



Far Flung: Improvisations on National Parks, Driving to Russia, Not Marrying a Ranger, the Language of Heartbreak, and Other Natural Disasters

Cassandra Kircher

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Underlying Cassandra Kircher's intimate and moving essays on nature, family, and adventures in the wild there are secrets: of a beloved father whose silences and rages marked her childhood; of the people who traveled to the mountains, some to die and others, like herself, who found new life there; and of what it means to come to terms with our ambivalence about the world and the people we love.

Kircher, who was the first woman to patrol the remote, isolated backcountry of Colorado's Rocky Mountain National Park, writes about how love for the earth's wild places is intimately tied up with who we are, lacing these musings with memories.

Kircher recalls the night her father, armed only with a flashlight and a can of bug spray, scared off a marauding bear; how his choice of family reading material for a wilderness camping trip was a book detailing how park visitors had been mauled by grizzlies; and how, failing in health and spirit, he'd driven alone across Nebraska to visit her at work. He'd been sullen, quiet, and slow then, as if his heart ached. He'd caught some fish and left them in a cook pot treading water until they began to tilt sideways, dying. "I can't kill them," he finally said.

In that moment, Kircher understood that she had no idea what it feels like to grow old and feeble. "What I do know is that I miss him—his way of knowing and seeing the world, his way of making me feel safe, like when I was a kid," she writes. Her stories reveal her growing awareness of the arc of life, both his and hers, and the ways each of them were formed and nourished by nature.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May/June 2019)

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