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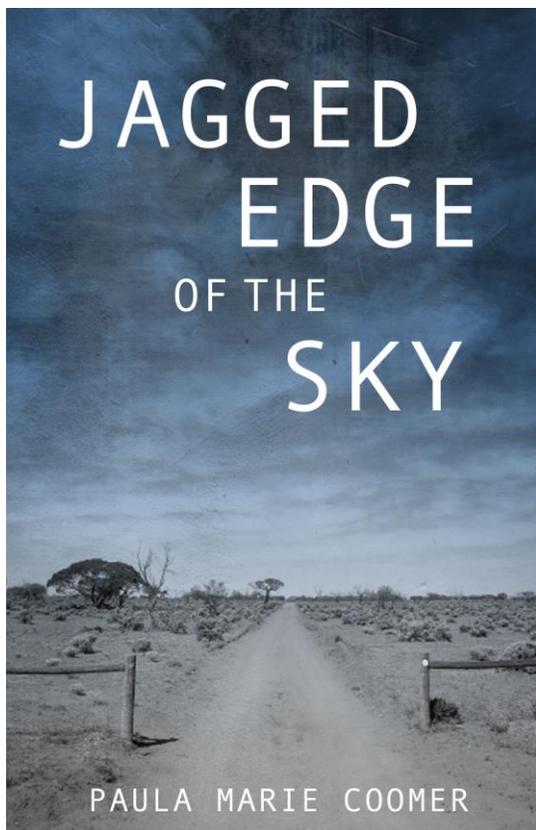
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Paula is available for personal appearances and interviews.

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Jagged Edge of the Sky

by Paula Marie Coomer

“A lusty, tragic tale for readers who are willing to work for its satisfying moments of connection.” —*Kirkus Reviews*

In Paula Marie Coomer's *Jagged Edge of the Sky* connections of blood and circumstance emerge from a kaleidoscopic narrative in which interconnected characters navigate rugged personal terrains of loss and hope. The resulting literary landscape is spare and challenging as the Australian outback, mythical as the American West.

This fractured family saga, told and re-told from 16 different perspectives, transcends continents and time periods in an intricate exploration of family, relationships, identity and all the ways in which inner and outer landscapes merge to create the lives ultimately lived. With a relentless eye, Paula Marie Coomer flinches from neither the gruesome nor the humorous in this fractured tale of loners, siblings, parents, and lovers.

ABOUT PAULA MARIE COOMER

Paula Marie Coomer is a poet, fiction writer, and sometimes food writer. The daughter of over two hundred years of Kentucky mountain people, she lived most of her childhood in the industrial Ohio River town of New Albany, Indiana. Ms. Coomer is the author of four books of literary prose and poetry, as well as the cookbook, *Blue Moon Vegan*, and a food memoir, *Blue Moon Vegetarian*. Books of note include the well-received novel based on her years as a public health nurse, *Dove Creek*, the short story collection *Summer of Government Cheese*, and *Nurses Who Love English*, poetry. Coomer lives near the mouth of Hells Canyon in southeast Washington State where she is writer-in-residence for a writing retreat and workshop program in the Idaho Rockies known as Clearwater Writers. Find out more at www.paulamariecoomer.com.

About Fawkes Press

Fawkes Press is a small publishing house which arose from the ashes of Booktrope to assure the continued availability of a few exceptional, yet still undiscovered, titles. For more, go to www.fawkespress.com.

Ordering information

Jagged Edge of the Sky

By Paula Marie Coomer

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eBook price: \$4.99

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- Discounts or customized editions may be available for educational and other groups based on bulk purchase
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Press Release

For Immediate Release

Fawkes Press announces the release of Paula Marie Coomer's second novel *Jagged Edge of the Sky*. The story of loss, endurance, and individualism at all costs is set partially in the harsh environment of the 1950s Australian outback and moves to the Western U.S. in the latter half of the twentieth century. Two half-brothers grow up a world apart, spiraling toward each other on a path paved by the women in their lives. Told from the points of view of sixteen different characters, *Kirkus Reviews* calls it "A lusty, tragic tale for readers who are willing to work for its satisfying moments of connection." Coomer is the author of *Dove Creek* and the food memoir *Blue Moon Vegetarian*, among others. *Jagged Edge of the Sky* is available at retailers June 1. For ordering or booking information, contact Fawkes Press at jodi.thompson@fawkespress.com.

An Interview with Paula Marie Coomer

Q: *Jagged Edge of the Sky* begins with a woman delivering a baby in an old loft. The chapter is less than a page long. It's the only chapter that is so succinct, yet it is fundamental in terms of completing the story's arc. Can you talk about why you used this technique? What you hoped to accomplish with it?

A: I thought starting the book with that very succinct chapter would prepare the reader for an unusual journey. It sets a sparse tone, mimicking the emotional and geographic landscapes prevalent in the book.

Q: What or who inspired the book?

A: Two people, both total strangers I met by accident.

Q: How long did it take to write?

A: The actual writing took about five years.

Q: How did you accomplish such a vivid portrayal of Australia? Did you travel there? What was your research process to make sure your depictions of time and place were accurate?

A: Once the idea presented itself, I began researching Western Australia, its history, its people, geography, climate, etc. I explored newspaper accounts of famous floods. Read dozens of books, watched hundreds of Australian films, studied more than a thousand photographs. So much of the material just found its way to me—there is no other way to say it. My husband and I marveled at how all that time Australia-related stuff (for want of a better word) simply showed up in our lives. All that took five years.

Q: What sparked your interest in writing about Australia, in particular Western Australia? Do you see a comparison with the western U.S.?

A: My interest in Australia began in the 1990s with Marlo Morgan's book *Mutant Message Down Under*, which is a late-20th century narrative written by an American physician who went on walkabout with a band of aboriginals who stopped reproducing because of the catastrophes they foresaw coming to the planet. I have a copy of the original self-published edition, which is labeled as a non-fiction. The book was picked up

by Random House, is now marketed as a fiction. No clue why the switch was made, but I was completely moved by the aboriginal relationship to the land and by the changes to the physician's body as she adopted their patterns of living. I understood their connectedness to the natural world. I felt at home in those pages.

The comparison I see with the western U.S. has to do with the amount of blood in the soil. Australian aboriginals were hunted down by the British as if they were vermin, as Indian tribes were in the U.S. Also, geographically, the western portion of both nations consists of large, open, harsh, sparsely populated places mythologized for the extent to which the landscape attracts visionaries and loners.

Q: Can you speak with an Aussie accent? How did you capture the dialog in the book?

A: I do not speak with an Aussie accent. In my bathroom in front of a mirror, yes. In public, can't make it happen. We have people in our area who come from Australia, so whenever I'm around them my hearing becomes hyper-attuned. Otherwise, I've studied the language by listening to film actors in the two hundred or so Australian films I've watched. Happy to say the book's proofreader, who grew up near where the novel is set and still lives in Australia, gave me thumbs up.

Q: Your family is originally from the mountains of Kentucky, which is clearly influential in the writing of *Dove Creek*, but how did that background influence *Jagged Edge of the Sky*?

A: Until my parents moved north, my family lived in those mountains apart from mainstream culture for more than two hundred years. Definitely I am drawn to rurality and to under-represented groups. I understand what it feels like to be an island of just a few kin. Also, people in my family have always been intent on making their own way. I see that in all the main characters. Even Martin and Piotr with their mental health issues are trying to pave a way for themselves. I come from people who blaze trails. Every character in *Jagged Edge of the Sky* is in one way or another blazing his or her own trail, is essentially in charge of his or her own existence, despite obstacles and disadvantages.

Q: Where did the title come from?

A: My husband Phil was the one who pointed out that my original title did not represent the story. During one of the revisions, I had my eye out for a line that might express the intention of the book. Midway through the book, Merl Chatcolet talks about the myth of the big floods that every few hundred years or so hit the Outback, "rearranging the jagged edge of the sky." That line glowed with a bit of an aura. I knew that was it.

Q: *Jagged Edge of the Sky* is an expansive story that ultimately comes full circle. But having spent so much time with these characters and their stories, do you think there is more to tell? Do you envision more chapters to the saga?

A: No, I'm not a serialist. In fact, my next novel is already complete and is profoundly

different from anything I've written. The next four books are already in the hopper in one form or another. Even if I did revisit *Jagged Edge of the Sky* for a subsequent book, it would be decades, and I'm already facing sixty. I doubt there will be time.

Q: How do you work differently when you are doing your food writing as opposed to poetry or fiction?

A: For fiction or poetry, often I'm not in my own house but a retreat situation at a favorite remote inn in the wilderness, or I've checked into a hotel in another town. I work twelve to fourteen hour stretches, late into the night, sleep until midmorning.

I can go days without leaving the room. I immerse myself, in other words. The food writing is in a way a form of technical writing, so I equate it more with my profession than with art. It is done in snatches and usually at the breakfast table, where I originally started working on it in the early days of *Blue Moon Vegetarian*. The poetry and fiction require me to be separate, to vanish into it.

Q: How do you start a project? What process do you follow to get yourself through an entire book?

A: Long ago I adopted Anne Lamott's 4x6 file card habit. I have 4x6 cards everywhere. I jot notes like a maniac. I keep a journal and a devoted notebook. Getting through an entire book is an internal process. A relationship. I can't stand it until I've reached the end. I literally get sick if I can't get a book out of me. It's brutal pain. Imagine carrying a baby that you never give birth to? It festers. That happened with *Jagged Edge of the Sky*. I had to give up my academic teaching job and go write it. Fortunately for me, two years later, once I had a decent rough draft, they took me back.

Q: Who are your favorite living writers? Why?

A: Lidia Yuknavitch and Lance Olsen. Because they are cultural trailblazers. They both were instrumental in teaching me that the shape of the story is not what is important, what's important is breaking it open to reveal the unexpected. The goal of a story is to jar the reader awake. They taught me that what is real is not what we've been told is real, and what is real to you is not real to anyone else. That makes you responsible for telling the truth as only you can, and in a way that only you can.

Q: Who are your favorite "writers past," or late writing predecessors?

A: Franz Kafka. James Joyce. Italo Calvino. Virginia Wolff. Bell Hooks. Beryl Markham. Adrienne Rich. Anne Sexton. Sylvia Plath's poetry, but not her prose. I love Octavia Butler and Margaret Atwood. Clarice Lispector. Plenty of others, but, I have to say, my all-time favorite remains John Steinbeck. He's the Woody Guthrie of the literary world. He understood the plight of the unknown, the uncelebrated, and the rural.

Q: What advice do you have for people who want to write but are afraid to start?

A: Writing is something we should all be doing. It's part of keeping a healthy mind. You might just write something that will matter—to yourself and the rest of us. In that case, what right do you have to hold back? Come to one of my workshops. I'll stand by just in case any bad monsters emerge from the wallpaper and try to cart you off.