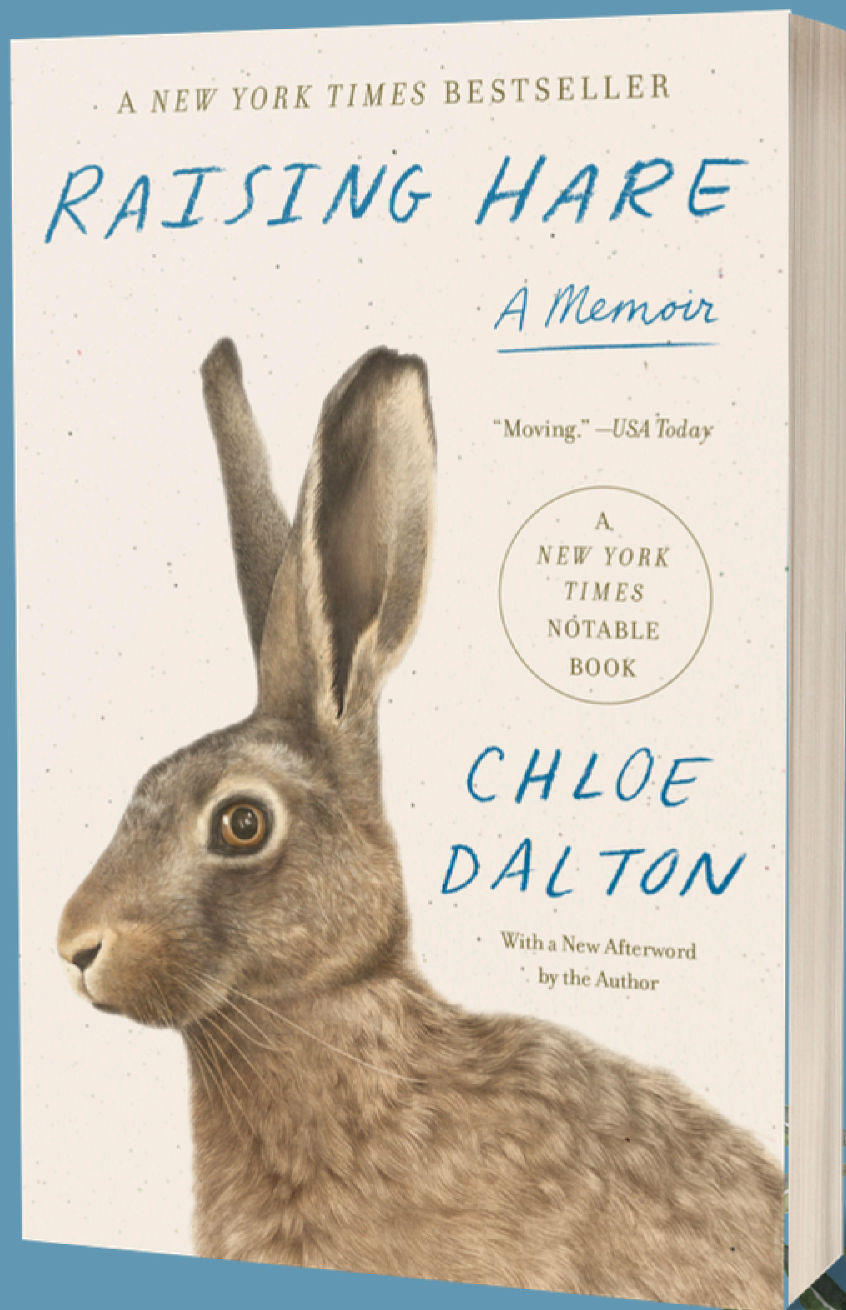
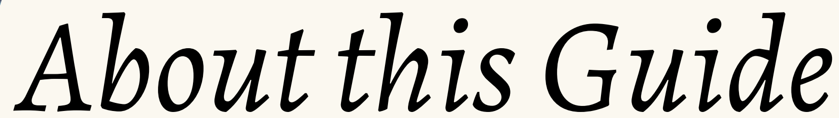
Raising Hare
BOOK CLUB KIT





About this Guide

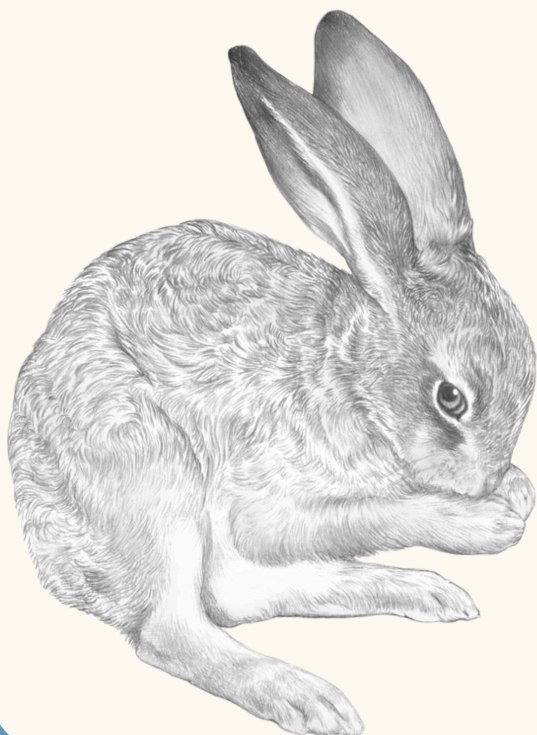
The questions, discussion topics, and other material that follow are intended to enhance your group's conversation of Chloe Dalton's memoir, *Raising Hare*—a fascinating meditation on freedom, trust, loss, and our relationship with the natural world, explored through the story of one woman's unlikely friendship with a wild hare.

Discussion Questions

- What does the relationship between the narrator and the leveret reveal about the nature of companionship?
- How does the author's perspective on nature change throughout the memoir?
- What role does loss play in the narrative, and how does it affect the narrator?
- Has the book made you think differently about the hare's place in culture and folklore?
- How does the setting of the English countryside influence the narrative?
- The memoir repeatedly returns to the idea of freedom, both the hare's and the author's. How does Dalton explore the tension between care and control, and where do you see this tension reflected in human relationships as well?
- Dalton comes to the countryside after a career defined by urgency, crisis, and movement. How does the pace of rural life (and of caring for the hare) challenge conventional ideas of productivity and success?

Discussion Questions

- Throughout the book, Dalton resists the urge to anthropomorphize the hare. Why do you think this restraint is important, and how does it shape the emotional impact of the story?
- The author often chooses observation over intervention. Were there moments when you disagreed with her decisions?
- Raising Hare invites readers to pay closer attention: to animals, landscapes, and fleeting moments. How did reading this book affect the way you notice the natural world in your own life?
- If you had been placed in the narrator's shoes, is there anything you would have done differently?



Author Q&A

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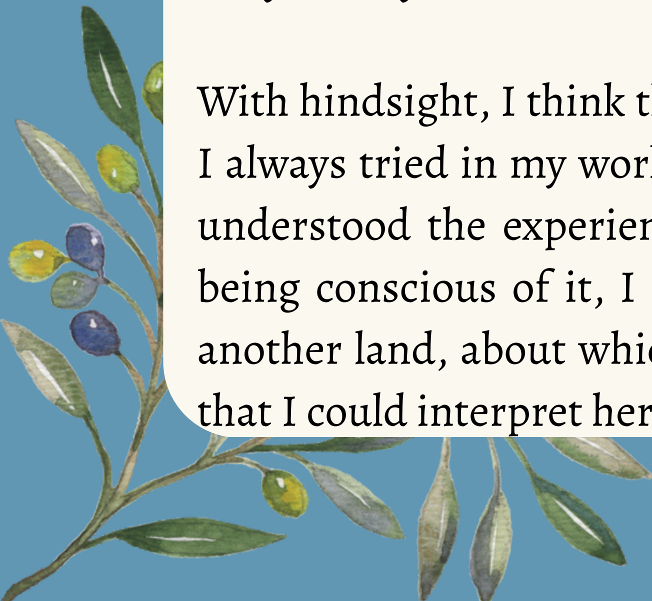
The book beautifully captures both the tenderness and the tension of caring for a wild creature. How did your relationship with the hare challenge or change your understanding of the natural world?

Well, thank you. The experience woke up my senses and brought me much closer to nature, after years of city life. It brought me peace and contentment. And it has made me think about the importance of the wild that remains: Most living things on earth now are humans, pets, and livestock. Wild animals, like the hare, are in a tiny minority, clinging on. I find that thought electrifying, and a reason to change some of my priorities.

You write with vivid precision about the countryside—the textures, sounds, and weather. Did your background as a foreign policy adviser shape the way you observe and describe nature? Why or why not?

With hindsight, I think that it did inform the way I wrote the book. I always tried in my work to avoid assuming that, as an outsider, I understood the experience of people in other countries. Without being conscious of it, I approached the hare as if she came from another land, about which I knew very little. I tried not to assume that I could interpret her behavior or emotional states. It also



helped, I think, that I'd lived so far from nature for many years, in the city. I had to relearn what I know about nature from first principles. I spent a lot of time walking the fields, trying to get a feel for a hare's world, sometimes dropping down into the grass to imagine the landscape seen through her eyes. Hares, for example, have a nearly 360-degree field of vision, something we humans can't even imagine.

Many readers have described Raising Hare as a meditative or even healing book. Did writing it have a similar effect on you?

I wrote the book with the hare alongside me, usually with her asleep across the doorway to my office. It meant that when I wanted to describe her fur or whiskers, I could study her. It gave the experience of writing the book immediacy and poignancy: I didn't know where the story would go, and knew that at any moment, it could come to an end. I spent hours at a time watching the hare and her leverets. I could feel my pulse slowing in those intervals. Irritations would drop away, time would slow, happiness would bubble up inside me. It was a very joyful experience, full of surprise and wonder. It rekindled a curiosity about the world that I hadn't felt so clearly since childhood.

The pandemic forms a subtle backdrop to your story. How did the stillness of that period influence your writing and your connection with the hare?

When I think about the strange confluence of events that brought

the hare into my life and made it possible for me to live alongside her for so long, it feels miraculous. As is so often the case with our most important experiences in life, it very nearly didn't happen. I could have easily missed that moment when the leveret was chased by a dog. I could not have gone outside to see what had happened. I could have decided not to intervene in the life of the leveret and let nature take its course. She was with me for nearly four years. I only wish it could have been even longer.

The book raises questions about freedom and control, about what it means to love something wild without possessing it. How did you navigate that emotional boundary?

It is not something I had ever thought about before. But it was clear to me, from the very first moments, that this was a wild animal that needed to be free, that could never be a pet, and that didn't belong in a human home. She had a faraway look in her eyes, limbs that were built for speed, fur that was intended to camouflage and protect her in the coldest temperatures. I never imagined that she would choose to live alongside me in the way she did, but the idea of caging her against her will was unbearable to me, instinctively.

Your life before this experience was fast-paced and global. How did the hare alter your sense of what "purpose" looks like, either personally or professionally?

I am still the same person—I love to travel, I care deeply about the

state of the world, and I am committed to the same values. But the hare did make me reconsider what constitutes a good life. I wrote in the book that, under her subtle influence, my own “wants” have simplified, and, on a practical level, I spend much more time in the countryside.

***Raising Hare* has been celebrated for its blend of memoir and natural history. Which writers or books guided or inspired you as you shaped this hybrid narrative?**

Thank you. I think it’s the accumulation of a lifetime of reading. I have always loved novels in which nature is a character, because the action is set at sea or in the desert and it involves a journey or struggle for survival. I read a lot of poetry growing up, from authors like Yeats and Tennyson, Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson, who evoke a certain feeling about nature and the landscape. I love adventure stories, sensitivity to language, and simplicity of style. In Garden of Eden, one of Hemingway’s characters says that to write well, you should “know how complicated it is and then state it simply.” That has always stayed with me.

Did You Know…? Hare Facts

Fascinating facts about hares that many people don't know.

1. **Hares are born with a full coat of fur and open eyes.**
    a. Unlike rabbits, which are born blind and hairless, hares are born fully furred, with their eyes open, and are ready to move shortly after birth.
2. **Most hares live all their lives above ground.**
    a. Unlike rabbits, which generally live in communal burrows underground, hares live all their lives above ground, exposed to the elements.
3. **Hares are surprisingly social animals.**
    a. Though hares are commonly viewed as solitary, compared with rabbits, they often spend time in proximity to one another, forming groups particularly during times of foraging and mating.
4. **Hares can run up to fifty miles per hour.**
    a. Their powerful hind legs make them incredibly fast, allowing them to escape predators with incredible bursts of speed.
5. **Hares can change color in winter.**
    a. Some species, like the Arctic hare and the snowshoe hare, grow a white coat in winter to blend in with snowy environments, providing camouflage from predators.

Did You Know…? Hare Facts

6. **Hares have extra-long ears for temperature regulation.**
    a. Hares' long ears aren't just for hearing; they also help regulate body temperature by releasing excess heat, which is especially useful in hot environments.
7. **Hares can leap up to ten feet.**
    a. Their powerful hind legs not only make them fast runners but also excellent jumpers, helping them evade predators in rough terrain.
8. **Hares have nearly 360-degree vision.**
    a. Due to the placement of their eyes on the sides of their heads, hares can see almost all the way around them, which helps them detect predators approaching from any direction.
9. **Hares' mating rituals are complex.**
    a. Hares' "boxing" behavior, often thought to be between two males fighting, is usually between a male and female. The female will "box" the male to test his endurance and persistence as part of the courtship process.

Excerpt

1

A Winter Leveret

"Siberians name hares by the time of their birth: nastovik (born in March, when snow is covered with crust), letnik (born in summer), listopadnik (born in the fall, when leaves fall from trees)."

—A. A. Cherkassov, Notes of an East Siberian Hunter, 1865

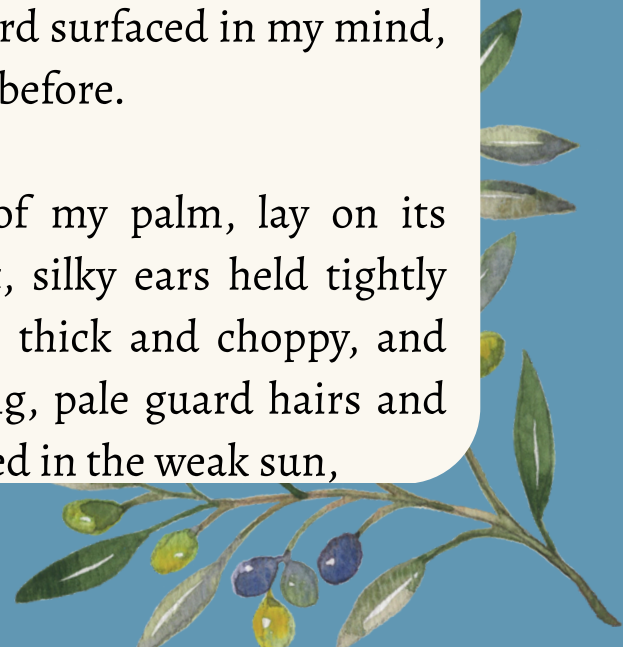
Standing by the back door, readying for a long walk, I heard a dog barking, followed by the sound of a man shouting. I jammed my feet into my boots and walked across the gravel to the wooden gate to look for the cause of the disturbance. There was no reason for a dog to be nearby. The barn where I lived stood alone in a broad expanse of arable farmland, quartered by streams and hedgerows and interspersed with stands of woodland. I had grown up with stories of poachers cutting locks and forcing open gates to drive onto the farmers' fields and into the woods, hunting deer and rabbits or setting their dogs to chase hares. More benignly, dogs had been known to bolt from their owners walking down the lanes, in pursuit of a rabbit or simply drawn by the open spaces, scattering sheep or disturbing nesting birds in the process. A zealous dog, panting from the chase, had jumped over the wall into my garden once the previous year, lunging at nothing and sawing the air with its tail in a playful manner before bounding up and off

and away. But such incidents were rare, and I was curious to know what was happening.

I leant on the gate and scanned the field, which rose in a gentle incline towards the horizon and then dropped out of sight. The sky was gunmetal grey. I ran my gaze along the hedgerows, over the expanses of bare stubble and lingering patches of slowly dissolving snow, and towards the dark silhouette of the nearest wood. Whatever dog had been on the loose was no longer visible. The wind cut at my cheeks with an icy edge. The white fog of my breath was whipped away. I fumbled in my pocket for my gloves, pulled my coat closer around me and set off for a walk.

The path I took was a short, unpaved track leading along the edge of a cornfield and emerging into a narrow country lane flanked with tall hedges overflowing with bramble and snowberry. The track, formed of two strips of hard-packed earth, was solid enough for a car to pass but pocked with potholes and puddles. I crested the skyline, deep in my thoughts, and began to walk down the slight slope towards the lane, when I was brought up short by a tiny creature facing me on the grass strip running down the track's centre. I stopped abruptly. Leveret. The word surfaced in my mind, even though I had never seen a young hare before.

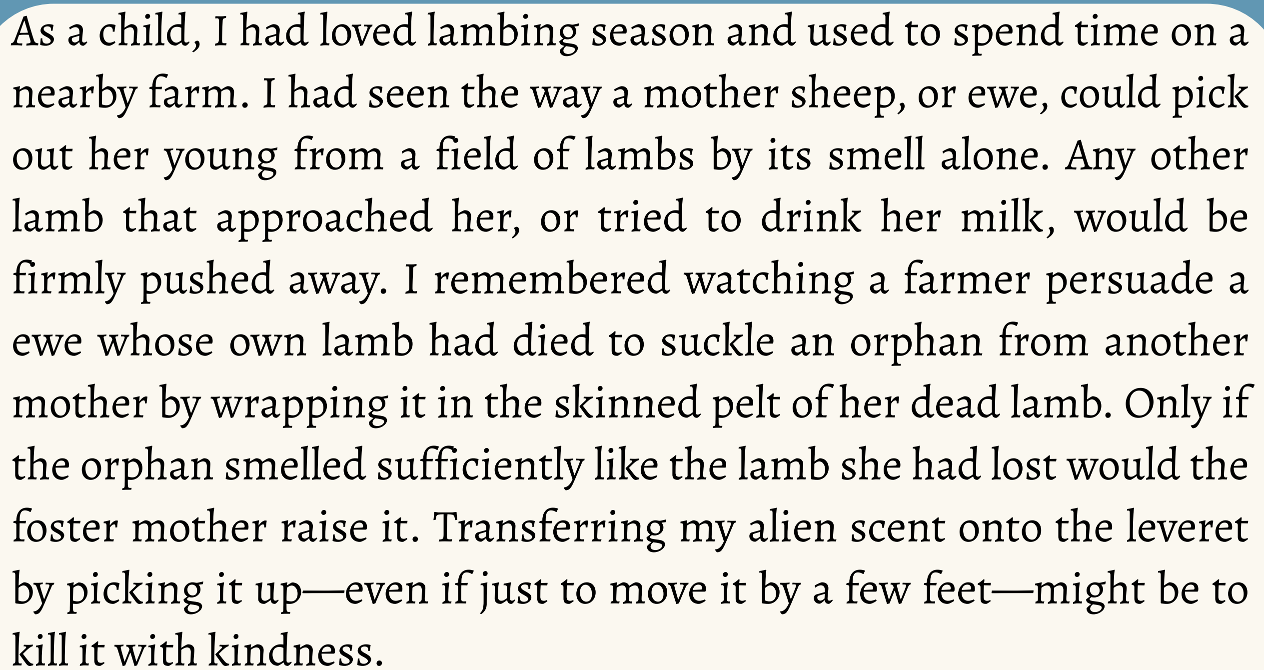
The animal, no longer than the width of my palm, lay on its stomach with its eyes open and its short, silky ears held tightly against its back. Its fur was dark brown, thick and choppy, and grew in delicate curls along its spine. Long, pale guard hairs and whiskers stood out from its body and glowed in the weak sun,



creating a corona of light around its rump and muzzle. Set against the bare earth and dry grass it was hard to tell where its fur ended and the ground began. It blended into the dead winter landscape so completely that, but for the rapid rise and fall of its flanks, I would have mistaken it for a stone. Its forepaws were pressed tightly together, fringed in fur the colour of bone and overlapping as if for comfort. Its jet-black eyes were encircled with a thick, uneven band of creamy fur. High on its forehead was a distinct white mark that stood out like a minute dribble of paint. It did not stir as I came into view, but studied the ground in front of it, unmoving. Leveret.

The gaping mouths of rabbit burrows beneath trees and banks, and the flash of their inhabitants' white cotton-ball tails, were familiar sights from my childhood. But hares were rare and secretive, only ever glimpsed from afar, in flight. To see a leveret lying out in the open—or at all—was very surprising. The most likely explanation for its exposed position was that it had been chased, or picked up and dropped, by the dog I'd heard, and had ended up lost on the track.

I considered the options. I could leave the leveret where it was, hoping that it would find its way back into cover and be retrieved by its mother before it was found by a predator or crushed by the wheels of a passing car. I could pick it up and tuck it into the long grass, with the risk—I thought—that its mother might not be able to find it since it could have been carried or chased some distance from its original hiding place, or that she might reject it.



As a child, I had loved lambing season and used to spend time on a nearby farm. I had seen the way a mother sheep, or ewe, could pick out her young from a field of lambs by its smell alone. Any other lamb that approached her, or tried to drink her milk, would be firmly pushed away. I remembered watching a farmer persuade a ewe whose own lamb had died to suckle an orphan from another mother by wrapping it in the skinned pelt of her dead lamb. Only if the orphan smelled sufficiently like the lamb she had lost would the foster mother raise it. Transferring my alien scent onto the leveret by picking it up—even if just to move it by a few feet—might be to kill it with kindness.

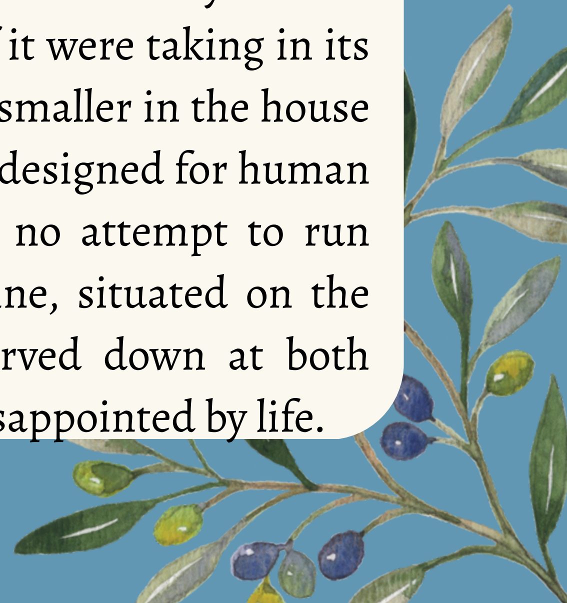
It seemed impossible that the fragile animal at my feet could survive by itself in a landscape teeming with dangers, including foxes and the hawks I often saw hovering close to the ground before closing their wings and dropping like stones upon their prey. The leveret had no protection against these earth-dwelling or sky-borne killers. However, I knew that human interference could do more harm than good, so I decided that I had better let nature take its course. I would leave the leveret where I had found it, in the hope that it would hurry into the long grass as soon as I had gone, and be reunited with its mother. I counted the number of fence posts so I could remember the spot and went on my way.

When I returned, four hours later, I had almost forgotten the leveret. But there it was, on the open track, exactly as I had left it. It lay without a scrap of cover, with buzzards wheeling in the sky above, keening mournfully like lost souls. I hesitated, considering the several hours of daylight that still remained. It seemed odd that

the mother hare had not come back to reclaim her young, as I thought she surely would have done. I weighed the possibility that the leveret had been injured by the dog, or that its mother had been killed. In either case, if it did not move from the track, the chances that it would be hit by a car or attacked and eaten increased the longer it lay in the open.

Acting on instinct, and still uncertain about the right course of action, I decided that I would take the leveret home until nightfall, when I would return it to where I had found it. To avoid touching it with my hands, I gathered several handfuls of the dead grass fringing the track. I crouched down on the ground, half expecting it to dart away. It did not flinch. I placed one hand on either side of the leveret's body, and lifted it carefully to my chest, wrapped in the grass, before walking the few hundred yards to my back door.

Once home, I placed the leveret anxiously on a countertop so I could examine it for injuries, wrapping it loosely in a new yellow dust cloth to continue to avoid directly touching its fur. To my relief, I could find no sign of bleeding or a wound. It pushed itself up on trembling front paws, each barely half the length of my little finger and as slender as a pencil, and sat unsteadily on its hindquarters, blinking, its nostrils flaring as if it were taking in its strange surroundings. The leveret looked even smaller in the house than it had on the track, dwarfed by any object designed for human purposes. But it seemed unafraid and made no attempt to run away from me. Its mouth was a tiny sooty line, situated on the underside of its rounded little head and curved down at both corners as if the leveret were already slightly disappointed by life.



Its ebony eyes had the faintly milky, purple sheen of many newborn creatures. Its whiskers were short and stiff, while its hind legs bent at a sharp angle, its rear paws almost half as long as its body.

I rang a local conservationist, formerly a gamekeeper, to explain what had happened and ask for advice. He quickly dispelled my notion that I could return the leveret to the field. He told me that even if it could somehow find its mother, she would reject it, since it would now smell of humans despite my precautions. Moreover, he said that in decades of working on the land, he had never heard of anyone successfully raising a leveret. "You have to accept that it will probably die of hunger, or shock," he said, speaking kindly but bluntly. "I've met people who have reared badgers and foxes, but hares cannot be domesticated."

I felt embarrassed and worried. I had no intention of taming the hare, only of sheltering it, but it seemed that I had committed a bad error of judgement. I had taken a young animal from the wild —perhaps unnecessarily—without considering if and how I could care for it, and it would probably die as a result. My heart sank.

I grew up abroad with my parents, who worked overseas, and my three siblings. We returned to England during the holidays, to visit family, and my childhood summers were spent at our home in the countryside. My mother had an extraordinary way with animals, and I remember a succession of hedgehogs and baby jackdaws and even a greenfinch, rescued from the jaws of a crow, that she nursed back to health, to my delight. I loved those days, but as I finished school and later university, I set my face towards London and the

world beyond.

The years that followed took me steadily away from the countryside. Life, and its beating heart, lay for me in the city, where I was drawn into the world of politics and foreign policy, working as a political adviser. I developed ideas and strategies for public figures, helped put their thoughts into words, and stood by them in the "war room" in a crisis, working with a close team of equally committed people. Antoine de Saint-Exupéry, author of The Little Prince, wrote that "there is no comradeship except through unity on the same rope, climbing towards the same peak," and he might as well have been describing the single-mindedness that animated me and my colleagues. We used to joke that in another time, during a coup or revolution, when everyone else had fled, we would be the last to go down.

If I had an addiction, it was to the adrenaline rush of responding to events and crises, and to travel, which I often had to do at a few hours' notice. I avoided fixed plans that would remove the flexibility to take a bag and go, and what I missed of holidays and family occasions I believed I gained in novel, unrepeatable experiences and exposure to parts of the world I might otherwise never have seen: glimpses of Bamako, Baghdad, Kabul, Algiers, Damascus, Ulaanbaatar, Tallinn, Sarajevo and Siem Reap. Working on the weekends and over holidays became second nature. It would have been cruel to keep a pet at home under these circumstances, and I lacked the mindset for it. I worked on international crises involving people, and seldom considered animals. My time was spent in offices, meeting rooms and airports. I would not have

called myself a practical person. The last animal I had cared for was a white mouse named Napoleon I'd had when I was eight years old, and that had ended badly when the family cat overturned and opened his cage one day while I was at school, with predictable consequences.

When the centrifugal forces of the pandemic flung me home to the countryside and pinned me there, relief and awareness of my good fortune warred inside me with a deep restlessness and anxiety about the future. I struggled with the change of pace. A friend and colleague came with me when we shut our office. She and I maintained the strict rhythm of our working days and planned incessantly our return to the city. A baby hare had no place in any of the scenarios we had discussed or that I had envisaged for myself. On a solitary walk a few days previously, I had sat down on a rock by a stream that was little more than a rivulet, my boots squelching in the mud, the lifeless trees above me scarcely bleaker than my own thoughts, and indulged in miserable feelings about my own life slowing down to a commensurate trickle. And now—improbably—I stood over a wild creature that I would have to find a way to feed and keep alive.

The leveret waited patiently, oblivious to my thoughts. My friend, observing the scene, put my doubts into words. "Don't take this the wrong way, but I'm not sure this is a good idea," she ventured. "What will you do with it when you go back to London? Wouldn't it be better if you gave it to someone else—someone who actually knows about animals?" I had been thinking the same thing, but as she spoke, I felt an inner stubbornness stirring. I will work it out.

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Suggested Reading

What an Owl Knows by Jennifer Ackerman

The Hummingbirds' Gift by Sy Montgomery

Fox and I by Catherine Raven

American Wolf by Nate Blakeslee

Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer

The Sound of a Wild Snail Eating by Elisabeth Tova Bailey