

## ★ **The Cold Canyon Fire Journals: Green Shoots and Silver Linings in the Ashes**

**Robin Lee Carlson**

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Robin Lee Carlson's enchanting, enlightening, and colorful nature book charts the renewal of life after wildfires ravaged a remote Northern California canyon.

An exquisite sketchbook capturing several years of observation, the book depicts resurgent wildlife in Cold Canyon following the 2015 Wragg fire—and also addresses the impact of a subsequent wildfire in 2020. Hundreds of delicate watercolors of birds, wildflowers, butterflies, mammals, and other canyon inhabitants underscore the message that, while wildfires seem devastating, these ecosystems have “come to need [periodic fires] for their biodiversity, health, and resilience.”

Carlson's prose is as luminous as her artwork:

*Having watched each flower appear in its own season and seen the vigor of life reasserting itself in this stark, opened, breathing landscape, I find my own ideas of beauty expanding.*

The narrative tracks the progress of various species in the charred terrain. Wildflowers including poppies, lupines, delphiniums, and penstemons “respond exuberantly” after a fire, soaking up the sunlight. Other plants, including whispering bells, emerge *only* after a fire, “in a continuum of long, patient waits and fleeting emergence.”

Carlson notes that birds that rely on the cover of heavy foliage, such as Anna's hummingbird, may be scarce for a few years, but they do return; others, such as Nutall's woodpecker and towhees, thrive on the newly exposed seeds and insects. The shrubs, insects, fungi, and other inhabitants of this chaparral landscape also evolved ways to recolonize. But these hopeful accounts are shadowed by a warning that, if fires become too intense or too frequent due to climate change and other issues, this delicate balance may be disrupted.

Enthralling and vibrant, *Cold Canyon Fire Journals* is an exceptional tribute to the strength, diversity, and beauty of the natural world, championing the importance of protecting our wild places.

KRISTEN RABE (July / August 2022)

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