**1/21/21**

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I found myself on a community baseball field watching a game. The game went on despite all the people who walked through the field, nonchalant, in pairs and threes, unconcerned with the play around them. The walkers and the players ignored and accommodated one another, somehow. People walking, players playing. The last hit was to left field. It took a single hop and then skidded along the grass. A player picked up the ball and threw it hard to home plate, and out of his hand came iridescent confetti which completely filled the sky, like fireworks but without any pattern, simply a sudden sky full of glitter.

Puzzled, delighted, awake, I got up, made coffee, and opened all the blinds in the house so I could see the dark winter sky and watch it turn to morning. I searched for signs of iridescence.

The sky first brightened, then dramatically darkened: an early rain hailed out of the sky, or an early hail rained out of the sky, or both, really, rain and hail, wind-driven into an oblique sloppy stream—the wet, darkly glittering sky foretold in my dream. I finished one then another cup of coffee. I ate a platter of eggs stirred up with sharp cheddar. I composed and sent an email about the date, a hopeful post-inauguration palindrome. “I'll wait for the ground to dry,” I scribbled on a scrap of paper from my kitchen table, messy with maps and books and letters, “then lumber up some obscure slope into the sky.” I intended to walk onto a mesa later in the day. There may be snow. There certainly will be mud. I dressed and put the scrap of paper in my pocket. Maybe someone will find it.

A few hours later, the clouds passed, and the sun came out, the bright denouement of a typical fast-moving high desert storm. I took a small backpack from a hook, water and some almonds, a warm hat, gloves, sunglasses, a down jacket compressed into the size of a softball, a headlamp.

The Black Ridge Canyon Wilderness, a favorite haunt, is near my house on Colorado’s Western Slope. As wildernesses go, it’s easy to get to. I walk there to clear my head, which needs frequent clearing. My plan was to walk/run a few miles along a trail into a maze of redrock canyons, then take a steep, direct line to the top of a singular mesa. Near 65, approaching geezer status, its more walk than run.

I like to make my way along the edges of cliffs, a lifelong intrigue. Along the top, the sense of danger is always present, the feeling that a quick step to the left would result in becoming airborne. I imagine wind as I plummet. I imagine kaleidoscopic colors rushing by. I never imagine hitting the ground. Along the bottom of cliffs, I often follow the tracks of bighorn sheep, which tend to walk in single file. Once, I found a complete skeleton, but broken, perhaps shattered, and wondered if the bighorn had stumbled. What would a bighorn see as it fell down the face of a cliff? Would it imagine hitting the ground?

There was no one else around. No fetid Covid-breath to breathe, and no one upon whom to breathe. Nary a horse, nor a fieldmouse. It was winter after a storm. Ravens for company, however unpredictable and raucous. They chased a smaller bird into a crack of the sandstone above me and took turns landing on the edge of the crack, trying to pry the thing out. Eventually, they grew bored with the game and flew out of sight.

I was happy to be in the wilderness. I was just as happy to be alone in the wilderness. In town, about 80 percent of my neighbors wear masks in grocery stores. Men, women, young, old, rough, refined: I couldn’t see a pattern for those who disdained common sense. Liquor stores were the same, 20 percent without masks. At the grocers or buying booze, I never asked the maskless for their rationale. I kept my distance. But I wanted to chase them into a crack high on a cliff, where they could breathe their own doom and fall to their own deaths and leave the rest of us to suffer the pandemic in relative peace.

The day warmed and on the margins of a steep ravine splitting the side of the mesa I found dry rocks to scramble up. I liked that about the desert. Morning snow and afternoon warmth, the winter equivalent of a spring freshet, but for which I had no word. In some ways, words were superfluous. They didn’t help—no words came to mind—as I pulled on a loose boulder and leaped awkwardly out of the way of its crashing descent, its delicate angle of repose inadvertently re-reposed. All the rocks in this ravine were similarly precarious, and I continued with greater care as the ravine steepened near the top of the mesa. I had lost sight of the ravens, and they of me. I had not spotted a bighorn sheep the entire day. I was pleased the boulder did not take me with it.

The day got away from me, as days do, as many of my days have done. The climb to the top took longer than I had anticipated, and the views of the snowy Book Cliffs were so magnificent I sat and looked and drank my water and ate my almonds, one by one. Finally, I started down. The sun touched the rim of the mesa and continued to disappear. I put on my hat and down jacket and hoped the batteries in my headlamp held a charge. Rimrocked at night with the temperature dropping was not my idea of a good time. I thought about the scrap of paper in my pocket, of my neighbors without their masks, of all of us as we begin and end our days, a sudden sky full of glitter, a baseball moon, a solitary descent at night down a steep ravine by failing light.