

T I M O T H Y  
M C S W E E N E Y  
HAS AN ENDANGERED SPECIES  
FOR A SPIRIT ANIMAL.



T H E S K Y .

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One day the sky was an extraordinary shade of blue. It was a blue the likes of which no one had ever seen, not even in their dreams. It was a blue that crossed all boundaries, that summoned up sailors and oceans and nights from all seasons. It was a blue that reminded people of wishes, the small hopes they tried to forget while walking about their daily routines.

The color shocked all who saw it, especially the most jaded New Yorkers. The sky made people stop in their tracks in the middle of the day and consider quarrels, why they ever had them. People first seeing the sky quit driving. They put their feet on the brakes when lights were green, left their keys in their cars and walked into traffic. No one was killed because the color called them to witness simultaneously.

Radios played dead air as DJs left their stations to see the special thing. News crews were dispatched on the spot. Normally talkative reporters held their breath. The sky was too delicious. The sky made them delirious. They waved their hands in helplessness and stuttered into mumbles. No, they said, there was nothing they could say.

Children were the least stunned, having less of a wealth of comparisons. They were disappointed by the adults they consulted for explanations. They were not accustomed to seeing the community they one day planned to join stumbling, gasping at the sky.

"What is it, Mommy? Teacher?" they wanted to

know. The voices of small children were all that could be heard as everyone tried to make sense of the normal going askew.

The religious were inclined to think of apocalypse. They ran to their churches, where even the pastors could not finger disaster or glory. It was, after all, simple, a glimpse of sky. The ordinary background turned its back on its believers and encouraged doubt, incredulity.

The politicians tried to take advantage of the opportunity, but even they, at their podiums full of microphones, found it daunting.

"The sky is blue," they said in frightened, thunderous tones, as if this were news.

People went home, walking long miles with beneficent smiles on their faces. They opened their curtains and windows. They took vinegar and newspapers and started to clean. The color flooded in like a bath, filling rooms like loud visitors. It made people feel warm and naked, and so they took off their clothes, to feel like they felt.

At six o'clock, one anchorman per town broadcast his mute assessment. Nobody over the age of ten cared what the newscaster thought should be done about the sky, or what had caused it. This shade of blue erased all questions for adults. The nagging agony of experience was stilled. As the day wore on and people waited for the night, wondering what surprise *that* sky might hold, people looked at the sky and at each other. They were patient for the sun to set, a comfort they expected halfway on this day, so different from all others. They didn't worry whether tomorrow they'd get the same treat. They watched the sky like a movie they'd been waiting for. They watched the sky with adoration, as if it were a newborn baby.

The next day the papers were blank, to absorb the color and reflect upon it, should it again appear, which of course, it did. You may be concerned that the people might eventually get used to the color. You may worry they might forget the shock and return to themselves, start wearing clothes, start driving cars, stop cleaning their windows. But progress reached a door and that door was shut. Things stopped evolving. The sky was blue and

people watched it.

The sky watched the people and it was proud. To think, after all these years, the sky was suddenly more than an atmosphere. If the sky had a voice it would have shouted. If the sky had a body it would have climbed mountains in single bounds. If the sky had a heart it would have beat fiercely, and turned people's heads with the thump thump thump of its thunder. But all the sky had was a color that was soul.