

STAGE FRIGHT

Sarah Stone

Julia splurged on a bucket-shop, round-the-world ticket, a month of travel between leaving San Francisco and landing in New York to start rehearsals. She'd be spending everything she had on the trip, with just enough left to get a cheap place to live in New York. Her older brother Robert was furious with her, first of all for leaving their own company, but also, apparently, on behalf of the honor of experimental dance-theater in general. He said, "You have some *idea* that doing Shaw in New York will make you a real actress. You're a real actress here, even if it's not all talk-talk-talk. But fine, go for a year. You're going to hate all that artifice and clawing for position. Just let me know when you're ready to come home."

But her new home was out in the world, a bigger life on bigger stages. She promised herself not to call any of the family until she was settled in New York, to live in the world without having to describe it to her family or

cannibalize it for theater. It was enough just to look. In Fukuoka, all the gardens had shrines: Buddhas, exact arrangements of bamboo and water. In Tokyo at night, extravagant palace rooftops reflected the neon lights of the big hotels. Bangkok's mosaics and gold statues, like light shining off the water, said *this is what matters*.

Truly on her own for the first time—at 38!—she found informal guides and phrasebooks, learned how to point and gesture and pidgin her way through. If you got the accent right, even if you had almost no vocabulary, people could understand a surprising amount. As usual, people stared at her, burst out grinning, wanted their picture taken with her, and confessed to her the secrets at the heart of their life stories.

This had nothing to do with Julia herself, but with her oracular, almost surreal beauty, which would be gone in a few years. She hadn't yet figured out what, exactly, would replace it. Though she could become whatever she was playing, imagine what it was like to be another person, her efforts to develop a personality—what was a personality?—had come to nothing. As near as she could figure out, she didn't entirely exist. On her good days, she experienced herself as a clear, glass bowl full of shifting possibilities; on others, she'd begun to have falling dreams, jerking awake in a sweat.

Fortunately, she was learning her lines for *Heartbreak House* and her nightmares faded as she became her character: worldly, tolerant, bossy, generous, amused by everything.

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Though she missed her family ridiculously, she was not lonely in general. In her first three weeks of travel, she garnered more than a dozen email addresses and phone numbers. She took a train north from Fukuoka with Marie and Celeste, two doctors on their way across Asia to join a nonprofit doing AIDS work, both so young that Julia mistook them for college students. She toured temples in Tokyo with a Danish couple traveling the world till their money ran out: Nicklas, who'd been a pastry chef on cruise ships for twenty years and couldn't stand it anymore, and Gallina, who'd raised their three children and run a series of legal offices.

In Bangkok, Julia met Renard, a lovely, foul-mouthed journalist from Paris, and spent three days with him. He said, "You should let me make love to you until neither of us can see or walk," but somehow, though she'd wanted him, they didn't wind up in bed after all. What he really wanted was to talk about the end of his marriage: his wife's affair, why he'd hit her, his retaliatory affairs, and finally, his wife's hacking into his computer and email

account, her deletion of all his contacts and every article he had in progress. Though she had stopped along the way to forward his most intimate e-mails to all of his colleagues at work. “It is not possible that we became those people,” he kept saying. Until 5:00 a.m. on the last night, when Julia had to go back to her inn, scramble her things together, and catch her next plane, they’d walked through Bangkok’s alleys and thoroughfares, temples and palaces, while he told it again and again, from different angles. He added new layers of detail each time, admitting more culpability, but also discovering new levels of blame for his now ex-wife.

Her last stop before New York was Zanzibar. The plane landed in Dar Es Salaam, and the cab dropped her off at the edge of the city, so hot it wavered under the afternoon sun. Peddlers and beggars clamored for her attention. Light-headed, queasy, and slightly feverish, she stood in line at the port for a ticket to Stone Town, Zanzibar. Eventually, she boarded the high-speed ferry, soon packed with women vomiting into baggies and veils. To keep from succumbing, she fixed her eyes on the blue sea beyond until a woman curled into a ball on the bench next to her said, “*Tafadhali*”—please. Julia, using all six of her Swahili words, and an invented sign language, conveyed the idea of rock, paper, scissors to the woman’s two youngest children and

played until they reached the shore, where the family was claimed by relatives and disappeared.

Stone Town revealed itself as white, white buildings and walls, dhows, and coconut palms. Stepping onto the wharf, Julia smelled cinnamon and cloves. The Indian Ocean shone a bright, clear turquoise, deepening through a series of greens to a luminous violet. Everyone had come here, at some point: Shirazi Persians, Assyrians, Phoenicians, Chinese, Sumerians, Egyptians, Omani Arabs, Dutch, English, leaving behind their sad history and a city of beautiful stone houses or mosques with carved doors, earth houses with thatched rooftops, and children playing in yards full of chickens. Julia imagined Arielle reveling in the stonework, the light. A pair of women in black *bui-buis* with hennaed leaves and vines on their hands walked past a donkey nosing into a bucket. A voice from inside said, *What you've been looking for is here*. A double promise: first, that she'd discover what exactly she was looking for; second, that it would appear to her, magically, like a genie in a bottle, an Egyptian amulet in a junk shop.

Julia's hotel room—romantically peeling, with long, sheer, white curtains around the carved bedstead and a cracked tub that trickled cold water—opened onto an alleyway. She felt dizzy and peculiar, her stomach

and head hot. Around 4:00 a.m., just after the call to prayer rang through the streets, she broke her promise to herself and tried to call Robert on the special cell phone she'd gotten for the trip. Fortunately, the room had no reception. The room had already begun to lighten when she fell into the dreamy state that comes with the lifting of misery.

She slept late, did her stretches, then washed in the cold water. She couldn't eat, but she made her way outside, shakily, and tried to call Robert again.

Fortunately, she failed to reach him. The following day, she took a dhow ride through the mangrove swamps, trailing her hand in the water that rose almost to the top of their boat. Back in town, she wandered past the museum: the first place Robert would have gone, full of important information about colonialism and slaveholding. Afterward, she found a small restaurant where she could sit under the vines and slowly eat a stew of sweet potatoes in a lemon-onion sauce, sharing a table with a pair of American college girls who were very happy to have been nearly arrested in Zaire and even happier to tell the story to Julia. She visited with street vendors and consented to having her hands hennaed, her hair tied up in dozens of heavy beaded braids.

She spent the whole of the next day at the beach—the sea the turquoise-shading-to-green of a tourist brochure, the sand hot and white—where she worked on learning her lines, far from phones or any internet café. The longer she resisted calling, the easier it would be to keep her promise. Some actors wouldn't learn their lines till they were in relation to the others and knew *how* they'd be playing the character, but she counted on her primary strengths as an actress: her nearly photographic memory and the way her lack of any fixed personality of her own gave her the ability to transform her own objectives in relation to the impulses of those around her.

She went for an early dinner to the terrace of Africa House and was invited to join a group of strangers of all ages, brand new traveling friends, telling their war stories, bargaining with local vendors. Across the table sat Piers Wright: British, trained voice, very public school. Fortyish, tall and slender with a nose that took up most of his face, but appealing. Emphatic eyebrows, hollowed cheeks. His hair creeping back—he'd be mostly bald in a few years. As if he had a penumbra, he seemed to take up more than the usual amount of space, but he seemed contained, a warship full of soldiers ready to swarm out and capture the beach. He caught her studying him and gave an inadvertent smile of recognition. She smiled back, more widely than

she meant to. An actor—almost every man or woman she'd ever been involved with had been a serious practitioner of the make-believe. And he had clearly spotted her as a co-conspirator.

Maggie, a tall woman, perhaps in her early seventies, had brightly waved chestnut hair and lipstick the color of a red stop sign. Years of too much sun, drink, and smoke had given her an intriguingly ruined look. She said to the table, in a firm mid-Atlantic accent, “Darlings. All of you who are able must go on the Spice Tour. It is the can't-miss of Zanzibar. And going with strangers is more than acceptable.”

“It's pre, per, *prefer*,” said her husband Simon, older than Maggie, the side of his face pulled down in a permanent sag. He opened his hands wide to make a shape that would finish the word for him. His eyes, bright, frustrated, dared them to register pity or dismay, just as her father would. Julia had an urge to help, ridiculous considering she'd left her own parents behind in their terrible, chipper assisted living; left Robert to run News of the World. She gave everyone at the table a guarded, appreciative smile, admiring them for being strangers. She wanted everyone to be a stranger from now on.

After a dinner of curry and coconut rice—all of the tourists facing the sunset as the sky turned rose, violet, and orange—she found herself saying to

Piers, “I always wanted to do Shakespeare, but it would take a very different kind of training than I had. Where did you...?” He didn’t look like a romantic lead, though he could have been a Hamlet when younger, an Iago or Mercutio now.

He said, in apparent surprise, “Oh, I’m not an *actor*.” The horror in his voice interested her: he was performing an excellent rendition of aristocratic dislike of theater, a faint offense at her mistake. Not only an actor, but really first-rate. She revised her estimate upward: Iago or Mercutio with the Royal Shakespeare Company. And yet, here he was in Zanzibar, lying to strangers. Desire for him ran all through her, flipping on the switches in the darkened house.

Late the next morning, Julia, Piers, Maggie, and Simon, in addition to an older Italian man and three young French girls who’d become part of the group the day before, clambered into the old van that would take them on their deluxe spice tour: historical sites followed by a trip into the woods. It was about a hundred and four degrees by then—the Muslim women in their black coverings moved more slowly, though the tourists walked as briskly as ever, not to waste vacation.

Piers was now wearing a pith helmet kind of thing that made him look like a ridiculous Hollywood version of an explorer; she was pleased to find herself a little less attracted to him. He, however, flushed, then swallowed, when she touched him.

She said. "Not to be incredibly American, but if you're not an actor, what do you do when you're not lying on the beach?"

"That remains to be determined. Some chance or other will present itself."

"Then you're resting."

He said, with a smile, "Unemployed. Resting implies that you will, at some point, be active again."

Leaving behind the stone ruins, they were taken to where they could walk under starfruit trees; their guide peeled slices for them. She didn't quite exist here; she felt like a ghost, drifting, but could not have said whether this sensation was an effect of lingering illness, the white heat, or the island's history, the Arabs with their spices and slaves. Probably not the history. She leaned against a tree.

Piers said, "Are you quite well?" And when she said she was, he said he'd been thinking of having a seat himself, that it was all a bit much. Did she want him to help her back to the bus?

"That's very kind," she said. "But I can manage."

Piers was smiling at her, wryly.

She smiled back. "Was I indicating?" When he laughed at this, she tapped his arm. "Fine, then you're not an actor," she said. "One of these years, you're going to have to confess anyway. Wouldn't it be easier now?"

He gave her a look. In any case, it was too hot to sort it out there, and as soon as they returned to the center of town, they'd be besieged by touts, peddlers, prospective guides, and boat captains.

"If you really wish me to stop, I won't ask about it again," she said. "I do know how people are supposed to behave, even if I was raised by wolves."

"Were you raised by wolves?"

She laughed and gave him a shy look. "Mostly by my brother. So, yes."

"I don't know when you're acting."

"What else would I be doing?" she asked.

The next day, back at the beach with a plan to meet Piers for dinner, she finally broke down and got through to Robert, who caught her up on the non-progress of the family—no new troubles, no actual good news—and made too much of how well rehearsals were going. “I’ve hired some great people for *The Torture Chronicles*. You’ll see if you come for the performance.”

“Robert, I’m not on the moon. Of course I’ll come for the performance. Maybe I’ll bring my new friend Piers.”

“Uh-oh. What new friend?”

Why should she tell him the truth and have him patronize her? She said, “He’s a British aristocrat. He sleeps three hours a night and eats only raw food, including steak, because he thinks we destroy our energy by eating cooked things we’re not evolved to digest. He inherited something like three million pounds and then invented some crazy internet security system and quintupled it. He’s invented spyware detectors, ways of using computers and phones to create virtual business structures. He flies to Downing Street to discuss technology futures.”

“Jules, for crying out loud.”

“Recently he’s been buying a chain of super-resorts. It’s all about the water. You swim through a mile of interlocking turquoise lagoons to the underground bar. You have your own rustic hut with 800-thread-count sheets on your own mini-island where a boatman brings you your meals. Or you stay in a palace hung with crystal, with a working moat, Indonesian shadow puppets, and dance extravaganzas every night.”

“Please feel free to lie to me as much as you like. I think we’re paying international roving charges on our cells, but maybe not.”

“He is British. I think he might be some kind of aristocrat. If we fall in love and become an item, you’ll meet him yourself.”

“I wish you won’t do anything particularly stupid while you’re away. Just be on vacation. Have a great time, fuck whoever you like, check in with me when your imagination gets out of control.”

“I’m not coming back,” said Julia.

“I’m not asking you to. But you can’t be on your own for five minutes, can you? You’ve already found someone to sleep with and fuss over. Tell me the truth—isn’t he damaged in some interesting way only you can repair?”

“I have to go,” she said, pretending not to be upset. “I’m going to the Africa House for drinks with all of our new friends. Take care, Robert.”

“*Jules*,” he said. “Wait.”

“I’m waiting.”

After a short pause, he said, “I don’t know how to do without you. It frightens me. And when I get scared, I get ugly. I’m sorry.”

Julia hadn’t allowed herself to imagine what it might be like for him. “You’re the big brother.”

“Count on your fingers how long we’ve been working—and living—
together. You are the most powerful, the most willful, the strangest woman
I’ve ever known. And, not incidentally, my best friend.”

“Thank you,” she whispered. She was silent. Then she said, “That sounds
like a problem.”

“Tell me about it,” he said.

After they’d said good-bye and disconnected, she looked at her cell: the
photo she used for wallpaper showed Robert leaning forward—hands pressed
down and shoulders hunched. At the moment Julia had photographed him,
he’d been saying, “Find the why of the movement, the story inside.” They
were rehearsing “Visiting Hours,” based on interviews with five incarcerated
men and women, and their spouses or partners, who’d given permission to
have their stories included in the collage. Suspected terrorists, actual

murderers, accidental or otherwise, stories of rage and addiction, of the power plays of guards and system. Five cages of light on stage, striped bars across the actors/dancers' faces, the visitors outside in the half-dark. Despite his intensity, he had a half-smile in which she could read his deep knowledge of the structures and habits of power, his habitual mix of rage and wry appreciation, his sinuous, dark, life force. Being around Robert was like standing at the edge of a river as it swelled and burst its banks. She understood why, at every flood, bystanders were drawn to the edge of those waters when they should have been running away.

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The next night, Julia went with Piers to a restaurant full of bright wall hangings and budget tourists. The windows opened onto the street, letting in the smells of spices, dust, and donkey dung. Outside, tourists strolled through the warm night in shorts and sundresses. A few well-covered Muslim women had passed by the water's edge during the day, but almost all of them were gone by now. Candlelight flickered on the tables, sending shadows up the wall.

Julia had three glasses of the South African wine, much more than she was used to. Piers had drunk the rest of the bottle and part of another. Time

to get some answers. It was all very well, in your twenties, to get involved with a charming man or woman lying to you about this and that. She'd always had Robert to go home to, his nasty, comforting jokes about her lovers, his shoulder to lie against while they watched bad movies. That was finished now. No more cruel stories, no more flood tide.

She said to Piers, "So, tell me the truth about your acting."

"I thought you weren't going to ask again?"

"I thought so, too. But somehow I feel you'd like to tell me."

He shrugged. "I had a year at the Royal Academy in my teens. It gave me the lingo."

"My mistake," she said. "I thought you were the real thing." She still didn't believe him. No man with a year of study in his teens would have such control over his face, his voice, the modulation of his tones.

He smiled and poured out the last of the wine. "I'm just a layabout. I have a bit of money from an inheritance. Not much, but I can live a life of pinched idleness if I choose to. Probably, I'd be better off if I had no choice and had to stay in jobs I found distasteful, to build up my character."

At the table next to them, a pair of lovers drew their fingers along each other's wrists. Julia said, "You don't need money? That's hard to imagine."

“Having money seems to me like being very beautiful. You wouldn’t give it up, if you have it, but it’s not necessarily the best thing, as you yourself must have noticed. Would I be telling you all my secrets if you were ordinary, even if I weren’t a little drunk? You must get your way a frightening amount of the time.”

“Judging from family history, my looks will disappear suddenly when I’m about forty-two. So I have four years left.”

“You sound so calm.”

“I’m *terrified*. Ignorant as a rock and all right as an actress, but maybe not better than that. Sort of a dancer, sort of an actress, but not really all the way anything. I could get more training, but the problem is me. Everything that I’m not as a person. And without my looks, there will be nothing to mask it. For example, everyone is always saying how kind I am, how nice, when actually I’m just pretty. But there’s no bedrock underneath. Wouldn’t you be frightened if you lost your money?”

“I have a couple of times, first in stocks, then in real estate. But it comes back if you work at it.”

“When my looks go, that’s it. How many fifty-year-old dance-theater performers do you know? If I got the training, I could play Lady Capulet. Or

the nurse. Even if I could really act, though, no one would ever cast me as Lear or Prospero.”

After dinner, they wandered down to the open-air market of the Jamituri Gardens, near the Beit-el-Ajaib palace, the House of Wonders. The air smelled of roasting meat, curry, sweets, of the sweat of the crowds around them. With her eyes half-closed, she saw him, just for a moment, angelic and menacing at once, shining darkly. The next moment, he was himself again. Back at the hotel, they went to bed at once, holding each other, shy now that it had come down to it. He rolled onto his back, and she climbed onto him, staring down at his closed eyes, intent face, a glimmer of white between his eyelids where his eyes had rolled up, all her skin shocked into the memory of itself and its true purposes. A faint light came in from the street, turning the curtains ghostly.

They drifted off after, dozing and waking, beginning their next lovemaking with a slow, almost painful kindness. As they discovered the rhythms and movements that matched each other's, the knowledge that she'd be gone soon gave her a sense of time running ahead, unstoppably. The sweetness and imminent loss of this second time, after the disappointment

and unexpected violent pleasures of the first, made it more piercing, as if she'd never before fully understood the uses of skin.

Afterward, he said, eyes closed, "That was a different line reading." His voice trailed off as he slid down into sleep.

She sat up, pushing aside the lace canopy for a better view—the glass lamp was very dim. She imagined him visiting, once she was settled in New York. The leaves of trees shading brownstones casting shadows over them as they walked together. Maybe he'd see her perform and begin to consider a return to the theater. Waiting backstage for each other if they'd seen the performance too many times to sit out front. Most people weren't actors, didn't think of being actors—except in some vague fantasy of stardom and universal acclaim—and would live their whole lives without stepping out under the lights and becoming someone else. The world seemed too much to face as just one person. With Robert, she had nearly two decades of performances, spectacular or humiliating moments, sudden discoveries. And now, on her own, she'd watched the sun rise over a hidden Buddha in the mountains of Japan, the crowds out the window of her cheap hotel in Bangkok while a man killed chickens in the corridor outside. She hated it that no one shared those memories. With Piers, she'd walked through the

places where slavery had existed, then been abolished. They'd eaten cinnamon bark together. She'd seen his other self, the dark, shining angel.

He lay on his side now, breathing softly, his face slightly puzzled, as if he were working out some problem in his dreams. The amplified recording of a bell sounded for the 4:00 a.m. call to prayer from the mosque down the street. He sighed and turned, eyelids twitching, the corner of his mouth lifted. Julia stretched out beside him, closing her eyes.

When she was small, Robert had said to her, "Wait here," investigating before he allowed her to cross streams or streets, climb trees or the side of the house. The work he'd put in to get the company going, to haul them out of their ordinary, unimaginative, doomed life and into the one he'd imagined for them. She closed her eyes and seemed to see him gesturing to her to wait as they approached a bridge, but ahead of them, she saw another brother, older than either of them, turning back to wave at them. He had bushy eyebrows and an unreadable smile, was already halfway across. She was surprised to realize she'd always had two brothers, and had only known about one.

She woke up then and saw Piers watching her. She said, "Tell me the truth, really, about your acting."

Piers said, “God, you’re persistent.” And, when she waited, he said, “I will tell you, on two conditions.” She nodded. “No advice. No trying to rescue me.” She nodded again, a little less certainly. “I was an actor for nearly twenty years. My stage fright was no worse than most people’s. And then, one night, none of it made any sense. Not in an intellectual way, not the usual questions about why we put ourselves through the misery of auditions, rejection, and the mockery of old schoolmates embarked upon decent, regular lives with children and jobs and pension funds. I’d been through all that, from time to time, of course, but none of it was in my mind then. There had been some bad notices—not for the first time, naturally. Somehow, though, in the middle of a performance of *Merchant*, I became Piers and could be no one else, not then, not ever again. It was *over*.”

Once started, he couldn’t seem to help telling the entire story. As Bassanio, he didn’t have much to do in the first part of the opening scene, and somehow, listening to Antonio’s “I hold the world but as the world, Gratiano—a stage, where every man must play a part, and mine a sad one,” waiting through the monologues, he’d become aware of the audience, an enormous, waiting, potentially vicious animal. He stood on stage, cold and sweating, staring at his colleagues. Allan and Jonathan and Paul moved easily

through the set of a Venetian street at night. But it was all pretend. “I am Sir Oracle,” said Allan, and, “Thou shalt not know the sound of thine own tongue,” said Paul. The speeches went by very fast: Paul and Jonathan would be exiting in a moment. Piers felt his lines waiting for him, somewhere outside his mind.

In fact, when he thought about it, it had started in the wings, people whispering, “Piers, are you quite well?” Nodding, a kind of laugh, trying to pass it off. Sweating, clammy, his throat closing, knowing that this wasn’t the normal thing, the normal nerves.

“Is that anything now?” asked Allan, and Piers looked at him, swollen tongue filling his mouth. Concern on Allan’s face, a whisper from the prompt box, “Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice.” Piers, shaking his head, Allan picking up the line, “Perhaps you’d say Gratiano speaks an infinite deal of nothing, more than any man in all Venice.” And, when the silence continued, “His reasons are as two grains of wheat hid in two bushels of chaff: you shall seek them all day ere you find them, and when you have them they are not worth the search.” He took hold of Piers’ arm, kindly, and patted him. Not part of the blocking.

Piers stood there like one of Medusa's suitors, trying to think how and where it had been lost. The weekend notices. *Samuel Rosen's thinly unremarkable Shylock...A curious failure of attention in the second act... Adriana Lang seems more than usually petulant, as well she might, choosing among such an undistinguished crop of suitors...Piers Wright, dreadfully miscast as Bassiano, seems to feel the role of the passionate suitor as a waste of his slight but genuine comic gifts, which work well enough if tightly confined and directed. Alas, the acid delivery and vamped-up comic timing that have worked for him before, playing Dadaist Tristan Tzara in Travesties, for example, make him a strange choice for a romantic lead.* He could remember *that*. Clammy. The nausea. What was his next line? His tongue, the size of an arm, choked him.

Allan—looking right into Piers' face—began to freeze in turn. Time had stopped: Piers felt that only he and Allan knew what was happening. Anyone in the audience who knew their *Merchant* well knew that he'd slipped. The cast and crew knew it. But they might all still think it was a normal drying up, that Piers would catch on in a line or so. Soon, they would know that this was something else. And then the waiting, breathing, multi-headed beast out there would know it. His toxic unbelief was already spreading like oil in a

stream, breaking the spell, slicking it over with the ordinary, the everyday world where one defining failure or mistake can change everything that comes after. The hardest thing he had ever done was getting off that stage, now a nightmare obstacle course, before collapsing into a ball in the wings.

When Piers finished telling Julia his story, he put his head into his folded hands. She cupped her own over his, silently, trying to imagine what it was like to be so thoroughly yourself that you could no longer be anyone else. She bowed her head, hiding her envy. Also her disappointment. Piers wouldn't want to sleep with her again after this. They didn't, after they confided in you, except for the truly desperate ones who would then propose marriage. She could imagine Piers on stage, just where he had stood, night after night, though it hadn't until that moment been *Piers* under the heat of the lights, his vision reduced to a dark slit. All those judging eyes, a sea of them, waiting.

In a moment, he would look up, ready for the sympathy that he deserved. She paged through her memories, hunting for one that would call up the right emotions. Not the level of sympathy appropriate to the loss of a house, a grave illness, or the death of a family member. A gentler expression, maybe just a hint of irony, not overdone. Years of improv at rehearsals made

the process almost instantaneous: she returned to the uncomplicated empathy she'd felt for Renard in Bangkok—all his secret e-mails exposed to his colleagues by his enraged wife—and she could feel her face take on the look of tender understanding she now felt. Ready, she lifted her head. Piers might or might not perceive the work involved, but experience told her that he would, in either case, accept her offering.

Sarah Stone is the author of the novel *The True Sources of the Nile* and co-author, with Ron Nyren, of the textbook *Deepening Fiction: A Practical Guide for Intermediate and Advanced Writers*. She has written for Korean television, reported on human rights in Burundi, and looked after orphan chimpanzees at the Jane Goodall Institute. Her work has appeared in *Ploughshares*, *StoryQuarterly*, *The Believer*, and *A Kite in the Wind: Fiction Writers on Their Craft*, among other places. She teaches for Stanford Continuing Studies' Online Writer's Studio and for the MFA Program for Writers at Warren Wilson College.