



To Lose the Madness: Field Notes on Trauma, Loss and Radical Authenticity

L. M. Browning

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Browning's essay explores the confluence of natural and interior landscapes in a manner both beautiful and searing.

Two years of medical procedures, bouts of pneumonia, surgery to mend an unstable fracture followed by a year of relearning how to walk, and the effects of advanced endometriosis left L. M. Browning feeling violated, her body fragile. After miscarrying twins and ending the relationship with their father, she was reduced to a shadow of herself.

It was her friend Mallory who held her together as denial was breached and grief poured out, and it was Mallory who suggested that they drive out west to the majesty of wide horizons and the Milky Way in its unobstructed glory—a magic that helps the mind and heart soften and heal.

Their drive took them to the Taos home of Mallory's friends, a simple place set on a "sparse hill." Kind and welcoming, they offered Browning a spacious shower, a bed with crisp, fresh sheets, and a warm, heavy blanket. Their caring ways "bound like a bandage around my vagabond soul," she writes. "I'd been living out of a bag since the miscarriage—evicted by the hand of circumstance from the life I'd had and still trying to find the place where I now belonged."

In an essay that explores the confluence of natural and interior landscapes in a manner both beautiful and searing, Browning, an award-winning author and poet, seeks the strength to carry her losses and live the life she would now have to live, reckoning time as a counting of days that "would have been" in the lives of her twins.

Instead of a way to forget, the landscape of the Sangre de Cristo Mountains helped her find a way to bear the remembering, and in it to find peace and meaning. Taking us into her inner world, Browning calls us to feel our own pain, and through it, carve a way to acceptance.

KRISTINE MORRIS (January/February 2018)

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