

The Witnesses

—after the 2018 wildfire in Curlew, Washington
and the photograph *Curlew Witnesses Curlew Fire* by Karen Elias

Near the confluence
of Long Alec Creek and the Kettle River,
the curlew watches its namesake—
town of one hundred—
as residents stare toward the west,
inhale fear.

Smoke rewrites the sky
where the curlew once flew.
Flames attack its map and habitat.
Ridgelines pulse with what is singed:
feathers, pines, mountains, horizon
streaked with regret

and the burnt promises
of those not there to witness,
the incineration of branch,
the contagion of spark,
the long, slow burn of loss.

O Curlew and curlews,
obscure enough to hide
once within these safe acres,
even you Grief has found,
even you.

—Marjorie Maddox



Karen Elias, *Curlew Witnesses the Curlew Fire*