

THE WITCH ON MY GRANDMOTHER'S MOUNTAIN

Tusheeta, your name thunders
between clouds as clouds rise
from underwing of ocean
& stride across to meet sky

transforming into heavy-lidded desire

You teach sky to desire Earth
& your name, itself, enough
in its syllabic hue
to paint sky wild
& remember sweetness of desire

filling combs of our
cells, sap of memory
itself rising from the ancient
ones, threading itself into
a web that stretches
between infinity, petals
opening outward

infinity opening outward
stretching to meet iterations
of itself that whirl
into being, into form
every time a name is spoken

Tusheeta—hear your name

Arrive

*

“Another legend states that the witch Tusheeta currently lives on the mountains of Sulaiman.”

I seek & seek
& cannot find Tusheeta's legend
anywhere—trawl the Net,
scour databases,
comb search engines
of lore & memory

Tusheeta—
mrig marichika—arrives

only as a silver streak,
the same sentence appearing
on different sites
over &
over again

Tusheeta does not give
her legend away

*

Grain of legend
will go only so far

if you look for scratches
outside its home

Story often is a place,
remembering

Certain stories can be told
only on their own mountains,
sung only in their own rills

Digital modern streams
may not tell the very,
very old stories

*

Howling
for what is lost
every full moon we gather
& find ourselves on our feet

pounding to a mortar
& pestle beat

Tusheeta
Tusheeta

Arrive

*

Your unwavering belief
that your women

will rise, sustains
a future that is ready to arrive

smooths my own anxious
heart, fills its furrows of
dark doubt with what is sprouting
from sweet Earth, drums
of longing and rain—
as old as fierce
as first contact, first rains

In desire, your name is spoken
Earth touches sky

Tusheeta, arrive

*

The witch who lives
on my grandmother's mountain

perhaps knows names of women
who disappeared

The ones who gave the places
their names

before Ghazi Khan
& Fateh Khan
& Ismail Khan

I am trying to find the bestowing women
& your legend, Tusheeta—

summon witches of yore
mountains & rills & level plains

*

Did your story go missing because you are a witch?
Did your name go missing because you are a witch?

Did your story go missing because you are a woman?
Did your name go missing because you are a woman?

*

You who were discounted—
if I count you among my ancestors,
what do I do with this silence?

We are far away—are we far away?

*

Tusheeta—you are power
You are memory
You are star-lit pulse

Wor(l)d slips its loose
garment off

Speaking to energy found between things
that makes them work in cooperation
I connect with you across lifetimes

I ask you to show yourself

You whose name lingers
on mountains

You who walk on rocks
witch's memory extending

This future rises up to meet you

Stands with you on the mountain
filled with longing

I am merely a blade of grass
swept into your present

Fall of afternoon light
on rocks, butterfly wings

Here in stillness of time
you make all there is to
remake life

*

That old kind of be-
ing
where writing

reawakens energies
& speaking transmits

to future generations
a knowledge of what is
to come

We dabbled in these arts
as children
so we could come back
children of nature

*

Tusheeta, you are
alone on the mountain

The very image of a woman in power

You & elements, in primal
conversation—wind
whipped hair

Behind the mountain, crow
lifts her head

Words from your mouth invoke
& herbs on your seedwalk
spell love

Far away, a village burns

You wrap a word in wind fibers
& send it off to call rain

Late one night, a baby comes in another
bundle

A new being
& before this child is snagged
by shrilling claws of patriarchy

you draw a black mark of protection
on her forehead

for all who she is

Ready to burst into flame
when she is
willing to remember

This child will
remember herself
—you tell yourself

Not be a living corpse
dragging
failing to remember
what has petrified in her heart

You have seen too much
& are sometimes afraid

You keep doing your job

You are the only one you want

*

Word rumbles in wind's throat
Wind tears it from inside out

Powers rise
as smoke every time
you call on them

jinns

shapes swimming

There you are
looking into rim of canyon

You, who were taught how,
reach your fingers in

Reach in and we will come

*Wind will come and fire will come
Waters will come when they are called*

*

You are never alone on the mountain

Chronologies fly out of your mouth

Each timeline like a bird

Some, you have already mourned
knowing the dust they would become

Your name lives on in fragrance
carried in filaments of wind
swollen within
pollen like eye of an eagle

Rapt
in attention—rapt
in yarn

Stones saw you become a young woman
& older

barometer of who you have been

You swing between
easily
Age flaking off your foot

*

Too much called out for your care

Yours was not the luxury to lose
yourself in meditation
long enough for ants to build a hill

You knew those ants, their mounds,
& soil they made their mounds from

They knew you

You breathed in trees

You were in relation

Relation is reciprocity
with flowers growing out of heart
of hill into open palms
of etheric wave

Their real
& essence

You bend your face even now to whiff:
flowers

let yourself sense
pleasure unfurling laced underskin

Repose into grandeur

The old of the old
when Mountain had walked around, silver
anklets on its feet

Your heart—valleys within
Mountain remembers myths
afire

Each myth a secret flameseed
you wrapped in your own breath
& willpower
scattered across Mountain

Grasscroppers find it sometimes

Goats find it
Mountain dreams it

Flameseeds have eyes: see
all pasts, all futures

*

You—
woman & shadow—
appear every time your women
find you in your name

तु--शीता
Tu--sheeta
Cool touch of wind
frisson of remembrance
canticle of bonematter listening

*

You cultivated aloneness as a gesture of respect
for elements—allies & playmates

You gather
each other

Gathering is a motion that relieves aloneness

Solitude beckons mysteries
of well of life

Home to all who originate

You find yourself amongst
the most ancient of swimmers

Animal larvae, plant bones, DNA—
all that is before it becomes matter

In that echo-chamber
sound is sounded before
it pre-determines silence

Ears of ocean listen
fluid listening
listening on inner ears

Listening is an aspect of consciousness
Sentience is a matter of life

You drift along with
all
receiving their stories

*

Unannounced, deer come to graze at your tree
Unbidden, grit rides your bones

You've built safehouses overnight
for women hurt & bleeding
You are one & many

Your healing
heart & hands

remember

spin threads of life
& all around you
is life

Tusheeta,
arrive, knowing
Mountain would shift & settle
in turning time

*

Then one day you are here

I kept hearing the fey in the bushes that day
—moving energies around, busy
with who knows what

& sun was a ball of fire
that birds flew out & found

I was hearing the shining ones
Feeling you

Mountain was alive with spirits
behind cloud's veil

I gathered all hunts & trials
burnings, stonings, strangulations
all the times we were thrown into rivers & oceans
feet tied & weighted
tongues blackened

—all the fear & maliciousness—

in a medicine bag
let it become cure

& wept in the breathing air

*

Thus the tales of old are told
At the close
of telling, you will rest
buried

across the heart of a startled fern

*

Sun shone &
you live

bright in parallel
passageways

Become a bard
become

bird
become available to life

Single syllable changes
freedom
access to skies

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