

## TURNING A NEW LEAF

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The trio of very old cottonwood trees will no longer provide me with a sitting place in its heart, and next year, when the eagle builds its nest, it will be without my curious and watchful eyes. The leaves of autumn soon will cover the place where my feet now stand, on terra firma. I must now say, "Farewell, old home."

I sold my house, and the new owners will not know what I feel now. They may never appreciate the things that touched my heart in this old place. Will they meet the Indian elders who once blessed me with their smoke and their feathers? I never told them about the ones across the river, natives of the Americas. I never told them about the old matriarch who walks the riverbanks at full moon and is almost as old as the trees. Now I also realize the artesian well may no longer quench my thirst. Perhaps the new owners will appreciate the things I find difficult to leave behind.

With no one to tell my tale, I stand here alone where my feet know the ground's every fold... where my eyes have seen the morning star and my heart's pulse danced with the music in the air.

My newly married state necessitates that I move from my much loved home in the mountains, where the water from the stream sang to my soul. This is my last trip, picking up one final treasure and leaving keys to new owners.

Never again will I sit on this middle boulder, deposited right in the middle of these three cottonwoods trees forming an angle due east. Someone told me the trio was more than a hundred years old. I call them Grandfather; while numbering three trees, my mind sees one, for their canopy of protection is one.

What force of great strength or persons saw to it that a boulder the size of my sofa would find itself where, one day, I would use it as a viewing stand? None of my unanswered questions matter now; it is my time to start a new life. This year, no need to curse the giant sycamore for losing its leaves. Today, this giant, shading the front of the house, feels more majestic than ever before. I must walk up to it and touch its bark, feel its canyon, from which I have seen emerge everything from ants to lizards.

This is my last trip going from old to new. There is great anticipation, and there is also sadness... I did not know how attached I had become to my old home.

Like the old gold coin my father once gave me, there is more than one side to look at. But, for now, I am sitting in the car and none of these matters.

I turn one more time to see the long driveway. The pear tree already has begun dropping its leaves; it is too early for that. Perhaps it is reminding me that next season my arms will not be there to reach and taste its fruits. I sense that the various peach, pecan and all the other fruit trees began the shedding of their leaves to tell me the time for other fruits is upon me. A new season approaches.

I drive off and, approximately three hundred feet away from the house, decide to turn around. The row of junipers, cottonwoods, sycamores and other high desert trees form an arch of green and yellow, with patches of blue sky; I will miss this canopy...

I re-enter the lengthy driveway I took for granted for many years and look at the house. It is neither grey nor lavender; this was not a good paint job. I pray the new owners will change that.

I get out of the car, and my little dog realizes one more time that he does not understand his mistress. He waits for me to get him out of the car since he is too small to jump down to the ground. But, once there, he follows me gingerly, probably wondering why we have returned when we were just going for a ride.

I walk toward the gazebo where I left for the new owners the table and chairs that came from a foundry in Georgia. I run my hands across the table, feeling the texture underneath. The style is no longer available, having been made more than one hundred years ago. I remember when I purchased it at a store in New England. It has tales to tell, my old table, I know it will remain silent as it did for me. And it will serve those well that use it.

A gentle breeze caresses my face while the leaves covering the gazebo rustle with equal gentleness. I feel a tear escaping now, blurring my vision for a moment. This is the final goodbye.

I am not sure how long I remained under the gazebo, facing the Grandfather trio to the east.

I listen to the stream one last time, and the crescendo clapping the various rocks I used to sit on continues incessantly. I can see a new diaphanous veil of lace formed by water droplets, blue with cold. I can no longer remember how often I walked down, just on the other side of this orchestra, to harvest some mint leaves. I am still sitting here, contemplating, taking in what I often took for granted.

My many guests will never again drink mint tea grown in the waters of the stream, nor will they eat tarts made from the apricots I picked from the trees on the west side of the driveway. I look again toward the water and know it is now too cold. The plants are dormant and today there are no mint leaves for me to harvest.

Inside the house, in the kitchen with sparkling white appliances, the stovetop is empty; the teapot has made it to someone else's kitchen. I wonder if the new owners will ever discover the mint and use its leaves. Will they ever find out? I did not tell them about that either.

I hear a bird, a variety of jay, I think; two kingfishers arrive to join the chorus. I see the eagle, soaring high and making a large circle. This is part of his territory; perhaps he wants me to know he is not moving like I am. Not too far away, the doe I fed so often looks as if to say, "Who will feed me apples, and who will buy me a salt block?" The wild of nature all gathers here today on the far side of the western bank. This represents their goodbye as they all appear out of nowhere. Today, everything is the same yet it looks different.

I watch all this and know it is now time to begin my new life. The man I love and respect is waiting for me in another house which one day will be home to me. Now I simply feel homeless. I do not have a spot I can call mine in that other house; it does not have my scent. Its footprint stands in the low desert, by a lake made by men.

I get up satisfied that I have shed my last tear for a home that is no longer mine. My little dog barks once to give me the signal. He has marked his territory one more time, not knowing he will never again have the opportunity to do so by his favorite peach tree. He is now ready to go for a ride in the car, his last ride from this driveway.

I am ready! "Start your engine," I hear myself say, instantly realizing a new marriage requires a shift. Now I am finally all set. I close the car door with assurance

and back out of the driveway; the farewell is complete.  
This time I close the gate.