A week after water began bubbling up in our front yard, Black-billed Magpies, *Pica hudsonia*, claim the place, their pennants, black and white, flapping brightly, their tails, iridescent green, dipping like quill pens into the trickled stream.

Whenever I approach, they pause, cock their heads to eye me, but never fly off. They hop back a bit the closer I come.

I appreciate their presence, like cavalry patrolling against insects, small mammals, carrion. But they also like the cherry trees, and, if pressed, will eat sunflower seed fallen from the bird feeders.

In Europe, Magpies sometimes speak, tell the Europeans how to raise families, build pocket nests with domed roofs. Here, they merely drink and bathe, and though I ask many questions, they will not speak to me.