

Into the Woods

By Drew T. Noll



Echoes from the Hallway © DTNoll 2.2017 48cmx63cm

Separated by the Rocky Mountain range of craggy peaks, I was forced to reinvent myself by the sheer fact that I was physically cut-off from my past; I had to rely upon the foundation that had been set down by ancestors who once had moved west. I moved east and landed in Colorado, then perched onto the foundation of a suburban home built the year I was born. There, I began to search for work ... and three years in I began again to paint. After stints splinted with real estate, museum work, and cabinet making, I carved into my suburban home a woodworking studio for days and a painting studio by night. Hence, after tucking my freshly bathed jammy-clad boys

into bed with a story read between lines, pages skipped in anticipation, and then with a parting kiss to the lips of my love, I disappeared down below the earth into a basement brightened with paint to light up dreams of doorways invented to ascend.

I built there a tiny staircase with a curving rail up through a hole in the wall leading into an unseen garage, my woodworking studio by day and a place to dwell above ground by night. My suburban bi-level began to transform and to morph into its own, during daylight building cabinets, but at night spray-painting dreams to create jet-ways into the unknown. From table-saw to router, with some hand-tools in between, my mind would leap from paint in the basement to ornamentation above. Built, mortised, and finished upon the ground, with gold-leaf spread around and between, I spent my nights traveling between worlds, one above ground and the other seeking the light from far down below, but mostly unseen.

My boys grew while my worldview shrunk. But, I found that I was able to survive and almost thrive, and regardless of numbers and inherent fears, a business was formed—built in summer with winters too cold. So, built more I did, cloistering up, into the sky with a loft in my woodshop to look out from with a ladder leading below—I left a dimension and time, leaving behind the clutches of foundations built. I had parted from my past-life in California and built my dreams on my own. In suburban Colorado I built it alone, with no way to be heard, internet only a dream, I built from anew a worldview unshared and painstakingly unsung.

I coached soccer for my first-born, attending teacher-meetings for my second; I evolved and developed into a parent each day, LEGOs on the carpet, museums for learning, and teaching about bikes; playing Airsoft in the day, but by night descending—seeking, expecting to rise up again nightly via a staircase through the wall, I painted in oil-cosmic, and the nights slipped together into still. By catching a ride in the dark on the waves passing by, I remained to myself tangible, quite possibly alive, and my mind was able to soar. At least that is what I told myself. Really, I was completely lost in a foreign land with a foreign alibi. *Who was I fooling, anyway?* I left California because I was tired of holding on to something that had died many years before. I needed something new, something strange, something obtuse and prickling in order to live. The world I had known wasn't ever real, wasn't ever anything that could manifest a footing. It was a world overrun, that I lived in, with too many other things, hollow things, devolving. The cultural condition in California had mutated, for me, into something grand and bulbous, a sore toe tripping forward, so with almost no choice left, I left it.

My father grew up there, in the sunny state of California, his father too, all watching the place breed and spout, spreading a sort of cancer with a vintage tin watering can haphazardly onto dreams dreamt, and then packed away out of sight—into crates perfectly fitting produce produced in the dark. I left California with a brother from Laguna on one side and from Israel a brother-in-law on the other. We slept one more time 15 stories above ground in a rent-controlled apartment on the L.A. shore, above the ignoble chaos my mind depicted way down below. My head was made up

and I had to leave, the place I loved from generations before had spit my soul out in order that my body should follow. And we went east...

With a truck and trailer ready for an early morning departure, we three woke in the wee-hours before our alarm. Rocking back and forth, our mummy-bags protesting, my last California earthquake had hit, swaying the tower I lived in like a whip-it stick in the hand of a child, whipping us all with glee. Alarms sounded throughout Santa Monica to the north and Venice down south. For the last time I looked out the plate-glass sliding windows onto a balcony squirming from tremors, cracking and bent. Alive in the night, flashes of smoke rising up only to disappear, I flashed on the race riots erupting some six months before, when I saw the entire city aflame with plumes climbing up to join with my birth basin's perpetual haze and cultural decor.

I remembered the past as it was depicted on the television, with sitcoms and cartoons paving the way for a culture to rock the future. LA was like that, meeting celebrities in the hall, and thinking about how not to notice ... LA being what it is—Mel and John in the elevator, Ed and his daughter, someone I chased once on the Ten. LA with speedos and topless girls bathing in the sun by the pool down below. Yes, I noticed it all. Migrants from the south and mid-westerners from the east, all building a life in the place I was born, seeing it all on the big-screen and wanting it more, wanting it utterly ... like us all in the trend of being in. The smoke plumes erupted one at a time, in time with my fears of what was to come. Who knew, who could help, who was responsible; my father? He was really tall—

two meters and continually rising in my mind as I age, my father defined me in so many ways ... from above, always and still.

On the way out of town we drove back in time, my future recounting the past as we went. Driving through fog that my grandfather built east in L.A., a house, a pond, a driveway, we passed the restaurant that my grandmother ate at with her brother, my great-uncle truck-driver, who had been born, lived his entire life, and had died all in the same place, in the same house in East L.A. that my great-grandmother Ferlin passed in. We were speeding back to the east, to a future unknown. My brother went home, back to Laguna where he and I were raised up together; and my brother-in-law, from Israel, drove with me east pulling my whole household in tow. I had visited before, our up-and-coming foundation to thrive in, but didn't know what was to come, and what it all might sow.

Life for me was like that, closed doors screeching with openings anew—we had a phone on the wall too, in our home anew, just like when I grew up, me still believing I was an alien experiment, seeing foreign eyes from the shadows, once familiar, watching intently ... eyes always learning, growing, metastasizing—and thus ...I landed in Boulder, a rock bare and exposed, with mountains rising from my backyard up to the heavens above. That's what I thought of, that to climb the slopes there would put me closer to me, my primordial being, me; they called them Flatirons, the mountains that rose up, red and pointedly proud, but sharp and obtuse all the same.

I found all the trails first, before really climbing, but then brought my kids with me in tow, my baby son via backpack. I climbed the peak poking out of

my backyard, with my baby son stowed onto my back. Wandering near the top, too craggy to wonder freely, I didn't see it then but a shofar blew; in the future of my son, echoing east and over the plains... It happened on the birthday of Adam, making me so proud. We both hiked to the top and he blew forth a note that resounded throughout time and space. My inteligenetical offspring had ruptured the barrier of consciousness to manifest the destiny of the world I lived in. I visited the peak again, once much later, when my youngest son climbed with me, time and life having already gone by in lost spasms, and no longer living beneath the Flatirons. We picked raspberries trailside in surprise, me and my young adult son, much, much later.

She came to visit one day, my mother. It's a strange term: *mother*, for me, since I really felt I had more than one stuck into my life. She was always who she needed to be, in any moment, given or taken, a young child to play with, or an adult to teach ways into the world. With a tiny dog she arrived red-eyed and searching. In the end I realized that she was only looking for approval of deeds done; my dad was gone and she had been married on a whim in Las Vegas to a criminal out of jail, having bailed him out just before eloping like a child. They were married in a one-night stand, in front of a judge, but behind our backs, and no one ever really knew...

In hindsight, I realize I should have seen that she was only visiting my new suburban home to find something lost, like an imagination thief, in order to plug me into a spot vacated by my dad when he left to another world. At night she woke me up to impart her dreams of past-lives lived by with other

personalities inside. She shared with me stories unbelievable, free-association rampant within them all. It started when I saw her materialize from the dark, the door opening to her room, a guest in the house in the place next to mine. In the painting studio in the basement, where I sought to escape up the tiny staircase through the wall, she captured me, binding me to the light way down below. The whites of her eyes expanded in the dark like a ghost from another life un-lived, and forgotten. "Your father listened to me and it always calmed my soul," she said. "I just want to retell the experiences in order to grow up my children, the babies I harbor inside," her voice quivered and quelled.

So ... I sat on her bed, in the same place in my mind where I listened to my father come back to life and tell of his life after death in another story, which I may someday tell. Mom told me her story, to help her grow-up fractured babies that split off after trauma was endured, and that it was a blessing and something a good son should do, and hear, know. My face glowed white in the dark, I can only now see. "*Mom can't be that,*" is all I can muster, after ... inside my head. "*It's ... just ... not something to tell...*"

Her dog crapped on the carpet every night she stayed. It smelled in the basement, in my studio to paint, in the guest room she occupied, and it all floated up the stairwell into our home and then began to dwell inside my head, and into my family's life. I couldn't even escape into my garage, above ground; so, when she left for good, on a plane back to Sheol, I drank myself silly with a bottle of tequila and walked out the front door. It was snowing. I walked up the street watching the flakes fall all around,

streetlamps beckoning each down, and then I disappeared into the darkness of the trail, and into the quiet left by my ghost.

Snow was piling up high, crunching under my feet, and I had to pick up my knees with each and every step. Into the woods I left, slowly and thankfully becoming buried under falling snow. The trail got steeper as I lost myself up the path, missing steps, missing what I had built. My world asunder, drunk in the snow, I walked into darkness and became further unknown. The trail meandered one way, but I lost it each time, making new prints deep under the surface of the Flatirons rising, dusting the Rocky Mountain divide. The trees became lost, following rocks under snow; I felt where I was, but the world around me had left, compressed by the air, quiet, still—so, in silence, I continued to bury my soul under snowfall, to live.

Sweating beneath a jacket and boots, I stopped, unzipped, and sat down. The trail left me, it was no longer leading me up the steep canyon of ferns and boulders under snow—it crunched when I sat, expanding my awareness. The sound invoked my family, my sons, and my wife down below. The snow fell continually and buried my tracks—down the slope, filling each footprint I created and erasing me under it all. With a breath of warm air, I disappeared. Suddenly ... I sat up, and then stood; I walked down, towards the direction I'd come. Trees, snow over terrain, rocks tinkling and snow falling, with no path to follow I followed gravity as it pulled me downhill. I emerged, eventually, and down onto the asphalt of living—then, I was home, with smiles all around. I crashed down into the warm embrace of my life; then just slept off my mother and her friends,

waking in the morning with a hangover to remember, along with some words that ... here, have just finally spilled out.