

East Fork of the Toklat, Sunrise  
Transcript of a reading by Kathleen Dean Moore

For Stephen and Wendy, the 2013 artists-in-residence.

Today, June 13th, the sun is scheduled to rise at 3:46 am, and I am here to meet it, sitting on a bench by the East Fork of the Toklat, looking upriver toward the snow-covered ridges of Mount Pendleton. This early in the morning, the braided riverbed, the mounded moraines, the rising peaks are printed on the Earth in shades of grey. Even the sky is grey. But there it is, right on time, the first spot of color, a pink brush stroke on the peak of the mountain. At first, that's all there is, the surprise of this pink mountaintop in a grey world. But soon enough, the sun daubs the same pink paint on the shoulders of the mountain and adds lavender strokes over the glacier and down the east ridge. Now there's cadmium yellow across the face of the snowfield and more pink on the talus slopes. Slowly, as the Earth rolls, the sun slathers pink down the angle of the ridge. Burnt umber dots the gravel slopes of the alluvial plain. This is not a watercolor wash. This is oil paint or gouache. These mountains are daubed and streaked in color as thick as van Gogh's.

But now, here is green, a big slathering of green along the tundra plains of the hills. Painstakingly, the sun applies permanent green in short strokes over the grey spruce forests and sap green over the grove of aspens. One by one, the cobbles in the broad riverbed take on all the colors of stone – ochre, black, silver, red – and now the reaching arms of the river and the sky itself are suddenly blue. Cerulean blue, applied on the river with the tip of the brush, and with wide strokes on the sky. The colors are rushing now, streaking toward me, splashing on the bars and rills, a flood of colors splattering across the stone. And here is my shadow, long and black in front of me, and I can feel the sun paint color across my neck and down the back of my sweater. I didn't know that blue was so warm, or that color would feel heavy as a hand on my shoulder.