

P. Scott Cunningham

Planet Earth

...the variety of ephemera of human intervention on the landscape is far greater than anything the land itself has to offer.

William Kentridge

Summer. Men emerge from their garages dragging cans of gasoline and chainsaws into the trees. Like most things, trees can sometimes look like people. They scream *Get off of me!*, except they don't. They take their trimming like a human, standing mute amid their grief. Like birds, chainsaws have eyes—one on each side of the head, lidded by the heavy chain that winks as it spins throwing its nose over and over into the heart of the trunk. Once ignited by the jerking of a rope, each saw works furiously to exhaust itself, emitting a horrible noise no one can stand—*Has anyone seen my glasses?* it cries. But what it sounds like once it's in the tree is the opposite: saw and tree become the same, so if sound contains truth then trees were made to be cut down. Have you ever heard one fall? The wood cracks and breaks with full-throated ease.

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Airplanes fly. As businesses they fail.
People get into them, are vaulted five miles into the sky, then fall asleep.

In 1978, 1% of all couples met on airplanes.
Despite what you've been told, falling in love
requires speaking. I saw her first
in the boarding area, kneeling with a child.
Then she was across the aisle from me.
Speaking felt like pounding in a flush nail.
We wrote letters for a year. I drove
down the mountain to the post office
and was distraught if there was nothing.
When there was, I devoured it in the car
and mailed a response that afternoon.
Together at last, we lasted one month
before I cheated on her with a woman
who sold running shoes you weren't supposed to
run in. There's a difference between elegance
and truth. Airplanes land on wheels.

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Once, in the woods, I saw two owls mate.
At first, I saw only one, standing in a tree.
The noise it made was deep and powerful.
Snow and leaf were the cathedral I crawled
through on my knees to be closer, and kneel
and look up into the sky whose light was
disappearing as the sun fell further
behind the mountains. I was just about to go
when I heard it—like an echo, a reply.
Like waves breaking into one another, each cry
punished the air, each had its own mass
that rolled across the world and crashed

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into the bird it had been aimed at,
each came faster than the one before
until every other noise had been flattened
and the other owl, with the violence of a planet,
burst into the clearing. With each flap
it halved the distance between them
until one was hovering over the other.
Each was airborne now, suspended by the weight
of its alternate. Neither made a sound.
I held my breath until it burned.