

A Vulture at University House.

Eight of us sitting around the polished hardwood table
to meet with the queen-designate, the new CEO, the Chancellor
of our campus the vistas of Monterey Bay and the far-off Big Sur mountains
dominate thought.

You can see all the way to Japan
The world heats up in front of us,
the manzanitas bloomed two weeks early this year
oil production up, wars are flaring over the last reserves, China booming
Walmarts sprouting. No winter in Kyoto this year
thirty million people in California alone
are driving furiously from nowhere to nowhere every day of their lives.

Our new queen wants to cash in big-time on all the growth
Got herself a 100K signing bonus and 200K for her partner
in the-just invented University of California post of International Development.

“Come one, come all, you movers and shakers :
the California voter’s have just passed a big initiative for stem cell research.”
“It’s a cash cow!” says our new queen
“We’ve just been given a free ATM machine,
all we need to do is get out our card, and start withdrawing money.
I want you all in on that stem cell research money: I want initiatives !”
Who cares about the lives it might save,
or the purity of research, or the tradition of intellectual pursuit.
New mandates have come down: chase the cash cows
High tech dollars! Almaden IBM research center, Silicon Valley. Bill Gates, Genentech, rich alumni!
that’s where to focus attention.

Our campus’ recent history floats into the conversation.
Our new queen tells us: “There’s no time for contemplation anymore.
International competition is on its way. Japan. China. It’s eat or be eaten.
I heard about your Elfland. That sounds cute, beautiful,
but there’s no time nowadays for navel gazing in Elfland.”
This woman doesn’t even know Elfland is gone:
torn up, its oldgrowth redwoods ripped out to make way for the dorms of College 10.

the new words: Speed, cash, power, size, drive, and seize cash.
replace the old: think, write, teach, discuss, walk, and contemplate some more.

As our meeting is winding down
an enormous vulture swoops just in front of the view,
circles once, settles on the old fence just there
and watches us.

You don’t need to squint
to see the vulture eating the remains of our Chancellor
Not so long from now.

State money dried up,
Federal debts called in by China.
The cash cows run away, starved, and butchered.

Students long gone. No petroleum. No need
for this commuter campus plunked down in the middle of the chaparral.
Some of the grounds staff will be staying on,
and a few professors with no place to escape to:
we'll be here, farming corn and squash, tending
chickens and goats, picking up manure for fertilizer,
watching over a small herd of cows in the meadow around University House