

# The Botanist

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*Leath Tonino*

*for Cyrus Guernsey Pringle (1838 – 1911)*

The botanist collected specimens  
from nine until noon, when the monsoon  
rains came, then sheltered beneath  
a brown felt hat, ate his simple lunch  
of cheese, bread, and eggs.

Never drank tea, coffee, or alcohol.

Four years in a row traveled  
56,000 miles by train and foot.

Was a shy man, a Vermont farmer  
famous across Mexico for his knowledge.

Said he knew 10,000 plants by name,  
a couple of friends, but often forgot  
who was president of his country,

of any country.

# Thunder River

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*Leath Tonino*

Soon after his wife died  
of leukemia, Ed and his good buddy,  
an artist from Taos, hiked down  
to Thunder River in the Grand Canyon.

They went into the cave  
from which the water falls, that black  
hole in the red limestone wall, and vowed  
to write and paint the West.

Ed leaned against his friend  
and cried. His friend, who had recently lost  
his father, leaned back and cried.  
Tears flowed out into sun, into space.

And then the part of this story  
that isn't often told—they rose  
and hiked up to the North Rim, soft purple sky  
all around, lightning in the distance.

# What Kind of Earth

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*Leath Tonino*

John Muir, rambling the North Country woods,  
once in a swamp found, and sat down beside,  
a rare orchid, *Calypso borealis*,  
and over its beauty and fragility,  
so it is said, fell to pieces,  
fairly cried.

What kind of earth  
is this that grows

such flowers,  
such men?

# Brothers

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*Leath Tonino*

*for Henry Thoreau and John Thoreau*

In 1839 they fall in love  
with the same woman  
at the same time,  
a seventeen-year-old  
named Ellen,  
and spend two weeks  
paddling the local rivers,  
camping out,  
watching birds fly  
with their reflections.

Upon returning,  
one brother proposes marriage  
and his proposal is accepted,  
but Ellen's mother  
convinces her daughter  
to break the engagement.  
The other brother writes poetry.  
He proposes marriage through the mail.  
"I never felt so badly  
sending a letter in my life,"  
Ellen will recall.

On the first of January, 1842,  
the older brother nicks his finger  
with a razor while shaving.  
The finger goes black and stiff.  
Ten days later,  
in his little brother's arms,  
he dies.

The trip down the rivers,  
the reflected birds.

They were best friends,  
two years apart in age.