

Didgeridoo

Kim Cheng Boey

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She heard him before the shoppers and pedestrians parted to reveal his seated figure, his slightly bowed head earthed to the pipe, the long throbs of throat sounds pulsing, as if he were sucking sustenance and warmth from the cold Dublin street. The didgeridoo was about one and a half metres long, and had two clay-red lizards painted along its ochre length, separated by sinuous lines of white dots. The ring of Dubliners stood round, hushed, in their coats and mufflers, tuned into the antipodean, earthy yet unearthly music, the pulsing drones that seem to come and go in circular waves (this was the pre-global early 80s, before ethnic cultures started circulating in the global consciousness and when the Troubles in the north were conspiring to keep the tourists away from the Emerald Isle and the Celtic Tiger was still a cub waiting in the wings).

Esther had seen him in Florence, performing outside the white façade of Basilica di Santa Croce, after she'd seen the tombs of Michelangelo, Galileo, Machiavelli and fragile frescoes of Giotto. In Seville she'd been walking through the narrow winding alleys towards the Cathedral when the didgeridoo called to her through the weave of Spanish voices. In Munich his didgeridoo drew the festive crowd, the deep belly sounds a counter-bass to the bright peals of the bells from the Marienkirche. At first she thought there was an embassy of them, spreading the deep gut-sound of the instrument around wintry air of Europe, sowing the European sod with its seeds of warmth and red earth; but after the third sighting the face, the posture, that aura became instantly recognisable.

Yesterday morning she'd seen him in the International Youth Hostel on Mountjoy Street. It was a Georgian house quartered into dorms; it had what used to be a little basement chapel with stained glass-windows, now converted into a dining-room. He was spooning his bowl of cereals and was engaged in an animated conversation with a sallow-faced man of indiscriminate age in Rastafarian locks and a slightly anorexic Swedish girl whose bed was above hers on the third-floor dorm, and whose late return had awoken her with the groaning of the bunk frame and the creaking of bedsprings.

The two chirped brightly while he was mostly monosyllabic; his eyes would shift their sad, tolerant gaze to his companions, patient, perhaps bemused with their gusto, and then return to scanning some distant horizon. His face was handsome in a lean, weather-

beaten way, his nose well-shaped but flaring out at the nostrils, his hair brushed back and spilling over his collar, greying at the temples. A scar ran down the side of his right cheek and a light beard concealed the strong well-shaped jaws. His skin was of an indeterminate hue; when he was outdoors he seemed darker. Indoors it seemed to emit a soft pale glow.

Esther overheard snatches of their conversation, which clearly showed the couple's New Age interests in Indigenous cultures. He was explaining to them his own culture. "In the time before the whitefellas came, the land was dreaming time country connected by psychic highways. We blackfellas call them songlines, pathways we map out in our minds, in what you call the collective memory by songs, walkabouts," he said. "Wow, that's incredible. That's beautiful. Tell us more," the girl pleaded with her wrapt eyes.

A boisterous pack of young lads settled on the adjoining tables and drowned out the conversation. Anyway, it was rude to be eavesdropping, and she was too shy to intrude.

It was Esther's second time in Ireland. Six years ago, she'd come here on her own after two months travelling on a Eurailpass with Lim. It was bliss at first, her first extended trip abroad, with a man she loved. There was something surreptitious about it, getting away from their families, even lying to her mother that there were three of them travelling. In Italy and Greece they were bound close together in the first flush of romance, and made greedy passionate love when they could afford a private room. In Olympos, they were given a shack on the beach and the lovemaking became more bold and hard, as Lim turned her around and came at her hard. She consented at first and tried to like it but would protest; in the tiny room on Rue Mouffetard she'd stopped him, put on her clothes and walked out to join the insomniacs on the rain-slicked cobblestones. The rest of their European tour was marred by strained silences, sudden squalls of disagreement, and her complaint about him dictating what to do and where to go. After another row in Amsterdam, he decided to return home to work while she took the train to Le Havre for the ferry across to Rosslare.

Now Ireland was the last stop of her year-long trip, as it was six years ago. She'd given up her teaching job and had thought that she and Lim could travel together again. But after his release from prison, it was clear that they would have no future together. He'd been among the twenty so-called "Marxist conspirators" bundled off to prison for an alleged anti-government plot. In the days after his release, he kept her at bay, sullen, and paranoid.

She'd started with Istanbul and travelled to Israel and Egypt, before moving onto Europe. After a whole year traipsing with a backpack that had become a challenge to carry and pack (being a collector she hadn't been able to resist the rare souvenirs, the shells and stones, and books), she was no closer to knowing what she wanted. In the first few weeks she imagined him with her, wondering if they could have started afresh and left the past and their stifling island home behind. She wrote him a few postcards and letters that were unsent; they were tucked away in the notebooks that she had

started keeping. The letters seemed less for him than for herself, to clarify her feelings, to see more clearly where she was going. At times it was like conversing with a ghost left behind, a shadow she was writing to exorcise. She was testing the unknown, sending probes to sound out the road ahead.

She dreaded going back. The sense of repression that instantly was clamped on you like handcuffs, the train of changes, the juggernaut march of progress that had removed the old landmarks, streets and buildings she'd loved, all vanished. What had happened to the island she'd known as a child, the bucolic seaside villages, the old civic heart of the city, with its exhilarating blend of Edwardian and Oriental architecture? In a mere decade of feverish developments, the entire island had become sliced by highways, massive developments that left no space for the small and beautiful. In her tiny island nation, nothing was certain except change.

How different it appeared to her here in Ireland. Nothing seemed to have changed in Dublin. No massive urban developments had wrought havoc on the Georgian and Edwardian streets and houses yet, their history and spirit still very much intact. The restaurant in an alley tucked behind Grafton Street, where she had Irish stew on her first day here, was still serving its traditional fare to loyal customers. The second-hand bookstore nestled in another side street off Grafton is still here, and she was happy to have another cup of tea in Bewley's Oriental Café.

In the morning she'd walked out to the Martello Tower. She'd read *Ulysses* in her Honours year at university and loved the scene in which Stephen and Buck Milligan held their Socratic dialogue. On Sandymount the sandpipers and gulls strolled on the mudflats, leaving delicate tattoos that reminded her of the Aboriginal . dot paintings she'd seen in a book in Chapters Bookstore on Parnell Street.

A sense of expectation stirred within her on the way back from the Tower. As she approached Grafton Street the sound was like a familiar call that grew more distinct with each step; yet it resonated with distance, calling her to a place she'd dreamed about but could not remember. It was like the honk of cranes she'd seen while stranded in a country station in Hungary, their long necks dragging their V formation across the twilight sky, their cries ringing in the air long after they were gone.

Then it was over. There was hearty clapping but only a handful walked up to drop change into a weather-beaten hat.

An old man lingered to talk. She hesitated, then moved up to drop a pound. He looked at her with what she thought was a smile of recognition, and seemed about to speak. Unaccountably she turned on her heels and walked away, regret already seizing her heart as she crossed the Ha'penny Bridge.

Three days later Esther found herself walking on a lonely road in the Dingle Peninsular, regretting not having packed more food. She'd expected the intermittent pub and shop along the way, but long stretches of the country road passed without any, only more

fields marked with stone fences, freckled with stone piles, stone cottages, tiled or thatched, and farmhouses, leaving a mildly disquieting sense of emptiness. On the bus from Dublin the impression of an eerie emptiness, of a land that had been quietly abandoned, grew, as the country rolled past with little signs of life. The houses seemed untenanted; no tractor or plough moved on the untilled fields. It was as if the Potato Famine were still on, draining the land of its natives.

She'd taken the coastal road skirting precipitous slopes that ended in sheer cliffs plunging to thunderous swells. Her heart had skipped a beat as a lamb skittered down a scree-covered slope to the perilous drop, and shifted on the edge nervously. Then the ram, its chest dyed a powdery red, came to the rescue, surefootedly skipping down and steering the stray up to safety.

Now the sea was behind the high bluff, the booming echoes of wind and wave became distant, ghostly. She stopped and perched on a stone-slab by a fence-gate. A double-storey farmhouse sat high up in the lee of the long ridge; no sign of human activity, only browsing sheep and cattle. In front of her the land heaved gently in a dramatic quilt of sunny green and shade, mirroring the sky of dark blossoms of cloud patches, the sun broken up in dazzling shafts and panes. The misty drizzle that had dogged her first few miles seemed to have spent itself. She expected a rainbow but none materialised; she'd seen quite a few already since arriving in Ireland. It was a rainbow country, she'd decided, where sudden arches of colour could break out without warning and just as suddenly vanish.

She was lost. It'd seemed easy, with the map given by unpredictable hostel-warden, who flashed twinkling eyes and a bright, Irish smile one moment, and then became reticent, cold even. Just like the weather, one moment a burst of beneficent sun and then a soaking drizzle.

On the damp and wrinkled map there were just deceptively simple lines connecting the key highlights, including the Gallarus Oratory that was her goal. But the crude map belied the reality of turnings, intersections, minor tracks, and the scale was clearly askew.

If Lim were here, he would probably have marched them to the Oratory and back, done all the sights in a day; he'd have a strict itinerary and made sure they never deviated.

She continued and soon saw ahead a disconsolate figure on a stone seat. It was Kimiko, the Japanese woman from the hostel. They'd talked tentatively the night before, seated by the fireside, while a Swedish couple sat across on the couch, reading Swedish paperbacks, cuddled together and smooching, as if communicating to each other what they were reading or spurring each other on with the reading.

As she got used to Kimiko's halting English, Esther was struck by their similarities; they were both thirty-three, Esther just a month younger. Both were slim and were nearly of the same height. Both had straight long hair (Kimiko's tied up in a pony tail,

and Esther's worn loose), a delicate oval-shaped face and elegant nose. In the few moments when their gaze shifted from the lovers, to the crackling fire and to each other, Esther felt a strange sense of recognition.

Now, her double smiled at her from the red anorak hood, loose wisps of hair trembling across her forehead. Her eyelids were pink, her eyes filmy with moisture.

"Hello, Kimiko."

"I want to go to Oratory. I lost."

"Me too."

They sniggled like school girls.

"We go together?" Kimiko suggested.

They walked together in awkward silence at first, then their steps found an easy rhythm that loosened up a trickle, then a flow of conversation. Kimiko had lived for the last five years in Vienna, teaching the piano. She'd gone there to live with an Austrian man whom she'd met in Tokyo. Now that the relationship was over, she was contemplating returning to Japan.

The road crested a rise and revealed a breathtaking view of a wide bay, the sea combing a scimitar-shape beach with white-laced waves. They came to a junction with a sign pointing left for Oratory. It wasn't long before the boat-shaped stone chapel stood limned against the brilliant green fields and blue sky. It was like the beehive huts she'd seen near Dunquin, a lego stack of stones, all assembled without mortar.

They stepped in, almost reverentially, stooping under the low doorway, and stood in the oblong of light that reached the opposite end, where a tiny window admitted a thin sleeve of sky.

"All this without anything to glue them together. These stones sitting on top of one another for more than a thousand years."

Kimiko nodded, and moved into the dim shadow, resting her hand on the stone. Esther moved to the window and looked back at the door, the frame of dazzling light held in the chill interior of the vault. The two women stood still, in awe of the simplicity of this sacred place. It was a microcosmic version of a cathedral, the corbel vaulting allowing finite space to reverberate with infinity. In that abstract space of light and shadow, the outside world – the view of the fields and sea, the world of race, nation, and time, was blotted out by this ethereal air, and they were both islanded in a capsule, a vessel that floated briefly on the sea of timelessness.

Later, after a tour through the Blasket Interpretive Centre where they'd been absorbed in the history of the Great Blasket, and learned that the majority of the islanders had emigrated to Springfield Massachusetts, and that the last islander was ferried to the mainland in 1953, they strolled down to the headland, a grassy walk above the beach. This was the westernmost edge of Europe. The Great Blasket stood like a mammoth

turtle, its great hulk facing the mainland, its snout pointed north-west toward the Lesser Blasket, whose shape hung hazed on the shimmering horizon.

Two days ago she'd walked the winding road down to the stone pier and taken the ferry across to the island. The bare, rugged, steeply sloping land, the withering blasts of the Atlantic, and the sad, abandoned cottages spoke of an unremittingly tough existence. But at least the islanders were spared the worst of the Famine, for they were skilled fishermen who worked the wild seething waters with their skiffs and coracles.

Depopulated. That was the word that came to her as she walked back from the furthest point of the island to wait for the boat back to Dunquin.

Now the images of the islanders and their immigrant lives in Springfield lingered in her mind, as she faced the abandoned island. Emigrants, their lives, the difficult crossing, starting life in a country they had never seen. Strange, her ancestors, the Chinese and Indians, they weren't that different from the Irish. She had no idea of her ancestral roots; her paternal great-grandfather had come from a village close to Calcutta and her paternal grandmother was Sumatran. She never got to asking her father when he was alive. He was caught in the union movement and then in opposition politics and was jailed in a crackdown on those with Marxist persuasion, just after she had started primary school. After three years he was released, a broken man. When he died just before her sixteenth birthday the archive of genealogical memories went up in smoke with him. There was her mother left, but they'd stopped communicating, after she'd disobeyed her and insisted on going out with Lim. Anyway, her mother would never want to dig into the past; something had kept her looking away. All she'd revealed was that her grandfather had come from a village in Guangzhou while her mother's family still had ties in Hainan.

"Very beautiful. My home village in Japan, like this. But sunrise," Kimiko said, as they paused and looked at the sun, now low on the horizon, firing up a bank of cloud, sowing the waters with sequins of quicksilver and gilding the Blasket with a golden halo.

They sat near a Celtic cross, a recent memorial to a beloved wife by a grieving husband. Kimiko started talking about her village near Sendai on the north-eastern coast of Honshu, the main island of Japan, where her parents lived by the sea, farming and fishing. Something about the Blasket islanders' history must have triggered off her memories. Her father would take her and her brother and sister out on his boat, and she never got sea-sick even when the sea got rough. They would help haul up nets full of mackerel, snapper and squid.

Years later Esther would watch with horror the tsunami tides racing across the towns and villages, swallowing up houses and cars, after the earthquake. She'd think immediately of Kimiko and dig up the address book from twenty years ago, frantic that she might have lost it in the process of emigration and the series of removals that followed before settling down in Sydney. She'd send a letter, half in dread, half in hope. Three months later, a reply would come from Japan. Kimiko was safe but her parents

had been swept away. She'd been away on a visit to her in-laws in Tokyo, with her husband and two children, when it happened. Two children about the same ages as Esther's boy and girl. But Kimiko sounded happily married. Esther had become a single parent.

"My brother and sister over there, where sun is going," Kimiko said. "My sister in Boston. My brother in Brazil. Many Japanese in Brazil." Esther had never thought of the Japanese as the emigrating sort. Now it seemed like the whole world is a diaspora, people moving across borders, over land and sea, since time immemorial.

Over the horizon the sun flared, sending up last spears of light into the twilight blue before sinking to where America is. The two women felt themselves on the edge of the world, both thirty-three, at the crossroads of their lives.

As the bus pulled out from the station, Esther waved goodbye to the waif-like figure of Kimiko. She felt the loneliness that had been lifted the last two days return, but it seemed more bearable, something she could live with for the rest of her life.

She'd always wanted to see Sligo. At university she was drawn to early Yeats and the Celtic Twilight. One day she'd picked up an LP of John McCormack singing Irish ballads and was enthralled by his rendering of "Down by the Salley Gardens," his rich trembling, poignant Irish tenor filling her with quivers of pleasure and wistful longing for something she couldn't name.

From the station she walked through the town centre, noticing with delight the traditional shopfronts – two or three-bay stone-and-brick facades, painted in cream, light lime-green, blue and burgundy. After crossing the five-arched Hyde Bridge, where she paused to check her map, she followed the river to the whitewashed cottage on the edge of town, with a faint "Hostel" sign on its side. She opened the creaky glass-fronted door, walked in, and tapped the bell on the reception desk a few times and was about to give up when the warden strode in from the back. He was tall, and slightly stooped, in his thirties, quite attractive in his dark-haired, saturnine way. He wore a black woollen jacket and a tartan scarf, and looked more like guest. In his hand was a book with well-thumbed pages, which he rested face-down on the desk. Before that Esther glimpsed a name: Wittgenstein.

"How long have you worked here?" she asked, after signing the register. She was surprised that he didn't ask for her passport or hostel card.

"It's a summer job." His deep mournful eyes avoided her, looking through the window at the sea as he passed her a key.

"Where are you from?"

"Cologne."

"Looks interesting, what you are reading?"

"German philosophy."

He showed her to the dorm room. It was freezing and dank.

She wondered if she should have accepted Kimiko's invitation to go to Vienna. She still had a flat there, and possessions to dispose of, and a big decision to make: to stay in Europe or return home

Again she heard it before she saw him. In the town centre, just below the Lady of Erin statue with a missing arm, in his faded Army surplus jacket and jeans.

She stood beside a woman with a double pram, savouring the April sunlight and the comforting sounds of the pipe.

"Hello. We keep running into each other." He smiled as she dropped a pound into the hat, after the crowd had dispersed.

"You've noticed."

"I have a good memory for faces, especially those who give. In Seville, and one or two other places."

He scooped the earnings and shoved them into his pockets, putting the hat on his head.

"This hat is from my father. He was a stockhand, you know, the Aussie cowboy, on a cattle station. The Brothers sent him there from the orphanage. You want a cuppa?"

"What?"

"Coffee."

"Yes, that would be nice."

"My name is Lawrence." He extended his hand.

"Esther." His hand was large, rough but gentle as it held hers briefly.

In the café overlooking the river he told her he'd been travelling for two years now, starting with India. He'd gone overland through the Khyber Pass, to Europe. He planned to finish up with the Americas and then go home.

"Where is that?"

"What?"

"Your home."

It was a few hours' drive north-west of Alice Springs, the traditional home of his Aboriginal ancestors, on the edge of the Napperby Station. He told her about Aboriginal skin-names that are like Chinese clan or surnames, binding the tribe to each other and to the land. His was Tjapaltjarri, a whole network of kinships that boasted famous Indigenous painters like Clifford Possum.

Years later, she'd go to Alice Springs with her husband and wonder about him, whether he'd made it back. He never wrote after Ireland, as promised, and the letters she'd send to a Perth address would return unopened.

"You don't look Aboriginal."

"Yeah, not your typical blackfella in loincloth hunting kangaroos with boomerangs."

"Sorry, I didn't mean"

“No offence taken. You won’t believe it but my grandmother was Irish and there is a Chinese great-grandfather. What about you, are you Chinese?”

She told him she was also a product of inter-racial marriages.

“I believe they call people like us hybrids.” She saw a bemused look on his face. “Mongrel,” she added, remembering those terms from the post-colonial literature course she’d done in her final year. For the first time she understood the reality behind these words.

“It’s good to belong to many. We are the nomads, at home everywhere in the world.”

She looked at him, at his eyes, hair and skin, and imagined the Chinese and Irish and the Indigenous ancestors all dancing together in a strange corroboree.

“My father was part of the stolen generation. He was taken from his parents when he was two and brought to an orphanage. When he found out who his parents were they were already dead.”

Fifteen years later, after becoming an Australian living in Sydney, she’d join thousands as they marched across the Harbour Bridge on Reconciliation Day, defying the intransigent Howard government with a display of solidarity with Indigenous Australians. She’d read about the early genocides committed against the Indigenous people, and the generation of babies and children forcefully taken from their parents and land by the church and government, and would be incensed by the denial of the conservative government and many average Australians. She’d rejoice on Sorry Day, when the Prime Minister Kevin Rudd delivered a national apology for all the atrocities and sufferings inflicted on the original owners of the land.

“My father didn’t want to talk about it. But it troubled him till he died. He drank to forget.”

“It must have been awful. My father drank to forget too. He died when I was sixteen.” She told him about her father, how broken he’d been by the politics.

They were silent for a while, gazing at the scene outside the plate glass.

“I met this wonderful fellow yesterday. He is a wood-carver. Used to be a butcher until he discovered his gift. Let’s drop in and say hello,” he said.

It was a real butcher shop partly turned into a workshop studio, with a lathe and an array of saws, hammers and chisels. On the white-tiled walls were shelves displaying Celtic gods and goddesses, heroes, aishlings, queens whose faces and figures half-stood out from the wood, and half-blended with it.

Michael Quirke had a long, hefty face, pasty-white mottled with red, a trim greying moustache above full lips.

“You brought your girlfriend.”

“We just met. Well, not really, just got to know each other.”

“Welcome to my shop. Feel free to look around.”

“Thanks. Is that Yeats?” A more contemporary bust, the noble features unmistakably that of the poet, stood on what must have been the counter-top where the meat would have been chopped and sliced.

“Yes, I do quite a few of them. They sell very quickly.”

She took her time, listening to the two men talking about Celtic lore and Aboriginal Dreamtime, their voices soft and easy.

“What are you working on?” she asked, coming to the workbench where Michael was chipping away at a woman’s face on a log-sized block clamped in a vice.

“She’s, the Goddess Queen of Connaught. She is buried on top of Knocknarea, about 4 miles south of here. You haven’t seen Ireland if you haven’t been to Knocknarea. I recommend it strongly that you see it before you leave.”

“We can go tomorrow.” Lawrence turned to her.

“I’d love to,” she said instantly.

They left the shop without buying anything, but Michael gave her a hand-sized figure of Oisiin, and told her about how Yeats had written about him.

At the bridge she said goodbye to Lawrence, though she really wanted to spend the day with him. By the look in his eyes, she knew he wanted it too. But it would be too soon.

It drizzled lightly when they set out the next morning. It was more like a fine mist that cleared, started again, then cleared, keeping pace with them as their feet kept a steady patter on the macadam, their strides almost in effortless unison. On his shoulder he carried his didgeridoo slung.

Once they left the outer fringe of the town behind, the megalithic slab of Knocknarea hove into view, its plateau mass falling away sharply on its eastern flank and sloping more gently to the Atlantic side.

“Looks like Ulluru.”

“What?”

“Ayers Rock. We don’t call it that. It’s the whitefellas’ name.”

They crossed a wooden bridge and paused to listen to the brook. He stood quite close to her, his right hand almost touching her left on the rail. Their breaths left little puffs in the cold air.

“Like a walkabout. This. You and I are on the Celtic songline.”

They passed a hostel and turned into an empty carpark, the hill looming above them.

“Wait.” He stopped at a scatter of stones and picked two oval-shaped ones. “Remember what Michael said, you have to bring a stone up.”

The stone felt right in her hand, a comforting heft that immediately gave her a sense of connection to this place. They climbed the faint trail up the gorse-and- heather-covered slope. It was slippery and a blast of cold wind tipped her off balance. She felt his hand holding her, steadying her. The path steepened and she was panting.

“Nearly there,” he held her hand tight and helped her up.

How easy it was, just like that, the hands finding a way, getting past the awkwardness of words, the barriers of nationality and race. The sky was a rinsed blue, just a belt of wispy cloud to the north, as the path levelled out and the stone cairn appeared. A faint track led to the cairn, ten metres high of piled boulders and rocks. She imagined the burial preparations for the queen, all the slaves hauling rocks up here and stacking them. Nothing to rival the Mayans or Egyptians but something about its crude and primitive

shape moved her. Somewhere in that mass of rocks was the tomb passage. She was glad that it was still unexcavated, its sacramental aura untouched. She liked the respect the Irish had for their culture and history.

She wandered off to the north-east edge, scrutinising the rubble, the stone remains of huts and tombs. It was a glorious view, and she felt a sense of calm and exultation. From her pocket she took a damp and frayed map out to read the landscape. The Strandhill Peninsula Knocknarea stood on rode out into the sea, separating the Bay of Ballysadare from Sligo Bay. Sligo Town lay sprawled out to the north, its roofs, towers and spires glittering in the afternoon sun. Further to the north the Donegal road led to the imposing shape of Ben Bulben. A few miles before it lay Drumcliffé, with its famous church and cemetery where Yeats is buried. Tomorrow, she'd pay a visit, and she'd ask Lawrence to go with her. Perhaps to Ben Bulben too.

Then the low murmurings of the didgeridoo started, the breathy rolls and twangs, air being plucked like string, the vibrating cadences almost harp-like in the wind.

He was seated on the seaboard side of the cairn, cross-legged and the didgeridoo stretched out low. She walked slowly, not wanting to distract him. He turned and gestured for her to sit beside him. Before them the peninsula snout rode out in to emerald shallows, then teal, then deeper blues, all gleaming under the immaculate blue sky.

Her hand found his, its hard knuckles, its thick rivulets of veins, long callused fingers, and deep-grained palm. His hand embraced hers in a light squeeze.

His lips and cheeks were pulsing, keeping the circular breathing going, the long notes that seemed to be summoning the spirits of those who were here before them, Maeve, all who had lived and died here, and his ancestors, from another lifetime, and hers from another world, weaving songlines that stretched and spanned vast tracts of space and time. The long breaths seemed to come out of the earth, and return to it, and the ground was alive, humming, dancing, sustaining them, and it didn't matter, that they were foreign, that they were displaced, nomads. In the notes that seemed to come and go, and return again, spirit sounds that rose and fell, and rose in the time before and after them, gathering and letting go, she was home.

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