





Discoveries: 'Nothing Daunted,' 'Lime Creek,'
'The Pianist in the Dark'
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By Susan Salter Reynolds
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"Nothing Daunted: The Unexpected Education of Two Society Girls in the West" by Dorothy Wickenden, Scribner: 320 pp., \$26

Dorothy Wickenden's grandmother, Dorothy Woodruff, was 29 when she set out for a remote Colorado outpost in 1916 to teach the children of homesteaders with her best friend, Rosamund Underwood. The young women, the privileged daughters of wealthy industrialists, had grown up in Auburn, N.Y., in the Finger Lakes region. Both women had attended Smith College, done the Grand Tour of Europe and were not married. They had grown up surrounded by intellectuals, entrepreneurs, suffragettes and reformers. Many men in their cohort were heading to Colorado, Wyoming and California to map, mine and "civilize" the West, but few women had the desire to live among the cowboys, miners and gold prospectors who were homesteading those states. Starting with her grandmother's letters, Wickenden has lovingly pieced together their year in Colorado,

a year that changed their lives forever. Both women were keen observers. They fell headlong in love with the vivid West, so unlike anything else they had previously seen. "It was the first time in my life," Rosamund wrote in an exuberant letter home after a night riding in the snow, "that I'd seen the sun set, moon rise, the moon set, and the sun rise all in one night."

"Lime Creek" A Novel by Joe Henry, Random House: 142 pp., \$20

Joe Henry, a songwriter whose work has been performed by Frank Sinatra, John Denver and many others, has written his first novel in a style so spare and deep that it could almost be sung aloud by the reader. It is not so much a story, a narrative, as it is a ballad, an insight into the relationship between a father, his three sons, their mother, the horses they break and tend, and the place at the foot of the Wind River Mountains where they live, Lime Creek. Here is the father, a young man of 20, sent from his home in Wyoming to the unfamiliar East for college, walking three miles from a train station to ask the love of his life if she will marry him. Here are the three boys they raise making a fire to heat the water for their bath. Here they are learning to live with horses, learning about the cold, getting to know the land around their home. Here they are navigating the loss of their beautiful mother, remembering her hair and the way she talked to dogs. Here is their father, eating alone. With such lyrical writing, it is astonishing how little information we need to embrace the feeling of a family we will never forget.

"The Pianist in the Dark" A Novel by Michele Halberstadt, Pegasus Books: 140 pp., \$22

Maria-Therese von Paradis, born in 1759, was a sensation in the court of the Austrian empress, her godmother and namesake. The daughter of the imperial secretary, she suddenly went blind when she was 3, in what everyone around her assumed was a hysterical episode brought on by trauma. Little Maria-Therese was a gifted pianist; by 17 she was a virtuoso, playing the work of her contemporary, Mozart, who was just three years older. The empress and her father hired the best doctors and the best piano teachers. But for Maria-Therese, blindness was a source of strength, heightened hearing, heightened senses, heightened awareness of the world and of the emotions of the people around her. When Franz-Anton Mesmer met her she was 9. He brought her into his home to cure the reluctant patient. Halberstadt connects the music, the colors and the raw feelings of this complex young woman whose critical connection to the world depends on darkness.

Salter Reynolds is a Los Angeles writer.