

THE ECOLOGY OF SUBSISTENCE

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No daylight for two months, an ice chisel slivers
frozen lake water refracting blue cinders.

By light of an oil lamp, a child learns to savor marrow:
cracked caribou bones a heap on the floor.

A sinew, thickly wrapped in soot, threads through
the meat on her chin: a tattoo in three slender lines.

One white ptarmigan plume fastened to the lip of
a birch wood basket; thaw approaches: the plume turns brown.

On the edge of the open lead, a toggle-head harpoon
waits to launch: bowhead sings to krill.

Thickened pack ice cracking; a baleen fishing line
pulls taut a silver dorsal fin of a round white fish.

A slate-blade knife slices along the grain of a caribou
hindquarter; the ice cellar lined in willow branches is empty.

Saltwater suffuses into a flint quarry, offshore
a thin layer of radiation glazes leathered walrus skin.

Alongside shatters of a hummock, a marsh marigold
flattens under three black toes of a sandhill crane.

A translucent sheep horn dipper skims a freshwater stream;
underneath, arctic char lay eggs of mercury.

Picked before the fall migration, cloudbberries
drench in whale oil, ferment in a sealskin poke.

A tundra swan nests inside a rusted steel drum;
she abandons her newborns hatched a deep crimson.

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