

MAYBE THE DARKNESS IS MAGIC

*Sixfold Poetry Manuscript Submission
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A Poem to a Younger Me

Be here now—
soak it in.
There will come a day
when these memories will fade.
Is it old age or the price you'll pay
for those electric nights filled with MDMA?

Be here now—
5 and alive,
hiding beneath the shade of a tree;
the cool dark earth serving
as a balm for your
tiny, sun-blistered feet.

Mouth dribbling with violets and blues,
painting impressionist patterns
on your white cotton dress.
“Mija, what a mess!”
she'll say, pulling it over your head
and into the wash.
Three sprays of shout &
pray to Dios the color runs out.

Lick the juices off your sticky fingers;
fruit so soft and sweet,
Enjoy this moment,
when that's all it takes
to make your life complete.

Because one summer day, at 21,
on the same blistered feet
now calloused by the sun,
you'll run to the drugstore
in the middle of the day
your tube top stains worthy of Monet
look just like those same ones.
Turns out now,
you're allergic to plums.

Be here now—
17, standing on the edge
of possibility
before they're counting your eggs
to determine virility.
Full of hope, full heart,
shooting stars in your eyes,
moonlight on your lips,
sunshine in your thighs.

Be here now—
8 and shamelessly parading
in front of your brother's TV screen
in the frilliest dress covered in pastel flowers,
making sure the neighbor's boy would see

the dance moves you practiced for hours.
Recklessly confident,
embarrassingly sure,
there's something so wondrous
about an outlook so pure.

Then, at 14,
your friend's mom tells you, concerned,
that you're "much too skinny"...
you're flattered.
And by 16,
you begin to count
how many nibbles you can take
before finishing a single Dorito
because every bite mattered.

You stuff your college dorm freezer
with Lean Cuisines at 19,
proud that today,
you were so busy
you forgot to eat;
it made you dizzy.

Raw vegan, juice cleanse, carb-free,
you've tried it all.
Now you're 34,
you find yourself picking up a pen to write a poem
about how you wish you were that small
again.

'Til you remember the words—
be here now.

Bo Po Mo Fo

I used to play with Daisies
in between the alphabet and
automobiles.

More interested in the dirt
underneath the fingernails
of my left hand
than the vast and unfamiliar
land splayed out before me.

A tune I should have known
from deep in my bones;
lyrics I could one day have come to
understand. A melody we could
have hummed together, danced, too,
lulled my unborn baby to.

I saved the stickers we'd get for each
completed homework assignment
in a small, puffy-covered plastic book
with colorful blank pages.
Each one haphazardly strewn with
cartoon animals, smiley faces,
Hello Kitty, flower vases.

Once the pages filled, I closed the book
and waded through a sea of stickers
to find the song stuck in my head,
but all I found was dirt instead.

Female, 34, Black Hair, Brown Eyes

565 days of not banking on a tomorrow,
where days blurred together like watercolors
and the only time you could muster up
any wherewithal to leave the house
without being consumed by sorrow
was for evening walks with the Moon.

Where you felt cheated by the clock
when you'd wake up in the morning after
8, 9 hours of sleep, but feeling like
you'd been pulling all-nighters for weeks.

You'd gaslight yourself into thinking
you were making things up,
it was all for attention.
And when therapists, friends, psychiatrists, and strangers
could see it so clearly
they staged an intervention,
you felt ashamed.
Not because of their diagnosis,
but because you had managed to fool them all.
You spent your time after
counting down the days
till they found out that they had been played.

It took 186 tiny white pills for the
fog to begin to clear
and for you to realize
oh
maybe that *was* real and
maybe *this* is how life should actually feel.

And when finally
finally
the shadowed, rotting film that
saran-wrapped your eyes,
is ripped off,
to your disbelief,
everyone you feared would leave,
all that you swear decayed,
actually stayed,
actually was beautiful.

The concerned aunt and mother,
the taciturn brother,
would do anything for your happiness.
The loving partner,
pushed away, who by now
had given up on kissing
never stopped holding your hand.
Turns out, they were always there.
It was you who had gone missing.

Lotus

Fleshy roots veining beneath the surface,
limbs swollen from carrying
the weight of its surroundings
and a tangled nest below,
holding it together,
prized and promised,
floats gingerly, exposed,
vulnerable, honest.

Perhaps this is 'the dark place'
that you often speak of
where everything moves more slowly
and it's hard not to get stuck.

A shadowed womb of muck
and mess,
its absence of light so profound
that even when you open your eyes
wide, wide, wide,
you still can't see what's in front of you.

Maybe all we'll ever have is darkness.

And yet...

From those very same roots,
cradled by mud and water,
a miracle pushes its way through.
Rising above, it is
immaculate, unsoiled.

Velvety petals of pink and white
burst forth
one by one
drinking in the warmth,
breathing in new life.

A beautiful survivor,
awakened for the first time.

Maybe the darkness is magic.

I Quit

I was never good at seeing things through—
I'm a quitter, always have been.
And even more so now than
I was back then.

Back then,
I could never get the hang of
reading sheet music,
and I dreaded the daily walks
to the back of the Yamaha store
for lessons. It smelled like
old carpet and damp
garage floors after a rainy weekend,
sneakers squeaking, and
children shrieking.
I was always told my fingers were
made for it, but
to me, it always felt like reaching.

I wish I knew that one day
I'd have something to say
that might actually be worth
listening to. And if I had been
more patient, forgiving,
it could've been my words
they're all singing.

Wednesday afternoons outside
posted up in the corridor
felt like hooky. While
everyone else was at their desks,
sharpening pencils and getting
butt cramps from uncomfortable
plastic chairs, I was free,
I was chosen.
Strokes of aqua and white
that would soon unveil
something beautiful—
three words that, in truth,
should more often be spoken.

But this was not the path
that I chose, and
some nights I can't help
but wonder what if —
I said *fuck it all*
and jumped off that cliff,
it, too,
could have been something beautiful.

This week, I paid \$300 to have someone tell me that
I am designed to succeed where others would fail.
And the me that I've always thought to be frail
would die in the end,

only to be reborn from the ashes that fell
from my heart when I was made whole again.

Today, I put down the brushes that only knew
the colors black and red,
ground my feet into a patch of grass
beside the cliff instead.

I take off my headphones,
stop singing sad songs
that played over and over in my
dark, dizzied head.

Start to unstick myself from weathered pages,
peel the sorrow off my skin.

I unroll my eyes to, for once, see the beauty,
but I'm still a quitter, always have been.