whatever garden each new post offered, sing in church choir, and take care of the Colonel. She just wanted to avoid trouble.

They had deserted their natural environment, they had abandoned their social order, and the Colonel was often gone, sometimes overseas, for months. The boys grew wild. As Cassie got older, they discussed her anatomy openly at the dinner table, and she began to slouch. She stayed in her room.

Oblivious parents, lackadaisical guidance, the moves, three big brothers, a dreamy nature, that hair. Cassie developed the excruciating sense that someone was staring at her, and she went about with downcast eyes. She tried to avoid walking across open spaces.

Brink

Extreme efforts ensued from the panic of getting down to twenty-two condors. Through 1983 and 1984, eggs and chicks were spirited into captivity at the San Diego Wild Animal Park. Biologists kept tabs on the five breeding pairs still in the wild, but in 1985, disaster struck. Six birds went missing, leaving only nine free-flying condors, and worse, only *one* breeding pair. Still, biologists, ornithologists, conservationists, wildlife managers, and bird lovers could not thrash out a plan. Some insisted the condor must make it on its own to truly be a wild species. Others advocated taking all necessary steps to preserve the diversity of the dwindling gene pool. As debate raged, three more adult condors were captured. One more wild bird died. By 1986, there were only five condors left in the wild. In captivity, twenty-five.

If a wild animal lives and breeds only in captivity, is it extinct?

* * *

The year after Cassie met Buddy, her family moved from Washington, D.C., to Monterey, California. Cassie was bereft. Buddy had been like the plug for some perpetually empty socket, maybe in her neck. She wrote him every day on pink scented paper.

But when she began her senior year at Pacific High School, things perked up. A boy in her physiology lab, a National Science Foundation honoree, took her into the oak hills of Carmel Canyon to install antibiotic strips for the wild bees, and she discovered trees pierced with scores of little holes, each with a solitary acorn. Acorn woodpeckers. A tenor from the chamber chorus took her hiking in Pinnacles National Monument: turkey vultures and mountain bluebirds. When a Greater Roadrunner dashed across their path, all crested up, Cassie fell in love. With birds.

Buddy, laughing off his \$800 phone bill, called her late at night. Sometimes she would jolt awake to his voice: “Hey! Rosie! Are you sleeping?” She would feel guilty.

Two girls from English Lit class took her surfing in Santa Cruz. She couldn’t even get a knee up on the board, but there were black-bellied plovers, marbled godwits, willets! Cassie started a list.

Buddy wrote, “My long drink of water, I am dying of thirst.” And, “If we have a boy, let’s name him Sue.”

“Ha ha,” she wrote back. Not every day.

When Buddy declared he was coming to California, the Colonel rolled his eyes and muttered, “Not the big bastard.” He told his wife, “She can do better.”

“Sure, Sugar, he can stay here,” Cassie’s mother said.

But once he got to Monterey, Cassie could not do anything right. Being a freshman at UC Santa Cruz took so much time. Buddy enjoyed hiking the Santa Cruz Mountains, but stopping to peer through binoculars was annoying. What was it with the birds?

“I don’t know,” Cassie said. “They just make me happy.” She did not say, *I love them more than anything*.

She gave up University Chorus, she dropped a class, she skipped labs. Buddy began taking classes, he got a job at Les Schwab, he moved into an apartment. And still, something was always wrong.

One night in the fall of 1986, Buddy barged into Cassie’s room, as he often did after working a late shift, to demand his mandatory goodnight kiss. After he stalked

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out, Cherie, who was visiting, blurted, “You call that love? He’s not very nice to you.”

It was as if someone had turned on the light. Cassie thought, *He isn’t. He isn’t very nice to me*.

And she picked up the telephone and broke up with him.

Fate

Breeding season in the wild, 1986: one female and four male condors. The female, AC 8, later called the Matriarch because of her prolificacy in captivity, had lost her mate to lead poisoning, and, ignoring the biologists in the bleachers, she seemed to have a hankering for an unproven male, AC 9. Biologists shook their heads at the juvenile’s clumsy courtship; they groaned at his awkward attempts to mount. Igor, they called him. But the Matriarch took care of things, and the pair produced two eggs. When she began to brood, one egg, thin-shelled from the lingering effects of the now-banned pesticide, DDT, cracked. Deciding they could not afford a single additional loss, the biologists stole the other egg and took it to San Diego.

And condor management careened to its contentious conclusion: Bring them all in.

Condor traits allowed their capture. They bury their heads when they feed. And takeoff can be cumbersome. If a flustered condor cannot get airborne, it will run on the ground—a clumsy leviathan with swirling legs and intermittent, gigantic wing-flaps—not very fast. When cornered, it will “hide” by standing still in some dark place. Easy pickings, especially if you have a cannon net.

* * *

By the spring, Cassie was ensconced in her own apartment with a champagne-colored miniature poodle named

Madonna. She collected Audubon prints of extinct birds: Carolina parakeets, ivory-billed woodpeckers, and passenger pigeons. She was saving for a trip to Hawaii to see the critically endangered honeycreepers.

Cassie started dating again: Donald, a nearsighted diver from the aquarium, and Steve, a genius from chemistry lab. She sang in a folk ensemble with her very cute guitar teacher, Gary. And then, through Cherie, who had moved north to attend Brainard Academy of the Arts, she met Arthur, a thirty-year-old filmmaker, smart, interesting, handsome, rich. They rambled the Santa Cruz hills in his classic Porsche convertible; they spent weekends in San Francisco, where his friends treated her like a beautiful porcelain object. He photographed her naked. One night they took mushrooms and went owling.

But Cassie was by nature simple and cautious. Arthur was sophisticated and reckless. One night when Arthur was off in L.A., she had a couple of beers—she was alone, it was late, she couldn't sleep—and she telephoned Buddy. A stupid impulse. But Cassie's traits made her do it. She felt sorry for Buddy; she missed him—he was one of her *people*. Aside from Cherie, Cassie had known Buddy longer than anyone.

She swung open the door. Buddy stood under the yellow porch light with his arms dangling, his dark hair haloed with gold. He held out his hands, palms up, fingers spread, and stepped across the threshold. He closed the door. When he wrapped his long arms around her, every cell in Cassie's body relaxed. Plug in socket.

She got pregnant.

Love

It turns out condors breed well in captivity.

Using thievery, keepers could often trick female condors into laying two, or even three, eggs a cycle. (They couldn't tell whether the female condor knew she had already laid her egg: *Now where did I...?* Maybe she thought ravens got it.)

With so many hatchlings, most condor chicks had to be raised by condor puppets. But condors are observant, and the babies learned to associate the puppet with a human arm, and the human person behind that arm, and they lost their fear. This would later cause big trouble

when they were released into the wild. Juveniles without adult mentors—like giving the kids the car keys. Silly condors tried to play with Boy Scouts and tourists; six of them took up residence in the attic of Bob Allen's cabin and tore the place to shreds.

Condor numbers grew. By 1987, there were fifty-two living condors, every one in captivity at the World Center for Birds of Prey in Boise, the San Diego Wild Animal Park, the Oregon Zoo, and the Los Angeles Zoo. That year, the first eight juveniles were released into the wild in the Sespe Condor Sanctuary. Seven survived. The next year, five more were released, three of them killed by power lines. Every year, birds were released and monitored by passionate biologists and volunteers who staked out donated stillborn calves; chased condors off of dangerous roosts that were exposed to coyote predation; and shooed condors away from human menaces—campgrounds, power poles, housing developments, strip malls. They also recaptured condors when the birds sickened from lead poisoning or needed a time-out to grow up a little.

In 2000, one of the birds released was AC8, the Matriarch, returned to the wild after fourteen years of service.

In 2001, the first wild egg of captive-bred condors was laid. It was later found broken on the floor of the cave.

In 2002, AC9, Igor, having spread his genes, was also released.

The first wild chicks of captive-bred condors hatched. None survived. Their inexperienced parents fed them bottle caps and plastic trash along with rotting flesh, and they starved.

In 2003, the bird world mourned the death of the Matriarch, the oldest living condor. A drunken hunter on a group hunt called Pigapalooza had shot her out of a tree. How he mistook a big black bird high in an oak for a pig is hard to fathom.

But by 2005, there were 242 condors in the world, 132 in breeding programs and 110 working the remote territories of Arizona, California, and Baja.

* * *

They named the baby Mary Theresa (Emmy) after Buddy's mother, and though Buddy had expected a boy, he loved this little thing almost as much as he loved Cassie. But romance and marriage were different. They tried to

do it too soon after the baby was born, and it hurt. And Cassie's breasts now seemed to belong to Emmy.

"It's like living in a candy store and not getting any candy," Buddy would complain.

Two years later, they had another girl, named Cecile Louise (CeeCee) after Cassie's mother. When CeeCee was three, Cassie went back to college. Her mama helped with the girls.

Buddy remained constant: more. Cassie thought she wanted to, but it seemed that the pressure killed that feeling. And then she caught him.

"Six months after we got married," he told her. "I wasn't ready to get married; you knew that." (His brother was a hound, his friends all did it...)

But—

"She was just this interesting girl from UCLA, home for the summer. We used to take walks in Oak Creek Park."

But—

"She was a lonely woman in a bar, not even a name—I wasn't looking. I just had to get out. It's not like you gave me any."

But—

She would cry. And Buddy would cry. Or get mad.

She would think, *Two babies and no visible means of support.*

He did not really see how it took anything away from her.

I'm finally back in school. I'd have to go to work.

It was just sex. He loved Cassie.

It would kill the girls. Cherie said dump him. But Cassie's people mated for life. And every third day, Buddy, a firefighter, slept at the fire station and Cassie ate popcorn in bed with the girls.

Finally he promised, never again.

But did he really understand?

He took the girls to baseball games; he built a treehouse; he dug up his precious lawn and laid irrigation for a hummingbird garden.

He *promised*.

He risked his life to pull three kids from a burning apartment in Del Rey Oaks—just doing his job. He brought home a pair of parakeets for Valentine's Day. Birds in cages? She made him take them back.

He *promised*. He never wanted to hurt her again.

All over the world, bird lovers reveled in the return of condors from the brink of extinction, celebrating every release, lamenting every loss.

Late

All over the world, bird lovers reveled in the return of condors from the brink of extinction, celebrating every release, lamenting every loss. They followed the pairings of captive-bred birds. They rooted for each new chick.

But for other bird lovers, when Igor was taken, there were no more California condors. For these bird lovers, the magnificent Pleistocene-era relics are now extinct. Monitored, carcass-fed birds with transmitters on their tails and large white tags on their wings—birds with junk—don't count. To these people, the kettles patrolling the Kaibab Plateau, Vermillion Cliffs, Ventana Wilderness, Grand Canyon, Bitter Creek, Sespe, and Pinnacles are no better than farmed salmon. No better than a pen of pigs. California condors are gone.

* * *

On her way from Monterey to L.A. for the Avian Rehabilitation Conference, Cassie took a little detour. To the Grand Canyon, to look for California condors, which she had never seen, though she'd been to Pinnacles many times.

I hope it's not too late. She leaned over the guardrail, her Vortex Razor binoculars dangling, and scanned the sky. The sinking sun lit the seams of sandstone like a dying star capable of light but not heat, and Cassie squeezed her arms in tighter. She stuffed her hands into her coat pockets, where she discovered raw Spanish peanuts. *Are they already roosting?*

"Hey. M.J."

She should not have let him come. But arguing was

useless; Buddy could not tolerate her driving any distance all alone. Cassie popped a peanut into her mouth.

“Come on. It’s getting late.”

She searched systematically, east to west. The side of her face tingled. *Staring at me from two feet away*, she thought, continuing to survey. A few stray silvery hairs blew across her gaze. *He’s probably counting how many days since we had sex. I hope he can count that high.* She chuckled.

“What?” he said.

Cassie popped another peanut. Nothing. If they were here, they were roosting.

“A couple more minutes,” she said. “Why don’t you wait in the lobby of that old lodge.” Her lovely voice was smooth as uncurdled cream, heavy, thick, rich. *I really could be a voice-over. I should take a class.*

Buddy leaned close and wrapped his thick fingers around the steel rail, penning her in. Cassie reflexively jerked her elbows out.

“I told you it was too late,” Buddy whispered, his breath tickling her ear.

She shunted her head sideways and raised one shoulder. *I can come back in the spring.*

“Hey, how about we skip Flagstaff, get us a room here?”

“No,” she said. “Now get. Go on. I’m busy.”

Buddy snickered, pleased to have elicited a response. He dropped his hands, turned, and sauntered up the cement path. As he pulled open the heavy wood-and-glass door, he called, “They’re not here, babe,” and then disappeared inside.

The sun was flattening as though it were softening. Cassie heard a sighing and she leaned over the rail. Beneath her, near the canyon’s rim, a huge black shape seemed to hover—big enough to climb on. Cassie’s breath caught. She reached out a hand; her eyes blurred. She watched herself hoist one leg and then the other over the rail, balance on the ledge, and then carefully straddle the waiting bird, a bird the size of a biplane. The tag on the wing read #243.

Hello, Number Two-forty-three, she said. Together they sailed effortlessly into the great empty space of the canyon. There was no wind, no sound at all, just pure silver silence as they swept into the abyss. They made a lazy circle and sailed back out.

Cassie extended both hands, palms up. All she had was Spanish peanuts. The condor coasted past one more time, then disappeared with a slow, thick susurrus. Cassiopeia Rose raised her head. The swollen sun slipped behind the far rim.

Love may travel; it may shift its shape or hide in the heart’s dark corners; it may dangle from a distant star while it waits. But love will never go extinct.

Patricia Smith is a writer and visual artist living in Seattle, Washington. She has written a memoir, comprised of narrative and paintings, about her mother, the death and mysterious life, as well as a series of essays examining problems, psychotherapy, religion, and nature.

“Extinct” is part of a collection of short fiction with human/animal intersections—bees, butterflies, spiders, pythons, wallabies, a feral cat, gnats. All consider the solace of the natural world. Or not.

Her work has appeared in *(em) journal of image and text*, *Short Story America* (in which she was awarded third prize), *Stymie, A Journal of Sport and Literature*, and is upcoming in the *Jabberwock Review*.

Until recently, she also practiced psychotherapy in Seattle.

KILLARNEY CLARY

The Old Rain

The old rain blows down from the trees; frogs gather in the culvert at the drain. Mice have made their beds of shredded pocket cash. The bird’s nest is part cat hair, the feral cat’s lair lined with feathers.

Darkness moves out from between guiding forms and takes on a shape of its own— coyote, deer, fox, the begging ghost, the hungry not-yet ghost. I look behind me for the hunted. I look forward and the predator has vanished.

There is a pattern, not a story, repetition of shape, change of scale and/or direction, a game of perception: find the hidden hat in the picture; it may be inverted. Shown for only a moment, the tray is taken into another room. How many items on it am I able now to name? This is for the prize.

Killarney Clary has three collections of poetry, *By Common Salt*, *Potential Stranger*, and *Who Whispered Near Me* (which is scheduled to be republished by Tavern Books in 2013). She lives on the Central Coast of California.