



# All My Relations

*Christopher McIlroy*

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Set against the stark but seductive landscape of the American Southwest, the stories in *All My Relations* explore the inner landscape of mind and heart, where charting the simplest course is subject to a complex constellation of relationships. In the title story of the collection, a Pima Indian hires on with a rancher in an attempt to quit drinking and to win back the wife and son who have left him. His efforts to master land and horses and to bake the perfect cake mirror his efforts to subdue his own demons and to embrace a peaceful domesticity.

In "The Big Bang and the Good House", Tony, a former drug dealer, pits his urge toward chaos against the orderly pleasures of marriage, finally yielding to the solidity and spaciousness of domestic love: "I feel myself gathering weight, density. Cautiously, I allow myself to inhabit this Good House, which surprisingly fits like my own body". Julia, the aging protagonist of "Simplifying", risks her fragile health in a love affair; her generosity of spirit toward her lover is matched in inverse proportion by the frugality with which her lover doles out his affections. In "The March of the Toys", a young woman flees Delaware, her chronically ill father, and her grieving mother, only to find that she's traded the neediness of her family for the harrowing disturbances of her lovers. She muses, "I couldn't affect anyone's life. I could only attend it".

In "Hualapai Dread", an investment broker's infatuation with an enigmatic Hualapai Indian woman, as elusive as she is beautiful, brings out his most predatory instincts and unmask her own deceit. Acting on similar but more destructive impulses toward the object of his sexual obsession, a character in another story takes his soon-to-be ex-wife on a bizarre "honeymoon for divorce". The close-knit family of "Builders" breaks under the strain of constructing their dream house with their own hands, and eventually they are forced to leave behind the illusion of safety and permanence: "Once the three had imagined themselves as a house on a hill, dug into stone with the tenacity of a lion. Now they sat tensely in canvas-backed chairs stretched like slingshots. They talked cautiously, with encouragement, hoping for the return of pleasure".

Embodying the transience and openness of the New West, the characters in *All My Relations* reinvent themselves, even as they struggle with the age-old, perilous necessity of loving.

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