Optimism in the Dark Night
by Gayan Macher

This story is about the creation of a song. Its title is Earth on Fire, Hearts on Ice. The song was born out of anguish and anger about our despoiling of the natural world. In the end it had become a prayer.

I am hopeful by nature. But I needed to get some things off my chest, things weighing heavy on my heart. And it has been a healing balm to make this song. I imagine it must have felt this way to black slaves releasing their sorry in their soulful gospel.

In the process of writing this song I was made to look deeply into the nature of optimism in the face of dire facts. Is optimism naïve, simplistic? Does it require living behind rose-colored glasses in denial of the truth? After all, how can any of us feel hopeful about our earth’s ecosystem and how it is trending?

During the song’s creation I went through several seasons of the heart. First, a deep melancholy. Then, in contemplation, I encountered the stark face of evil, of people whose fear and greed is so ravenous that they will poison the air their own children breathe. I realized once again that such unconsciousness, such disconnection from the sacred, brings a kind of insanity. It feels important to see it and name it for what it is. And at the same time, I saw how this alienation from the heart of life is pure suffering, and I felt compassion for those “who know not what they do”.

The weeks went by, searching and waiting for authentic lyrics, and I next entered a season of tears. To care—about the earth, the water, my children. To care about goodness, and basic respect for what has been entrusted to us. I felt, momentarily, helpless in relation to it all. My tears became a prayer.

The great Persian poet Jalaluddin Rumi says that it is important to cry out, that the call of the human heart brings divine blessing. He says, Don’t be silent with your pain. Lament! And let the milk of Loving flow into you.

After this dark night of tears a blessing did come. The earth’s climate wasn’t healed, but inwardly I began to feel what can best be called the dawn of the spirit of optimism. And no it was not naïve. It was not a denial of the facts, because it was not based on facts. It came and still comes from another place, an inner light that is innate, inextinguishable. I don’t now feel necessarily optimistic about the climate crisis. But I do feel the presence of an optimistic spirit.

I had never thought much about the prophets of the Old Testament, but they came to me
during these days as the expression of a certain archetype. It seems that the prophets lament for the world that worships the idols of ego gratification. They warn people of the consequences of such a life. They rage against humanity’s crimes against love and beauty. And then they appeal to the divine beneficence to forgive and help souls who have lost their way. Lastly, often against all reason, they embody optimistic faith.

It is said that both Buddha and Jesus instructed their disciples to be a light in the world. This light is who we are, and it is what we do. No matter what.

I continue to search my conscience about what action is mine to take in response to the environmental crisis. Some of us are here to be activists. Others are poets, entrepreneurs or monks. Whatever outer form our lives take, we can be a light in the world.

For we are both humans who care and cry; and we are rays of an inextinguishable light.

I hope you appreciate Earth on Fire, Hearts on Ice.

Below are the lyrics:

Earth on Fire, Hearts on Ice

The wind is stirring  
The clock is ticking down the time  
The warning bells are sounding  
Sending us the warning sign

Well I wonder  
Yes, I wonder how you feel  
Well I wonder  
Yes, I wonder how you feel  
When you see the water rising  
While we pretend that it’s not real

Earth on fire  
Hearts on ice  
It’s time to be quiet  
Hear the cry in this night  
See if we’re willing  
To sacrifice  
To change our ways

Can you tell me  
Can you tell me what to do  
Can you tell me  
Can you tell me what to do  
Seems the man has got the power  
But the man don’t have a clue

He’ll push for profit  
He’ll push his kids to get ahead
He’ll push for profit
He’ll push his kids to get ahead
He’s gone so crazy pushing
He’ll push us all right off the ledge

chorus

The TV’s talking
We might as well turn off the sound
The TV’s talking
We might as well turn off the sound
With all that empty talking
The truth lies bleeding on the ground

Tell the children
Well I think they ought to know
Tell the children
Yes, I think they need to know
Let’s look into their faces
And say we’ve poisoned their whole world

Chorus

I’ve been hurting
About the way we’re treating you
Yes, I’ve been hurting
About the way we’re treating you
Lord will you forgive us
For we know not what we do
Lord will you forgive us
For we know not what we do...

Chorus