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THE FARAWAY NEARBY
By Rebecca Solnit
259 pp. Penguin Books. 2013.

Rebecca Solnit is a writer, historian, and activist (she inspired the term "mansplaining"). Here, in *The Faraway Nearby*, across thirteen essays, she is daughter, traveler, empath, a preserver of memory and fruits. The book is a meditation on creation and decay, form and formlessness. It is a somber reckoning of the storyteller's responsibility for and powerlessness over the story. "We think we tell stories, but stories often tell us" (4). Does life sustain art, or does art sustain life? Like Scheherazade in *The Thousand and One Nights*, Solnit weaves an endless, circular tale. The table of contents folds in on itself; the first chapter "Apricots" mirrors the last chapter "Apricots," and so on. Endings do not end and yet, all is ephemeral. The storyteller tussles with the story. Along the way, Solnit tells of the arctic climes in Greenland, and a Roni Horn sitework in Iceland. She analogizes her mother in the throes of Alzheimer's disease as "a book coming apart, pages drifting . . ." (11). She likens an all-white chess set designed by Yoko Ono to an autoimmune disorder, "struggling to keep track of whose piece was whose" (223). Grasping, Scheherazade-esque, Solnit adds a one-line saga spanning the footer. It's about how we drink stories like moths "drink the tears of sleeping birds" (3). "Metamorphosis [is] inevitable" (80). A finalist for the National Book Critics Circle Award, *The Faraway Nearby* is a bonfire of wit and grace. We are held equally rapt by invention and evanescence. —Lisa Thaler (author of *Look Up: The Life and Art of Sacha Kolin*), 29 May 2021