

# What did you learn here? (Old Man House)

By Cedar Sigo

*For Joy Harjo*

How to fall asleep easily on the beach, to dig clams, to dream a net made of nettles, a medicine of marsh tea boiled out to the open air, a memory of cedar bark coiled, resting for months in cold water to be fashioned into our so-called lifestyle, clothes for ceremony as well as our dailiness, canoe bailers, diapers, we used the wood for our half-mile longhouse and totems, dried fish, a hard smoke, wooden oval plates that hooked together filled with clear oil of salmon, to wet our palates and smooth our bodies. A shawl of woolly dog (now extinct) they were bred on tiny islands we can still identify, Tatoosh Island off of Cape Flattery, where there were whaling tribes too, the Makah, one of whose villages collapsed, preserved in silt (later unearthed) and how else? Which other ceremonies or necessary edges of objects? Our ivory needles, otter pelts, mat creasers, our dances. *What else do you remember dreaming of?* A kind of rake to skim the waves, to catch tiny fish on rows of twisted nails.

Source: *Poetry* (March 2021)