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The Solace of Fierce Landscapes: Exploring Desert and Mountain Spirituality

Belden C. Lane

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In the tradition of Kathleen Norris, Terry Tempest Williams, and Thomas Merton, The Solace of Fierce Landscapes explores the impulse that has drawn seekers into the wilderness for centuries and offers eloquent testimony to the healing power of mountain silence and desert indifference. Interweaving a memoir of his mothers long struggle with Alzheimers and cancer, meditations on his own wilderness experience, and illuminating commentary on the Christian via negativa--a mystical tradition that seeks God in the silence beyond language--Lane rejects the easy affirmations of pop spirituality for the harsher but more profound truths that wilderness can teach us. There is an unaccountable solace that fierce landscapes offer to the soul. They heal, as well as mirror, the brokeness we find within. It is this apparent paradox that lies at the heart of this remarkable book: that inhuman landscapes should be the source of spiritual comfort. Lane shows that the very indifference of the wilderness can release us from the demands of the endlessly anxious ego, teach us to ignore the inessential in our own lives, and enable us to transcend the false self that is ever-obsessed with managing impressions. Drawing upon the wisdom of St. John of the Cross, Meister Eckhardt, Simone Weil, Edward Abbey, and many other Christian and non-Christian writers, Lane also demonstrates how those of us cut off from the wilderness might make some desert in our lives. Written with vivid intelligence, narrative ease, and a gracefulness that is itself a comfort, The Solace of Fierce Landscapes gives us not only a description but a performance of an ancient and increasingly relevant spiritual tradition.

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