

*The fact that “natural” is no longer a
dirty word is amazing . . .*

Change Rae Lee, *On Such a Full Sea*

I see Venus and Jupiter, and they rise
above the horizon as close siblings.
Venus sits to the left and Jupiter to the
right. Venus appears large and warm,
while distance diminishes Jupiter's
scale, and the largest planet in our solar
system glows cool. In the night sky, a
chorus of stars and constellations join
these planets. Our waning moon brings
more light, and a shooting star streaks. I
make a wish and keep my eyes fixed
upwards. I want to see more flashes; I
have so many wishes, and I see another
glow advancing with swiftness.
Constancy and steadiness temper its
speed. Confusion strikes, and I grasp
that I am not gazing at an asteroid
pushing through the atmosphere but a
satellite in low earth orbit. It, too, imparts
wonder. An astronomer tells me to look
out for the space station, and a mobile
app foretells its imminent crossing.

Now I am climbing a hill where prickly
pear cacti, cypress trees, and towering
umbrella pines line the rocky path. The
sun shines intensely and illuminates
shades of green, dark and light, warm
and cool, and those that mark greater
and lesser fertility. I turn my head to spy
the cooing dove. She is resting on the
ground with relaxed wings, and her
peacefulness transcends. I continue
walking, and my body jerks and jumps
as a dark and violet form escapes my
sandaled feet. A snake, not more than
sixty centimeters, slides into the brush. I
am unsettled, and I am frightened.

The dove and serpent mark my day just
as celestial bodies and rocketed
satellites mark the night.

This is the state of our anthropocene
age: human development has marked
our planet in such multiple and profound
ways that the natural world and human
world are now inextricably intertwined.
We cannot understand one without
knowing the other. Climate change is
real, and humans are the cause.
Smallpox has been eradicated.
Passenger pigeons, too, no longer
darken the skies. Roads and power lines
traverse earth's surface. The ways in
which these two worlds intersect and
become one are innumerable.

Yet, in this new age, there is an
insistence on marking their separation.
Nature is our paradise lost, and we
yearn for its reemergence and its
existence. Governmental agencies
demarcate official areas of wilderness.
Manufacturers advertise the benefits
of *natural* sodas. Biologists and
ecologists team with filmmakers to
produce wildlife documentaries. Reality
television shows depict
humans surviving in the wild. Markets
offer diverse heirloom tomatoes
alongside genetically-modified produce.
The backpacker seeks solitude and
respite in wilderness, and a family
retreats to a mountain cabin. Students
study Thoreau's *Walden Pond* and
imagine Nature's transcendence.

Space is the final frontier, and it is also
one marked by humans. Eons ago, an
asteroid hurtled through the atmosphere
and permanently marked the earth. Not
even a nuclear detonation compares to
its impact.

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