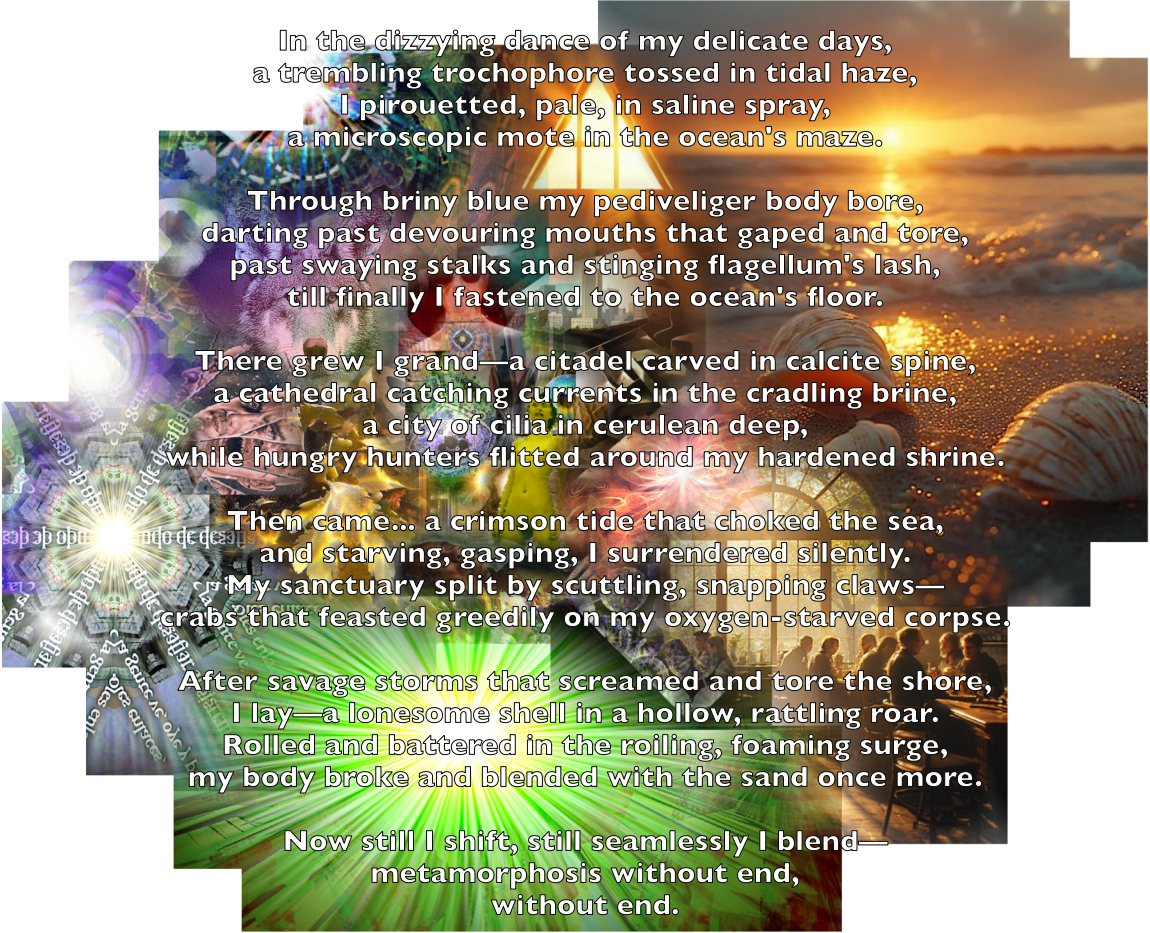


WORN SHELLS: Metamorphosis Without End



In the dizzying dance of my delicate days,
a trembling trochophore tossed in tidal haze,
I pirouetted, pale, in saline spray,
a microscopic mote in the ocean's maze.

Through briny blue my pediveliger body bore,
darting past devouring mouths that gaped and tore,
past swaying stalks and stinging flagellum's lash,
till finally I fastened to the ocean's floor.

There grew I grand—a citadel carved in calcite spine,
a cathedral catching currents in the cradling brine,
a city of cilia in cerulean deep,
while hungry hunters flitted around my hardened shrine.

Then came... a crimson tide that choked the sea,
and starving, gasping, I surrendered silently.
My sanctuary split by scuttling, snapping claws—
crabs that feasted greedily on my oxygen-starved corpse.

After savage storms that screamed and tore the shore,
I lay—a lonesome shell in a hollow, rattling roar.
Rolled and battered in the roiling, foaming surge,
my body broke and blended with the sand once more.

Now still I shift, still seamlessly I blend—
metamorphosis without end,
without end.

Andrei: *(thoughtfully scratching his head while his eyes trace the dying sun)* Eventually, won't we become like worn shells? Over time, won't we curiously hollowed out?

Jules: *(nodding absently, his gaze lost in the shimmering waters and voice tinged with melancholy)* Quelle pensée morose... We're just echoes of what survives the tide, like memories washed ashore. *(gesturing then toward the horizon with cool nonchalance)*

Elijah: *(leaning back on his palms and grinning)* Sorry, my universal translator's isn't working well. You mentioned a gloomy thought, right? Why so fatalistic? *(chuckling faintly as the waves briefly subside and the wind subsides)*

Jules: *(laughing softly, eyes twinkling with mischief)* Oui, c'est vrai. But gloom has its charms—don't you think? It makes the fleeting light a little sharper when it returns.

Andrei: *(smiling at the waves with a tinge of bittersweetness)* And we Russians understand gloom: it's a wintry friend. Maybe what we leave behind aren't merely empty shells, but former selves. This is certain: soon we will amount to dust, phosphorus, and calcite.

- T Newfields

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