

UPPER LEFT EDGE

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“I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.”

Mary Whitefish
by Charles Le Guin

Towards the end of October, fog came for good, and rain, and Indian Summer was over. Summer is good, Indian Summer is glorious, but the return of the rain and the fog is like the return of an old friend. It is the grandparent time of year, come to embrace with gentle, soft familiarity. For the rain, if constant, is gentle and the fog moderating and benign, fending off the penetrating cold that can come down from the Gulf of Alaska. The temperature is generally comfortable and the great dark fir forests are highlighted by outbursts of gold from maples and alders and red from vine maple. In the subdued light of swirling fog, the forest colors are like matches flaring in gloom. Bridger Bay is a cocooned world when late Autumn comes, lulled by the rhythmic sounds of the waves as they break on the beach; the noisy tumult of very high tides as they break against the foot of Bay Street alternating with the distant soft murmur, slap and slush and sizzle, of the corresponding low tides, far out on the beach. This is an inward time of year, and I like it very much indeed, though you probably have to be a North Coast person to believe that.

Mary Whitefish is a North Coast person, of North Coast people who were here long before my people ever knew there was such a place. But, as discovered when we met, she and I shared similar feelings about our common place.

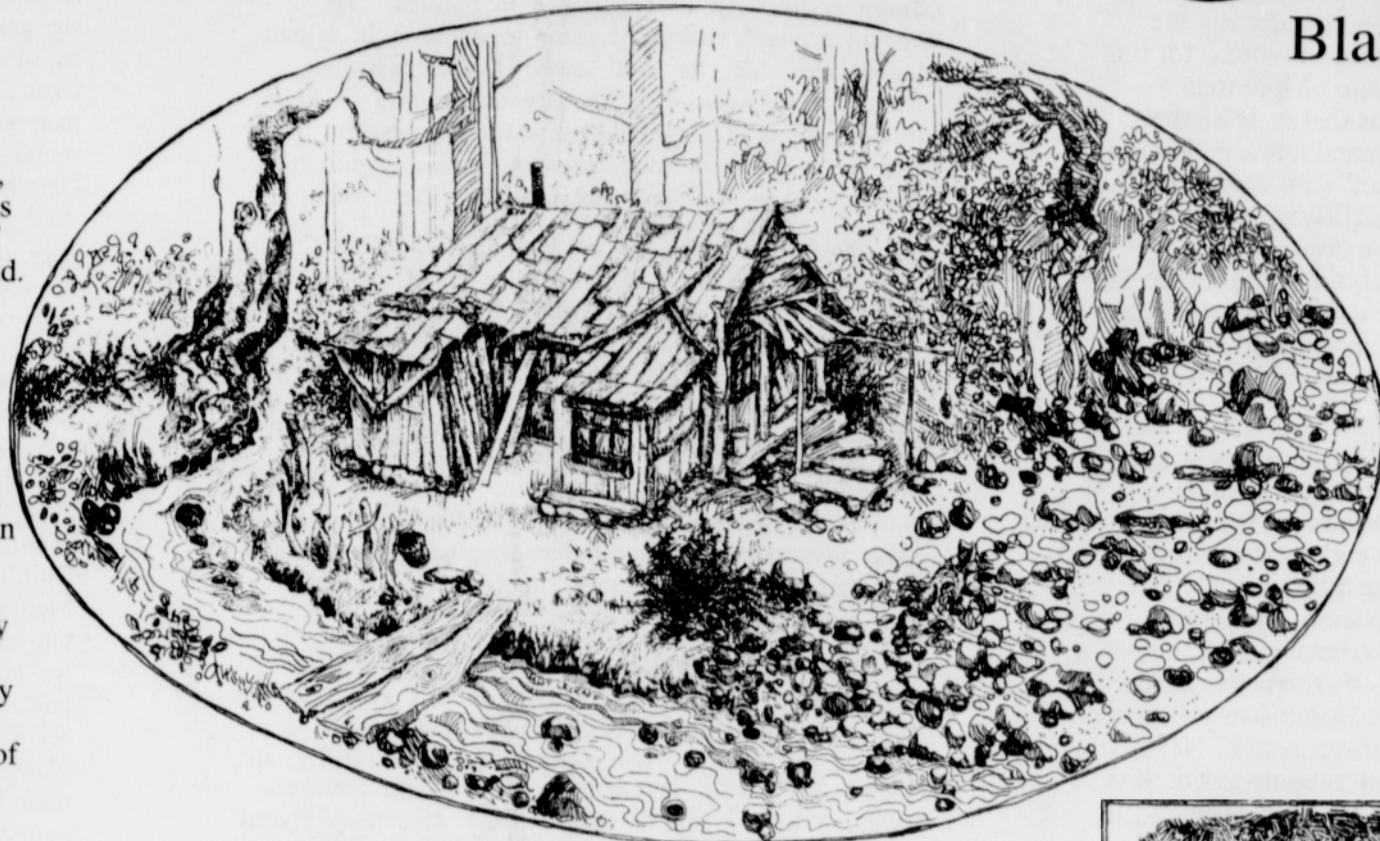
Early in November, Steve, Mary's friend and mine, told me that he had gone to see if Mary were at home. She was: it was now the home time of year, she told him. He asked if he could bring me, his friend interested in the Bridger Bay area, its history, its people and their legends, for a visit. She said it was ok, we should come to see her the following Saturday afternoon, after Steve had finished his work at the motel.

The day dawned typically, drizzling and foggy, very wet; by noon the drizzle had let up a bit, but not the fog—it was not always easy to tell the difference. Early afternoon, Steve appeared at the house and we set off for Mary's.

Immediately south of Bridger Bay, just across South Arm Creek, is a promontory jutting perhaps some four hundred feet westward into the sea, a bulwark protecting our town to the south. (There is a similar conformation, across the North Arm River, to the north of town.) The south promontory is known as Cape Disappearance. How it got that name I'm not sure, but it is well named, for it truly does disappear into fog and rain most of the time between mid-October and mid-February, and often throughout much of the Spring as well.

We walked across the promontory on the old road and turned onto a small trail that wandered down to the cove on the south side of the Cape, where Mary lived. The trail was cut through the undergrowth of thick salal and huckleberry and large sword fern, and in the fog it was like making a very damp descent into a tangled void. At the bottom we found what Steve referred to as “Mary-Land.” It was a small, deep cove, perhaps five hundred feet wide at its ocean edge, with a steeply banked beach, a narrow sand strip from which ascended a broad stretch of rock, ranging in size from gravel to boulder. A small, clear, rapidly flowing stream rushed down and emptied into the sea, dividing the cove into two nearly equal halves. It was embraced, all around on the landward side, by huge trees, fir and hemlock, all but lost in the fog.

Towards the rear of the cove, nestled against the trees that grew on the steeply rising Cape, as far from the shore and high seas as possible, was Mary's cabin. In the hazy light the cabin looked as if it had grown out of the landscape of Mary-land, an integral part of the place. It had obviously sort of accreted there, taking shape and size as materials had been accumulated and arranged. It was principally constructed of driftwood and of whatever had been gleaned from sawmills in the area. It looked entirely native, entirely natural, and this outward impression was confirmed by the interior. It was essentially one large room, with various lean-to additions that served specific purposes; in one, snugly fitted and separated from the main room by a curtain, was Mary's bed, a sleeping platform. Other extrusions were closets, pantries, storage places. One end, nearest the



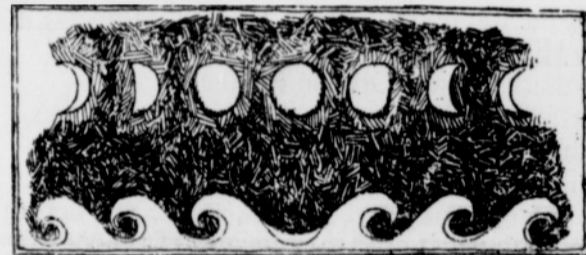
Blanche DuBois

stream, was given over to the stone hearth, which provided Mary with heat and was also where she cooked. It was massive and the smoke escaped through an arrangement that looked makeshift but was clearly functional: half an oil drum faced outward over the fire and a stove pipe led from the drum head out through the roof. The room was sparsely furnished—a long wooden table with benches; a couple of shelves with basins, pots, a water bucket, and various other utensils; two well-used, low slung, and rump-sprung arm chairs; and a couple of three legged stools. There was a kerosene lamp on the table, and a couple more in wall sockets. There were rugs on the floor and on some of the walls; there were blankets on the chairs and on a shelf, easily at hand when needed. The cabin had an aura of cleanliness, derived from the silvery sheen of the driftwood from which it was principally made, and busy-ness, revealed in the idiosyncratic ordering of its contents. Permeating it was a heady aroma, a combination of the sea-salty smell of the wood, the wood smoke, the fog, and various herbs and condiments that hung from the rafters and around the walls. I had never been in a home like Mary's before; I never expect to see its like again.

We knocked and were glad to be invited in from the damp of the late afternoon fog, now thick in the cove.

In the warm twilight interior, in an armchair by the fire, sat Mary Whitefish. No introduction seemed necessary. She recognized me as Steve's friend with a smile of welcome that creased her round placid face. The smile and further acquaintance confirmed that Mary accepted Steve and anything and anyone connected with him without question or reservation or unnecessary words. In the dim light, she seemed like some giant frog, some beneficent Buddha. She was a small and stocky person; her face and hands were like delicate soft leather, well tanned and creased and crinkled by a thousand wrinkles, like bronze-golden eel-skin. Her long, coarse, still black hair hung in two braids, one over each ear trailing down over her generous, shapeless bosom. Her eyes were like Steve's eyes, fathomless pools of intense dark night. Unlike Steve's eyes, which sparked with the challenge of living and the uncertainty of quest, Mary's eyes had the resigned look of having lived. They shone with the humor of humanity, which was accentuated by several deep-set crow's feet emanating from the corner of each eye. A dominant nose and a generous mouth added their effect to Mary's memorable face. Seated there in her chair in the twilight, she looked ageless, ancient, for all the world like an idol in a meditative mode. I would see her more clearly as our acquaintance grew, but my initial impressions remained always the strongest.

Mary took me in, as she had taken Steve in, as a feature of her life. She accepted me, without fuss or bother or even special notice, and I realized that all the things I wanted to ask her could be asked only in the way she wanted them asked and then only when she was ready to answer them. If Mary taught me anything, it was that acceptance and patience were positive things, that things would come to me if I deserved them, that they might come to me even if I



CORRECTED FOR PACIFIC BEACH TIDES
JANUARY - High Tides

| DATE | time | ft | time | ft |
|--------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| 1 Mon | 8:55 | 9.1 | 10:10 | 7.1 |
| 2 Tue | 9:39 | 9.1 | 11:00 | 7.3 |
| 3 Wed | 10:20 | 9.1 | 11:45 | 7.6 |
| 4 Thu | 10:59 | 9.1 | ..... | ..... |
| 5 Fri | 0:25 | 7.7 | ..... | ..... |
| 6 Sat | 1:36 | 9.1 | ..... | ..... |
| 7 Sun | 1:03 | 7.9 | 12:12 | 9.0 |
| 8 Mon | 1:38 | 7.9 | 12:48 | 8.9 |
| 9 Tue | 2:12 | 8.0 | 1:24 | 8.7 |
| 10 Wed | 2:43 | 8.1 | 2:01 | 8.4 |
| 11 Thu | 3:15 | 8.2 | 2:42 | 8.1 |
| 12 Fri | 3:48 | 8.3 | 3:30 | 7.6 |
| 13 Sat | 4:25 | 8.4 | 4:29 | 7.0 |
| 14 Sun | 5:08 | 8.5 | 5:43 | 6.5 |
| 15 Mon | 6:00 | 8.7 | 7:08 | 6.3 |
| 16 Tue | 6:58 | 8.9 | 8:28 | 6.5 |
| 17 Wed | 7:58 | 9.2 | 9:37 | 6.9 |
| 18 Thu | 8:57 | 9.6 | 10:36 | 7.4 |
| 19 Fri | 9:55 | 9.9 | 11:30 | 7.9 |
| 20 Sat | 10:50 | 10.1 | ..... | ..... |
| 21 Sun | 0:19 | 8.4 | ..... | ..... |
| 22 Mon | 1:43 | 10.2 | ..... | ..... |
| 23 Tue | 1:05 | 8.7 | 12:35 | 10.1 |
| 24 Wed | 1:50 | 9.0 | 1:27 | 9.7 |
| 25 Thu | 2:33 | 9.2 | 2:18 | 9.2 |
| 26 Fri | 3:15 | 9.2 | 3:11 | 8.5 |
| 27 Sat | 3:58 | 9.1 | 4:08 | 7.7 |
| 28 Sun | 4:43 | 9.0 | 5:11 | 7.0 |
| 29 Mon | 5:32 | 8.7 | 6:22 | 6.5 |
| 30 Tue | 6:24 | 8.5 | 7:36 | 6.3 |
| 31 Wed | 7:20 | 8.4 | 8:46 | 6.5 |

CORRECTED FOR PACIFIC BEACH TIDES
JANUARY - Low Tides

| DATE | time | ft | time | ft |
|--------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| 1 Mon | 2:41 | 2.9 | 4:02 | 0.5 |
| 2 Tue | 3:35 | 3.1 | 4:48 | 0.1 |
| 3 Wed | 4:24 | 3.1 | 5:30 | -0.1 |
| 4 Thu | 5:06 | 3.2 | 6:08 | -0.2 |
| 5 Fri | 5:52 | 3.2 | 6:43 | -0.2 |
| 6 Sat | 6:32 | 3.1 | 7:16 | -0.1 |
| 7 Sun | 7:11 | 3.1 | 7:46 | 0.0 |
| 8 Mon | 7:48 | 3.0 | 8:15 | 0.2 |
| 9 Tue | 8:26 | 2.9 | 8:44 | 0.4 |
| 10 Wed | 9:06 | 2.8 | 9:15 | 0.8 |
| 11 Thu | 9:51 | 2.7 | 9:50 | 1.2 |
| 12 Fri | 10:44 | 2.5 | 10:32 | 1.7 |
| 13 Sat | 11:48 | 2.3 | 11:24 | 2.3 |
| 14 Sun | ..... | ..... | 1:00 | 1.9 |
| 15 Mon | 0:28 | 2.8 | 2:12 | 1.2 |
| 16 Tue | 1:40 | 3.1 | 3:18 | 0.5 |
| 17 Wed | 2:50 | 3.2 | 4:16 | -0.3 |
| 18 Thu | 3:55 | 3.0 | 5:09 | -0.8 |
| 19 Fri | 4:55 | 2.7 | 5:58 | -1.2 |
| 20 Sat | 5:51 | 2.4 | 6:44 | -1.3 |
| 21 Sun | 6:45 | 2.0 | 7:29 | -1.2 |
| 22 Mon | 7:38 | 1.8 | 8:12 | -0.9 |
| 23 Tue | 8:30 | 1.6 | 8:53 | -0.4 |
| 24 Wed | 9:22 | 1.5 | 9:35 | 0.3 |
| 25 Thu | 10:17 | 1.6 | 10:18 | 1.1 |
| 26 Fri | 11:17 | 1.6 | 11:05 | 1.9 |
| 27 Sat | ..... | ..... | 12:22 | 1.6 |
| 28 Sun | ..... | ..... | 1:59 | 2.6 |
| 29 Mon | ..... | ..... | 1:30 | 1.5 |
| 30 Tue | 1:01 | 3.1 | 2:36 | 1.2 |
| 31 Wed | 2:05 | 3.3 | 3:34 | 0.8 |

BASEBALL

The Cubs signed Dave Madigan to play third. Madigan, to Sandberg, to Grace. It has a nice ring to it. Spring training begins next month!!

did not deserve them, and that they would, at any rate, come only in their own way and pace, over which I had little authority or control. I have come to appreciate that this was not the least of Mary's lessons.

“You can make us tea,” she indicated to Steve in a deep, resonate, guttural voice, strongly suggestive of a mellifluous bullfrog. We sat quietly — Mary never saw the need of unnecessary talking — while Steve took water from the kettle on the fire-hook and poured it over the peppermint leaves that Mary had collected and dried. While the tea was brewing, I was aware that Mary was studying me; I studied the fire, though under the heat of her scrutiny I felt it was cool air that I needed.

As we drank our tea, Mary remarked, slowly, deliberately as was her way, “Fog has escaped and won't be caught for many months.” I was having my first lesson in patience, and in time I was rewarded. After what seemed to me a very long

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