

## Healing Crisis

An Anishinabe medicine woman told me,  
“Every seven years we have a healing crisis.”  
Healing means to alleviate; to correct an undesirable situation.  
Crisis is a time of intense difficulty; the turning point of disease  
when an important change leads either to recovery or death.

I wondered if the me from seven years ago  
would recognize the me now...would I recognize her?  
Layered plates of armor hammered over soft spaces,  
metal stitches sealing her shut, chainmail-lined lips  
sewn into a perfect fortress, keeping everything in  
and everyone out, at the same time.  
And she may have stayed that way,  
wrapped and rigid, cocooned in her wounds.

But sometimes, transformation happens.  
Gradually, a crack we can't resist scratching  
slowly widens and the walls we've built begin to crumble.  
Maybe she caught a sliver of light through the tear  
and decided to try the world again. Her iron patches frayed  
and fell and she shed her way to me--  
no multi-hued butterfly wings, but heart no longer on lockdown.  
And now, seven years later, another healing crisis.

The world is heaving and I am hurting again:  
cyclones writhe against my mind, earthquakes quiver in my gut,  
volcanoes erupt at the back of my throat, keeping me from speaking--  
and the armor looks tempting again.  
I know I am not alone in my suffering,  
it doesn't make me special or separate.  
It is the same pain we all carry,  
though we may never show a tremor on the surface.  
There are so many people quietly raging like wildfire,  
blinded by dust clouds, billions  
of perfectly crafted landscapes sliding into the sea.

I have been called a healer  
because I'm trusted and honored to touch people in pain.  
I listen and hold, I make space for them to heal,  
but I don't heal them. I can't.  
Everyone heals themselves,

which makes us all healers,  
if we're willing to do the work.  
We can't just remove the afflicted parts,  
reengineer and reassemble ourselves,  
like malfunctioning machinery.  
Our fine tuning happens from the inside out.

A split bone knows how to knit itself back to weight-bearing,  
sewing stitches to make a seamstress swoon.  
Skin cells lay cement over open wounds  
like hasty construction workers,  
until craftsmen return to sand and polish.  
But a shattered heart, a scattered, panicked mind,  
a disconnected spirit--these blueprints we've lost.  
To heal these, we must become artists,  
imagine new mediums, colors and forms.

How do I shape my life without my partner, my parent, my child?  
How do I see brilliance through the dulled lens of depression?  
Where is my meaning and purpose without passion?  
These questions leak like poison through the water main.  
We swallow the suffering we cannot see  
until it fills us so completely, we can't stop it spilling over.  
These questions are turning points, opportunities.  
This is a healing crisis. Untreated, these unspoken,  
invisible injuries become raised voices,  
too loud to hear comfort or connection,  
raised fists, too tight to touch or feel.  
And this illness, unnamed, can consume us.

The Earth is not immune from this dis-ease.  
Like a mirror for our virus of disconnection  
she shakes in violent seizures, breaking her own bones;  
fiery fevers flare and vomit; anxious tornadoes  
tear the air as she struggles to breathe;  
her unsoothed tears become hysterical hurricanes,  
flooding her nervous system into submission.  
Maybe Earth would also like some armor.

The Anishinabe medicine woman says,  
"There are only two emotions, happiness and sadness  
and lots of words to describe them."  
I don't know if it's that simple, but I know how similar it makes us.

We can't compare our pain.  
The worst thing that's ever happened to you is still the worst thing,  
no matter what has happened to me.  
The circumstances of our stories keep us isolated in our wounds,  
and wounded people wound others, without even meaning to,  
like cornered animals lashing out in fear of our own vulnerability,  
that dimly lit space wherein we are closest to one another,  
if we could only look up and reach out.

And what if healing is as contagious as illness?  
What if all it takes at that turning point is choosing  
to let go of suffering, in order to hold something new?  
I have been healing myself for decades,  
and I am not yet wise.  
All I have really learned is this:  
We are always whole, even when we feel broken.  
We are never as alone as it seems,  
and every single one of us deserves more love.  
I offer these truths like medicine,  
that they may relieve suffering when applied.  
Because everyone hurts. Everyone can heal.  
And everyone heals themselves,  
which makes us all healers,  
if we're willing to do the work.

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