

They's Things Disappearin'

by
Charles Frode

“Because the question for me was always whether that shape we see in our lives was there from the beginning or whether these random events are only called a pattern after the fact. Because otherwise we are nothing.”

All the Pretty Horses
Cormac McCarthy

The clapboards on Farris Moyers' farmhouse stopped drying out and warping years ago, about a hundred years after his grandfather, Everson Moyers, had methodically hammered the overlapping twelve-foot rough-cut green spruce boards onto the Douglas fir studs with the cut nails he fished out of the bulging pockets in his frayed overalls. The hot Idaho summer sun and the freezing winter winds and snow had burnished the rough-cut cream-colored surface of the wooden siding to a smooth warm silver-grey luster. The original whitewash and subsequent layers of grey, then green, then yellow paint had long since sloughed off and left tenacious memories of the family's attempts at modernization and then resuscitation. The wood had slowly opened up thin shadow lines here and there along the intersections of the growth rings, and most of the boards had cupped, warped, and shrunk so that daylight penetrated into the four rooms along the spaces between the planks brushing white shards of light that drifted slowly across the walls and floor.

Farris had stopped cramming old pieces of fabric from shirts and sheets into the gaps between the siding boards when they no longer opened up in the summer heat. The clapboards had calmed down and stopped struggling against the rusted nails as if they had finally accepted their fate, aging and withering on the sides of the Moyers' ranch house while inside the farmhouse three generations of thirty-seven Moyers children were born, cried, laughed, ate, slept, argued, and died. Perhaps the clapboards recalled with longing where they once grew from saplings, swayed and trembled, buffeted by the cold winds that blow across the spruce and Douglass fir forests covering the Owyhees to the East.

Farris's leanin' back in his fav'rite chair, and the top rail o' the ol' hick'ry high back he daddy made's propped 'gainst the scarred back wall o' the screened-in rear porch. He staring out at them same Owyhees like he do ev'ry ev'ning 'round the same time. He seven'y-six now, dried out and warpin', strugglin' 'gainst the witherin' onslaught o' mem'ries he cain't stop or even figure out in his

mind, pitchurs that overlap each other ‘n’ lose they individu’l selfs in time ‘n’ place and morphose ‘stead into some form o’ mental dusk he surrender to without grumblin’ ever’ night.

Way too many times Farris has tried to locate in the dusk dimness what his father, Reed Moyers, had recounted to him years earlier about how that late spring of 1862 Everson Moyers made fifteen or twenty runs from the sawmill across from Boise’s Old Penitentiary on Warm Springs to his 160 acre homestead of sagebrush close to The Mill Ditch where it flowed from Loggers Creek. He had arrived from Missouri fleeing the chaos and destruction from the war years before Lincoln signed the Homestead Act in 1862.

But now Farris sits in the dark back porch of that farmhouse Everson had built for himself and his bride, Evletta, and however many children he would be able to sire before his time and energy ran out. Evletta had followed her family’s wagon along the Oregon Trail from Missouri and the fall of the Confederate States and the death of her two soldier brothers by Union bullets. Everson helped get them situated in Boise, and he let them pitch their camp on his land before he had started building. By the time he dumped the first load of lumber on the highest point on his land, he had already talked to Evletta’s father, and with some cursory grumblin’ the secretly grateful father had finally given in, “Yes, a’right, yes, ‘course you may marry my daughter, Mr. Moyers, a’course...”

Farris don’ know what he gonna do now that comp’ny give ‘im a check for fi’ty thousand fer his farmhouse. Say they gonna build more houses but differen’ kind like the pitchers they showed ‘im. Nice lookiin’ buildins, you right, but kinds Farris don’ wanna live in, thank ya’ll anyway. Ain’t no farmhouse he ever seen b’fore. He don’ know what he gonna do wit’ that money, don’ know where he gonna park his butt if it ain’t here on the porch. Jus’ don’ know. Nothin’ he can do now t’ make things any differen’...They say it’s progress, whatever that mean. He got six months t’ git out, but that was three months ago, so now it jus’ three, so...

Construction companies and their venture capital sidekicks from the C state have arrived undercover for the past year, staging out of sight, hiring rōnin mercenaries to do their bidding. New arrivals and Born In Idaho sorts don’t notice because they are ordering more amber ales all around, trailer camping in Ponderosa Lake, sand surfing at Bruneau Dunes State Park, bucking bales of alfalfa under the hot sun, burning rubber at the Firebird Raceway quarter mile, floating the no-alcohol-on-the Boise River, hunting bears and cougars in the Selkirk Mountains, attending worship

services in their local ward, shopping for the best price on another AK-47, or enjoying Thai in their favorite strip mall joint. The hired guns don't stagger down from the Oregon Trail after two-thousand thankless and treacherous miles, but instead they deplane from their Alaska and Frontier Airlines' Bombardier commuter planes in their new Ray-Bans, anonymous and intent, into the newly expanded Boise Airport.

Corman Homes, Huddle Homes, CDC Homes, Haven Homes, Prestigious Construction, scores of others gearing up, lock 'n' load, salivating at the prospect of converting outdated and useless 40 acre fields of alfalfa, barley, oats, and corn to shining new neighborhoods infested with minimum setback three bedroom two bath houses with oversize RV garages and granite countertops. There's only so much topsoil and crop cover to scrape off, only so much two-million-year old Treasure Valley river rock to cart off and dispose of, only so much 300 year flood plain land to deck out with more ice cream shops and movie theaters. A hundred or so family farmhouses to level. It's a corporate decision. Working men and women on bulldozers just following directives. Jobs, that's it. Jobs. No one has a problem with jobs.

Farris got 'im a daughter in Twin maybe take 'im in if she have to. She don' wanna, but ain't no one else. Don't got no money t' put 'er dad in one o' them facilities or wherever...Twin Falls a good a place as any, Farris thinks.

The deep bank of hollyhocks across the entire front of the weary Moyers farmhouse is filled with every color Marguerite could have imagined when she planted those hundreds of black seeds years ago. Every year they come back faithful and beautiful, not like Farris had hoped she would come back when she passed from consumption after lingering too long with a pain Farris couldn't do nothin' about. Doctors told him it was inevitable, and he knew she knew, but they never said anything to each other. Now he avoids the front porch because when he sees the tall, graceful flowers, he remembers her smiling blush glowing in the sunlight, her small hands digging the little holes for each seed, the gardening overalls she would exchange for her pink or blue dresses, her excitement when the first hollyhocks came up and flowered, the purple and pink ones, then the whites, doubles they were and still are. They all come up now every May or June depending. They all come up. Every year. Marguerite's hollyhocks keep coming up.

Farris don' watch the mailbox no more neither 'cause the faded yeller door o' that oversize thing hang open all da time now that no mail come no more. He paint'd it bright yeller an' da wood

post fire engine red so's the mailman wou'nt miss it and fergit to leave a letter 'o two from da folks back in Missoura, but ain't no mail comin' no more, no bills, no letters, nutin.

Everson Moyers built the farmhouse like so many other farmhouses in Idaho in the mid 1800s. Square floor plan, no second floor, porch in front and back, dining room in the center, two bedrooms on each side with one bathroom that Farris' father, Reed, put in when the women complained. Gable roof East to West, no dormers, couple a windows across the front and back, wood stove and brick chimney in the dining room, nothin' fancy. The cedar shakes Reed had hand-cut and split and lugged up there to replace the ones Everson had first installed long ago had lost whatever integrity they may have had, and when it rained, Farris had to put 5 gallon plastic buckets here and there on the floor. Been a good house though for Everson, Reed, and Farris' families. A damn good house.

Many times Farris has seen small clouds of blackbirds flurry and scatter up from the golden sun-burnished sea of wheat in his neighbors' fields around the property. He stopped borrowing the mower, rake, tedder, and baler from his closest neighbor to the west, Mason Grummons, for harvesting his own alfalfa fields to the East and West. His old Massey Ferguson had finally rebuffed Farris' abuse and lack of maintenance and refused to start, and Farris had thrown up his hands and called it quits.

Mason parked his faded sky-blue 150 in front of the farmhouse, clambered up the steps, leisurely stood on the porch and rolled a cigarette with two generous pinches of Bugler, lit up with a wooden match, inhaled once, then knocked on the weather-beaten front door to see if Farris was going to need to borrow his harvesting equipment, but Farris didn't' open the door. He had heard Mason's car coming up the gravel road and decided then and there that he wouldn't open up anymore to anyone, even Mason. He hadn't reseeded for 10 years anyway, and the alfalfa weevils and locusts had their way with every full bloom of his fields. Just the way it was now.

Thank Almighty Holy God and curse the Damned Pernicious Devil that Farris never lived to witness the two well-worn New Holland front loaders creep up to the unsuspecting farmhouse like preying mantis monsters and ram their buckets into the side of the shuddering house. It stunned the timeless calm of 150 years, the more than 44,750 days and nights of cooking at the wood stove, eating around the simple rectangular oak table, washing dishes in the tin kitchen sink, sitting around the fireplace listening to Everson, Reed, and finally Farris recount stories from their childhoods and

from the history round about Boise, tucking fidgety children in their beds, hugging folks who were moaning in pain, mourning and weeping for loved ones just past on, rocking newborns in grateful arms, agonizing about husbands' and wives' decisions for the future of their children and for themselves, boiling and canning thousands of Mason jars packed with elderberry jam and apple butter and pear slices and 'cots and cling peaches and other sweet things taken out for dessert, washing hair and shaving in scratched mirrors, sitting looking out a window for someone to come, rocking on the porch watching the alfalfa grow, looking for a patch of shade in the dead heat of June and July for pouring sweet mint tea from a pitcher. The helpless walls of the building buckled one by one, splintered, and fell into the heap of what was once three generations of Moyers lives and deaths as the roof of the clan's sanctuary collapsed on top of the dusty funeral mound until there was no evidence of ever having smelled, sounded, or felt like a safe and welcoming place for human joy and suffering.

“Oh, My God...oh, My Holy God...God damn you fer a thousan' years!” Ferris would have groaned and cursed had he seen the simple, everyday catastrophe that would occur everywhere in the Treasure Valley in the new millennium as thousands of upscale immigrants fled the excess and depravity of the Golden State and demanded two-story mansions for which they would pay cold hard cash.

The final mortal act of the front loaders was to dig up Marguerite's hollyhocks as if they were nothing more than atoms and molecules of biological rubbish. The workers scraped them up with the iron buckets then dumped the hollyhocks' deep colors and stately vigor on top of the collapsed roof, and no one took notice that they were like flowers placed on a newly dug grave. If Farris had seen this ultimate insult and affront to love and beauty, his heart would have seized and stopped right then and there in a tsunami of grief.

Mason had been watching from the cab of his 150 parked a ways down the gravel driveway. When the front loaders started to take out Marguerite's hollyhocks, he had gotten out and stood expressionless and straight as a new hand split fence post as he watched the flowers disappear under the authority of the machinery he knew so well. Marguerite had brought Mason a bundle of flowers now and then to cheer him up after his wife passed with typhoid fever, and he remembered suddenly with tearing eyes the times she would accept a cup of mint tea he had offered her, sweet tea in the green and cream colored Belleek cups from Ireland his Prudence had brought with her from Kansas. Her mother, Chloe, had brought an eight-place setting of Belleek china from County

Cavan when she arrived at Ellis Island after fleeing the potato famine in 1847. The china was all Marguerite had left from her mother after the 2,000 mile trek from Kansas to Idaho.

Mason tried to push down the sweet memory of the flowers and Marguerite's smell when she hugged him apprehensively the first time. Mason knew that Farris had been troubled a time now, and he had no idea of their marital situation, but when Marguerite's embraces became more frequent with the hollyhock deliveries, he let himself slide into the warmth of her care and tenderness.

I owe that man a lot, Mason thought as he watched the hollyhocks settle in a heap on the mound of what was once Farris' house. *I miss her hollyhocks so much...*

Mason allowed himself to weep quietly as he watched the scene unfold in front of him and deep in his heart.

As soon as the front loaders were finished with their toil and trouble, a small group of men who had been watching quietly a safe distance from the undoing dropped their cigarettes, ground them into the ground, walked slowly with heads down towards the rubble, and began sorting materials, cold and without emotion as if they had done this dutifully a hundred times, grabbing a piece of metal here, broken glass there, piping, electrical wire, large timbers, irregular blocks of limestone cut from the hills around Boise, red bricks, linoleum pieces, plumbing fixtures, all sorted and heaped into their own separate piles, as if the grave robbers were looking for cadavers to sell to medical facilities in Salt Lake City or internal organs to dispatch into the transplant black market in Calcutta or Mexico City.

Mason had waited for Farris to open the door until he had smoked his cigarette down too close to his fingers.

"Gal dang it!" he uttered a little too loudly so that Farris would hear and know that he should have opened the door for his neighbor.

After all, Mason thought to himself as he ground the smoking butt into the wooden floor of the porch, *I jus' wan'd a see if that man want'd me ta plow under all that mess of alfalfa rottin' in the field an' full of bugs an' such...* He pushed his hands into the back pockets of his pants and stood for a moment wondering about his neighbor and farming friend of so many years now he couldn't count.

“Gonna have t’ find a way...” Mason stopped talking out loud to himself and thought a moment so when Farris listened and heard him through the door, he would open up, “...way da git in there’n find out wha’ gives wit Farris, he sick or sumpthin’... or dead an’ nobody know? Maybe at da cor’ner’n a green zip up bag? Or’n ambulance an’ such?” Mason was a patient man like most farmers around in Idaho who had learned the hard way from the seasons and the weather and the crops not to be impetuous, but after a few moments of waiting, he felt the heebie-jeebies suddenly shooting up his legs, and without a thought he bolted down the porch stairs and over to his truck.

“Gitin’ the hell outta here,” Mason pulled shut the creaky dented door of the 150 with a rusted clunk, fired ‘er up, and buggered off knowing he would leave a plume of gravel and dust behind him.

Farris stood in his family farmhouse arm’s length from the front door. He had heard everything his neighbor had said on the porch, and he heard Mason burn rubber as he took off down the farmhouse road to the highway.

They’s things disapearin’ all over this land nowadays, Farris scratched his head at the thought and touched the door.

Monsters eat their offspring, and carcasses of mammoths fill the land.

Waters flee the skies for darkness, and the Earth swallows its tail.

This story is written to acknowledge and honor the hundreds of beautiful old Idaho farmhouses the author has seen razed to the ground to make way for the virus of neighborhoods of three bedroom two bath houses with oversize RV garages. This story also recognizes and reveres the lives of the hardy people who arrived here 150 years ago and who made and lived in those farmhouses and whose lives created the foundations for modern Idaho. Deep obeisance to the original inhabitants, the native peoples, the ones who lived here in harmony with the land for thousands of years before the arrival of the conquistadors, both then and now.