

## vactionland

by Laura Bither

Today we watched the ocean burn.  
In school, they taught us how to extinguish fires, "life skills," they said  
water extinguishes fire, one can't exist with  
the other, they said  
this was never supposed to happen.  
They used to call it "survival," not "life," but maybe that was before it was  
they were  
the same.  
Back when ocean was water, not fire or storm.

The kelp farm survived (lived) –  
good news for the Community.  
After all this time, it feels like one of few constants –  
a dependable food source fed by a dependable excess of carbon fed by a dependable excess of human consumption  
so, not all roads are dead-ends  
just underwater.

Skeletons of cities ("progress," they said) quivering under ribbons of heat, robbed of chaos  
green shoots pushing past cracks, places  
fled abandoned forgotten  
or  
instead  
laying still under ever-changing, ever-rising waters  
(life-giving and –taking)

Some cities fared better.  
Our Portland, thriving 30 years ago  
on everyone's getaway (get away) list  
As the tides lapped at brick and steel  
every year greedily encroaching  
the peninsula narrowed, revealing an island for  
The Elite –  
Shirking change, they build and rebuild  
on top of one another  
the poorest among them forced out of home and in to sea (but are they so different?),  
abandoning the charade to become the newest members of our Community.

Our Community  
members united by place and circumstance  
bound soundly by shared wisdom  
Tonight's lesson: the Three Sisters  
our permaculture gardens flourish under indigenous guidance  
leafy sprouts shoot radiant reminders of resilience.

These days, we share  
food, dance, medicine, books, language  
but especially knowledge. Always knowledge.  
We attribute our successes to this prolific interchange;  
in it, a conscious refusal to repeat history's mistakes of senseless arrogance and bias  
Instead we learn to forage mushrooms and pound yams  
we heal our sick and injured deep in the therapeutic wilderness  
we solve conflicts with restorative justice  
one Community living with and for our Earth  
("there's only one," they'd say) (look how far that got them)

\* \* \*

I hum as I plant, fingers wriggling in soil, lost in place  
when I realize something is wrong:  
I'm surrounded by the suffocating absence of sound  
When did birdsong fold into stillness?  
when did the ocean breeze withdraw, leaving behind only empty  
anticipation ?  
nervous electricity prickles my spine as it starts to course through the air and I realize  
The water will come.

I can barely outpace the gathering darkness  
my practiced sprint is a pathetic defense against the growing storm  
a familiar terror invades my body  
The pounding of my heart echoes furious waves, but I hazard a glance to sea  
a cloud of spray has obscured the island  
the Elite are under attack  
this time might be different for them  
(how foolish to think their privilege is unending)

I bargain desperately for our Community to be spared.  
But, our foundation is rooted in what others lack  
we embrace change  
hunger to learn  
adapt with our environment  
all this driven by hope, love, and respect  
for all.  
With deep faith in our Community, I finally reach a place to rest  
and face the storm.