

Ann-Marie Oskolkoff

HEALER: REMEMBERING THE EXXON VALDEZ OIL SPILL

(After Jamaica Kincaid)

Think of glaciers scraping across grass; think that sometimes the lady in the lake takes *people* for offerings in place of quarters; listen to the noise of worn cartilage, it's like writing with chalk on sandpaper; place both hands over her knees—see that mountain goat? standing on two legs, it is offering you its horn; grind a penny to fine dust; smile when Mrs. Allen tells you, “your weather didn't work”; think Mrs. Allen has 12 kids, and is always washing clothes anyway; wonder why the railroad tracks when viewed from the air look like stitches as they pass along the Chugach Mountains; check the sky often, if you can't look at the sky look at the ceiling; look into people's eyes; look at the Northern Lights, you might see Uppa's outline; acknowledge him; wave; sometimes when spirits come back they sound like they are dancing with clogs on top the roof; *Why aren't they barefoot?*; they'll get slivers; if you put your shoes next to your bed you will travel far away; if you go far away the land will miss you, I will miss you; sometimes on the inside people look like the lead of a pencil, sometimes they look like the sun glinting on a stream; remember the old people predict that the waters will be still one day, black and still; think of the sea becoming filled with the lead from pencils, when I was a little girl that was where I'd hide my school supplies; if a teacher hits your child on the hands with a ruler yell at him in front of that child, let the child see him go paler; wear black paint on your face, so that the enemy won't see you go pale with fear; pray hard if you see the inside of a seal's belly filled with black ink; don't drink and drive; use otter fur for your hats and mittens because it stays warm when it gets wet; listen to Uncle George when he says today there was a thick coated otter dying of hypothermia; don't drink and let anybody else drive; don't bother trying to gather herring eggs, they are all gone; don't try to cure things like radiation sickness; use Old Nick's Stick to cure cancer, but not radiation sickness; think of the sound that the tissue makes when you pry open a razor clam; watch as your shoes turn the color of bruises just from walking on the beach; remember the tsunami of 1964 that ripped those children from their parent's arms; scrape the bottom of your shoes with your fingers; cover your face; granddaughter— this is how you sop up oil with your hair. This is how you sop up oil with your hair.

Uppa-Grandpa