



# **Sunflowers & Starlight**

**Elizabeth J. Mitchell**



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## Dreaming of You

There are people we dream of  
before we meet them  
& people we can't stop dreaming of  
once we know them.

## Starlight

On a night when you existed but did not exist, I pulled you from the sky.  
On a grassy hill I gathered the stillness around me, filling my eyes  
with the dragonflies of night. I invited your presence, the dark

wash of your jeans, gleaming buttons of your shirt.  
Our bodies were phantasms of light. Our noses  
traced the quiet brilliance of constellations, our palms

turned together towards earth. You asked me  
“Do I know you?” and “Where can I find you?”  
but my heart's only answer was “yes.”

On a night when I existed but did not exist, you brought me  
to the base of a mountain. You lying there in the freshly sawn grass.  
Your eyes were so familiar, your voice

a lullaby I had slept to for years. Above us  
the spirits laughed and glinted as we had never seen them before.  
Our whispers that night made love to the whispers of the night.

A love of listening to your words, our laughter blended into crickets.  
And what to do with this fire that breathes  
only on nights when we do not exist.

## A Room of Painted Ladies

in this room are deer  
and a river creeping up the wall,  
where northern leopards  
leap, each splash a breath.

the wings of painted ladies,  
their fire and black, their light  
and silt settling on our heads  
folding and unfolding over daises.

it does not rain here  
nor is there cold,  
an endless spring creeps  
into fall and returns.

orange flames of leaves  
where we rest together  
each night, the sky  
lit with planets.

my hair, a long throw of curls  
to warm us in the night  
as our bodies cup  
the earth beneath  
this gnarled bough.

## Night Mare

Inside the moon is a black knight,  
la yegua de la luna, the moon mare,  
flying across oceans, fleeing through the night.

*No me olvides*, dices. *Do not forget me*, you say.  
Words pouring out from one I've only met in wind.  
Night our only witness, your touch invisible yet potent.

The soft sound of my voice stirs your heart  
when your part of the world is a quiet ache in the night.  
*"Where are you?"* you ask.

Ask the knight. She is the only one who knows.



## Approaching Winter

Dark shore a continent away from home—  
 an old man's voice emerges from a boulder  
 as my shadow passes him on the sand.  
 I barely see his face in low light

but his shaking voice pierces me.  
*The lady of the sky is leaving*  
*É as she fades, your feet will whisper across the sand.*  
*This enchantress of a moon, like youth, is fleeting.*

His words are music, but I fear him—  
 hands in jacket, chin pressed into soft scarf.  
 I saunter away, but a part of me remains  
 on the Algarrobo shore.

This night is a grain of sand in the whole of a life  
 & I have never again seen the full moon  
 slip below the earth, but I have stood at water's edge  
 waiting for the sun to greet other worlds—

watched birds and bats adjust to changing light.  
 In an interior universe I know, I journey  
 to valleys, mountains, meadows, and mirasols—  
 to the base of a waterway that forever calls me home.

## Guardian of the Earth

Moon, on nights you appear  
I cannot remove my gaze—

your illuminated face.  
The mouth that cannot open.

Hollow eyes. I follow  
your silent beckon into woods,

quiet death beneath my feet,  
stirrings of life in wind.

I, this spirit seeking  
someone who understands.

\*

Listen—  
the grasshoppers are chirping. In the creek  
a night heron gulps down its meal.

See jewels sparkle, an opossum's eyes,  
kept safe by the glow of headlights.  
Light to see what we cannot reveal.

Mask of Truth, let me hear that stillness—  
no, that rustling— between leaf and star  
that only the earth can whisper.

Peace comes to those who let the earth  
speak remedy into their lives.  
But sadly I forget to be still.

Too busy with life  
to watch swifts swooping at sunset  
or to be surrounded by swallows on a soccer field

or to walk a path that leads to the gentle eyes of deer.  
All this land, water, sky—  
how are you not dizzy with the earth?

\*

When I lift my eyes to yours, your desire pierces  
my longing to belong, to know wholeness.

Your light a guide, I sit on damp earth  
and listen to the river slide into shore.

## Black girl dreams

a wooden boat on which to lay—  
soaks in sun, soft sounds of waves  
brush beneath her.

books. some worn, yellowed dears.  
others crisp breaths. her mother gifted  
her keys to new worlds

& she's been collecting keys  
since. she opens portals  
to healing streams.

she gifts herself words  
as a gardener tending  
a beloved patch of wildflowers.

she believes herself beautiful—  
mind fierce & full  
of cherishable things.

wolves wither  
under the glare of her eyes  
& do not harm her.

rain touches her forehead,  
slides through her curls— free  
falls down her neck.

sunlight fills the places harm entered.  
rainbows pour from her palms—  
taste of new beginnings & forgiveness.

her body is her own safe harbor  
where she gifts herself

permission to dream  
permission to be

What is within you

the gleam of a river's black current  
through the smooth, white earth.

the patience of a heron  
awaiting the promise of shore.

the reach of a red-tailed hawk  
in clear Midwestern sky.

The imitation of life

What one is within  
may not be on the exterior.

What one is  
not allowed to exist.

What one is not  
allowed to exist.

So we wear our veils.



You are in a dark place

A light appears before you  
in the shape of a hunched human being.

Their heart glows amber,  
ember energy flows to their fingertips.

Their radiance reminds you  
of your own interior light.

There is pain here—  
to discover light in your darkest place.

You reach out towards this curved light  
a mix of fear and joy.

You uncover their moon eyes  
hidden behind their hair  
encounter sadness

They too are filled with heaviness  
& cannot see their own radiance

Depart from this one  
who reminds you

there is a dormant fire inside you  
that you have forgotten

how to ignite

Alone now, you struggle  
to find radiance on your own, struggle

to find love inside yourself.  
Years of strain grow you.

Your light vines across your legs  
takes the form of bright roots

etched into your skin.  
Your speckled fingertips

leave traces of sunlight  
on the places and people you touch.

One day you discover  
it is no longer a struggle

to see that you are radiant,  
worthy, and whole.

You are ember and starlight.

You found you.

You fuel your fire.

## Waiting

I stand in the woods  
listening for your song.

But I hear nothing. I  
listen to the trees instead,

the woodpeckers, the wind.



## Spirit

If you meet yourself on an empty street,  
eyes slapping your face like the wind,  
do not glance away. Gaze into the eyes of  
this stranger of different circumstance  
who is you from a different life.

If your other self rejects your existence,  
remember, there are only a few of you  
in this world. It is rare to find yourself  
in the body of another.

Cherish this other self  
even when they walk away from your life.  
It is you cherishing the you that is not you.  
It is you cherishing your whisper,  
your mind, your breath.

Your eyes are not mirrors

just pools of glistening light. a red dragonfly  
rests on the surface. minnows devour  
the gold flecks of your eyes.

there is not stillness  
here, an under searching. the moon  
touches the hem of your eyes.

a fish of fire swirls in the center.  
a leopard laughs, its webbed feet sliding in.  
your eyes flooding.

## The Night Ink

I lay in the room of her,  
no trace of light.

If I remember everything, memory, a long lyric,  
the place of ghosts.

As long as I hurt, I won't say a word to her  
to safeguard my undoing in what she said.

I wanted to be slow  
with her. I heard her breath, her whisper.  
I felt a heat, a fragile mourning.

It was raining skin,  
she a dark anchor.

I had forgotten how to love  
that mess that made us human.

## Vessels of Light

Our bodies are containers for stars—  
vessels that consist of light.

If you see those who have forgotten this, remind them  
that the light emanating from them is beauty,  
that the gap between her teeth is gorgeous,  
that brown skin is to be heralded.

Remind them to fill their vessels  
with laughter, hope, and second chances.

Our eyes are focused too much on the broken,  
jagged pieces of each life. Our struggles  
take the forefront of our imaginations.  
We feel that we wear a cloak full of holes.  
Our flaws, fears, failings all visible.

We cover up the light within  
to hide our brokenness  
but we vulnerable beings  
are bearers of suns.

Our bodies are beautiful  
to the artist who draws the lines of life  
through careful hands.  
Their voice cracks  
as they describe  
the beauty in capturing a moment,  
the breath of another human being.

Tell the woman swimming through water  
that her wide hips are filled with joy.

Tell the man with a broken smile  
that his eyes emanate forgiveness.

Who taught us to be ashamed  
of all this interior light?  
Or to shame and shun

these bodies we've been given?  
Who told us one life is worth more  
or less than any other?

Cherish the girl with barrettes in her hair  
making song with feet and rope and braids.

Cherish the child whose arms become wings,  
whizzing with hands off handlebars down the street.

Cherish each life, each breath, sacred.

## On Finding

i.

After winter, storms usher in spring—  
an urgent wind in every gust. This night  
I feel the air change, rivers rushing.

The existence I have lately lived  
appeared tolerable. The hollow-eyed  
wan spectacle I was. My face up to heaven

I sigh out a prayer & I look out into stars.  
On the ground below, I see the black horse.  
Their dark frame trembles as they kneel into snow.

I walk out into the night. An unexpected warmth  
emanates from my chest. I touch the white diamond  
between their eyes. Draw the horse to me.

These are the days of miracles.  
In my arms, the body of the one  
I encountered so many times in dreams.

ii.

The years have taught me  
to prize you as friend.

Your presence brought back  
to my heart warmth.

Friend, to atone for lost time,  
whatever lessons I have learned  
are in a dearer and tenderer sense yours.

iii.

I renew the love of my life—  
not in the body of another,



but in the loving of the body,  
this self, the life that I live.

Love, a living spring, a pouring into the self.

## Labyrinth

A maze of gnarled trees and weathered stone  
is the life I've known. These paths  
have left me cut and bruised.  
But I've fought

to find my own way  
in search of a truth  
I understood with my heart  
but could not grasp or see.

At the center of this maze  
is you. Your arms covered in scrapes.  
Your countenance weary.  
I find comfort in your eyes, offer my hand.

We help each other  
find the way, our own way. This journey  
is not unicursal but we have each other.  
You and I are always the way home.

We release these doves into the air

Facing each other, we take  
this pain, heartache, strain,  
disappointment, regret, illness,  
abuse, hurt, confusion

and throw it all into the air.

Every burden lifted.

I grab a dove from my chest  
and free it to the sky. And you  
hold up your burden and release.

Dove after dove  
we release into sky,

the weight within less.

more room for light.  
more room for laughter.  
more room for after.

more room  
to discover the beauty of the self,  
all that was already there.

Our bed is white sails & safe harbor

warmth, like a fireplace on a below freezing winter night  
after you've been walking in the cold for hours.

The heat touches something inside first,  
then melts the rest of you.

Our bed is blanket forts & quiet  
conversations about what matters, what hurts.  
Where we are unafraid to name our fears,  
able to admit & make peace with our mistakes.

## Trust the Journey

1.

The ocean kisses our feet.  
 Your palm kisses my palm.  
 Here on this shore  
 we are radiant lights.

*Continue to 2A or to 2B.*

2A.

Here the water  
 washes away all our fears.  
 There's a bench  
 where we sit together  
 as the sunset cradles us

*Continue to 3A or to 3B.*

2B.

We go here for the peace found  
 on familiar, ethereal shore.  
 We become

*Continue to 3C or to 3D.*

3A.

You ask, "is a dream a chance to heal?"  
 A plover rises from the shore.  
 To be anything at all is a gift.  
 To grow together is joy.

*Continue to 4.*

3B.

This is my most sacred space.  
 You find me here,  
 show me how to love myself.

*Continue to 4.*

3C.

aware of the hurt and mistakes  
 we have grown through.  
 I marvel at the blessed vessels that we are.

You have taught me to trust  
 the journey, trust this light within.

*Continue to 4.*

3D.

broken vessels repaired with gold.  
 Our scars make us precious.  
 The lessons you have learned  
 are the songs I most need to hear.

*Continue to 4.*

4.

I have found what is of most value.  
 My own spirit  
 undeniably radiant

& you, blessed spirit,  
 who chooses to travel with me  
 in this journey of life.



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“Guardian of the Earth” first appeared in *Blue Heron Review*. “Mask of Truth” is a reference to a magical item in the video game, *The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time*.

“Labyrinth”: “always the way home” is from the song “Life on Earth” by Snow Patrol.

“On Finding” started as a found poem from the chapter “Miss Marchmont” from *Villette*. However, the poem diverged from the original text. “On Finding” is a partial found poem. Source: Charlotte Brontë. *Villette*. Project Gutenberg, 2005. Chapter IV, “Miss Marchmont.”

“The Night Ink” first appeared in *The Inflectionist Review*. The poem is a found poem. Found poem source: Chang-Rae Lee. *Native Speaker*. Riverhead Books, 1995. Pages 226-229.

“Trust the Journey”: The form for “Trust the Journey” is a modified version of the form used in Franny Choi’s poem, “Never Here.” Poem form source: Franny Choi. *Floating, Brilliant, Gone*. Write Bloody Publishing, 2014. “Never Here,” pages 70-71.

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