

## Stretching the Truth

### Walking Away

Do you remember the big oak tree  
Smack in the middle of our (my) yard  
The one I insisted couldn't be removed  
So the patio was built around it.  
That tree was here before us  
And I assure you it's still here - even after you.

You said I was stagnant,  
Like a tree that has reached its maximum growth point  
That I was like that overgrown pine in the front yard  
The one that leaves your hand sticky with just a simple touch  
And requires too much pruning (attention),  
But I thought my attachment was my strength and sealed our bond.

I said you were my *chi*, and  
I tried to wrap my arms around your body  
Thirsty for an energy exchange,  
But your arms were stiff  
Always pointing upward  
Drawing from somewhere (someone) beyond my curved limbs,  
Robbing energy from the universe  
And keeping it.  
That's not an energy exchange.

I thought you would remain stationary like our patio oak  
Locked in place  
Grounded  
Satisfied with the changes nature provides  
Slowly setting into the ground  
Drawing nourishment; giving nourishment.

I think my arms (branches) are more like those of the willow tree, all soft and weepy  
But your feet (roots) are shallow  
And you never get them entangled anywhere.  
Even in a yard so filled with nature  
You walked away,  
No, you flew away.  
You grew wings, while I grew roots.

You called *settling-in* "locked up"  
While I called it "rooted"  
Imagining your ties to me as deeper than they were  
I thought you were too entrenched to saunter away so easily.

And now I circle that tree like an experienced meditator  
Befriending it with the same intensity I showed you.  
Moving from your skin to its bark hasn't been easy,  
But I'm beginning to feel the warmth.

The oak and I speak daily, silently,  
And that sometimes reminds me of you  
Because you were often wordless,  
But I've learned that  
There's a difference between wordless and silence.

And here's my good news.  
My strong oak has no possibility for a change in position  
Asks for little in return  
Is still grateful about the patio adjustment  
Appreciates the routine of our life together and  
My walks around him  
When both of us, with  
Arms extended upward,  
Exchange energy  
In equal portions  
And no one's  
Walking away.

## **Stretching the Truth**

### **The Hair Wash**

**Dark hair is for brooding  
So I stow my deepest regrets in its creases  
Tied snugly in a flexible band  
Wrapped and triple twisted  
An elastic circle holding my ponytail and insecurities in place  
Until it loses its stretch  
Ripped apart suddenly  
Scattering my hair in uneven sections  
While squeezing the stray, messy strands in its fabric forever.**

**Throwing my head upside down  
Letting it loose in the kitchen sink  
A hair wash  
Dark knots that turn to sticks, spiked at the ends  
Spread against a cool, white sink.**

**Faucet waters defining spaces of  
Parallel streams  
Spilling out inner truths.  
Gushing water running through slick rows  
Brown strands in straight lines  
Heavy and water logged,  
Some released from long-held spots  
Spinning around the drain  
While currents of water splash against my scalp.**

**I meticulously scrub the roots of my brooding  
Covering the melancholy  
With bubbles and lather  
Smoothing out the troubles  
Cold rinsing in the shine.**

**Faucets locked shut  
Clumps of rejection caught in the stopper  
Ready to spin through narrow and dark tunnels  
All that cannot be reattached  
Darkened with no light source.**

**While I wrap a threadbare towel around and around  
And cover every rescued dark strand with  
A smell that is clean and light  
Until tomorrow's wash.**

## **Stretching the Truth**

### **Wednesday Night at Bar'Lees**

**Bar'Lees --- sleek, suburban galaxy  
Shiny planetarium ceiling  
Minimalist archival song museum  
Diminutive menu, substantial wine glasses  
Contemporary trimmings for  
Drinkers and musicians digging the past.**

**Performers circle the space  
Communicating with tee shirts  
Souvenirs of Dylan, Clapton, Baez  
Silent acknowledgments of familiarity  
Subtle hints of decades and genres  
Generations of guitar cases propped against the wall.**

**The sign-up sheet stationed on a low footstool  
Rules the night  
Ukuleles, harmonicas, violins compete  
With guitars, drums, singers  
For coveted positions on the roster  
Waiting eternities for ten minutes under planetary light fixtures.**

**The house band plays  
Momentarily suspending  
The push and pull, while  
The door swings open again and again  
Regulars arrive carting in sounds and cases  
Reggae meets rock and the night soars.**

**Bar-huddled patrons  
Stage-bound musicians  
Competitive sounds merge  
Hook-ups to the right; plug-ins to the left  
It's all hope at the start as  
The mounting orchestration of Wednesday night begins.**

**Planets swirl in solar systems above heads  
Floor planks vibrate in drum beat rhythm  
The drinking crowd swells their volume  
Music makers crank up the amps  
Sounds vie for control, for attention with  
Brief interludes for applause and uncertain quietness.**

**A lone watercolorist captures the night  
Loose hues dripping musical desires  
With runny brush strokes  
Committing longing to paper  
Magnifying the urge to be heard as  
Left and right sides battle in a cosmic sound war.**

**It's all nostalgia and raw emotion  
At Bar'Lees open mic night.**

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**1969**

**Anchored on the outdoor platform of the 180<sup>th</sup> Street Station  
She notices herself  
In the windows of the uptown-bound IRT train**

**Face hair jacket, youth  
Streaming live  
In multiple versions  
Framing her face like a Warhol model  
Zooming live like an unraveling film reel**

**Pleased with what she sees  
Her sheen blooms through filthy windows  
The stance the smirk the slender frame  
Vibrating speckles of light pouring through  
Chantilly-scented hair  
Perfection smiling back at 60 mph**

**The passing train whistles  
At her elevated moment  
Moving too fast to stop**

**The sun changes position  
The wind stirs up the platform's stench  
Grabbing her freshness with it  
Depositing grains of grit in her Patchouli-oiled skin**

**She squeezes her eyes shut as  
The fleeting train's current drags her  
Image along the tracks.**

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## String Theory

I sometimes imagine there's a string that runs inside me  
tying my brain to my feet  
until my unpredictable emotions twist that string  
causing it to vibrate  
hoping it will burst  
for a quick taste of freedom  
just like a string on your guitar  
that has stretched and snapped, but

Then sensibility kicks in and  
I am forced to straightened out my core's string,  
defer to its gravitational pull  
measure my voice and my tone  
and normalize my chord.

I tune myself just  
as I have seen you tune your guitar, which  
has six obedient, unique sounding strings,  
strings that you controls with nimble fingers  
strings that you can press and strum and silence  
in harmony with words that come from your artistic core  
and sounds that fill our space  
so gently, so forcefully  
so completely as

I try to copy your motions and  
tighten my invisible internal renegade string, a  
solo thread I press into obedience.  
I test its recalcitrance  
and remind myself that this is my life-string  
tying my mind to my harmony  
and should be kept in check  
limiting its desire to reverberate and amplify  
choosing instead to maintain a steady beat  
tied to an old wooden metronome you no longer need  
Until I am sure I sound just right and can  
fit in when the band plays.