

A Study of a Pagan Upbringing

Exhibit 1. A Fortuneteller –

Eyes deep like scratched stone. Aquiline nose, square jaw. Walks with a limp. Wears a woven straw hat in the garden.

Mom told me the Earth is alive. This planet, her body, holds her mycelian nervous system, her mountainous teeth, her magma blood. The wind is her breath, stones and crystals hold her thoughts and memories, and trees are her eyes. She would stand in the garden with eyes closed, hands on hips, head tilted towards heaven. She'd tell me to stick my feet in the dirt, that grounding is a literal phenomenon. I'd walk barefoot in the tilled soil before the peppers and string beans were planted. Mom accepting the overcast sky, tilting her head upwards to let the wind move past her straw sunhat directly into her face.

“Sit with it for a moment,” she'd say. “Feel how the Earth breathes.”

We do not live in an age of healers. We haven't for centuries. Midwives and healers were slaughtered in the European Witch Trials. The forests of Ireland sacred to the Druids lay at the bottom of the sea as sunken English boats. They tore the pagan tree down to carve out a cross for their Messiah. Mom would be better suited to a hut in the middle of the woods, one where she can speak to the wind and hear its response. But rather than children whispering about the witch in the woods, instead they whisper about the strange woman in the old brick house with the overgrown lawn.

Exhibit 2. A Coyote Tooth Necklace

Yellowed with age, held with a rough leather cord, with a long, neat crack.

Aunt Pam's trailer was settled on a sandy plot, weeds and sagebrush the only semblance of a lawn. I wasn't allowed to go further than the fence. If I wanted to see the horses, I'd have to put my shoes on to avoid sharp stones, goat heads, or worse. I'd lace up my shoes to protect from the ground and put on my coyote tooth necklace on a leather string to protect from everything else. Indian Days started early each day, so mom and Aunt Pam dragged me and my cousins out of our beds down to Fort Washakie. Though the dirt of the powwow grounds were silty and soft, I still wasn't allowed to take my shoes off.

"Are you Indian?" A girl asked me, unsure what to make of my milk skin compared to the crowd of brown skin. Mom said I had an ambiguous look back then, when my face was angular and nose more pronounced. When I was born, Grandpa told her, "You must've been dreaming about Indians when you had him." Jet black hair, powerful lungs shouting a song.

Years whipped it away. When I grew into my nose, when my beard took to Scot blood and grew in ginger, when my hair curled and lightened to brown, people didn't ask me *are you Indian* anymore. I'd look in the mirror and see so much of us is lost. Yet so much of us lives on through mom's aquiline nose, Aunt Pam's cheek bones, and Aunt Jacqui's thick black hair, and my nephew's epicanthal fold eyes. But we don't braid our dark hair, we don't know the old

prayers, we don't go to the sweat lodge, and we don't know how to say goodbye to something that's been gone for centuries. Aunt Pam moved down to Utah, and we haven't gone to a powwow since.

Exhibit 3. Cold Springs Farm

32 acres. Forests. A creek. Deer migration trail that cuts through the property. If you screamed, no one would know where to find you.

Grandpa bought the farm after Grandma died to live out her dream of a house in the southern woods, copper kitchenware, and the sound of nothing. He didn't believe in cell phones, computers, or the internet, so the hollow was a dead zone. I would run outside barefoot. The hot summer rain drenching me. The more waterlogged my clothes got, the freer I felt. Grandpa said, "You must've been dreaming about Indians when you had him." For that day, I didn't put on shoes once, sliding across slick blades of grass. Perhaps there was something to this *grounding* mom talked about, but dry, crumbling dirt didn't have the answers for me. Like an oracle, seeing visions in rain, mud, thunderheads, lightning—I found answers. I ran in the rain, seeing if I could feel what mom did.

Author Bio

Éamonn Shults is an award-winning writer studying creative writing and film production at Utah Valley University. He has been commended by the Adroit Prizes 2023, was featured in *Happy*

Magpie's Pride Poetry Exhibition, and has been published in *Touchstones*, *Warp + Weave*, *Essais*, and *Ever Arriving: Highlands to Islands*. He works as a writing tutor at Fulton Writing Center.