**And Reflect from The Mountain So All Souls Can See It**

Jacki Weaver

Two mornings after the most violent and beautiful of the monsoons, the sunrise was still discovering new things that could be made out of the clouds. Smoky gray brushstrokes, obscuring the pastel blue, gave birth, as if through fire, to a brilliant pink above the mountains. I stood on the pavement, humming a good-morning to the clouds, forgetting that I’d grumbled at my alarm only half an hour ago. The other dawn-hikers arrived, pausing to take a photo or comment on the vastness, the impossible effortlessness of the view. For perhaps the twentieth time since arriving in Santa Fe, I thought to myself: this sight might be it.

Alfredo, our trail guide, suggested that we walk down the arroyo. “It will be an olfactory experience after the storm.” He nodded beneath his signature baseball cap and checked his phone, teasing a regular hiker for arriving late at 6:02 a.m. Raised in Los Alamos and as much a wordsmith as an outdoorsman, Alfredo carried with him two hiking poles, an essential supply of jokes, and a solidarity with the plants, sights, and local memories of each trail.

*If I have two piñon seeds in this hand and three piñon seeds in the other, what do I have? A difference of a piñon.*

*Who knows the names of the flora? Who can name the mountains?*

*I think it’s this place here, this is where some of my ancestors maybe hiked to. And when they got to this place, they looked around and they said, “Where the fuck are we?”*

A few paces into the hike, Alfredo bent to gather a handful of tree scraps and debris that had been swept by the storm. “You’ll see these clusters everywhere,” he said. “The flood carries it all forward – pine needles, leaves, coyote scat, dog poo.”

And anything with roots that couldn’t be carried forward responded with a release of scents: pine, chamisa, some lavender maybe, a plant we thought might be in the willow family, something that smelled like skunk.

“We’ll keep going down until we get to the confluence. And then,” Alfredo added as a gentle matter-of-fact, “we’re going to become water.”

We journeyed along the creek-bed, stepping, crunching beneath our feet, striding through the red, still-damp silt.

*Oh, where have you been, my blue-eyed son?*

*And where have you been, my darling young one?*

*I’ve stumbled on the side of twelve misty mountains*

*I’ve walked and I crawled on six crooked highways..*

*And it’s a-hard, it’s a-hard, it’s a-hard, and it’s a-hard..*

Through the tributary, we came to a ledge with shrubs and tall grass and mud all combed downward in the same direction. Alfredo gestured with a hiking pole and said, “You’re looking at a dry waterfall.” He asked us if anyone wanted to climb down, and we laughed at the joke, until he led the way over the edge through fresh dirt and loose rocks.

\*\*\*

I was inside that day as the rain hit. White streaks of lightning followed by choruses of thunder – the kind that can only be understood when hearing the sound arrive over the mountains. Deep, barreling collisions, climbing high – a solitary sound reechoing, uninterrupted, across the earth’s surface. Then rain, pattering down, growing in abundance as if whatever it is that the thunder has broken has also set the raindrops free.

Streaks of water begin to pour down both sides of the open windowpane, obscuring my reflection as I stare from behind the screen. Soon, a steady stream of water hurtles from the downspout just above my room, smacking and splashing onto the pavement below. Pools form on the uneven slants in the sidewalk and beneath the hedges that are being hurled about by opposing winds. Instead of stone, the red earth is clay, new material for creation that God might soon breathe into life. The sky has become white like dissipated lightning.

I lean forward, my nose touching the window frame, to see perfect layers of color in the distance: red ground, black mountain, blue sky, white storm – one atop the next. The rain strikes the earth at an angle, arrows launched into the ground as a welcome assault. More rumbles and the power flickers off and on several times. I wish it would give up.

I remember my first dawn hike of the summer, how I had been surprised that so many little cactuses were yellow and withered. A few even had a bite taken out by some creature willing to risk a mouthful of pain for momentary relief.

Now, the rain has arrived, overwhelming, covering the ground in a degree equal to the desperation. Replenishment by force; baptism by fire by water.

Through the window screen, the raindrops strike my face, and though I’m indoors, I toss my head back like a child and stick out my tongue. The droplets are cold. Hale pings against the window frame, and in seconds, the force of rain surges, covering my feet and suitcase, notebooks and blankets. Yet I hesitate to pull the window shut. Any other day under the sunlight, the air moves as one substance. But now, it has been shattered into endless small pieces: ice, plant, wind, sand, fur, leaf, pine, mud. Each breath catches another piece.

A few minutes after the storm has ended, a woman walks by on the sidewalk. She doesn’t notice me leaning into the window frame, forehead against the screen, filling my lungs with what is cold and pure. She tugs her dress up to avoid stepping in a puddle and mumbles something to herself as she passes out of sight.

The carpeting beneath my window is soaked and streaks of water decorate the wall. The sky is silent again. Kind, even. I look once more to the farthest point I can see from the window, and the mountains have turned to purple. A deep violet shadowed by a mountain of lilac, shadowed by a mountain of heather.