



Small Wonder, by Barbara Kingsolver

Barry Lopez writes that if we hope to succeed in the endeavor of protecting natures other than our own, "it will require that we reimagine our lives.... It will require of many of us a humanity we've not yet mustered, and a grace we were not aware we desired until we had tasted it."

And yet no endeavor could be more crucial at this moment. Protecting the land that once provided us with our genesis may turn out to be the only real story there is for us. The land still provides our genesis, however we might like to forget that our food comes from dank, muddy earth, that the oxygen in our lungs was recently inside a leaf, and that every newspaper or book we may pick up (including this one, ultimately, though recycled) is made from the hearts of trees that died for the sake of our imagined lives. What you hold in your hands right now, beneath these words, is consecrated air and time and sunlight and, first of all, a place. Whether we are leaving it or coming into it, it's here that matters, it is place. Whether we understand where we are or don't, that is the story: To be here or not to be. Storytelling is as old as our need to remember where the water is, where the best food grows, where we find our courage for the hunt. It's as persistent as our desire to teach our children how to live in this place that we have known longer than they have. Our greatest and smallest explanations for ourselves grow from place, as surely as carrots grow in the dirt. I'm presuming to tell you something that I could not prove rationally but instead feel as a religious faith. I can't believe otherwise. []

Oh, how can I say this: People need wild places. Whether or not we think we do, we do. We need to be able to taste grace and know once again that we desire it. We need to experience a landscape that is timeless, whose agenda moves at the pace of speciation and glaciers. To be surrounded by a singing, mating, howling commotion of other species, all of which love their lives as much as we do ours, and none of which could possibly care less about our economic status or our running day calendar. Wildness puts us in our place. It reminds us that our plans are small and somewhat absurd. It reminds us why, in those cases in which our plans might influence many future generations, we ought to choose carefully. Looking out on a clean plank of planet earth, we can get shaken right down to the bone by the bronze-eyed possibility of lives that are not our own.

-- Barbara Kingsolver, in "Small Wonder"

