

# Circle of Seasons

Spring

2021



Cover

—

The Cracks Let the Light In—  
or, Life Lessons from Leonard Cohen

—

Katie Marrone

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This issue is dedicated to Amy Stubblefield: a pillar in our community gone too soon. A mentor. A friend. A mother. An advocate for countless survivors of domestic and sexual violence and stalking in Wallowa County. She was warmth and love, embodied.

Thank you for the light you brought to this county and to everyone who got to be in your presence. Thank you for the light that will continue, because of you.

And thank you, reader, for picking up this issue and witnessing.

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*If you or someone you know is contemplating suicide, please reach out. Let's fight the stigma of mental illness, together. It's strong to be vulnerable. It's okay to not be okay. And it's okay to need help. After all, we're not meant to do this life alone.*

National Suicide Prevention Hotline:  
1-800-273-8255

Wallowa Valley Center for Wellness:  
541-426-4524; 24/7 crisis line: 541-398-1175

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i need you to know

-

Marika Straw

*\*Content warning: suicide*

my dears

i need you to know

that you can be strong and still be vulnerable  
that reaching out for help  
is a sign of strength, not weakness

i need you to know

that even the people you think are perfect  
have their own demons and sometimes  
cry and rage or  
stuff it inside

i need you to know

that whatever you are going through  
you are not the only one

that we all go through Hard Things  
but there are people you don't even know  
(and even ones you do)  
who want you to be okay

i need you to know

that if you chose to leave this life  
we would miss you

i need you to know

that you need to tell your friends how much you  
love them

i need you to know

that as much as there are mistakes and heartbreak  
and confusion  
and hatred and loss and grief and suffering

there is also joy and love and beauty  
and compassion and forgiveness and goodness

i need you to know  
that if you ask me for help and i say no  
it's not because i don't love you,  
it's because i need to love myself so i can love  
you

i also need you to know  
that i don't even have the words  
for how much i love you

my dears  
i wish i could wrap you in an everlasting hug of  
goodness and warmth  
and chase away your loneliness to the moon  
and wipe away your tears and calm all your fears  
and surround you always with kindness

but the best i can do right now  
is tell you:

i need you to know  
that you are loved

*dedicated to the memory of Amy Stubblefield. we  
love you, Amy <3*

# The shape of an ending

—

Katie Marrone

*\*Content warning: suicide*

I write the map of this essay late, after midnight, after my blinds are closed, after the street lights have begun their dance between the cracks, after I wrap myself and wrap myself and wrap myself. Under.

I do this sometimes— when I can't sleep— my brain coloring and drawing and writing. First lines. Last lines. Hills of words I can crawl onto on all fours. My body, a mummy under white blankets. My body, the shape of a question mark.

*What happened that day? What were the clues? What could we have done? What could I have done?*

*How does one talk about suicide? What shape does that kind of loss take?*

\*\*\*

I knew I wanted to write something about her. About my former boss and mentor. About Amy, a growing friend. But I'm having trouble with the beginning.

Okay.

I knew she was hurting. I didn't know just how much. I knew she loved fiercely. Her community. Her family. And, the four of us: her "work family," as she called us. She loved her job at the nonprofit where we worked— so much so that she rarely took true breaks. Rarely turned off her phone. She supported so many survivors of domestic violence and sexual assault and stalking. So many people who were experiencing the worst days of their lives. She gave and gave and gave: glowing smiles and "how can I support you in your healing?" and "that must have been so difficult" and listening and shelter and concern and hopeful safety.

And she spoke up about what she believed in. After she died, I heard countless people call Amy "strong," as they talked about her and their disbelief.

And she was strong. Very. But she was also so much more. I wonder if she felt she could show those pieces, too.

\*\*\*

The night of her death, I open my phone in the darkness of my room and read everything I can about suicide.

This is how my mind works. I feel. I cry out. My hands shake. And then I research.

I want to understand how this can happen. I want to understand her. I want to know how someone reaches that point. How a thought can start small and feeble and then move and and transform and loom larger and larger until you can't see the truth behind it: a truth that is grasping, yelling, waving its hands to you above the tumult, above the waves.

I find an article that delves into the psychology of those who take their own life in a way I had never read before, and I learn how, in that state, someone can experience such cognitive distortion that they can't even fathom the pain of those they will leave behind. They cannot— quite literally— access the part of their brain that would allow themselves to think about the world they would leave behind. Or the future that could be. All they feel is their own pain, blinding and suffocating and so all-encompassing that they actually believe the biggest lie of all: that they are a burden, that the world would be better off without them.

This research feels tragic and depressing and empathic and empowering all at once. I feel as if I am pulling back a curtain of sorts, as if I am excavating some kind of truth that debunks the claim that suicide is something we can't possibly understand. A claim that leaves it at that, door closed, no questions asked— *don't name the cause of death in the obituary, don't talk about it at the funeral*— so that, really, we can pretend it never happened like that. So that we aren't forced to have to go *there*. Please, not *there*. Not *that* darkness. Not *that* pain. Anything but *that*: *Because I worry if I witness the darkness within you; I will see mine, too.*

My mother and I speak on the phone for hours that night, sifting through the days leading up to her death, through the last morning during which I asked Amy how she was and her answer and the questions I could have followed up with, through the shock and the pain, through the images on repeat in my mind. Toward the end of our call, I ask her a question I hadn't since I was a child who walked into her bedroom in the middle of the night, puffy-eyed with sleep, scared anytime a plane flew above our Brooklyn apartment after 9/11:

"Will I be safe tonight?"

I had never feared monsters under my bed before, even as a child. This night, I do. This night, I worry they will pull me in. Quickly. Without a second thought.

\*\*\*

I'm having trouble with the ending of this piece.

So I walk, instead— follow the Imnaha river racing, squeeze my way through hugging canyons, watch the spiders shake their grey legs as they appear from under the rocks at the confluence of the Imnaha and Snake rivers.

I think about the inevitability of endings— about how much I can't know. About the stigma of suicide and how not talking about it paves the way for the doing. About the mental and emotional and spiritual isolation so many people in this world feel.

About how we value "strength" and stoicism and "pushing through" over the bravery it takes to say *I am really having a hard time; I need you*. How this naming of our dark doesn't take away from our light, or from our strength and generosity and love. How this opening just makes us more honest. How this opening just makes us more real.

I think about all the things I learned from her: to speak up for yourself and for others, to show up with warmth and curiosity, to learn and grow and listen to other people's perspectives and experiences— especially those who have lived vastly different lives from your own. To be of service, to shine loud and bright.

I pat a boulder on the beach, the loud and deep thud of the sound comforting to me in some small way. It's in that moment that I notice two words engraved into the rock, all in caps:

"WE LEFT."

I pack up my things, say goodbye to the spot where the two rivers become one— become something new— and head toward the place my hike began. Back to another beginning. Another ending. Again.



Pond Boats  
—  
Sherry Smith Bell



water again  
—  
Lauren MacDonald

we had the sun on us  
and let ourselves be water again

lapping

    this raw edge of earth

turning stones to sand  
with our tides

What Sets It Apart  
—  
Nancy Christopherson

The going alone into wilderness, muscle-  
limbed, among limber pines. Among many pines.  
Among bear, wolverine, wolf. The high  
peaks. Along crystal waters through clear sky  
at night. Best to stay still, then. Listen.  
Separate the sources. Hold the pan over the fire-  
ring with your own flesh inside burning.  
Wade into the lake at moonlight. Leave no wake.  
Eat no meat. Come back with sweat  
on your hands.

Under the Snow

—

Anne Jestadt

On Chief Joseph  
mountain  
the promontory juts  
above white  
sullen slopes — larches,  
firs  
rising into clear  
wind, sighing  
shadow  
to sky

Silent as a great  
gray's glide  
out, above  
the moraine's hollow  
bowl, over flat blue  
fields rising  
to the Zumwalt  
swell, Seven Devils  
black,  
rimming Hell's  
Canyon at their feet

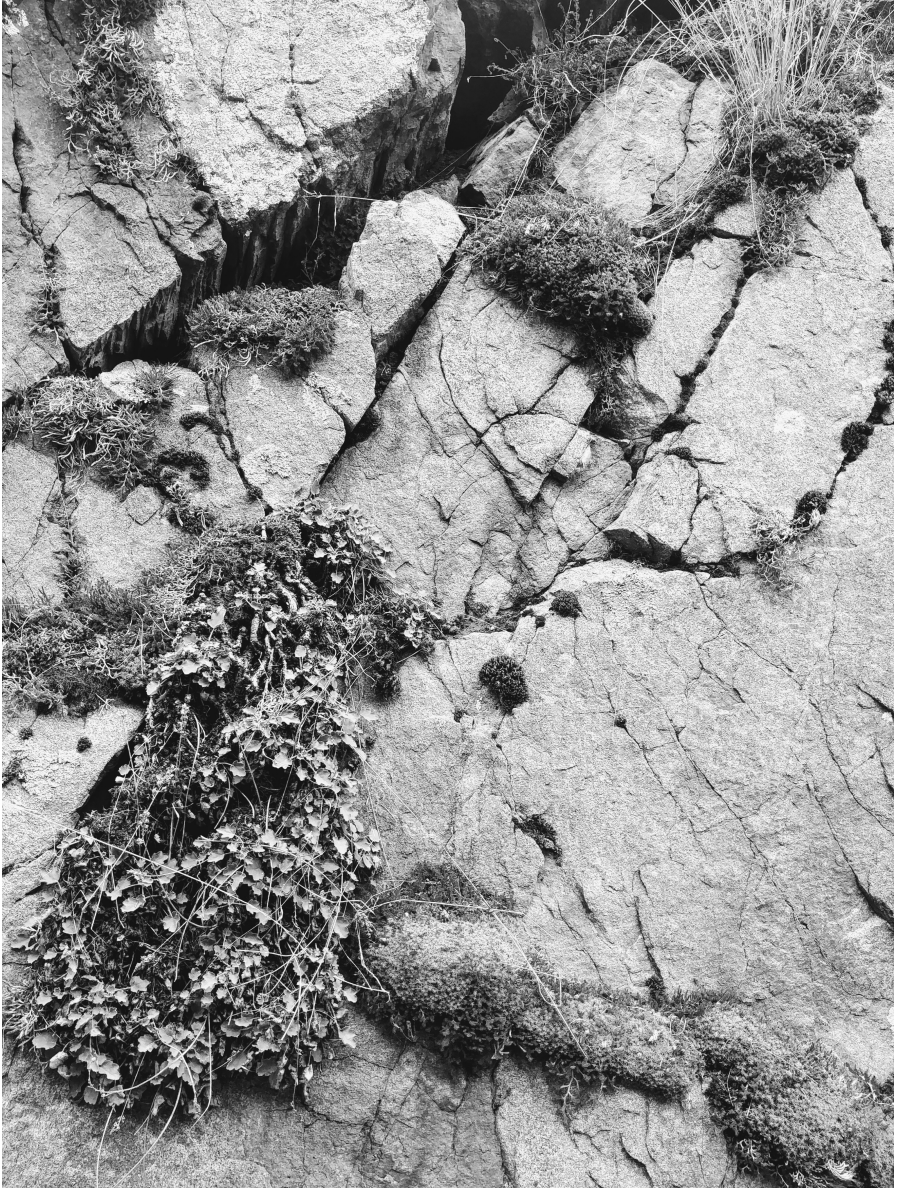
Dawn  
rises in rapid  
increments to melt  
what has muffled,  
letting the green  
loose  
to lure the plenty  
of hermit  
thrushes

silence waiting  
for ascending

notes to ring  
up the blue, trilling  
fire  
into new  
summer air,  
unseen, yet singing  
their songs like  
hope.

Hell's Hanging Garden

—  
Emily Aumann



on the line

—

Luce Behnke

i asked you once if you thought i was strong enough to pull out what was in me and you said i think too much. but i thought about tape and hooks, birds pulling straps, and enough glue to reject gravity anyways.

years later, i set out my clothes: carhartts, boots, a sweater, gloves. and this time, with fishing line, rope, and hook, i entered. trimming the line, pulling the reel, i eventually felt a tug inside. a mass was on. and i fought -- two long-term relationships, three car accidents, multiple surgeries; i knew at some point it would give.

so, i pulled and torqued and found a way to position my hip to pull even harder.

but, it-within-me always seemed to match. even in the hospital, as i struggled, it had consumed an organ, moved me 1500 miles from home, and still it tugged. perfectly balanced against my desire to remove it. it was at this point, my habit of pulling, relaxed. and as fast as the line dropped, i was done fishing for myself at such depths.

recovering, one morning, i opened my eyes. and curled up, in my arms, there it sat, having crawled out of its own volition. and i wish you were still here, because i would tell you that you were right: rope was too much.

Before My Eyes

—

Rhonda Struth

Family meets with good intentions  
    Casually masked without forethought  
Kinder attends their hybrid school  
    Next day quarantined with a temp  
Teen friends crowd unmasked to car pool  
    Breeds a positive Covid test  
Pandemic spreads or is thwarted  
    Individually made choices  
550,000 passed  
    Isolated from their loved ones  
Totaling four war's casualties  
I'm hypervigilant, double-masked  
    social-distanced, Security Guard  
The responsible rule complying  
With the burden of worry and fear  
While you act out your noncompliance  
    Irresponsible with disbelief  
Choosing to ignore facts of science  
I quietly shout to your face  
    This is real! Good people are dead!  
Do you notice I work so hard?



## My Pentecostal Friend

—

Sara Miller

I think of her this time of year, rotting snow, thawing manure, calving season, box elders and willows kissed rust and gold along the river.

We met when I was twenty-one with a baby girl in one arm and a year old son in the other, and she was my only woman friend in the piney cow camp where our men were gathering cattle while drunken hunters wandered the forest pointing guns at what looked like elk but sometimes were our husbands.

She thought nothing of me riding off, baby tied in my lap and leading a toddler perched on a mule just to show some forest service dudes the empty Indian village that still felt alive, where the world stretched and I often thought a part of me might float away over the breaks and rims.

And when the stray dog tied in the back of her truck jumped out the canopy window and hung itself while I was driving us to town, it was obvious she had to keep her pregnant belly out of the way and I was the one to cut what was left of that dog loose and bury it in a sea of mud.

And a couple months later at the laundromat dumping in stinky diapers when I felt the hair stand up all over my body, even though we were working different winter ranges and hadn't seen each other in a long while, I reckoned now was the time to send her everything I could spare.

It was weird and I knew completely she would understand, so at 1:06 pm I let something like a rainbow pour out of the top of my head in that grubby little laundromat and arch across the valley to where I figured she was struggling and sent her what I would have wanted, stamina, courage, peace.

Savory Dinner  
—  
Kristy Athens



Articulation

—

Nancy Christopherson

*Hyup*, the mule packer says to his mules as they push up among boulders in the high mountains.

A man who loves his work and the animals who work hard for him, who are faithful, who stand still

while he loads them with weight measured carefully on both sides so it rocks center. *Nothing better*

*than a tight rope*, he says. *Come on mules*, he calls, while the scenery unscrolls.

What he says belongs in a poem is what I am thinking as the short video plays and unwinds.

*These are my friends*, he says, *I don't want to rub holes in them and all that good stuff*.

—for Steve Morris, Wallowa Mountain Outfitters

## Obedience

—

Moll McCarty

Spring arrives when I am not looking, the words "objective reality" are written on my mirror. I bind myself firmly to this

idea. The desert spreads out wide: prickly pears weary of wind;

a man yells at his kid in a yard full of cars. I take out my

headphones and start a fight. Evening closes around us. Rabbits scatter

flirtatiously. I stand at the edge of the yard, my blood tinted with fire,

and tell the man to come at me. I imagine the impact of his body, the

cement behind us waking up with the thud of whoever lands first. A

howl of loneliness rises up my spine. I straighten like a cactus:

In objective reality, we are all

always

actually

completely

unceasingly

alone.

The man walks away and I resume my evening walking. A cactus reaches

toward a dry rivulet as if pining for what once was real.

Agave stretches tall, begging the sky for validation. I snap a photo on my

phone of the dark blue night. My stucco apartment greets me steadily. I

climb into my hammock and listen to a book. In the book,  
the main

character's love interest is murdered. I press pause, slide  
out of my

hammock, weep. Two doors down a man speaks Spanish to a  
woman

on speakerphone. I pull my phone out of my pocket and send  
the photo

of the dark blue night to everyone I know. My apartment  
waits for me: a

warm cave lit with orange and purple curtains. I go inside  
to see if my face has

changed, flick on the bathroom light. "Objective reality"  
in dry-erase pen: the

words wrap around my throat like a collar. I bow to the  
idea, obedient.

## Bad Day

—

Marika Straw

*\*Content Warning: The following piece addresses the recent murders of eight civilians, including six Asian-American women, at a massage spa in Atlanta, GA.*

Things to do when you have a Bad Day instead of going on a killing spree against Asian-American women:

Take a bath - or, better yet, get takeout and eat it in the bath

Go find a dog or a cat and pet it

Call a friend

Break an unimportant inanimate object in a way that doesn't hurt anyone (including yourself)

Go for a walk

Go for a drive, if you can drive safely in your state of being

Scream into and/or punch your pillow

Write in your diary

Eat waffles

Bake cookies

Watch dumb tv shows

Make or listen to music

Scream into the void

Watch the snow fall

Go to your room

This is an incomplete list created largely from things Marika does when they have a Bad Day. Marika would like to note that they had a truly Bad Day recently and yet, somehow, managed to not kill or even harm anyone as a result of it. Hm.

Please email further suggestions to: [fucktoxicmas-culinityandracism@gmail.com](mailto:fucktoxicmas-culinityandracism@gmail.com)

Around Here the Spirits

—  
K.G.H.

Around here the spirits like root crops and egg  
yolks, fruit and fat meat.  
They love soup of about any kind,  
they like to eat from a plate.

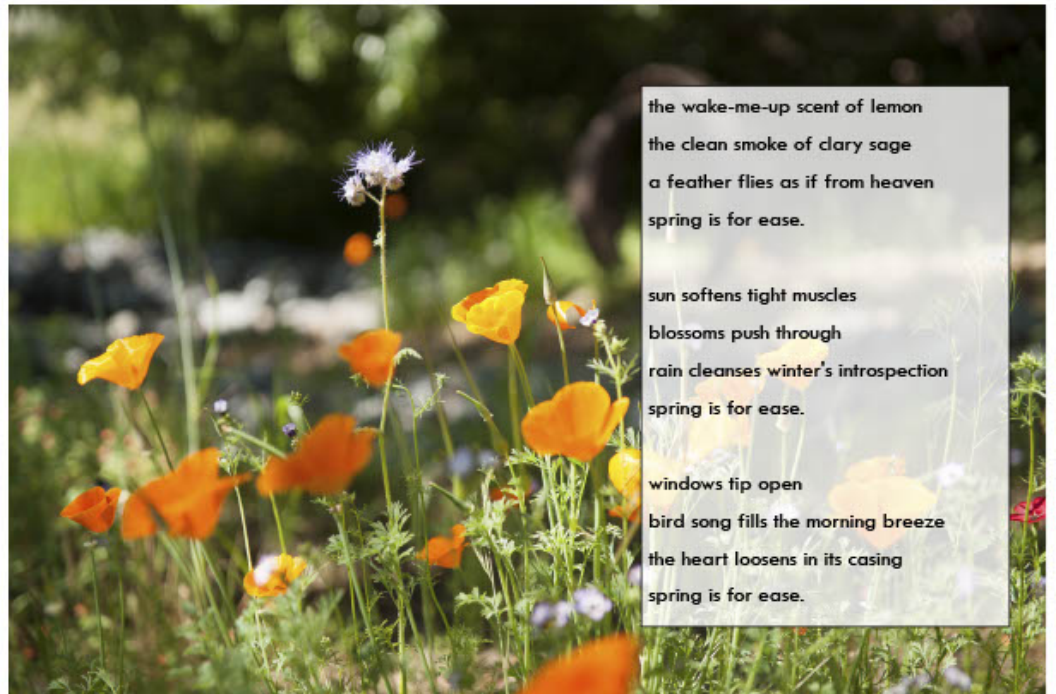
Doe groups are forming in the canyon walls.  
Watch them, feel their center, stockstill.  
They are radiant sentience, then  
pungent flight.  
The nearest deer shimmers rising, touch them, shud-  
der,  
nimble glance and scatter.  
deer are a tempest of feeling, infinite then bundled.

Feel your skin.

Serviceberry, hawthorne, mockorange and roses.  
Bunchgrass, buckwheats, ironwood and artemisia.  
Climb the cliffs and thickets are caves. hillsides  
so steep that a human could fall out.  
But you lie down safe against a rock and listen to  
the does breathing.

Spring is for Ease

—  
Alia Ayer



the wake-me-up scent of lemon  
the clean smoke of clary sage  
a feather flies as if from heaven  
spring is for ease.

sun softens tight muscles  
blossoms push through  
rain cleanses winter's introspection  
spring is for ease.

windows tip open  
bird song fills the morning breeze  
the heart loosens in its casing  
spring is for ease.



Dandelions

—

Tricia Knoll

lurkish boors  
in jagged leaves  
rooted into winter

flat like mud  
and shriven  
in camouflage

we own the earth  
and have a plan  
to spring an action

across your lawn,  
your meadow,  
and your party

yellow/gold  
and what you don't  
know

of weed you find out  
in contrast, be-deviled  
by half root and mast

so get used to insult  
and hold the bloom  
to your chin

to pretend you are butter  
or watch our ballerinas  
fly and pirouette to mud.

## Letting in the Light

—  
Cynthia Pappas

Our yard work in early 2021 seems to be themed around letting in the light. Our McKenzie River farmhouse has become engulfed in overgrowth. We remove nine 40-year-old rhododendron bushes and one azalea that have grown so tall they were casting the entire east and north sides of the house in shade. Their carcasses, piled thickly on the lawn, had to be removed with the tractor bucket.

The viburnum paniculata, planted when our oldest son got married, also succumbs to the chainsaw. The showy white blossoms served as part of the backdrop for the cake-cutting ceremony at the wedding reception in our yard. But it grew taller than the eaves and looks half-dead, with fewer and fewer blossoms each year since the marriage 17 years ago.

We limb the dogwood and will likely have to hire a professional tree remover to take it down. It has grown taller than the house and we planted it too close to the house's foundation. I will miss its soft white petals. We'll plant another, further from the house. We live on gorgeous river bottom loam and we've learned the hard way that plants typically grow at least twice as high as stated in the planting instructions.

On the west side of the house we remove two volunteer holly bushes that are threatening to take over a corner of the planting bed. We trim the wisteria vine to allow light to reach the evergreen clematis. Both were planted on the pergola at the same time, but the weighty wisteria has tilted the pergola so it lists to the north.

It's sad to remove these old plants, but things were starting to feel a bit gloomy, moldy, and overrun. Like most, we are desperate for this year to be an improvement over 2020. We commit to transform last year's sadness and isolation into joy and brightness.

It's been sunny these last two winter days, which brightens my mood and gladdens my heart toward an early spring. Two kestrels call cree cree cree cree back and forth to each other in a sharp staccato, one in the oak tree near the barn and one in a cottonwood along the creek. I wonder what they're saying? Is it too early for them to form a mating

pair? In 2021, I intend to pay attention. It's important for me to spend time outside listening and watching-taking a deep breath and embracing what this year has in store.

I've chosen my 2021 reading with intention, as well. My first book is all about joy: *The Book of Delights* by Ross Gay. Each essay leaves me with a sense of deep expansion. I have felt depleted and dry for four years, but reading about delight now refills my internal spring to almost bubbling. I read only a few of Gay's essays at a time because I need to savor each one, like the delicious tang of a bleu cheese dressing that you don't want to swallow because then the salad will be finished. After reading five in a row, I wander outside to stretch my delight muscles. The sun reveals itself from behind a cloud and I see the first jonquils peeking out from under soggy leaves. I'll read five more and then stop until after dinner when I'm sitting in front of the fire. Then I will slowly devour the remainder of the book.

Ross Gay has makes me ponder the nature of delight. I think he is right-when it's shared it compounds. Early in the pandemic when the novel coronavirus was still novel, my husband, George, and I occupied ourselves with things we'd normally never make time for. We sat on the deck, binoculars in hand, watching for Bullock's Oriole babies to emerge from the nest high in the walnut tree. I marked the date on the calendar, hoping we might be lucky enough to see the babies fledge.

While keeping vigil, we heard the drone of a low-flying plane overhead. The pilot made lines next to each other with two quick pulses of white cloud. Then she banked sharply and came back at a remove and executed a half circle and we realized she was skywriting a smiley face. What delight at the silliness of it. We laughed out loud at the unexpected serendipity of being outside to witness this act. As we continued to watch, the plane moved further west toward the city and she managed a second smiley face emoticon. The first one had almost faded by that point, carried away by the wind. Then, circling over the city proper, she left a third smile. We hoped that, like us, there were lot of people looking up at the sky and getting a kick out of this seemingly random act of kindness. We wondered who was inspired to give this gift, to buoy our spirits and fill us with delight.

In keeping with opening to the light, both physically and psychically, I am soaking in the hot tub, lost in expansive thoughts. All of the sudden, I hear a sound - like a large

person is sucking liquid into a straw, or maybe it's more of a gushing sound. It's coming from the base of the oak tree. I think I am hearing transpiration through the tree's xylem occur in real time! Is this possible? The tree is drinking liquid from the earth. I am astounded. I look toward George with wide eyes. He says, "What?"

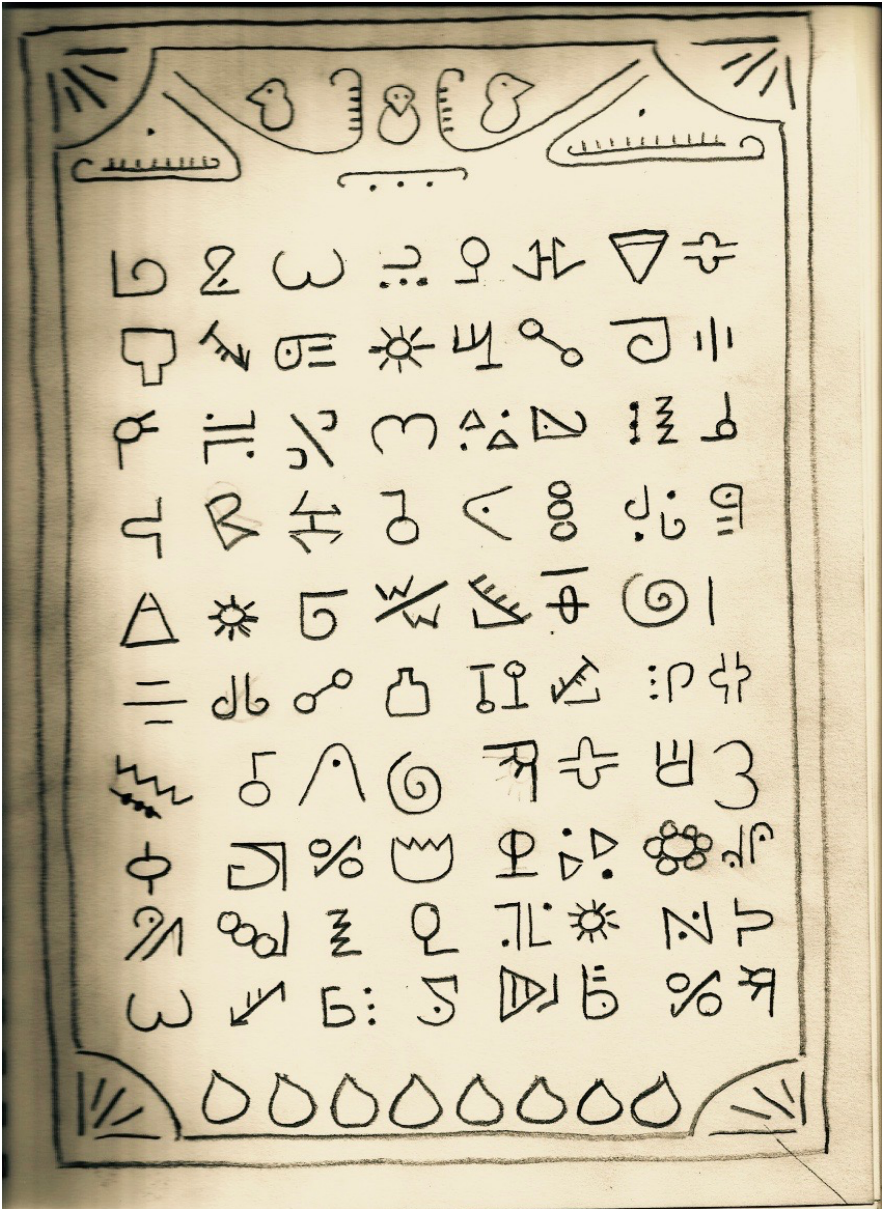
I say, "Did you hear that?"

He says, "What?" Darn, he has left his hearing aids inside. I'm disappointed he hasn't been a witness to this magnificent act of nature.

Next time I'm in the hot tub, all is quiet, until again I hear the gushing sound. I try to sort through this and I realize it is timed exactly with the washing machine's rinse cycle when the soapy water empties into our sewage system's drain pipe, buried in the yard. The pipe goes right under the tree. Not originally, though. The tree has grown huge and now straddles the buried pipe. That must be why the tree grew so fast. How long has this been going on, I wonder. There must be a leak in the pipe, feeding the tree. This is not good. It is no longer a wonder of nature, it is yet another thing that needs to be repaired on this farm.

The tang of witch hazel fills the air and tulip leaves spike through the soil. The exuberance of spring can't be too far off. We planted lettuce, rocket, broccoli, and cauliflower seeds in the cold frame. Soon they will be ready to eat. The year is off to a good start.

Bloom  
-  
MidLo



call for a return of the sensual

—

Lauren MacDonald

morning light prised on bedroom walls  
steam from sidewalks after rain

woo me like that

## Wolverine

—

Galen Miller-Atkins

I have tracked you a thousand miles. Along the steep, sandy hills of Michigan, I cut my legs on the sharp grasses and rested my back against the sharp skin of the jack pines. I bent down, sweat darkening the yellow sand, and gently pushed each blade of grass, looking for a sign of you. But the shifting sand twisted and rolled in the hot, summer wind. Your footprints blended, buried, amid deer tracks and tire treads. Nothing lasts in the sand. Dirt roads twisted and choked the forest like a snake. Black, gnarled branches, baked in the sunlight. They curled with rigor mortis above their fallen brothers. I was too late. You were gone. But still I followed.

I followed you up the stark, sharp rock of Idaho. The great spine and ribs of the mountain laid bare above the world. The granite bones were cold, cutting my hands as I pulled myself higher, feeling the pine trees and two-track roads loosen their grip on me and fall back to earth. There was nothing between the mountain and I but a chill breeze. My breath turned to smoke in the crisp, fall air. I tried to catch my breath but it ran higher up the mountain. Your claws had not left any marks on Idaho's rocky spine. No patches of fur were caught in the mossy tendrils of lichen around me. The forest flooded the canyons and valleys below, crashing waves of pine and aspen against the mountain's granite walls. Autumn was creeping along the tree tops, leaving a trail of red and gold in its wake. But the trees melted together, roads faded into air. There was no sign of you below. If the mountain knew where you were, it wouldn't tell. But still I followed.

I followed you to the pine forests and rolling, mountain peaks of eastern Oregon. I wandered, lost amid the roots of the mountains, searching for claw-cut bark or an imprint of your paw in wet earth. Nothing. When winter fell down around the mountain like a cloud, I climbed to this ridge, this mountain side, in hopes of you. The skis on my feet shuffled silently under a thin layer of snow. All the world was quiet, holding its breath, as I passed beneath the outstretched hands of pine. Rowan trees blushed behind a wall of fir, a dash of red across a sea of green. I pushed each ski through the newly fallen snow, stabbing and cutting a trail. My breath steamed and my sweat froze icicles on my beard. Winter does not welcome newcomers. You have to prove yourself. You taught me that. Your breath is a roaring fire on the mountain side, melting the winter beneath your feet.

The ridge gradually opened to a prairie. The trees bowed out of the way. The mountain side laid bare but for a blanket of snow, overlooking the valley below. The grey clouds rolled down like an avalanche and all the world before me turned to an undulating sea of cloud and snow. I caught my breath, leaning on my poles, and started looking for a sign of you on the settling snow banks. There were no footprints but I could feel you there, like a forgotten fra-

grance or a silhouette in the periphery. Were you behind that tree? Watching me? The thought pushed hot blood to my feet. It was time to move on.

I coughed. The cold air scratched at my throat as I climbed one last hill. Tall Ponderosa pines stood like spears in a glade. My camp for the night. Using ski and pole and boot I carved out a floor from the snow bank. Each handful of snow thrown to side warmed my muscles. A fire began to color the grey twilight in waves of red and orange. Each snow flake burned against the dark blue forest wall. Which glint in the darkness was a snowflake and which was your eye, piercing the winter night? Did the fire pull or push you away? I stood on the periphery of your world. Close but impossibly far. A language understood only through gestures and tone. The fire died. I wrapped myself in the starlit night, drinking whiskey and listening for your footsteps. I fell asleep as the winter wind played the branches like a violin.

In the morning, rain dripped along my tent in creeks and streams. The morning light hit the branches above me, shattering into a thousand pieces of glass then falling gently on the melting snow. The world shed its skin. The old one laid melting on the bushes and grass. Spring. My skis sank into the warm snow while my poles cut through slush. The tracks I made the day before crumbled like sand castles in the sunlight. Blades of grass cut through, breathing the first air of Spring. A glint of shadow and light caught my eye. The snow had melted and crumbled around an impression. Little valleys of compacted snow with four canyons above them. The shape of you, now just a memory beside my ski tracks. Suddenly a familiar whine began to crash over the branches and tree tops. I stepped onto a snow bank, waiting for the snowmobile to fall down the trail like an avalanche. Without slowing down, the red and black streak raced by, following my tracks and leaving nothing but compressed chaos behind. I followed reluctantly, skiing along the rumbling waves of snow. The mountain shook.

I have tracked you a thousand miles. But spring and civilization found you first.



Chimera Obscura

—

Dustin Lyons

Studied on the back wall  
Of a timeless soddy

A brood of pinhole scenes

Mother of suns  
Of doddering bodies:

moons, stars...  
exploding things—

Stories born with lives in tow  
And made of hatchling wings

Of sleep in the eyes,  
gaping maws,

Ears that hear...  
Everything—

Persona to person  
Dustin to dust

Upside down, outside in

Prick of light, light of lust

Clawing walls  
That go unseen—

The pits- the prats- the leaps for love

Swollen joints

Remembering..

Flops and phosphorescence

Whalefalls..

that sinking..

Sing-

*December 1, 2020*

*Blood Moon Ranch*

Winter Ouzel at Wallowa Creek

—

Karen Jones

Currents flow in dark turbulence.  
Below shelves of thin, white ice,  
watery shapes form and disappear  
like schools of small, dark fish.

A dipper perches on the bank,  
her suit of feathers neat, gray, plain  
as a Quaker. She's a pert bundle of bobs  
and curtsies, her belly fat and round,  
her tail short, flipping up and down.

She hops to the edge of the creek  
on jagged teeth of ice, dunks her head,  
jumps in and out of the water, devours  
stick-like insect larvae. Belly deep in current,  
she flips drowned leaves, grabs more tasty bites.

Skittering the bottom rocks, she disappears  
under an isthmus of ice, emerges on its other side,  
then flits across the creek, her voice dainty  
as a shaken strand of glass beads.

Tiny gray bird, her dense feathers warm and oiled,  
she's at home in icy winter, unperturbed  
in rush of current.

What a feat to flourish here, below cliffs and peaks  
of the Eagle Cap, among towering ponderosas,  
in the clear, austere coldness of a braided creek,  
its patches of gravel, scatter of snow.

# Clam Sauce and Corn Circles

—  
Debbie Carson

A long time ago, in a galaxy far, far away,  
we gathered to cook, and then shared meals.  
Now, separated, we recall

A long time ago  
In a trailer  
In a corn circle  
In Boardman,  
Two ranchers rested for the evening.

One prepared orzo with white clam sauce.  
Not just any clam sauce.  
The sauce from that new Italian cookbook  
Made from scratch.

The other rancher told stories,  
Convoluted stories.  
Stories with tendrils  
That led into the woods to hunt wild boar,  
That took side trips to Peru,  
And gave tribute to

"Ideologically opposed ranchers who still  
Worked pretty well together."

That rancher always told his stories with a sense of wonder,  
Surprising even himself  
While he led the listeners  
To places they'd never imagined.

Then guided them back  
Without their realizing it  
To unexpected places  
Of gathering.

Their guest had never tasted clam sauce  
At least not this clam sauce that had  
Olive oil  
Red pepper flakes  
Sauteed onions  
Fresh Italian parsley  
Reduction of beer  
Reduction of clam juice  
With a can of clams thrown in

At the very end.

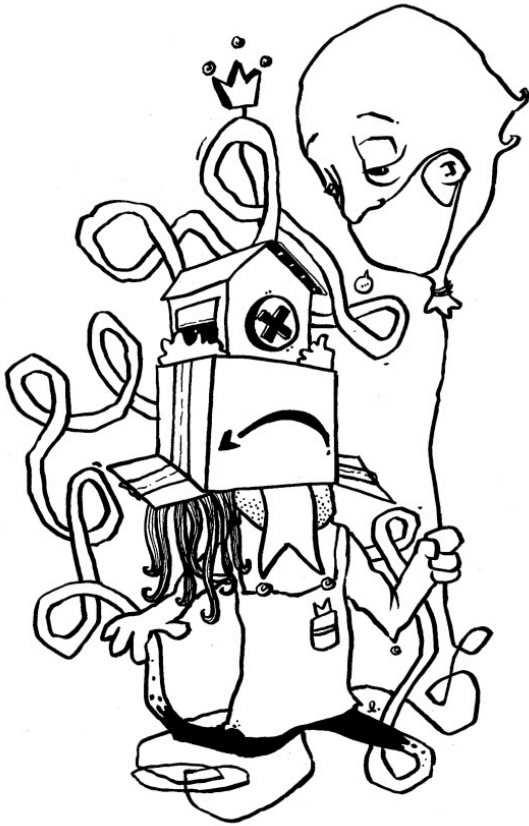
If there had been a caption balloon  
When that clam sauce hit her taste buds,  
It would have read something like  
"Shazaam!"  
Mixed with a "wow," and small swoon.

It was that good.

That trailer  
In the corn circle  
In Boardman  
A long time ago

Held the ranchers and their guest  
Safe and warm and comfortable  
Swathed in the aroma of clam sauce  
And surrounded by the soft breaths of cows.

Untitled  
—  
Luce Behnke



paint chip  
—  
Lauren MacDonald

delicate lilac

rain will change you

we will smell it

Upcoming summer zine  
submissions with title  
due by: June 6, 2021  
[wccircleofseasons@gmail.com](mailto:wccircleofseasons@gmail.com)

