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Cranberry Picking Season

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Cranberry Picking Season

Folded-over Woman missed cranberry picking season this year,
Because she was cradling mountains in her arms,
Rocking them gently against her bosom until they slept,
And dustings of snow could fall quietly upon their jagged young peaks and reddened
cheeks.

They shuddered and rested until spring's melts,
When rivulets ran between her breasts,
Along the rises and dips of her ribcage and belly,
Finally cascading between her thighs.

They would wake to thunder and wail like windstorms,
While the warmth of her body shed into streams and rivers,
With anxious canyons and carefree rapids echoing through her springtimes,
Her long breasts stretching downward to nurse wildfowl and ruminants.

Folded-over Woman watched over her offspring who survived the long winters,
Her joints growing thin, splintering off, bones shattering like limestone,
While antlered snakes crept through crevices beneath her feet,
Causing her stone-cast nurseries to shake and crumble.

Folded-over Woman missed cranberry picking season this year,
Because she was working in a day care center,
Soaking illness and poverty into her long arms and lungs,
While she wished away wasted years of foreign education and underemployment.

She breathed heavy and dry, coughing up mountaintops and snowmelt,
While health care and opportunity flushed through her treetops,
Swept past her chilled arteries and internal bedrock,
Gushing past her like transport trucks on a hardened highway to never.

She would quiver and roll onto a mounded side,
Resting until winter's dull respite,
While overheated mountains rumbled into her kitchen and cried out for nurturing
And her long breasts stretched downward to nurse habitats for generations.

Folded-over Woman healed herself in scaled-bark patchworks,
Retreating into her own bosom during summer's solstice,
Waiting for fresh breezes and new, broad eyes and ears,
To listen for hope and survival until the next season of autumn's cranberries.

Folded-over Woman missed cranberry picking season this year,
Because she was working in a nursing home,
Where she was scorned and screeched at by a young beetle with half her credentials,
And she cried on the roadside where she picked wildflowers for her bedridden elders.

They shuddered and slid their fingers through the boughs of her long hair,
While their autumns progressed, their own children heaved westward,
And their limbs ached with pride in gashes of longevity,
Her long breasts stretching downward to nurse the desperate and helpless.

She would hold them to her warm body and soft nourishing heartbeat,
Where they would crumble into soft clays and valleys of gravel,
Lifetimes of their snows tumbling down her crevices,
Willing boulders to her valleys, rounding youth into experience.

Folded-over Woman sheltered their lifetimes,
Caressed their aspirations and accomplishments,
Ran her palms along their stiffened branches and sentiments,
And massaged their ancient secrets into histories and stories of success.

Folded-over Woman missed cranberry picking season this year,
Because drills and hydraulic internal parasites shoved themselves hard and unlubricated
Into the wet sands beneath her hearth,
Causing her hand-hewn floorboards to buckle downwards at their strongest foundation
points.

She tried tucking a matchbook under a cast iron foot of her cookstove,
While its brittle iron teetered and shrieked,
And searched for bedrock,
While she shoved a wider wedge of cedar into the emptiness.

She would reach for ancient volcanic glass as it stretched at her windowpanes,
Shuddered, and cut into her flesh like an injured dog,
Her life-lessons seeping into the floorboards,
Useless in place and time, modern expectations, and economics.

Folded-over Woman folded deeper into herself,
Holding overworked generations in her arms,
Agate eyes scanning her horizons for mountaintops to nurture,
As her breasts stretched downward and hardened into ropes of cold lava.

Folded-over woman filled her buckets with wild cranberries this season,
Unfolding torn muscles briefly between seasons of heat and hardness,
Between advancing cold and autumn's warm dip into the space between her soft
breasts,
Where she cradled young mountains in her arms and gently rocked them into quiet
sleep.

LOIS BEARDSLEE (Lake Superior Ojibwe) is the author of several books, including *The Women's Warrior Society*. She grew up back and forth between rural northern Michigan and remote family bush camps in northern Ontario. Her traditional artwork includes birch bark cut-outs, bitings, quillwork, and sweetgrass basketry. "Cranberry Picking Season" is from her forthcoming collection *Words Like Thunder: New and Used Anishinaabe Prayers* (Wayne State University Press, 2020).

