

FALSE

Summit

False SUMMIT

John DesCamp



Wind Mountain Press
Portland, Oregon

False Summit
by John DesCamp

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ISBN: 978-1-5323-3206-7

Cover photographs by John DesCamp.
Cover and interior design by Dennis Stovall.

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Wind Mountain Press
PO Box 4448
Portland, OR 97208

For information regarding ordering, reprints, or
readings, contact www.johndescamp.com.

Printed in the United States of America.

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Acknowledgments

Tacitus said, “Success has many fathers, but failure is an orphan.” In the hope this book will be a success, and because it could not have come into being without several parents besides myself, two experienced and talented friends need to be recognized (or blamed, as the case may be) for what appears in these pages.

My editor, Dennis Stovall, continues to educate me on how to write with clarity and insight. He has been responsible for all the technical and organizational issues that surround the publication of this book. More importantly, his informed literary taste and dry sense of how best to express an idea have kept me from going off the cliff in all the ways one can when writing. Any rough spots in the poems are mine alone. He tried.

For the second time, Jim Halliday has taken on the task of providing images to accompany my words. His love of music, good food, and of the pleasure that runs through everyday life is evident in his work and amplifies the content in what I’ve written.

It’s my good fortune that these two are good friends. Each has given me the gift of his technical skill and artistic excellence. This book wouldn’t have come into being without them.



false summit | fôls 'səmət|

noun

In mountaineering, a false summit is a peak that appears to the climber to be the pinnacle of the mountain. But when it is reached, the climber sees it concealed the true summit, which is still in the distance. A false summit can have a damaging effect on a climber's psychological state by inducing feelings of dashed hopes and failure.



We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.

TS Eliot—*Little Gidding*

False Summit

From the bottom
The climb didn't look that hard
Sun warmed rocks and cool evergreens
Along the way.

A summit just seen from the trailhead
If you squinted and craned your neck.
Unseen: the steeper pitches,
The washed out trail and the deadfalls.

Farther along, you arrive at the place
You started for, only to find
It is not your destination
The summit is further yet
And even from this height
Can no longer be seen.

Eyes blinded by sweat and years
Muscles cramped, fingers numb
We yet conclude the joy is in the climb
And welcome each false summit

The real one will be our last.

Creation

Eternally, our mind replays
The drama of new consciousness;
The always changing now
Perpetually on the path
From was to will be.

But how did it all begin?
Nothing but waters on the earth.
In the midst of the waters, the one seer
And the seer's mind

Within the god, that first division came
Prefiguring all others
The watcher and the one who watches
Both in the god's mind but
Now two beings

With this first division, creation had begun

Valentine's Day? Really?

How did this all get started? The hearts, the candy, the flowers and, worst of all, the gooey rhymes about roses and violets.

The impulse to romantic love seems universal. And being human, once we have the impulse, we need to express it. Virtually every culture in the world has some sort of springtime festival of romantic love and the tradition goes back for centuries—back to grittier subjects like fertility and procreation. Predictably, the Islamic countries ban such things, but the ban itself suggests the tradition has long existed in their culture as well.

There are some edgy parts of the tradition. Not everyone has a valentine, or is necessarily happy about the one they have. St. Valentine was a Christian martyr, and the St. Valentine's Day Massacre occurred in Chicago (where else?) on (wait for it...)

Valentine's Day.



Competition and jealousy are more likely to rear their ugly heads on Valentine's than at any other time, except for the reading of a rich uncle's will.

The unlikeliest people (lawyers and accountants, for example) fall in love and have agonies of the heart, just like the rest of us. One of Jackson Brown's great tongue-in-cheek songs was "Lawyers in Love." And accountants can apparently suffer for love as well. Here's an image I found on the conference room white board of a regional CPA firm.

Not sure I want this person working on my tax return.

Well, if you have a Valentine, and I hope you do, be sure to do something caring and romantic for them, and not just on February 14th. We need to



be told, more than once a year, that we are loved. At least, I do.

Here's a poem I wrote it for those taking their first risky steps towards having a Valentine.



As It Is in Heaven

Caught in bare branches,
the full moon ceased its struggling
and watched.

Between past and future,
we ceased our struggling
and kissed.

With a relieved smile,
the moon rose free
and went about his business.

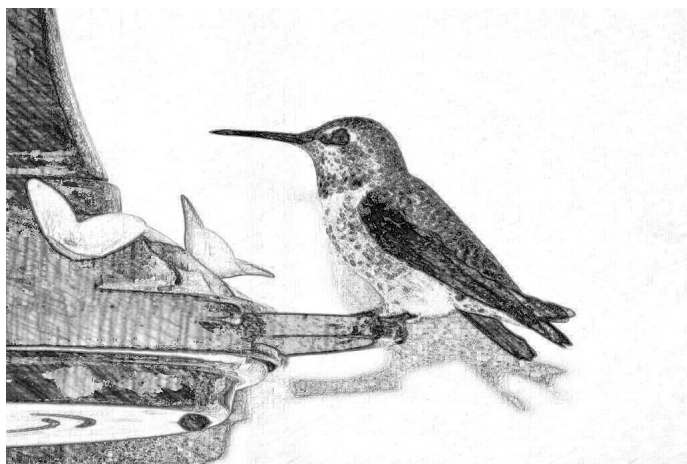
Valentine Secret

Quick guarded glances
Red silk in secret places
Inamorata

Vulnerability

Relationships are like seeds
Nothing grows
'Til the ground is broken

Being broken open is scary
Think how the earth feels
When the farmer
Starts about
His springtime business



Surprise Visitor

February snow

Green blur in bare birch branches

Winter hummingbird

March

What do we always think about when March comes around? I don't mean the rain; that's a given: the endless undulating succession of sunny days, thundershowers and soft rain that first raises and then washes away our hope for Spring. Not that. What I can't stop thinking about are the things that stuck to my Velcro mind when I was a kid.

First of course, there's the old vaudeville question "what day of the year is a command to go forward?" The answer, of course, is "March 4th." Da dum! I used to torment my sister Jean with this one. Her birthday was March 4th and since she was my little sister, she (mistakenly, I assured my mother) saw everything I said to her as some form of teasing. In retrospect, it probably was.

Then there's the old proverb. You know; the one that definitely smells like a stack of nineteenth century Farmers' Almanacs: "March comes in like a lion and goes out like a lamb". The Japanese (of course, you all know this) would say "sangatsu no raion (3月のライオン)," but I seldom say that myself. In fact, as a card-carrying Leo, I'm skeptical about this one because Leos are all about sun, brightness, warmth, light, and all the other good things that the month of March notably lacks.

Other months have a better time of it. For example, unlike March, the month of April can lay claim to a complex and edgy literary ancestry: TS Eliot's "The Wasteland" opens with "April is the cruelest month..." Now, that's a role a month can really sink its teeth into! But, more about that next month.

So, there you have it. March in a nutshell: a bad joke, a hoary proverb, and weather you would only wish on the US Congress.

And yet: March bears within it the beginning of Spring, and all the joy we feel at the birth of new leaves that erupt overnight from hard little green buds. No other month is so full of new life and beauty, moving in a punctuated dance from potential to

actuality. No other month reminds us, almost simultaneously, of the gloom of Winter and the promise of Summer.

I wrote this poem one day when I was watching the sun and rain fall simultaneously on the West Hills and trying to assess how wet I'd get if I hiked to the Pittock Mansion. As it turned out, it was sunny and warm the whole way.

It often is.



A Song for Her Absence

Absent
But still with us
Lost to heaven
Where peaceful entry must be earned
Harvested early
But alive in our memory

She lived beyond herself
Beyond prediction
Love was her faith
Care and kindness were her prayers
A girl for a moment
Never forgotten.

To live in hearts of those we leave behind
Is not to die.