

ELIZABETH RUSH

AND LIZA YEAGER

# Tell Me How

DIALOGUES ON

## Beginnings

**Liza Yeager:** I call my sister because I'm not sure about the question. I'm worried about wasting people's time. When I ask if climate change has impacted her romantic life, she laughs. Then she says that one time she did get ghosted during a wildfire. Does that count?

*Interview with Amelia, thirty-three-year-old water resources engineer.*

**AMELIA:** This guy, he lived in my apartment building. Actually, it was my friend Molly who ran into him the first time in the elevator. And she mentioned me to him, like, *Oh, my friend is single. She lives in the building.* And so I just went up the stairs one day and I left a little sticky note on his door and I was like, we can hang out if you want. And he was very charmed by that.

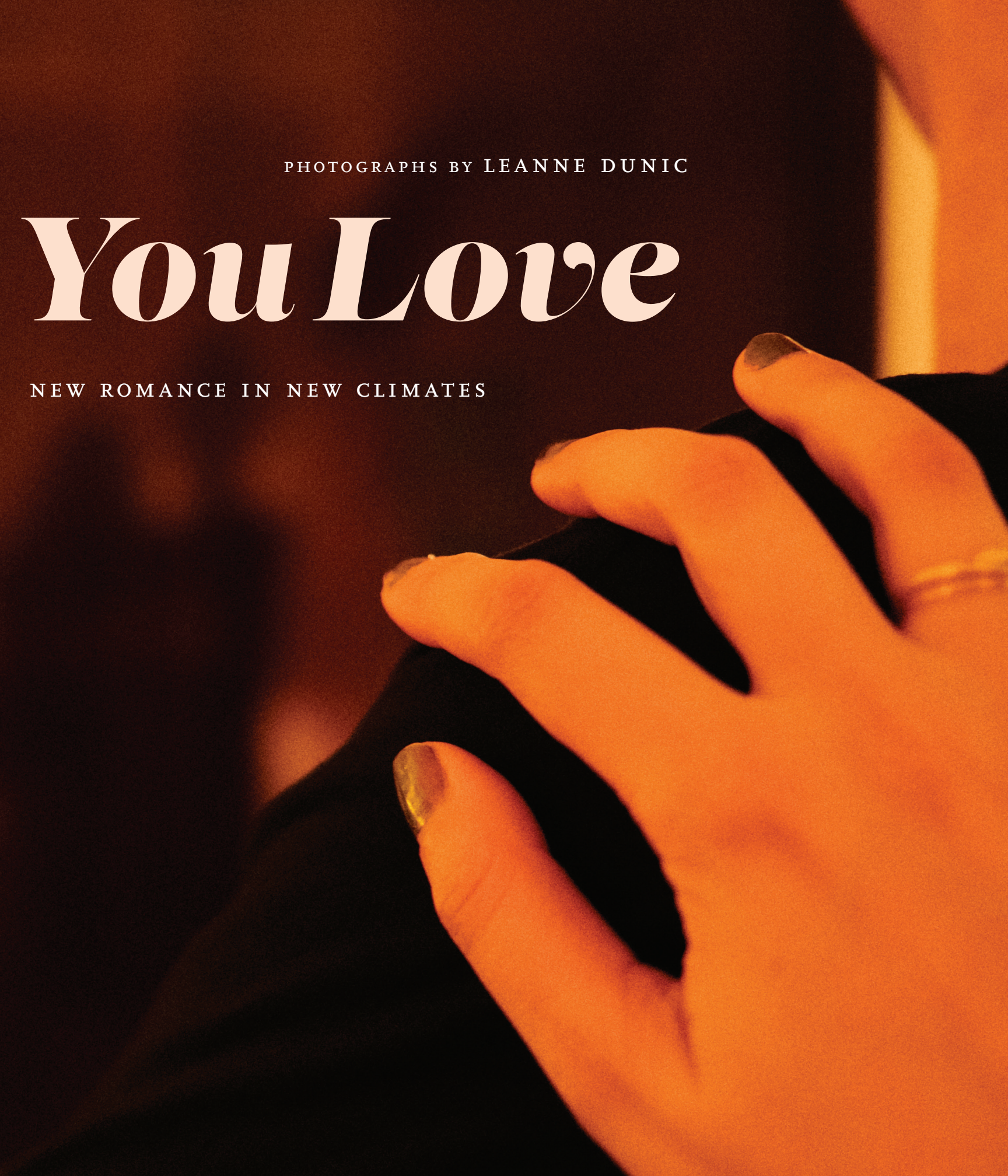
I went up to his apartment for drinks one time and I was like, I don't know if this is my type. He was kind of dramatic. But then I guess, yeah, we hung out a



PHOTOGRAPHS BY LEANNE DUNIC

# *You Love*

NEW ROMANCE IN NEW CLIMATES





few more times. I kind of got more into it. I was like, Oh, this guy is really just, like, psyched about life.

But then we had the wildfires start up and it was another crazy year.

I remember seeing the evacuation lines kind of encroaching in on central Portland. I was living in this super old apartment building, with just single-pane windows. You could always feel the drafts coming in. There was a run on air filters at Home Depot, because there was this hack that was put out by the City of Portland where you tape a furnace filter to a box fan.

And, like, we might've had a plan to hang out. Like we were going to go kayaking or something. But then the fires came. And he's like, *I've just got to go*.

You know, at some point you realize that you're being ghosted and you're just like, Well, I guess I just, like . . . stop texting. I guess I'm just alone now in this disaster.

**Elizabeth Rush:** I had gotten an assignment to report on how climate change is impacting online dating—it was the kernel of an interesting idea, but my instinct told me the question was probably bigger. I also felt like maybe I wasn't the right person to do that reporting. My son was born in May 2020, right in the scariest part of the pandemic, so I hadn't really gotten out much and I hadn't online dated since 2009. So I called Liza.

**LY:** Mostly, my friends just smirk when I tell them.

**DENALI, climate activist:** I don't have any thoughts on sex and climate change.

**MIRIAM, midwife:** I am sorry, but, like, *what* and climate change?

**ER:** Tinder. Like, online dating and climate change.

**MIRIAM:** Okay. I thought I heard you, but I was like, I can't possibly have heard that right.

**TJ, wildland firefighter:** Are you talking, like, too much sunlight or not enough oxygen kind of gets people not going as well?

**VERENA, social worker:** It seems like you're just trying to put sex and climate change into the same essay, to make it fun.

**SALLY, environmental scholar and activist:** My first reaction was, I have nothing to say on this. I haven't thought about it. I haven't explicitly thought about how this big topic in the world relates to my romantic relationships. So, whatever.

## Proof?

**LY:** I start trying to think of questions people might actually be able to answer: Do you think you'd be in an open relationship if you weren't kind of aware that the world is ending? Would you have sex with someone who doesn't believe in climate change? What is attractive to you about the person you're with? Do you like that he knows how to kayak in the bayou or is it that he knows how to survive a storm?

**ER:** What I find attractive has certainly changed over time. I used to be into the kind of guy who could read a topo map and fire up a camp stove at the end of the day, you know the rugged self-sufficient type. But, well, those guys—at least in my life—they were never very good at caring for me. And I value care more than I did before. It may sound bizarre but I think about having to survive a climate disaster often enough, and I also think that were I to make it, my husband would be the reason—he is really good at making friends.

**LY:** My friend Jackson knows more about structure than I do. When I explain the idea for this story, they tell me it's like a classic novel, where, at first, the political context is in the background and the individual dramas of the characters' lives take up all the space. *Like* Anna Karenina, they say. *Or* Derry Girls? I ask. *Yeah*, they say, *like* Derry Girls. But slowly, as time passes, the context comes forward. Until you can't help but notice it everywhere. It takes over, and that's actually the point of the story. *Like* The Sound of Music, I say. *Yeah*, says Jackson, *usually it's the Nazis*.

*Miriam, a midwife. The summer before this conversation, a heat dome descended on Portland, Oregon, where she lives.*

**ER:** I don't know. Like, seeing places that you love disappear has to impact your other forms of love. I don't exactly know how. I guess another way of thinking about this whole story is, like, sometimes I feel like there is a noose sort of tightening around our necks currently, but we don't quite know that it's about to get really tight. And everyone keeps sort of doing the same things that we always did, but then there's all of these really subtle shifts in those actions that also are, like, a sign.

**MIRIAM:** Yeah. People who had AC probably got laid a lot more during the heat dome. And/or could get a date. Because all people wanted was to get into some air conditioning.

I definitely have those moments with Gabe where I am like, *I want to have sex but it's too hot*. And then there are those moments when you do have sex and afterward you're like, *I want to cuddle you but I don't actually want to touch you because both of our bodies are too sweaty*. So let's just, like, hold pinkies after we fuck.

**ER:** It was so straightforward. When it's hot people have less sex. It made me feel like what we were asking maybe wasn't that crazy after all. And maybe there was even evidence of it.

I found Carlos by searching "breeding behavior and climate change."

*Interview with Carlos, principal investigator at the Botero Lab, which studies how organisms cope with and adapt to fluctuating environments.*

**CARLOS:** A lot of the traits that females use to select what male is the best are often also environmentally given. For example, in certain environmental conditions, like when, say, there are a lot of big seeds, the best mate is probably the one with a massive beak because it can crack those seeds. But in situations where the seeds are tiny and small, maybe those guys are going to have problems. So in that situation, you want someone with a small beak.

One thing we found is that when female birds have increased uncertainty about what their future environment is going to be, they tend to hedge their bets. They tend to either divorce more often or to copulate with multiple partners to produce clutches with different kinds of kids with slightly different genotypes.

**ER:** I've certainly noticed more and more of my friends entering into nonmonogamous relationships, but I've never really thought of it as related to climate.

*Interview with Sally, who studies the green energy transition. Her relationship is "polyamory, or poly open, or whatever you want to call it."*

**SALLY:** I mean, I feel very fortunate that I have relationships that feel stable in the face of uncertainty. At the end of the day, I am confident in my relationship with Jake. And I'm pretty confident in my relationship with Lars. I feel security in those relationships that maybe is accentuated by the fact that everything else feels pretty insecure.

And more to the point, I know they're resilient 'cause they've gotten some; they've experienced some stressors. Lars and I, a very long time ago, stopped dating, then encountered one another; Jake and I had, in the past, more drama around the open relationship and whether or not we ought to continue with it, but it's been very stable for a long time now, and I've also

witnessed him having his first really deep non-me relationship. That was jarring at first, or it's been jarring at various moments, but it is not, actually, anymore. I mean, I think I've seen some of the edges of what I'm capable of.

## Journal Entries #1: Noticing

**ER:** *Late October, around the time I started doing these climate change interviews, I laid naked on a rock in the middle of the James River, this river that runs through Richmond, Virginia. It had been so long since I'd last swam naked. So long since I had last been on an airplane. I was down there for work. And when the work was done, I took a hike, and I swam. It was unnerving to swim so late in the season. I loved it but also it felt a little wrong.*

**LY:** *Last summer I went to a wedding on a mountain. The wedding vows struck me as notably practical: one about wanting children, one about how relationships are hard, and a last one about how you might as well be with a partner instead of being alone. It was a clear, sunny day, and everyone was relieved, because the ridgeline had been burning that week. Right before the ceremony, the bride changed the way the chairs faced, rotated each one so that we were looking up at the peak, which was clear of smoke.*

**ER:** *Even our child, he too is made possible by unearthing the decomposed bodies of plants and animals and setting them aflame. Without the energy they provide, the energy we only recently started to transform into real speed, my husband—who loves the place he is from wholly—would have never left Colombia to study Latin American literature in the United States. Not if it meant that going home would have been difficult. And then, of course, he and I would have never met.*

**LY:** *I got my first crush in months at a walk to protest the Line 3 pipeline. We were walking next to the highway for 15 miles a day, and I watched Annalise herd people into a safe line, laugh loudly, drive the water truck. I'm not sure how to separate things out: whether I just like competence, or if I appreciate these traits because of how the world is now, or how it looked from the road.*

**ER:** *The skin I relish touching and kissing and nuzzling is my son's. I dive into his all-encompassing allure, licking his cheeks and the bottom of his feet. There is such intimacy, such sensuality, between us. It's not quite erotic but it does touch many of the nodes of nerves that used to spark when I was younger and discovering someone else's body for the first time. Other things Nico is into: walking backward, his green boots, warm milk in the morning.*









**LY:** *Despite his bio on Tinder, which said that he was “looking to keep it casual,” the geographer tells me he’s having a pregnancy fantasy about me. It becomes clear that this isn’t just a sex thing, not just that kind of fantasy: both of us like imagining the future together, the stability we could build if we just decided to.*

**ER:** *Last night I dreamed I was on a walk down by the seaside and there was a photographer with us and he kept asking his young daughter to stand in front of these eroded dunes. He was using her body for scale, to photograph the aftermath of a disaster. About an hour later, her hands and legs started getting really, really long. Like, her whole body started getting really deformed. Nico was with us and I began to worry about him. We eventually got to an old mill in the middle of a forest and the girl’s body just kept stretching out and I was like, We need to get out of here now. And I got everyone outside and on their way. But I had forgotten my hiking boots, they were somewhere at the bottom of this really long flight of stairs, which I ran up and down a couple of times, searching for them. Suddenly an insane force picked me up, began floating my body up the stairs, like I was riding an escalator, but I knew I was going nowhere good. The people around didn’t see or hear me screaming. I flailed my arms and finally touched someone and the force was broken and I dropped from the air and said, again, We need to get out of here now.*

**LY:** *I watch the magnolia tree outside my third-floor window. I see the first bloom—magnolias bloom from the top of the tree down—a spot of red. Over the next days, the tree starts puffing out, pink with buds. And then, one morning, I look outside the window and the whole tree is brown, fall-colored. It froze the night before. My roommates all peer up. There are still some closed buds, and we talk about whether they’ll open. In the end, only four flowers bloom on the whole tree. Stephen comments on how big they are. Are they always that big?*

## Lots of Other People

**ER:** *Slowly, something like evidence begins to pile up. In our own lives, sure, but we are also hearing little confirmations from most of the people we speak to even if there is hesitancy at first. Yes, it seems climate is somehow causing romance or attraction or intimacy to shape-shift a little, among humans but also among, you know, breeding birds.*

**LY:** *Throughout my conversations, I realize that sometimes, people are answering the question, even when they don’t realize it. And that what counts as an answer can be bigger—or smaller—than we thought.*



**David Oates**

## Big Tree Something

When I walk by the big trees  
with their big shade, their big quiet,  
something

alive in the nose, the eyes, the  
leaf and sway, something makes me  
regardful.

And now that I am old so many faces  
seem beautiful too, even homely ones might have that  
something,

and I'm so glad of a smile lately it's embarrassing,  
and couples of any kind—honestly, that tender  
something.

What is that I've lived through, now skeining  
out behind me, and still this woven now?

What must I be, what can it mean  
that I keep trying to say?

If I play that sonata or prelude, what is it  
that I am playing?

If I say my love, what are words  
beside whatever our love actually is?

Yet if I keep silence, it is mostly pretentious  
since I am always noisy inside.

Those old trees hear right past all that. So  
I am always standing in their big mind.  
Something

will come to me, it always does, and I'll wish  
I could share it. But it's not  
that sort of

something.

*David Oates is the author of six books of nonfiction, including The Mountains of Paris: How Awe and Wonder Rewrote My Life. His second book of poetry is The Heron Place.*

**ER:** It becomes clear that the way forward is to just keep talking to other people. Like, lots of other people.

*Sarah bounces back and forth between Rhode Island and Alaska, fishing on gill-net boats. Before she spoke about her love life, she talked about seeing mid-Atlantic species traveling farther and farther north. Her life is constantly changing because the water in the bay is getting warmer.*

**SARAH:** Five years ago, I thought, Oh, I'm supposed to save. I'm supposed to have something to live on in my old age. And with the pandemic, in particular, and the urgency of climate change, it has totally rearranged my, you know, what economists call the discount rate, how I value the future compared to the present.

I'm single, as of about a year ago. You know, I had a long-term relationship, um, that was loving and stable. It had a future. But it wasn't quite fulfilling to me. So, yeah, my whole attitude changed to a much more "seize the moment" approach.

I've had this crush on a guy I fished with five years ago. I sort of maintained a crush on him while I was in that other relationship. And so once I got out of that relationship, I contacted him. I've been pursuing him. It's weird, like I have absolutely no read on where he is in terms of actual interest. Like, he'll spend time with me. Sometimes he will communicate, sometimes he won't. He lives on the other side of the country. I'm trying to figure out how to play my cards. So it's a very weird situation and he's a lot older than me.

Basically, I am just, my brain is just totally living in the moment now.

Like now, I'm pursuing this older guy—he's twenty-five years older than me—obviously that doesn't have a long-term future, at least not one like the relationship I had with a guy my own age. But I don't care. Like, I don't know, the future just doesn't exist for me anymore. It's like the only thing that matters is the here and now.

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*Camryn, a wildlife endocrinologist for NOAA. She has just returned from a tiny atoll northwest of Hawaii where she is studying sex ratios of green sea turtles in their foraging grounds.*

**CAMRYN:** Sea turtles don't have sex chromosomes. Sea turtle sex is determined by the temperature at which the eggs incubate. They produce 50 percent males and 50 percent females at eighty-four degrees Fahrenheit. Say you had a downpour during the week that the sex was determined: You might actually have a nest full of males that week. If the sand were baking, you'd have a nest full of females. It just really depends on the environment within the nest during the second trimester.



We're already seeing a decrease in hatchling production. Now we're wondering what's going on with the sex of those hatchlings. As we were collecting samples from all of these younger turtles at their foraging ground, you have no idea what sex they are, right? They look exactly the same. You can't tell them apart. But when we finally did the genetic analysis to figure out their sex, that is when we went, *Oh shit*.

What we found is the turtles that were born recently at that beach on that island, well, 99 percent of them were female.

Back in Australia, they are trying to keep the nests cooler with a shade cloth or palm fronds or watering or misting them. People are producing, or trying to produce, more males.

One more thing about temperature I should mention: generally ninety-three degrees Fahrenheit is the point where you have embryonic failure. So if the nest gets too hot, then the embryos just don't persist. Right? You can think of them as being cooked to death. So there's a fine line between producing males and females. And then there's a fine line between only producing females and death.

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*Holly is in the process of building a house on a large plot of land to live in with her polycule. Throughout construction, they've been considering climate safety and the possibility of housing climate refugees in the future. But she and her wife have been thinking about survival in the face of uncertainty for a long time.*

**HOLLY:** It was always there. This sense of, like, What are we gonna do? Even when we were back in college.

I remember once, back then, someone cut a fiber-optic line. They knocked out cell service, internet, and phone lines. So one day we woke up and all the lights turned on, but none of the phones worked. Cell phones didn't work anywhere in any capacity. No one had heard any news from anywhere.

And I remember me and my now wife and several of our friends, we all met up on the second day. I was the only one who had a car, a Volvo station wagon, and we could definitely fit like ten people in it. Not legally, but like, ten people.

So we agreed—we all shook hands—that if it got to a certain number of days, we would all cut classes and we would all pitch in to fill up the tank and drive until someone's cell phone turned on. Or some government official told us to stop. 'Cause we thought maybe the world was ending.

It was such a defining moment in me and my wife's relationship, like, *It's you and me, and like, who knows how far we're gonna have to drive?*

*Hayley is a stay-at-home mom in Bangor, Maine. She worries about climate change, but her fiancé doesn't think it's a problem.*

**HAYLEY:** I think he's in denial. And that gets us into a bigger fight because I get frustrated that he doesn't listen to my opinions. He's like, *Oh, you think you're so smart 'cause you have a college degree*. And I'm like, *That has nothing to do with it*. So it just escalates, you know, into a big to-do. But, yeah, it all starts with the snow.

I mean, my kids, they see snow and all they wanna do is play in it. We used to have so many days off of school because of snow and that doesn't happen anymore. And he is like, *It's just the weather patterns* or whatever.

I mean, it would be one thing if it was like, we're talking about ways to parent our child. But climate change isn't a big enough issue in terms of us having to reassess our relationship. I mean, if there was, like, an apocalypse or whatever, it wouldn't be the type of thing where I would be like, oh, you know, in your face. I think it would kinda be like, Okay, what do we do now? Just kinda stick together and make the best of whatever situation we were in and, you know, ignore our issues from before. And probably find another thing to bicker about.

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*Lauren spent her early twenties working for the Sunrise Movement, a youth climate organization. She told a story about a spur-of-the-moment overnight protest on the steps of the DNC. She had to figure out logistics.*

**LAUREN:** You know, I remember there being some dynamics of like, Ooh, who's sleeping next to who? Like, are these people like cuddling in a flirty way? Or like, These people are a couple, so maybe they'll share a sleeping pad.

I have a tiny story that I'm gonna absolutely butcher because it's, like, thirdhand and I don't remember all the details. But it's short. A Sunrise founder at one point was talking to a coach of theirs, like a mentor. They were having a conversation and this person asked, *How will I know if this movement is gonna work? What are the signs that I can be looking for?* And the coach said, I guess in reference to just, like, everyone involved, *Are the kids fucking?* And the person said yes. And they were like, *If the kids are fucking, it's gonna go well.*

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*Lorene, an applied scientist and a grandmother, restores permafrost in the Arctic. When a fiber-optic cable goes in between Coldfoot and Deadhorse, she attempts to backfill the ground with something resembling what was lost.*









**LORENE:** My scientific practice is ecological restoration. But oftentimes in the Arctic I don't even feel free to call it restoration, because the goal in restoration is to return things back to an original nature state. I end up calling it rehabilitation, because the state where I can get something to is just a glimmer of what might come in the future. I don't know if it will eventually become restored, you know, even in a couple hundred years. Or will it all fall apart again? But there's more and more work and so there's a lot more demands on my time. And demands for something that can sometimes feel like a futile effort in the face of climate change.

Since I own my business, I've hired my husband to work with me. He is essentially my logistician and camp manager. He used to be a wilderness guide, so he has all of those skills. And so I'm able to bring him with me, but it is far from romantic because I'm usually a total stress-ball.

Oftentimes we have these lofty goals to have our little romantic time in the tent, and for one reason or another—fatigue or stress or just being too grimy—the romance falls away. Which is kind of sad. I mean, we're still spooning, but that's about as far as anything goes. So the two of us together are kind of a sad state of affairs during field season.

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*TJ, a wildland firefighter in Oregon. In the interview, he said that an average fire season used to last a couple months. His most recent season started in March and ended in December.*

**TJ:** I mean, so, since I started doing fire, and being gone as frequent as we are, dating stuff falls through a lot.

What has happened to me is you kind of start talking to someone and then we'd be gone for a couple weeks at a time. You get back and it's like two, three weeks later, depending on how far you're driving. And then I'll be like, *Hey, I'm coming home, you know, around this date. Do you still want to try?* And they're like, *Ah, you know, something else came up.* Piss off, kick rocks kind of thing. And it's like, cool, cool, cool. I'm going to go to the bar and just, you know, haggle people there.

It's harder to start and maintain longer-term relationships. Like, unless you've been married for years and you guys know you're dying together, you don't know whether or not you're gonna come home and still have it.

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*Nicole, a biologist who studies social organization in insects.*

**NICOLE:** The simplest way to think about phenological decoupling is that it is like this missed opportunity in time. Like a



missed connection. If you're thinking about a flowering plant and a bumblebee, for example, you get this situation where they're in the same place. It's just that they're not in the same place at the same time anymore.

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*Rachel responds to our Memphis Craigslist ad. She tells a story about sitting behind two people on a plane who were going on and on about climate change being a conspiracy. They were speaking so loudly and at such length that the flight attendant even asked them to be quiet, which of course they didn't like.*

**RACHEL:** A man, as we were exiting the plane, he said something about *the flight from hell*. It was clear that he was referencing these people and that's how we started talking.

I hadn't really thought of climate change, um, being viewed in such a polarized lens from a political standpoint, but that was clearly how these people in front of me viewed it. And so anyways, this stranger and I, we started making jokes about it. The two of us are just walking through the airport—it was at the New York airport—and he was like, *Oh, don't worry about crime, you better watch out for the tree huggers*.

That night we ended up going to a pizza place. I got a margarita pizza, but it had the buffalo mozzarella on it—I'm not sure if I even pronounced that correctly. It was just so creamy, so good. I think, in the moment, though, I was more focused on him than the food. We've been together three years now.

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*Joe was a longtime spiritual leader with the American Indian Movement. He and his partner, Kaylee, spent time at Migizi Camp before leading a multiple-week walk to protest the Line 3 pipeline.*

**JOE:** Migizi, they were claiming to be a traditional camp, so I wanted to, you know, kind of just add my two cents in there or whatever. You know, I walked into camp, the first thing I said was, you know, *Where's the coffee?* There was no coffee! If you have an Indigenous camp and you have elders coming in and there's no coffee, you've lost credibility right off the bat. By the time we left, they were doing spirit plates, they were having council, you know, in the mornings around meals. There was always coffee going, there was food always going.

**KAYLEE:** We got there, to camp. And, I don't know, people just saw us and like, held us up in this way that I had never been held up before by a community. Like, they saw us, they saw what kind of love we had for each other, and we kind of got held up

as this, like, powerhouse couple. People knew us as Kaylee and Joe or Joe and Kaylee. And we were working really hard together. Like I remember just constantly feeling like, holy crap, like this is, you know, this is *real*. Like we're doing this work and people see us for it.

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*Kerrick, twenty-six, works as a researcher in Minneapolis.*

**KERRICK:** My ex-partner, I think when we were dating early on, he was way more informed and, like, freaked out about the climate crisis than I was. And that was a big problem. He described feeling like being in slightly different realities. I was like, *I don't wanna be like you*. I don't wanna be freaked out all the time. And feeling like it's difficult to connect with people sometimes because of how freaked out I am. But now I have a lot of climate nightmares. Where I'm running away and I have to sort of guard people I love against these forces. I feel much more on the page that he was on. I think we're pretty equally freaked out now.

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*Tucker, thirty-two, a nurse.*

**TUCKER:** My parents live in the city of Spokane but their house backs up to the state park. They called me and they were like, *Tucker, go out back and start spraying down our backyard because there's a fire, there's a fire like a mile from our house*. I ran outside and I started, with our little tiny garden hose, just like spraying down all of this shrubbery that hadn't seen any rain for probably two months. And it wasn't long before I could see the fire.

It was just, like, really fucking scary to watch, like trees explode into flames a half mile from my parents' house. I don't know quite the word to describe it, but it's made everything feel a little bit more, maybe tenuous. I worry about them.

So basically, what I'm trying to say is that place matters a lot more to me than it used to. In the past I would've thought I can live anywhere. But now, I feel like in order for a romantic relationship to work, that person needs to be okay with me living near my family.

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*Aqsa started dating the man who would become her husband in Lahore, Pakistan.*

**AQSA:** Originally, we were both from different parts of the country, so we didn't have a family home. I lived in the university



dorms and my husband had his own apartment. So those were, essentially, the only two spaces where we could spend time.

That part of Pakistan, the city especially, saw really brutal summers, sometimes temperatures going as high as 105 degrees Fahrenheit. That really limited our mobility and options in terms of what we could do. So if you wanna go out to have lunch, that's, like, not possible. If you wanna hang out, you stay at home, watch a movie, you know, just spend time indoors.

It accelerated the process of talking to our families and telling them about ourselves and each other, and saying, *Okay, you know, this is the person I wanna marry.*

## Knots

**ER:** At some point we started scheming about how to talk to even more people. But how? Should we set up a hotline? Make a portable listening booth to put in public places? But where? The park? On the corner of 6th Avenue? Who would even have time to stop and talk? And what question would we put on our imaginary placard?

**LY:** The most important answers—as in, most mundane, most everyday, most demonstrative of how climate change is actually impacting most of the population—would come from people who don't think a lot about climate change. That's the trick of the story: to use this frame, this ambiguous idea about romance, whatever that means, to try to see the shifts that are happening at a level we don't normally notice. But it's hard to ask complete strangers to describe something that's invisible.

**ER:** Eventually we started posting on Craigslist: Miami, Kansas City, Sioux Falls, Houston. The responses were really wide-ranging, everything from, “when it's chilly I hook up with more men” to “the bomb cyclone killed my vehicle, now I'm more destitute than usual.” The subject line of one response read: *I wish climate change impacted my love life.* In the body of the email the woman told me that her husband had died the previous year. Then she linked to a couple articles she had written, click-bait things like the “15 Smelliest Places in the World Worth a Visit” and “10 Thought-Provoking Images Captured by Drones.” She reminded me of Rachel in *The White Lotus*, a little desperate and also trying to have a career. “I can transcribe and write up your interviews,” she wrote, “if you can use me.”

**LY:** Sometimes it was hard to tell how much people's answers were shaped by the questions we were asking, or the twenty dollars we

were offering for their time. But even then: climate change was always there, the real and undebatable context for all of the conversations, and all of the circumstances people were telling us about.

**ER:** These interviews felt paradoxically like some of the most true and also the most false we had done so far.

*In her reply to the Craigslist post, Sari writes, “I am more comfortable if a date wants to use public transit or share an Uber, or even walk, instead of each of us taking our own cars.” She is breezy and seems interested in talking to a stranger.*

**SARI:** I'm fifty and single. I split my time between the East Coast and the West Coast.

**LY:** But you saw my Craigslist ad for Atlanta?

**SARI:** Yeah. Sometimes I look around.

The way it used to be, where everyone drove a car and it was, you know, Gosh, if a guy didn't have a car, it's 'cause he couldn't afford one. I was like, Oh no, you don't have a car. What's wrong with you? But now it's by choice.

You know, now some people do mention climate change in their profiles, that they're very environmentally aware. They bike, they walk. People are like, *No, I don't wanna have a car. It's expensive. Gas is expensive.* So, you know, they're more datable now than they used to be, just put it that way.

*[We talked for a while longer, and it didn't seem like she had a specific example. But it wasn't like she wanted to get off the phone, either.]*

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*Michael is a customer service agent in Atlanta.*

**MICHAEL:** I noticed a big difference. Like, as soon as summer came. It may not be ninety degrees, but with humidity, it's just so sticky and muggy. My wife, I think it's affecting her mood. I, I really do. She's just seemed so withdrawn maybe the last few years. We're disconnected. That doesn't mean that we don't love each other. It just means that the way she acts sometimes, it's just so strange and I just can't explain it.


**LY:** And how long have you thought that, like, this is because of climate change?

**MICHAEL:** I was watching a documentary on it and people were talking about their concerns about climate change and they







A photograph of a cluttered workshop or garage. In the foreground, the chrome headlight and mirror of a motorcycle are visible on the left. The background is filled with various items, including a person wearing a blue cap and a white shirt, a large plastic bag, and a red container. The scene is dimly lit with overhead fluorescent lights.

*“How I love and who I love,  
those are the only things I can control.”*



start saying, *I feel this way*. And, maybe a few months ago when I noticed how she was acting on a particular day, that's when I thought to myself, well, maybe it's climate change. I'm thinking to myself, Could it be climate change or am I just imagining this? I don't wanna call a therapist and say, *Oh yeah, by the way, can my wife come in? Because I think climate change is making her flip out*. I don't wanna put my wife in a straitjacket, you know.

**LY:** Well, maybe you should talk to her about it. Maybe it's something else.

**MICHAEL:** Yeah. She'll try to put me in a straitjacket.

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*Tytianna, thirty-two, is a stay-at-home parent with two kids, a baby and a three-year-old. The baby coos and cries in the background. Tytianna calls from Memphis, where she moved a little over a year ago. She says that she and her boyfriend have been going through a "rough patch" but she hopes things can get "back on track" because he is the only person with whom she really likes to go camping. She's anxious; that much is clear.*

**TYTIANNA:** Yeah, my baby won't let me be today. I dunno why. Lately it's just like she'll want me to hold her, right? And then she'll get down but she won't get completely down and then she'll jump back into my arms.

My support system here is really not that good. 'Cause I only know two people and that's my dad and his girlfriend. And he, well, he is always working all the time.

I love being a parent. I really do. But I also want to go outside and enjoy with no worries. At least where I'm from, like we know when it is going to snow. Here I could be home one day just having a normal day and then boom, it's flooding, or, you know, it's a fire. It's just something happening. You have to be careful.

Have you talked with anyone who has had a crisis with climate change?

**ER:** What do you mean by crisis?

*[I tell her about the conversations I've had with people who've lost family members in floods, conversations that I've been having for nearly a decade at this point. I also tell her about the firefighter who is away from home for longer and longer periods of time.]*

**TYTIANNA:** I don't want to be caught up in no fire. I know people's houses that caught on fire. I'd be devastated if that happened, if, you know, Christmas just passed, and if all the things I

got for my kids got ruined, I would have a mental breakdown. It would make you cry. You gotta start all the way back over.

We used to go out to more wooded areas and have picnics and things but, you know, I'd be scared to do that now because everything keeps changing. Like the weather keeps changing drastically. I'm just saying like, the weather could be fine one minute, then boom, it could be raining real hard. So I just stay in the house more. Me and my baby, we just do things in the house. That's the only impact I really have.

I'm really, like, considering, you know, since it's tax time, going back to North Carolina, where the weather isn't so unpredictable. At least over there it is winter right now. And it's staying winter. I mean, you have a hot day once a month, but it's not that hot. Not so hot it turns to a fire.

Sometimes I like it when it gets real hot, but sometimes I don't, you know. I'm not trying to have no heat stroke. I'm not trying to get no skin cancer either.

I'm sorry this didn't last for an hour.

**ER:** No, that's fine. You were great.

**TYTIANNA:** Okay. Well thank you so much again for the opportunity.

## Journal Entries #2: Everything Is Everything

**LY:** *Sophie is traveling around the country, reporting on housing. She tells me that if I can buy a house, I should. That no one can afford anything, anywhere. I want to quit my job but Kelly tells me her health care costs \$700 a month and will only help if she gets hit by a bus. Mitra says I should get a domestic partnership, but Stephen can only move in if the landlord decides to make an exception and allow a cat.*

**ER:** *One time I had a conversation with a stream ecologist. We were standing atop a giant downed Douglas fir tree, the tip of which plunged into the churning waters of Lookout Creek in the central Cascades. Do you get what we are looking at? he asked. I saw big boulders. Cold water. But I didn't say those things. The flood of 1996, he continued. We tend to talk about disasters as having a beginning, middle, and end. But those are just stories. We live in the aftermath, always downstream from the most recent big disturbance.*

**LY:** *In North Carolina, Cat tells us her company held an Easter egg*



hunt. In the eggs there was mostly candy, but in some of them there was PTO in one-, three-, and eight-hour increments. She tells us this on a mountain where we're camping, where there are wild ponies. We Wiki search "horses" and learn that they're from Europe and Asia. These ones have been wild since someone left them here. The sign says they're "good for the ecosystem."

**ER:** Sometimes it is all too much: changing broken light bulbs on the porch, putting mulch around the plants, buying cleaning supplies, getting the car to pass inspection, making dinner, scrubbing the mold off the bathroom ceiling, arranging to have a tree specialist look at the beech to make sure that the warm winter didn't indirectly lead to the flourishing of a little nematode that would kill the tree. I mean, just trying to care for what is already here.

**LY:** The scenic river bend used to be lined with coal mines. In the visitor center video, there's a shot of a guy with a candle held in his helmet: a wax headlamp. And then, people just started thinking about conservation, the narrator explains. That's an example of idealism, Stephen says. People don't just start thinking in new ways out of nowhere—there are material reasons. This place probably got conserved because companies were petitioning the government to take the land off their hands when it started being less productive, running out of coal.

**ER:** Alexis Pauline Gumbs says, An ingredient becomes most itself when broken open, when it can merge with other ingredients to become something else.

**LY:** In California, Stephen and I drive into Yosemite and it's burning: a sign on the way in has melted. But because of the fire, there are campsites open, and it's less crowded than usual. The rangers tell us we have nothing to worry about. We feel lucky to be there.

**ER:** Today my husband sent me a video of Nico mixing three tubes of toothpaste together in the bathroom sink. Qué haces? Felipe asks off camera. Estoy haciendo un desastre, Nico responds. He's not wrong; we are always making a disaster.

## Disasters

**LY:** There's something else that we have to pay attention to: the kind of climate disaster that doesn't need to be teased out. People die, homes are destroyed. But also, other things happen.

Monica works in a panadería (bakery) in Houston. During a hurricane, her partner's mother got sick, and on the way to the doctor, they got in an accident. Her partner was in a coma for a month. This interview is translated from Spanish.

**MONICA:** Everything was fine. We were planning to get married. The relationship was great. One day I went to see him and he woke up. He was happy that I was there. I brought him back home with me. I was taking care of him. I tried to help him, help him do his exercises. One month, two months recuperating. But there was the physical part and then there was the emotional part.

We were continuing with our relationship, our plans to get married. He wanted to continue. He walked perfectly; he went back to work. But he started to change. He changed his mood. His way of being. Sometimes he treated me badly. Sometimes he didn't respond when I talked. And one day I said to him, *What's happening?* and he said, *It's because of the hurricane.*

I continued because I was in love, and I wanted to help him. It's not easy to recover. I continued with him. But in another month he became depressed. He was irritable, anxious, didn't want to know anything about the world or about me. He wanted to stay in the house. We separated for four or five months. They called me and they said he wasn't answering the phone, wasn't coming to the door. I go to the house, open the door, and I find that he was on the floor. He had tried to commit suicide. He wanted to escape the situation he was in. For me, I already felt tired. I talked with him. He promised me he was going to get better. But it didn't happen. He couldn't. When it was windy, he would get nervous. It scared him; he remembered that moment. It was always in his mind. This image, that he was going to die: it was the hurricane.

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Jean decided to start medical school on the island of Dominica. The school website advertised that Dominica hadn't been hit by a hurricane in more than thirty years.

**JEAN:** So, I've been there two weeks. And on Saturday they're like, *Oh, just be aware Hurricane Maria is coming.* I believe it was a tropical storm, actually. It wasn't even called a hurricane at that point. I didn't really care. I just knew I had an exam on Monday, and if I failed it, that's it.

**LY:** So what were you doing that day? Studying?

**JEAN:** Yeah. We were learning about the nerves that connect to







the arm, all that stuff. My godfather in Puerto Rico, he doesn't normally message me, he's like, *It's getting really bad. Be careful.* But the exam hasn't been canceled. At some point my dad sends me a picture from the Weather Channel. And you see that the hurricane is headed directly toward us now. Oh, this is a very dramatic part. My dad's texting me and he's like, *It's Category 3.* A couple minutes later, *Oh, it's Category 4.* I didn't get any text for like ten minutes. And then he says, *It's Category 5. Be safe.* And then we lose all power.

We wake up to . . . the apartment's fully flooded. There's probably, like, I wanna say, two feet of water.

Well, everybody's just freaking out at that point. And they put us, all of the students on the island, in an auditorium kind of space. So at this point, everybody's mind kind of changes to like, *Oh shit.* Like, this has become really real. Like, this is gonna be like survival of the fittest out here. Like *Hunger Games.*

My emergency buddy had met this girl in one of our classes or like an anatomy lab or something. I guess I loved her immediately. There was just something about her. She was cool. She was, like, calm. I knew that, like, oh, this is the person I'm gonna hang out with for the next seven days.

They started giving us, like, ramen noodles. But we didn't have clean water. So you would just eat them as crackers. The school, I guess they lost their satellite phones. So for three days nobody knew anything. People were sleeping under tables. They were sleeping in classrooms. And everything smelled like mildew. And there was no plumbing. And there were no showers. So people, they were getting pretty stinky.

LY: How were you feeling at this point?

JEAN: Honestly, yeah. I don't know. It all just seemed like an adventure to me. Because we were just hanging out all day and like, I was having a good—I guess maybe I trauma-blocked it or something. I wasn't ever nervous. I don't know.

LY: Well, and you had a crush. I feel like that helps.

JEAN: Yeah, exactly.

It was actually on the way to the airport. We were sitting together on the bus. And we were separate from everybody else. She actually brought it up. She's like, *Uh, this has been a crazy time or whatever, but just know that I, I do like you? But I have this current boyfriend and all this stuff.* So it was . . . it was a very weird conversation. But it was the first time we held hands, I guess. Like secretly.

When I came back from it, I think I experienced a little bit of, it's not PTSD, but, like, stress. There was a point where I

remember driving to one of my friend's houses and a branch fell while I was driving or something and I went into this crazy anxiety attack. I honestly have no idea what happened, but my heart started racing and I started sweating. I was hyperventilating. And I called Sandra. She just told me to pull over immediately. And to relax. She stayed on the line with me. Like, she didn't really say anything. We both didn't say anything. We just stayed.

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*Shanai, an artist and an organizer, has just gotten off the phone with a civil rights lawyer who wants to contest the conspiracy charges filed against her.*

**SHANAI:** The decision to move myself from the Twin Cities, where I had been living since high school, back to my hometown was because of the Line 3 oil pipeline. It crosses the Mississippi River, right where I grew up.

I lived in one of the Indigenous-led pipeline resistance camps, right at the Mississippi River crossing. We're having to take care of each other every day. Like, we cook our meals together and we had to figure out how to stay warm in Minnesota. And then people were joining in frontline actions from all across the country. And so there was a lot of security and need to plan together.

There was a person who had showed up at our camp early on but I wasn't super interested 'cause I was like, Oh, this person's also a lot older than me. And, I don't know. But then there was a moment when Johnny—who's now, he's my partner—he was part of an action where they locked themselves to a gate with bike locks. There was a moment where Johnny was putting this lock on his neck, and I just remember this weird feeling. And I was just like, Oh my God. I'm worried about you. Like I'm having this real feeling of intense fear and grief and just, like, love for you because you're doing this brave thing where you're standing up for what you believe and you've come from far away to be part of this here.

People bond in those traumatic experiences. And then when they're done, when the pipeline is complete and folks are moving on or going back home or doing whatever they're intending to do, those relationships that were formed in that kind of environment can start to unravel quickly.

Johnny was one of the first people who came back. You know, he called up last spring—the pipeline had been done since October and I'd been cleaning up and moving through all the things that had happened—I was facing a trial, you know, I'd gotten charged with conspiracy for basically doing mutual aid work and organizing. They wanted to put me in jail—and he came back to help us with Maple Sugar Camp.



**Eva Hooker**

## Supplication

**Of a sudden, she rises: peering through wave: dive-dapper,  
pond-silked.**

**In her shy gesture, she makes no apology  
for jewel round her neck:**

**bone-of-God jewel,  
tangle-of-spirit jewel, shadow-of-shadows,**

**fish in her mouth.**

~

**I came here to purge my brainstem  
of its usual store.**

**Amygdala, counter-argument  
to will:**

**I want ten degrees of constancy.**

**I shush myself. Hover within  
the prospect of knowledge**

**and its tendency to bruise.  
And yet, I bear no trace of loss,**

**simply dive under  
its shadow.**

**Stilled,  
I come up breathless.**

**Behind me birds of evening ride  
the tidal wind, familiar,**

**surely, with its requirements,**

**bend the full and frothing heart,  
to tenderness and plaint.**

*Eva Hooker is the author of Godwit and two hand-bound chapbooks, The Winter Keeper and Notes for Survival in the Wilderness. Her poetry has been deeply affected by Madeline Island and the mysteries of Lake Superior. She is a writer in residence at Saint Mary's College, Notre Dame, Indiana.*

We still tap maple trees and do all of the seasonal work as part of our life here. So for a good part of late spring, he and I were just basically alone at the camp. He was my driver and security person 'cause, well, you know, we are just living in this place where there's a lot of people who don't like us. So we were spending all this time together. And then finally one day we were driving back from somewhere and he was like, *Hey, do you like holding hands?*

And I was like, *Huh, I guess so.* That's how it started.

I had tried to go on a couple of dates with people back in Minneapolis, like I went on a date with one guy and it was so hard to maintain a conversation. He was like, *I Googled you.* Like, *That's really cool. All that stuff you're doing is really cool.* And I'm like, *You know, I don't, I don't feel like I can have a conversation about it like that 'cause it's not cool. Like it was actually really heartbreaking.*

Sometimes I do have these days where, like, I don't think it's nostalgia, exactly, but this feeling of, like, Oh, I remember when it was easier. I remember when I could turn my brain off or when I didn't wake up in the morning and worry about these things, or I didn't feel like I was being watched by law enforcement, or when I didn't remember all of those difficult conflicts and painful things that happened.

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**LY:** I interviewed twenty-six people as we were making this story. In almost every conversation, I heard something that completely surprised me. But the one I think about most is the call I had with Nick, who sent me a two-line email I almost didn't respond to.

*Nick, a contractor in Georgia. The first time this interview was scheduled, he couldn't talk, because he was in the middle of paying his power bill. The next day, he started the conversation by talking about lots of other things: his mom's foreclosure, a friend OD'ing, how his girlfriend's grown kids have PTSD and schizophrenia and how he's trying to help them keep their jobs. He's warm and chipper. He says he likes a lot of different kinds of music because he's a Pisces.*

**NICK:** They're fish, so we kind of go with the rhythm. I'm Aquarius, Aries, and Pisces.

**LY:** That sounds like a lot of water stuff.

**NICK:** Yeah. I just moved back from Maryland. I lived on the Chesapeake Bay. I used to work on skipjacks, big old oystering boats. The captain I worked for, he stopped oystering when he



was ninety-four years old. He had a stroke and his dementia set in really bad. And his family, like anytime he acted out they'd come and get me, 'cause I was the only one he'd listen to.

I rode out Hurricane Sandy up in Maryland. I had a house that was right there on the water, and it was a module home up on cement blocks. The water came right to the bottom of my door, never came in the house. The pine trees got pushed over. It was like hundreds of trees that were just straight pushed over. I went through three or four hurricanes up there. I rode a kayak around on the road one time 'cause it was so much water. It was like caskets and stuff floating around. There was an old church and I guess they didn't have 'em buried very well.

LY: Were you scared?

NICK: No, no. I was enjoying it. I was having fun with it. Like, go check out over here. Let's see what happened over here.

During the wintertime, the last couple years I was there, I don't know if it's just getting colder and whatnot, but the whole bay would freeze over, for like a month at a time. Every year I tried to walk farther and farther out there on the ice. I wasn't working for two months out of the winter 'cause of the weather.

I'm a contractor right now, but I'm actually on disability. I've messed up my spine pretty bad. They want to use my C3 vertebrae to fuse together my 5 and 6. I mean, I still go to work and still do jobs just fine. It's just sometimes I get really bad headaches and dizzy and stuff. I get real bad dizziness.

LY: Did you say in your email that your injury changes with the climate, or did I make that up?

NICK: Yes. With my back and stuff.

LY: Like when it gets cold?

NICK: Yeah. It seems like my back hurts more, locks up more. My hands lock up a lot more. I mean, it's really weird for your hands to lock up. You ain't able to move your fingers or nothing. It hurts to move. I just like to sit there and wait for it to unlock itself.

LY: And you noticed that it's colder now than it was when you were growing up?

NICK: My mom had stories of when we were younger and it snowed one time. Only time she could think of that she remembered snow. And now it's commonplace pretty much every year.

Temperatures are slowly getting colder and colder.

*[When Nick first tells me this, it strikes me as odd. But it's true: Overall, Georgia has warmed. But in some places, it's gotten cooler. It's because of a disrupted jet stream; freezing air from the Arctic moving farther south than before.]*

NICK: When it's colder, we end up snuggling a lot more in bed and staying in, not doing anything. I find myself, a lot of times it'll be 12 o'clock by the time I'm waking up. Just going to the store, you gotta put on two and three layers. I don't even like wearing shoes. Half the time I wear flip-flops, so, yeah, it's kind of a headache to me.

I've been looking up these major disasters and stuff and just how much money these people just screw off and it's like, Lord.

We are screwing up our planet. We're screwing it up bad. I mean, it's got to the point where we can't even eat freshwater fish. Like literally all our fish are polluted with plastic. Microplastic. And we still create this stuff constantly and hand it out.

I think we can't stop ourselves. We're too selfish. We're not gonna stop ourselves till we crash.

## There Is No End

ER: The more stories we listened to, the clearer it became that this wide-scale planetary transformation is also causing our most intimate, most interior, selves to change. Sometimes, I thought I could see a pattern emerging out of the chorus of voices but then someone would say something new and the pattern would dissolve or change tempo, which was frustrating for a while and then it wasn't.

LY: I started out frustrated with trying to capture a neat response to a question I wasn't sure I believed in. But by the end, that's what I liked. I appreciated the impossibility of the task. I liked, in the face of it, still asking.

ER: You said something recently that helped me understand what we have been doing. You said, *Maybe we are not trying to prove anything; maybe the point is the conversation itself.*

LY: And I like trying to hold all the parts of the answers. Like, Stephen and I recently had a fight, and we went outside to talk because there's no room in the apartment, and we saw some ducks all huddled together in the park. Stephen said, *This is a climate change love moment.* Of course it was.



*Interview with Ryan, a bookbinder from Phoenix.*

**RYAN:** Monsoons are—you know, we don't get a lot of rain here. And so, for me, monsoons, growing up, were this thing you sort of waited for. It was just, like, hot as all hell. And then it's just like, Oh thank God.

On the corner there is a place that water would always gather in this big puddle. When I was little, one time my dad and I went out after the rain. We put on rain suits and stood there and tried to encourage cars to drive really fast through this puddle and splash us.

The most recent relationship I was in was with somebody who also grew up here and also had these really strong associations with the monsoon, and this sense that it had shifted. You know, it's not like we're going back and reading through rain records. It's just like, Doesn't this feel different?

When we did have our rains, even if it was less, those rains felt like really special moments. Even if we weren't in the same place, it'd be like, texting, *Oh, I hope you got to be outside*. Like, got to be out in the rain. There was a place where I was working, they had a metal awning covering some of the parking spots. And I remember us sitting under that awning and one of the monsoons came in and we were just, like, sitting on the curb, you know, listening.

It just felt special. And also, like, a strange thing to find connection around. You know, a memory of how things were in comparison to how they are.

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*Eva, a solo mom by choice. She talks about how it took her more than five years to finally elect to have a child and the labyrinth of complications she experienced along the way—everything from how to legally deal with having a friend do direct donation, which she says can get “pretty squirrely,” to trying to spin up the worst-case climate scenarios so that she could reflect on whether that would change her actions.*

**EVA:** So I gave birth and then the summer hit and it was horrifying. It was the once-in-a-hundred-year event or once-in-a-thousand-year event, an event that of course will be more frequent now, but I think the highest temperature I read—I had to drive somewhere in my car—was 115 degrees. Things were very still and that was so unnerving. It was so hot that nothing was out. It just felt like this stillness that suggests an absence of life. Like things can't survive when it is that hot so they go and hide.





We had no air conditioning so we would keep Lou—his little tiny body—naked and drape wet washcloths over him. It was so scary for the child to be that small. We were hovering, hiding in our house from COVID, from the heat, from the smoke, trying to protect his sweet, perfect, brand-new little lungs. And it just felt like, God, what the fuck have I done?

I couldn't eat. I lost all this weight really quickly. And, of course, I'm also extremely hormonal. I was like sobbing every day because I was thinking about death a lot. 'Cause how could you not during that time?

For me, one of the joys of parenthood—or what I imagined at the time as one of the joys of parenthood—is introducing your child to the world, and the natural world in particular. And we couldn't do that. I had also read about the cultural process of becoming a mother. It is a socially mitigated process. It is not a private process. It's like, you need to come out as a parent, particularly as a mom. And I wasn't doing that either. I was in complete isolation. And so what did it mean to be a mother? What did it mean to have Lou here? My community wanted to help, but they couldn't, we were all just trying to keep ourselves safe. I mean, you know, I think you're in this sort of like intense, primal, survival mode and you feel so protective of this teeny tiny wet wrinkly infant.

But, interestingly, Lou could not have been bothered. He never cried, never seemed overheated. He thought the washcloths were hilarious.

I think there is a lesson in there, I mean, sometimes I grieve and cry about tragedies that the person experiencing it doesn't see as a tragedy. I have to be careful about that. Right? Like he was actually doing okay. Did he love it? I don't know about that but I would worry so much more about what it meant for him than he himself was bothered. In the end it was also his experience. I don't get to like, co-opt that grief and magnify it. Somehow we made it through. And like I said, he coped probably the best out of all of us.

How I love and who I love, those are the only things I can control. This sounds so corny but I try to tell people I love them more. I think I just continue to live my life the way that I'm living it, but more.

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**ER:** Often what our interviewees said was pretty profound. We want one of them to have the last word.

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*An environmental writer recommends speaking with Nic, a soil scientist who she says gets this kind of thing, "like at a really microscopic level." Nic talks about his relationship with his wife, a veterinarian.*



*They don't actually speak about climate much. She is "a refuge in some way for me. It's not like she doesn't believe in it," he says, "it's just not part of what we do." What he really wants to talk about is dirt.*

NIC: I mean, [the soil] is the only place on Earth where the atmosphere, the biosphere, the geosphere, and the hydrosphere all interact. There's part of me that's like, What's intimacy for soil? Like what is that? Oh goodness. Okay. It's almost too big to imagine, but also very close. I mean, just in terms of our physical bodies being basically assembled from the earth and air. The parts of our physical bodies are from literally all over the world. And so we're super connected even though we don't feel like it.

We set up our mental constructs to see ourselves as separate, but we can't really say, you know, the things that are part of me, at a very basic level, are unique. No, they have come from the same places that have formed parts of other people. So you can't really say where one person ends and the next begins.

The reality is those building blocks are not themselves gonna change over human timescales. Maybe over the timescale of what astronomers study, you know, when the sun explodes, the elemental composition of our Earth will change. But I don't think that there's gonna be a meaningful change in those atomic building blocks or elemental building blocks.

When we go out and dig a hole and observe, we're observing that soil in profile, reading the story of that individual. And every soil individual has its story. So to me there's, like, a big intimacy there. I feel like it is some sort of big intimacy with the place that I am in. There are patterns. But there's still all these individuals. 🌀

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*Liza Yeager is a radio producer and writer. Her audio documentaries have aired on BBC's Short Cuts, Invisibilia, 99 Percent Invisible, WNYC's Nancy, Planet Money, BirdNote, and Latino USA.*

*Leanne Dunic is a multidisciplinary artist whose most recent work is a poetic memoir with music entitled One and Half of You. She is the leader of the band The Deep Cove.*

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