FLASH FICTION

The Brightest One

by Richard M. Cho



"A Heart Pouring Out The Sound of Light, Acrylic on Plexiglas" by Pablo Saborío

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The Creator imbued the universe with time, and told the angels, this will set us celestial beings apart. They watched the stars coming into being and were fascinated by one that was blessed with the precise condition to erect things that breathe, think, and evolve.

One particular species came to resemble angels, minus the wings. The spectacle down below intrigued the winged-creatures, and one among them realized that what time brought along with it was transience: Everything decayed until it ultimately disappeared without a trace. This angel, who had the brightest halo, against which the night never dared to approach, saw humans utterly helpless against time. This Brightest One noticed their eyes watering — a phenomenon which it had never experienced itself — when time robbed them of their close kin. Its descent marked the pivotal event in their history.

The Brightest One flew around the earth, observing the manners and customs of humans: how a wailing baby calmed when its mother's breast was offered; how hunters chased after animals and fed their families; how two naked persons became one and moaned; and how two tribes marched against each other and killed. Amidst all this seeming chaos, it glimpsed a certain striving. So enraptured by the affairs of humans, it neglected the Creator's repeated calls to return above. It saw time as the culprit for death, separation, hence grief, realizing that humans' eyes shed water when they grieved. It wished to lend its hand, with its superior intelligence and mobility, and with its immunity against time.

Every living being must die, but memories can give comfort, the Brightest One concluded after many years of thinking. It stretched out its wings, flung them once, startling all the trees and wildflowers in the area, and took off. It found a cave, a large chamber of sorts, shrouded in darkness, down the crevasse between two cliffs. Then, it created various symbols that correspond to earthly things. These symbols could be combined to infer and signify all things that exist in this terrestrial world. Juxtaposing symbols to mean love, sadness, forgiveness, and beauty took immense effort and time, and when the Brightest One succeeded, it found itself longing after them. It then made tablets from limestone and gypsum, the stern materials of its habitat, which it figured would last a very long time. For the next thousands of years, it never stopped carving symbols on the tablets, describing all things human, every so often flying around the planet to investigate as needed. Nothing else occupied its thoughts.

One day, a group of men scantily dressed with animal furs approached and looked down the crevasse. It was then the Brightest One committed the truly unpardonable sin in the eyes of the Creator: It availed itself to be seen. The men gazed at it, stunned, and when it spread its wings, floating upward, and reached out its hand, they bolted away, except one brave boy, who stood still, albeit in numbing fear, and allowed himself to be led by the angel to the

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subterranean chamber. When it brightened its halo, the boy saw the cave full of inscriptions on walls and tablets, which occupied the entire floor and eaves in layers; the enigmatic yet beautiful array of signs and marks that recorded everything the angel had seen on earth. To the boy, they were incomprehensible, yet his eyes took in what they could. The angel picked up one tablet and handed it to the boy, who received it timidly, surprised at its weight. The boy was finally able to look straight into the Brightest One's eyes.

When the Brightest One was left alone again in the cave, the Creator descended on Earth, fuming, snatched the angel in one sweep and tightened its grip on the neck. But the Creator thought that a mere death wouldn't set a proper example for other angels, so it instead conjured another dimension underneath all else and set the fire to burn eternally. The Brightest One was exiled to become the first inhabitant of this new world.

The angel looked up from the great below and saw the boy writing down a set of crude symbols on a dried reed he had retrieved from the river bank. Amidst burning pyres everywhere, its skin turning red due to the unbearable heat, it found itself terribly missing the human world — the Brightest One shed its first tears.

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