

Story, Story

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Have I told you of the horde atop the mountain?

Warnings arrived just before them
A fire atop the mountain
A putrid taste in the sea
They make bonds with chains
Have an appetite that is all-consuming
And a strange understanding of reciprocity.

I know of someone who heard of someone who saw that day

Shadows appear atop the mountain.
Offerings were left to invite them down unto the free land
But they chose the peak
Sticking to its rocky grounds
They kept gold where hearts should be.

Heated round the fire, passionate as their hate
Smothering as their gaze.
They arrived to meet us, wild
Maddened from their time
Bending and breaking nature.

Wicked and confused, they could not live alongside the land.
Seeds seldom returned
Rescued in the breeze, escaped to the sea
Our world cursed the weight of laboured feet.

Pickers sent out three times this week
We found an unquenchable thirst in their way of being.
They chanted the oldhymns daily,
On their babbling peak,
Even in the new world, reciting the same stories.

We listened to the warnings that arrived just before them.
There would be a fire atop the mountain
A putrid taste in the sea.
A call to resist from pebbles and shells quaking on the beach, freshly ashore from the old world they foretold
Souls darkened in the halls of industry
Advised, Kings do not heed the need for reciprocity.

Once in a lifetime, tectonic plates shift to open possibilities
We heard you can also find poison in the pressure released

Hear the cry as the horde approach
They come to devour us, a witness of their age.
Fashioning a line between us and their sensibilities.
In the struggle, make your own the collective's gain.
We weaved tactile demands in the blankets we braced ourselves in
Guided by the light from the cold, smooth surface of the moon.

And what if we did not act?

If we had not plotted into the night
We would have awoken as a wild horde
Love stolen from our beings
Nature's cycle replaced by machines.

So hear me carefully
As alive as the hordes' screams
They almost...almost
Broke the rhythm of our work
Calling back the trees.
When they came down from the mountain to pillage us into a plight
Cruelty kept close to them
Darkness and loneliness on that peak
Warped their understanding of reciprocity.

Natural Ways of Homemaking

One

Two paces in front of another

They'd always shared the weight of the world that way.

The connection of their hearts joined destiny

Sustained the warmth of their memories through blistering winters.

Closed

Rankless around a fire

Pride took precedence in their questioning

Curious and dedicated in their reading of each others' spirit

Intention grew beyond them like radio frequencies seeking an outlet to make noise in the world

Looking back to find themselves in the journey seeking.

Their presence added to the footprints on the beach that day, their presence only added to the remnants of love left on the beach.

Wet sand greeted and grounded them

Hoping to stay in the pockets of respite they made

A wall away from the water

And when it came, it came in waves, both washer and washed drawing a breath, pulling back before feeling safe to release away their weight.

On the land

The separation gave them new reflections to explore.

Echoes of visitors turned local kept a home here

Called their spirits by a new name.

A soft chorus rose from broken rocks smoothed on the shores.

To arrive and feel at home confirmed the history ancestors told

Life is held collectively.

Their spirits became porous, taking in the calling of the water

Floating from this sphere

To the dimensions of the next.

Coming into the current

They moved their bodies in a new way

To admire its beauty and shape

Redefined in this place, almost reaching out for communion

Of faith and hope in change.

All together, not necessarily all at once, they found acceptance of a world that cannot be tamed.

Scaffolding

In the hay, we've been left to grow dusty
Inconspicuous treasures
Broken devices
Lost to the fray.
Sharp eyes
Abandoned to the dark
Keep a lookout for danger.
Rough edges, exposed to the elements
Make perfect bedding for a flame.

Thatched
Woven into a shelter as we fall
The deserted find a home here
All forms accepted
Integrated into a new shape.
Thorny and unruly
Under the pressure of the other world's weight.

Much like scaffolding
We hold this world in place.
Inescapable work, assigned in existence
Hear the snap and crack of our tools echo our pains through the space between us and the roof.
We laugh at the thought of space
Burrowed in the warm folds
We found beauty
Assigned to it new traits.

On nights when the seething pulses through the collective body
Send smoke to the sky
Taste the bitter in the elements
They converse on the tongue with you.
Join you to
Dance under the sheet of the waters
Release cries alongside
Battles to duel and rewrite demands
Dream of broken promises
Call on the sky to cleanse the ground with rain.

Tie-dye skies roll in
Overshadow an otherwise blemished evening.
Shrouded in the cliff's cove
Revenge watches over the movement of our beings
The lonely waters mix and foam their wrath
Twinned

Grey as the sky that birthed them.
We play as we would on a foggy morning
In this suspended time
No point in toiling if you cannot see.
Or writhing in what you cannot free.
A sign from the Earth
To us
It's people
Perfect time does not arrive
But is made
Made space for
In the eruption of all the things we've discarded and denied.

The tide came in
The water arguing against the rocks
Thunderously
Their only desire that night was to consume and degrade
A marriage in crisis
Perpetually feeding new waves into the fight.

And when we took our affirmation from the water and the land
We turned our fury to the roof with flames
A rallying cry to spark danger
Make tools of our rage
Care for the ground
Rooting in strength and humility
Find more life in time suspended
And take on new ways.



A REFLECTION ON STANZA FESTIVAL 2023

Jj Fadaka – Open Award Residency Recipient

This year, I was honoured to be selected as a StAnza x Edwin Morgan Trust Poet in Residence. The opportunity to access and reflect on Morgan's work over six weeks transformed how I use poetry to explore politics, community and identity. I had been interested in bringing other mediums to my work, like video, photography and collage, so to be inspired by how Morgan brought different art forms together gave me the confidence my multiple perspectives could stand alongside each other.

I was guided in stretching my writing by Éadaoin Lynch, who gave me feedback and invaluable advice on enjoying the writing journey and taking my imagination to its furthest point.

I was fascinated to visit the Edwin Morgan Special Collection at the Mitchell Library and see Morgan's annotations of the books that inspired him. The way Morgan used photography and travel to bring new worlds into his writing captured people in a very human way. We share a love of folklore and myth and I learnt a lot from the way Morgan presented the lessons from these stories in a layered but accessible way. His work has stayed with me as I try to speak to political and social issues of my own time. Morgan's work inspired me to explore the morals and contradictions of nature to find lessons for how to live alongside one another.

Since the festival, I have returned to Edinburgh and read poetry across the city, I'll be reading at the Push the Boat Out Festival and read over the summer at the Spit It Out Festival. The residency experience gave me the confidence to build connections in the literary community. With these connections, I have been motivated to bring more poetry to the city and have organised writing groups, creative writing workshops and curated poetry events for the Leith Late Festival and Radical Book Fair.

The development opportunities the residency gave me has also motivated me to share more opportunities with the artistic community around me. I'm excited about my new role on the committee of Rhubaba, an Artist-Run Initiative based in Edinburgh, delivering artist development programs and workshops for emerging artists, of any practice from writing to film-making.

At the beginning of the year I released a poetry zine '3 Days in Community', available at Lighthouse Books. Now, I am working towards my debut pamphlet, a mix of poetry and short stories about women of colour's relationship to motherhood and care work.

