










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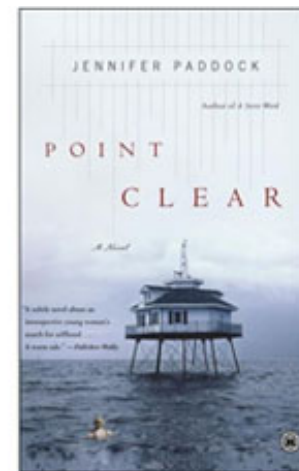
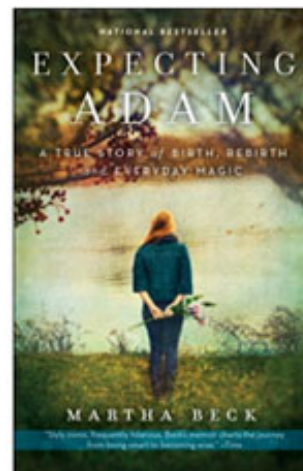
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## Reading the Truth

### Sea Change

by

Katherine Hauswirth



*The Moment*, an anthology of essays about life-changing moments resulting from a story project at *Smith Magazine*, has just been released, and in the introduction editor Larry Smith

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comments that “these stories hit us where we live.” Stories like this make us realize how our perspective, which often seems so logical and immutable, can change drastically in an instant. I haven’t read *The Moment* yet, but this week I read two books that also ponder life transformation in response to a specific—and often unexpected—occurrence.

Martha Beck didn’t have a singular “moment.” She had a whole string of them, beginning around the time of her long, nauseous pregnancy. She was carrying a baby boy with Down syndrome, and in her memoir *Expecting Adam* she talks about the radical shift her pregnancy sparked. Hearing this, you might assume it was the anticipation of mothering a special needs child that engendered a change. But Beck’s change started before she had proof that she was pregnant and before she knew of Adam. Inexplicable, mystical things started happening to this Harvard-trained social scientist. She felt compelled to share her experience, knowing full well that she was risking ridicule from the academic world in which she’d so vigorously pursued achievement and perfection.

The book opens with an interview conducted by Beck as part of her PhD dissertation work. Her subject turns out to be a clairvoyant, and this woman passes on a message from 3-year-old Adam, who’s home asleep at the time. The clairvoyant’s of the especially whacky variety, and Beck’s uneasy with the whole scenario, but she listens to the message anyway. What she hears is that there is nothing to fear from being open, and that it’s important to stay open. It’s a message she could have used during that long pregnancy, although she probably wouldn’t have been receptive to it at the time.

So where’s the why and the how of this message, and the multitudinous odd occurrences in the book, like the disappearing entity who escorted Beck out of an apartment fire, or the times Beck could see exactly what her husband was seeing (only she was in Cambridge, and he was in Japan)? What I like about the book is that Beck doesn’t posit an explanation for any of this. She has partially-formed theories, but mostly she’s mystified. Her pregnancy is a brutal one, and she’s the first to wonder if factors like dehydration and stress are playing a role in her wild ride. Beck, who’s left religion behind along with the Utah of her upbringing, is increasingly convinced that she’s been graced by some unseen phenomenon. The best she can do is liken it to being in the presence of Bunraku puppeteers, who are so skillful that you forget they are there right there on the stage as the puppets perform an enthralling show.

Beck describes a new life since Adam’s come, a risk-embracing life that she and her husband never could have anticipated during their deliberate, self-conscious life at Harvard. In the epilogue, Beck describes an afternoon of swimming with dolphins, and I could see how both her mind and her life had been radically opened to possibilities she’d never before considered.

After watching Adam and the dolphins together, I was convinced that they were

communicating in some method indiscernible to my mundane senses, the way the Bunraku puppeteers had communicated with me while I was pregnant . . . That day in the lagoon, I could feel the same strange electric energy between Adam and the dolphins that I'd sensed around me before he was born. Go ahead and laugh, but I've been through too much to dismiss these things. I've also learned that I will probably never fully understand it. That's okay. Just being nearby is a privilege.

In the novel *Point Clear*, protagonist Caroline Berry is ripe for a change, too. No pregnancy here, but there's a rebirth of sorts brewing. The novel has a relaxed tone but drops hints that something bigger is around the corner. Early in the book twenty seven-year-old Caroline seems unsettled, although on the surface there's nothing critically wrong. She feels like an unseen ghost in New York City, and fitfully considers several possibilities, one of them writing a novel. Her inner turmoil, particularly about unsettled family issues around the loss of her father, is represented by rogue bouts of vertigo that come at her sideways and knock her, quite literally, off course.

Caroline uses a modest inheritance from her beloved grandfather to book a three-week trip to Point Clear in Alabama, a resort where he loved to golf and where her parents honeymooned. She rides out a hurricane there after hiding when guests are required to evacuate. She's got the place to herself and initially holes up in her room, eating junk food and, once the power is restored, watching the news about the devastation of the storm. Gradually, she emerges to explore her surreal post-storm surroundings.

Just after the hurricane, Caroline meets Walker Galloway on the beach. He's about to take a swim in the bay, despite warnings to avoid the water. They have a brief exchange and she feels strangely connected to him. Later, when Walker's family reports him missing, Caroline reports their meeting and the water is searched. His best friend and family want to talk to her. Did he seem happy? They wonder if the champion swimmer could have been suicidal. How did he look? What was he wearing? What did he say?

Caroline becomes a student of Walker, researching him at the local library and gleaning an impression of him through her interactions with his loved ones. She examines the possibilities of what may have happened as if looking through a prism from different angles. During this unexpected investigation she's drawn to Daniel, Walker's best friend, and a relationship begins. Odd synchronicities seem to awaken something in her—Walker's father wears a battered Timex just like her father's, Walker's house is a duplicate of her grandfather's, and she discovers that she and Walker shared several tendencies. She works through her puzzlement by beginning her novel, which doesn't attempt to change the details of her encounter with Walker. But she uses her words to examine how his life may have ended.

Things come together for Caroline through Walker’s disappearance into the water, although a logical approach would deem it unlikely that the two happenings could be linked. I don’t think the word synchronicity is used, but the story conveys a sense of insight, empathy, and connectedness brought about by a seemingly random occurrence.

Reading these books left me thinking of the lyrics to *West Side Story*’s enthusiastic “Something’s Coming”: “Could be! Who knows? There's something due any day; I will know right away, soon as it shows.” The nature of our busy world is such that there’s the potential to *worry* that something unexpected may be coming. But these books each illustrate, in their own way, that sea changes are inevitable and not all of them are frightening rogue waves, although they may scare us with their suddenness. Sea changes can bring unexpected sweetness and joy. They can lend us great insights. They are something we should swim into willingly, with eyes wide open.

**Books mentioned in this column:**

*Expecting Adam* by Martha Beck (Three Rivers Press, 2011)

*The Moment*, edited by Larry Smith (Harper Perennial, 2012)

*Point Clear* by Jennifer Paddock (Touchstone Books, 2006)

*Katherine Hauswirth is a medical writer by day and a creative writer by stolen moments. She writes creative nonfiction and poetry. She is the author of the book Harriet’s Voice: A Writing Mother’s Journey and contributed to the anthology Get Satisfied: How Twenty People Like You Found the Satisfaction of Enough. Katherine has been published in many venues including The Writer, Byline, The Christian Science Monitor, Pregnancy, The Writer’s Handbook, The Writer’s Guide to Fiction, Chronogram, Women of Spirit, Wilderness House Literary Review, Poetry Kit, Eat a Peach, Lutheran Digest, and Pilgrimage. A Long Island native, Katherine lives with her husband and son in Deep River, Connecticut. *Harriet’s Voice: Home Base for Writing Mothers* is her personal website. *Contact Katherine*.*

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