

## The End of the World Notwithstanding: Stories I Lived to Tell

**Janna Goodwin**

Travelers' Tales (Apr 19, 2021)

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The humorous essays of Janna Goodwin's *The End of the World Notwithstanding* concern the joys, perils, and absurdities of being alive on a small blue planet that's whirling its way through space.

Based on a solo comedy performance, Goodwin's stories cover encounters with fire, a tornado, snakes, stinging insects, wild boars, and creepy men with sex on their minds. While appearing lighthearted, they're laced with the terror about what could happen. Goodwin's mind, gifted with a "heightened sense of risk," goes where most minds don't (or won't admit to going), from killer garage doors, to a cataclysm predicted for the Pacific Northwest, from which she expects a tsunami to engulf the motel where she's on a three-day vacation. Underlying all is the inconceivable thought that she will one day cease to exist. "Surviving is harder than a person might think," Goodwin writes. "Life is everywhere on this planet—if nowhere else in the universe—and it all wants to eat you."

A Wyoming native, Goodwin has an ear for the spicy, sagebrush twang in the speech of dusty cowboys. Her first story covers a solitary writing retreat near the Medicine Bow National Forest, where she felt hog-tied by indecision as to whether to leave or stay as a large column of smoke bore down. Her frantic questions got one response: "Idunno." Even Goodwin's husband's expected approach is startling: "I jolt violently, emitting a yip like a nearsighted, coked-up Chihuahua who catches a glimpse of itself in the hallway mirror." While such descriptions are hilarious, they also invite compassion.

*The End of the World Notwithstanding* is a quirky essay collection in which people, and life itself, are absurd. Goodwin's travels result in exuberant gratitude and suggest a possible cure for anxiety: laughter.

KRISTINE MORRIS (May / June 2021)

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