

Soundscape:



Transcript:

Everything is dead in Winter. That is what's supposed to happen. When Hades, Greek god of the underworld snatched Persephone, daughter of harvest goddess Demeter, the latter woman wept for a full season, neglecting the crops in her depression and causing the earth to go barren. Hades married Persephone, but eventually he let her go. However, every year for just one season he'd take her back to the underworld. That is how Winter was born.

As the cold crept like a robber into the Southern hemisphere, I found that sadness was easier to access than joy. One week in June, my parents, who I still live with, travelled to Sydney for their respective work trips. Initially, I appreciated the space but then I grew lonely.

Perhaps, I was grieving all the leaves and flowers that the dry air had crumbled into dust.

Perhaps, I was grieving a death yet to come.

I celebrated the solstice for the first time this year, because in my loneliness I had sought the comfort of Celtic pagan traditions for commemorating the changing seasons. Change is inevitable, I realised. But it is also cyclical. A select few shifts in temperature, landscape and mood are recycled over and over and over, and this is good because whenever we lose a part of the world, like sun and rain and flowers, we are safe in the knowledge that it'll return to us

some day. So, on a grey Friday afternoon I made chocolate bark with rosemary, citrus peel and sea salt. I drank cider. I gave thanks to Mother Earth who bore us all.

Six days after the solstice, I woke up and as soon as my feet went from the bed to the bedroom floor, things started to go wrong. My phone flagged a message from an acquaintance who'd expressed a desire to move into friendship territory but whose past behaviours had made me feel unsafe, and I'd expressed as much to them the previous night. I saved the message, and my mother drove me to a nearby psychiatric hospital where I was to see a psychiatrist about managing my ADHD, and the appointment awoke the medical trauma that always seemed to slumber in me, and I ran out of the office in the middle of the appointment. It wasn't even 12PM, and I was already feeling as if my life had snapped in two and if I didn't glue back the pieces together quick smart, everything would get worse. It's wrong, I thought. It's wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong, wrong.

I didn't know until later in the afternoon that my grandmother had died. While I had been bolting out of the psychiatric hospital, she had been as still as it were possible to be. But once my mother told me the news, I became still, too. Is empathetic death a thing? Neither me nor Mum moved all that much for the rest of the day, and we haven't done a whole lot of moving since. Neither, it appears, has the sun. Although June was not especially bright or light, after Grandma's death the landscape drained even more of its colour, even more of its luminosity, just like the hair that waited undyed on Grandma's head for her life to end. Oh — was this limbo? I felt like Persephone, being dragged underground by some morbid mastermind, only to be let out after three months. If Winter were supposed to be a time of croplessness, of landlessness, of daughterlessness, then it must be an opportunity for the living to taste a bit of lifelessness, so it shouldn't have been so surprising that someone was going to do the real

thing, to die properly. Grandma had lived through ninety Winters. I guess she was ready to rest, now.

My grandmother's funeral was held on Yuin-Monaro land in the Bega Valley, her home for the latter half of her life. Many people were grieving — family, friends, Labor Party members — and so was Mother Nature. When my parents and I drove from our motel to the crematorium, there were no other cars on the road. No clouds in the sky, either. It was as if all of Grandma's mourners and the lands where they came from were encased by a smog. All the greyness did in the moment was rub in the sadness. But in hindsight, what if it was trying to protect us?

I was cold for the whole day. My black coat clung to me as I walked hand-in-hand with my mother into the crematorium. During the funeral, my tears were frozen behind my eyeballs. My muscles were frozen, too. I fell under a spell of dissociation, which has always happened to me at funerals. The difference this time was that as soon as the curtains closed over the flower-adorned wicker casket that carried the body Grandma used to inhabit, my tears began to melt. I cried for the next half-hour or so. On the drive back from the crematorium, I took a nap.