Where the Tiny Things Are: Feathered Essays
Nicole Walker

Published by Punctum Books

Walker, Nicole.
Where the Tiny Things Are: Feathered Essays.

For additional information about this book
https://muse.jhu.edu/book/84170

For content related to this chapter
https://muse.jhu.edu/related_content?type=book&id=2917606
Microwine

All this global warming and I can’t find a decent bottle of Rosé.
—Gabrielle Calvocoressi

I do not come from a family of Italians who drink wine. I do not come from a family of French who drink wine. I come from a family of Utahns who drink wine, which made my family somewhat outcast in Utah. It also means my knowledge of wine is not inherited from the soil. As with all white people in Utah, my love of wine is immigrant. It’s as imported into my blood as the wine my parents drank—which was not wine from either Italy or France and definitely not from Utah but from California where they make big boxes of wine. My understanding of wine came from assumption, soap operas, and marketing.


When I started working at the Oregon Winegrowers I learned this: The first rule of a good wine? Let it be red. Of the sips of wine I’d taken from my parents’ cold glasses, Chardonnay tastes like salad dressing
filtered through burnt walnut shells. But pinot noir. That tasted like cherry blossoms in winter. And so it began. A new dream. No wedding. Instead, I would buy a winery myself. I would have great big parties in my vineyard in McMinnville on tables lined with wine and salmon. During harvest, we'd have an old-time grape-stomping party. Off with your shoes. My children would run through the vines. *The Wine Spectator* would visit. Take pictures of my wine, sun filtering through the glass, stained with red, still letting sun through.

Except we're in Oregon. There is too little sun on this side of the Cascades to grow the full-bodied wine I want to grow. There is also no million dollars to buy this vineyard or that winery. *Wine Spectator* must have lost my phone number. They never showed up to rate my wine that I never made. There were no children. I adapted my dreams. I moved on from the Oregon Winegrowers to the Oregon Humane Society. If I couldn't have a lot of wine and vines, at least I could have a lot of cats.

Growing up in Salt Lake, I didn't know I lived in a desert. Having been born there, arid mountains and brown summer grass were normal. But when I came back from Portland, where even the asphalt turns green, layered with a crop of moss, cracking drought covered everything. Even what looked like soft green grass snapped in bony half when you pulled a blade from the ground. I put fliers on my neighbors' lawns suggesting they try xeriscaping or at least stop watering the sidewalk. I
collected rainwater to water my garden even though it is illegal to do so in Utah, because in Utah someone downstream owns the water rights to that falling rain. I felt smug in my rebellion. I sat on the back patio drinking wine imported from California. I felt guilty for the fossil fuels that brought me my drink but I felt confirmed in my smugness knowing I was drinking someone else’s water right.

It’s a cliché to say that you worry about the planet for your kids. But it was true. I pictured a planet turned from an Oregon into a Utah. Where would the children play if not between rows of green vines? Where would they dream of getting married? How would they celebrate without wine?

I have no winery but I do, finally, have some children. My son, Max, likes wine already. He is three and when I finish a glass, he is allowed to take the last sip, which is really no sip at all but it’s enough to tickle his tongue. I hope I’m not subjecting him to a lifelong problem with alcohol. And I certainly hope I’m not coloring his palate with red wine so that when he grows up, he rebels and drinks white. For now, he is content with the droplet of wine. He is outside playing in the dirt because we have no grass. We live in Flagstaff, Arizona now. It’s as dry as Utah, except we get monsoons. The green that we have here is not bottom-up green like they have in Oregon. It’s top-down green with the branches of the Ponderosa. I’ll take it. If the Ponderosa will. I heard somewhere that if these trees burn down or otherwise die, new Ponderosa won’t take
their place. The monsoons are too short now. The snowpack too shallow. Something will take their place. Maybe even something green. But it won’t be vines. And it won’t be grass.

Max stumbles over one of the solidified lava rocks in the front yard. I set down my wineglass and run to him. A rock has split open the skin on his forehead. He’s OK but what I would give for a lawn that yields to falling foreheads. In Salt Lake, I thought grass was such a sin but now that I have kids, I have changed my mind. I would like to be better but the more kids I have, the longer I don’t live in Portland, the more I drive. My friend Misty still lives in Portland. She tows her five-year-old daughter to school in a trailer attached to her bike. She locks up the trailer and then rides on to work. I have two kids. I have become so the opposite of Portland-good.

The winegrowers are trying to be optimistic about climate change. It’s worth a try, I think. Why spend your days imagining whole forests turned to desert? Whole ice caps melted? Whole polar bears drowning? Humans are basically optimists and people who grow grapes are good at looking at the bright side of things. In Canada, thanks to global warming, vintners are already hoping they will be able to raise cabernet sauvignon grapes. You cannot grow cabernet grapes in Canada, was the old belief. The season is too short for cabernet grapes which require a long, warm growing season. Pinot noir, a cool-air loving grape, does well there.
The winegrowers are thinking across several levels of adaptation, from the variations that will happen outdoors to what they can do indoors in the winery to adjust their practices to compensate for these changing fruits. “One is what can we do in the vineyard to adapt to what looks to be very variable and very challenging weather,” says research scientist Gary Pickering. “The second general approach is what can we do in the winery in terms of adapting to changing the juice composition that we may start to see.” The vintners are good at something I am not: staying in place to adapt to change. I keep moving like I can stay ahead of the changes I cannot control—like global warming or drought or bad politics or bad drivers. I vow to leave Arizona if they keep cutting the education budget. I vow to leave if these Californians don’t stop cutting me off in traffic. But where will I move? California? Where I can grow cabernet? Where the politics aren’t so bad but the water situation is equally dire.

The winegrowers fight other aspects of natures too. Phylloxera, almost microscopic, pale yellow sap-sucking, aphid-like insects that feed on the roots and leaves of grapevines, destroyed over half the grape vines in Europe in the 19th century. Thereafter, vintners combated the problem by grafting well-known grape varietals like cabernet sauvignon to relatively unknown rootstock from the United States. Because phylloxera is native to the Americas, that rootstock has inherent resistance. But now stubby toe and pin nematodes, roundworms that eat at the roots of vines, have
become increasingly difficult to deal with because rootstock resistant to phylloxera isn’t resistant to nematodes. Nematodes withstand even with synthesized chemicals. Winegrowers, especially small producers, prefer a non-chemical solution anyway. To adapt their fields to the nematode onslaught, viticulturists plant mustard, which repels the nematodes. Sulfur for mildew, fans to circulate air to prevent vine rot, tents pitched over vines to keep the frost from turning the grapes to otter pops, and a willingness to pull up merlot vines and substitute pinot noir after the merlot-snubbing movie *Sideways*—winegrowers use natural resources, technology, and pure stubbornness to induce their plants adapt to change and simultaneously change their own ways to accommodate the equally-stubborn willfulness of the plants.

I adapted once. I used to drink beer. In Portland, even when I worked at the Winegrowers’, I drank more beer than wine. As much as Oregon would like to be wine country, Portland proper is beer land. IPAs and reds, ryes and pales, wheats and porters. Beer beer beer everywhere. Twenty-ounce pints at The Horse Brass with Andy. We broke up there. Nick and I made out in the parking lot and then never saw each other again. Jonathan and I talked about not getting married at the long table in the corner. Two twenty-ounce pints add up. Maybe the beer was driving the men away.
When I moved to Salt Lake, I switched to wine. And then I got married.

Solution solved, as my husband, Erik, would say. Maybe a man dreams of marrying a woman who drinks less than him ounce by ounce even though he knows she’s keeping up drink by drink.

When I worked at the Oregon Winegrowers Association, I had been an English major, not an oenologist. But I could type and I could put a sentence or two together about how the wine grapes in Oregon grew at the 45th parallel—just like Burgundy, France. Metaphors. I could make them. Truly, that band of latitude was the only similarity to which we laid claim. The smaller details like microorganisms in the soil, the amount of limestone and volcano in the soil, the winds, the truly micro-matters did not make it into our publications. We liked to talk about how the plants behaved similarly (no, identically!) to the famous Burgundy grapes of France, where grapes have been adapted to make wine for centuries. The problem with metaphor is, sometimes, that micro-matters matter. That’s the point of wine. Terroir. You can taste the microorganisms. You can taste the blood of the Celts. That of the Saxons. Of the Vikings. Of the Chumash tribes. The vineyards adapted to the soil as the victors adapted to their newfound home. Easily and with short memories. This soil was always theirs, says the history. Says the metaphor.
There’s evidence that humans have been growing grapes since the beginning of time. Or at least since 3200 BC. Thucydides writes, “The people of the Mediterranean began to emerge from barbarism when they learnt to cultivate the olive and the vine.” Wine is the opposite of barbarism. Wherever humans have adapted to live, grapes seem to follow. From the Republic of Georgia, to the near east, to Germany and France, to Canada, people have figured out what type of grape can grow where and they plant it. optimists. Although climate change does not bode well right now for grapes grown in Bordeaux or for cold-loving grapes at all. Pinot noir likes a cool climate. Cool is far away. Maybe there will be no cool. But the Canadians persist. We’ ll move the ice wine vines farther north. Make way for long, dry summers. And, as it warms and dries up in Arizona, cool, wet, Canada is looking better to me every day. Perhaps I can pack up my desert plants and move north too.

My daughter Zoe wants to move north, too, but to Salt Lake where her cousins live. She thinks it’s stupid we live far away from our family. “It’s my dream to live with Lily.” Lily is her cousin who is the same age as Zoe. She tells me this at least twice a week, usually when I’m driving and swearing at traffic, even though compared to real cities, there is no traffic in Flagstaff.

“It is my dream that I have a job so I can feed you and your brother.” But this is not really my dream. If I can’t have a winery on a river, then my
next choice is to have wine with my mom and sisters in Salt Lake City. I am with Zoe on what Flagstaff lacks: a river, a winery, sisters, my mom. Zoë uses the dreams in the present tense, “I am eating an ice cream cone with caramel sauce. It is my dream,” and even in the past tense, “When we are in Disneyland, Lily and I go-ed on a roller coaster that got you all wet. Cameron and Valerie don’t want to go because they would get all wet, but Lily and I don’t care. We are all wet. Even our underwear. But then it is so hot, we are dry in like five seconds. It is my dream.” To Zoe, dreams are ongoing facts. Perhaps that is innocence—the understanding that you’re already you’re living your dream. My job is to crush her, a little, like a basil leaf, tell her she’ll get used to living away from her cousin. It is the hardest part of being a parent, feeding them bad news by the spoonful, inoculating them against worse news later on.

Even though Zoe’s dream is to live in Salt Lake, we are all beginning to understand that we actually live here, in Arizona. Flagstaff is good. We live within driving distance of nine national parks and monuments. If we are cold in the winter, we can drive two hours south and find swimming suit weather. If we get too hot in Phoenix, we can gather our jackets and drive north. We are adapting to this variable place. There are people who sought this state out, who chose these varied climates on purpose. Even wine people. There’s a guy, Eric Glomski, who grows wine grapes in Arizona on purpose. Although he was born in Chicago, Arizona is
his true home. After college at Prescott, he looked for a way to stay in Arizona and found it by buying Page Springs Winery. He makes wine with Maynard Nixon, lead singer of the band Tool. They sell their wine at fancy restaurants in Phoenix. Eric may be my hero. He also may be my fool. He thinks Arizona, as a whole, is great. I want to learn why he chose to grow grapes in one of the weirdest climates in the world.

Adaptation is a strange thing. The verb “to adapt” suggests that it’s the thing that can move—the tree’s, the agent’s, the human’s, the bear’s job is to change according to its circumstances, as in, there is a tsunami coming toward me so I should move out of the way. Evolution assumes that species adapt to the world, not the other way around. But we humans don’t only move to where the water is—we bring it to us. You’d think humans would see that climate change requires changing their ways, to become adapted. But humans are humans. We most often use the verb as transitive. We adapt things to meet our needs. Plant plants that I like to eat and drink. I move this plant and that plant and the wine tastes better now. And meanwhile, geo-engineers strive to find ways to control the climate.

It is summer. School is out and I have the kids. We live in the west, so we are, as always, in the car. On our way down to Page Springs, Max and Zoe sing the four songs we know all the words to. “Mockingbird,”
“Frog Went a Courtin’,” The Baby Song from Oh Brother, Where Art Thou?, and “Baby, You Can’t Love One.” But we don’t really know all the words to “Baby, You Can’t Love One.” We make up the one that rhymes with the number four: “Baby you can’t love four because you can’t fit through the door.”

“Why does love make you fat?” Zoe wonders. I think of wine and look at my soft stomach. Why indeed?

“I don’t think it’s fat so much as you can’t fit all four people at once through the door.”

“That doesn’t make any sense.”

“No. It doesn’t but neither does five: Can’t love five and stay alive.”

“Yeah. Love won’t kill you.”

“No. Probably not,” I say. But truly, I don’t know. Sometimes, I love my kids so much my heart hurts. Sometimes, I think about how brown the earth, not just Arizona, is becoming and I can’t look either Max or Zoe in the eye.

After Sedona, the road turns flat and dismal. Chaparral-dismal—full of the kind of scrub plants and shrubs that hug tightly to the ground, like arctic tundra, but in this case, to stay close to the water and tucked under from the sun, conflating the way a plant grows for why it grows where it does. Like there’s no way anyone could grow anything delicious down here, let alone grapes. But then you turn left and find Oak Creek
again. Birds fly outwards from the river like there’s somewhere better to go. (They figure out quickly that there is not any place better than the river and do an about-face.) To the right, as the road twists by the creek, the riparian vegetation zone abounds with cottonwoods, willows, reeds. To the left, full-on desert sand. You neck is sore, whiplashing as you check the two impossibly paired sights—lush to the right, vapid to the left, abundance to the right, scarcity to the left.

Arizona has a long viticultural history dating from the 16th century when Jesuit priests tended vines and made wine for ceremonial purposes. Most of the grapes in Arizona are grown near Tucson, in the southeastern part of the state. But lately, in the northerly parts between Sedona and Cottonwood, a few pioneer-types grow grapes and make wine. Coming from Oregon, where winegrowing made some sense—45th parallel and all—I could not imagine what anyone was thinking about trying to grow grapes here. I asked Eric Glomski in what sense it was a good idea to try to grow wine here. Didn’t he notice Arizona is, Merriam’s six different life-zones notwithstanding, mostly a desert?

He told me actually, grapes don’t need that much water, once they’re established. I didn’t ask how much was not that much. He laughed anyway and said that here in Arizona, his two most difficult weather-related problems were mildew and frost. Unlike in Oregon, when it rains in Arizona, it rains in July and August. This is hard for wine-farmers because late summer is when the grapes need to ripen. It’s not so bad
for the cabernet grapes. They’re loosely packed and can dry out the next morning, but for grapes like pinot noir, it’s rough. They’re such a tightly compacted grape that when the water gets in, it can’t get out. The grapes rot from the inside. And because although this is Arizona, it’s still northern Arizona, a frost can creep down the mountain in the night and kill grapes as late as May.

The temperature in Sedona is hotter than in Flagstaff. When it’s freezing in Flag, it’s usually fifteen degrees warmer. In the summer, when you want it a little hot, it’s already too hot in Sedona. A hundred degrees in May. However, Sedona in some ways seems more sustainable—the creek flows through it and plants would have more natural sources of water. I’m a little jealous. Owning a winery, on a spring, next to a creek. Maybe I should move down here.

Born in Chicago, raised in Boston, Glomski went to Prescott, College in Northern Arizona. “Until I moved here, I had no real sense of self and no real sense of place. I majored in landscape ecology. I discovered how important it is to belong somewhere and relate to a landscape. I fell in love with Arizona and shortly after fell in love with wine.”

I loved Arizona a little more now that I knew wine could grow here. If Oregon is my Arcadia, my dream of a self-sustaining place, a place where even if the rest of the world fell apart, I could live self-sufficiently, then maybe this little bit of Arizona could be called my Oregon. Here,
there are grapes. I could raise honeybees. My dream has always been to have goats. I would milk them. I like goat cheese with my wine.

As Eric and I sat on the deck, my kids ran through the grape vines. Max pinched leaves of sage from the herb garden. He walked over to me, put his fingers in my nose. “Smell my fingers.” Eric laughed. It sounded like a pull-my-finger fart joke but Max didn’t know that. Zoe looked at Eric, laughing. Did she know the fart joke? No. She didn’t. She wanted something.

“Can I pick some grapes?” she asked him. She’s a little shy. She must have really wanted some grapes to speak to a grown up.

Eric hesitated. “Just a couple. They should be ready.” This Arizona winery dream was a good substitute. Eric liked my kids. Maybe I could work here. I clicked through my set of marketable skills—cooking, weeding, braiding hair (good for tending vines?), Photoshopping, wifing (we’re both married to other people, but heck, I’m from Utah)—looking for a way to insinuate myself here permanently.

But it was getting hot on the deck. Eric and I, trapped by the niceties of interview, set up our conversation station and that’s where we would stay no matter how hot it got or how much wine or water we wanted. Zoe came back over and opened her mouth to ask another question but I shot her a look. I had told both her and Max if they came with me on this interview, they couldn’t interrupt. But now that she’d gone back to play, I wondered what she needed.
After college, Eric became an ecologist, specializing in river ecology. He spent a lot of time walking up and down rivers. Because pioneers settled along the river, he discovered abandoned homesteads where settlers had left behind orchards of pears, apples and quince that still produced fruit. He started making wine from these fruits. Once he made an apple wine under the tutelage of an apple wine mentor. He remembered tasting the wine and it reminded him exactly of this one homestead he’d found along the creek. The wine tasted just like that place. Those apples tasted only like the apples from that orchard. The wine acted as a conduit of very specific place—you might call it a microclimate. Working as a scientist at the time, the experience was expansive. He came to see the art in the making. “You can paint the landscape, like Monet.” Wine gave him the opportunity to be a scientist and an artist and to express the landscape through a liquid. He took time off from teaching at Prescott College and began working at wineries in California. “I really wanted to come back and make wines that expressed this place.”

“One day I was driving down the road and I saw this place for sale. I had actually hiked along this river before, in my previous life, and looked up here and thought, that is the most beautiful place I had ever seen. I mean, would you ever think we were in Arizona?”
I look around—green vines, green cover crops, maybe alfalfa keeping out weeds from under the vines, shade from the winery and out-buildings, willows hanging over the creek, the creek itself. It’s odd to me that to make an Arizonan wine, you have to find some of the least Arizona-like, at least on the surface, land around.

But Eric sees this place as distinctly Arizonan, not because it is sun and desert but because of its nuance. He’s found a niche, a fold in the hillside, a bend in the creek where both the possible and the impossible meet. He researched sites all over the state—looking at water supply, soils, geology, elevation, hot and cold temperatures--and then he thought about economic factors, but kept returning to Page Springs. The owners wanted to sell more land than Eric and his partners could afford, but he described his dream, drew a picture of this place for them. He convinced them to sell him just seven acres. The rest he would buy later. “Those owners are kind of like parents to me. They’re so proud of what I’ve done. They come at least once a year to check in and say, ‘We’re so glad we sold this to you!’”

I’m beginning to see why Eric has been successful. It’s optimism mixed with a willingness to give up small parts of the dream if you have to. When you’re negotiating a deal, you have to be willing to walk away, and Eric would have built his winery somewhere else if the Page Springs
land hadn’t worked out. Eric never changed the roots of his dream, but he was willing and able to train the vines up and around his dream.

Now Max and Zoe play hide and seek in the rows of vines. In between, grass. Max trips and falls. And he gets right back up. No rock opening the skin on his forehead this time. Ah, grass in the desert. Maybe dreams can survive climate change. I know that at least rationalization will. We can have grass and wine. We’ll just have to learn to like it a little hotter.

“Even with all the research we did, we still got our butts kicked by Mother Nature,” Eric told me. You can know everything and still know nothing. Climate is the primary detail with grapes. He chose Page Springs because of the soil, its volcanic material, an extrusive igneous rock, blackish kind of gray basalt. Underneath that basalt is a bed of limestone. Layers of complicated soil make complicated grapes. The Verde Valley used to be an ancient lakebed. The volcanic material flowed on top of it. Limestone is one of the golden jewels of winegrowing. Limestone, because it has a high pH, limits the vigor of the vines. You want the vines to suffer so they will put more energy into the fruit. I know what he’s talking about.

Wine grapes are not like food grapes. You want them sweet. You want them seedless. Wine grapes are an extreme, complex fruit. But as
a winemaker/artist/scientist, you’re choosing a harsh path. The scientist in you is balancing the acids, the sweetness, the yeasts. You measure and you test. The artist in you is looking for an aesthetic. Unlike adapting purely for survival, something else is desired.

The kids are getting hungry and I am getting thirsty. There is wine, El Serrano, and bruschetta, prosciutto and fig with pistachio butter, in the building just a hundred yards up the hill. But this is the dream, sitting on the deck by the creek, watching the kids play, hearing about the acrobatics of wine growing. I sit. I look up the hill. It’s not so far. It won’t be too long. I’ll get to the wine and food soon enough.

Eric pays attention to the bands of elevation too, but not in my anxious, dream-needy way. His obsession isn’t mine. His dream isn’t a dream of sitting and drinking. It’s a dream of making it work. I do get that. I’m married. I’m a writer. I teach. I have kids. We have a house. I’m working all the time. I try to align my obsession with Eric’s. Break the mountain into strata, then deal with it. The band of elevation in this state that is conducive to growing grapes is roughly between 3,500 and 5,500 feet. If you go too low, it gets too hot and your grapes lack acidity. Acid is a big part of what makes wine wonderful. Wine is actually quite acidic. The average pH is 3.5—like a mixture of lemon and orange juices. The temperature has to be cold enough to make the grape suffer, to produce
acid, to prevent the wine grapes tasting like Welch’s. If you go too high, above 5,000 like Munds Park or 7,000 like Flagstaff, you can’t actually get the grapes ripe enough. They won’t develop enough sugar. The wines would be too acidic. You would also deal with winter kill issues and spring frosts. Down south in Phoenix you also deal with drought and too much heat.

So within this little band of elevation that exists in different spots throughout the state, the wine industry grows. They might have wineries in Phoenix one day, but they’re not going to grow great grapes there. Eric works within that band, but there are striations and fluctuations within that band. The winery partners with vineyards in Chiracahua Mountains near Portal that are close to 5,500 feet, but because of the funnel of cold air coming down from Flag, Page Springs suffers more frost here at 4,000 feet.

Eric claims that the distinctiveness of place comes out in the wine. “I’ve also been most surprised by how unique and distinctive our wines are here. Pinot noir is one of my passions. I can taste pinot from Santa Barbara, from Napa, from Carneros, from the Russian River, and it’s pretty easy to tell where those came from. I guess I really look forward to the day when people can say, this came from Arizona.” He’s looking forward to the day when people can vicariously experience this microclimate in their bottles of wine.
But that variation presents challenging management issue too. If the tiniest variation can lead to different outcomes, then unless you know all the permutations, the outcomes will not turn out as you had hoped. In a little vineyard right below the deck upon which we sit, near the water, there’s a gentle slope that leads to the water. Eric planted two varietals, mainly grenache, near the banks of the river where the river materials are mostly gravel and sand. Grenache is known to be incredibly vigorous and the gravel would keep the vines in check, vigor-wise and let the grapes, which like it warm, produce a good mixture of sweetness and acid.

But he was wrong. Lower is not always warmer. The river valley drains cold air all the way from upper Oak Creek and the edge of Flagstaff. Cold air is denser. Each night it literally flows down like water, down this valley bottom. It flows across the bottom of this vineyard planted with grenache, making the bottom of the vineyard radically colder. Eight years later, he still hadn’t gotten a crop off those vines.

Eric shakes his head like he can’t believe this happened to him, after all that research, after being a river ecologist. I picture the cold coming down like a ghost, nipping those grapes in the bud, forcing their vines to tuck under toward the ground. These grenache were not adapting at all. Even though from where we sit, it’s like 102 degrees. If I were a grenache vine, I’d be sprouting grapes out of my sweaty head. But it’s the nighttime
temperatures that make the grape blossoms stay tucked safely in their vines.

“We tried all these different things—built straw bales to act as a wall, bought a fan that takes air from the ground and shoots it into the sky. Years and years late, we finally said, fuck it. Pulled out those grenache vines one-by-one and planted a French-American hybrid. Gewurztraminer and sauv-blanc. That’s just one of many examples that you learn about microclimates by farming. When you live a lifestyle when your economic sustenance is directly link to the cycles of nature, you have no choice but to become very conscious of those things.”

It’s not the machinations, in the end, that will make a difference. Eric and I can’t even manage to move out of the sun in temperatures over a hundred degrees. Humans are too slow to change. What makes me optimistic is this: Eric can imagine the force of cold air, the will of red grapes, the size of a barn, the humidity of a valley, the effect of a slope, the amount of sulfur on a grape, the rate of water flowing through Oak Creek per minute, the burble of the spring, the sway of a cottonwood, the birth of his child, his love of pinot noir, his fascination with old homesteads, the first taste of apple wine. It’s the capacity to hold each bit of minutia in the head, the ability to hold every tiny thing together simultaneously. The heat and the mildew, the drought and the rain, the ocotillos and the citrus groves, the bear, the train, the ponderosa. If we begin to notice and to remember every tiny thing, life gets longer, the world gets bigger, we
begin to hear the voices of millions of microorganisms in the soil saying, look what I can do. And the humans: Look what I can see. Expand your focus and the world becomes numinous.

But in this very moment, the kids are sweaty. Their faces are flushed in the way only Scandinavian skin flushes—like a sunburn. I have to stop Eric. I know he could explain a lot more about what I want to hear. That wine is a realizable dream—that we won’t run out, that I won’t have to travel to Syria to see how they make wine in places even hotter than Page Springs, that my kids will have grass and water, that the dream of the future is a lot like my dream of the present. Or he could tell me that this could be the end of wine and the end of rain and the end of children. But I go before he can say either. I leave Eric sitting on the deck and walk toward the fence surrounding the wine property. We walk to the gate that reads, “no alcohol beyond this point” and pass through. I’m wearing sandals, carrying Max, holding Zoe’s hand and we trip over rocks and slip on the red desert sand but we go a little faster anyway. There’s a long granite rock that reaches out over the water where we can put our toes in.

“It’s so cold,” Max says as he plunges his feet in. But it’s not so cold that he pulls his feet out.

“This is my favorite water,” Zoe says. I know. It is the best kind. The river kind that moves around your feet, that cools you down, that isn’t so deep you’d drown but isn’t so shallow you’ll be muddy, where coyote
willow grows from the banks and herons hide behind its leaves. Where an eagle flies overhead and the climate is neither hotter nor drier because your toes say it is cold and it is wet. You could stay in this place forever where the dream is that this water is a kind of wine.