

FOSSIL SONG:

Reflections on Earth's Becoming

Sooner or later,
the lush, living pastures of today,
that breathe bright green and gold,
will crack and collapse beneath searing solar rays,
til parched deserts spread across Earth's final days,
as memories dissolve in the galactic cold.

Sooner or later,
the ocean's cradle where sea-creatures now roam
will be gradually thrust up into mountains of stone;
silvery fish will become pressed as hard fossils
of chalk and calcium in alpine cemeteries.

Soon enough,
the contours by which recognize familiar forms,
will warp and wander in future storms,
as all well-known shores and skies shift
as current prevailing norms drift.

Soon enough,
the contours by which we know land forms,
will blur through earthquakes and storms;
no shore will keep its ancient stand,
no sky retain its cerulean colors;
time will shift all that once was known,
claiming new patterns as its own.

Soon enough,
some distant kin of you and me
will tread above our shadowed trace,
pausing to wonder who we were,
and why we ceased to be.

Tiny dust motes danced in the thin afternoon light slanting through a bookstore café's smudged windows, as three friends reflected on the previous poem. The alcove felt cramped with the scent of roasted coffee, aging books, the faint warmth of bodies too close together for too long.

Yahui didn't wait long. She tapped her fingernails against the formica counter in a quick gesture. "This poem is damn wimpy!" she said flatly. "It feels like surrender dressed up as wisdom. Where's the verve and zip? Where's the vigor?"

Carla gave a slow, affirmative nod, her chin resting on both hands as she stared blankly at her friends. "Mmm," she said mutely, which wasn't quite agreement and wasn't quite not. Then, after a beat: "I mean, yeah. Death is inevitable. That's obvious. But to ignore life entirely while you're still in it? It feels like a tragic waste. It's like closing a book halfway through and calling it the whole story."

Carlos remained silent briefly, his gaze shifting between Carla and Yahui. He straightened up and then gestured toward the view outside. The late afternoon pulsed with life—people crossing streets, trees flickering in the wind, sunlight dragging itself slowly across the hoods of parked cars. Still looking out through the window, he said, "This is not about surrender. To me, it's all about scale." He leaned forward slightly, his elbows on the table. "Not the scale of a human life, or even a civilization scale. It's about larger planetary scale. The one we usually flinch away from because it makes us feel small and most people don't like that."

Yahui opened her mouth as Carlos kept going, but then refrained from speaking. "If you only look at endings, sure—everything hollows out. But if you only look at beginnings, you're lying to yourself about the cost. The poem's not choosing a side. It's holding both at once. Death in one hand." He raised his left hand, "and the absolute, stubborn, almost irrational insistence on living in the other." He raised both hands, looking at Carla and Yahui briefly.

Carla ventured, "Freud had a name for that," almost to herself. "Thanatos and Eros. The twin drives. We carry them in our bones, and yet—" she smiled at her friends at the table—"we keep ordering coffee and keep on arguing about poems."

Yahui stared at Carlos for a moment, her fingernails hovering above the counter but no longer tapping. Then she looked away, out the same window, her expression unreadable—not convinced, perhaps, but quieter than before. The dust motes in the room kept dancing. No one spoke, though the silence had subtly shifted.