



Watermelon Snow: Science, Art, and a Lone Polar Bear

Lynne Quarmby

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Biologist Lynne Quarmby sailed on a two-week Arctic Circle expedition to document global warming, and *Watermelon Snow* juxtaposes descriptions of that voyage with reflections on her career, her climate change activism, politics, and the fascinating evolution of microbes, Earth's "machines of life."

Watermelon snow refers to red algal blooms among snow colonies of microorganisms. Normally green, the algae adapt to warmer temperatures by using red pigments as sunscreens. Unfortunately, this also speeds up snow melt, setting up one of the many feedback loops that magnifies polar warming. Quarmby researched these jewel-like, intricate microbes with wonder; the text communicates how exciting scientific discovery can be.

Quarmby also reveals her anger, grief, and frustration about global warming. Her climate activism includes civil disobedience and arrest over pipeline construction; she campaigned as a Green Party politician. She participated in the expedition to witness the impact of climate change on the Arctic, and to help other voyagers understand the science behind the changes, but admits "I am also feeling the emotional weight of being here, at the soft heart of global melting."

The expedition becomes a way for Quarmby to recharge for the long fight against the selfish, doomed strategies of corporations and the "cheater class" that supports the dying fossil fuel industry. Inspiration comes from the creativity of her diverse shipmates, who translate their emotions, images, and sounds into art. Composers record bearded seal songs, dancers and photographers observe emaciated polar bears, and artists fashion installation components, all to communicate the significance of climate change to the public.

Channeling passion and science into a "search for life beyond despair," *Watermelon Snow* is a powerful book. Quarmby warns of the devastating, facts-based inevitability of climate change, with guarded hope that human beings will act in time to avert the worst scenarios.

RACHEL JAGARESKI (September / October 2020)

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