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Cock Robin Island

Angie R. Young-Petrillo

If you've never been to a Delta, I've no hope of describing it to you. The Delta is something you must feel with your skin, carry it back with you and wonder how many showers it will take to wash off. The more often you go, the deeper it seeps, and suddenly you have Delta in your bones. Like DDT it'll never leave you, it'll come out to play with your organs and you'll curse it the same. You'll only ever find comfort in the recognition of transience, and the melancholic sensibility you possess must be fed, body and spirit. No, if you've never been to a Delta, you won't understand. But try.

The smoke cleared enough to see robin's egg skies and that meant it was time for a drive. My old best friend's mom has a goal to drive every road in California. Lofty, sure, but my own father had shown it near possible. The attitude was "I've spent my whole life trying to get lost and I haven't succeeded yet." He wasn't much of a hiker. But the last time I'd wandered proper the back roads of Loleta was with my old best friend's mom nearly a decade ago, and we didn't do a thorough enough job. Humboldt's wonder rested in its ability to produce new roads lined with hundred year old barns and historic plaques out of thin air. There is always something to marvel at and rarely are there tourists marvelling next to you breathing their noisy tourist air.

I took off towards Table Bluff Reservation and meandered through the tall grass and coast cypress. The road had fewer potholes than you'd expect and the homes had that Pacific wash. A fence adorned with notes made of buoys and grids of abalone set the tune of nostalgia. That's the thing about the California coast—it's all one song.

I came upon a rusto-amended speed sign—hadn't seen an eighty mile an hour sign since the last time I was in Montana. Stuck to twenty five, good and slow, slowing further to peep into the homes I

passed. I wondered if Hitchcock had considered this place for *The Birds*, or if anyone had considered it for a remake. Trailers returning to earth live next to Victorians so well preserved they'd be ID'd if they tried to buy liquor. Big swayed-back dairy barns so sweet you'd want to cry rest across from teensy houses absolutely festered with an infestation of dahlias. It's hard to pass through, not stop and set up shop, build a little lean-to and whittle the days away in the fields of Eden. People don't take kindly to that, though.

I reached a crossroads and had a decision to make. There's a road, inconspicuous, that leads straight towards the ocean, its efforts thwarted by the jetty. It is perfect. Halfway down it I almost hit a baby goat—your reason to drive slowly—that took it upon itself to do a disturbing display of adorableness. It jumped and reared to one side of the road, where it's siblings were munching the greenery, and absolutely skipped back across, soared into a perfect jump through the wired fence and returned delicately back to mother. I'm about ready to trade my shithead dog for that baby goat but I know the damn goat will grow into a shithead, too.

My map showed a bridge, single-laned over the river to an island I'd never heard of before. As I pulled up to the lot before the bridge, an electric tingling rolled up my toes through my ankles up until it poured through my eyes and nose and made me shiver. A river delta, right here, like I just took the lid off my present. Anticipation crept with me as I crawled over the bridge. The water of the Eel was choppy but a vivacious blue, and the river was wide and met silted beaches. Cock Robin Island is thick with trees, who's orange leaves littered the gravel road like confetti. A shot to shit road sign resided across from a gate that had a smattering of refuse in front of it. There are no "no trespassing" signs and I did not let my honed trepidation for going solo down middle-of-nowhere roads in Humboldt stop me.

Cock Robin Island resides within a dream of a place and time that I did not think one could enter any longer on the coast of California. The more that I think about it, the less I am sure that I did not cross into a separate dimension, for it felt so. Heat rose, the air stilled, and it felt like an embrace. As I snuck down the lane, the

trees parted here to reveal a field with a neat row of haystacks, there to look out back towards the hills over golden waves with green trim. A barn joined me on the left, and held on until I abruptly entered what I swear was the set of some Swedish film I watched a couple years back.

Bucolic, idyllic, these words do weak work to describe the home at the end of the lane. It is a vision. I was so stunned to behold it I was rendered incapable of describing it—it was like beholding God, or so I've been told. I'll have to go back for a picture for you. I'll have to go back for myself. Riding back down that lane, crossing back over that bridge, as the spell lifted mile by mile, I felt I must humbly ask them if I could pitch a tent near the riverbank, bring what I may by boat and take a proper rest from the wilds of society.

You see, I grew up by a Delta and a Delta's grown in me. I've no speed until the stormy season and when that hits I'll wreck all in site. Vital news is brought upon the backs of cranes and the islands that can only be reached by water are always where I've known the treasures to be hidden. If you fall asleep upon the Delta, the spirits will whisper secrets into your dreams and when you wake the look in your eyes will shake loose the guilt of man. All that is abandoned is beautiful in decay, and all will be washed into nothingness in due time. Fecundity is of the moment—thus is the philosophy of the Delta. But you won't get it if you've never been to the Delta. You should fix that.