

Whitehawk Woman at Cuckmere Haven

Joyoti Grech Cato

Our Neolithic ancestor stands watch over the land and the People as we walk through time's spiral.

- o Standing lookout on the brow of the hill, the sheep sleeping under gorse that burns bright with yellow flowers in daylight, dark at night now with all of us asleep, I am awake.
- o Deeply rooted in this island, yet some white magic rolls over invisible generation after generation, and every generation digs to rediscover ourselves over and over again. Held in the spiralling embrace of time and land, draped in the wrap of heavy sea mist that rises from the water and drifts inland, so far, I persist.
- o Looking down from my standpoint, I see the silver river serpent its way slowly, meandering across the marshes.
- o More than once I was the fog, rolling inland as I rose from the saltwater marshes, and more than once the flint farmhouse, though that was much later. Later too, I was the furrowed field in winter.

- o They said I was brave when I walked out into the field until I lost the farmhouse. It wasn't brave. I was held by the dark path at my feet when I looked down and then, in the instant that the farmhouse disappeared, by the fog that set me free. Spirit in all things, my siblings surrounded me. Not fearful, not brave.
- o All the human ties that bound me disappeared and the land reclaimed me and I returned into its love. The mother and lifesaver, the blood and bone and marrow, the earth matched by my skin, the sea by my eyes, the winds by the soft cloud of my hair and whispering in my breath and spirit.
- o I have always been here.
- o This generation of me is recently arrived but my family sees in you and me the face we seem to share. Our family, living so close in geographical space, from Whitehawk Enclosure to Eastern Road to the place where the river rolls its double question mark down to the wider waters of the sea haven. Time draws us through its kaleidoscope, Neolithic to the closing moments of the Anthropocene era.
- o Some of us have been signalling the extinction to each other across water and land from Furamon to Standing Rock in extending circles that finally are spiralling outwards.
- o Since I walked here with the People, we have always been here.
- o We watched the great green smooth skin and scales evolve to feathers and then the early murmurations swoop and whirl in the wide red sky.

- o We were strong when we set off, the curious ones, determined, the outcasts and explorers. The arrowhead, the cutting edge.
- o We did not say we helped each other. There was no other. We walked together and we carried those who could not. We fed ourselves with the wild *za'atar* that grew in profusion along the way, and the *lawza* although it was *vitkadhira* when we brought it with us and its perfume was protection potent enough to keep away hostilities, at least from those with two legs and a sense of smell.
- o We brought change as we passed through, wittingly and innocently both. Animal life shape-shifted, lifted its wings, entered into unfamiliar element and made there its home.
- o Herb and shrub transformed, flowering at our fetid season, scattering seed in our infants' playthings with songs and laughter, teasing and tears, and left behind in our remains.
- o Accompanying our movement the earth moved also and the waters broke in an eruption of continental re-formation. The south bestowed upon the north its gift of brilliant cliffs. The ancient sisters split apart, all four A's beginning and ending our names. Asia and Africa even though still linked, now surrounded by seas and Seven new Sisters rose up at the edge of the land where we settled.
- o Although we walked here, if ever any one of our exhausted sleeps threw up nightmares of unsafe return, now that journey would take a vessel, or strong swimmers, or surrender to the whim of the water.

- o We have always been here.

- o In Mothertongue there is no singular i. The way we speak the earth and its life into being has only a First People, no first person, of any verb.

- o Time - circular, spherical, a shape that maybe has no name is hidden in these words. Time is always. Now living a short walk from our original home, that is itself a long walk from our aboriginal home, we are history in progress. We are the fog and the farmhouse and the furrowed field. Our truth is.

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Joyoti Grech Cato is a published writer guided by their intersectional experience of life, including being a parent, QTBIPOC, disabled by society, of Indigenous (Jumma) and Maltese origin, a migrant living in the South Downs National Park area since 1971, the teachings of their ancestors and contemporary Dharma teachers, and the principles of Mutual Aid. Cato is a Changing Chalk Associate Artist for Writing Our Legacy/The National Trust.

A recording of this text can be found at writersmosaic.org.uk

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