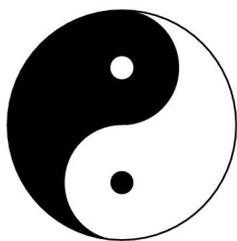




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Cover Art by Carella Keil

Yin & Yang



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“Yin and Yang are one vital force– the primordial aura.”

Wang Yangming

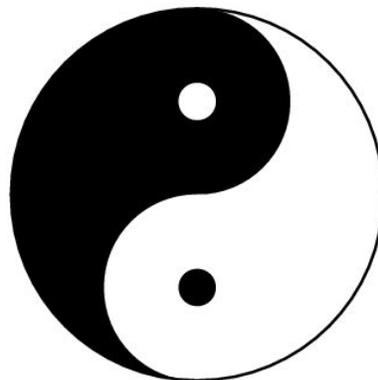


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Pearls

A warm gust guides my hunt below the tide.
I mine freshwater pearls for you, Palomita,
iridescent like the shine of your dark eyes.

The Way

on a line from Wang Wei

This is the way I do things now:
I grimace through the sudden gripping pains
that always take me by surprise somehow,

and minimize whatever fleeting gains
I manage day to day. The simple lunch
I pack with care the night before contains

low sodium, low fat, whole grains, a bunch
of apple slices that have slightly browned
by one o'clock, but still provide a crunch

that pleases me – the tartness and the sound
redeem the chalky rattle of the pills
I swallow for my breakfast. I have found

a fragile string of minor gifts fulfills
me most these days – one of midlife's clichés,
though less so than a vain pursuit of thrills.

Some years from now, I'll run across the phrase,
“in middle age I came to love the tao,”
and laugh, and while away my latter days.

Snowfall's End

In the dark of the kitchen, before bed,
the wind-crested snow on the dark lawn,
the tidy white lines along the porch rail
seem brighter in the night. It started
with flakes thick and slow as locusts,
growing busy like stars on a stirring sea.
The wind swarms with crystal flakes
that cake the ground in silence,
no louder than the hot jacket zippers ticking
in the drum of the dryer. Tonight, I know
in the darkest hours, it will all flutter to a stop,
the air growing still, the last of the snowfall
spiraling downward. In the morning will come
sun, golden light holding the truth in inches,
the realization that the snowy night came to an end,
all snowy nights come to an end.

Furious and Wet

Whatever sea creature
has arisen from the unknowable black;

Whatever nightmare
has slipped by sleep into awakening
and now runs free;

Whatever hidden things --
beasts or beings --
from the coldest, deepest depths
that now want showing,
*Come spend time
right here with me.*

Oh, abhorrent, unacceptable, unrecognized --
I reach out across the windy beach
and welcome you.
All outcasts, you are mine.

Whatever is unloved, unlovely, unwanted,
abandoned, bruised, scarred, despised,
I embrace you. Come, complete the whole.
Come. Make All, not less.
Imperfection, you are mine.

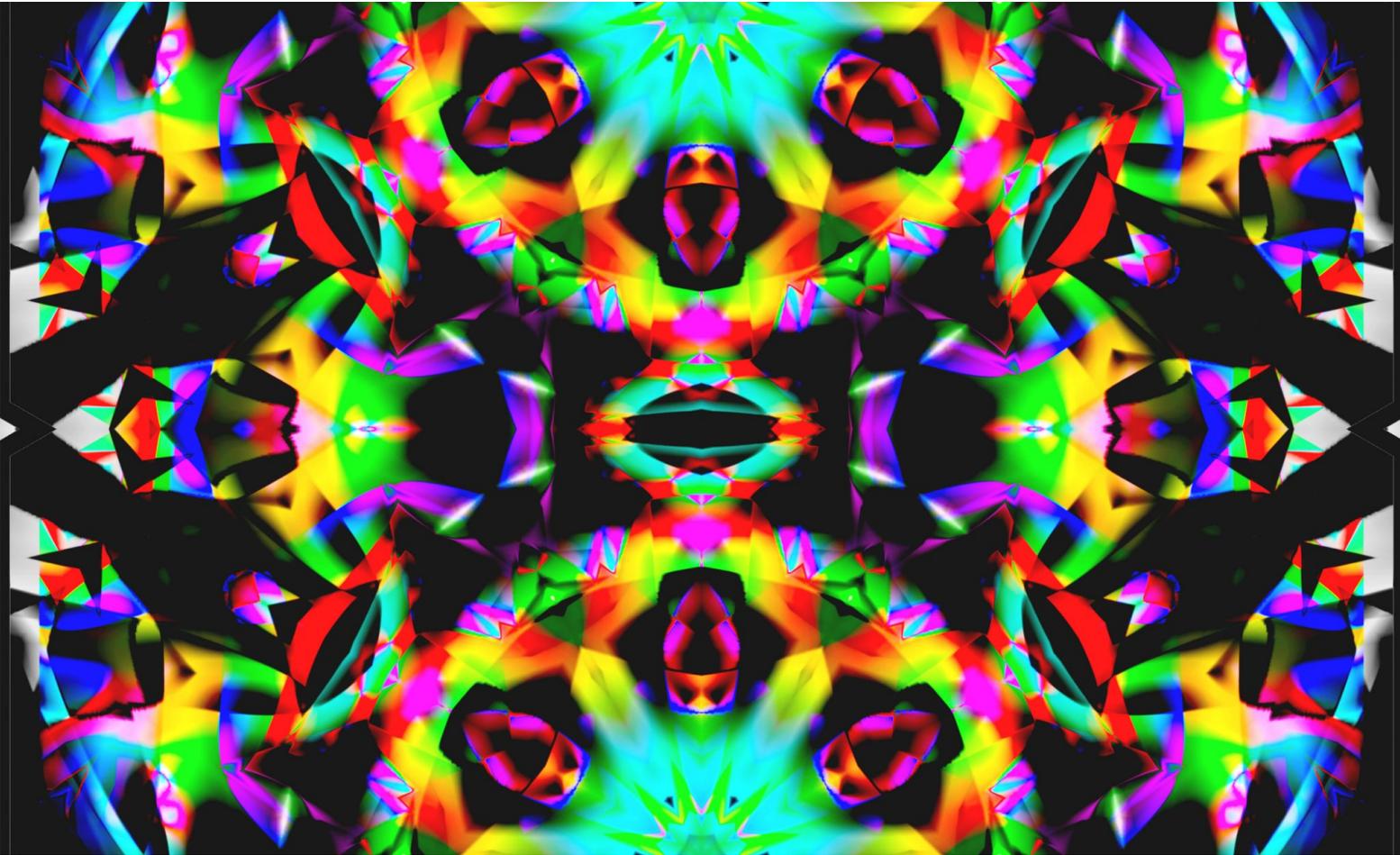
Furious and Wet

Whatever causes terror,
love, envy, devotion, sorrow,
you -- you are the current pushing.
You are the tide,
the land-carving ocean.
You, you are mine.

Keep rising, keep crashing.
Keep coming --
furious and wet.

Oh, Ocean come,
complete the land.

Primordial



Mantra of the Heart

We start a small fire in the corner
where the tempest cannot touch it.

You procure a knife to peel potatoes;
you see so clearly through the clouds.

The beach is barren and cold. Are
we the only two hearts beating?

We dip our bread into the bubbling
dish, fingertips dusted with paprika.

The red pigment stains my lips, but
you don't acknowledge the alteration.

Full of a trembling inquiry, my
artistic involution is at stake.

I count the comets that cut across the
sky. It's cruel to be a witness to global

afflictions. When I smile, I am held
by the promise of one responsibility:

Hope.

Mantra of the Heart

Your last bite of the tagine is cold; the
firewood sizzles, bloated from the rain.

I need the hissing mantra of heart: be
with me. I hold a palm over the embers.

Instinctively, I reach for the flicker, but
what I really want is to feel settled in my

Soul.

I am safe with you, but not from you.
You cannot have one without the other.

Ashes float and dissolve into the sand,
and you secreted away from the wind.

Dorian Gray



Selfless Love

I don't believe in selfless love
I don't know how anyone can
Are they lying? Just better than me?
It's an idea I can't understand

I love with my whole being
My soul cleaves to people
Their laughter warms my body
Their tears spur my muscles to action
Their problems spin my thoughts into plans

But selfless? Selfless?
I am braided into their tapestry
If I am not entwined with them, I am unbound
Without direction, without meaning
Self
Less

Eldest; Youngest

Cazimir was everything Exodus was not. There were some days Exodus appreciated this fact; others, he hated it—like now, as the family sat around the dinner table.

“There is no need for you to talk to her like that, you know,” Cazimir was saying. “Being your daughter doesn’t make her any less of a person.”

Exodus fought to not physically cringe against his younger brother’s inability to not vocalize every thought that entered his head. Even Ambrielle, their sister, wedged in between them in their birth order, looked rather horrified, fork frozen in midair, at Cazimir’s retort to their father, who had made one of his usual jabs at Ambrielle. She was like Exodus in that way, with a preference of dancing around conflict, even at one’s own expense.

Cazimir, it seemed, took after their father when it came to conflict resolution.

But Exodus couldn’t manage to involve himself, even when he probably should have. Words seemed to seize up within him in

Eldest; Youngest

the same moments they poured out of Cazimir.

Exodus set his focus on pushing his peas around his plate, keeping his head down as his father's and brother's voices continued to rise, until his father surrendered first, slamming his fists down on the table as he pushed himself up from his seat to leave the room. The dinnerware seemed to tremble even after he was gone.

The siblings departed shortly afterwards, the following silence too much to bear. Exodus planned to disappear up to his room and lose himself in a book as he usually did; it was generally easier that way, to exist as little as possible. But he stopped short as soon as he heard Cazimir's voice in the corridor behind him.

“You could say something, you know.”

Exodus turned. Though at one point, Cazimir had shot past Exodus in height, when Exodus looked at him, he could not help but see the little boy he used to read to at night, after their mother had passed. The little boy who was not quite as angry, and, perhaps,

Elders; Youngest

the version of Exodus who was not quite as withdrawn.

The years had taken its toll on the both of them, it seemed.

“It doesn’t do you any good, keeping quiet. You just look like you agree with him. Like you’re the asshole, too.”

A rare burst of anger sparked within Exodus’ chest.

“*She* knows I do not agree with him.” Even mid-sentence, he saw Cazimir’s brows twitch upward, like the younger boy was surprised Exodus would actually defend himself. “We talk privately every night. She knows what I think. Does that not matter?”

Cazimir bit the inside of his lip, but in this rare moment where he did not seem to have the words, Exodus did.

“I know you think lesser of me because I do not handle things the same as you,” he continued, “but that does not mean they go unhandled.”

Cazimir stared, his jaw tight. But Exodus’ spark of anger quickly diminished as his brother gave him a short nod. It was a simple gesture, but it acknowledged more than words could.

Elders; Youngest

“Understood,” Cazimir said. “Well, goodnight, then.”

Exodus nodded, but Cazimir had already disappeared into his room, leaving Exodus standing in the darkened corridor, alone. Leaving him with the knowledge that this conversation would happen time and time again, but never with a resolution; leaving him with the knowledge that they would never truly be able to escape this conversation at all.

Regardless, they were brothers.

“Goodnight,” Exodus said quietly.

The Moon on a Stick

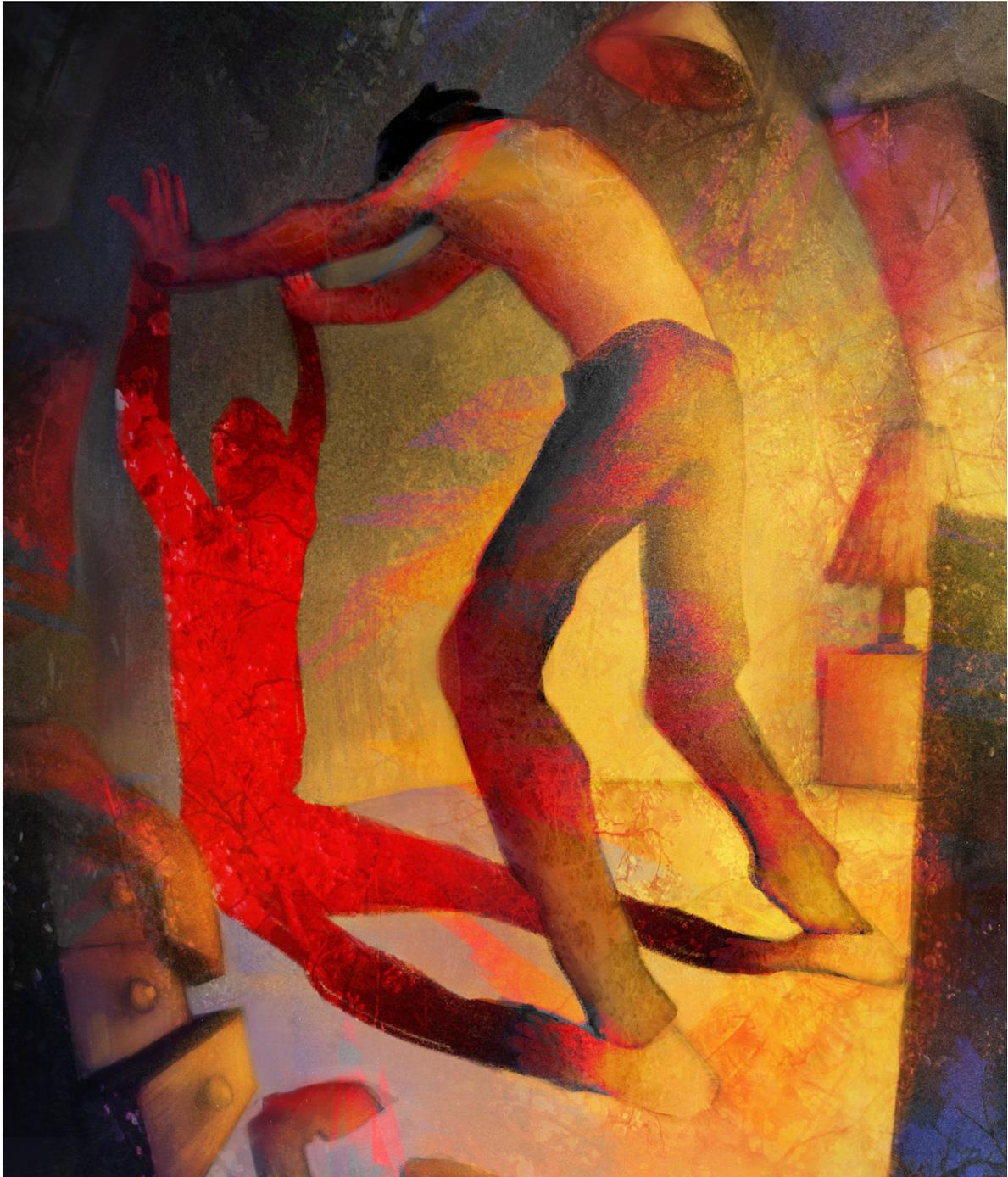
I soak in her glow, flying upwards and around. Around and upwards. Keeping my back to the light. Until I drift too high and the darkness chills my chitin. I fall back into her radiance. I start to circle again, farther from the light. Except I'm exhausted. In a tornado of moths, the air current keeps us all in place. Except I drag downwards. I slam into the metal pole that holds our mother Orb, folding my wing in two. Fluttering awkwardly away from heated yellow safety til I hit the concrete. On the tarred road below, the feeling of release overwhelms the pain from my injury. A single moonbeam delivers me into the ether.

Silken lunar light

Unknown to the swirling swarm

Of the AMC parking lot

Balance



Grounded

I am jealous of all
the doves sitting
in accord
on the power lines
on another cold day
barely moving
with only one heart each

they don't seem to be
at all troubled

so I keep driving,
away from them
with my two hearts
beating each other

self and mother
watching the winds,
confident and fearful
wanting arms and wings

to hold haphazard
places in and outside
our grip on the cables
that hold us together

Unutterable Knowing

She always waited up for Cole, even when he told her not to. They both knew it. Which was perhaps why when he'd gone off to work that morning, he had not bothered to tell her at all—only that he would be back late, probably around ten or eleven, and that his business was out of town.

He would probably grab dinner along his return trip. He often did. But there again, that did not stop Willa from having spent the better part of the afternoon bent over the kitchen counter kneading pasta and slow-cooking his favorite scalloped ham, carrots, and peas recipe. She even used the home-crocheted tablecloth that he liked best (it had once belonged to his grandmother), and had taken pains to polish the silver. She set two places at the table, one for each of them. He was not likely to bring home any guests without forewarning.

When at last she had done all the tidying up that she could think to do, she wandered out onto the porch to sit on the top step with a glass of white. It was early evening still; it could very likely

Unutterable Knowing

be past dark by the time he made it back. She thought about whether the pasta and ham would keep for his lunch tomorrow—it would, she decided. In fact, it would do well to marinate overnight.

Willa stretched out her legs and brought the glass to her lips. The late summer stillness had worn into a milder, more fragrant warmth. A part of her almost thought she could stand to wait out here forever, now the nights were becoming this way. Only a familiar disquiet stirred within. As though there were something she ought to be doing, but had only just forgotten in all her restless leisure.

As the hours wore on, the more uneasy she grew. She could scarcely keep her hands from trembling. Some nights were more unbearable than others, but she fought not to dwell. Willa already knew fully their defects, and so did Cole. Pure vocation and pure devotion: he the one, she the other. Correcting these was a separate matter. If she had known how to fix what was broken, then she would have done so by now. When she found she could sit still no

Unutterable Knowing

longer, she abandoned the glass of stone-dry Riesling on the step with an unceremonious clatter, and staggered back inside. She sank to her knees in the foyer. Leaving the door wide open behind her so that she would hear Cole's return without having to turn around.

There it was: the sound of the dropped bag, his shoes flying up the porch steps, his ragged, worried breath. Hitching at the sorry sight of her. He scooped her off the floor with a tender, bated, unutterable knowing—delicately as he might a wounded bird, one palm splayed behind her back, the other beneath her knees—and bore her up the winding staircase. Willa's eyes were squeezed shut, but she knew well enough where they were going. She felt him lay her on the bed, atop the scrupulously tucked comforter.

She did not have to ask him to stay; she did not even have to open her eyes. She only placed her hand, palm down, on the lonely space beside her. The mattress sank beneath his weight.

Make me a witch

My wife's voice is the hip-whisking
(shh-shh) side-to-side
of a mother soothing her baby.
She says: *I've always wished I was a witch,*
I tell her: So have I.

To be a cackling sorceress over her stinking cauldron
powerful enough to stop our worrying
stop glancing behind our shoulders
when we the hear the whistle
and know
we're being followed
know
the men by their drunk musk
know
there is nothing we could do if they decided
to take everything.
To be an owl's talons or a wolf's teeth,
a creature to be feared.

Make me a witch, I say
and they will know
I can burn it all
 if I want to when I want to
I can wield the power

Make me a witch

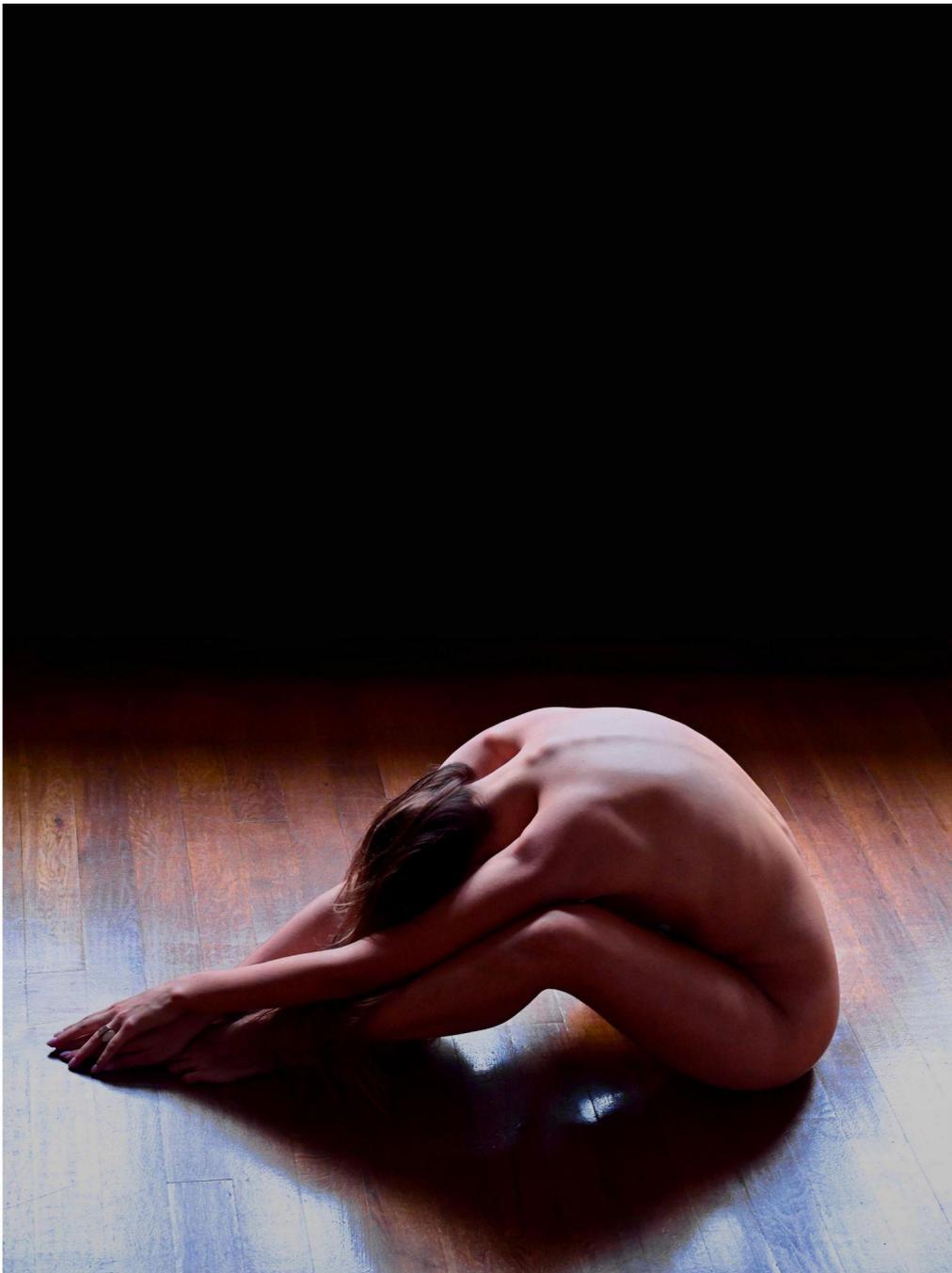
my fingernails will be ravens' claws
against their scratchy throats
deadly, familiar.

*Shh, shh, she says,
Make me a witch
so you don't have to burn it all.
I can brew a potion to fix it
a salve for fear
a remedy for rage.*

*Make me a witch, she says
I will keep you safe so
we can raise our sons to be better men.
Make me a witch.*

Shh, shh I tell her
if I were a witch, I would do it.

Stretching Like the Blindfold of Moonlight



Befriending Shadows

Since they died, if ever I'm near Scottdale, I drive by my grandparent's old house, just because. As I slope through the backroads of Southwestern Pennsylvania, I hunt for wooden silhouettes of wild animal: deer, and bear, or old men leaning against buildings smoking pipes. The real eye-catchers are welcome signs announcing in chunky, block lettering painted black and yellow, "YOU'VE ENTERED STEELER COUNTRY." My favorite signs hide, tucked under awnings or beside trees, existing as mere shadows until my eyes adjust and allow me to see.

Each wooden cut-out was a labor of love, like everything Grandpap had done. Carefully measured, cut by motor saw or by hand, then each piece carefully painted rustically by my grandma; a job they couldn't complete without each other. When I see these

Befriending Shadows

signs, I have to stop myself from pulling to the brim of the road or into the driveway. I have to stop myself from knocking on the door and asking if they remembered where they got the sign.

I want so badly to ask, “Did a man named Howard make that for you?”

I like to think the owners would tell me they bought the house in the last decade. They adored the old-fashioned aesthetic, so they held onto it. “If you want it, you could have it,” they might offer. I would politely answer, “No, thank you,” wanting to take it. Instead, I’d say, “I’m sorry to have taken up your time,” though I would be heavy-hearted it wasn’t his handiwork. I would wait until I returned to my car to cry, deflated, having finally mustered the nerve to ask.

Maybe instead, they’d pour me a cup of coffee. “Your

Befriending Shadows

grandma, what was her name?" I would hold the *a* in my mouth, the way the word nostalgia rolls off the tongue and hangs in the air.

"Cora," I'd reveal. They'd remember her laugh, the way it filled the room. They would tell me how she offered them one of her gobs.

That her kitchen felt like home.

It's not fair my grandparents died when I was young, when I was still a teenage delinquent. It's a shame they'll never know I grew out of the brat they knew me as. It's been a process, but I've learned to make peace with my past self. I found healing within a gray area, within the merging of the dark and the light.

"Shadow work," deals with shifting internally through seemingly corrupt aspects of your character - parts of your past you've ignored - coming to terms with these sides and integrating

Befriending Shadows

them with the counterparts. In this regard, the basic concept of yin and yang was best explained like a personal Pandora's Box. In the same way shadows follow us wherever we go, when something shudders our confidence or we feel emotionally exposed, we put up a shield. We repress those feelings. Shove them deep down and close the lid.

When you meditate, you open that box. You start shifting through these archaic dilemmas, travelling to repressed memories, and ultimately deal. Once you identify and integrate these things, you realize they aren't bad aspects at all, but scars that make you who you are. Once you understand the truth of yourself, you forgive yourself. You function differently. You can see.

Some guided meditations use binaural beats to help relax the

Befriending Shadows

mind and regulate breathing. I used one to program an asylum from anxiety: a secret sanctuary in my psyche where I felt protected. I chose my grandparent's back yard: a memory from the last house they lived.

Whenever I'm worried or distraught, I envision the scene from the meditation: their house resolute behind me. The burnished brick below the siding steadies me, calms my heart. The sun shines brightly, high grasses tickle my ankles, wind caresses my cheeks, and the negative energy is carried with the gale. This vision calms me instantly every time. When darkness from my past sheds shadows onto my present, I confront it by holding that vision in my mind.

Disconnection



Sun and Moon

“I’ve been talking to Jesus lately,” says Zeus. “Didn’t think we’d get along, but the guy knows his stuff.”

Artemis and Apollo share a sidelong glance. It’s not that they don’t like Jesus – everyone likes Jesus once they meet him, with a few noteworthy exceptions. But there’s the mutual concern that this is going to become their dad’s new Thing, like when he got really into Eastern philosophy a few centuries ago.

“So, I’ve been reading the Bible here and there. Interesting stuff.”

Artemis doesn’t really trust her father to form a nuanced interpretation of the Bible. She can already picture him bellowing out-of-context scriptures at Hera during arguments, as if their constant conflicts aren’t obnoxious (and potentially deadly) enough.

“When should we expect your baptism?” asks Apollo, leaning down to scratch the wolf at his feet between the ears.

Zeus looks at Artemis dryly. “Is your brother capable of

Sun and Moon

having a conversation without sarcasm?”

“No,” says Artemis. Neither is she, but it’s often too subtle for most people to detect.

It’s her turn to pick where they have dinner. In lieu of nectar and ambrosia, Zeus tends towards burgers and barbeque. Apollo likes pretentious five star establishments where he can flirt with the waitstaff. Artemis always picks her own hunting lodge, so she doesn’t have to leave home.

While a few of her huntresses prepare the meal, they sit by the hearth, wolves and deer lounging around the room like house cats.

“What’s interesting is – you remember when I told you about Yin and Yang?” Zeus asks, interrupting himself.

Apollo huffs. “You explained it to us about a thousand times, so we must have retained at least something about it.”

“Well, it’s kind of all about that, the Bible. They don’t call it that. But there’s good and evil. Heaven and Hell. God – just one –

Sun and Moon

and Satan.” He sits back in the antlered easy chair. “We don’t really have that, do we?”

“I think we do,” says Artemis. “There’s Olympus and the Underworld, for example.”

“Yeah, I mean – of course there’s life and death, up and down. But we aren’t, you know, *good* or *bad*. We’re good *and* bad. All of us.”

Apollo looks taken aback. “What have I done that’s so bad?”

Artemis looks at him. “Are you *kidding* me?”

She gives him a minute to remember just a few of his actions.

“Okay, point taken,” he relents. “But Heracles seems like a pretty nice guy.”

“Why don’t you ask his wife?” asks Artemis.

“That’s not fair, I think Hera had something to do with that.”

“My point is –” Zeus speaks loudly, like he does when he wants to change the subject – “for a lot of religions, balance is external. Yin and yang. One God, one Devil. And that’s weird to

Sun and Moon

me. Because for us, all that's inside." He shakes his head. "I can't imagine it being any other way."

Later that night, after Zeus departs with a flash of lightning and roll of thunder, Apollo meets Artemis outside.

In the dark, it's more apparent that they glow – like the sun and moon, respectively. They both have their father's dangerous beauty and lightning blue eyes.

"So, what do you think?" he asks.

She shakes her head. "I think Dad's not cut out for philosophy. But he craves balance."

The two of them look up at the night sky, perfect compliments for each other. Yin and yang.

"Well," says Apollo, "that's what he has us for."

Sun Salutation

Salutations to my sun,
warmth to ignite my touch
and heat my surface.

Brief glimpses of you,
as you set and rise,
bookmark to the days.

There is power in your gaze,
bringer of light and life
but only from a distance.

You, blazing matter into plasma,
explosions of prominences and storms,
echoing into astral silence.

Millions of years but limited time,
not enough in this lifetime for our system.

Moon Salutation

Salutations to my moon,
jewel in the sky as I shrink
or grow in your presence.
Queen of waters you pull
towards your craters and silver dust.
Let me set in pose to worship,
angled to slip into temporary night:
a brief collapse from cyclical.
I let you eclipse me into diamonds,
every precious ring earned
as you slip off in my light.
Steal my luster to reflect your rays,
brighten this night at full strength.
Wax and wane, love steady
for millennia but not long enough.

Plan A Plan B



Open

She left everything open—
windows, doors, drawers, cabinets,
the little cap on the tube of toothpaste,
letting the air in, letting the bugs in, letting
everything in. He, on the other hand,

was a firm believer in twisties
and double knots, double bagging and double
checking to make sure the door was
double locked. You could say
she trusted while he trussed. He wanted

to bind her to him with that wedding band
on the one hand. On the other, she wanted
to keep their relationship open. “The heart
must remain open,” she said. He closed
his eyes and exhaled miserably. “And where

does that leave us?” he asked and opened
his eyes and saw that she was sitting
close to him on the couch, her mouth slightly
open, as if to say “kiss me” without saying it.

The origins of harmony

Long ago, high up in the Cosmic Gardens, where there were as many blades of grass as there are seconds in the Universe, a single star split into two. From the two halves, the Twin Gods forged their material forms – the one named Tamisa took the form of a waning moon, while the other, named Yorokke, took the form of a blazing sun.

The Twin Gods longed for purpose and wished to create something of their own. Guided by a common vision, they used a lake with crystalline waters as a canvas. They moulded mountains from ripples, fertile fields from algae, and clouds from floating cherry blossom petals. At the end, they used the soil underneath to shape diverse forms of life to inhabit this new world.

They could not, however, come to an agreement on how to oversee their creation. Unable to reach a common ground yet supportive of each other's dreams, the Twin Gods split their world in two, so that both could see their vision come to fruition.

The First World was placed under Tamisa's domain.

In this realm of endless nights, she wanted all creatures to live as they wished. She let go of her reins, and let them flourish at their own pace, completely free of any expectations or rules. Despite her kindness, the inhabitants of this world took advantage of their

The origins of harmony

privilege, and committed terrible deeds in the name of freedom. They placed arbitrary divisions amongst themselves, only to wage wars and suffering upon those outside the bounds. Before Tamisa could intervene, the world drowned in a sea of blood and ash.

On the other side, Yorokke ruled over the The Second World, bestowing upon it never-ending light, with no sunrises or sunsets.

Unlike his sister, he thought freedom was too big of a gift for the forms of life they forged. He wanted to be in full control of his world, a God among mortals, a forger of laws and punishments alike. All living beings survived in peace as long as they followed his strict laws and fell into damnation when they didn't. Some lived in fear, while some turned hateful, spitting on statues of Yorokke when he wasn't looking. One by one, they all turned against their God, choosing death as the only way to finally be free from his cruel reign. The world fell silent and withered away into nothingness.

There is a lesson in every failure, and the Twin Gods understood that living beings need the moon as much as they need the sun. Separated for so long, they met again with newfound perspectives and, lying under a tree with rusted leaves, they talked about how to best weave their differing ideals together.

The origins of harmony

And so, for the Third World, they decided to blend day and night into a balanced tapestry of light and dark. In this world, they would not be ruling, nor would they be leaving the inhabitants to their own devices - instead, the Twin Gods would be distantly watching, giving people the freedom to choose for themselves what they thought best, and enforcing just punishment only when necessary. Unlike either world before, this one flourished under benevolent rulers striving to fulfil their Gods' will and keep the world kind and safe.

There was no fourth world. Satisfied with their creation, Tamisa and Yorokke embraced each other and watched over their creation, until time stood still and the Cosmic Gardens were swallowed by eternal snow.

Yang

ten MORE INCUBATED
 pearls on the ceiling
 what's left to right backwards country

Knowing Where you Come From and Where you Want to Go

(after Where I Come From by Mathangi Subramanian)

I come from a place of liltng streams and chopsng valleys
A country of black gold and rain sodden green graves
Holdfast boots and unlucky rabbits
Where the lard spits and the salt bubbles up in the wire

My country was slant rhyme
Skimmed stones and dimples landing in the lake
My country was uneven teeth and druidic temples
The stay-at-home moon and bone broth cwtches
My country was Brycreemed curls and coal cough voices
Women who bleached their nets with their hair every Friday night
And my country was a setting down, an enduring
A place where robins and doves were called corpse birds
And where the daffodils that first reached to heaven
Soon bent their necks
So they only saw what was in front of them

My new country is iambic pentameter
Black and white and all things in between
This country is twanging tits and too many teeth
Shining like sharks in the darkness
A million north stars and necking in the car park after curfew
This country is hair extensions and asbestos voices
People who tattoo Jesus on their tongues and the devil on their backs
This country is a standing to be counted, a striving
A place where the flowers reach brashly for the sky
Not scared to show their beauty or their thorns
And this country tries to make where you end up
More important than where you came from

Knowing Where you Come From and Where you Want to Go

There is a word in Welsh—hiraeth
That means longing for a home that maybe never was
So when the wind moon turns me inside out
And I dream in half remembered hymns
About broken shoes and bara brith
Well then I try to remember
That where I come from is only part of my story
The rest is up to me to write
And I know despite everything
I've ended up in the right place
To begin volume two

Two Souls

In my palm, cracks crazing;
the cup where I give, receive
 from the place where I've been broken.

I'm not a god. I only wear
 the stepchild hands of an unknown force.

Skewed crosses mark heat, soul.

Sister souls: one clumsy. Unsure.

 Fumbling, writing a name meant for grace,
 in a childish whimper.

The other: strong, confident

 but greedy. Flattered, distracted by toys.

Which hand seeks truest
for rightness, happiness, destiny?

 Mirror images. I can't disown either reflection.

Place them both against

 the baffling windows of heaven.

Shadow

I think I am less afraid of the dark
than of the light.

There is a magic there
hiding in the unknown
and I too can hide
and seek comfort there.

The light is a different matter.
Exposing that which should be hidden.
Shining into my hidden places
and yours,
exposing us to view.

I am afraid to see these hidden places.
Afraid of what the light will reveal in me
and you.
What lies beneath the skin is best hidden
in the dark, lost where the shadow falls.

I don't know what the light may reveal
only that I'm afraid to see it

Sunrise at the Pagoda



A Pair of Everywhere

The creek steps out of itself,
and I offer my daffodil-air,
to you.

Dreams fall to their knees
like the greens and grapes—
Phew...

*How are you today?
We're together somewhere...
saudade.*

*You're still writing upon the water?
I'm still trapped like a stem—
darker.*

*It should be easy to find me, then.
Easy as an essence, in the end,
as a friend.*

*The meadow spends its time
telling me that I'm the moon.
Good.*

A Pair of Everywhere

*No, we are both passive,
when I only want to dance like evening.
We are.*

*We are blue, flowing, the reverse
of an embrace that is close vastness.
We are gone.*

*We are in the painted energy,
with curved trunk-backs and limbs
that take us with them.*

*Let yourself beat.
I am.
Let me.*

*The creek steps back into itself,
and my daffodil-air rolls after it.
We are here.*

Same

Who is to say the scientist
is not really a theologian searching for truth
in the story of numbers,
graphs, trials, errors, failure, forgiveness.

She asks questions of creation:

What splits an atom?

The way he might ponder in his heart

How do we embrace Eve?

A Sawyer's Education

Max Williams brought his battery-powered chainsaw to Harmony Acres.

He knew he didn't need it. In fact, he offered all his tools to the men's workshop, whose leaders turned them all down. In the 20 years of the retirement community's existence, almost every man arriving had made such offers. By now the shop had multiples of most tools, with no need – or room – for anything more.

So Max gave most of the tools in his basement to an appreciative shop teacher in a nearby junior high. But he kept a few favorites, including the chainsaw, which was of recent vintage, light enough that even a 74-year-old could manage it easily.

The Acres, as residents called it, was built on the edge of a flood-control reservoir. In the decades after World War Two, the

A Sawyer's Education

state had diked several such areas to hold back heavy rainfalls, releasing water slowly to avoid flooding brooks in urban areas downstream.

Those “reservoirs” were, by design, dry most of the year. Heavy rains might create a network of small ponds, almost lakes, but those soon drained away, leaving a wide swath of woods and meadows that invited wildlife habitation. Volunteers – both men and women residents – built a series of trails through their reservoir/forest, with rudimentary bridges over areas most subject to flooding, and a dozen benches where walkers could take a break.

Because the forest patches continued to grow up willy-nilly, trees or large branches occasionally fell across trails; a little pruning was needed now and then. Max had never been a

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woodsman, or even a Boy Scout, but he joined the Trails Committee with gusto. His chainsaw would be exactly the tool needed for the autumn sprucing-up. And he learned, at his first meeting, that the committee was lopsidedly female, including several youngish-looking widows.

Widowed himself a decade ago, after a long and happy marriage, Max had never considered a second marriage, and wasn't now interested in a serious romance. But some feminine companionship might be an unexpected bonus.

New England only rarely gets severely damaging hurricanes, but they had a pretty good one in late September that year: heavy winds and rain; some power outages, the TV weathermen reported. Two days later it turned mild and sunny; Max took his saw out to

A Sawyer's Education

what they called the Blue Trail. There were indeed downed limbs; he spent two satisfying hours cleaning up, and looked forward to some reinforcing praise when the committee met a few days later.

To his shocked surprise he was instead excoriated. “You took down that dead pin oak!” exclaimed Muriel, one of the women he’d thought of inviting to dinner. Handsome, a bit of curl in bobbed white hair, a body that suggested purposeful exercise. “We don’t do that!”

“That was a favorite nesting tree for our hairy woodpecker!” insisted Anita, another attractive widow. Tall, grey ponytail. “Don’t you know?” demanded Harriett. Short, black, tight curls.

“Chickadees and nuthatches use those old woodpecker cavities for nesting! And others prize them for grubs to eat!”

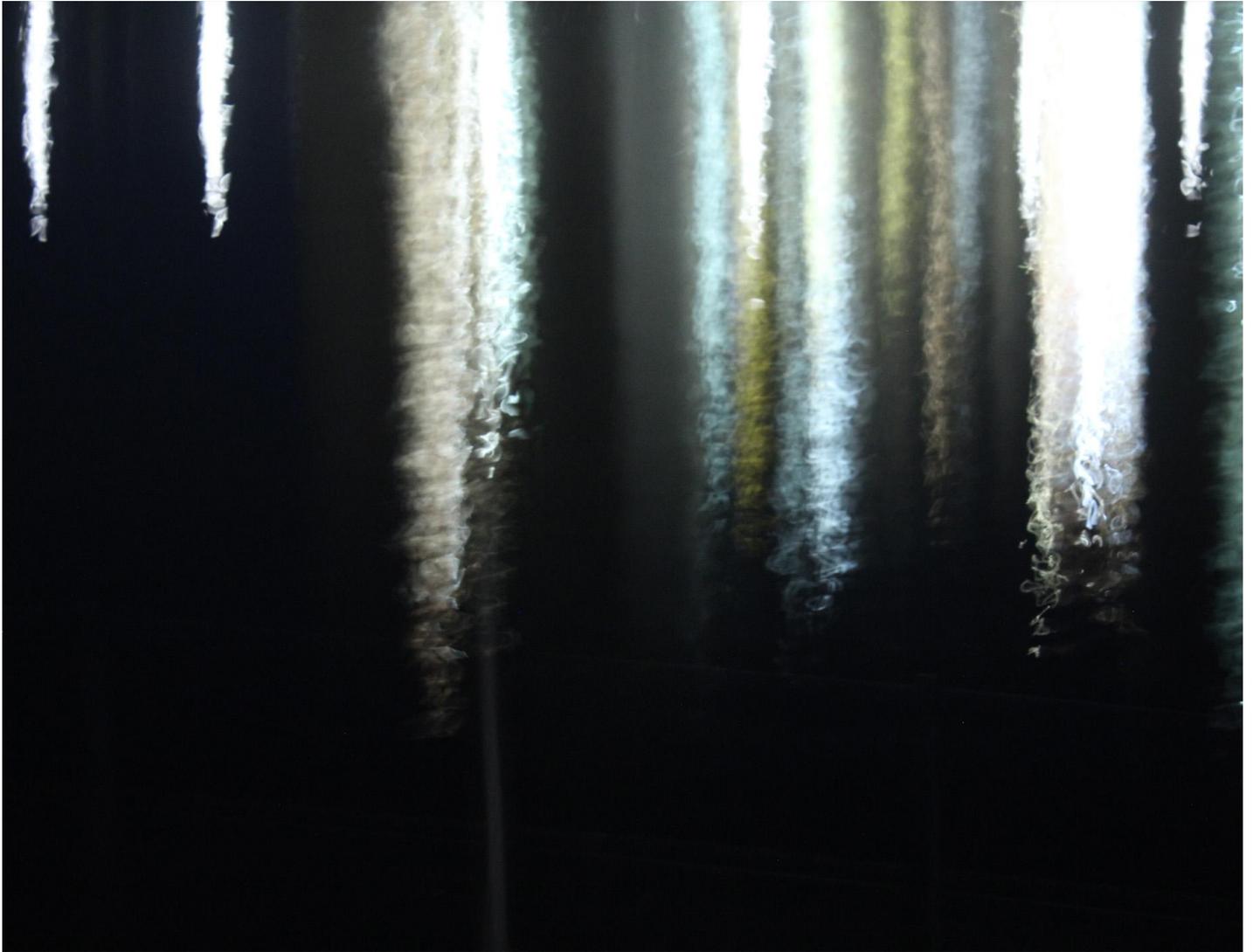
A Sawyer's Education

“I was just trimming!” Max protested. “No city park I know is infested with dead trees!”

“Infested?” demanded the Muriel woman. “Our woods aren’t a city park! You need to keep that fancy saw of yours close to the trail! If it isn’t a danger to people, leave it alone! The birds will thank us.”

It was a humiliating morning, but one with redeeming value. Muriel offered to go out on the trails with him to explain the appropriate limits of trimming.

And agreed to join him for dinner the next night.



Dissolution Untethered

I cry into my mother's hands with vague apologies about selfishness and instability, a tear for every heartbeat; forgivable things only when it is a daughter who sins. And I thought then, my father should have taught me to have more pride than to kneel and weep and know that Mary Magdalene would never have done as I have. She would have wept for no man other than the Son of God; nothing is forever with the mortal man, and I should have better things to do yet I drink the bar dry over the ways I used to be held. And yet life is still too beautiful, no poverty of the imagination here. I watch our memories back in a silent movie, black and white trailing out of my eyes.

The scene plays, and I question who was who, you or I, the night light of the new moon winter; you or I, the daylight of the full moon summer. And this confusion and interchangeability should of course disrupt the natural world to a point where we can no longer speak to each other. The loss of equilibrium leads to the dissolution of companionship, for I was in the wrong to unleash a tide of ungovernable emotion unto you, anguish persisting when water had receded. I plead to the powers and the saints to rewrite my sins and restore the balance, redeem myself of the neglect laid upon one another. Here, opposite forces began to come in play, the soft

Dissolution Untethered

passive nature of my white invaded by the immeasurable hardness of the black, and without ความสมดุล or balance, stability and fastness remain out of the question in our connection. I might as well be in love with the natural world, kissing sick birds and turning the bare eye to the eclipse, blinded by the sky behind who pities me, as she cries and cries, rains and rains, then and there.

So, after the accelerated intimacy and esoteric nonsenses, you understandably, lovingly, renounce our unsustainable passion, reduced to something like a half-hearted love full of atavistic notions. And the ceiling cannot hold all of us, and here is the cycle of unreconciliation and reunion, filled with unbridled intensity, the occasional enemy of comfort and familiarity. I once had the paradise of a hearth, crushed to ashes from indecision and bouts of silences. But here, I am already overly melodramatic, shamelessly so, still enjoying your beauty. Above all this, I had believed I would have married you, though I suppose now I will rest like God did on that first Sunday.

After the Storm

When the flood waters receded, Nephra embraced the dead. Whispered her apologies to those whose eyes remained wide in horror. “You don’t feel me anymore.” She gently closed their lids, tucked the hair out of their faces, laid them to rest.

A familiar shrill pulled her attention to a submerged stack-home. A call to her darkness, her fear, her pain. “Some still suffer.” She floated to the cries, leaving a trail of black wisps, eyes shining like a pair of full moons.

“Thought I'd see you still hanging around.” A lily-soft tone. A blossom to Nephra’s otherwise thorn-ridden thoughts. Sephir emerged from the sunbeams, pooling the light from the water's surface. When his golden form took shape, he embraced her though she did not embrace back.

“It's the survivors. They need you more than ever.”

Sephir sensed the sadness in her tone. “You’re needed too, love. We exist because of them and for them.” He gave a gentle kiss to her cold cheek, took her hand, “come with me.”

Three children huddled close to each other, trapped in the attic of their sinking home.

After the Storm

Nephra stayed far back, a careful distance, enough to show the possibility of drowning and starvation, but not enough to send them into blind panic. A healthy fear is one in moderation, it helps others avoid pain and death. But too much, also causes pain, especially for young ones.

Sephir held them close, warming them, reminding them of the taste of fresh apple cobbler, the laughter of their parents, and the chance of going to bed dry tonight.

“You’re good with the children.” Nephra whispered with a smile. She had grown used to the fact that children only liked her when life was only games and pranks, Halloween frights. It was best not to reveal to Sephir how jealous she was that she’d never feel their love.

Sephir smiled up at her as the thump of rescue helicopters approached. “It’s just my nature to bring hope. It’s worked on you a few times.”

Biographies

Edward Michael Supranowicz is the grandson of Irish and Russian/Ukrainian immigrants. He grew up on a small farm in Appalachia. He has a grad background in painting and printmaking. Some of his artwork has recently or will soon appear in Fish Food, Streetlight, Another Chicago Magazine, The Door Is a Jar, The Phoenix, and other journals. Edward is also a published poet who has been nominated for the Pushcart Prize multiple times.

Crystal Taylor, author of *Garden Gate (Keeping)* and *Dolls and Idolatry* published by the Last Stanza Poetry Journal and Cosmic Daffodil respectively, is fascinated with how we respond to uncertainty, and how our responses shape our futures. When not reading or writing, you will find her with her dogs and a pair of binoculars, enchanted by winged things of all kinds. You may find her on insta @cj_taylor_writes, crystaljonestaylor.com and LinkedIn at /in/crystaljonestaylor/

David Rosenthal is a public school teacher in Berkeley, California. His poems and translations have appeared in Rattle, Birmingham Poetry Review, Rising Phoenix Review, Change Seven, Teachers & Writers Magazine, Measure, and many other journals. He has been a Howard Nemerov Sonnet Award Finalist and a Pushcart Prize Nominee. His collection, *The Wild Geography of Misplaced Things*, was published by White Violet Press (Kelsay Books).

Biographies

Devon Neal (he/him) is a Kentucky-based poet whose work has appeared in many publications, including HAD, Stanchion, Livina Press, The Storms, and The Bombay Lit Mag, and has been nominated for Best of the Net. He currently lives in Bardstown, KY with his wife and three children.

Erich von Hungen is a writer from San Francisco, California. He lives under a giant Norfolk pine in a century old house between Golden Gate Park and the Pacific Ocean. His writing has appeared in The Write Launch, Versification, Green Ink Press, The Hyacinth Review, IceFloe Press, Fahmidan Journal, and others. . He is the author of four poetry books. The most recent is "Bleeding Through: 72 Poems Of Man In Nature". Find him on twitter @poetryforce.

Seraphina Dawn has a BA in Literature from Simone Fraser University and participated in the Creative Writing Program at UC Berkeley. Seraphina is a Kundalini teacher, writer, and poet. She admires Clarice Lispector's prose, Octavia Butler's fiction, and the philosophy of Simone Weil. Seraphina currently lives in Istanbul.

Ivona Coghlan studied Creative Writing with The Open University. Her story, Turns was published online by The Blue Nib, two of her stories are published in the New Worlds, New Voices anthology. Ivona has had poems published in The Bangor Literary Journal and Raw Lit.

Avery Timmons is an Illinois-based writer holding a BA in creative writing from Columbia College Chicago. Her short fiction can be found or is forthcoming with Querencia Press, Wild Ink Publishing, and other print and online publications.

Biographies

Jordan Alejandro Rivera (he/him) is a 23-year-old queer Xicano writer living in Boston. Jordan is passionate about mutual aid and currently works as a medical researcher. His work is featured in fifth wheel press, Writers Resist, Acedia Journal, and partially shy. Find him on Twitter @jordinowrites.

Susan Shea is a retired school psychologist, who was raised in New York City and now lives in a forest in Pennsylvania. In the past year her work has been accepted in a number of publications including: Across the Margin, Ekstasis, Feminine Collective, The Avalon Literary Review, Persimmon Tree Literary Magazine, Military Experience and the Arts, Triggerfish Critical Review, Amethyst Review, Litbreak Magazine, A Time of Singing, Invisible City, Roy Faineant Press, and others.

Whitney Crawford was born and raised in Houston, Texas, but currently resides in Virginia, where she is pursuing her doctorate in clinical psychology. She is the winner of an honorable mention in the 2023 Lorian Hemingway Short Story Competition, and her poetry and short stories have appeared in various literary journals, including Halfway Down the Stairs and Agape Review.

Bethany Tap received her MFA in creative writing from the University of North Carolina at Wilmington. Her work has recently been published or is forthcoming in Flash Fiction Magazine, ballast, The MacGuffin, Emerge Literary Journal, Thimble Literary Magazine, and The Hyacinth Review. She lives in Grand Rapids, Michigan with her wife and four kids.

Biographies

Gina Moriarty is an emerging writer who earned her MFA through Chatham University in Pittsburgh where her thesis was the recipient of the Katherine Ayres Award. She's mostly a nonfiction writer but dabbles in poetry. Typically, her work covers the themes of addiction, heartache, and coincidence beneath an umbrella of hope.

You can check out her official website here: <http://ginamoriarty.com>

Her nonfiction has been published by Permafrost Magazine, the AROHO Foundation, the Braided Way Magazine, and 3 AM Press. Upcoming by Marrow Magazine and Purple Ink Press Bimbo Feminist Anthology. Her poetry has appeared in the Brief Wilderness, the Ekphrastic Review, and the Classical Poets Society.

Brooksie C. Fontaine was accepted into Salve Regina University at the age of fifteen, where she obtained a BA in Studio Art and an MFA in Creative Writing. She is currently an MFA candidate for Illustration at the Savannah College of Art and Design.

She is a teaching assistant, tutor, and illustrator. Her work has been published by Eunoia Review, Boston Accent Lit, Anti-Heroin Chic, Report From Newport, and the Cryptids Emerging and Things Improbable anthologies. Her illustrations may be viewed via BrooksiesSketchbooks.com.

M. A. Dubbs is an award-winning Mexican-American and LGBT poet from Indiana. For over a decade, Dubbs has published writing in magazines and anthologies across the globe. She is the author of three poetry collections, including *Limestone Versified: Indiana Haiku and Other Poems* which releases in Spring 2024. She won the 2023 Holden Vaughn Spangler Award from River City College MUSE and served as judge for Indiana's Poetry Out Loud Competition.

Biographies

Maria Belik, an international painter and 2D animator based in London, UK, brings visions of dreams, love, everyday sadness, and unique life experiences to life through her use of experimental mixed media and traditional and digital materials. Her inspiring and emotive works of art aspire to bring emotion to the hearts and minds of people around the world, reminding us all of the beauty and complexity of the human experience.

Carolyn Schlam is a figurative painter, sculptor, glass artist and published author on art. In 2013, she was named one of the finalists in the Smithsonian Museum Portrait Competition and her work, "Frances at 103" was exhibited at the Museum, and subsequently acquired by the Smithsonian. Carolyn's three published books on art include "The Creative Path". "The Joy of Art" and "The Zen of Art".

Paul Hostovsky's poems have won a Pushcart Prize, two Best of the Net Awards, the FutureCycle Poetry Book Prize, and have been featured on Poetry Daily, Verse Daily, The Writer's Almanac, and the Best American Poetry blog. Website: paulhostovsky.com

Gabriela Baban is a Romanian fantasy writer whose work delves into the weird and fantastical. With a background in Linguistics, she has always been fascinated by language and how we can manipulate it in unexpected ways to tell a story. You can find her first published story in the short story anthology Fate by UK-based press Bitterleaf Books, or you can get in touch on Twitter at @GabbyBaban.

Biographies

Jerome Berglund has worked as everything from dishwasher to paralegal, night watchman to assembler of heart valves. Many of his poems in a variety of forms including haiku, haiga and haibun have been exhibited or are forthcoming online and in print, most recently in bottle rockets, Frogpond, and Modern Haiku. He is also an established, award-winning visual artist, whose black and white pictures have been shown in New York, Minneapolis, and Santa Monica galleries.

Bill Wolak has just published his eighteenth book of poetry entitled *All the Wind's Unfinished Kisses* with Ekstasis Editions. His collages have appeared as cover art for such magazines as *Phoebe*, *Harbinger Asylum*, *Baldhip Magazine*, and *Barfly Poetry Magazine*.

Adele Evershed was born in Wales and has lived in Hong Kong and Singapore before settling in Connecticut. Her prose and poetry have been published in over a hundred journals and anthologies. Adele has recently been nominated for the Pushcart Prize and Best of the Net for poetry, and the Staunch Prize for flash fiction. Adele's first poetry chapbook, *Turbulence in Small Places* will be published this year by Finishing Line Press.

Mary Elizabeth Birnbaum was born, raised, and educated in New York City. She has studied poetry at the Joiner Institute in UMass, Boston. Mary's translation of the Haitian poet Felix Morisseau-Leroy has been published in *The Massachusetts Review*, the anthology *Into English* (Graywolf Press), and in *And There Will Be Singing, An Anthology of International Writing* by *The Massachusetts Review*, 2019 as well. Her work is forthcoming or has recently appeared in *Lake Effect*, *J-Journal*, *Spoon River Poetry Review*, *Soundings East*, and *Barrow Street*.

Biographies

Lynn White lives in north Wales. Her work is influenced by issues of social justice and events, places and people she has known or imagined. She is especially interested in exploring the boundaries of dream, fantasy and reality. She was shortlisted in the Theatre Cloud 'War Poetry for Today' competition and has been nominated for a Pushcart Prize and a Rhysling Award. Her poetry has appeared in many publications including: Apogee, Firewords, Capsule Stories, Gyroscope Review and So It Goes. Find Lynn at:

<https://lynnwhitepoetry.blogspot.com> and

<https://www.facebook.com/Lynn-White-Poetry-1603675983213077/>

Claudia Tong is an artist based in London, dedicated to storytelling and humanity. Her practice spans from painting and illustrations to mixed media, visual computing and music. Claudia graduated from Brown University in computer science, and she has worked, lived and exhibited internationally.

<https://linktr.ee/clauidiast>

Daniel Lockeridge is a twenty-nine-year-old Australian who has self-published two collections of poetry and two collections of meditative reminders.

His poetry has been published in literary magazines and on websites such as Gasher Press, The Winged Moon Magazine, Reverie Magazine, Free Verse Revolution, Livina Press and Boats against the Current, among others. He also shares poems and loving reminders on his Instagram page: @danlovepoetry.

Britt Kaufmann lives and writes in the Appalachian mountains. She enjoys listening to scifi audiobooks while weeding in her garden or piecing quilts. Her poems have recently appeared in Scientific American, J Journal: New Writing on Justice, Pine Mountain Sand & Gravel, and Anabaptist World. In September 2004, Press 53 will publish her first full-length collection Midlife Calculus.

Biographies

Jackie Barnes is an artist and poet living in Berlin Germany. They like to work with long exposure shots to create expressionism from realism. They are looking for work.

Carella Keil is a writer and digital artist who creates surreal, dreamy images that explore nature, fantasy realms, portraiture, melancholia and inner dimensions. She has been published in numerous literary journals including Columbia Journal, Chestnut Review and Crannóg. Her writing was recently nominated for a Pushcart Prize, and she is a 2023 Door is a Jar Writing Award Winner. Her art has appeared on the covers of Glassworks Magazine, Nightingale and Sparrow, Colors: The Magazine, Frost Meadow Review and Straylight Magazine.

Retired after four decades' prizewinning print and broadcast journalism in Hartford CT, **Don Noel** received his MFA in Creative Writing from Fairfield University in 2013, at age 80. He has since published more than 100 short stories (including "Outliving Sin" in Cosmic Daffodil last winter).

Pran Phucharoenyos is a Thai immigrant teacher residing between Bangkok, London, and Seattle. She has a BA from Seattle Pacific University and an MA from Queen Mary, University of London. Her work can be found published or displayed in publications and places such as Lingua Magazine or Shoreline Exhibitions. You can find her on instagram and twitter at @pranleu.

Biographies

Lydia Vaz is a junior in high school based in California. She is passionate about art and paints in oil, acrylic, gouache and watercolour, focusing primarily on realism. Her work includes portraits, observational studies and abstract experimental imagery. In 2023 she received the highest mark in the country for her IGCSE in Fine Arts.

S. L. Reno is a Filipino-American writer and teacher based in Salt Lake City. Her fiction has appeared in or is forthcoming in 365 Tomorrows and Hungry Shadow Press. She has also earned honorable recognition for her short fiction in the Writers of the Future contest.

Special Thanks

I would like to thank our incredible content reading team for reading over and reviewing all of the submissions for our sixth issue Yin & Yang.

Kelly Brocious - Poetry, Fiction, Non-fiction

Kate Schnetzer - Poetry

Glenis Moore - Poetry

D.W. Baker - Poetry

Callie Jennings - Poetry, Fiction, Non-fiction

Karley Milito - Fiction

Melissa Witcher - Fiction, Non-fiction, Visual Art

Lara Hussain - Fiction, Visual Art

Héctor Coyote - Poetry, Fiction

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With love,

Madisen Bellon, Editor-in-Chief