WATERSHED

Other Books by PERCIVAL EVERETT

Erasure Grand Canyon, Inc. Glyph Frenzy The Body of Martin Aguilera God's Country Big Picture For Her Dark Skin Zulus The Weather and Women Treat Me Fair Cutting Lisa Walk Me to the Distance

Suder The One That Got Away

WATERSHED

PERCIVAL EVERETT

Beacon Press Boston

BEACON PRESS Boston, Massachusetts www.beacon.org

Beacon Press books are published under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations.

@ 1996 by Percival Everett First Beacon Press edition published in 2003 Published by Beacon Press in 2024

All rights reserved Printed in the United States of America

27 26 25 24 8765432

This book is printed on acid-free paper that meets the uncoated paper ANSI/NISO specifications for permanence as revised in 1992.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data Everett, Percival L. Watershed / Percival Everett .- Ist Beacon Press ed. p. cm. ISBN 0-8070-1627-5 (acid-free paper)

I. Indians of North America-Treaties-Fiction. 2. African American men-Fiction. 3. Water rights-Fiction. 4. Hydrologists-Fiction. 5. Colorado-Fiction. I. Title. PS3555.V34W36 2003 813'.54 dc21 2003003619

For Chessie As always, with love

1

LANDSCAPES EVOLVE SEQUENTIALLY??

except under extraordinary provocation, or in circumstances not at all to be apprehended, it is not probable that as many as five hundred Indian warriors will ever again be mustered at one point for a fight; and with the conflicting interests of the different tribes, and the occupa- tion of the intervening country by advancing settlements, such an event as a general Indian war can never occur in the United States. (Edward Parmelee Smith, 1873)

My blood is my own and my name is Robert Hawks. I am sitting on a painted green wooden bench in a small Episcopal church on the northern edge of the Plata Indian Reservation, holding in my hands a Vietnam-era M-16, the butt of the weapon flat against the plank floor between my feet. There are seven other armed people sitting on the floor, backs against the paneled walls, or pacing and peering out the windows-stained and clear-at the armored per- sonnel carrier some hundred yards away across the dirt and gravel parking lot, and at the pasture where two sad-looking bulls stand, their sides, black and gray, flat against the sky behind them. Out there, there are two hundred and fifty police-FBI, all clad in blue windbreakers with large gold letters, and National Guardsmen, looking like the soldiers they want to be. There is an FBI agent sit- ting in a chair opposite me; his hands are bound with yellow nylon cord; his mouth is ungagged; his feet are bare and rubbing

1

2 PERCIVAL EVERETT

against each other in this cold room. The hard look he had worn just hours ago has faded and, although his blue eyes show no fear, the continual licking of his lips betrays him. His partner, a shorter, wider man, is face down on the ground outside; his blood and last heat having melted the snow beneath him. He lies dead between two dead Indians, brothers, twins.

That I should feel put out or annoyed or even dismayed at hav­ ing to tell this story is absurd since I do want the story told and since I am the only one who can properly and accurately repro­ duce it. There is no one else in whom I place sufficient trust to attempt a fair representation of the events­ not that the events related would be anything less than factual, but that those chosen for exhibition would not cover the canvas with the stain or under­ painting of truth-and of course truth necessarily exists only as perception and its subsequent recitation alters it. But I can tell it, my own incriminations aside.

The insignificant point of light on the ceiling seemed to dilate as I watched, and I wondered how it was that the perforation would not let in enough light to illuminate even a section of the poorly lit room, but could allow in enough water to ruin the entire house; how it had to be in some way dark to see the distending prick, but water would always find me in there. I slapped myself for pondering like an idiot and did the only thing that made any sense: I grabbed my vest, the box of flies I'd tied the previous night, and my sixty-year-old Wright and McGill bamboo rod that no one could believe I actually got wet, much less used, and went fishing.

. . .

3

watershed

Nymphs are meant to be fished near or on the bottom of the water and so must absorb moisture and/or be weighted so they get to the bottom quickly. The materials of their construction must give the appearance of life, suggesting the movement of a living insect in its larval or nymphal stage, its pulsing, vibrating. The fish get close to it, without the concern of the surface predators, and take a good look, and so it must be lifelike.

My father had never liked fishing. It seemed enough to him that my grandfather, his father, hunted and fished. My grandfather never pushed the idea on him, however. In fact, he confided in me that he understood my father needed the difference between them as a necessary point of divergence. "We're so much alike," he would say, then make a cast or load his rifle or rip the guts out of a fish in one quick motion. Indeed, he and my father looked enough alike to be brothers and to my mind, in matters all but those having to do with the outdoors, they shared the same be- liefs. They were both physicians and both well liked, though to hear them speak you'd have assumed they found people objec- tionable and you would have been right, but it was people, not persons, who were problematic, they would articulately point out. They hated America, policemen, and especially churches. Their outright detestation for Christianity-it was much more than a simple disregard-had ended their marriages: my grandfa- ther had known full well that his wife was a member of the AME Church but had hoped that he could live with it; my father claimed that my mother had found religion and bushwhacked him one day with a prayer at the dinner table. My grandmother died when I was ten and we went to the funeral, Christian service and all, and my aunt shouted at my grandfather, called him a hea- then. She then turned to my father and said, "You're just as bad." She then knelt in front of me and tried to be nice, offering me a

4

PERCIVAL EVERETT

Lifesaver-I said, "Blow it out your barracks bag." After my par- ents' divorce I lived with my mother, and the religious stuff weighed heavily on me, my being convinced that one had to be in some way born Christian because there was not a genuflecting bone in my body, and so my mother and I lived with our horns locked. The religious stuff became a lot more important than it should have been, as I did not actively dislike it, but simply did not care. When I was twelve, I went to live with my father and grandfather, whom "I was just like," and for four and a half years until I left for college, I watched the two of whom it would seem I was a pretty faithful copy.

The fishing turned out to be slow-I took three trout in a couple of hours, all on a store-bought Royal Coachman. I hated the gen- eralized flies, the ones that didn't look like some particular insect native to the water but that because of their color or glitter caused the fish to strike them out of interest or anger or whatever, but I enjoyed following the green-and-red fly whiz through the air and light with its stark white calf-hair wings on the surface of the water. Anyway, the fish were small and I let them go. I switched to a hare's ear nymph and began to have pretty good success, starting on a string of keepers.

Before I came out here to the cabin, to fish and think and be alone, I was in the city with Karen, a woman I had been fucking. I decided on this term for our interaction, having found disfavor with the term relationship and seeing that I had simply and stu- pidly fallen into something out of convenience and, sadly, habit and, as with most things entered into easily, extricating myself turned out to be decidedly more difficult. Her voice grated on

5

watershed

me, as did her attitudes and disposition, and finally her smells, but still I would lie between her legs again and again, pathetically seeking release or simply seeking.

"This is not a good time to go fishing," Karen had said, sitting at the kitchen table in my apartment, drumming her nails against the Formica, her index finger striking the place that had been chipped when I dropped my binoculars some months earlier. I just stood there, in sort of agreement, sort of nodding. We had been arguing, about what exactly was unclear now, but it had come, as it always did, to my defending myself by telling her that I did indeed care about her and that I did want to make her happy. As the discussion wore on I realized my lie and wanted to tell her that indeed I was not in love with her, never had been in love with her and, further, believed completely that she was too insane to be capable of love herself. Karen was a smart person and not unrea­ sonable, but she wouldn't let me talk, wouldn't take a breath, and, sadly, as I was forced to listen now, was saying nothing new. "So, are you going fishing?" she had asked. Her drumming stopped.

Her words had sounded exactly like, "I dare you to go fish- ing." I studied her eyes and felt sick to my stomach at how I, in some way, genuinely detested her and her ways and here she was again daring me to do what I had done so many times before. I had been chanting in my head, and perhaps she heard it, that this was the last time, that this time I meant it, that there was no com- ing back, that I was turning the corner, no longer the weak man I had proven myself to be. I had said, "Yes."

"Why !? " she had screamed, her voice much louder than her size. "Because you need to get away from me? Am I that awful?"

"No, because I want to go fishing. I like fishing. It relaxes me." "And I don't relax you ?! "