

Folklore

I Didn't Know How To Mimic A Boat

Hornless

Do Crows Remember Human Faces?

The Best Place On Earth

Jane

No One Else

Folklore *by Peilian Li*

Preface



Folklore is a narrative standpoint I worked on during my stay in
Optic Art Residency in Ockelbo, Sweden.

The folklore-like filter is evoked by sensing the environment physically and emotionally.

Here the boundary between
fiction and reality

is meant to be blurred,

and the timeline between the stories remains ambiguous.

With this experiment,

I would like to question also where the boundary

is between atmospheric narrative and poems.

As I wrote this collection of short texts,

I felt like I was composing tracks of music; Instead of describing a visual language,
a melodic line emerged

which is present throughout the stories.



Folklore



“If you want to see a Näck,
you should come to the forest early morning or evening...”
Jane explained. “Well, it’s afternoon.

I guess we are out of the magic timezone.” I keep walking on the small forest path.
but Näcks are near the water; they usually don’t appear on the tree or
pop up in the middle of the road,
but they can come out around the lakes or rivers.” She said.

“Why?”

I asked. “Because it’s a creature that attempts to carry people off and drag them
into the water
when they get too close to it.”

She replied while lifting her long black dress and carefully stepping over the
water puddle in front of her. Inside the puddle,
the reflection of my face distorted in the waves.

The muddy path was getting tight,
so I followed Jane by walking behind her.

She was wearing a black dress with long and large bell sleeves.

From the back, somehow, she reminded me of a blackbird. We walked in the forest
near Ockelbo, a small Swedish town in Gävlesborg County.

“Maybe we won’t meet a Näck.” I thought, but with every step I took,
I realised more how impressively delightful the nature around me was.
Enough to make me feel

I was slipping into a portal
that led to a whimsy narrative,
a lullaby situation,
perhaps.

Indeed we walked through the alpine birch without
talking to each other anymore
and found ourselves immersed in an endless wildflower meadow.
The flowers bloomed like a dream, but I was amazed by the green colour of the grass,
so brand new and bright.

I would never imagine that
the time would stop ticking because of a colour.

This green colour was pure enough to clean the hustle and anxiety
accumulated in the past months.

I guess that was the meaning of a “forest bath”.

In front of us was a
crystal clear lake dappled with the flickers of light,
a little house painted in a bright crimson-red hue with white trimmings on the windows
was standing behind tall grasses in the water as if someone wilfully inserted it
into the impeccable view of nature.

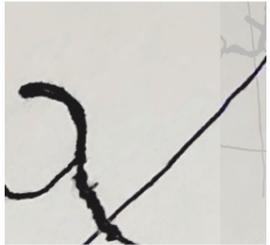
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I Didn't Know How To Mimic A Boat



“What do you like about this place?”
Jane opened a bottle of wine and then lay down on my bed.
“You mean Ockelbo?”
I asked. “Yeah, Ockelbo.”
she poured some wine into a glass.
“I have never been in a place where almost everyone owns a boat.”
I took a glass, lay on the bed next to her,
and began to explain.
“Growing up precariously, I always sought a place where I felt at home.
The obsession with
“having a place to go back to”
made me an odd flying tree constantly looking for its roots,
with the fear of withering and eventually dying.
What could I do besides keep going?
I wondered if it was a cultural identity issue or
if this sense of wonder came from the estrangement within my family.
When I saw an old lady sitting on her boat,
which floated peacefully on the still water surface,
the green bristle grass swang with the breeze like dogs’ tails.
You know,
Jane, for an instant, I felt understood.” I said.



“How important is feeling that you belong somewhere?”
Jane kept sipping from her glass.
“I don’t know...”
Do you know anything that’s happy without belonging anywhere?”
I asked.
She tilted her head and said,
“Uhm... a bird? Or a kite...?”
“Yes, kites are made for flying and they’re fun” I asserted;
“It is fun!” she highlighted.
“But the life of a kite depends entirely on the hand that holds the thread from the
earth.” I replied;
I took a sip from my glass and continued: “Without the hand, the kite wouldn’t fly,
or it would be blown away by the wind and eventually fall and get destroyed.
So,
technically, the hand is the kite’s root,
giving it vitality and a good guide while flying.”
“What if you attached the kite to a boat?”
Jane observed.
“We can run a kite from a boat, I guess.”
I replied, thinking it might be fun.
“You know I feel like you are like a boat, and I am like a kite at this moment,”
she said and jumped out of bed, spread her arms and stood on her tiptoe on the shaggy
carpet while holding her glass of wine.
“Sailing on our stream of consciousness.”
I said, amused to see how Jane turned herself into a kite, but I stayed in bed
because I didn’t know how to mimic a boat.

Hornless



I was inside the house,
 feeling I had my restful shelter and
 the possibility of experiencing thoughtless summertime.
 The room was not very big;
 I had arranged all the humble pieces of furniture
 around the thirteenth square meters of space.

The end of the bed faces the door,
 and the window,
 against the wall facing North.
 According to Fengshui,
 orienting your bed towards the entrance is terrible.

Still,
 I liked it anyway because that was the primary light source
 for the room during the day,
 and I enjoyed how the sunbeams fell on my blanket and
 my feet as I wake up.

I got up and went to the table at the window.
 There was an opened bottle of wine from the day before and two dirty glasses.
 The sunlight and the shadows of the green leaves
 from the cypress trees wobbled lazily on the table
 and reflected on my wine glass; inside these golden rays,
 time seemed to flow exceptionally slow.

I took a sip from the bottle and headed to the market. I took the bus in front of the house.
 The bus driver was very discrete and told me that trip
 was around one hour and forty minutes.
 The bus was empty. I sat near the windows:
 I liked the forest view with the tall trees. "The bears are four meters in height!"
 I remember the drunk man in my dreams once said.
 (He sometimes pops up to drink whiskey or beer while small talking with me)
 "If there are four meters high bears, they might be just as tall as the trees out there." I
 thought while looking at the panorama in movement and falling asleep listening to.
It's only a paper moon by Nat King Cole.

The warm sunbeam came through the big window,
 waking me up from the long trip. I opened my eyes,
 and instead of a bear, I saw a reindeer in the forest,
 a hornless reindeer.

I asked the bus driver to stop and I ran towards the wooden pier.
 When I got there, the reindeer was still standing on the wooden pier by the lake, sur-
 rounded by endless fields and forests, some dramatic hills, marshes and mountains that
 converged in the distance, all immersed in the fog. The lake was grey and quietly under-
 current. It looked like somewhere I could hide secrets, like a dark fairy realm. I looked at
 the hornless reindeer on the other side of the lake, but it didn't turn its head towards me.
 I abandoned the idea of going to the market and
 walked back to the house instead.

When I got home, I sat down at the table;
 I took a sip from the old bottle of wine and started to draw the missing horns of
 the reindeer. Suddenly someone knocked on the door.
 I opened the door, and Jane smiled: "Wanna take a walk in the forest?" she
 asked me. "Sure," I said, knowing I was going to walk back to where I just came from.

Do Crows Remember Human Faces?

“Do crows remember human faces?”
Jane asked me while we were having a picnic
on a wooden pier by the lake.

“I mean...

can they recognise you by just looking at you?”
she looked apprehensive about it.

“Why? Because of the crow on the tree over, there is looking at you?” I laughed
and pointed to the tree on the other side of the lake.

There was indeed a crow resting on the tree.
“Looking? I think it’s staring at me... like... intentionally,”
she replied.

“What are you talking about?

Are you being serious?” I laughed again.

“Yes, I mean, no, I don’t know... The other day I was walking in the flower garden. I
stopped when I saw

a dead crow

on the ground

in front of the hedge of red roses,

where people walk to enter the garden.

A flock of crows overlooked the corpse-like guards on the top of the roof nearby.

I got closer to the dead crow

and saw it had a broken

wing,

but the rest of the body was perfectly intact.

The way it hit the ground felt like it was being
chased by something.

I looked around, and a ray of sunlight fell on the fountain, making the running water
golden. “I might move the bird to the fountain.” I thought to myself it would assist in a
beautiful sunset there. But just as I led my hands close to the dead bird, the other crows
flew down from the roof and started chasing me...” she said.

She took a bite of her cinnamon roll and continued:

“Puff...

don’t exclude yourself before others do, they say!!!

I think we just don’t understand each other,

you know,

the birds and me.”

The Best Place On Earth



The last time I saw Jane,
we ended up inside the little red house at the lake after a long promenade in the forest.
The green tablecloth, the brown couch,
the wall with dusky orange shades, the natural wood ceiling
and a golden retriever chilling under the dining table.

I remember having coffee
while enjoying the earthy tones all over the living room.

The owner of the house was an old gentleman
who had offered us some food and warm coffee.

Jane started to play with the dog.

“Where are you from, young lady?”
the old man asked me.

“I am from a similar place, just with more mountains, I think.”
I described. “Oh,

sounds nice too... well,
nature here is the best place on Earth, isn't it?
I mean we have the most breathtaking views of the lakes and forests,
you can breathe the purest air
and meet the nicest people here! It's a real paradise!”

The old man exclaimed;
he seemed incredibly proud of his hometown.
“It's relaxing to be here; everything looks so nice, indeed.” I confirmed.
“Oh yeah...the lake view just calms my soul;
nature can really heal, am I right?
Here you can stay away from all the city noises and industrial objects.
Look!

The cups are ceramic!”

He pointed at my cup of coffee.

“Ah, wow, it's a nice cup.”

I turned the cup in my hands and made an observation.

“I hate the industrialisation, you know,
those pieces of furniture that all look the same... blegh!”

The old man acted annoyed. I took a sip from my cup of coffee.

“This is real life.” The old man looked at me firmly and pointed again at my cup made of ceramic.

“Well, do you like it here?” he asked.

“I do enjoy this place very much,” I replied with a smile.

“What do you like about this place?”

he asked again. “Well, I like the forest... I like the clouds... the nature... and the water is nice...”

I said while the old man nodded.

“I bet this is the best place you have ever been!”

he said proudly.



Jane



Jane didn't stay over that night, and I had a nightmare.
 I dreamt I was walking in a deep foggy forest
 where I could barely see
 the path;
 Jane was walking ahead of me.
 We were talking about
 something
 that existed only in the dream.
 At some point,

there was
 a water puddle
 in front of us.

We were about to step over it
 when a horse-like creature slowly appeared from the fog.
 "Näck!"
 Jane yelled and started to run.

We ran as fast as we could away from the creature in the fog;
 Jane tripped over
 a rock and tragically broke
 her left arm.

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dream.

No One Else

After the reindeer faded into the fog,
 there was nothing and no one else
 but me standing alone on a wooden pier facing an enormous lake.
 I remember having high-frequency tinnitus in my ear, and my head felt fuzzy, as if some-
 thing was lingering on me in an unexplainable way.
 My body was paralysed, just like the still water of the lake.

I couldn't tell if I was hollowed out or overwhelmed,
 but I was afraid to look back and go back to beyond.

It felt like my inner child was crying,
 but tears wouldn't have reason to fall down here because tears make up that lake.

There was no one else but me standing alone on a wooden pier when it got
 colder and colder.

I closed my eyes,
 and the flux of my thoughts suddenly became more vivid.
 I remember Jane laying on my bed;
 I remember the gorgeous sunlight and endless green meadow;
 I remember the warm coffee and the cinnamon rolls;
 I remember the dead crow;
 I remember the red house on the lake;
 I remember the forest path;
 I remember running a kite on a boat;
 I remember everything.

