

# Lavonne Adams

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## Confession

At the base of the Taos mountains,  
a fragmented tree, victim  
of a lightning strike. As I pass,  
I turn my head away as if seeing  
something intimate in the paleness  
of the exposed wood. A friend's  
son who was struck by lightning  
later took his life. I wonder how  
much that act hinged on burdens  
I knew nothing about—a complex landscape  
forged from disappointment and pain—  
how much was due to the lightning strike's  
trauma, the exit wound like a stigmata.  
Once, I longed for a life that was extraordinarily  
good—to radiate faith like a five-hour sunburn,  
to heal others with a touch. Now,  
I'm satisfied with wisps of grace: letting  
cars merge into thick traffic in front of me,  
tipping the barista who mixes my complicated  
drinks. But that earlier desire resurged  
the day I drove to Chimayo after hearing  
of a sanctuary deemed the American Lourdes,  
where abandoned crutches lined the walls  
like car parts in an old-fashioned garage.  
The room was small and stifling;  
rows of candles flickered above  
a plate-sized pit filled with adobe-colored dirt  
that I knew I could not eat  
even if it meant a miracle. In my life,  
desire rarely trumps fear.  
Ten miles down the road, I stopped  
at a convenience store where I bought  
twin chocolate cupcakes with white icing  
scrolls like a string of cursive e's.  
I ate them with the faith of a child.

## Taos, Early July

In the center of the Plaza, seedpods hang like clusters of diaphanous grapes from an enormous cottonwood. With each breeze, they disengage, drift like mock snow across the stage of the sultry afternoon. As the light begins its tentative turn toward evening, clouds crest the mountains, couple and uncouple, darkening to cobalt at the core. From somewhere in the distance, church bells remind us of the two-faced nature of time—dire and irrelevant. If you didn't know better, you'd swear this scene was a backdrop, a way to provide perspective for the plein-air artists who unfold their easels as if laying a two-square claim to forever. When you close your eyes, the sound of leaves scoured by wind transforms into a storm sweeping the ocean, pocking the waves like tooled tin. But beneath even the worst turbulence, the fish continue with their small perfect lives, unfettered, undisturbed.

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## After the Ice Storm

*for Micah*

When you filmed your ordinary neighborhood  
suddenly sheathed in ice, you didn't speak,  
so all I hear as I stare at the screen is  
the hollow sound of your breathing,  
water dripping from trees and eaves,  
ice crunching like cinders beneath your shoes,  
and it feels as if you're carrying me  
the way I once carried you. Under crystal weight,  
each tree, even live oaks and maples,  
are transformed to weeping willows.  
Normally taut from pole to pole,  
power lines drape along the ground  
in a way that seems natural,  
as if destruction has acquired its own grace.  
Glistening in the sun, bushes transform  
into overgrown chrysanthemums or fireworks  
frozen in that millisecond of glitter  
before nothingness, like a retinal afterimage  
as hazy as the moment joy turns to nostalgia.  
And I imagine death to be like this disembodied  
vision: me, unable to touch your face;  
whatever I struggle to say subsumed by wind,  
by tires slushing on the far side of the hill,  
by the crisp white noise of everyday life.

## From *Through the Glorieta Pass*

### Murphy Wagons

*I want to know what you are doing on this road. You scare all the buffalo away.*

—Sitting Bull

Consider the weight of what was carried,  
7,000 pounds of blankets, suspenders, boots,  
gin, whiskey, rum, raisins, sardines,  
dirks, pistols, chisels, hatchets.  
Yet even a wagon can be a work of art.  
Joseph Murphy gauged his wagons' aged  
wood by the feel of its grain, searching  
for what was most durable. Only saplings  
were lathed into spokes, their moist wood  
more resilient. Instead of wielding an auger,  
he burned every hole a size smaller than the bolts—  
charred wood was less likely to rot; each joint  
was more snug. Consider how, in the dry air,  
wagons rumbled themselves apart—axles snapping,  
wheels splitting, spokes dropping out like rotten teeth.  
The better drivers tuned their ears to the music  
of their wagon, to variations in the timbre  
of each creak and groan; they soaked wheels to swell  
wood; tightened loosening tires with wedges;  
splinted wagons minus a wheel with a pole  
that trailed eight feet behind, like a stick dragged  
through dirt by a bored child.

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## Anna Maria Morris

A brutal winter storm.

On the downswing of the Trail,  
the oxen of a man named Brown  
dropped to their knees, air frozen  
deep inside their chests.

When the wind died, he was left  
with only a few mules  
and his wagons—a ghost town  
of creaking wood. For a hundred  
bitter mornings he scanned the horizon  
for some sign of rescue. Indians  
found him first. Before  
they could take his life, in a gesture  
of resignation or despair, he gifted  
the only squaw who met his gaze  
with his rare white mule, earning  
her pleas on his behalf.

Now, I see the same white mule  
in the distance, like a rising moon.  
On its back is the squaw who—  
in the past year—has become legend  
for saving Brown's life.

Her skin is the color of steeped tea,  
her clothing is clean and neat;  
I didn't expect such strength  
in the cast of her shoulders,  
in her imperturbable gaze.

A Chief's wife, she wears her own  
authority as if it were a robe, weighty  
with beading and quills. She gestures  
toward my diamond ring, offers  
the brass bracelet from her arm.

I shake my head no. As she walks away,  
I watch the fringe of her skirt  
and feel something close to regret.

How long would that metal have held  
her body's heat? How long  
(no stanza break)

would I have felt its warmth  
seep into my wrist?

## Jicarilla Apache, Shaping Clay

This is a sacred place where  
the earth shelters the richness of clay  
the way a woman protects her womb.  
Run the clay through your fingers, winnowing  
fragments of bone, small rocks, stray roots.  
For purity, relieve yourself in the bushes  
before you begin. For balance, divide  
your hair in two, tie each section  
on the side of your head. For sanctity,  
refrain from mating until the final  
pot is set aside to dry. Earth, air,  
fire, water—you are an extension  
of what is sacred. If you must speak,  
whisper, or your noise will enter  
the pot and cause it to shatter.  
Let your wet fingers work the clay,  
slick as afterbirth, until it is eggshell thin,  
until it is more than the promise  
of what can be held.

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