The Dog Ate It



That’s my story and I’m sticking to it.

Or perhaps this happened again.

Or maybe this happened.



Make it stop.

Oh well. Could be worse…



Could be raining.

My Favorite World #19: The Old Man’s Beard



Let’s talk about the old man’s beard. No, not that one up there. This one:



Chionanthus retusus, aka Old Man’s Beard

Spring is here, full force. That lovely above is *chionanthus retusus*, more commonly called Chinese Fringetree. Other names for it in the South are *Grancy graybeard* and *old man’s beard*.

It lives in our front yard.

Here’s how the US Forest Service describes it:

> *The pure white, fragrant flowers, emerging just as the dogwood flowers fade, hang in four-inch-long, spectacular terminal panicles<fn>I had to look this word up. ‘A panicle is a much-branched inflorescence. Some authors distinguish it from a compound spike, by requiring that the flowers (and fruit) be pedicellate.’ Now I need to go look up ‘inflorescence’ and ‘pedicellate’. I’ll get back to you.</fn> which appear to cover the tree with snowy white cotton for two to three weeks. Flowers emerge at the terminal end of the spring shoot growth flush. This differs from the native Fringetree which flowers before leaves emerge.”*

Here’s a detail shot:



Old Man’s Beard

I love this little tree. My Favorite World.

Also, too…the springtime sunset light makes me look huge. My shadow strides My Favorite World like a colossus.



The Shadow Knows

MFW.<fn>inflorescence – n. An *inflorescence* is a group or cluster of flowers arranged on a stem that is composed of a main branch or a complicated arrangement of branches. Morphologically, it is the part of the shoot of seed plants where flowers are formed and which is accordingly modified.</fn> <fn>pedicellate – adj., having a pedicel. Oh swell. I'll get back to you. Hang on…</fn> <fn>pedicel – n., one of the subordinate stalks in a branched inflorescence,

bearing a single flower.</fn> <fn>The cirularity of the definitions is awesome. I’m dizzy without being one iota smarter.</fn>

Now It’s a Party



Lots to say this week, but no time to get it down on whatever it is that passes for paper these days.

I blame that lovely beast pictured above.

I have been unable to play since October. Because reasons:



Two weeks ago I had a witch doctor inject a load of Lance Armstrong-ish stuff in my wrist. And lo and behold, the brace is gone and I can play guitar again.

I should qualify that. I can pick up, hold, and coax some noise out of a guitar. After five months of not playing, it sounds like shit. Just terrible. Damn, it makes me happy.

Naturally, the return to “playing” the guitar spurs all kinds of thoughts about what it means, about the significance of a 46 year, 6 month, and 21 day<fn>My first guitar lesson was on Sept 9, 1969.</fn> love affair with this *thing.* And as I was scraping and buzzing notes left and right, I thought of all

kinds of deep observations and critical theories about art and aesthetics and how the pursuit of same can lead us into preposterous excess and obsession. Also, too, there arose a flood of jocular *bon mots* guaranteed to elicit chuckles and knowing nods of recognition.

But I couldn't be bothered to write any of it down. There was a guitar to tickle, don't you see.

Perhaps next week. In the meantime, here's some minimal evidence of what I used to be as a musician.

I'm coming back. Look out world. Now it's a party.

My Favorite World #18



When I was a lad, I decided I should go ahead and plan on accomplishing three simple tasks:

1. Read every great book ever written.
2. Listen to every great piece of music ever written.
3. See every great movie ever made.

I'm almost finished.<fn>/rimshot</fn>

Reading is a huge piece of My Favorite World. Much of my

recent reading has been non-fiction. It's been pretty heavy slogging.<fn>Including yet another run-in with Daniel Dennett that ended the way the first two did: I'm doing pretty well until, inevitably, somewhere c. page 120-150, I begin to feel I am the stupidest person in the world.</fn> I liked *Coming of Age in the Milky Way* quite a lot, but covering billions of years can sort of feel like it. It was time for some fiction.

Now, because I like to believe I am an enlightened and fair-minded fellow, I stacked up three books written by actual women(!).<fn>To burnish my bona fides as a Friend of Women; my membership renewal is up for review.</fn> Briefly, then, a few notes on these.



I've seen her movies and read her short stories, and I've even spent some time with Miranda July's web-based work. I really like her; she feels gentle and optimistic, but not a Pollyanna. Still, first novels can be problematic, so I wondered if she could pull it off.

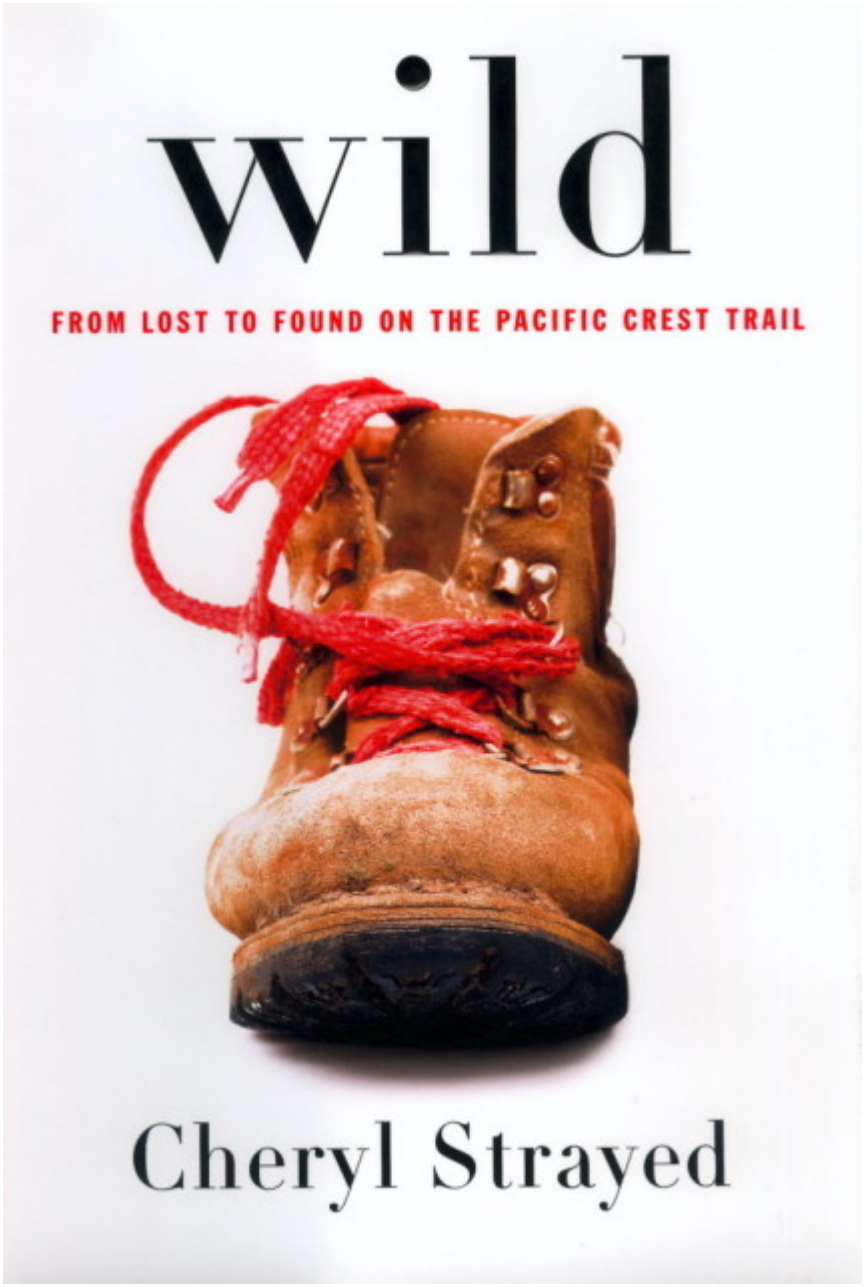
Wonder no more. This strange tale spent the first third making me annoyed-unto-angry with the characters; the second third creeped me right the fk out; and the ending wrapped up this unlikely story with a sweetness and hopefulness that was not

forced or cloying, but somehow managed to give some credence to the idea of *First Bad Man* being some kind of feel-good novel.

July's writing is sometimes spare, sometimes florid, but always direct and compelling. Even during the sections that angered me or creeped me, I never considered putting it down. She takes an unfiltered view, but never comes off as cynical or above-it-all ironic.

(Also, too: her book of short stories, *No One Belongs Here More Than You*, is pretty terrific.)

MFW



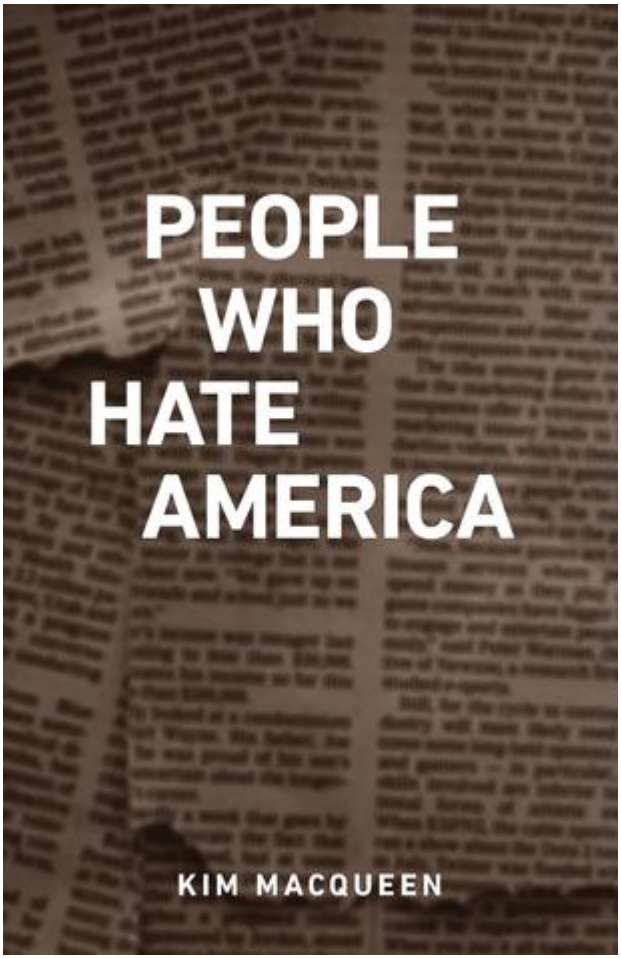
Yeah, it's an Oprah pick, but I ain't ashamed. I'm only about half-done with this book, but it is really pretty great. Strayed is a fantastic writer; the night I started, it kept me up way past pumpkin hour.

I had avoided this one for awhile, despite or because of the hoopla. Add the fact that I kind of hate the *memoir* genre<fn>With some exceptions like Jeanette Walls and Frank McCourt.</fn>, and I let this one slide. I get the sense that Strayed is giving us a pretty straight story<fn>Keeping in mind this blog's fealty to the Unreliable Narrator theory that posits that all writers lie.</fn>, heartbreaking and

terrifying and tragic.

I've been known to hurl *memoirs* wallward in disgust<fn>Augusten Burroughs, I'm calling you out!</fn>, and it could still happen with *Wild*, but I think I'm down for the whole hike.

(I also find Reese Witherspoon pretty adorable and I'm curious to see how she manages this on screen.)



This is the first of the three that I read, and it kicked this whole batch of reading off in high gear.<fn>Full disclosure: Kim and her family are good pals. This blog takes its conflict of interest standards seriously!</fn> The writing is spare, with an incessant rhythm that keeps the pages turning. The central – and several of the secondary – characters are fully realized in a crisp and economical manner. The book is funny, and sad, and tragic in places.

The story is a fictionalized account of the Mayor of Newark leading up to the 1967 riots. It’s familiar in a strange way for any of us who watched *The Sopranos.* We recognize some of the wise guys from our tv screen, and some of the grifts ring bells, too. But it never feels derivative; perhaps that is because the actual Mayor was a relative of the author, but I think it has more to do with the distinctive styling MacQueen brings to the page.

Sure, she’s a pal, and I’m giving her an enthusiastic plug. Take it with a grain. But I’m telling you: this is a really terrific book. And watching a friend develop her talent into something that rings like *People Who Hate America*: that is My Favorite World in spades.