

Healing Lights

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It was 2010 and my heart was shattered, my body ablaze, my soul lost. I didn't know who I was anymore, the child within me slipping away, only a fragmented 'I' remained. Mentally I was suffering from trauma from a former abusive relationship, physically from initial symptoms of Lyme Disease—only in retrospect did I realize that. My being didn't know how to cope. I didn't understand how I could suffer so much from a break up when others seemed to carry on so painlessly, so effortlessly, if not expressing to my face, then with their eyes that I should get over my pain already. I didn't understand how and why every fiber of my being was on fire, and nothing could put it out. There were fleeting moments of freedom and peace, at least I had that.

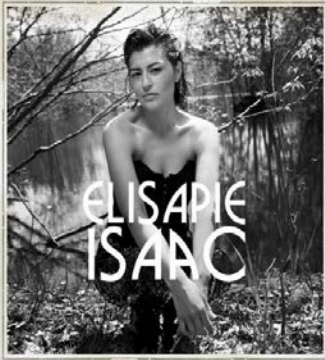
One November evening my grandmother invited me to a concert at a local community establishment. I didn't know who the performer was; I didn't know what to expect. I was hesitating to go, my body heavy and pained, but a little light part of me pushed me to go. As if the child in me crawled her way through and whispered gently to me, tonight there will be stars—healing lights. Before the concert started, all I could find out was the performer was Elisapie Isaac—a singer and songwriter from Salluit, Québec, birthed from Inuk mother and father from Newfoundland. When she came out into the dark-lit stage and started speaking in a tender-hearted voice, introducing herself and her first song, a little part of me sparked, that part kept sparking and expanding all through the starry night.

When Elisapie sang, she was like a soft sparrow; I could feel myself taking flight and being transported to a northern starlit wintry night where the snow was shimmering and crisp, where humans and animals and wildlings co-existed in respect and harmony, where light and love reigned, where my heart felt warm despite the cold. I looked to my neighbors and I could sense they too were spellbound. When the concert ended, I felt so much—catharsis, healing, euphoria—my body could explode with fireworks. I had to buy her album *There Will Be Stars*. When I returned home, I burst out to my mom, I've healed, mama! It was a premature thought, considering it took me more years of healing and re-healing after that, but I had hope that night, and that was a good start.

Since then, I had *There Will Be Stars* playing on repeat, soothing me, elating me, renewing me. There are several songs from this melancholy yet uplifting folk-pop album that resonate with how I felt at the time. Elisapie's words were mirroring my life experiences, and somehow it felt very comforting because someone else was feeling and living it too. I didn't feel as isolated and alone anymore.

In the album's second—rather bouncy—song, "Butterfly," Elisapie coos delicately, a lament:

"In my life there's a dark hole
In that hole there's a future butterfly
I become a shelter of fear and desire
Why, why why, I don't know why
I just end up crawling when I try
To say the simple words kiss me goodbye
Why, why, why, I don't know why



Elisapie Isaac

There Will Be Stars

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Caprice Records

Always end up crawling when I try
To fly, to fly”

For me, it was arduous to part ways with my former boyfriend because it was my first love, and there was still some love left in me, but most significantly because it had become a manipulative relationship in which he learned how to have power and control over me, and he was masterful at exercising it. Every time I tried to walk away from the push, he knew how to pull me back in. I felt like Sarah in *Labyrinth* seeking to rescue her brother and escape Jareth’s overwhelming grasp; in my case, I was seeking to reclaim the strength within me and escape a potentially dangerous relationship. Jareth was right to sing to Sarah, “I can’t live within you.” Sarah eventually found her words—her strength—and assertively she uttered, “You have no power over me,” breaking the spell, undermining the Goblin King. Eventually I also walked away from my own Goblin King when I was at my weakest, and that’s when I recognized I do have inner strength and I must continue feeding it. “Butterfly” is representative of that looking inward to reclaim your strength and freedom in order to break away outwardly. Fast forward seven years later, in my heart there’s a butterfly—winged and free. I hope Elisapie was able to fill her heart with her own butterfly.

“Why Would I Cry” is the seventh song on the album and is slow-paced, orchestral, fluid. Elisapie’s voice is soft-spoken but strong when she sings, “Before you take me again / I will run / Before you break me again / I will run.” Here, she is the embodiment of a river that is still and gentle but can nevertheless cut through rocks. I felt such potency when listening to it back then. With every sung line Elisapie was like water collecting itself and rising upwards, cutting through all obstacles, wild and free. While it’s a melancholy song, it’s very empowering. To this day, whenever I listen to it, I get all teary-eyed—and it feels very releasing and healing.

“Wish Song,” which follows after, is my most beloved track in *There Will Be Stars*. The refrain goes:

“I wish you, I wish you hope,
I wish you love and tenderness
I wish you strength,
I wish you dreams and happiness”

Sonically, “Wish Song” sounds similar to “Why Would I Cry” in that it’s also slow-paced and symphonic. Whereas “Why Would I Cry” is escalating at moments, “Wish Song” is even throughout. It fills the ears with peace and comfort and wisdom. When I left my former relationship, my perspective on love was distorted. I didn’t think I could ever find love again; I didn’t think I was worth of being loved anymore. I know now it’s not true. This song gave me hope again; it murmured to me, you deserve love and joy. In the meantime, I could daydream and regain my strength. In this song, Elisapie personifies an ancient, sage tree which, with the rustling of its leaves, passes on the truth you knew all along, but it was buried too deep in your gut for too long. This song awakens the child in you full of love and wonder and dreaminess—that’s how I feel whenever I listen to it.

The ninth track, “Nothing In This World Is Free,” is a beautiful merging of two tongues: Inuktitut and English. Personally, I find this song a perfect summary of the entire album. The most striking, poignant lines are “In this weary heart / There will be stars” and “Nothing in this world is free / But I will find the way back to me.” Elisapie acknowledges that she’s aching, but she has the knowing that she’ll be all right, she’ll find herself again. If her spirit is an animal, she starts out like a trusting, vulnerable cub then becomes a fierce, resilient wolf after experiencing something traumatic but awakening. Her voice

sounds brittle in the beginning then soon develops an infectious confidence. Having listened to this song the first time, I felt I could heal from my own trauma. I felt I could recover my essence, find the child within me again. Or perhaps, since you can never go back from the effects of trauma, I could carve myself new, ever growing, ever wondering, ever loving to myself and those who deserve to be within me.

Sometimes I envision Elisapie and me as two white wolves playfully running alongside each other in the Nunavut snowscape. We reach the deep north where the only sounds we hear are the kaleidoscopic auroras and our echoing heartbeats. What a safe and sacred place to be, amongst the healing lights.