Homeland
By Karenne Wood, Poet, Monacan Indian Nation
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Most of the remarkable moments in the bicentennial were when Native spokespersons held the audience suspended in our world.

Blue mountains encircle a prayer to the breath of the dead—everywhere, seeds lie dormant in the ground. This is a country remembered—dogwoods and redbuds, deer at a field’s edge, the river roiled into its embrace of red earth. We are powerless here, in the face of our love for legends of granite and shapes that gather at night.
We are powerless when mountain laurel spreads its stars through forests, when cedars dance with the yellow leaves falling, when hawks are crying over us.

Shadows move west, then east, a circle of two hundred years.

On the Missouri, a man with braided hair tells himself stories and looks at the sky. He guards the sacred places of his people, a hundred miles of shoreline, and he is alone when he faces the ones who would steal from those graves. They are not white men this time but relatives, robbing the spirits. He is the dust of their bones.

A Montana woman wrestles barbed wire and drought, searching the skyline for rain. Her grandfather plowed this same ground. So she goes into it, freckled and burned by the beauty of pastures where calves graze, lavender mountains rising to the west, the vanishing outlines of wolves at twilight.

And in Lapwai, the Nez Perce leader holds his hand out to the future where forgiveness lies within himself. He remembers years of winter and the chiefs who would not leave. His prayer heals a generation—a red flower’s fingers, uncurling.

Nothing was discovered. Everything was already loved.