



The Windhover

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MY WORK AND RESEARCH revolve around Mexican folk stories and healing traditions. I am interested in both the storyteller and the interactive process of storytelling. By applying visual language and recording fragments of shared stories, a visual dialogue emerges, creating new perspectives on cultural beliefs and practices. As I continue to investigate and create, I draw on the complex parallels of human experiences.

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PHILIP C. KOLIN

Saint Therese in a Normandy Winter

A bitter Normandy cold
seeped into the convent

through windows
and doors; even the chapel

candles felt its brittle breath trying
to break their flicker at times.

A great chill rushed down halls—
the sisters could see their words

in the air filled with
misty clouds.

It also brought a surge
of snow, Therese's delight

over this flurry of white flowers,
fields of gardenias and carnations.

But warmth in January
was a luxury.

Suffer the cold, endure its pain,
the mother superior warned.

But Therese lying on her straw bed,
thick as cold spars, was warmed

just watching those tiny white blue stars,
the hottest in God's garden universe.

ADRIANA WATKINS

Deaf Child

WHEN THE STATE HIGHWAY extension severed Wreath Street in two, Adam Moss' world shrank to a stump. The low, dusty lane with high lawns and frayed porches had never sprawled with life, but now, split into unequal segments, it withered like a worm cut in the wrong place. In the part where Adam lived, there were only himself, his grandmother, and their neighbor, Mrs. Lynn Rose. Adam's house was near the highway intersection, Mrs. Lynn Rose's further back, and further back still the street ended at a deep gully in the woods. It seemed to Adam that the three of them could feel each other breathe, but he never asked the old women if they sensed it, too. He went about his day alert to every twitch of worry in his grandmother's heart.

He had given her many reasons to worry. In nearly all respects he was an ordinary boy, even good, with clear green eyes and thick skin like oatmeal gum. But he had also been born without ears, and this fact converted his grandmother's world into an infinite series of dangers. She went ahead of him always, clearing the path of obstacles and arguing his case to the unsympathetic. Adam was really, hopelessly deaf, she insisted to the school board; not even Christ could have cured him; though he could have read the Savior's lips as he said, "Be opened," he had no ears for Jesus to spit in. The sounds he could make were as far from speech as east from west, so she had him talk with his hands—like this, she said, and demonstrated "please repeat."

As a rhetorician, she was yet undefeated. While the state chased other children into their desks the Tuesday after Labor Day, Adam had begun every grade, first through fifth, in the armchair by the television, flying through *Paulson's Primers for the Challenged Student* as Beaver Cleaver lived his childhood on a loop.

But their home and neighborhood were only miniatures of the world, and the world at any size was full of threats. To protect Adam from potential kidnapers whom he would not hear coming, his grandmother installed a large spool of butcher's twine in the kitchen window. She would open the window before he went out to play and, affixing one end of the twine to his thumb, let him wander his hundred yards. If he were ever forcibly detached from the twine, she would be able to tell. And when she wanted him home, she needed only to tug three times. Then he would stand in the doorway, watching her strong shoulders bob as she reooled the line, and he would get a peculiar breathless feeling.

The intersection of the new highway opened a world of possible catastrophes that ran up her blood pressure like a flag on a pole. She had a nightmare where Adam was dragged under a passing truck which had swerved out of its lane, and she recounted this dream at breakfast with eyes like two wide, stark windows. There would need to be precautions, she said. Adam read her lips, set down his spoon in the bowl, and signed, "I'll be careful." She told him careful was not enough, that someone had to protect him, and she did not know why no one else was willing to do it, but it was not hers to reason why. She had never been angry with him, so was it too much to ask for his help in saving his life? Reaching for his hand across the table, she asked God to give her guidance and to give Adam a loving, obedient spirit. He bowed his head and watched his Cheerios form a chain in the milk.

So at the start of that summer, she wrote to the city requesting a "Deaf Child" sign for the entrance to their street, facing the highway traffic. She received an acknowledgement and a soft promise of six to eight weeks for a reply. In the meantime, she discussed the matter with Mrs. Lynn Rose, their neighbor, who came to their house each day in dresses that might have been nightgowns and squeezed her used teabags with a spoon until they were almost dry again.

Even Adam could tell Mrs. Lynn Rose would be relieved when the sign went up, because then they might talk about other topics. She had several champing behind the gate like racehorses. Most often, she tried to slip in a word about her nephew, Rodney Rose, who had been staying with her every weekend of his vacation, and who had extra pinky toes on both feet. Unlike Adam's grandmother, Mrs. Lynn Rose did not fret over preserving him from further woes—nor could she, in a town so intimate that two rarely-glimpsed pinky toes were as socially disabling as two ivory horns would have been. She resigned herself instead to Rodney's condition and talked about it with cynical nonchalance. Recently, his baseball teammates had seen the toes while he was swapping out his shoes behind the bleachers, which revived their interest enough to inspire a song among the small children—*Rodney Rose has tons of toes!*—and a more sophisticated iteration among his junior high classmates. Mrs. Lynn Rose had heard it personally from jump-ropers near the grocery store:

*Rodney asked me to go steady,
Told me all the things he'd get me.
Asked him for a dozen roses,
But I got a dozen toeses!*

Snatches like these littered the women's conversations on weekday afternoons,

before the talk turned once more to Adam, who looked out the window if he tired of reading their lips. On the weekends, however, Rodney himself was there and would let Adam accompany him to go climbing in the gully.

Rodney was three years older, heavily freckled, lean and strong and practically a man. He had brown work boots like a man's, and a huge black baseball bag which he brought everywhere—even just next door—and deposited by Adam's porch steps. He always wore a stained green polo and stood curved forward like a bruised cucumber. Adam wished he could tell him this because Rodney found it funny to say such things about people, and Adam wanted to make him laugh.

But Rodney could not understand sign language. He was even skeptical that this was a means of communication. When Adam's grandmother translated his signs, Rodney clearly believed she pulled meanings from her own mind, like a child reporting the words of her doll. She tried to teach him the sign "Thank you," but Rodney said it looked like something his Italian classmate did to get people out of his face.

Still, Adam brightened like a sprung prisoner when Rodney Rose came over, because he did not need to wear the twine if Rodney was with him. He could go climbing in the gully, a place otherwise forbidden. He savored the sight of the older boy's lips as he told, not asked, the two women, "Me and Adam's going to the gully."

Nobody refused Rodney Rose. His indifference absorbed the concerns of adults as totally as a black hole.

"Mind the cars," Adam's grandmother would say.

He would have a reply ready, like, "No cars comin down this street," which was true, and he would say it with his barely perceptible stoop, as if lecturing a child.

She would take a sip of lemonade by way of conceding, and Rodney would go out the kitchen door with Adam behind him, and if Adam looked back, he could see the women smiling to each other as if to say, *Isn't it sweet they can still find pleasure somewhere?*

Then they would go to the gully, where Rodney would climb all the way down and start back up again before Adam could get halfway to the bottom—and Adam would struggle up after him, sweaty, and heavy with unsatisfied longing.

Finally, on a Wednesday in early August, the requested sign appeared. Adam spotted it through the window at breakfast, but let his grandmother discover it on her own. When she did, she put down her coffee and led him outside to inspect the sign together. It stood at the corner, neon, official, and anonymous: DEAF

CHILD, as if he had just been born and this was the star announcing his rising.

Adam watched his grandmother smile at the sign and he tried to smile at it, too, but it was an occasion of mixed sentiments for him. He was no longer sure he wished to be called a child, or that he wanted his existence announced continuously. He was also taken aback by how solidly the thought struck him that he would die one day. This fact, simple as it was, had not appeared in *Paulson's Primer*. Yes, one day the city would remove the sign. Would it still say DEAF CHILD then, or would it have been updated—DEAF MAN, DEAF ELDER? Or perhaps the city worker would not take the sign away, but would produce a marker and change DEAF to DEAD and let it stand forever.

His grandmother rubbed her thumb over his hand as she held it, and suddenly he wanted to break away and run outside. But they were outside, he remembered, and were about to go inside, which was really an inside within an inside.

“Isn't that just great?” she asked him, wringing his arm and beaming.

Before he knew what he was doing, he shook his head, but her smile slipped from her face so suddenly that he signed, “Perfect. Thank you, thank you.”

They went inside.

That Saturday, Adam's grandmother made a yellow diamond-shaped cake in celebration of the sign, ironed a yellow shirt for Adam to wear, and invited Mrs. Lynn Rose and Rodney over. First they all went to the sign together, but Adam did not look at it this time, only at the dust, where he did not have to see what the others were saying. After a long time, his grandmother touched his arm. Mrs. Lynn Rose and Rodney were already walking back to the house for the reception.

The boys finished their cake in five minutes, then sat slack-mouthed for another ten while the women debated who would be the first person buried in the new graveyard. Adam's grandmother said Maura Jennings was most likely, but what tone would that set for the cemetery? Adam watched Rodney squish the crumbs on his plate with his fork—watched his lips, waiting for a word—and when he felt the linoleum under his bare feet, he realized he had crept to the edge of his chair. Mrs. Lynn Rose said no one thought much about setting good examples anymore, and if anyone doubted it, they could spend five minutes with Rodney's parents. Rodney, as unmoved as if they had been discussing the water cycle, excused himself and Adam to go to the gully. Adam's grandmother nodded and smiled. She signed, “I love you,” and Rodney smirked at Adam and flicked his fingers from under his chin.

As they walked down the street, he saw Rodney glance over his shoulder at

the gray backside of the DEAF CHILD sign. Adam wished he would say something about it, however cruel. But he only said, “Guess you’re glad to be off your leash.” They walked on, kicking dust. And Adam waited for Rodney to begin.

On every trip to the gully, as soon as they were out of sight of the kitchen window, Rodney would begin on what Adam thought of as his “speeches.” These proved for certain that he thought Adam senseless, as no one would venture to say such things to a comprehending audience. Rodney would speak as they walked, turning to look at him as if it were a conversation, but his words took frightening, unknown shapes that transformed his face into a mass of anger. Before meeting Rodney, Adam had never seen a tongue flick, teeth flash, veins arch, lips snap like those of an animal. The light fuzz around Rodney’s mouth stuck straight out in the sunlight as if alarmed by the words that passed it. Adam could not tell the place where one obscenity—he could not doubt they were obscenities—ended and another began.

The first time he heard Rodney speak this way, on a climb at the start of the summer, Adam felt he had witnessed a murder. He did not tell his grandmother. He would not have known how to reproduce the furious molten stream of words, and if he had known, he would not have dared. And then, he did not want her to stop him from seeing Rodney, because beneath his shock he felt a sure, calm need to learn the speech to the very end, to memorize it if possible.

He could never get there. The first part of the rant always had to do with his tutor and baseball coach and their many faults, and in due course he would move on to Mrs. Lynn Rose, his siblings, and his parents, in an ever-tightening circle of abuse. By then they would have reached the gully, and Rodney would start climbing down, apparently wound-up enough to continue without a conversation partner. But Adam could not keep up to catch any more of his words, and when he returned again, meeting Adam halfway up, he was silent. Adam burned to know whom Rodney cursed, alone, at the bottom of the gully. He thought it must be God.

But now, as they followed the curve of the road and Adam felt the stark letters of the sign follow him like eyes, he steeled himself for the climb. Since Wednesday, he had caught himself thinking of different footholds, different routes that might be faster. He was animated by a determination he did not understand, and he felt it meant he would not be left behind, he would know what it was like to stand at the bottom with Rodney and his anger.

Rodney, as usual, began with a flippant remark about something Mrs. Lynn Rose had said a few minutes ago. He followed it with vague but related

complaints about *what girls think they can do* and *how they have another thing coming* and a lot of bad but uninteresting things like *fat cow* and *old prune*, which Adam could have heard on television. Then, all at once, the fireworks: short jolting jumping words, *d*'s and *f*'s and *b*'s and a particularly ugly *ch* shape. Rodney's cheeks and ears grew red as if he were a sword held over a fire. The ends of his sentences disappeared. All ran into a river of anger, Rodney walking more quickly as if borne along on it, and Adam trotting beside.

Suddenly the older boy fell silent and stuck out an arm, more irritated than protective, to keep Adam from going headfirst into the gully. Adam followed his gaze to the bottom.

The gully was a deep, thrilling gash between ribs of rock. A silence hovered there that was the only kind of silence Adam recognized as such—that of isolation. The drop plunged twenty feet, every inch covered with ferns or trees whose naked roots clutched the rocks like fists.

As Rodney lowered himself over the edge of the gully, raving again, Adam scrambled to climb beside him. His feet were slow to find a hold on the rocks as always, and he placed them too often in wet muddy patches or sheens of slippery moss, and caught his shirt on the fingers of saplings. Sometimes his feet got too close to Rodney's hands or face, and the older boy slapped his heels. But then the slapping stopped, and every glance downward betrayed a farther-off Rodney. Only the top of his blonde head could be glimpsed from this angle, his obscenities hidden like insects that had scrambled beneath a bright stone. He had reached the bottom.

Adam made a misstep and clung for a moment to his holds, panting and steeling himself. He felt the pull of gravity, but it might have been the pull of Rodney's words, somehow irresistible in their hatred. It was a language, he felt, of which he had long been a student; it was the language that would not quite come when he watched his grandmother respool the twine in the window. There was no one to teach him but Rodney. There was no one but Rodney who knew what was spoken at the bottom of the gully.

At that moment—when the desire first took shape in his mind as the words *teach me*—Adam opened his hands and let himself fall. He shut his eyes and felt the contours of the gully, its angles and growths, as they struck his right side and then his left. He rolled down into a bed of greenery, one nostril in the dirt; he opened his eyes and saw little red mites in the moss and a blur of blood between his eyes.

He ached and his forehead bled, but when he moved, he knew he was not

badly hurt. He did not know how he knew it or how he could stand it, since he had so rarely been injured before. Rodney, standing at the center of the gully, did not turn to look at him. The motion of his jaw and the bulge of his veins proved that he was still speaking. Adam stumbled to his feet, raced over, and grabbed Rodney's elbow.

The older boy wheeled on him. His face was as red as the blood on Adam's nose, but it was shiny like a cooked ham—tears, Adam realized. Not streaks of tears but a bath of them, so that they seemed to come from every pore.

"What do you want?" he said, his mouth open wide, clear to the back of his throat. "What do you want?"

Adam knew it was useless, but he signed, "Please repeat," and regretted it immediately. Rodney seized his hands as if he might twist them together.

"You can't understand me," he said. "No stupid old lady can convince me you know zip. If you know what I'm saying, tell me who I was just talking about."

With a trembling foot, Adam traced the word GOD in the mud. He meant to add a question mark, but Rodney kned him hard in the stomach and shook his hands.

"—no God except you—" he was saying when Adam looked up. "Except you, deaf boy!"

Then he was gone, and Adam stood alone gasping. A rivulet of blood, mingled with tears, pooled in one corner of his mouth. The word he had written on the ground cleared, bulged, and cleared again in his clouded eyes; his lungs at first felt shriveled and blocked, then suddenly, as he got his wind back, they seemed so wide they might have kept expanding out of his chest. By the time he came to his senses, Rodney was disappearing over the top of the gully.

His fear for himself vanished as he imagined Rodney running loose in the neighborhood. He went back to the slope and climbed as fast as he could, pausing to rest his hot face on the rocks. Finally, he heaved himself onto level ground and ran home.

When he came around the bend, he saw Rodney's green figure in the distance, at the highway end of the street. Rodney held a baseball bat with both hands; his gym bag lay upside down in the dust. Just for a moment, despite all evidence, Adam did not know what he was about to do—and then he swung the bat hard against the DEAF CHILD sign, and Adam saw that it was not his first stroke, and that the sign looked as if it were being folded in half. Rodney's scrawny arms swung from side to side, and even from afar Adam could see big chips of wood flash as they splintered from the bat.

Adam stopped, stared, and felt nothing. When his breath had come back at the bottom of the gully, the terror and morbid fascination had left him together. He felt the way he imagined his grandmother had felt when he was small and knocked down his freshly-built towers of blocks.

After watching two or three swings, Adam saw his grandmother and Mrs. Lynn Rose huddled in a corner of the porch. They were also watching. Mrs. Lynn Rose held onto the railing with one hand and in the other gripped, perhaps by accident, a spoon with its strangled tea bag still wound on. In profile, her jaw was as blunt as a carpenter's square. She called Rodney twice before falling silent altogether.

But it was his grandmother's face, partially hidden by Mrs. Lynn Rose's, that arrested Adam. Her eyes were frozen open, her hand half-covering her open mouth, just the way she had come downstairs the morning she recounted her nightmare. Adam felt as if he were watching her watching him die. He started to run again.

Neither woman saw Adam until he stepped onto the porch. His grandmother flew to him, twined him in her arms, and pressed his head between her breasts, where he could feel her heart banging as if to be let out. Then she held him away from her and cried as she examined his bloodied face, his scratched arms. He had forgotten those pains for the ache in his stomach, but she could not see that. When he realized she could not see it, he suddenly felt a kind of pity surrounding them both like a sheer drop—not only her pity for him, but his for her, which he had never noticed.

All his thoughts tumbled together and, like a remembered dream, he was aware that he had wanted to strike her, to kick her, the way Rodney had done to him. He had wanted it so, but the desire was gone now. She seemed to him a deep, narrow worry, and as she probed his wounds, he tried to sign to her, and with the signs a humming flood rose in his throat. From the stiffening of her features, he knew he was making sounds she thought were nonsense. But he could not stop. He let the noises spin out of him, and signed, "I love you, I love you, I love you," so quickly it became an endless gesture against the dark little anxious rooms he had glimpsed in her eyes.

KAREN D'ANSELM

Villanelle for a Dead Bee

Your gently curving but now useless wings
shimmer with plastic stillness in the gloom
on my old porch of dry and dusty things.

On your crushed torso yellow pollen clings,
too light to be swept downstairs with a broom,
so fragile are your curved and useless wings.

Once with the freshness that the morning brings,
you crawled inside the irises in bloom
and flew above my porch of dusty things.

With heaving heaviness the old door swings,
sending a breeze, the lightest weight of doom,
to gently swirl your curved and useless wings

that used to soar and circle among kings:
Solomon's palace, Barbarini's tomb,
far from my porch of dry and dusty things.

Your buzz was loud in those days and your stings
a threat, but I had neither time nor room
to eulogize your useless, curving wings
from my old porch of dry and dusty things.

STEVEN PETERSON

Another Name for Kestrel

Late winter, bird-watching a prairie
along Lake Michigan's cold shore,
I spotted one, so boldly striped,
swaying on a stalk of prairie grass.

Consulting my pocket bird book,
I found *Falco sparverius*.
It is our smallest kind of falcon,
common name: American Kestrel.

I looked back just as it detached
itself from its perch of dead grass,
faced into a strong steady wind,
and rose up high where it could hunt.

My Kestrel hovered overhead,
its body russet brown, tinged red,
its spotted wings straight out, outspread,
like one spread-armed upon a cross.

And all it once it came to me—
another name for Kestrel is
the Windhover, just like that poem
we read so many years before.

MARIE MARCHAND

God is Everywhere Singing

After Claudia Mauro's "You Wouldn't Think"

I forget. I do. Who I really am.
That elusive, salvific strand of truth
slips from my grip into turbid eddies
at the river's edge. As it tosses in whirlpools,
among reeds, I forget how close to God I am—
just a breath away and that's the bone-deep knowing
that gets lost in the wiley construct of time.

Within my breath, I can hear God. Sometimes.
Once the water settles and the wind
has tucked itself in and the river turns
pink from the dome of dusk above—

then. I remember *then.* I do.
Who I am, where I'm from, and where
I'm headed to I grasp in one coherent
resonance—although this neon alchemy
doesn't happen nearly enough to offset
the grief I wear like a woolen winter coat
even on summer evenings when stars
twinkle in my drink and I dream of a
different, more peaceful life.

A lone crow poised on a tree limb—
a Linden, leaning from the slope wind—
caws as the sun glistens on its
feathers glossed with midnight.
This is all that is happening right now.
The sound is jarring, startling.

But I hear you. I hear you
singing.

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