

Drowned Disillusionments

by Hridi Das

Abstract

Hridi Das uses poetic prose to reimagine the disillusionment of BIPOC librarians in a fantasy imbued with elements of the sea. The use of metaphor gives a quality of anthropomorphization to the “90% of LIS is white” statistic. The piece sets the scene by starting off with statements that are direct to the injustice suffered, some inspired by recent events, others old as time. The writing takes a deep dive from there on by immersing the reader into the fantasy world.

Keywords: *poetic prose, white supremacy, creative nonfiction, fantasy*

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Introduction :

I will be using freeform poetry to reimagine the disillusionment of BIPOC librarians in a fantasy imbued with elements of the sea. The fantasy world of this piece is intended to immerse the reader in an environment that speaks to the real life experiences of BIPOC in LIS.

I am a neurodiverse Desi (South Asian), middle class person from Canada. I emigrated from Bangladesh at a very young age. I am fluent in English and Bangla as my primary languages and conversational in French and Hindi. I acknowledge that I am a settler on the occupied Lands of Peoria, Anishinabewaki, Attiwonderonk (Neutral), Myaamia, and Mississauga.

My current location is home to a number of First Nations, Inuit, and Metis and is also covered by Treaty #2, an agreement signed by the Village and War Chiefs of Ottawa, Chippawa, Pottowatomy and Huron Indians Nations of Detroit and the Crown. By acknowledging this land is to acknowledge that the truth is at the forefront of this conversation.

As a settler who had the opportunity to be educated on Indigenous territories and lands, I recognize my privilege and I am committing to acknowledging Indigenous issues in an ongoing manner.

I will fight against these systems of oppression that have dispossessed Indigenous Peoples of their lands and denied their rights to self-determination. I would like to improve the relationship of all individuals, Indigenous and Non-Indigenous alike, by righting the wrongs of our colonial history and inspiring others to obtain a better understanding of themselves, their ancestors and the world in which we live in, so we can move forward into a better future.

Drowned Disillusionments

By: Hridi Das

History may not repeat itself but it will often be kept in rhyme.

A name, mispronounced.

A raised eyebrow, a critical eye passes over the crown of our heads.

A patronizing compliment on diction.

A cursory glance at our credentials.

A contemptuous journal cover reeking with blatant anti-Blackness, a lateral betrayal rearing its head, proving that not all skinfolk are kinfolk.

A blanket statement on intellectual freedom and expression.

Curated positions with a superficial safety net, no support network, no cushion for the inevitable fall out.

A drowning descent weighed down with conditional compliments,

the pressure of it cloying with the sentiment that, if you were chosen, you had to be grateful above all else.

A glass knife twisted in the back over words spoken in resistance.

Our work is a tonic to be swallowed, a medicine to be endured. A bitter prescription for momentary relief. A panacea for the fragile dark parts of their soul, to help these white monstrous creatures convince themselves that one dose is enough.

Our diversity populates a pool for these creatures to fish from. To be chosen is to have the fates look upon you more kindly, when in reality drowning on land is its own cruel punishment. Surviving on land is feeling the flickers of fire burn at the edges of your personhood.

The ashes of your work used as war paint,

to dress themselves as the heroes of diversity in the field.

Once on land, I am made to cut off parts of myself, those parts that made me stand out in that pool in the first place. A name wrangled, choked on tongues that are not worthy of housing such history. Instead, the sharpened talons belonging to those white creatures that populate every other inch, both on land and in the sea, flex without another thought in a cycle of eternal consumption.

They slowly tear off pieces of us who have been chosen for land before cruelly plunging their hands into the pool again to trap their next honored [*victim*] candidate.

Articulate.

Resilient.

Strong.

Selfless.

Initially, the touch of the claws do not register as pain – it is magicked as a net to sieve out the cream of the crop. When the net descends into the turbulent waters, we, the denizens of the deep, wonder if it is a mercy of the fates to be caught or continue to desperately tread.

Sometimes, we are made to dream of the moment that the net comes for us, tricked into wanting to be chosen for slaughter and not see blood that has begun to seep out far before the net touches our skin.

Some do not feel as if they belong in the sea nor when they are chosen, that their blood is that of an imposter's. Others are forced to swim further down in brackish waters where friend is indistinguishable from foe.

We are overshadowed by white scales, tentacles, shells – the waters become milky, a cloudy horror coalescing with others as it forges a fog stronger and stronger again. In pockets of the sea, there are a rainbow of colours, a flood of bioluminescence that has the potential to make the ocean so much more beautiful. But those are always rare -for every drop that spills in the sea, the fog threatens to dilute it down to reduce the vibrancy to a tint.

The creatures unceremoniously spill streams and streams of oil, back into the very place they are privileged to be. Whiteness pretends that to be doused in an oil slick kaleidoscope is an honour, something to wear proudly, as if that will enhance our luminescence. They intentionally destroy our bodies, pollute our soul, erode our spirit.

Some spots of coral feel themselves being washed out with a terrifying ferocity, parts of them torn off, bitten,

consumed,

dissolved,

corroded;

they are forced to make a choice.

Choose to stay in the ocean that we have come to know for all our life or find another environment that may treat us better than this, a place where our colour could slowly come back to us. The sea will cease to exist without us, yet we are the ones who face the greatest threat of extinction.

Heartbreak, relief, regret, anger, sadness, joy – departure from the ocean is an unknowable storm that we must weather through with the possibility of Pandora's final gift fluttering from her box. *Hope*.

We, these bright spots of colour, can choose to toil against the current of the sea, or make a painful climb onto land. Are there other environments that may cradle us better than the sea, or are we castaways left to fend for ourselves? If we choose the land, we will have to learn how to breathe again. I will allow the air to expand my lungs, to let myself feel life once more.

The land, the air, the sea will always be

brighter,

lighter,

righter,

kinder,

for having us be free.

I stand in the sand, in the nexus of the sea and land. My luminescent skin pulses with the beat of my heart, staving off the oil slick running down my body. I feel a creeping wet claw wrap around my ankle just as I feel the roots of the earth ribbon through the sand to grip my other one. I know what awaits me in either of my choices; making it will require a careful balancing act on a scale.

What am I willing to turn a blind eye towards, to put up with, to sacrifice?

A name mispronounced? A cursory glance?

I am afraid.

I am anxious.

I am capable.

I am everything.