

FAR ENOUGH

A WESTERN IN FRAGMENTS

Joe Wilkins



Black
Lawrence
Press



Black
Lawrence
Press

www.blacklawrence.com

Executive Editor: Diane Goettel

Chapbook Editor: Kit Frick

Book and cover design: Amy Freels

Copyright © Joe Wilkins 2015

ISBN: 978-1-62557-994-2

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in critical articles or reviews, no part of this book may be reproduced in any manner without prior written permission from the publisher: editors@blacklawrencepress.com

Published 2015 by Black Lawrence Press.

Printed in the United States.

This book is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual events or locales or persons, living or dead, is entirely coincidental.

Winter-born

Willie Benson lost his right thumb at the Newman branding in the spring of '92, the ninth year of drought along the Musselshell River Valley. He was roping calves and accidentally headed a big, winter-born Angus. The calf jerked hard on the rope, eyes going wide and white. Willie braced down on the saddle horn and dallied up quick but caught his thumb just under the knuckle. Days later, sprawled on a chair at the Ryegate Bar, Willie told his friends he felt rope grind hard down on bone. He said his horse reared back, the calf's tongue lolled out—*and my goddamn thumb popped clean off.*

About the Blood

Wade Newman, Willie's boss and owner of the RL Ranch, the biggest spread of private land all down the river, knew the work day was done. He had thought they might finish his fifteen hundred head of calves in just three days, but once they got Willie loaded into the cab of someone's pickup and sent off to the hospital, the cowboys started passing a fifth of whiskey. It wasn't even late afternoon, the sky wide and hot with dust. But Wade figured they might as well open up the beer coolers and put on the steaks. He knew Willie's thumb would be the big story tonight at the Ryegate Bar, and as he flung hunks of meat to the fire, he thought about how he'd tell it, the loud bawl of that heavy calf and the rope's sudden, rip-tight twang. He took a cold drink of beer. He'd tell about the blood.



Photo: Liz Wilkins

Joe Wilkins's debut, *Killing the Murnion Dogs*, was published by Black Lawrence in 2011 and subsequently named a finalist for a number of national post-publication book awards, including the Paterson Poetry Prize and the High Plains Book Award. Wilkins's other books include a memoir, *The Mountain and the Fathers* (Counterpoint 2012), winner of a 2014 GLCA New Writers Award—an honor that has previously recognized early works by the likes of Richard Ford, Louise Erdrich, and Alice Munro, among others—and another book of poems, *Notes from the Journey Westward* (White Pine 2012). He has recently published two chapbooks in addition to *Far Enough: A Western in Fragments*, one of essays, *We Had to Go On Living* (Red Bird Chapbooks 2014) and one of poetry, *Leviathan* (Iron Horse 2014).

A Pushcart Prize winner and National Magazine Award finalist, Wilkins has published poems, essays, and stories in *The Georgia Review*, *The Southern Review*, *The Missouri Review*, *The Sun*, *Orion*, and *Slate*. Of Wilkins's work, Deborah Kim, editor at the *Indiana Review*, writes, "The most striking component of it is its awareness of 'the whole world.' What is ordinary becomes transcendent. In places derelict and seemingly unexceptional, Wilkins compels us to recognize what is worth salvage, worth praise."

Wilkins lives with his wife, son, and daughter in McMinnville, Oregon, where he teaches writing at Linfield College. As the winner of the Boyden Wilderness Writing Residency from PEN Northwest, he and his family will spend the summer and fall of 2015 living in a remote cabin along the Rogue River in southwest Oregon.