

BREATH, LIKE WATER

AN ANTICOLONIAL ROMANCE

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These pages are dedicated to land protectors and water defenders everywhere.

Another Way to Say I Love Mountain

Women lacing their boots and walking,
weary and spiteful, away from children and men.

Women who leave a note *Gone for a walk*.

Women who leave the doors unlocked, dishes dirty, men unsoothed.

Women who wake before dawn.

Look, Mountain does not need me.

Mountain needs pinecone-bursting fires, seed spreading floods, nut-cracking birds, larva-scraping bears, fish-feeding flies, vole-warming snows, stone-breaking mudslides.

Look, my grandmother walked Mountain too. As she walked she would tear a twig from a pine branch, swing that twig like a taser, poke and complain.

My grandmother and I walked Okanagan Mountain together. She, following trails, scabbling in the soft earth with her long branch. Me, looping behind, ahead, around, off the trail, on the trail, so young and unbitter, imagining cities. My grandmother had an eye for the lichen and moss growing on the forest floor and would sometimes fall to her knees, look close to a decaying fallen tree. I wish I'd listened when she told me about pixie cup lichen, freckle pelt lichen, step moss. She didn't pick them, but would kneel there, telling me the qualities of each small forest at our feet. I had no patience for the scale of lichen and moss.

Look, my Irish English great grandmother hated mountains, especially every mountain in these unceded Indigenous territories. She was born to the soft green of Munster hills and travelled to England as a nurse in 1917. I know she loved Percy Bysshe Shelley and Lord George Byron; my grandmother showed me the very chapter of poetry my great grandmother had carried to Canada and filled with lonely annotations. She must have dreamt of a sailboat, an officer, serge, a castle. Instead she fucked an injured Canadian soldier in Devon, and her English father forced her to marry him and take herself and her embryos to Winnipeg. My great grandmother did not ever forgive Canada for forcing her to leave Ireland, England, and poetry. Moving to warm Vancouver barely lightened her resentment.

Look, I come from a line of angry women.

I am not in love with mountains, or rivers, or poetry.

I am in love with Mountain.

An Anticolonial Romance

Okanagan Mountain's

animal people

and

insect people

burrow resistance

through

fire and flood.

Mountain reads the intent of every

footstep on the soil,

and like a thawing river

cannot help but breathe

a welcome to all warm life.

Oblivious to Mountain's

righteous welcome, the poisonous invader's feet

walked on and

walked off

mountain.

Still, Mountain broke

horseshoes, cosseted

rattlesnakes, burned

faces.

So Priest and

his men cut a long, slow trail around

Mountain's softer eastern slopes.

Settlers brought their

own workers, housed them

barely.

Governors transported

prisoners to

work the fruit orchards,

bankers borrowed on

slavery loans

to mortgage the

lakefront villas.

Even today, antebellum

verandahs

cup the villas all

along lakeside sands,

like fragile wooden pastries.

have lived and told and listened here	LAND BACK
for time beyond time.	LAND BACK
It is my intent to return Mountain and Lake	LAND BACK
all the land	LAND BACK
animal people	LAND BACK
bird people	LAND BACK
fish people	LAND BACK
insect people to Syilx stories.	LAND BACK
I do not tell Syilx stories. I am not Syilx.	LAND BACK

What I can tell today is a story of Priest's people,
the settlers,
and their
burning.