

ekphrastic writing

Peace Liard Regional Show 2021

Peace Liard Regional Arts Council

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Figure Study 1 – Fireweed by mary mottishaw
Poem by Seanah Roper



Figure Study 1 – Fireweed by mary mottishaw

When we leave
There will be little trace
Of the burnt up beings
We once were,
There will only be
The gentle, indigo songs
Of the fireweed along our lovely limbs,
A gift to our granddaughters.
We will not be bags of soot,
Carried on the backs of those to come.
We will re-claim, re-grow.
Let this stand for who we were,
And who our granddaughters carry with them.

Seanah Roper, Fort Nelson
Distinguished Award

Fireweed
If we are sent
It is by the moon,
We are not rocks, but raindrops,
Whole, plump and luminous.
Or perhaps we come by rivers
Glittering cascades
Of galaxies,
Arriving like small miracles,
Little light beams.
Ancient cycles spin within us,
Sunshine burst
Tucked within solar plexus,
Exhale of lunar breath
Inhabiting hips.
We are beautiful,
Enduring, capable
Of life, of nurturing, of pain,
We are strong,
We are vulnerable.
As raindrops, we soar,
All the eyes of our grandmothers
Peering out in kaleidoscopic swirls,
We carry them
As they carried us.
We forge toward earth
Falling,
 Falling,
 Falling,
We burst.
Too many of us hit like this,
Arrive like this,
Not within the gentle arms of ocean,
But upon the painful slap of rock.
We are illuminated in the wholeness of hope
Only to break
Into a million pieces.

And the water we once were
Dries, seeps away
Into dust,
A breath, a hiss,
A flame ignites
Alighting its way along all our vessels,
Burning us along all our nerves.

I have heard too many stories
From sisters,
About uncles, grandfathers, neighbours,
We have suffered too much collective robbery,
Of ourselves and of our bodies.

Too often
The pain of this overtaking
Becomes flame
Red, scorching,
Surging,
Spreading out across our beings,
Taking everything in its wake.
Until we grow up,
Or escape
Somehow, some way,
Harbouring the glowing ember
Of its awful memory.

Still walking, we keep going,
Powered by bones
That move like machines,
Not from will
But habit,
Memory,
Maybe at the insistence of the grandmothers,
Keep going, keep going they say.
We walk in these disjointed, stolen bodies,
Carry these bodies
Like stones.
Great burdens bearing down
On bended backs.

It shows in
The slump of shoulders,
The tendency to look away
Instead of ahead,
In the way
Our voices waver as our throats
Go thin and close over.
And we can't stand up for ourselves,
And we can't find the worth,
To make ourselves strong again.

This is not finite.
Do not misunderstand:
These burdens do not define us.
These obsidian shells,
Despite their thick covering,
Are not impermeable.

Fireweed is born from this,
Sometimes called bombweed,
It comes to occupy and re-colonize
Traumatized land.
First in little buds
Breaking through the vessels of our blackened hearts.
When we realize
And peel back the tarnished layers,
To find the truth of ourselves
That we are better than the things
That happen to us.

As so we begin to bloom again,
Magenta flowers burst forth
Veins growing, expanding out
Making new skin.
It will never be the same,
Mottled, this scar tissue
Gives us armour,
A way forward.