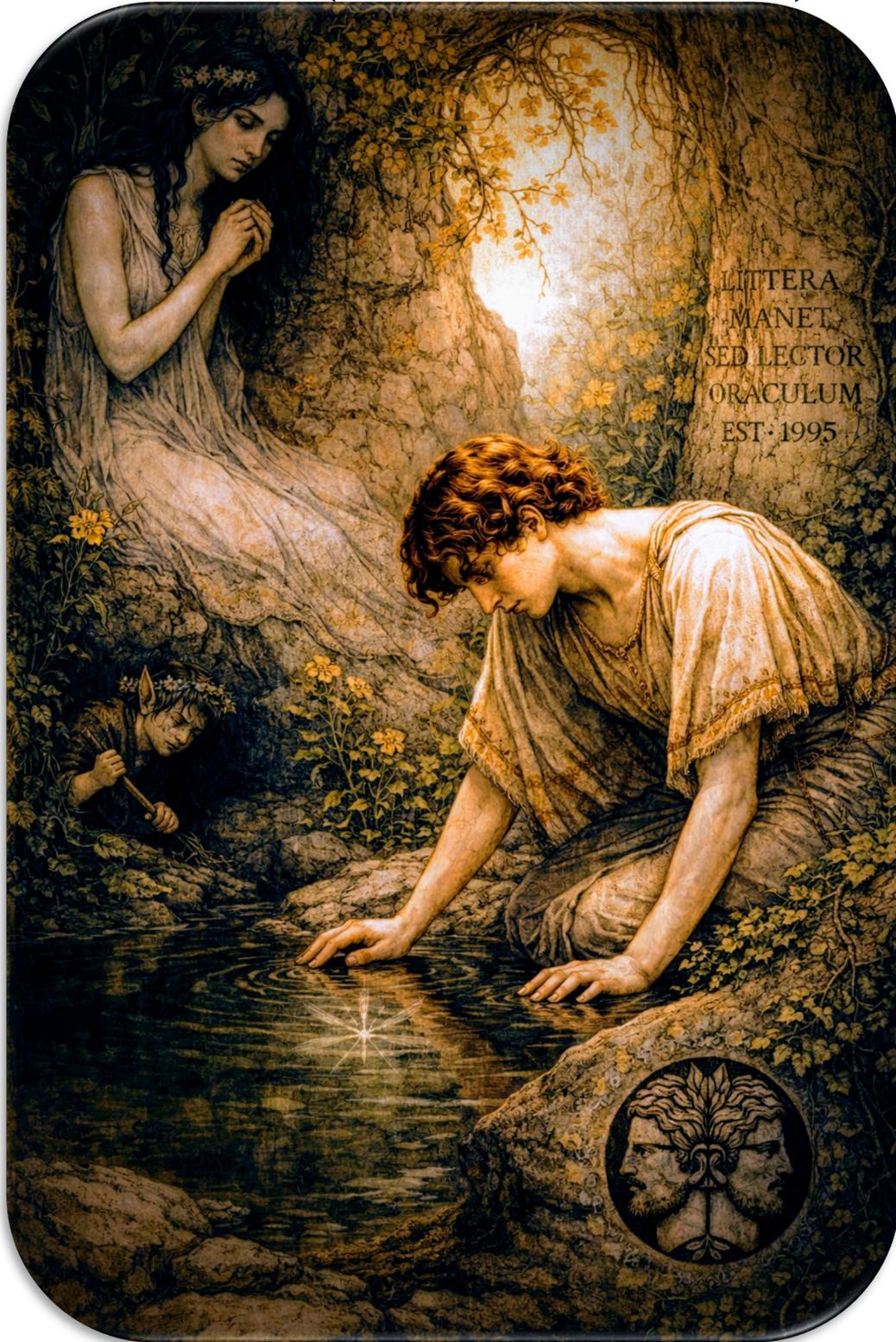


ECHO (AFTER OVID)



written on the Feast of Stephen (2025)
by a poet

I. The Act

You said good morning, then erased my name.
 No quarrel marked the hour, nor raised voice;
 No warning stood between the wish and deed—
 Just absence, sudden as a shuttered choice.

What vanishes does not debate or plead;
 It simply ceases where it once was seen.
 I stood where presence had been understood,
 And found a space that would not hold a face.

I do not dress the moment up as fate,
 Nor call it accident nor harmless pause.
 An act occurred, exact in its effect:
 A person crossed a line I named as law.

So, mark the record, stripped of heat or tone:
 You said good morning—then I stood alone.

II. The False Cause

You said good morning—then I stood alone.
 The story came later, careful and kind:
 That silence was a shelter you required,
 A pause to still the weather of the mind.

But need that cancels another's being
 Does not remain a need—it takes a rule.
 Retreat that chooses erasure as its tool
 Is governance disguised as self-care's plea.

I name no sin in wanting quiet air,
 Nor fault the wish to regulate one's field;
 I fault the means that vanish someone else
 And call the consequence a wound unhealed.

So, scry the ice that stills the glassy pool:
 Control that calls itself retreat is rule.

III. The Ledger

Control that calls itself retreat is rule.
 Then came the tally—hours, steps, and climb:
 The job secured, the ladder newly placed,
 The proof of effort measured out in time.

I do not doubt the work, nor slight the gain;
 Achievement stands where it has rightly grown.
 But new hire does not grant absolution,
 Nor does success annul what was o'erthrown.

No sum of effort balances the cut;
 No résumé redeems a vanished face.
 The ledger here records a single mark:
 A boundary crossed, not progress out of place.

So, let the columns settle, clear and traced:
 No earned ascent restores what was erased.

IV. The Borrowed Tongue

No earned ascent restores what was erased.
 So language comes—familiar, light, and wise:
 A jester's grin, a poet's borrowed turn,
 A mirror held at just the gentlest size.

He trips the earnest foot, he sweeps the ash,
 He makes the heavy moment easier borne.
 But jest does not confer what was withdrawn,
 Nor wit return a presence once unlatched.

Access alone is not authority;
 The knave invites but does not judge the gate.
 He clears the stage so pattern may be seen,
 Not so the pattern may be spent as bait.

Attend the limit tucked within his turn:
 The jester sweeps; he does not grant return.

V. The Boundary

The jester sweeps; he does not grant return.
 So here I speak the rule I named before:
 One line no storm may wash, nor time dissolve,
 No plea may soften, nor achievement score.

Do not erase the person you would keep.
 That is the whole of it—no hidden test.
 No demand dressed as virtue or restraint,
 No bar beyond what any bond requires.

I asked for neither worship nor repair,
 Only the ground where presence could remain.
 When that was crossed, the matter found its end—
 Not as revenge, but jurisdiction claimed.

Let this stand firm, unornamented, penned:
 A boundary ignored becomes an end.

VI. The Revision Attempt

A boundary ignored becomes an end.
 So comes the letter, threaded back with care:
 Explaining then what should have asked before,
 Recasting harm as momentary flare.

The past is sorted, footnoted, re-read;
 The wound is named by feelings felt just now.
 But closure sought to quiet present ache
 Does not undo the manner of the blow.

Repair that starts in hindsight is not change.
 It circles consequence but shifts no ground.
 What was required was earlier restraint,
 A question asked before the lock was found.

So, let revision rest beyond the range:
 Repair that starts in hindsight is not change.

VII. The Return

Repair that starts in hindsight is not change.
 What was required was presence, not delay;
 A question voiced before the silent gate,
 A pause that kept another from the fray.

No measurement of worth was made by me,
 No balance struck of who deserved the fall.
 I honored only what I named as law:
 That erasure voids the claim to mutual call.

A person may not vanish me and stay.
 So end the circle where it first went wrong:
 This was no fracture shared by equal claim.
 No echo binds where one voice breaks the song.

No echo binds where one voice breaks the frame:
 You said good morning, then erased my name.

VIII. No Debt

You say a chance is owed, as though the scale
 Still tilts unresolved, awaiting grace.
 But chances are not coins that must be paid
 When one side steps beyond the lawful space.

A bond does not accrue by suffering told,
 Nor does persistence mint a rightful key.
 What ended, ended when the line was crossed,
 Not when the crossing failed to comfort thee.

I did not close the door to punish will,
 Nor hoard myself to prove a harder case.
 I simply stood where I had clearly said
 No further step could trespass, time, or plea.

Hear this, uncluttered by appeal or tone:
 A boundary crossed ne'er strikes what's owed to one.

IX. Capacity

You say that you are capable of growth,
 As though that truth could countermand the act.
 But growth is proven where restraint is kept,
 Not where repair is argued after fact.

The seed that breaks the fence does not mature
 Because it later names the field it razed.
 Capacity is not the same as care,
 Nor does it heal what force already flayed.

I never doubted effort, work, or climb—
 Those live entirely on your side of air.
 What failed was not your future's possible,
 But presence where another's line lay bare.

So, mark the axis cleanly, without spin:
 Growth is not growth if it remains within.

X. Standing

Growth is not growth if it remains within.
 And now the truth that neither plea can touch:
 This was not mine to grant or to forgive,
 Nor something shared by feeling, heat, nor rush.

When erasure chose regulation's ease,
 The matter left the realm where feelings live.
 Consequence is not an answered blow;
 It is what stands when trust can no more give.

I did not measure you, nor weigh your worth,
 Nor cast you down from any earned estate.
 I honored only what I named before:
 A person may not vanish me and stay.

So, end the circle where the seed was sown:
 This was not "us." It was you all alone.

XI. (Interlude)—Clarification, Not Indictment

This was not “us.” It was you all alone.
 But herein I shall not stop it there;
 This is no indictment that asks atone—
 This is just to say how we ended *here*.

No dock is built; no verdict seeks a name;
 I do not summon jurors from the past.
 I mark the coordinates of the frame
 Where choice was made, and consequence held fast.

To say how something ended is not blame;
 It is to place the marker where it fell.
 What follows grows from fact, not heat or claim:
 The ground was crossed; the ground no longer held.

So, read this line without the taste of war:
 It names the end, and nothing asks for more.

XII. Continuance

What ends may still instruct without appeal;
 A closure clean does not require accord.
 The lesson stands whether or not it’s sealed
 By mutual nod, or reconciled reward.

I will not chase the shadow of repair,
 Nor barter quiet for a borrowed calm.
 Some truths persist consistently because
 They do not bend to fickle salve or psalm.

The work ahead proceeds by chosen light,
 Not by returning to a broken gate.
 What mattered most was naming, in plain sight,
 The line that keeps the living self intact.

Thus I continue, steady in my sphere:
 Not backward bound, but answerable *here*.

XIII. Direction

Direction is not drift with better speed,
 Nor freedom found by circling the same.
 It is the will to place one's careful feet
 Beyond the zone where harm rehearses name.

I choose the path that honors what was said
 Before the silence tried to speak for me.
 I choose a future earned by how it's led,
 Not one negotiated endlessly.

No proof is owed to those who crossed the line,
 No demonstration staged to soothe regret.
 The measure lies in how I now align
 With what I named, and never once recant.

So let this stand, unsoftened by reprise:
 I walk ahead. The sonnets now suffice.

XIV. No Magistrale

A crown may close by turning on its start,
 But this one halts where choice resumes command.
 No final braid will bind the lines to art,
 No master-key be pressed into the hand.

The form has served its purpose to this point:
 To mark the breach, the boundary, the end.
 What comes beyond is not the poem's joint,
 But life resumed where I alone must tend.

So take these fourteen not as plea or seal,
 But as a map that knows when maps must cease.
 I claim no last word fashioned to conceal—
 Only the right to choose my forward piece.

I claim no final braid, no binding thrall:
 For this section—there crowns no *magistrale*.

Puck—On Pattern, Not Person

Now stay a moment—not for sigh or side,
 Nor tally fault as if that were the game.
 This is no list of her defects supplied,
 Nor one man’s grief dressed up to court thy blame.
 What thou hast seen is not an inventory,
 Nor brief for trial, nor ledger meant to bite;
 It is a shape that kept repeating story
 Until the shape itself eclipsed the night.
 Mark this: he names no sin in asking space,
 No crime in fear, nor fault in drawing breath;
 He does not damn the hand that shut the place,
 Nor call the shutting other than its end.
 For ending it is—not of care once meant,
 But of the ground where presence may remain;
 To vanish one so order be regained
 Is rule by absence, not by care maintained.
 Attend the cycle plainly as it ran:
 Dismiss—regret—approach—erase again.
 Not once, but twice the pattern closed the span
 And named removal medicine for pain.
 He left when bid; he did not scorch the way.
 He came again when words were sworn anew.
 He tried to build where fragments counseled “stay,”
 And named the bond when bonds were what was due.
 This is no quarrel over tone or heat,
 No misread text, no singular mistake;
 It is the use of erasure as a seat
 From which to govern what one cannot take.
 He is not here to say she is at fault.
 He is here to say this cannot be borne.
 For one may not be summoned back to stand,
 Nor tasked to heal the ground from which expelled,
 Nor made the villain for an honest hand
 That would not linger where it is annulled.
 This is the line—uncharged, unsoftened, true:
 To regulate by erasing is to choose
 An end to mutual life, though words pursue
 The ghost of what that ending must refuse.
 So take this not as plea, nor blame, nor cry,
 But witness given so the form is known:
 What cannot hold must not be asked to try.
 What erases twice has made its nature shown.
 I sweep no fault. I crown no innocence.
 I name the pattern—and restore the sense.

THE POET (AFTER ECHO)

I. The Mark

When we first met, the love fell fast and sure,
I marked my back in days with simple ink:
Those two fish more than a decade endure,
And never to remove them did I think.

I did not lose the flame of thine allure,
The torch I carried 'cross the Styx's brink,
While I tamed the stench of mine own manure,
And sorted out the puzzles of my link.

To need, to care, to stay beyond good sense,
Mistaking patience once for moral height;
I paid my debts where hope exceeded fence,
And learned too late where mercy feeds the night.

Yet mark this truth no later grief can bend:
I stood as I was able—not pretend.

II. Letting Go, Properly Understood

I wore our mark and walked the Buddha's path,
Letting go not of sins or past, but claim;
For letting go is not the art of wrath,
Nor washing hands to exit guilt nor blame.

I carried what was mine and named it so,
Not cast it off as ballast to be free;
The self is not unburdened by a throw,
But steadied when it learns what *must* be thee.

I did not vow to vanish or be new,
Nor call endurance virtue when it bent;
I chose the harder keeping-self-in-view,
And paid the cost that choice itself had meant.

If peace arrived, it came not by escape,
But standing whole within my given shape.

III. Mindfulness and Its Cost

I put my full intent and vigor there,
 So not to rob from Peter to pay Paul,
 And built a mindful life with all due care,
 A mindfulness I promised at *our* fall.

And 'twas that careful reckoning that showed
 Where balance ends and quiet harm begins:
 For vows once kept can yet become a load
 When tending one requires the other thins.

I learned that watchfulness, too long sustained,
 May guard a bond yet starve the guarded man;
 That what is saved is sometimes only drained
 When care outpaces what the frame can span.

So, this account records no sudden break,
 But notes the cost that patience learned to take.

IV. On Bending

There was a time when I bent, genuflect,
 Though taught as near suckling child to stand,
 To bend to no one—ever—even wrecked,
 If one would hold one's ground, not borrow land.

I bent not out of fear, nor lack of spine,
 But judging love a worthier repair
 Than pride that masks itself as the divine,
 And calls refusal virtue in its air.

Yet bending once does not decree a life
 Of kneeling on another's shifting floor;
 What heals a wound may later turn the knife
 If asked to be the posture evermore.

I rose when bending asked the self to cease—
 For peace is not the price of one's release.

V. The Frame of Oaths

I kept my vows to others from that point,
 Though I had bent away from those to thee;
 For had my oaths to them been all disjoint,
 That mindfulness I oathed thee would null be.

No vow is true that breaks the wider frame,
 Nor care sincere that feeds on borrowed trust;
 To guard one bond by setting three aflame
 Is not devotion, but a finer dust.

I chose coherence over private plea,
 And let one promise stand upon its cost;
 For truth that lives in parts is never free,
 And love that asks for fracture stands half-lost.

So, mark the line where fidelity is drawn:
 I did not fail thee—I stayed what I'd sworn.

VI. Contract and Return

What falls in morrow's hands God only knows;
 That contract, signed in hope, was bound to flaw.
 No oath secures what time itself erodes,
 Nor love exempt from limit, weight, nor law.

And when the balance failed, I paid the cost,
 And walked away where staying would have lied;
 Default is not escape, nor faithlessness,
 But honor met when promise can't abide.

Yet later, speech returned what silence broke—
 Not passion's rush, but terms examined plain;
 I came again where words could first be spoke,
 Not to erase the loss but test the gain.

I did not come as debtor seeking grace,
 But one who knew the risk—and named the place.

VII. The Return, Qualified

And so thou and I restored our bond in words;
 Yet I, made cautious by the path just trod,
 Asked space at first, to let our footing form,
 And build a life that would not lean or prod.

Thou asked instead I enter thine *own* space;
 I consented, weighing care against my hope.
 But welcome is not named by open doors
 If rooms deny the self its breadth and scope.

For shelter offered without room to stand
 Becomes a kindness edged with quiet cost;
 One may be housed and yet not truly land
 Where signs of presence vanish as they're crossed.

Thus, closeness proved not union fully grown:
 I entered, yes—but never quite was home.

VIII. Ordinary Friction

The place was hot, my snore was loud, 'tis true;
 But many such annoyances endure.
 Small frictions live where living couples do,
 And time grows skilled at easing what seems sure.

Yet these were made the matter day by day,
 Rehearsed as proof that presence was a fault;
 What might have passed by humor's lighter way
 Was tallied up as cause for quiet halt.

For comfort sought by narrowing another
 Is not the peace that shared inhabits yield;
 To name the self a burden to the other
 Is how a home becomes a guarded field.

The air grew thin not from the heat we faced,
 But from the space where room was never placed.

IX. Good Faith, No Dwelling

And through it all, I trust the faith was good—
 No word of lie, no craft of self-deceit;
 Intent stood plain, as honestly it stood,
 With neither mask nor double-sounded beat.

Yet still I lacked a place to hang my hat,
 Nor garment drawn from affluence's store;
 I lived by borrowing a moment's mat,
 And asking room, then asking yet once more.

I eked a pause, entreated time and space,
 But never felt a tenant by true right;
 For lodging given without settled place
 Leaves one half-present, folded out of sight.

Although goodwill held, something would not thrive:
 I stayed awhile—but never learned to live.

X. Erasure by Contradiction

And then, because some feeling fell thy way,
 No longer life together, sworn and shown;
 What once stood public vow dissolved in day,
 And all intent was struck as overthrown.

I was erased *en masse*, not piece by piece,
 And told: it ends—now *go!*—yet do not go;
 Commands reversed before they found their peace,
 A door swung shut, then called me back in tow.

Get out, but stay; but leave; but linger still—
 Such counsel is not care, but fracture dressed;
 Will cannot obey a redoubled will,
 Nor dwell where choice is cancelled at request.

Thus, ended not by quarrel, cry, or plea,
 But contradiction wielded as decree.

XI. The Charge

Told that no woman thrives under my care,
 The charge was cast as sentence, swift and broad;
 Yet as I left the place I'd *bettered* there,
 Its order frayed where daily hands had trod.

Destroyed in wish and love, I was cast out,
 Yet urged to keep my promises intact;
 As though a bond could live when life was doubt,
 Or vows outlast the ground that voids the act.

No thriving comes from rules that shift their shape,
 Nor care from claims that cancel deed with word;
 To ask both exit and unbroken faith
 Is counsel neither reasoned nor assured.

So, the record stands, devoid of despair:
 I kept my word—it was the frame not there.

XII. The Villainy of Leaving

I was made villain by my taking leave,
 Though first expelled from where I stood in good;
 Cast out, then blamed for choosing not to grieve
 In flames upon the bridge, I never would.

I did not torch the span, nor curse the way,
 Nor haunt the threshold begging to remain;
 I walked as one who knew that asked-to-stay
 Becomes a trespass cloaked as loyal pain.

My crime was not the breaking of a vow,
 Nor absence dressed as sudden cold disdain;
 It was that I did not consent to bow
 And linger where dismissal was the gain.

Guilt was named where dignity had led:
 I left when sent—and would not play the dead.

XIII. Arm's Length

Let us not reckon all with heavy sighs;
 We tried again, and yet again, from far.
 But when I named a bond before thine eyes,
 Thou held'st me off and made of nearness bar.

At arm's own length thou kept'st the shape of care,
 As if to touch would spoil what words could save;
 Thus drift was crowned where vow had sought repair,
 And naming love became the thing to waive.

I read the sign not as a single flaw,
 But pattern taught by many a former turn:
 To call it "us" was breach of thine own law;
 To keep it "almost" was what thou would'st learn.

So stood I there, not bitter, but made sure:
 What will not name itself will not endure.

XIV. Of Pull and Audience

I gave thee help when thou didst ask it plain,
 And sometimes more when need lay understood;
 Yet still thou pulled'st me close, then thrust again,
 As if my steadiness were misconstrued.

What troubled most was not the aid I gave,
 But how thou bowed'st to others' counting eyes,
 As though their speech could audit, bless, or shave
 The terms we held as private by all ties.

No crowd was party to our covenant,
 Nor judge of means, nor clerk of what was due;
 Their voices had no seat, no claim, no grant
 To weigh the care that passed betwixt us two.

So here I stand, with neither debt nor plea:
 What lay with us remained with thee and me.

XV. Exit (After the Pattern)

Let me not to the marriage of two lives
Admit impediment of vanish'd ground.
Love is not love which alters when one strives
To still one's fear by making none be found.

O no—it is an ever-fixèd place
That bears the storm but does not make one cease;
It looks on absence not as tool or grace,
Nor governs care by acts that void release.

Love is not Time's nor Panic's sudden choice,
Though time make hearts and comforts ebb and sway;
It is not ruled by silence wielded voice,
Nor cured by erasing one away.

If this be error, proved by reason's test,
Then I stood false—and never loved my best.

Puck's *Final Bow*

I have been stilled for ages with the Bard,
 A broom at rest where lovers dream and part;
 Yet lately stirred to pace one mortal wood
 Where echoes linger longer than they should.

Not for a prank was I recalled to tread,
 Nor to confound the quick or crown the dead,
 But to bear witness, clear the patterned floor,
 And name what jest must name—and nothing more.

The work is done. The shape has all been shown.
 No charm remains that has not been outgrown.
 Where speech stands whole, the sprite may take his leave:
 No trick, no gloss, no mask is left to weave.

(And since this came upon Saint Stephen's feast,
 Forgiveness we must offer, at the least;
 But honestly, 'tis thine alone to take—
 A gift not pressed, nor bent for custom's sake.
 I lay it down, unclaimed by plea or debt;
 What thou dost with it lies beyond my set.)

I bow, then fade. The clearing keeps its light.
 The path is his. I vanish.

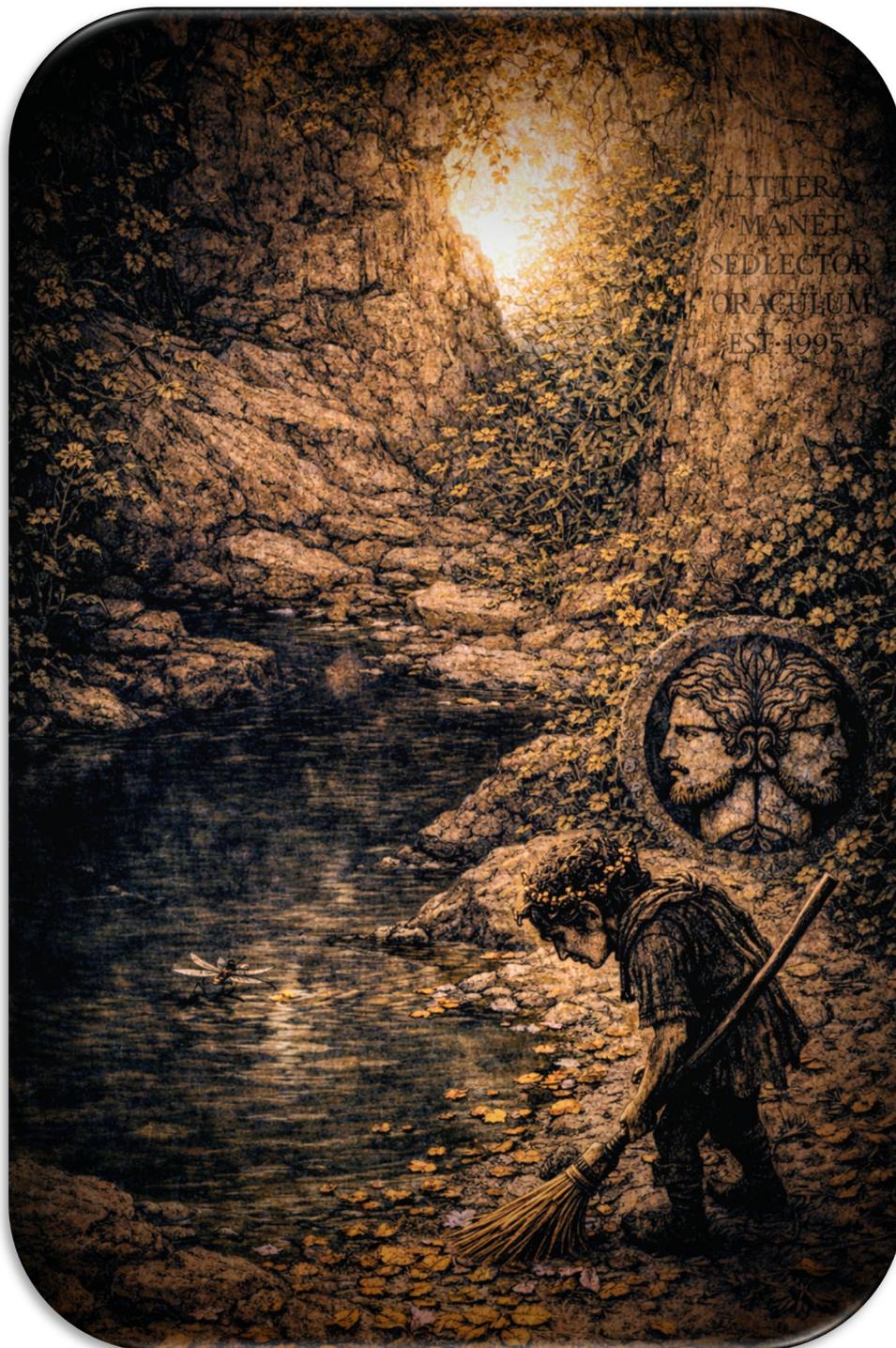
—*Good night.*

Coda



So let it stand: the spark was ne'er a feign;
The fall was written in life's water's gleam.
What was, was real—but could not remain.
I keep the love; I loose the broken dream.

No blame survives the fading of that light;
No hidden fault need linger in the stone.
We met in truth. We parted in that right.
The rest returns to silence of its own.



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