my relationship with faith and organized religion has been complicated from the get-go. my dad, a staunch atheist, raised Jewish in Montreal, my mom a good Roman Catholic turned born again Christian later in life, raised in Red Deer. my dad, a public school teacher didn't believe we should attend Catholic school, my stay-at-home mom's compromise was for us to go to catechism, Sunday school and mass. i spent more time in religious studies going to public school than i would have any other way. i will say this, i appreciated the rituals. they were grounding, thoughtful, meditative. and while the love of red wine runs deep and strong, i still get a hankering for a eucharist wafer occasionally.

ever since i can remember, when sifting through all things deemed worthy of devotion, even as a child, confusion took the wheel. in my youthful understandings of Catholicism, to be sacred implied a connotation of gilded reverence, foreboding, tightly locked away relics only the highest ranking holiest held keys to. these divine antiquities whose sole purpose is to bind us further in unwavering beliefs and passed down lyrical miracles we must blindly accept to ensure the perpetuity of one of the oldest, most successful business models, organized religion.

these last two years have been anything but lyrically miraculous though. relationships steeped in forever promises ending. the heartbreaking unexpected loss of family, of friends, shook me deeply, to my core. insecurities abound when footing feels less than secure any which way that compass pointed. the general frenzied state of the world, and the callousness we construct serves to insulate and without cognition, disconnect. most of those incidents would test a person's faith if they were inclined to lean in that direction. but what if you don't? how do you yell at a god you don't know exists?

i wondered why i was feeling isolated and vulnerable, hurt and scared. in between all of that, i was desperate to anchor myself to something meaningful, something challenging and fulfilling, sustainable, worthy and relatable, never demanding attention but still offering a space for quiet devotion, all at once. i looked and searched and tried and looked again. for years i blindly pursued that which i had identified as not of this world, sacred, magic, that-which-refuses-to-be-named-but-is-undeniable-when-found through experiences, books, travel, music, art, film, causes, stories entrusted to me. you know the ones, those instances that bring us closer to god/enlightenment/the feeling of connection to something beyond this experience, this plain.the manifestations of sacredness were all i sought after, which is different than searching for god.at least for me it is.it became harder to find in manifested or manufactured ways. i looked to nature and found almost what i was looking for. an extension of disconnect and a never drying well of awe inspiration. something i had nothing to do with creating or maintaining (apart from being a decent human being and one that doesn't deny climate change), could affect my day to day through its beauty and mere existence still brings me to my knees and is worthy of my devotion.

but now there is more to it. as i have come into knowing myself, my unapologetic self as a person, as a woman, that truly tries to abide within the confines of "do no harm but take no shit", became a recognition that maybe we are the stuff of ancient stars, of life creating terrestrial combustion, a happy little accident of epic proportions. that the A-negative blood coursing through this body to these hands that relish in the gift that is getting older each year still have a my want to create, to make, to love, to hold. therein lies the sacred in all of us. we are all divine creatures, omnipotent deity not included.

my name is andrea dillingham-lacoursiere. i am a mother, a sister, an auntie, a daughter, an advocate, an accomplice and ally, a fiercely loyal friend, a community member, a mobilizer, and a painter when time allows. thanks for reading, for being here

searching for sacredness November 2019

But, when time pulls lives apart
Hold your own
When everything is fluid, nothing can be known with any certainty
Hold your own
Hold it till you feel it there
As dark and dense and wet as earth
As vast and bright and sweet as air
When all there is is knowing that you feel what you are feeling
Hold your own
Ask your hands to know the things they hold
I know, the days are reeling past in such squealing blasts
But stop for breath and you will know it's yours
Swaying like an open door when storms are coming
Hold
Time is an onslaught, love is a mission
We work for vocations until, in remission
We wish we'd had patience and given more time to our children
Feel each decision that you make
Make it, hold it
Hold your own
Hold your lovers
Hold their hands
Hold their breasts in your hands like your hands were their bra
Hold their face in your palms like a prayer
Hold them all night, feel them hold back
Don't hold back
Hold your own
Every pain
Every grievance
Every stab of shame
Every day spent with a demon in your brain giving chase
Hold it
Know the wolves that hunt you
In time, they will be the dogs that bring your slippers
Love them right and you will feel them kiss you when they come to bite
Hot snouts digging out your cuddles with their bloody muzzles
Hold
Nothing you can buy will ever make you more whole
This whole thing thrives on us feeling always incomplete
And it is why we will search for happiness in whatever thing it is we crave in the moment
And it is why we can never really find it there
It is why you will sit there with the lover that you fought for
In the car you sweated years to buy
Wearing the ring you dreamed of all your life
And some part of you will still be unsure that this is what you really want
Stop craving
Hold your own
But if you're satisfied with where you're at, with who you are
You won't need to buy new make-up or new outfits or new pots and pans
To cook new exciting recipes for new exciting people
To make yourself feel like the new exciting person you think you're supposed to be
Happiness, the brand, is not happiness
We are smarter than they think we are
They take us all for idiots, but that's their problem
When we behave like idiots, it becomes our problem
So, hold your own
Breathe deep on a freezing beach
Taste the salt of friendship
Notice the movement of a stranger
Hold your own
And let it be
Catching
Hold Your Own

words by Kate Tempest