

## MILLER'S FOLLY

My father-in-law is buried on a hillside out in the country. Around his headstone are cedar and spruce trees; near him sleeps his grandson, who died young. At the bottom of the hill there is a creek which wends south and east, toward Molalla.

In Molalla is the house he built himself. Before there was a house there were blackberry thickets higher than a man's head. To get to the nearby creek you had to bring a sickle. The house took some years to build because he built it on Saturdays and Sundays. There were several porches and a fireplace big enough to roast a bear. He laid in gardens, lawns, hedges, trees. Because the creek is too shallow for swimming, he dug a pond near it. It would be a cozy swimming hole, he told his wife. He set to work with his sons and grandsons. They dug the hole and cleared away the mud. Instantly the pond filled with frogs and mud. They lugged the froggy mud away with streaming shovels. The pond immediately filled up again. This went on for some years. The pond acquired a family name: Miller's Folly.

Then he died, the house was sold, the family scattered, years passed, I married his final daughter. Recently I went to look at the pond, to find some of the man. It was late afternoon, when the edges of the day turn russet. The pond broke my heart. It is ragged and rife with weeds. Blackberry tangles are everywhere. Cattails obscure the western rim. I stood for a moment watching bright swallows carving rich dusk.

In my mind I told him this was folly; to strive for clarity year after year is madness. He answered me patiently, using his hands to show me the shape of his ambition. His hands were gnarled and deliberate. A mosquito landed on his forehead. His huge ears were silhouetted against the fading light.

I think his soul is here where he fought the mud. I think he is also in the voices of children. I think he is not dead, but coursing through water and dreaming in the hearts of green things. I think that stories summon and honor him, and that tales of him are prayers of enormous power.

Also I think his muddy pond is a sacred place.

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*Brian Doyle, Editor*

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