

Nine months later the two photographs I had remembered so vividly showed up at my cousin's house in Scotland (two of my aunt's three children have returned to Europe, as though the transplant to new soil didn't take for them; their mother excoriated the United States in classic leftist style, but she loved her redwood forest, her river, her house, and rarely went far from them). Looking at those photographs I realized how much they had changed in my imagination. And only as I sit down to write this do I realize that I too have erased the past. I always knew that my middle name was an anglicized version of a great-grandmother's name, but I dropped it in my teens, not liking its sound and feeling that a middle name was unnecessary, given how few people have my last name. Only now have I realized which great-grandmother that name belonged to, only writing this story do I know the name of that unknown woman and that it is also mine, or is now the blank space between my names.

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had been to the interior of my country and  
in several other provinces where I had  
travelled. I have, although the general idea was  
not clear to me, some knowledge of the  
country beyond.

In 1527 the Spaniard Álvar Núñez Cabeza de Vaca refused his commander's orders to take the ships of their expedition to a safe port while the commander and most of the men marched inland to explore. Narváez, the commander, asked why, and Cabeza de Vaca, the expedition's second in command, answered "that I felt certain he would never find the ships again, or they him, as anyone could predict from the woefully inadequate preparation; that I would rather hazard the danger that lay ahead in the interior than give any occasion for questioning my honor by remaining safely aboard." So the incompetent Narváez, Cabeza de Vaca, and three hundred men traveled north for fifteen days among the dwarf fan palms of an uninhabited expanse of what Juan Ponce de León had named Florida fourteen years before. They had met natives who told them that to the north was "a province called Apalachen, where was much gold and plenty of everything we wanted." Honor and greed would be the two gates through which Cabeza de Vaca entered the realm of the utter unknown.

The Apalachen they found was a village of forty thatched houses with ripe corn in the fields, dry corn in storage, deerskins, and "small, poor quality shawls" as

all its treasure. The gold seekers marched onward, wading through lakes, tramping for days, skirmishing with natives, eating their horses, building barges to head toward Mexico and the Spanish settlements there, not knowing how far away they were, dying of armor-piercing arrows, of disease, of hunger, of drowning. No one will ever be lost like those early conquistadors again, wandering a continent about which they knew nothing, not its topography, its climate, encountering inhabitants with whom there was no common language, plunging into a place for which they had no words for places, for plants, for the animals—skunks, alligators, bison—so unlike those of their own continent.

Eduardo Galeano notes that America was conquered, but not discovered, that the men who arrived with a religion to impose and dreams of gold never really knew where they were, and that this discovery is still taking place in our time. This suggests that most European-Americans remained lost over the centuries, lost not in practical terms but in the more profound sense of apprehending where they truly were, of caring what the history of the place was and its nature. Instead, they named it after the places they had left and tried to reconstruct those places through imported plants, animals, and practices, though pumpkin, maple, and other staples would enter their diet as words like Connecticut and Dakota and raccoon would enter their vocabularies. But Cabeza de Vaca and his companions would be conquered by this land and its people, and he

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at least seems to have found out where he was. All but four of the six hundred men who set out on the expedition died in this place they did not know, either quickly, of violence, illness, or hunger, or slowly, as slaves or adopted members of tribes, and their stories are mostly lost to history.

At the Mississippi Delta, Narváez put the strongest and healthiest men on his barge and rowed ahead, abandoning the two other barges. Days passed. One barge was lost in a storm. Cabeza de Vaca commanded the other, whose men had all “fallen over on one another, close to death. Few were any longer conscious. Not five could stand. When night fell, only the navigator and I remained able to tend the barge. Two hours after dark, he told me I must take over; he believed he was going to die that night.” After midnight, Cabeza de Vaca recalls, “I would have welcomed death rather than see so many around me in such a condition.” At dawn, he heard breakers; at daylight, they found the land that was probably Galveston Island in Texas; and the men “began to recover their senses, their locomotion, and their hope.” Natives fed them fish and roots; they embarked again but the barge capsized near shore; and “the survivors escaped as naked as they were born, with the loss of everything we had.” They fell upon the mercy of the natives again. Winter had come, the Spaniards commenced to starve, the natives began to die of the dysentery that came with them, and the sixteen survivors of the ninety or so shipwrecked named the place the Island of Doom.

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Cabeza de Vaca became a slave to this tribe, leading an “unbearable” life of hard work, including digging roots out of water and out of canebrakes. He was pared back to nothing, no language, no clothes, no weapons, no power, but he escaped and established a career as a trader of seashells, red ocher, and mesquite beans in the region. He seems to have had remarkable physical stamina and an ability to reinvent himself again and again. He walked for days and weeks on one austere meal a day. He became a slave again. He met up with some fellow survivors and with them escaped this new captivity. They arrived in the territory of another indigenous nation where they were welcomed as healers and stayed until spring. And what is remarkable about this point in his narrative is that he reports that he got lost looking for mesquite bean pods. He had so adapted to this new life he had fallen into that he no longer considered himself lost until he lost track of the route and his companions in the pathless region of the mesquites.

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He traveled for five days, carrying burning brands so he could keep himself warm with fires at night, and on the fifth he caught up with his fellow survivors from the Narváez expedition and with the Indians, who fed him prickly pears.

Because they went naked in the scorching sun, he reports, he and his companions “shed our skins twice a year like snakes” and suffered sores from sun, wind, and chafing labor (though one of them, Estevanico or Esteban, “the negro,” was from Africa and must have fared better when it came to burning). And again “we

became physicians, of whom I was the boldest and most venturesous in trying to cure anything. Confidence in our ministrations as infallible extended to a belief that none could die while we were among them.” Months passed among various tribes, years had passed since the disasters in Florida. They continued to travel west. Somewhere along the way they seem to have become sacred beings, these naked, relentless survivors whose journey had become a triumphal procession accompanied by three or four thousand locals. Each new village greeted them as miracle workers, holding dances in their honor. They received copper rattles, coral beads, turquoises, five green arrowheads whose malachite Cabeza de Vaca took for emerald, and an offering of six hundred deer hearts. They had been wandering for nine years by the time they arrived in what he called the Village of Hearts.

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Soon after, they found evidence and heard news of conquistadors: they had arrived in what is now New Mexico, a “vast territory, which we found vacant, the inhabitants having fled to the mountains in fear of Christians.” Assuring the natives that they were going to “order them to stop killing, enslaving, and possessing the Indians,” Cabeza de Vaca and his three companions pressed on. In the report he would write afterward, Cabeza de Vaca advised that only kindness would win these people to Spanish subjection and to Christianity. One day he set out with his black-skinned companion and eleven natives, walking more than thirty miles. The following morning they caught up

with slave-hunting Spaniards on horseback, who were stunned by this naked figure at ease among the people and places of this other continent. Although he had been striving for nearly a decade to return to his own people, the initial meeting was not easy. The Spaniards they met wanted to enslave Cabeza de Vaca's entourage, and he and his fellow survivors "became so angry that we went off forgetting the many Turkish-shaped bows, the many pouches, and the five emerald arrowheads, etc., which we thus lost." The Indians among whom they retreated refused to believe they were of the same tribe as the conquistadors, because "we came from the sunrise; they from the sunset; we healed the sick, they killed the sound; we came naked and barefoot, they clothed, horsed, and lanced; we coveted nothing but gave whatever we were given, while they robbed whomever they found and bestowed nothing on anyone." These men who came from the sunset were what he had been when he landed in Florida.

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It took some time after he arrived in a Spanish town in Mexico before he could stand to wear clothes or sleep anywhere but on the floor. He had gone about naked, shed his skin like a snake, had lost his greed, his fear, been stripped of almost everything a human being could lose and live, but he had learned several languages, he had become a healer, he had come to admire and identify with the Native nations among whom he lived; he was not who he had been. The language of his report to the king is terse, impersonal; his declarative

sentences describe only the tangibles of places, foods, encounters, and even these are given in the sturkst terms, with little description, little detail. The terms in which to describe the extraordinary metamorphosis of his soul did not exist, at least for him. He was among the first, and the first to come back and tell the tale, of Europeans lost in the Americas, and like many of them he ceased to be lost not by returning but by turning into something else.

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Cabeza de Vaca and his companions plunged into the American landscape, but in the centuries afterward many entered it involuntarily, as captives. Some of those who returned wrote or dictated accounts of their experiences, and these became a distinctly American genre of literature, the captivity narrative. Of course the stories of those who did not return remained unrecorded; their journeys were out of writing, out of English, into another terrain of story.

Often, initially, these strays and captives felt that they were far from home, distant from their desires, and then at some point, in a stunning reversal, they came to be at home and what they had longed for became remote, alien, unwanted. For some, perhaps there was a moment when they realized that the old longings had become little more than habit and that they were not yearning to go home but had been home for some time; for others the dreams of home must have faded by stages among the increasingly familiar details of their surroundings. They must have learned their surroundings like a language and one day woken up fluent in

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them. Somehow, for these castaways the far became near and the near far. They did not reject the unfamiliar but embraced it, in the course of which it became familiar. By the end of his decade of wandering, Cabeza de Vaca was no longer in harmony with his own culture, but he had kept it as a destination, a goal, that kept him purposeful and moving, even though arrival was another trauma. Many others refused to return.

In the midst of winter, in the frontier town of Deerfield, Massachusetts, 1704, Eunice Williams, age seven, was captured by a party of French and Indian raiders, along with all the other members of her family and many of their neighbors, 112 in all. They were given moccasins to wear and marched from northern Massachusetts to near Montreal through New Hampshire, in the snow. Some of the captors were wounded and dying, and some of the captives who could not keep up—notably infants, women who had recently given birth, including Williams's mother—were killed, their bodies left in the snow along the route. Many children were carried some or all of the way. Some of these child captives were not just prisoners but potential adoptees; Eunice's older brother Stephen Williams was taken by the Abenaki and then by a Pennacook chief, though he was "redeemed" as the religiously loaded term went, or ransomed, in the spring of 1705. Eunice was kept by the Mohawk Iroquois near Montreal, and she never returned.

The Iroquois practiced a ceremonious form of adoption in which a captive could replace a family member

who had died, and sometimes captives were explicit replacements for those killed in battle. The captive was given a new name and treated as a member of the family. Sometimes the given name belonged to someone who had died, and the newly named person inherited something of the affections and identity of the deceased. Ceremoniously, officially, Eunice Williams became someone else. Within a few years, all her surviving family members had returned to their Puritan communities, but the people among whom she lived said they would "as soon part with their hearts" as with her. She remained, soon forgot how to speak English, had a new name, then a Catholic baptismal name (becoming Catholic was almost more shocking to her Puritan preacher father than becoming Indian), eventually a second Iroquois name.

In 1713 in her late teens she married a member of the community named François Xavier Arosen with whom she remained until his death fifty-two years later. Her brother Stephen would write in his diary in 1722 that he had seen a man come from Canada. "He brings bad news thence. My poor sister lives with her Indian husband; has had two children, one is living, the other not." The Williams family never ceased to mourn her loss and to regard her as spiritually lost as well. But Eunice Williams had ceased to be a captive long ago. She finally met with Stephen and her other brothers in 1740, traveled with them to their home, and even attended "publick worship" with them. "Yet this might be as a pledge yt she may return to the house and ordi-

nances of God from wch she has been so long Sepratd," though according to tradition she refused to "put off her Indian blankets" and camped out in a meadow with her husband rather than residing in a relative's home. She was negotiating her emotional and cultural distance carefully, on her terms rather than theirs. On a few further occasions, she revisited her birth family, but she never left the community that had captured her, and in it she died at age ninety-five.

Her family always spoke as though she had crossed over into another world beyond reach, but what is striking is that even in the eighteenth century the boundaries were blurred. The Mohawks among whom she lived had close ties to the Jesuits of Montreal, and there was considerable movement between the various French, English, and Native communities. But it was different enough. She no longer spoke the language of her blood relatives, did not see them for more than three decades, and had settled among a people whose every belief and practice was profoundly different from the Puritans'. John Demos, in his book on Williams, *The Unredeemed Captive*, suggests that the Iroquois were kinder to children, and perhaps the thing hardest for whites to accept or, often, even to imagine is that some captives preferred native culture. Looking back, the cultures of Cabeza de Vaca's Spaniards and Eunice Williams's family look more forbidding, if no less remote, than the indigenous cultures among which they came to live. There is something obdurate, obsessive, inflexible about them, as hard and

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angular as conquistadors' armor, as dreary as Puritan theology.

Some of this is evident in Stephen Williams's refusal to regard her as anything other than a tragedy, a captive, a person waiting to return, to understand that she had become someone else. The word *lost* in this context has many shades. The captive is at first literally lost, taken into terra incognita. And unless that captive is redeemed, he or more frequently she remains lost to the people who were left behind, and thus the language of lostness is often used to describe the person as lost the way that a possession is lost—a lost umbrella, lost keys—without recognizing that he or more commonly she may well have ceased either to be a captive or to be lost. But the word *lost* has spiritual implications, as in the line of the penitent slave trader's hymn "I once was lost but now am found"; the person taken among the heathen was commonly imagined to be spiritually lost, estranged from Christianity and civilization. Thus, whatever the condition of the former captives, they were forever imagined as lost. But they did not always imagine themselves that way, and it seems that the captives had in a sense to lose their past to join the present, and this abandonment of memory, of old ties, is the steep cost of adaptation.

Mary Jemison, who was captured with her family in Pennsylvania in 1758, told her story to a scribe, and so her voice survives as Williams's does not. There was a raid on her parents' frontier farm when she was about fifteen. An Indian followed them with a lash, forcing

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the children to maintain the pace. They were marched, kept without food and water for days, and then taken to "the border of a dark and dismal swamp." There she and a little boy were given moccasins, signs that their journey would continue, while the other captives, including her parents and siblings, were killed "and mangled in the most shocking manner." Like Eunice Williams, she was adopted. She was to replace a brother who had died, and the two Seneca women—"kind good natured women; peaceable and mild in their dispositions"—to whom she was given she referred to as sisters ever after. The trauma of captivity, of the murder of family members, and a sudden new life among another culture and another language must have been considerable, but adapting to it all was a matter of survival, and these child captives survived and then flourished in their new lives. The rupture must have been as sudden and violent as birth.

More than a year later, the Senecas among whom she lived brought her along on a visit to Fort Pitt (the future Pittsburgh), where the whites took such an interest in her that her sisters "hurried me into their canoe and recrossed the river" and rowed the long journey home without stopping. "The sight of white people who could speak English inspired me with an unspeakable anxiety to go home with them, and share in the blessings of civilization. My sudden departure and escape from them, seemed like a second captivity, and for a long time I brooded the thought of my miserable situation with almost as much sorrow and dejection as

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I had done those of my first sufferings. Time, the destroyer of every affection, wore away my unpleasant feelings, and I became as contented as before. We tended our cornfields through the summer...." She married, she bore a child, she lost a husband, and by that time she was at home among the Seneca.

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Once again the possibility of returning to the white community appeared when a Dutchman began stalking her in hope of capturing her and turning her in for a bounty. Jemison chose not to be captured again and ran "with all the speed I was mistress of" to a hiding place. Inspired by the Dutchman, a Seneca leader thought of turning her in for the bounty himself, and she went and hid again in the weeds with her young son. She was desperate to remain where she had once yearned to leave. She remarried, bore six more children, and came to own a vast expanse of land, "by virtue of a deed from the Chiefs of the Six Nations," on which she lived the rest of her long life. That life she called, in her autobiography filtered through the pen of a scribe, "a tragical medley that I hope will never be repeated." But it was the deaths and discord of her children of which she spoke; her troubles had all become personal, and the land she lived on was itself a meeting ground between the two cultures, for she leased out land to white farmers.

For these eastern captives, the boundaries between cultures began to blur as the geographies overlapped. For Cynthia Ann Parker, there was no such blurring. In 1836, when she was nine, she and her family were

captured by Comanches on the Texas plains where they had recently settled (or invaded). The rest of her family was massacred. She alone survived, married a prominent member of her new community, Peta Nocona, and bore two sons and a daughter. A quarter century later there was another battle, this time initiated by white men, and she was captured on horseback with her youngest child in arms. She was led to believe that her husband had died in the battle, but it appears that this was a mistake. Even so she never saw her husband or sons again. An uncle in Fort Worth claimed her and kept her captive, locked up at night lest she flee with her daughter. She never relearned English properly during the decade she lived among the culture that had once been and was no longer hers. A man who met her recollects that she “had a wild expression and would look down when people looked at her. She could use an ax equal to a man and disliked a lazy person. She was an expert in tanning hides with the hair on them, or plaiting or knitting either ropes or whips. She thought her two boys were lost on the prairie. This dissatisfied her very much.” The whites always regarded her as having been rescued, but she seems to have regarded herself as having been imprisoned. The daughter died and ten years after her capture, Parker, who had starved herself into weakness, died of the flu. She never saw her sons again, though one came to claim her remains forty years after her death and rebury her in his world.

There are less dire stories, such as that of Thomas Jefferson Mayfield, whose family moved from Texas to California in the 1840s. They settled in the San Joaquin Valley, where their indigenous neighbors kept them stocked with fish, game, and acorn bread. When his mother died, his father, feeling unable to care for the boy while keeping up his roving business, allowed him to go off with the Choinumne Yokuts. After all the captivity narratives in which contact begins as masculine battle and after Cabeza de Vaca’s violent plunge into the unknown, it’s the mildness of Mayfield’s transition from one culture to another that’s startling. The Yokuts were maternal substitutes, though no single woman adopted him: they all looked after him, and he seems to have run in a pack of children. For a decade, his home was with them, and for periods of as long as three years he didn’t see his father. Eventually, as the Civil War broke out and the Yokuts were increasingly hemmed in by white settlers, he shifted back to the culture he was born in. His memoir in some ways marks the end of the captivity narrative (though there would be other captives later in the nineteenth century), because the indigenous nations were ceasing to be free in their own land; they themselves were becoming captives within the spreading dominant culture, and few found as amiable a reception as these children did. It was no longer individuals but whole cultures being brought up abruptly into collision with difference, traversing that distance between the near and the far.

Reading these stories, it's tempting to think that the arts to be learned are those of tracking, hunting, navigating, skills of survival and escape. Even in the everyday world of the present, an anxiety to survive manifests itself in cars and clothes for far more rugged occasions than those at hand, as though to express some sense of the toughness of things and of readiness to face them. But the real difficulties, the real arts of survival, seem to lie in more subtle realms. There, what's called for is a kind of resilience of the psyche, a readiness to deal with what comes next. These captives lay out in a stark and dramatic way what goes on in every life: the transitions whereby you cease to be who you were. Seldom is it as dramatic, but nevertheless, something of this journey between the near and the far goes on in every life. Sometimes an old photograph, an old friend, an old letter will remind you that you are not who you once were, for the person who dwelt among them, valued this, chose that, wrote thus, no longer exists. Without noticing it you have traversed a great distance; the strange has become familiar and the familiar if not strange at least awkward or uncomfortable, an outgrown garment. And some people travel far more than others. There are those who receive as birthright an adequate or at least unquestioned sense of self and those who set out to reinvent themselves, for survival or for satisfaction, and travel far. Some people inherit values and practices as a house they inhabit; some of us have to burn down that house, find our own ground, build from scratch, even as a psychological metamorphosis.

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As a cultural metamorphosis the transition is far more dramatic.

The people thrown into other cultures go through something of the anguish of the butterfly, whose body must disintegrate and reform more than once in its life cycle. In her novel *Regeneration*, Pat Barker writes of a doctor who "knew only too well how often the early stages of change or cure may mimic deterioration. Cut a chrysalis open, and you will find a rotting caterpillar. What you will never find is that mythical creature, half caterpillar, half butterfly, a fit emblem of the human soul, for those whose cast of mind leads them to seek such emblems. No, the process of transformation consists almost entirely of decay." But the butterfly is so fit an emblem of the human soul that its name in Greek is *psyche*, the word for soul. We have not much language to appreciate this phase of decay, this withdrawal, this era of ending that must precede beginning. Nor of the violence of the metamorphosis, which is often spoken of as though it were as graceful as a flower blooming.

I write this and then one day, with a free hour in between a conversation and an obligation, go to the old Conservatory of Flowers near my home, recently restored and reopened. I had not been there in nine years, since it was ravaged by a great winter storm. I thought I would look at the gleaming dark leaves large as maps, at the vines and mosses and orchids, and breathe that humid air, the steamy glories I remembered. But the west wing of the great greenhouse with its milky windowpanes had become a butterfly garden and in the

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middle of that chamber was a butterfly hatchery, a window a few inches in front of a wooden plank, or rather shallow series of shelves, to which were pinned platoons of future butterflies, sorted by species. The chrysalises had taken on the shape of the butterflies inside, and some rocked as though stirred by a faint breeze, though the adjacent chrysalises were still. Four butterflies emerged while I watched, and seven more when I returned another day.

They came out with their wings packed down like furled parachutes, like crumpled letters. Even as they emerged it seemed incredible that their wide wings had once fit in so slender a space. As they emerged, their bodies were visible as they would never quite be again, once the wings expanded and came to dominate the creature, and during those moments they looked like bugs, like insects, instead of what they would be when they were all brilliantly colored wing like some sentient cousin of flowers. Their bodies were still

plump with the fluid they had to pump into those wings in the first minutes of their emergence to make them the straight sheets with which they flew. Each clung to its chrysalis while its wings unfolded by almost imperceptible stages. Some did not get quite free, and their wings never fully straightened. One butterfly sat still with an orange wing curled into the chrysalis. One seemed permanently stuck halfway out, its yellow-and-black wings like buds that would not flower. One flailed frantically, trying to drag itself out by crawling onto adjacent unopened chrysalises until they too be-

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gan to thrash, a contagious panic. That one finally dropped free, though it may have been too late for its wings to straighten. The process of transformation consists mostly of decay and then of this crisis when emergence from what came before must be total and abrupt.

But the changes in a butterfly's life are not always so dramatic. The strange resonant word *instar* describes the stage between two successive molts, for as it grows, a caterpillar, like a snake, like Cabeza de Vaca walking across the Southwest, splits its skin again and again, each stage an instar. It remains a caterpillar as it goes through these molts, but no longer one in the same skin. There are rituals marking such splits, graduations, indoctrinations, ceremonies of change, though most changes proceed without such clear and encouraging recognition. *Instar* implies something both celestial and ingrown, something heavenly and disastrous, and perhaps change is commonly like that, a buried star, oscillating between near and far.

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