

When America's most-celebrated network TV news anchor wants to broadcast nightly from a ranch in Southwestern Idaho, he meets resistance, uncovers small town secrets, encounters dangers and discovers much about nature and about himself.

HOVER POINT

By Eric E. Wallace

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HOVER



POINT

A Novel

ERIC E. WALLACE

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Also by Eric E. Wallace

UNDERTOW

HOAR FROST

STONERISE

EMPEROR'S REACH

THE IMPROVISER

MIND AFTER MIND

Chapter 1

Canyons of the West

Hurtling toward the earth, the falcon looked like an oblong, gray-brown stone flung from the heavens, a chunk of meteorite plunging to destruction.

Graeme sensed the movement, half-turned, saw the raptor complete its stoop. A precision talon strike. A tiny *ppfft!* A miniscule eruption of fur, blood, dust, and the bird was almost-immediately aloft, carrying its limp prey over the canyon rim toward an unseen nest.

“What was that?” Lara asked. She took a cautious step away from the edge of the overlook.

“Nature at work. Falcons one, ground squirrels zero.” Graeme’s smile became a squint. The sun was back out in full fury and glory.

Lara shielded her eyes. “It’s not really a game, though, is it? Out here, death’s too obvious. One reason I prefer the city.”

“Right. No death there.”

She gave him a look of exasperation but said nothing.

Graeme gazed across the canyon’s airy expanse. The distant basalt walls were striated with dark bands of brown and black, stubborn thin lines of green. Several hundred feet below, the lazy curves of the Snake River glittered as the waters journeyed west.

“It’s amazing,” Graeme said. “This was all carved out by flood and fire thousands of years ago.”

“So, is it the flood or the fire that’s making my knees tingle?”

He grinned. "It's more likely fear of heights."

Lara nodded glumly. "An odd thing for an architect, yes? It's often enough I tromp about an assortment of high-rises under construction. Those don't seem to get to me as much as..." She shivered and took another step back. "But boy, couldn't they have made this so-called safety wall a tad higher?"

In the bright, vast openness beyond where she stood, ravens frolicked in the updrafts, mocking her timidity. Breezes brought low oily odors of warming sage and winterfat.

Graeme stood behind his wife and put his arms around her. "Lord, I never tire of this view. It just confirms my decision. And I think I've got the clout to pull it off."

"Oh, I don't think they'll give in that easily. Clout all you want." She wriggled playfully. "Shout, pout. Throw temper tantrums. The network's like any other corporation. Solid, stolid, mostly medieval in their thinking." She pulled free and faced Graeme. "Why should they let their fair-haired boy do what he wants?"

"Precisely because he's their fair-haired boy. Take Graeme Stockbridge out of the equation and Firth's got what? The usual set of interchangeable anchors and reporters. Switch channels and it's all the same."

Lara smiled at him. "Full of yourself, are you? Just because you have great looks, exceptional talent, abounding charisma, a decent brain..."

"...and I have you, don't forget that."

"Yeah, but seriously, Graeme—I don't want to live in Idaho year 'round."

Hover Point

He took her hands in his. “Well, hell, then we’ll be bicoastal, bi-intermountain, whatever it’s called.”

“Shit.” She pulled free. “You’re asking me to make the most of it.”

“I suppose I am.” Unbidden, his right hand traced the prominent scar on his cheekbone.

Lara sighed. “Well, let’s see what the network says. I’ll bet the big cheese—what’s his name, Crank?—puts the kibosh on it.”

“It’s Kirk, Everitt Kirk. But I like the name Crank. It kinda fits him.”

“Well, regardless, let’s not fuss over it for now.” Lara looked out at the canyon. “You know,” she mused, “I could design a bridge for this place.”

“A bridge?”

“An amazing, impractical, joyful, possibly impossible bridge from right about here, soaring above it all, ending at, say, that big craggy prominence ‘way over there.” She pointed.

Graeme frowned. “Ugly towers, giant cables, messy supports, that sort of thing?”

“No, none of that.” Her eyes danced. “My bridge would defy physics, metallurgy, aerodynamics, canyon winds...”

“...common sense?”

She laughed. “Yes, defy that too!” She took his hands again. “You want to upgrade broadcasting? I’d love to redefine architecture. And I—wooh!” She cringed.

A prairie falcon had risen silently from below the edge. Only a few feet away, it hovered in front of them as if weighing them as intruders, perhaps considering them as prey. As they gaped at the accusatory eyes, thin brown moustache and sharp, blue-topped beak, the bird banked, climbed, vanished.

“That’s one reason I want to live here year-round,” Graeme said. “Unfiltered nature.”

Lara returned from watching the falcon to staring across the canyon. “A hover bridge,” she told him quietly. “I’d figure a way to make my bridge hover, float in the air.”

“Then we have a deal.”

But both knew they really didn’t.

“**Stalagmites.** Urban stalagmites.” Graeme studied the distant upthrust cityscape as their limo labored through the push-pull traffic. “Not pretty.” A baleful chorus of horns seemed to endorse his sentiment.

Lara glanced up from her drawings. “Hey, cool it, buster. I might have had a hand in a couple of those beauties.”

“Maybe some of them—yours especially, of course—are beautiful in isolation. But not as—what?—a bunch of glass and concrete mushrooms crowding together.”

“Excuse me, Mr. Stockbridge,” their driver called. “You want me to try Lucas, loop around to Wilshire?”

“Sure, Harry. But next time you pick us up at LAX, use a helicopter, would you?”

Harry dutifully laughed. Lara lowered her sketch pad. “So, what’s wrong with mushrooms?” she said. Her soft jasmine perfume tangoed with the scent of supple leather.

“Maybe it’s more about mushroom clouds. I try hard not to think about mushroom clouds,” Graeme said. “Nuclear-wise, the North Koreans are moving out of the stone age, and God knows what wasp’s Armageddon they’ll stir up.”

“You don’t usually mix metaphors, or whatever that’s called.”

“It’s called my trying not to get sucked into worrying about—or even thinking about—the news while we were gone. Did you hear me mention you-know-who even once the last two weeks?”

Lara waved a pencil. “If you mean our ex-president, you moaned his name in your sleep quite a few times. But I decided not to be jealous.”

“No need. He’s not my type.” Graeme thumbed his I-phone and scowled. “Well, Trump and all the other sins and sinners of the world await me tomorrow. A good meal tonight might be in order. OK if we eat out? Maybe at Fia? Just go right there. Sautéed mushrooms instead of nuclear ones.”

“Great. But will they have a table on short notice?”

“Celebrity has its perks.”

She put a hand on his knee. “I like it when you flex your power, Mr. Stockbridge. You’re awfully cute in your Idaho farmer overalls, but Famous Newsman is a bit more commanding.”

“If I get my way, I’ll have the best of both worlds. I can do my broadcasts with a long bit of straw dangling from my mouth. Meantime...” Graeme leaned forward. “Harry, a slight detour for the country bumpkins. Would you please take us to Fia in Santa Monica instead of to the condo?”

“Would you prefer to go by limo or by chopper, sir?”

“Harry, you’re a smart ass.”

“Chauffeuring has its perks, sir.”

The two rock pigeons on the cornice were dozing in the dying sunset. A breeze tugged at their feathers but the birds didn’t stir.

“Not exactly raptors,” Graeme said. He looked past the birds to the broad panoply of high roofs, towers, spires and deep ravines, at the emerging lights, white and neon, steady, twinkling, flashing. A police helicopter hovered in the middle distance, turned, glided north, ascending into the orange-streaked sky. It was all a silent movie—no engine noise, no traffic complaints, no winds, no pigeon cooing. Triple-paned glass did its job.

Lara stood beside him. “Fat like us after a great meal, those two.”

Graeme, nodded, sipped his scotch.

“Now on my buildings,” Lara said, “those birds wouldn’t have a place to perch. No stray ledges, cornices, finials, odd little gewgaws, frippery decorations. I mean, thirty floors up, why did someone put that stuff into their design?”

“Because they could?”

“Hm, more like because sleek wasn’t a word back then. And there were few thoughts of wind patterns, acoustic repercussions, solar reflections, shadowfall...”

“Not to mention very few thoughts about earthquakes, I’d guess,” Graeme said. “Lots of extra concrete chunks to fall on people below.”

Lara turned back to survey the large living room. “Well, I like our condo anyway. It’s what’s inside that really counts.”

“Now you sound like a life coach.”

Lara frowned.

Graeme smiled. “I like it too, you know I do, Lara. You did a fantastic job with the remodel.” He put his glass down. “And here’s my related thought. How ‘bout we build a new wing on the east side of the ranch house? Your design, your creativity, you supervise the construction, and it becomes your Idaho studio?”

“You know how to seduce a lady, but you’re not getting me to move there that easily.” She swirled her drink, clinking ice. “And I’ve already got a great place to work—in fact three places if you count the Westwood office. Five if you throw in San Francisco and Denver. Plus big support teams. Not to mention collegiality.”

“You like colleagues, don’t you?”

“Socially, sure. But mostly for the ideas, the sparks when we interact.”

“Lucky you don’t burn the place down.”

“Really, great designs come out of those sessions.”

“Lock two architects in a room and eventually they’ll come out with the Taj Mahal?”

“Cute, Graeme. Look, why don’t you go battle it out with the network? In the unlikely event they give you the green light to make sleepy little Idaho the broadcast capitol of the world, we can talk about my part in it.”

Eric E. Wallace

“I will. They will. We will.” He sat on the arm of a couch. “And if I sound like Julius Caesar, so be it...”

Lara pointed her glass at him. “Ah, but you’ve forgotten one thing, Julius—the Ides of March.”

Graeme laughed, flopped sideways onto the couch, clutching at his chest. “*Et tu...and touché.*”

About the Author

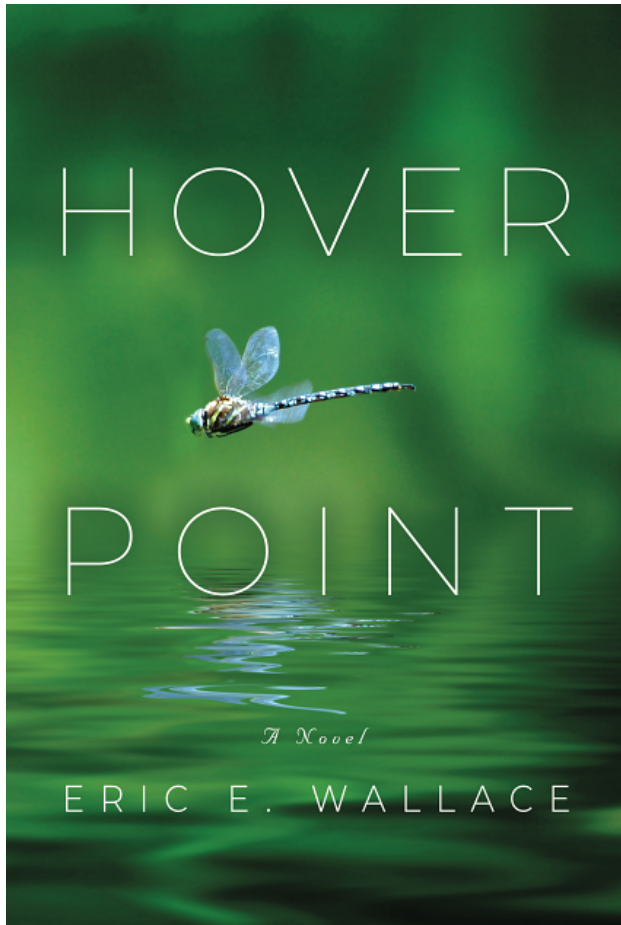
Eric E. Wallace writes fiction, poetry, plays and humor.

His work has been published in many literary journals and periodicals, including *Alaska Magazine*, *Alaska Quarterly Review*, *The First Line*, *Rosebud* and *Writer's Digest*, in more than a dozen print anthologies and online at *Writers Weekly*, *Idaho Magazine*, *Toasted Cheese Literary Journal* and elsewhere.

Hover Point is Eric's seventh book. His previous books, all published by BookLocker, are *Undertow*, a collection of eighteen of his short stories; *Hoar Frost*, containing seven stories; *Stonerise*, with nine stories; and three novels, *Emperor's Reach*, *The Improviser* and *Mind After Mind*.

Eric, who spent over 35 years on the air and behind the scenes in broadcast television and radio, now lives on five acres in Eagle, Idaho, with his partner Kathy McGowan. He's a member of the Idaho Writers Guild.

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