

would mean putting off breaking the horses. And without two of them to do the work it would be a battle to get the hay put up and hauled down the draw before the elk got into it. She could hire one of their homestead neighbors to split firewood, if he would take a steer in payment. The Gantz property abutted the Echol ranch along the northeast side, and they had always helped each other at roundup, so maybe when the Gantz family got word of Henry's broken leg they would show up, Arlo and his boys, and help her with the roundup without expecting any of the Frazers to show up for theirs. But Henry wouldn't want to sit by and watch them doing everything. And if there was any early snow, she knew he would be wanting to ride up into the Ochocos and look for any stray cows they might have missed. Two months.

She slipped out from under Bud, laid him down gently on the bench, and stood. She was dressed in men's overalls and boots and a man's work shirt that fit too closely across her belly, but the nun's face did not register any bit of disapproval. "I don't know what the bill is," she said quietly to the woman, "but we came away from the house without a bank check." She didn't say that they would need to sell some calves in order to raise the money.

The front of the nun's habit was spattered with goblets of plaster. Her white wimple, fixed close around her chin and cheeks, made her face look pinched. She said without inflection, "Come with me. We'll tell Sister Louise at the desk that you will try to pay when you come in October." She tucked her hands into the folds at the front of her costume and walked back down the corridor. Her shoes on the floorboards made no sound at all.

Martha followed her, and Henry waited, sitting in the wheelchair beside his son asleep on the hard bench. When Martha finally reappeared, he got himself up from the chair and stood on one leg with a hand braced against the wall while she woke Bud. The boy wanted to be carried but she stood him on his feet and then went over to Henry so he would have

her shoulder to lean against. They shuffled a couple of steps, but then the nun who had cast his leg reappeared, walking swiftly toward them with a pair of crutches. She held the door for them as they went out.

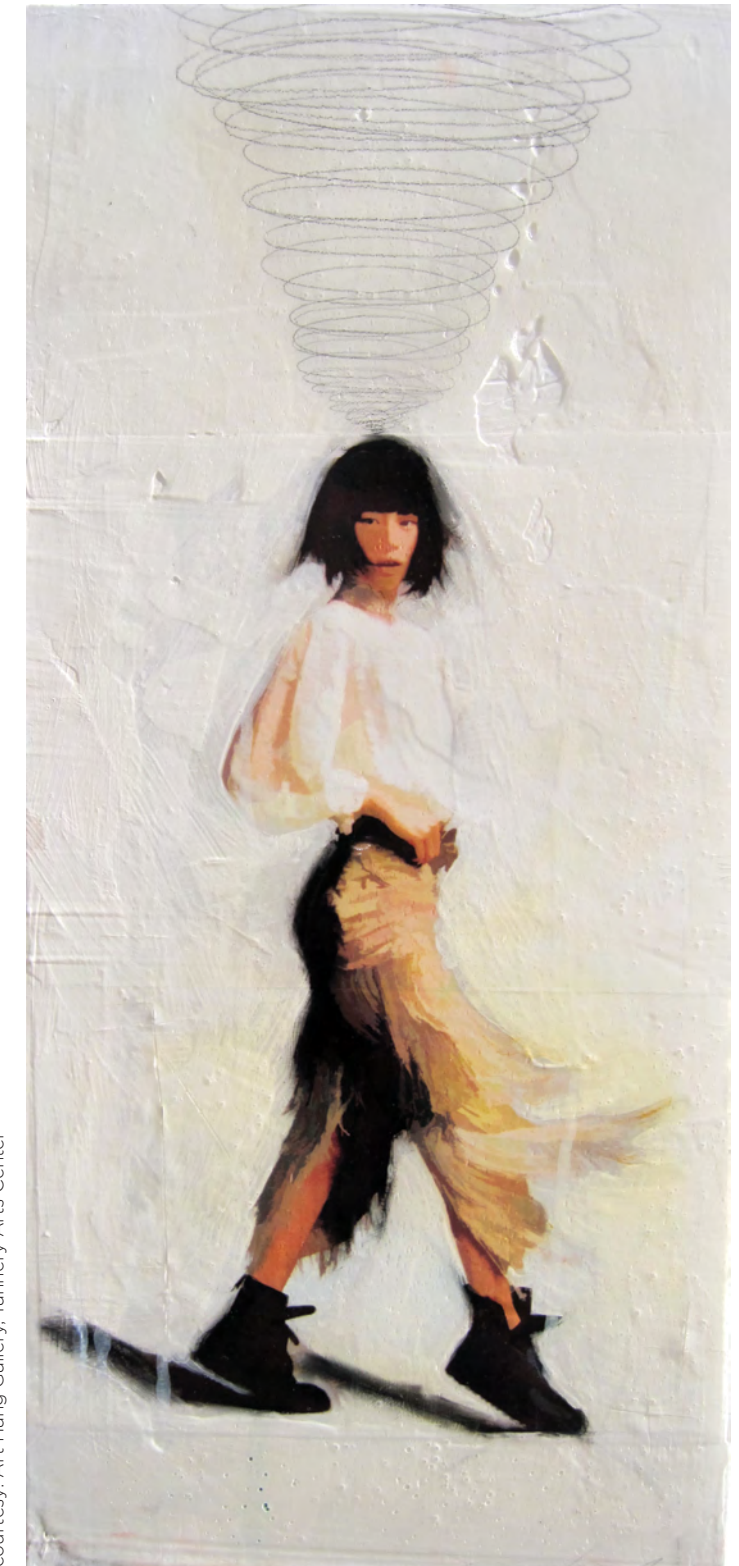
On the long drive home Martha kept the mules to a plodding walk. The night was clear and cold, the sky thickly peppered with stars, and a quarter-moon lit up the dry hills. Henry and Bud slept in the back of the wagon and Martha might have been able to doze on the seat—the mules would have been all right on that straight road—but she felt awake now, gone past the point of needing to sleep. She looked out at the dark land and turned a few things over in her head. She wasn't mad at Henry for being hurt. But she wanted him to get over his fear of machinery, his fear of learning to drive a motor. Where they had come from in Elwha County, they'd been just three miles by road from Bingham, which was a town of a thousand people. The Echol ranch, by those lights, was remote and isolated. They were now three miles up a badly rutted ranch lane from their mailbox, and twenty miles from Burns, the only town of any size. The doctor who had delivered Bud was back there in Elwha County where they used to live, and now that they were living in Harney County and so far away from any town, she didn't know how she'd find a doctor near enough to help when this one was ready to be born.

She had heard there was a wagon maker in Burns who built trucks by putting a cabin and a cargo box onto an automobile chassis. If she could find a chassis and motor, she wondered whether she might be able to do the same.

Molly Gloss is the author of several novels, among them *The Jump-Off Creek* and *The Hearts of Horses*. Her work has brought her numerous awards, including an Oregon Book Award, a Pacific Northwest Booksellers Award, the PEN West Fiction Prize, the James Tiptree Jr. Award; and a Whiting Writers Award. Her writing often explores questions of landscape, of Western settlement, and the human response to wilderness.

DEE HOOKER

Springhead, 2012
mixed media, 24 x 16 in.



courtesy: Art Hang Gallery, Tannery Arts Center