

## UNDERNEATH HERE

Underneath here there is a city of decay and creativity  
It is full of cannibals and curses  
To arouse within a feeling of completion and wholeness  
For it is dying slowly  
How do you fill the belly to nourish the body of a person who has already been starved

She looked almost like an opossum in women's clothing. Her eyes painting the room trying not to catch the reflections of her melancholy in the eyes of her family.

"Mom, get over here. This dip is amazing. Who made this?"

With piece after piece baptized in a river of trans fats and vegetable oils, the bread she gnashed between her teeth made her feel complete, if only for a moment; before her fleshy camouflage curled at the edges to expose the ailing animal underneath; eating with shame.

It is in these moments that I realize just how small we really are

"I'm not sure Jess, but it is damn good" her mother replied, with the same stroke of a paint brush eyes.

The dimensions of guilt and sadness are shared by families  
Burdens inherited and passed along with pathological indifference  
I'm still suffering for the glutinous atrocities of my wounded ancestors  
And so are you  
From Eve in the garden  
To you and I in the womb

"I don't think I could eat another bite."

We've nurtured this hurt for generations  
And will continue to for an infinity more

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My mothers infant body was abandoned in the driveway of an old childless couple in the heart of Amish country. Although not Amish herself, she grew up simple and plain as an only child. Her house had no bathroom, running water, heat or electricity. There was plenty of time for daydreaming because little needing fixing. As a young girl, she would pass the time exploring the wooded property;

collecting shot gun shell casings and empty liquor bottles, left behind from the men she new only as her Uncles.

She always knew that the old people raising her weren't her true parents, but this did not make the slightest difference to her. She loved them just the same. Even if that love wasn't reciprocated in a similar and equal fashion. It made her feel loved just to be tolerated. And that was enough.

She was eleven when the old man died. The only thing she can remember about him now, still and lonely, is his breath on the day he died. She wanted nothing more than to comfort him while he lay there, but the old women would relentlessly shoo her away saying "Let my husband be.", "He doesn't even know you." and "This is nothing for a child to see."

But my mother knew different. This was a big moment and everything this child needed to see. She leaned in to deliver a farewell kiss of thanks and gratitude, as a daughter in spirit, but was halted by the stale saturated dank humid smell of his dying breath. She breathed in deep to take in all she could because this was something she could keep. Within the hour he was gone, but for days after, she swore she could still feel the moisture of his breath on the tip of her nose.

The old woman was devastated by the loss of her husband, and for months afterward, would often disappear into the woods looking for him.

"He's been away for hours now." she would say before wrapping herself up in a shawl "Stay here and get dinner ready. He's going to be hungry."

As an act of a grief offering and love, my mother would prepare the closest thing to a meal she knew; hot tea and boiled potatoes. Just enough for the three of them. After sometime the old woman would come home confused and angry. Until eventually, one day, she never returned.

At first, my mother was scared to be alone, but she found comfort in the realization that she had always been alone.

By virtue of being abandoned  
there is always an emptiness in the solitude of an abandoned child's heart  
that is carried with them  
despite the life that may surround them  
There are few moments in this life that one may find a warm blanket of comfort  
in a cold bed of hurt  
but I am thankful for them.

It didn't take long for the food rations to run out and all that was left were rotten potatoes and a few pieces of growing fruit on the trees. Three weeks had past when my mother found the old women. She was scouring the leafy floor looking for shell casings and liquor bottles, (since the old man died she hadn't found as many), when she recognized the old women's shawl laying ominously in a pile of wood. A few feet past that lay her body. The old women was naked and curled up in a position much like the woolly caterpillars after the first frost. It was almost as if she had hugged herself to sleep and never woke up. This was her first time seeing a naked body.

The smell bit at my mothers nose and inserted itself directly into her mouth, making her vomit. Trying her best not to breathe in too much, my mother, unsure what to do the corpse, let it be. Making her way back to the house she picked up a few apples and glanced over at the remainder of the wood. Just a cord left. At eleven years old, my mother made her best attempt at surviving, living off hot water and apples. When she was unable to sleep she would wonder about her own life. Meditating endlessly about how she wanted someone to drink her in upon her death, like she did the old man. She would also have nightmares about being found dead and her discoverer vomiting upon arrival at first sight, scent and taste of her. Like a rhyme in her mind, she would recite it a thousand times.

It was a full season until somebody found her there. Now nearly twelve, she looked less like a prepubescent girl, rising toward the ascensions of womanhood, and more like a forgotten child left in a driveway for someone else to find.

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### **FEEDING THE FRIGHTENED CHILD**

I remember the day when the trees uprooted themselves and left  
leaves devoured  
with no clean breeze to share  
or shadows to cast  
they just stood up and left

In a procession  
single file

The sky wept  
and the earth mourned  
and life has not been the same since  
The sun has been eating itself while the moon whispers solemn evening prayers  
the melody has silenced  
and the stars have been hanging themselves

Everything tastes different now  
That which rots is saturated with flavor  
to full excess

It's overwhelming  
water is scarce  
and I have lost the craving for sweetness and savory  
I am a waning gibbous

And I don't want to forget living now  
As I am  
forever

So split my head open  
and spread my chest wide  
to get a closer look at my heart  
I can't remember what it looks like  
but I know how it feels  
Like a womb  
pregnant with the child of my reverence and awe

I wonder how many times will it beat  
before being removed from my chest and placed back into the earth

feeding the frightened child

Carve this into your memory to be sure  
that we were here  
and don't forget  
Do Not Forget

How much wisdom to become the light  
How much wisdom to become the heat  
How much wisdom to become to be the melody  
in myself  
once more

In my hearts cave  
I am forever...

## **WE ARE THE CIRCLE**

Do you remember when you were a child  
When you stretched out your arms with closed eyes  
a tilted head  
and chest full of breath  
you could feel everything  
the world  
Two hands like emotional antennae  
Mother Earth's wisdom dancing on the tips of your fingers  
Forget about the Library of Alexandra  
Your body is a veritable compendium of natural history

She spun around in vibrant circles, like a clumsy whirling dervish. "I'm flying" she screamed before plummeting to the grass.

"Almost, Madison. You are so close. May be next time really try to imagine yourself as a propeller, spinning faster and faster and faster, until whoosh, lift off."

Madison's mother spoke to her with the mindful gentle balance of truth and imagination that any six year old could relish.

Feed the mind but be sure to leave room for hunger  
For it is the gentle murmuring of the pang  
that reminds us to keep seeking nourishment

"I will mommy. I really really will."

Careful with a child's mind  
Over feed it and watch it waste away like a wolf that never learned to hunt  
Starve it, and see a mother who forgot how to love

"Alright sweetheart, let's go. Your father coming to pick you up soon. Let's get you packed up and ready to go."

Madison's parents were happy for awhile but ultimately they were not meant to be together. They seemed to be on the right track, but there was a silent beckoning in her father that he wouldn't accept or barely acknowledge. He knew it was there, but consciously denied it, and so did Madison's mother. She knew about him; his unscripted future, his past and even his failed suicide attempt at just eleven years old. He never explained himself further than the note he left behind, which read simple:

I just want to know.

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He was ready to ask questions but afraid of the physical pain necessary to have them answered. He had recalled the old westerns he and his father watched together, where the town outlaw was strung from a rope; there was no blood, and to his immature mind this looked relatively painless. So he walked himself outside with a length of rope and climbed high into a tree. Tying off to a branch with the best knot he could, he wrapped the rope around his neck and tilted his head back with closed eyes and chest full of air. He stretched out his arms and wiggled his fingertips, and then...lift off.

His adolescent body fell toward the ground with a summing purpose, stopping suddenly with a severe eye opening tension. His toes ever so slightly kissing the blades of grass that carpeted his backyard. The small underweight frame of his slight body prevented his neck from breaking. Dangling like a broken wind chime, he learned about the true nature of pain. He hanged there for roughly thirty seconds before passing out. Until eventually, the limb to which he had anchored his curious fragility broke clean delivering his body back to earth; perhaps to spend the remainder of his life reconciling with this odd and melancholic aberration. Alarmed by the noise, a neighbor came to investigate and found the boy slumped, still and lifeless like a dressed piece of driftwood, with the rope still wrapped tightly around his neck.

Quickly the neighbor loosened the rope and brought the boy inside to his parents. Panic, confusion, and anger ensued, and then increased when the young boy revealed the suicide note from out of his pocket and handed it to his father.

“What does this mean?” his father began to read aloud “I just want to know”

He stared at his son as if he were a stranger.

“What is there to know. You’re eleven years old, damn it.”

His father insisted that this was a childish attempt to garner attention from his mother.

“You’re not a baby anymore.” he continued “Cut it out and grow up. Life isn’t about having all questions answered. Just keep your head down and move along, Got it?” In a half hearted gesture of submission, the boy acquiesced with an unenthusiastic head nod. This was the day that Madison’s father learned how to muzzle the snout of his beast; to leash his wanderlust and keep his truth secreted for fear of discovery and humiliation.

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“Where is he?” she thought to herself. Madison’s mother nervously fidgeted with zipper on her daughters jacket.

“Mommy, I don’t think Daddy’s coming.”

It was hard to tell who was more disappointed as they sat waiting on the rough concrete steps of their modest apartment building.

“This is his one day to spend time with you, be around you, watch you grow, teach you things and learn things from you as well. I don’t think he’d want to miss out on that.” Her mother was careful to explain this thoughtfully.

“Do you think he forgot about me?” Madison asked anxiously.

Her eyes began to feel the heavy weight of emotion and welled slightly as they sought out her mother’s for some sort of sentient validation. Her mother recognizing this, stared back at her daughter like a narcotic reflection.

It is painful to see your child’s face suddenly expressing such tender emotions even before they can consciously discern the differences between them

“Oh sweetheart, no. Of course not.”

It is even harder to realize that this searching  
their need for affirmation  
they may have learned this from you

Just then, Madison’s father finally showed up to whisk away his daughter and invite her into his life. Truth is however, by the end of their visits she usually felt as if she was more of a visitor than a daughter. And that was ok for now, but even inside her young child’s mind, she knew that one day she would need more.

“Daddy’s here!” Madison exclaimed. Excited and relieved, her mother walked them over to the car he sat waiting in and plopped her into the booster seat.

“What time should I have her back?” he asked, almost as if this were a homework assignment.

“Whenever, just make sure she eats a real meal. I hate it when you have her all day and she comes home cranky because you’ve let her eat nothing but junk.”

Culinary freedom is an easy path to a child’s love  
and fathers who have a limited visitation with their children seem to exploit this

“Do french fries count?”

Her lips tensed sardonically “Very funny.”

“Love you Mommy, see you tonight.”

Madison sat strapped in the back seat looking ready for adventure but feeling like this time would be no different than any other. Her father was growing increasingly troubled and could barely muster up the



energy to be excited at all anymore. When she was younger he reveled in the fresh energy and curiosity the radiated out of his daughter, but after some time those very same qualities became a burden. It was all so fleeting. He couldn't bare the thought of watching his daughter grow up to become another empty adult drudging out a life fulfilling someone else's needs.

Once you become an individual part of a gathering mass  
you must sacrifice your totally pure and unadulterated creativity to fit in

The ugly truth of group acceptance...

no thought

action

achievement

or mistake is your own

It is shared by the group collective unconscious

and has come to fruition on the heels of every action that has happened before you

'You are not as special as you think you are'; this was Madison's fathers life philosophy.

After spending the day at her father's house sitting with him while he watched old movies, Madison's father drove her back to her mother's, stopping along the way for ice cream.

As they took the time to enjoy their treat, Madison stared at her father. She could sense his melancholy dripping like a leaky faucet.

"I love you Daddy." she said this because it was true, and she realized it was what he needed.

When he looked at his daughter, her aura was saturated with wisdom and sincerity; her face became more familiar than it ever has before. In it he could see his ex, her mother. More striking though, he could see his own mother, his father, and even his very own face. His reflection. It was as if all of these people were telling him those words...

I Love You

He could actually feel it in the pit of his stomach. He was overwhelmed by the power of this moment.

"Thank you." he said, taming the swollen lump in his throat, nostalgic for the love. He felt like *her* child while his heart pumped, and bled the absence. He allowed this moment to be immersive almost for a lifetime.

He dropped Madison off, and watched her longingly as her mother walked her up to the apartment building. Turning around to wave goodbye one last time.

"I love you" he yelled, as she made her way up the stairs. This was the first time, in a long time, he could say that with feeling.

Driving home in silent thought, he pondered the significance of this exchange that he had with this person, his daughter. And he wondered if she had felt it too.

Perhaps we never leave each other  
and there is no reason to miss someone who isn't in there body anymore

Maybe they are in someone else's  
or maybe even in everyone else's  
We all have the same past  
and we all share the same future

We are the circle