

We say stay safe, be well—

these are the middle layers of the artichoke —
but I'm getting ahead of myself. First trim
the thick stem, remove tough
protective bracts. Cut angriest tips
from layers that clutch, not thorny, but prickly
like me, tense with fear and recycled news:
deadly force, respiratory distress.
It's a thistle, after all, well-defensed.
Dip in lemon butter, steam till edges relax,
pull away, leaf by supposed leaf; don't they
taste faintly of nuts? Reach inner rings,
translucent petals, cynarin's flavor almost
cloying, scrape away fine hairs that could
choke us, cut tender heart into pieces, eat.

Overwintering

January 2021

This season of hunkering down distanced, masked,
I walk for relief along the creek, over muddy runnels
where a spring crosses the path,

and bushwhack up a steep ravine, crunching through the palette
of leathery browns I have come to love: chestnut oak, poplar,
hickory. I know how to go here, where I could slip

I grip a sapling, testing first to be sure, lean against a fat trunk,
rest burning calves. A word, *unceded*, rattles
like a beech nut in its shell, prickly as sweetgum

seedpods that resemble the virus. I notice a pale green scrap
you could mistake for a dessicated corn husk, perhaps,
or a wind-blown shred of grandfather's puckered

seersucker beach-and-umbrella-drinks shirt,
strewn sere, elliptical, over late-season litter—
puttyroot orchid's papery wisp.

Survivors, they wait till unencumbered branches clack
to put forth a single leaf, bask in thin winter sun,
unobstructed, gathering strength required to retreat,

come June, root replenished, and send up a single stalk
of insect-shaped flowers, each purple-tipped part,
from yellow-green sepals to frilled

white clamshell lips, so delicately lovely
you'd become a bee just to get inside.
How are you holding up, we ask,

the news a Möbius strip of colonial past. Orchid
feeds its unseen tuber that settlers were taught
makes putty to mend broken pots.

Inclusion Criteria

On Monday, June 24, 2019, Oscar Martinez and his daughter Valeria were found drowned along the banks of the Rio Grande. The photograph of the scene by journalist Julia de Luc affected the public and lawmakers.

You put in the photo of the young man, Oscar, face down
in the water. A kid nearly, only twenty-five, and Valeria, his little daughter,
drowned in the Rio Grande trying to make it across
from Mexico to the U.S.

He's the same age as your oldest—his child could be your
granddaughter. You put in *Aren't we all part of the same human family*,
then cross it out. Her red leggings are luminous. Sharpened focus,
in the foreground, grass reaches tapered blades

across the river's pearly sheen, touching them both,
wrapped together in his wet t-shirt, above a swath of river
cane buffer, littered with bright blue beer cans,
one shucked rubber glove.

You leave out the swollen rush of the nearby creek, the butterscotch
smell of Jeffrey pine, fox sparrow's insistent song. Dry-eyed,
you pencil tears down the side of the page. It is not
possible to go on putting things in.

Spring Morning Without Cream

i

If you can't drink it black, find joy
in water stones loving the river,
wood thrush returning.

Until you can drink it black,
until stones round in the reckoning,
until wood thrush restores normalcy.

Unless you can drink in the night,
find joy in stones of the river;
unless the thrush woods recover.

ii

The ordinary painful, that trap, wooden;
we reach for an earthy home under trees'
pale arms. Melody pierces our chambers.

Because of the earthy, bitter undertones;
because sycamore's pale arms reach out;
because melody flies in the heart.

Pain in the kingfisher's rattle;
ordinary bitterness arms us,
pierces the chambers of the heart.

iii

Behind the taste of terroir — everybody wants
a little cream. Inside obstacles, a little bit of pearl.
This land before us — someone else won't fix it.

Underneath the taste, terror for the soil;
underneath rills, littlewing pearlymussel gone now;
underneath parsing, a song beyond reason.

Under this abstraction,
land terrorism, someone else,
each expression of grief a season.