He Calls Her Blossom [1]

January 26, 2015 Flash Nonfiction [2]

Flash Nonfiction by Jeri Edwards

Prescott National Forest, Arizona, August 14



He's squinting his eyes like he just ate a handful of tart kumquats. Until I meet him at the end of their freshly graded drive, I've only known my friend's new second husband through her words. He calls her Blossom.

I know her as Jane, and on our weekly rambles off-trail across National Forest land that backs up to her forty-acre property, she's mentioned a few things about him, like he loves his beer at night and she no longer drinks with him.

"He takes care of me," she says, "so I overlook his mean streak."

Our "escapes," as we call them, cut through countless fingered washes that carve into Mint Creek, a riparian off in the distance where old cottonwoods and willows outnumber junipers. She always carries a .22 on her hip, so small I only see it when she's fleecing the sand on her stomach to get underneath barbed-wire fences meant to keep cattle in their grazing allotments. She mentioned the gun once in passing, said he insists she carry it.

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It’s an unspeakable accessory, goes with the imperfect language of the jag of mesas stealing the horizon, the four-wire fences running like sinews over every swale, the cattle looking out of place in these wild hills, the ranchers with a different grasp of the history of who came here first.

That day, the wash was soft under our boots. Tracks of cattle, coyotes, black-tailed jackrabbits meandered with ours. On occasion, we stooped to look at pottery shards, scooped them up gently, as if they were delicate eggshells. We turned them in our outstretched palms, then replaced them for others to ponder.

Now, her husband is not concerned about the cumulonimbus pushing our way. He points his chin at nothing over the rise. “I must have wounded it,” he says, and I notice the resemblance between the lines on his face and the deep canyon sloping steeply off their land.

“Shit,” he growls, speaking out of the side of his mouth. “I put out six steel leg traps last night and only got me one this morning.” He continues as if I know what he’s talking about. “I shoot every goddamn coyote I see stepping foot on my property.”

My thoughts become like a bird of prey. I smell blood vengeance, not table meat.

The eggplant sky that could unleash lightning any second is my excuse to leave Jane and her husband standing at the edge of their drive. Before I get in my truck, she takes my arm, says, “You don’t know how much your friendship means to me.”

This carries more weight now that I’ve met him. On the long stretch of dirt track back to the main road, I look for coyotes as if it were possible to warn them. I can’t think about those steel jaws, the screams that come in the night, him calling her Blossom. Instead, I think about the resilience of coyotes.

Art Information

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Jeri Edwards is a writer and a pastel/mixed-media illustrator who grew up in Virginia with a couple of acres of woods as her backyard. She now divides her time between the Santa Monica Mountains in Southern California and Northern Arizona. She’s passionate about the never-ending discovery of the ways we’re connected to everything in nature and remains a steadfast conservation advocate.

She’s been published in journals such as *Quiddity*, *Yalobusha Review*, *Portland Review*, *Worcester Review*, *Lumina*, and *Westwind*.

Why is this flash piece nonfiction?

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> An obvious answer: It’s an experience I had. It gnawed at me for days, the juxtaposition of the peacefulness of my ramble off-trail with my friend and the intensity of her husband's visceral ‘racism’ toward a native species.

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