



Woundscapes: Visions at the Precipice



A collective exploration of wounds,
memory, and the natural world.

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Rite of the Sacred Wound
-N. Tz.

When, of a wilde-moon'd night
We traced our footsteps
Down the trail of our true-skins
In aureoles of rhythmic catharsis
And wept in exaltation of you
Oh Sacred Wound

Wound·scape

/wōōnd/skāp/

noun

- Any aspect of a landscape that has sustained violence, damage, or other forms of ecological trauma. This includes physical, emotional, and spiritual wounds inflicted upon its inhabitants by military actions, capitalism, colonialism, extractive industries, and the many-headed forces of dominance.

Dear Reader,

We invite you to embark on a journey, a pilgrimage into both familiar and uncharted territories, just beyond the edges of our comfort. This exploration should not be burdensome, and neither should it be free of pain.

We invite you to envision the wounds around you: those that you call home, those of your ancestors, or even those of your dreams. Call them in, breathe into these sacred places, wander their darkness, and celebrate what they have given you and what you have given them. Mourn the wounds they have endured, and trace their scars like a topographic map.

We invite you to immerse yourself in the delicate spaces—both within and beyond—where greed and disconnection have bred violence against our sacred bodies and our sacred Earth. The wounds we carry are intertwined with those of our beloved Earth. And likewise, the wounds of the Earth are ours to bear, nurture, and heal.

Francis Weller writes, “Bringing grief and death out of the shadow is our spiritual responsibility, our sacred duty.” By journeying through the darkness of the land, may we begin to honor and hold reverence for it—to be in relationship with it.

This collection of poetry is a continuum of a story both old and new. It is the Earth speaking through us, as it always has; aching and yearning and singing through the shadows.

Let this be a guide, a mirror, and a companion on your journey through the wounds we all share.

Of resilience and return,

-Severed Branches Press

Salmon Cycle: Part I

-Heron

I struggled,
resting under fallen Tree People.
We all struggled at first, our bodies weak,
pressed against one another.

The Winged Ones circled,
awaiting their chance to pull us toward Great Above.
The Clawed Ones watched us, eager to fill their bellies.
The Ones Who Return Our Bones, gathered at the edges of our world,
singing to us as we remembered the way.

I survived this final journey,
to share this world with you,
To release you from this
returning body.

I will protect you, young ones
Until skin falls from these bones.

You will remember me as you come to know yourselves

My skin is your skin,
My eyes, your eyes

Remember.

Stay together for as long as you can,

for wandering to Great Waters alone

is to know death

and to return home

to the beginning of it all

is to know

togetherness.

Vibrancy

-Lucas Schuster

I love this life
Beside the warming embers of frustration
And bubbling spring of grief
Pure and joyful, as rain falling upon the windswept pines of my mind
It all feels so effortless, and so painful
This warm breathing water
Sometimes, remembers when the sky and earth separated
And I can feel it in my belly
This pulling apart
Creating space for living things to grow
This thin line of green and songs
Held by an unfathomable sky
My quiet thank you, and endless tears
Are like lilies blooming beside a churning mountain stream
That the creator can hear and cares about
I love this life
Beside the howling of wolves shamelessly relieved of starvation
Where I am free to run along beneath the clouds
who are sitting still, as I long for peace
To be strong like the sunflowers, who turn each day to face the sun
And the beans who work so hard to become all of who they are
And give of themselves entirely each year
To those who carry their seeds-
I love this life
And my broken heart
Warm within the warren of my own care
And lonely as one of the last cedars to be felled
Spared
Perhaps or maybe not, by something resembling love
To look a great distance
Upon this thin line of green and songs
Turning quiet and pale
By hearts that are still good
Into a mist
That is the sky coming to sing with us
A song of joy, rain, grief, and thunder

Body

-Sophia Nothing

Omphalos. The navel of the earth.

Thick and viscous vapors spew hungry from a crack in the ground
known as the place from which all life began.

Coils of steam rise slow from the umbilical opening
to deliver messages of prophecy spoken with red-hot teeth
on the wet tongue of The Oracle.

A freshwater spring in Delphi still flows beside the ever changing and sometimes bodiless
Pythia- deliverer of divine intuition.

I look at my own point of corporeal beginning. The mark of connection to mother,
to womb,
to body.

Body.

Body. I carry mine with me like a weight on bones.

The skin my soul sticks to is sacred in its likeness-
a form equal in shape as that of the Gods we offer prayer to
Ancestral bodies that bled but live forever
through river, ocean, mountain, wood.

I see their image cast in stars I crane my neck to.
I hear them call from forests just to curl around my wrists like wisps of smoke.
I beg them to protect me from the harms that are not mine provoked.

Please, defend my body from shadows I have not yet learned to see
Do the gods know all that is to become of me?
Have my ancestors the keys to my fate?
I know not the answer to this lesson.

I live this life autonomously, in celestial beauty and poise.

I accept the humble mystery

yet I am all knowing.

My body belongs not to me, but to the earth, the gods, to dreams and to death. I choose this.

Heedless of these enamored revelations, I stare stupid at reflective black surfaces and succumb against
my will

with bent knees to mass submission of the false power of state.

I am reminded again of my body's claim to human keepers of time and place. The ones with Titles

Badges

Robes

wielding wooden gavels and matte metal guns on their belt

I buckle under the weight of ties that bind me.

I consult the oracle. I am all too trusting.

EMBALMED in BEDLAM : BETWIXT UBIQUITY

-CJH

Strength sought of wrought ideals

Grasped at with withered limbs

Gasping for the deeper breath that never comes

It calls to me ... Finality.

My roots, ascending towards the sky

Extending forever, I see with my eyes

As I say goodbye and wait to die

But weight, holds me to the ground

Grounded in the sound of perpetual silence

I await the holy essence of guidance

Creaking branches break the stillness as I still kiss the dirt beneath

As fingers sink to knots of mud and clay, this body to the earth I shall bequeath

Absolute darkness, now, epitome of oneness and

ALL

Blind and mute, deafening silence

Gaining momentum towards disentrall

The ground gives way and I.

.. Am floating now, imponderous

A faint speck emerges, proliferating voluminosity

Does it approach me, or I it?

Impetuously, it morphs into blaze

I understand now.

The radiant glow of my own heart

It leaves my body and takes me by the hand

Careening through spiral of asymmetry

It no longer matters which direction I am headed

knows It

the way ...

Salmon Cycle: part II

-Heron

Memories of mother rest like Stone People
Unmoving, touching everything at once

Our movement is mother's movement

We have mother's-eyes
We have mother's-skin

Tree People fall when Great-Above lays too many eggs
Their bodies, returning over our bodies, shelter us young-ones
until we become old ones, ready for our return

Where are the songs?
The Ones Who Return Our Bones?
They cannot be heard, cannot be felt
Our world, wounded?

Fast movements in the Great-Above, an unheard song
Death Song Without End
Everywhere, falling Tree People
My mother's-eyes have not seen this.

Woundmakers move like Beast With No Eyes.
Great-Waters, show me the way

With mother's-eyes
We look all the way back

No darkness, no shadow like this have we seen,
No song like this have we heard.

Death-Song Without End.

And the Tree People fall faster, all of them
Faster they fall on our home, crushing us all
The Great-Above is wounded

Mother's-eyes remember the way,

our bodies follow

"Move fast, to Great-Waters"

Our strength,
our bodies,
one body.

Mother's-eyes,
mother's-skin,
remember the way.

Deer Spirit Whispers to the Unknowingly Lost

-Sammy Fielding

Whilst writing my own eulogy
A young doe sacrificed her body
Bludgeoning me out of my darkest inner abyss
Into the present
The passing of life before me
What truly matters
Kneeling beside a mangled mass
Beard full of tears, hands on her fur
Welling with grief and guilt
...We built a death trap through your home...
This sweet girl cannot be left here
I will harvest her flesh until dawn
And eat deer meat as the sun rises
And all made sense for awhile

Until the whispers came again, louder
As I'd forgotten the lessons from before
Down another dark hole, of love's blind corridor

"Live and love in the present
Appreciate all the beauty before you,
with gentleness and acceptance"

More damage this time, but no tears
Heavy with the weight of death
The sound of shattering antlers
That big open eye
Staring into me as it passed on
And it was time for me to listen

Anthem for Anamnesis

-Marlene Seven Bremner

Grave is the task set before us now
in these days of reason's waning,
to remain steadfast in our hearts
and not succumb to cynicism's
dimming of our light,
or misaligned ascension to some
height above the fray,
but to stay amidst the madness
without losing the Way.

To follow faithfully our cynosure
through the dark
that rises on all sides,
steady strides against assaulting gales
and clear minds unassailed
by deception's far-reaching tongue.

To resist the compulsion to blame
and name the enemy without,
yet ever taking up arms of love
for Truth that knows no sides,
doubtless about the purpose
of our flame.

Though perilous the path ahead,
beset by treacheries unspeakable,
there will be sunlight in our eyes,
birdsong in our hearts,
and fluttering wings in the space
between our breaths,
because we are the forest
and all that therein lies.

We are the skies
and the water below,
the wind in the trees
and the ones who know
that the wounds we inflict,
aching, stabbing, burning
are felt in one Body.

Seeing so clearly
that Nature is our mirror
the reflection of our callousness
descending in the raging tempest
and crying out, we try
to turn a maddening tide into retreat
by the Beauty and the Good
that can never be broken,
indivisible, *To Hen!*

In Mnemosyne's pool
we cry in reflections of sorrow
to remember, remember, remember
that we are
yesterday, today, and tomorrow.

If we could wash away the blood
with our tears
we could never cry enough;
for some wounds aren't meant to heal,
poison dripping arrow in our side.

We abide in our cave of life and death
licking wounds of soul and flesh
that the wisest of us know
will never close.

And so should it be
to remind us of our task—

To carry them a little longer
and make of them a story
that never ends,
tending the flame of one made deathless, and
fire to fire
we burn brighter,
sparks to stars rising and falling
in the long night ahead.



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Ancestors and Silence
-leucanthemum, Duwamish River

I descend below the clouds, gazing out over green hills
Grids of sheep and cattle, latticed by miles of hedgerows
Remnants of an ancient rainforest, now just borders between crops

I step out on tarmac, just the most recent method of conversion
Missionaries, farmers, urban planners—generations and generations of replacement
As the wild animals disappeared, so did their human cultures

The city noise conceals a silence, but one I notice instantly
No relatives to welcome, no elders to bless
But my ancestors are rejoicing, beckoning me to places where they still speak

My first stop, the largest river in this land
Vast biodiverse floodplains now just a canal for pub patios and yacht moorings
I place my palm on placid surface, whispering a water teaching from where I live:

"I do not come here to harm you. I come that I may share your medicine with my family."

Traveling south, crumbling walls of long ago imperial forts and outpost churches
Filled with the same flint used by indigenous hunters these structures were built to keep out
They carved hides, lit fires, caught food, honed weapons, crafted regalia

I happen upon an exhibit of a local anti-road forest defense from 30 years ago,
Moved to tears by the courage of relatives who lived up in these trees
To protect them from the chainsaw, the bulldozer—just the latest in a long history of enclosure

The same road system now threatens this land's most well-known sacred site, not far away
As I walk this stone circle, under the noise of too many tourists, I hear that familiar silence
The ancestors are here, but the meanings of this place are too far away now to maybe ever know

Thousands of years and thousands of miles separate me from my place and my culture
But I visit a living museum, where citizen scientists reconstruct ancient village sites
The thatch roundhouse reminds me of the teepee and longhouse, and I feel an echo of belonging

I follow the coastline to a national park where the courts are about to take away the right to camp
In the last place anywhere in the country; as I pitch my tent, I wonder how far we've come
That the most basic birthright of sleeping under the stars has become a defiant act

Every day I come across ancient yews and oaks, and more stone circles and burial grounds
And decide that even if the songs and teachings of the spirits of these places are forgotten
I can still offer a prayer of my own, something new but maybe even old:

*"All that I am and all that I have comes from you. Thank you.
All that you are and all that you give, you share with all.
Thank you."*

I find myself at the harbor where one of my ancestors who decided to leave this homeland
May have stepped onto the ship that sailed for the New World some four centuries years ago
A ship carrying destruction and pestilence, made of the same tree that once was worshiped here

I pass through a town that's become this country's hotspot for new age spiritual quests
So many people searching for meaning, filling an emptiness, grasping at answers
I want to tell them the silence can't be covered over so easily, too much has been lost

On the side of the road, I find a badger, recently run over, and try to offer some ceremonial rest
This would sadly be my only wildlife encounter of the whole journey
An incredible animal I'd read about since my youth, numbers dangerously dwindling

I'm shocked to come across an interpretive sign saying how there used to be salmon here
Just like back home, the rivers were all leveed and dammed for farms and electricity
And, like back home, they're trying to bring the salmon back, but it might be too little too late

In the far north, weeks into the trip, I for the first time hear someone speak my ancestral language
Something awakened, something more than silence, a quickening of heart
Linguists say it might be gone within our lifetime, too few left to pass it on—a literal silence

Wandering coastal cliffs and mountain valleys, I spot old stone structures, hidden in the grass
Not the five-thousand year old sort, but just a few hundred, and learn
That the native families were forced from their homes, left either to die, assimilate, or emigrate

Was this why my great-great grandmother left this land, to escape the birth pangs of capitalism?
As I grieve what she left behind, and what might never be recovered, I wonder
Is it really silence after all, if the ancestors are still speaking?

Magus

- Vanessa Skantze

for Donald Miller, guitarist extraordinaire

You brought the sea.

You brought the sea.

Where there was an arid space I sought to infect and encompass;

with words and sound and tensile fighting form--

I and I alone, making a world in a realm of affliction.

Of countless bars not reached.

I had no trust that space was waiting for me and that something could hold me, join me,

allow me a place to, at last, listen.

Listen.

And hear the inside space more keenly than ever I had

when all the outside pressed upon me

with its unceasing dare for me to pierce it and push through...

You brought the sea.

And I dove, and I surfaced.

And I heard the waves and remembered them inside my skin.

I heard the cries of birds cascading toward surf and rearing up again

and I was with them

I was them

I could be other, Other! in a realm not of my desperate making

and the weight of the line of arid, severed ones I came from fell away

And I was of, was within, the sea.

The sea beckoned to me: enter! and I dove, I crested, I drifted and dreamed

and there you were! a companion I had never known to seek.

You brought the sea.

You brought the forest.

A vibration of life so thick: a palpable verdancy filling the throat of silence

the deep breath and low hum of the ancients who knew time before the marauders;

before the severing and casting out from a place where the word home was not known

For there had never been anything else but home

The greengold become sound.

And I remembered bark like a second skin and sap like a blood twin

The scent of the loam thick with the fallen ones returned to earth

this was the moment of birth before breath was a slap and the cord cut and cast off.

You brought the forest.

You brought abandoned streets

the distaff of industry and ambition.

Ground charnel yet fecund for rats, crows, feral cats and all beasts scavenging

Where machines cast away from use

have become the talking drums of the dispossessed.

I listened.

I listened

I listened and this! was the way into the spirit life I felt but could not fall into and feel caught, held

For the burden of proof was a lead carapace I thrashed within never finding the frequency

to immolate it or myself

In yr sound came dissolution of that which I bore to save my skin

In yr sound came the awakening of what waited for the time when the realms returned to me.

The sea.

The forest.

The desolate streets teeming with anarchic scavengers and creatures reveling in their uselessness.

You brought the sound that reminded me I was instrument

And creator of worlds

with you

with any that would enter! Who would listen. Who would go.

You brought the sound that was sea and everything else.

I would not have become this now that I am without you.

This everything but myself; and more myself than I had ever been.

I bow to yr artistry; I embrace yr spirit.

You are with me in every dance. Beloved friend, bright star.

Fly swift. Fly strong on strings bowed to shudder and wave into infinity.

I will ride that with you.

A wave.

The sea.

Salmon Cycle: Part III

-Heron

Great Waters show us the way...

Home.

Home...

Where are you?

Home is not what mother's-eyes remember when we return
The Tree People are gone, but their roots remain
Holding on
Whispering to us of the time when we were in Great Waters
of the Woundmakers killing and trashing
taking away home after home

The roots they say:

The home you seek is beyond the Stone That Does Not Move. Forced
there by the Woundmakers. We tried to tell them to stop, but they just sang their Death Song Without
End. They cut us down, leaving nothing but our roots to burn under the remains of our flaming
bodies. The Windged Ones have left. The Clawed Ones have left. The Ones Who Return your Bones
still sing, but their voices are too far away, faint against the trashing of the Woundmakers. We are so
sorry. There is no way home...

We move forward as we always have
But this time mother's-eyes gaze upon the Stone That Does Not Move.
A stone bigger than any we have known.
We throw our bodies at this being, asking it to move

We want to return home,

To the beginning of it all

But you won't let us pass

The stone does not speak, only quietly hums the Death Song Without End

The roots they say:

We are sorry, Salmon People
We tried to tell the Woundmakers to stop, but they did not listen.

We don't think they can hear at all.

Beside the Heart Eater Monster

-Lucas Schuster

My heart is sweet
And the world is hungry
And busy
Eating sweet things
Until there is not very much left.
Buffalo and elk are sweet
And so are huckleberries and plums
I try to be brave beside them
Remembering all they teach us
And seeing so many of their fates
Being killed and exploited
And I wonder who might feed and care for us
But wild grasses and streams

I saw an elk once
His face was black
And his body white as snow.
He stood there all alone
Between two groupings of the heard
He was sweet, and I cried when I saw him.
So beautiful and unique and alone
Standing between them all
I know him in my tears.

I had a vision once, that I was bleeding upwards
Into the sky
Because I want for people to be full
I had a vision another time that I bled from my face
As tho weeping
Into a dry mountain creek bed
Because the spirits get sad when we sing only one song
And are hungry when we don't give anything back.
My brother advocated for my survival
He said my boundaries need cultivating.
I love him and it's true.
What is also true
Is that many who are called martyrs
Are those who live remembering something
That leaves them isolated in a fraying world
And where do I go with a heart
That is responsible to a world that has been forgotten and killed
And to a world that would have included me
And fed me too?

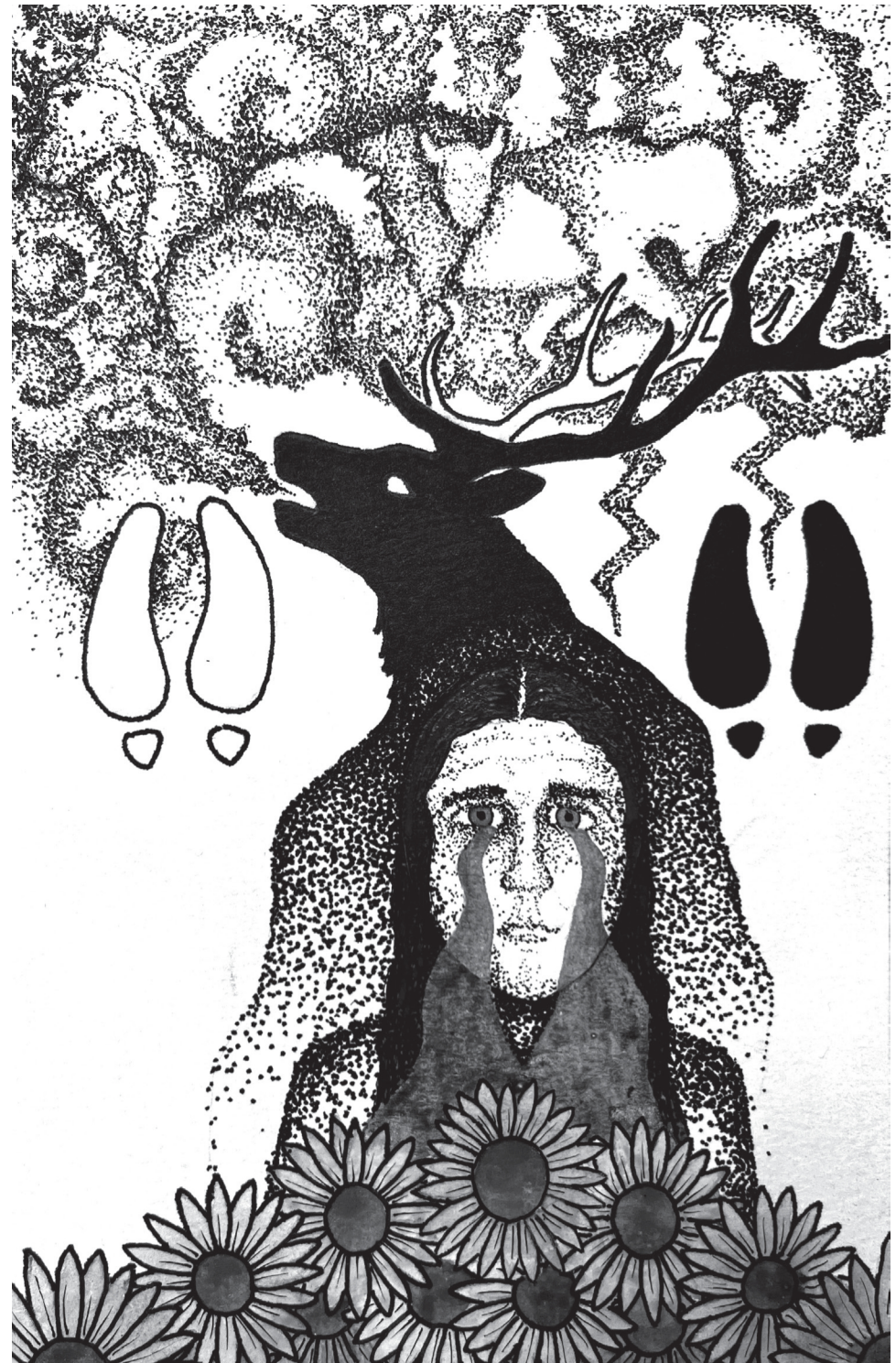
I lived with a grandmother who was born to that world
Where wealth was danced by impoverishing oneself
For those you love
And nothing was withheld to someone who was in need
And that's something that I know about
As I live in the world that killed her four brothers

And burned her long house
And the crying elk
And my beautiful blood
Spilling to the clouds and creeks
Who are weeping and hurt
From not being fed
Or celebrated for who they are

My heart is broken
At the bottom of a spring that keeps pouring
And in the soil that makes the world green
It's the same as my blood
And my kind heart
In the buffalo and elk, who were close to not being here any more
In the most ancient women who I have ever seen
Who looked more moon than human before she died
And saw both heaven and hell
And told me i'm not alone
And gives my voice power when I sing

I know an old man
His ancestors tears poured as bullets from his hands
When he was twelve
Toward the descendants of those who killed his grandmothers
He gave me his fathers knife
And told me he used it once to protect his mother
When he was nine

My heart is broken
In the truth
That all that has ever fed me
All that has ever given me life
Is from those who have sacrificed more than I have,
And my body is made of that understanding.
An elder once said
The root of the word "bless" is to bloody
So don't be confused when it hurts.
There is blood on the path that gives us life
Sweet hearts, are ordained-
In blood.



Wild Mother

-R. W. Ashentide

I found her,
in a vision

Children crying, mothers wailing in atmospheres of ash
The sky black; noxious air of chemical fume
The furnaces of abandon, glowing
of endless, unceasing death

Echoes of the Wild Mother, rang through hallowed ruin
Faint against gunfire and mechanized thrashing;
the songs of which end all songs

Black oil pools up from cracks in Earthflesh
Bubbling upwards from nightmarish depth
Flames spread crownward
To immolate the last barren tree

Wild Mother stood before me, glowing vines twisted across her body
Soot-skinned, eyes white as bleached bone

Her words came as whispers
Solemn, dispirited
Desperate, all at once

*Look upon my wounds, child
These wounds are yours to bare
Just as my dreams are yours, to contemplate
on this presipice without end.*

*I held you before you were born,
When you were just a soul, in a cradle of stars
Even now, as my children hold a knife to my throat
I will love endlessly
And even when you've shed all faith
I will hold you all, again*

And again

And again...

Come Great Wind

-ocean

Gag gassed greenglass
Pack torn rag
Ply smooth sand sphincter
Dark coat sneakers
Double bow knot then jet
To where the lumber stands
Crouch in night wasteland
Forth firebottle trembling
Snik of fingerfire casts dim flaxen globe
Cloth catches, then—
Heave—!
Shattercrack in tumorous woodskull
Spurt gas sprays pressboard
Ignites in gurgled whoosh
Blast of heat crackles and cackles
Spreads in bleachgold fans, in oxygen famish
Walls of inferno gorge
Fierce insatiable crow
Stumble back over framing nails and offcut
Roar of flickering suburb
Cobalt sky clenches
Splinter spatterwood
Dance the burnghost
Unborn structure groans and pops its
Song of burst cellulose
Smoke purls sparkspattered sky
Rising siren whine
Converse slap pave
Conceal boy in night's black wing
Watch redtrucks squeal
Glowing in gleam
Uncoiled hydrant tentacles hose steamsmoke
Under skyrivers the cinderous skeleton

Shudders and

Collapses

Blackly in dayshine cinder shines
Swirling ash a howl of renewal
...But in a month, dozers
Another month: orange flags line the rectilinear form anew
In the boy snakes coil
Still it rise stick on stick
The residential hivesquares
My adolescent home detreed for another blue-eyed nuclear
All over this burdened turtleback the city's silver scabs
Expand in malignant smoke
Come great wind
Breathe fire
Over all

Salmon Cycle: Part IV

-Heron

The Woundmakers continue their Death Song Without End.
Just as mother's-eyes remember,
the Stone That Does Not Move watches as we become few.

Mother's-eyes remember something else beyond—
a world we used to know, where the Tree People sheltered us.
Where are The Ones Who Return Our Bones?
Who sang to us
as we returned?

The Stone That Does Not Move just waits.
Waits for us to die.

It waits for the death of our children,
and all children who try to return home.
And the Woundmakers sing their Death Song Without End.

Our waters move too fast,
washing away our eggs.
No Tree People to protect us from the Great Above.

Our home, wounded.

There is nothing.

And there is nothing.

And there is nothing.

And there continues to be nothing.

No home.

Nowhere to return.

And then, a sound.

A great and powerful sound,
like all the Tree People falling at once.
Or the Great Above, laying its eggs
as its body cracks open with streaks of light.
The few of us who survived the journey from the Great Waters heard this sound,
this *song*, as we returned, *together*.

We struggled at first,
our bodies weak, pressed against one another.
The Winged Ones circled over us.
The Clawed Ones watched.
The Ones Who Return Our Bones—and even the Woundmakers—
gathered at the edges of our world, singing to us
as we remembered the way.

Home.

The Stone That Does Not Move, vanished
as our skins when we return.
It was broken into smaller stones,
and we laid our eggs amongst these smaller stones,
and they stayed,
safe within our waters,
within our home.

Remember, my children:

Stay together for as long as you can,

for returning home,

to the beginning of it all,

is to know

togetherness.

Mother's-eyes remember.



Communion — Ginko



Severed Branches
Press

