



IN MY HOUR OF DARKNESS

A POEM BY
JONATHAN FINK

ARTWORK BY
JULIE FINK

IN MY TIME OF NEED

**IN MY HOUR
of DARKNESS**



**IN MY TIME
of NEED**



A Note from the Author

On September 19, 1973, pioneering “Cosmic American Music” musician Gram Parsons passed away at the age of twenty-six from an overdose at the Joshua Tree Inn in Joshua Tree, California. Following Gram Parsons’s death, Parsons’s road manager and one of his acquaintances stole Parsons’s coffin and body from the Los Angeles International Airport and performed a failed cremation at Cap Rock in Joshua Tree National Monument, attempting to honor what Parsons stated previously and prophetically as his desired request. This poem imagines the final moments of Parsons’s spirit and voice rising in the smoke of the failed cremation.

A Note from the Artist

Many of the images included here are inspired and informed by Gram Parsons’s “Nudie Suits” created by Nudie Cohn. In a blend of tradition and irreverence reflective of his musical vision and life, Gram Parsons requested that his Nudie Suits contain images of pills, poppies, marijuana leaves, naked women, a Joshua tree, and a large cross, among others. The additional artwork included in the book reflects the landscape of Joshua Tree that was so important to Parsons as well as imagined renderings based on the content of the poem. All original artwork for this project was done in watercolor and charcoal.

A Note about the Book

This poem was written with the support of an October 2023 Artist-in-Residence Fellowship at Joshua Tree National Park. The author and artist would like to thank Joshua Tree National Park (specifically Sarah Jane Pepper) and the UWF Department of Art and Design (specifically Kel Crownover, book designer, and John Dougherty) for their support and assistance.





*In my hour of darkness
In my time of need
Oh Lord, grant me vision
Oh Lord, grant me speed*

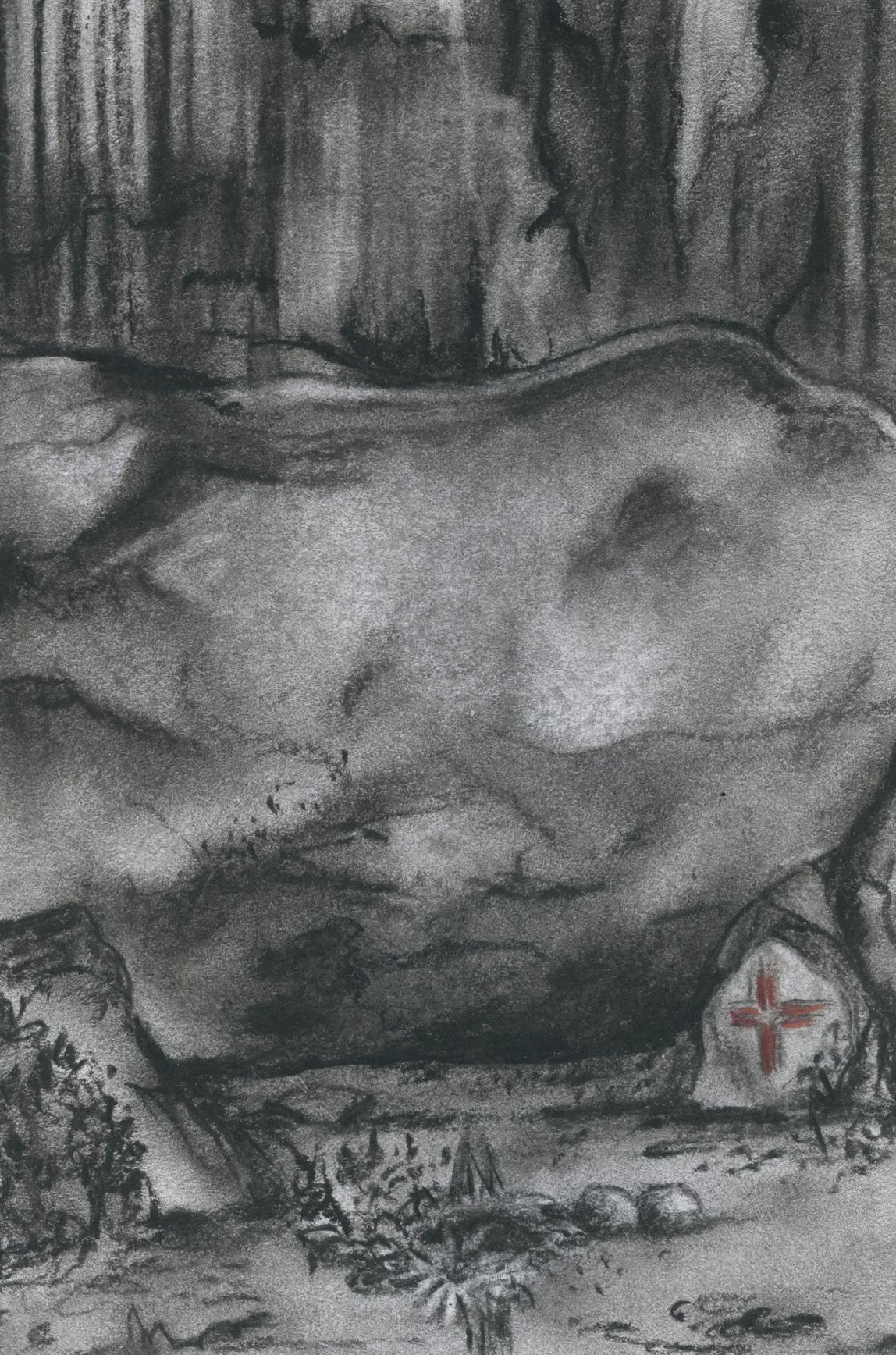
- from "In My Hour of Darkness"
by Gram Parsons



Gram Parsons
November 5, 1946 - September 19, 1973



Julia M. Fink



In My Hour of Darkness, In My Time of Need

There is a voice on the desert wind,
 hard lines of relief, and passing from this world

to the next feels as simple as stepping from the blaze
 of the midday sun, quivering in the cloudless sky,

to the shade of boulders, the air there
 light on the skin, in the lungs, unlike the air

of a tomb, this shadow air cool and rising,
 light enough to carry ashes, to feed a flame,

air as fuel, air to carry a voice, not on wings,
 but as an updraft, a flurry from which I form

these words. From the flint spark and the swirl
 of smoke, I call to you, I, who no longer

can sing, the smoke a curtain I cannot part,
 a haze through which I cannot see or stride.



In death, all memories fade as music fades,
 though, transformed to flame, some memories

still pull, each rising cinder lighting the desert
 as a throb, a glint, and then burning out,

like the fireflies I saw the night after
 my father died, a suicide two days

before Christmas when I was twelve.
 I wandered alone through the orange grove,

though I cannot remember if it was then or before,
 the limbs heavy and hanging as the fireflies

gleamed, like my father in the Second World War,
 a fighter pilot, there at the bombing

of Pearl Harbor, the flashes of fire in the sky
 imprinted on his mind, the back of his eyelids,

stars in negative that no drink could quell,
 my mother, lost too from this earth,



from cirrhosis, the day I graduated
high school. I remember both so little
and so much—the Cambridge sidewalk
bricks jutting up beneath my sock feet
as I walked home still drunk one morning
after playing a show late into the night,
my new boots dangling from one hand,
having rubbed blisters into my heels,
my guitar in the other, and before me
the Charles and the first glint of the sun
on the water, a rower in a single scull,
the oars dipping and feathering
like the divide between the living
and the dead, the future and the past,
and the boat's thin wake trailing and dissipating.
How easy it is to pull with the current,



to move in one direction while facing
the other, the near silence except

for the creak of the oars, their slight dips
through the surface, and then their rise.

All of this returns to me, though at the time
I only thought of home, one thousand miles

away. There is so much still I want say.

To Nancy, Polly, and Gretchen, all distant
and estranged, you must search your thoughts
of me alone, as you have already,

and must further learn to do. I cannot tell you
what to think of me, and even if I could,

your thoughts are yours alone. Mine rise
to me in this smoke and flame, and I try

to shape you in my mind. Polly slips
between my fingers as if into a well.



Her hand reaches for me, and I don't
or can't reach back, the well a throat,

the water there dark and swirling
like her mother Nancy's hair,

dark as the pupils of Nancy's eyes,
her lowered gaze, turning from me in tears,

in anger, telling me it was all my fault
as I left again, the final time, yet it was I,

I think, beneath the waves, and they above,
peering down from the edge of a boat,

their forms rippling, and I could not hear
their words. I see now that it was my throat

the water filled, vines from the ocean floor
pulling me, thorns into my skin, their dark poison

restraining and suspending me, wrapping
my throat, numbing me, never fully asleep



or awake. Polly, I have no claim on you
beyond my remorse. I will be forever
the father you did not know, the reed
of my voice all that remains, causing you
to search for me in the arms of others,
to stare into the faces on a subway train,
the bodies jolting at each turn and the light
pulsing like a movie reel at each squealing stop,
your reflection held in the tinted window
within the subway car, spectral and ephemeral,
as you think you see me reflected,
standing at your side, my back to you,
so much so you try to stand as the subway turns,
and stumble, reach for the pole, a stranger
catching your arm, but when you lift your gaze
the stranger is not me, and you are alone again.



Your future without me will become your present
and your past, and I see you returning

again and again to the hotel room
that held my last slowing breaths,

you on the bed there in the dark
beneath the soundless fan blade, lying

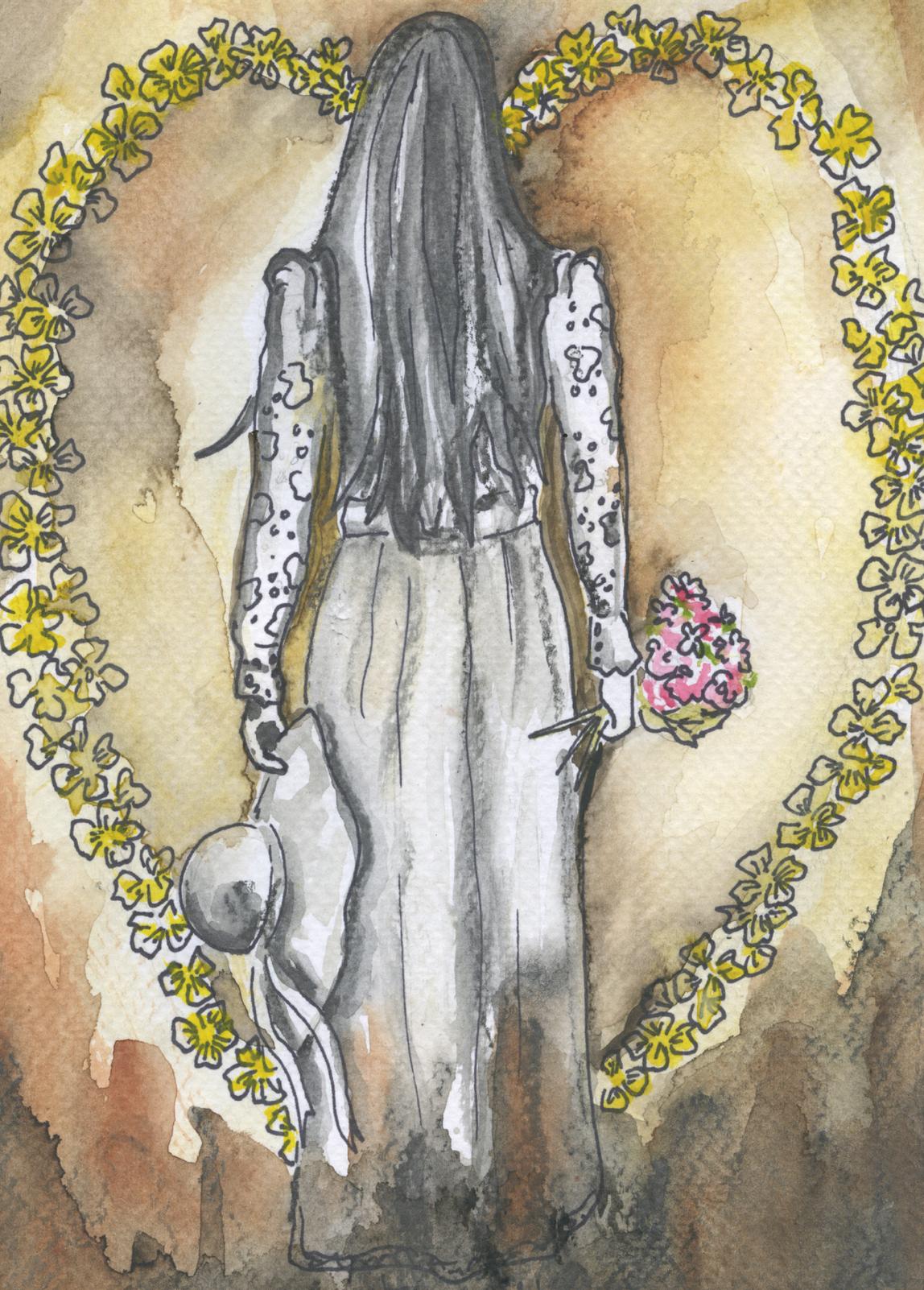
where I had lain, your form giving shape
to mine as a lone record turns in the room

like the questions you will have of me forever.
Gretchen, my hope is you will remember me

as on our wedding day and not as I am now
in the end, already separated from you,

your long-sleeve wedding dress abandoned,
its form a resignation, hanging like Spanish moss

in a closet at your father's New Orleans estate.
I would say one thousand times I am sorry



though I do not know what good it would do.

All I ever wanted was to sing. When asking

how hard it was for me and Emmylou

to harmonize, an interviewer, assuming

the intricacies made the process hard,

leaned forward in his chair, two fingers

at his dimpled chin, then smirked

when Emmylou and I both laughed.

Singing with Emmylou was the easiest thing

I had ever done, easy in its very nature.

Our voices intertwined like the colors

of the desert sky when the sun resigned

behind the rock outcroppings and the mountains.

I wish that I could say I understand it all,

yet all I know and feel is longing

for what I leave behind.



Already, the authorities are en route.

The coffin burns yet will not be consumed.

There is a limit to how high this smoke
will rise. It thins as all things thin

and cannot hold these memories long.

My hopes and sorrows merge and dim.

Beloveds, sing for me from where I cannot sing,
and speak from where I cannot call.

From smoke, I merge into the air and sky.
Behold my desert stars' last bloom.



About the Author

Jonathan Fink is Professor and Coordinator of Creative Writing at University of West Florida. He has received fellowships from the National Endowment for the Arts and the Florida Division of Cultural Affairs, among other institutions. His poems and essays have appeared in *The New York Times Magazine*, *Poetry*, *Narrative*, *Slate*, and other publications. His most recent book, *Don't Do It—We Love You, My Heart*, is forthcoming from Dzanc Books.

About the Artist

Julie Fink is an artist and educator living in Pensacola, FL. She received her BA in Art from Saint Mary's College in South Bend, Indiana. Following graduation, she served as a volunteer in the Peace Corp in Romania. Julie's artwork ranges from traditional fine arts such as painting and drawing to painted ceramics and larger projects such as murals and installation projects.





