



# A Poem is a Possibility

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A generative writing workshop  
exploring the poem as a new way of  
seeing

# The Xwlemi Chósen word for poem:

- Sxwiam = Story
- Stilem = Song
- Tiwiel = Prayer

“We had a means of oral instruction called storytelling... values, behavior codes, history, geography, civics, survival skills, you name it. It was all there in our stories.”

—Margaret Green  
(Samish elder)



# Lee Maracle (Stahlo Nation)

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"We regard words as coming from original being — a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or idea is in the doing." (from [\*Introduction to Indigenous Literary Criticism in Canada\*, p. 62](#))





Joy Harjo (from "[Eagle Poem](#)")

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“To pray you open your whole self  
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon  
To one whole voice that is you.”



# Where do poems come from?

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“The poet’s eye in fine frenzy rolling,  
Doth glance from heaven to earth, from earth to heaven,  
And as imagination bodies forth  
Forms of things unknown, the poet’s pen  
Turns them to shapes and gives to airy nothing  
A local habitation and a name.”

-Shakespeare

*(A Midsummer Night’s Dream Act 5, scene 1)*



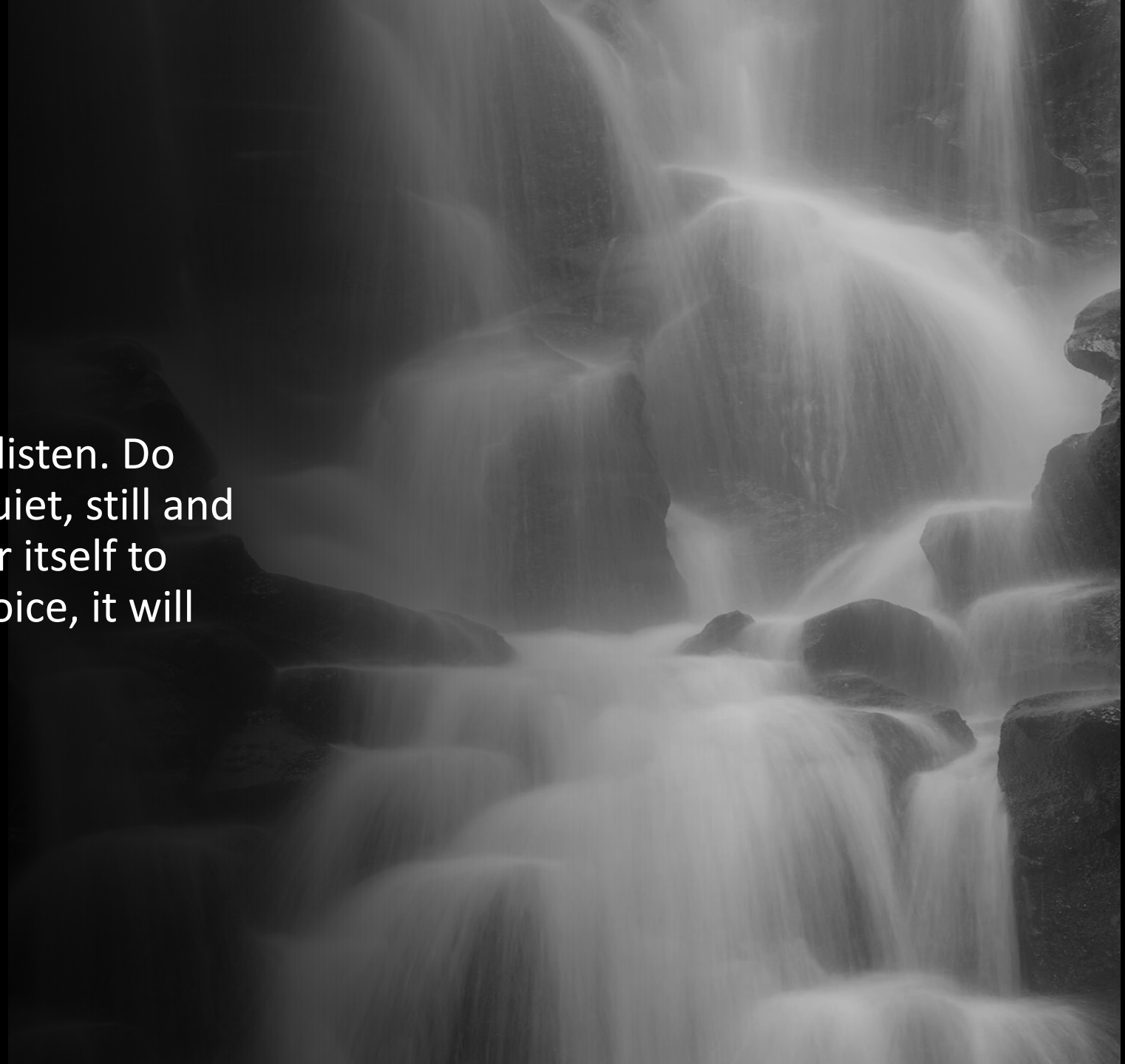
A poem in search of a poet:  
Ruth Stone via Elizabeth Gilbert (10:02-11:47)



# Franz Kafka

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**Remain sitting at your table and listen. Do not even listen, simply wait, be quiet, still and solitary. The world will freely offer itself to you to be unmasked, it has no choice, it will roll in ecstasy at your feet.”**



Minute of  
silence





# Poet as photographer (of airy nothing and things unknown)

Write a detailed description of something you are grateful for.

Write the recurring thought from your minute of silence?

Write about a memorable conversation you once had.

What is a phrase you heard repeatedly in childhood?

What is a question you've always wanted answered?

What did you dream about last night?

How do you feel?

What are you keeping secret?

What do you want to hang onto in this moment?



# Advice to Myself

By Louise Erdrich

Poem: "Advice to Myself" by Louise Erdrich, from *Original Fire: Selected and New Poems*. © Harper Collins Publishers, 2003. Sourced from *The Writer's Almanac*.

Read the poem at:

<http://www.philippamoore.net/blog/2019/2/16/poem-advice-to-myself-by-louise-erdrich>

# What Writing Is

by Stephen King

“What writing is: Telepathy, of course...

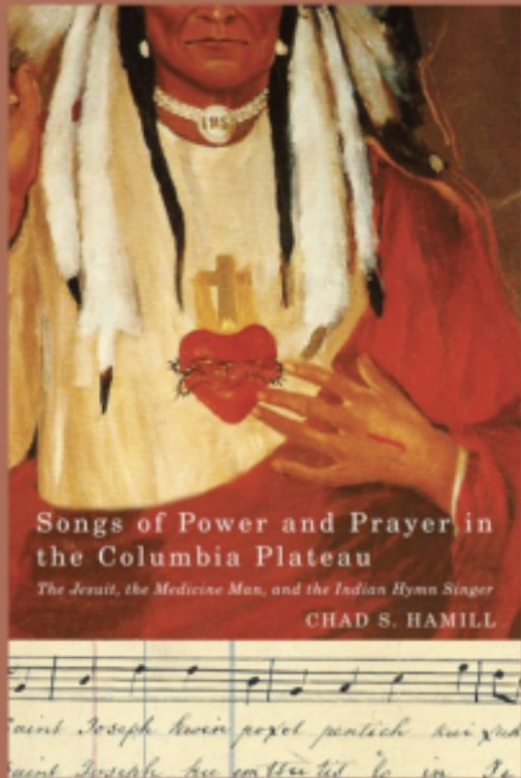
So let's assume that you're in your favorite receiving place just as I am in the place where I do my best transmitting. We'll have to perform our mentalist routine not just over distance but over time as well, yet that presents no real problem; if we can still read Dickens, Shakespeare, and (with the help of a footnote or two) Herodotus, I think we can manage the gap between 1997 and 2000. And here we go — actual telepathy in action. You'll notice I have nothing up my sleeves and that my lips never move. Neither, most likely, do yours.

Look — here's a table covered with a red cloth. On it is a cage the size of a small fish aquarium. In the cage is a white rabbit with a pink nose and pink-rimmed eyes. In its front paws is a carrot-stub upon which it is contentedly munching. On its back, clearly marked in blue ink, is the numeral 8.

Do we see the same thing? We'd have to get together and compare notes to make absolutely sure, but I think we do...

We're having a meeting of the minds.

# Chad S. Hamill, PhD (8:24-10:04)



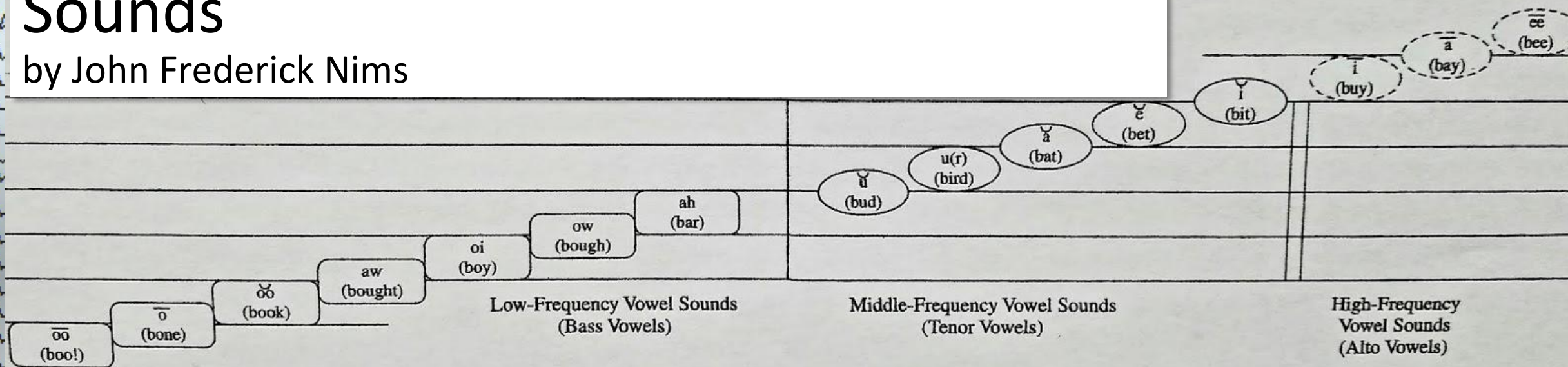
Amerind Free Online Lecture

## Songs of Power and Prayer in the Columbia Plateau: A Common Thread Through Tradition and Change with Chad S. Hamill, PhD

Saturday, February 26, 2022  
11:00 am - Arizona Time

# Frequency Scale of English Vowel Sounds

by John Frederick Nims



Frequency Scale of English Vowel Sounds

Sound and  
Sense  
by Alexander  
Pope

Read the poem at:

<https://www.poemhunter.com/poem/sound-and-sense/>



# Writing prompt

Write for 5 minutes about music.

- Think of one of your favorite songs.
- Write down your favorite lyric from that song.
- What about that lyric speaks to you?
- Is it what the song is saying or the way that it's being said?



# Kim Addonizio (From *Ordinary Genius*)

"Imagine a sentence as a hall with a series of doors. Each door is a possible way to use what you've already written to generate new material."







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# Infinite Possibilities

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Choose one of your original sentences from one of your free writes and write a few sentences to follow it. Do this at least five times and see what different narratives you come up with.

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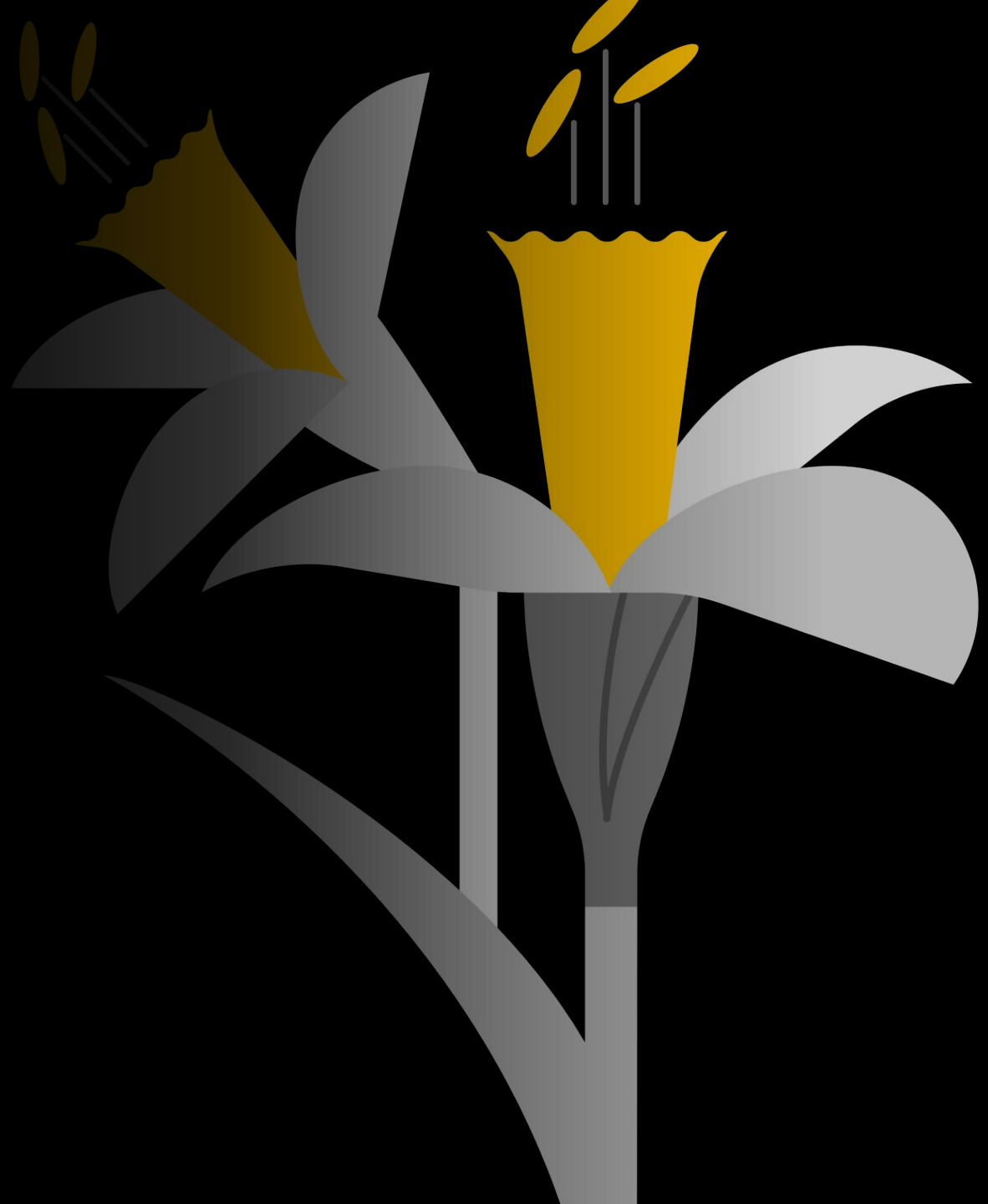
# Daffodils

*-after Wordsworth*

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The Indigenous poet  
writes life-affirming poems  
about daffodils.

Her audience says,  
“But you’re oppressed.”



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# Daffodils

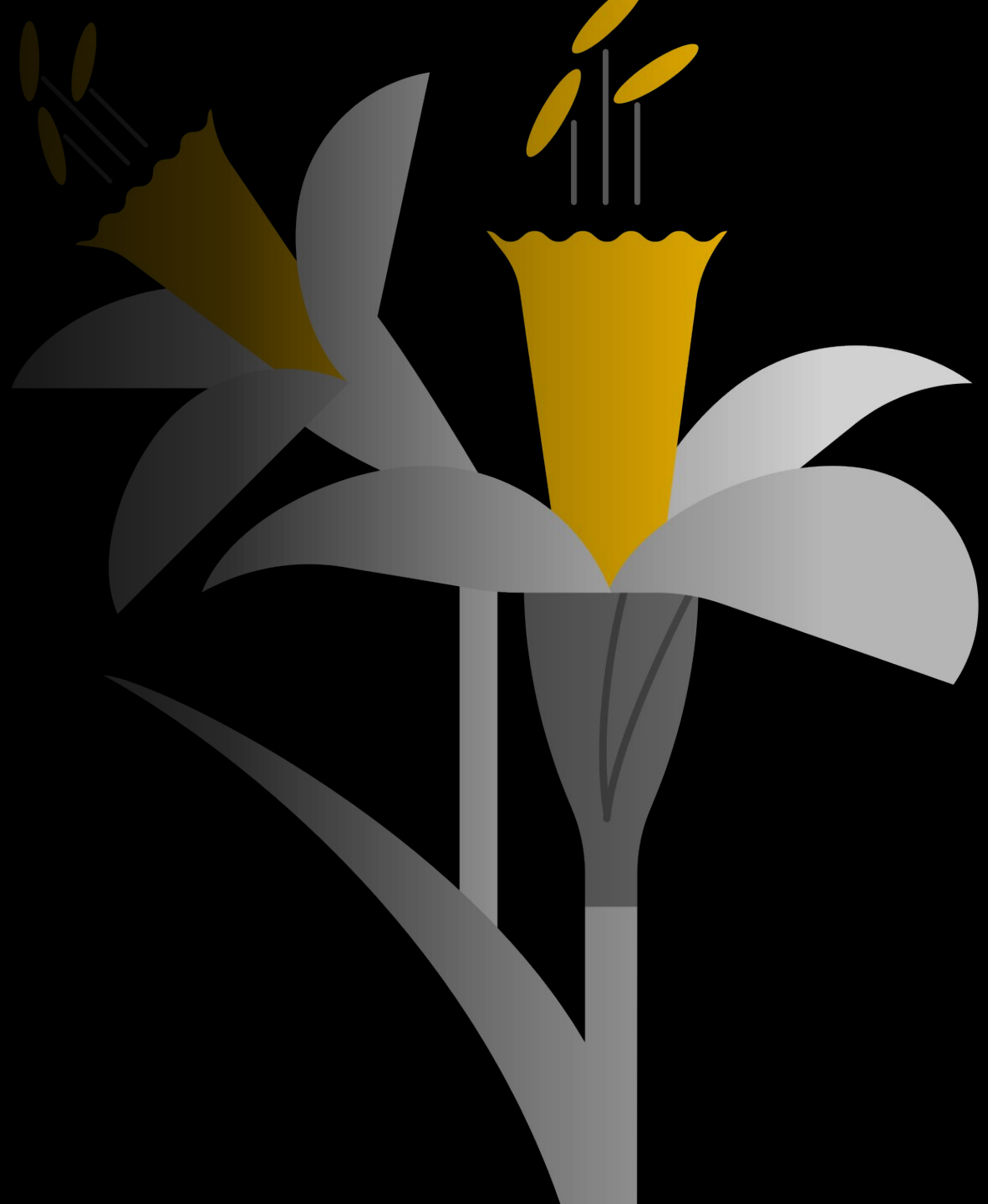
*-after Wordsworth*

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The Indigenous poet  
writes poems of outrage  
about oppression.

Nobody cares.

She gets depressed.



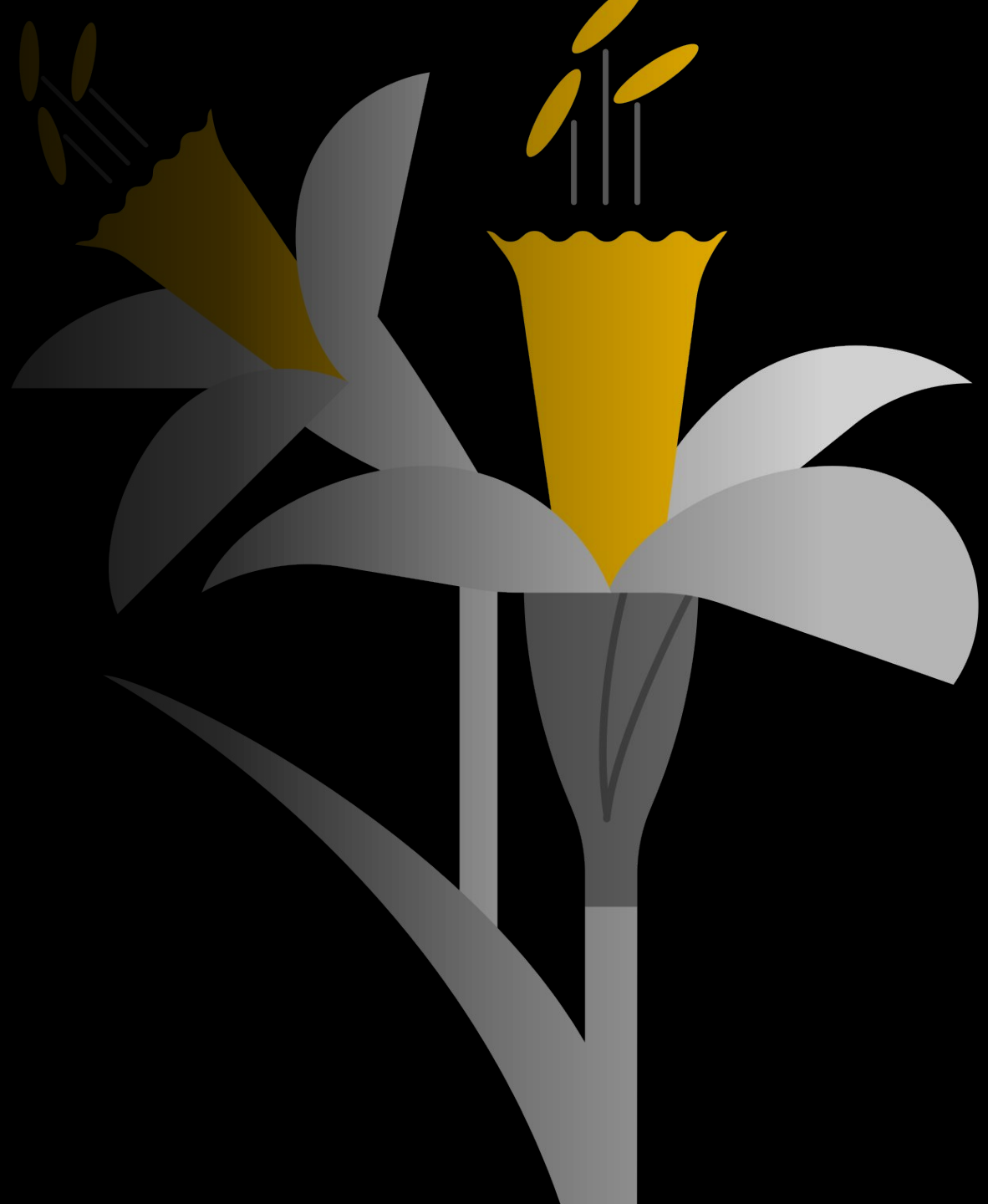
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# Daffodils

*-after Wordsworth*

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The Indigenous poet  
gets requests for poems  
about being Indigenous.  
“But, all my poems are  
about being Indigenous.”



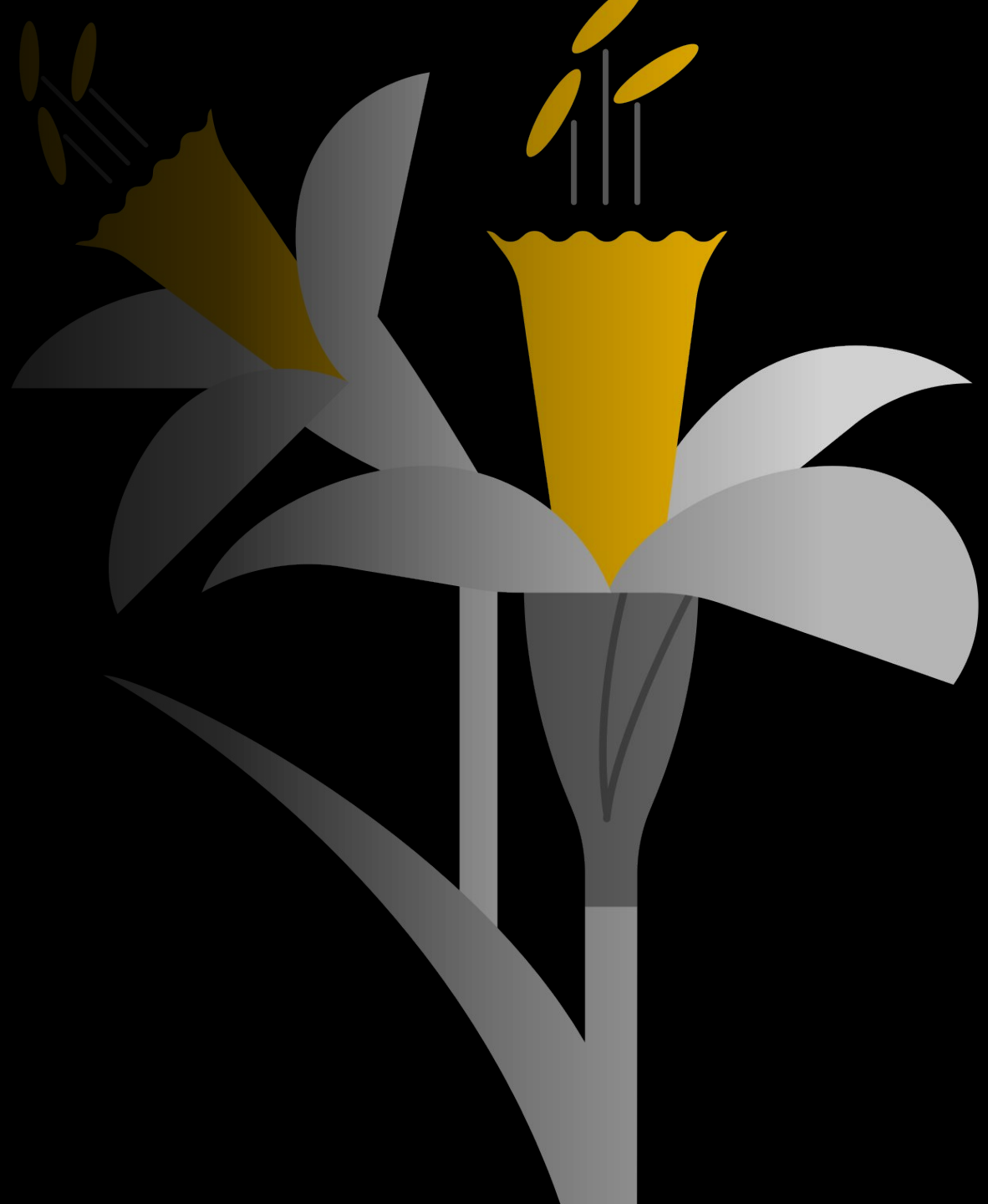
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# Daffodils

*-after Wordsworth*

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The Indigenous poet  
isn't considered  
an Indigenous poet,  
because, "Shouldn't you  
write about genocide?"



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# Daffodils

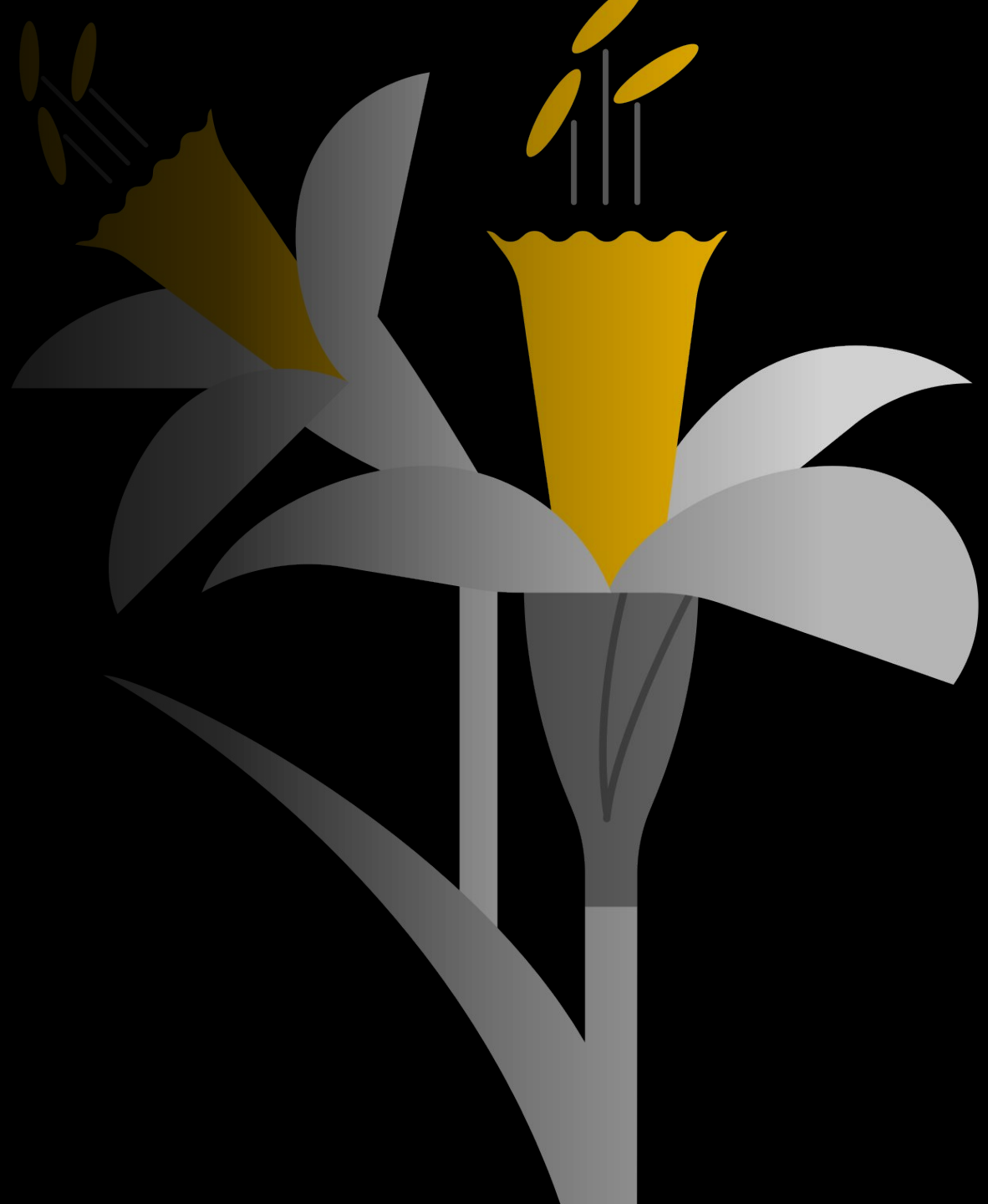
*-after Wordsworth*

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The Indigenous poet  
tries to write poems  
about genocide.

Her poet spirit dies.

(Genocide gets the job done.)



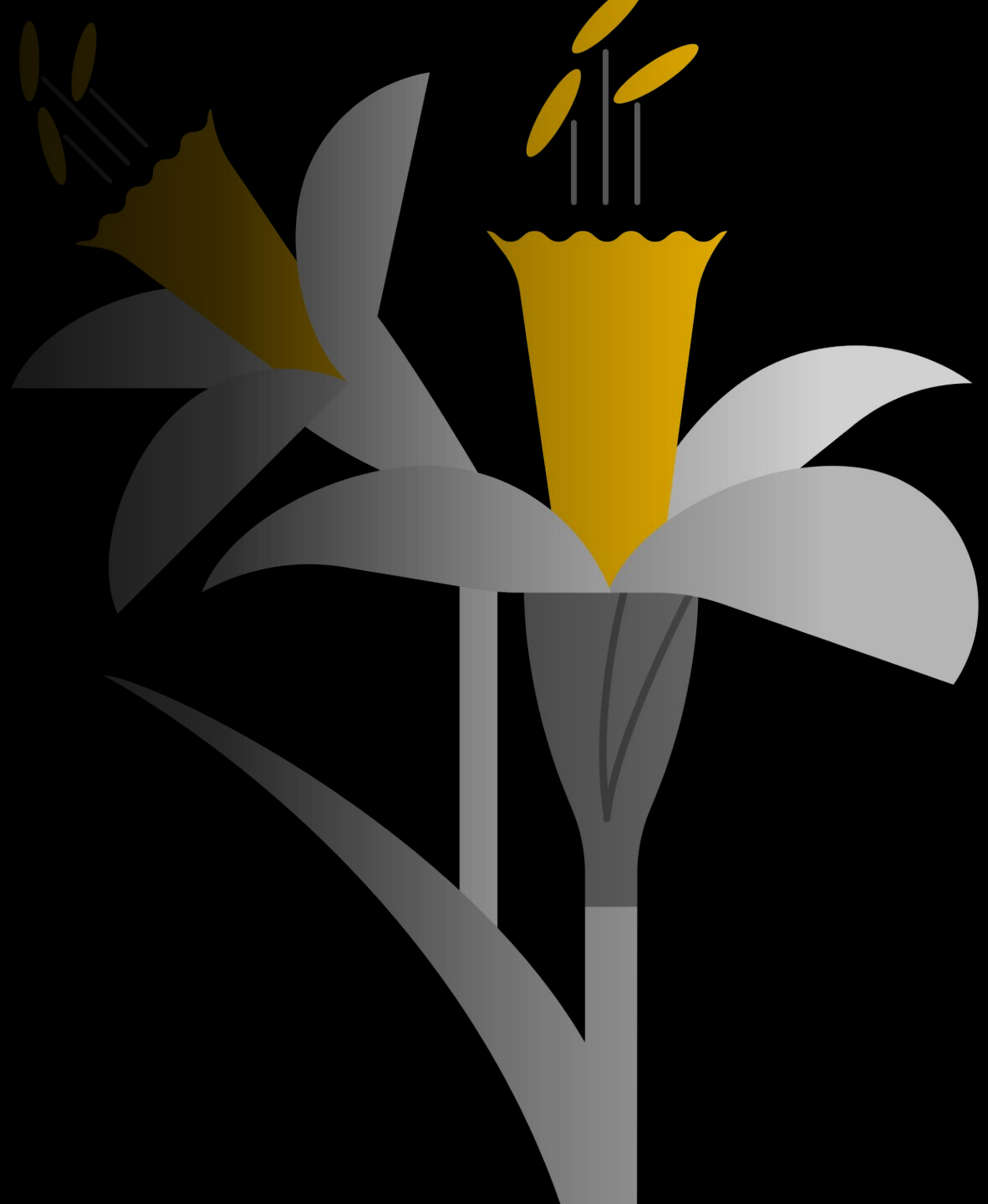
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# Daffodils

*-after Wordsworth*

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The Indigenous poet says,  
“Stang tse temxwila!”\*  
and writes about daffodils,  
and the untouchable beauty  
of living a poet’s life



# The Glimmer

by Rena Priest



From darkness, the idea of self, blood, water, a soul:  
my body, a brief victory over death by making breath.

Thoughts and actions in a series of moments expressed,  
a cup filled with bliss and the movement of breath.

Pulling itself into emptiness, water between stones  
disappearing—how quickly it goes. I leave with my breath.

I return with my breath, and I understand the tides.  
They are spun in currents by the exchange of breath,

for kisses branded on flesh. We claim each with each,  
join names to our tongues, weld our memories to breath.

In our chests, each moment dies for the next,  
singing shut the spaces between each allotted breath,

smelting our lives first into glitter, then into ash in this  
breathtaking glimmer above death—where we make breath.



Hy'sxw'qe!