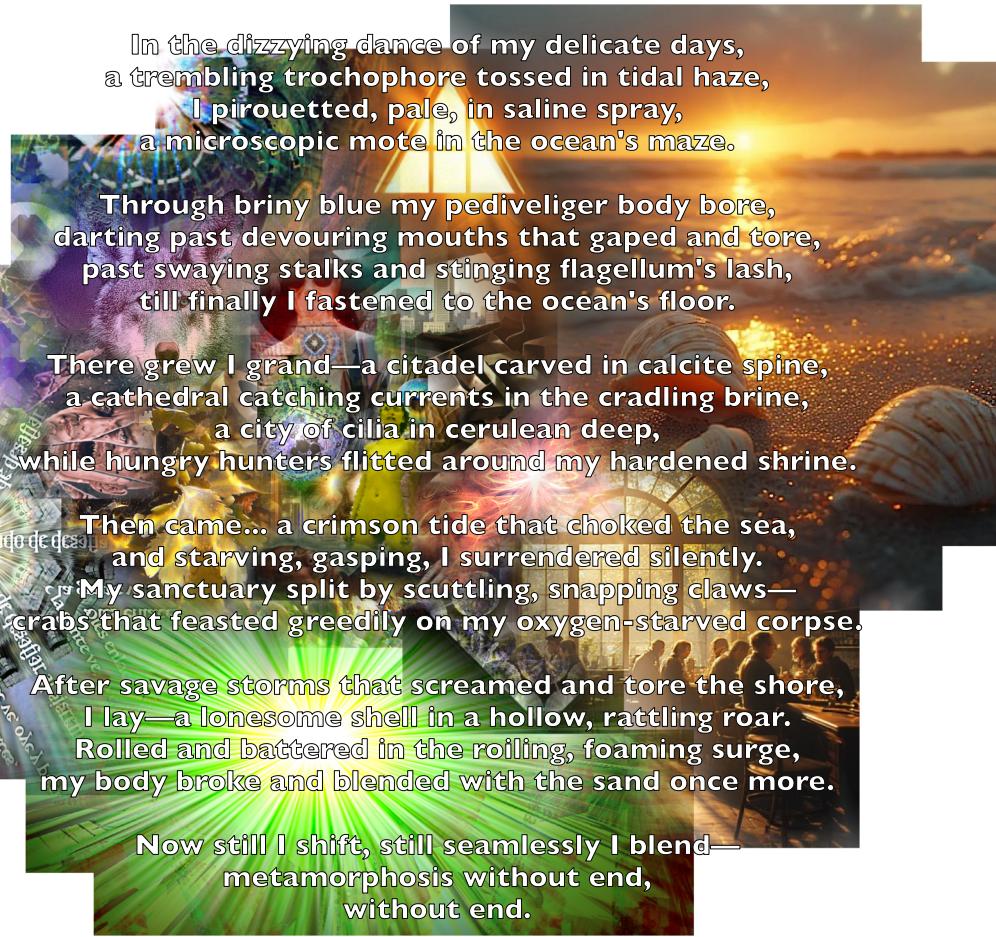


WORN SHELLS: Metamorphosis Without End



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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