

The Trance Dancer

Out of the lips of silence,
 out of the earthy dusk, my ancestors whisper.
My feet press into the earth.

The soil still holds the sound of the buffalo drums.
My heart catches the rhythm.

Gone are the words of my Grandmother's language, ripped from her throat as a child.
Gone are the seasons. Gone are the songs.

They beat her like a drum. Amputated her braids, buried them like bones.

They separated her from her sisters. Isolated her from herself.
Stripped her of her sacred,
 but the buffalo grass was planted deep within her soul.

My ancestors whisper above the trees.
The ancestors whisper.

Tilting my face skyward, my eyes reach back for memories.

I rock. My arms become wings.
I sing to myself—remember.
 I take flight and the Wasi'chu cannot touch her.
I move in a circle.

Out of the lips of silence, I sing.
Grandmother returns. Grandmother's mother embraces me.

Her sisters take flight and find me dancing in the forest.
I sway like the cord grass, greet the buffalo of the past.

I dance with the ancestors; their braids are the comets that guide me out of silence.

Pieces of Me at Wounded Knee

Assimilate or exterminate

These are the options

I adopt the white ways below of a haze of self doubt

My defiance a reliance of rational self-preservation

The reservation I live on is not my home

I want to roam like brother buffalo on the plains of my ancestors

Sun starched bones of my brothers are now fertilizer for forgiveness

My sisters suffer beneath a cross

My hair cut short,

I trance dance into the future

Nurture the unknown

I am alone in my tribe as I try to hang on to a sense of myself

Exterminate or assimilate

Survival comes at a cost

I am lost.

One cannot rely on religion

Tradition is a trail without tears I carry within myself.

Hidden from those interested in my salvation.

I dance the dance of my ancestors when I am alone.

I sing a defiant song. They are wrong.

If I assimilate, I hate.

This is not my nature.

Great Spirit Moon

We buried you beneath Little Spirit Moon.
The frozen ground resisted but we persisted
Insisted on the custom of returning you to the earth.
Four days after your birth, you took your last breath.

I was six and could barely understand.
Mother held my hand—her sadness was contagious and I began to cry.
I still don't know why one would ever try to replicate such a ritual.

Sixty-three years later, I find myself returning to your tombstone.
The touchstone of my childhood.
The soil holds the sadness.

On that day, so long ago, I not only lost you, brother, but I also lost my mother.
Buried in grief, she never recovered.
Her mind became Half Summer Moon.

I can barely understand the darkness that took her.

I buried my own child beneath Flower Moon.
She, too, gone too soon.
Yet her passing, was not sudden, or unexpected, or at the hand of someone else.
Her's was a slow descent into the grave.
After a brave journey with a disease that became her friend.
In the end, she reminded me that the moon has a shadow side.
I could not hide from sadness, or suffering.

Great Spirit Moon, I offer this to my memory of my mother.
Sixty-three years later, I still hold my mother's hand.
I hope she understands, that her rituals would not be replicated.

Storm Shelter

When I had my own personal tsunami,
no one brought me a casserole
or sent me toilet paper care packages
or served me salvation.

I was completely and utterly washed away.

A child,

a parent,

and a full time job with benefits—all gone within six months.

I hid beneath heavy blankets,

buried in disbelief.

My grief grew like a garden of weeds.

When I had my own personal tsunami

there was no news coverage

or public rally.

No one organized a fund raiser.

When I had my own personal tsunami,

my mind cracked,

my memories became moldy,

but for some reason my spiritual foundation held.

When I had my own personal tsunami,

I freed myself from the emotional debris,

cleansed myself of the toxic tales of others,

and stood unbending,

against the next inevitable storm.

When Poetry Met Art on a Blind Date

When she first saw him, she knew she liked him.

She liked his smooth lines, his colorful personality.

He spoke volumes without saying a word.

But it didn't take long for her to want to reframe him.

He was gilded and garish, and she found that distracting.

She knew she couldn't take him home.

As she looked for an easy exit, she spotted Art in a corner.

The bad lighting didn't do him justice, but as she approached him,

she noticed

that despite his monochromatic abstraction, he had a certain appeal.

He was understated

and would complement anything.

He wasn't too much.

He was simple.

He was comfortable.

He was just what she was looking for.

She couldn't wait to take him home.

