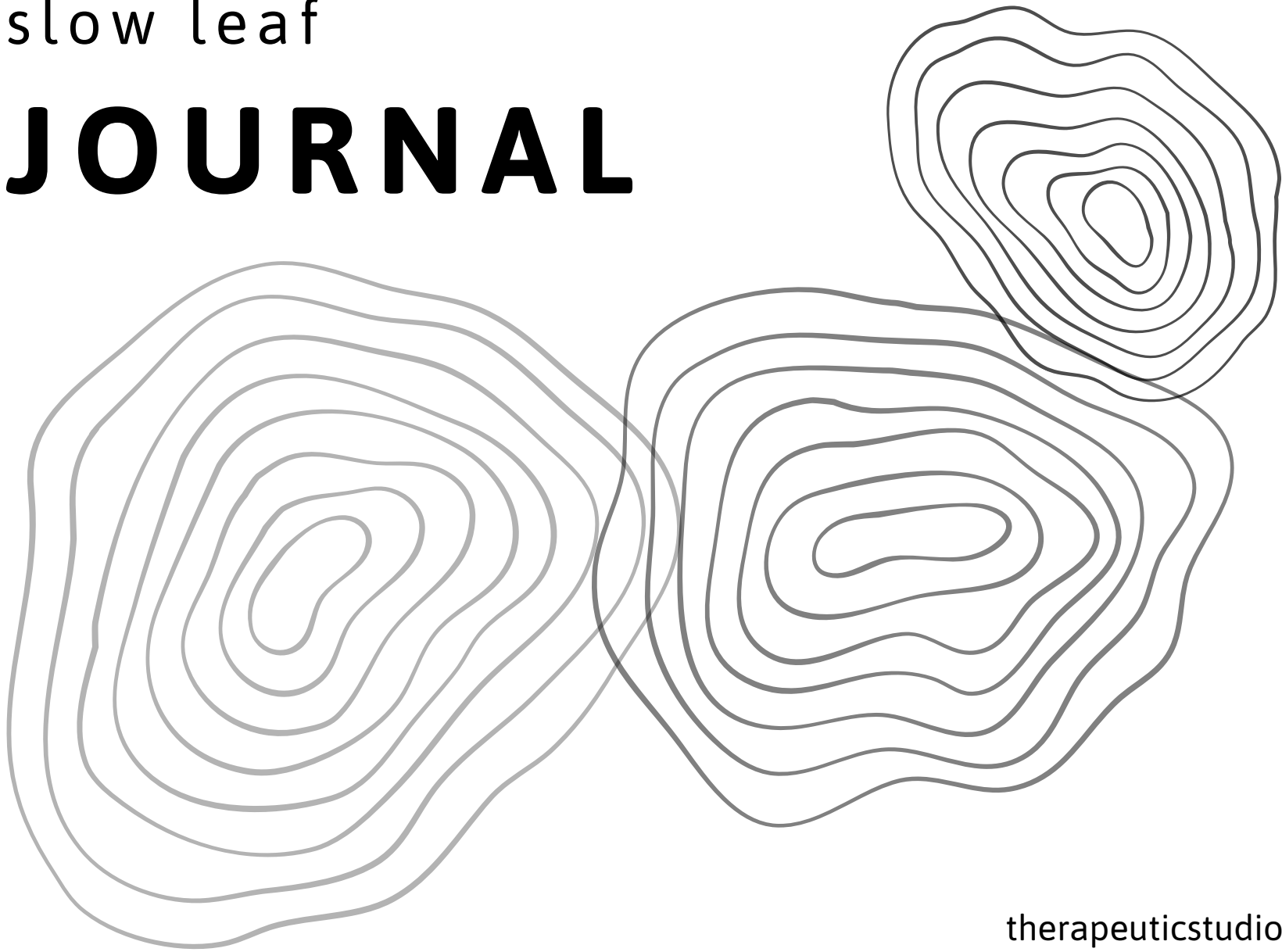


slow leaf

JOURNAL



therapeuticstudio.ca

Gratitude

I grew up in a household where a cup of tea could solve any problem. I felt at home among the teas in Mark and Deborah Mercier's then-small shop in the market on Granville Island. We were drawn there for the tea, but we stay for the community — one led by Mark and Deborah's care and generosity. They taught me how to meet a leaf, and how to let attention become the whole of the practice. I still keep the notebooks I filled while learning beside them; in a way, this journal is the next of those.

This journal also sits within a lineage of the healing mark, and three teachers are present in its pages. Shauna Kaendo and the ohHEY Creative Care Community taught me the principle it is built on: that making marks together — in community, with breath and rhythm and no image to complete — is itself a form of care, and that we heal alongside one another rather than alone. Behind that practice stand two teachers I have never met. Florence Cane, nearly a century ago, showed that a freeing line begins not in the hand but in the breath and the whole moving body, and understood the scribble as a path to the unconscious. Resmaa Menakem, whose somatic work attends to what the body carries — including what it has inherited — meets that material in the body itself, and pairs each practice with the written mark he calls "soul scribing." I claim no mastery of what any of them teach; the slow, unlifted line in these pages simply learns from all three, with gratitude.

About Slow Leaf

Slow Leaf is a series of tea experiences from Therapeutic Studio, built on the idea that tea is something to notice, taste, and share rather than only to drink. Its Tea Room follows a year in twelve teas, one a month, each paired with what is in season nearby — and this journal accompanies that year. Every month brings a different tea and a different sitting, met with attention rather than hurry. The leaf is treated here as another body worth attending to: one that has been through a great deal, and can keep a complicated feeling company.

The year ahead

Over the year, the Tea Room moves through twelve teas — one each month, beginning with the everyday and familiar and gradually opening toward more involved leaves and traditions. Each is paired with what is in season in the Pacific Northwest, and met with attention rather than hurry.

- **January** — Black tea. Fully oxidised and reliable; the everyday cup, and a familiar place to begin.
- **February** — Peppermint. A caffeine-free herbal infusion; bright and warming in deep winter.
- **March** — Sencha. Japan's everyday steamed green tea; fresh and grassy as spring returns.
- **April** — Longjing (Dragon Well). A pan-fired Chinese green, among the first leaves picked in spring.
- **May** — White tea. The least handled of all — simply withered and dried; delicate and quiet.
- **June** — Light oolong. Partially oxidised and floral, resting between green and black.
- **July** — Darjeeling. The muscatel second flush from the Indian Himalaya, harvested in summer.
- **August** — Jasmine. A green-tea base scented with layers of fresh jasmine blossom.
- **September** — Wuyi rock oolong (yancha). A roasted, mineral oolong from the Wuyi Mountains of Fujian.
- **October** — Masala chai. Black tea simmered with milk and spices; an everyday South Asian preparation.
- **November** — Matcha. Shade-grown leaf, stone-ground to a powder and whisked.
- **December** — Aged pu-erh. A slow-fermented dark tea; the year's most transformed leaf, to close.

This journal is not a diagnostic tool, a therapeutic assessment, or a replacement for professional mental health support. It is a creative care practice — a way of tending to yourself through tea, attention, and the making of marks. If you are working with difficult emotions and would like more support, please reach out to a qualified therapist or counsellor.

Everyday black tea *The leaf that met the air completely.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Consider the leaf that met the air and did not turn away from it. After the plucking it was withered, then bruised and rolled until its edges broke open — and then, this is the part that matters, it was given to the air completely. Oxygen entered every torn cell and the green went to copper, to russet, to near-black, the leaf darkening from the inside as the hours passed. Nothing was held back. What we call strong in the cup is simply a leaf that changed all the way through.

Brew it dark, with water straight off the boil, and let it be strong. Then open the journal and take up the pencil — not to draw the leaf, not to make anything that holds together, but to follow, in one slow line, the feeling that is keeping you company today. Graphite does what the leaf did: it darkens where you bear down and thins to almost nothing where you lift, so how you are will show up in the line whether you mean it to or not. Press dark where the feeling presses; let the mark go as far into the page as the leaf went into the dark. Keep the pencil down and unlifted — doubling back, wandering off, returning. You are not explaining the feeling and not fixing it. You are following it, and the tea is keeping you company while you do. Neither of you is in a hurry.

As you follow it, notice that where you pressed hardest the mark has gone all the way through — pressed into the page beneath, a trace that would not fully lift even if you tried to take it back. That is not damage. It is the thing the leaf knows: that what changes us all the way through is not spared us, and does not leave, and becomes, in time, a strength we can be found by.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What in you has been altered all the way through by something you were exposed to — and would you call that damage, or strength?
- Where did your own fullness come from: what did you have to meet, rather than be spared, to become it?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Peppermint infusion *The leaf that is not, strictly, tea at all — and whole anyway.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Turn your attention to the leaf that is not, by the old definition, tea. Peppermint comes from another plant entirely; it shares the pot, the hot water, the waiting, the very word — but not the lineage. Only one plant makes true tea, so mint sits in a category of its own, and steeps a full, clean, honest cup regardless. Crush a leaf between your fingers and the scent arrives, cool and immediate, asking no one's permission.

Pour the water and let it stand; there is no caffeine here to quicken you, so let the sitting be slow. Then take up the pencil — not to draw anything, not to make a picture that would justify itself, but to follow, in one unhurried line, the feeling that is with you. The graphite, like the mint, has nothing to prove and no lineage to answer to: a mark on paper is a true mark whether or not it ever becomes a drawing. Let the line be quiet. Let it wander at the pace of a cup with nothing to rush it — pressing a little where the feeling asks, thinning where it eases, the pencil staying on the page. You are not making it into anything. You are keeping it company, the way the tea keeps you.

As you follow it, notice what in you sits a little outside the family — sharing the table without quite sharing the name — and is whole there anyway. The line does not have to belong to a picture to be worth making. Some marks, like some belonging, are simply, fully themselves, in their own rising steam.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- Where do you sit beside a family, or a name, without quite belonging to it — and what is whole in you there anyway?
- What do you have that needs no lineage to legitimise it?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Sencha *The leaf stopped in time, kept green.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Bring to mind the leaf that was stopped in time. Picked in the first flush of spring, it was carried quickly to steam — and the steam, arriving within hours, halted the very oxidation that January's leaf gave itself over to. The green was caught and kept. What would have darkened stays vivid; the grassy brightness of one spring morning is sealed into the leaf and carried forward, unspent, to your cup.

Brew it cool and short, before the freshness can turn sharp. Then take up the pencil and, before you can think better of it, let the first line arrive fresh — quick, light, not bearing down. This is graphite at its most forgiving: held lightly, hardly committed, a feeling named in pencil rather than ink because it is allowed to be provisional, allowed to be wrong, open to revision as the year turns. Do not go back and darken it into something more finished. Let the mark stay as fresh as the steep is short — following the feeling where it first moves, and leaving it there. You are not completing anything. The tea keeps you company; neither of you lingers past the moment.

As you follow it, consider the wish to keep a morning green — to catch a good feeling before it can change. The light line shows both the tenderness of that wish and its cost: what is kept this gently must also be met quickly, and let go before it fades. Some things are held not by pressing them down hard, but by catching them lightly, while they are fresh.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- Is there a morning, or a version of yourself, you have tried to keep from changing — and what has that keeping asked of you?
- What are you holding onto that might actually be kept better by knowing when it is ready to be let go?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Longjing (Dragon Well) *The leaf shaped smooth by a hand and a heat.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Turn your attention to the leaf that was pressed. Longjing meets the same task as March's sencha — the heat that halts the green — but by a different hand entirely: a person presses each leaf flat against the hot, dry wall of a wok, palm and metal and leaf together, until it lies smooth and flat as a blade. The heat fixes it there. What emerges is not grassy but round, chestnut-sweet, gentled — a sweetness that came directly from being worked.

Brew it and taste the roundness. Then take up the pencil and turn it on its side, so the flat of the graphite meets the page, and press — broad, smooth, bearing down the way the palm bore down on the leaf. This is the pencil's other voice: not the point but the flank, laying a wide even tone where you lean into it, smoothing as it goes. Follow the feeling with that pressed, worked line — doubling back over itself, going darker and smoother where you press harder. You are not drawing the leaf. You are letting the hand work the feeling the way a hand worked the leaf, and letting the tea keep you company while you do.

As you follow it, consider the smoothness that pressure makes. The easy, even tone under your hand was not there before you leaned in; it is roundness earned, not the softness of never having been touched. Some ease in a person is the same — worked in, firmly, by a heat and a hand that knew what they were doing.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What ease in you was not always there — what pressure, or hand, pressed it into being?
- Where do you mistake having been worked for having been damaged?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Silver Needle (Bái Háo Yínzhēn) *The leaf almost left alone.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Consider the leaf that was almost left alone. White tea is the least handled of the true teas — young buds simply withered in the air and dried, barely oxidised, hardly touched by hand or heat at all. The fine down still silvers each bud. And because so little was done to it, the cup it makes is faint, soft, hay-sweet — easy to miss entirely if you arrive at it in a hurry.

Steep it long and cool, and give it your patience. Then take up the pencil and let it barely touch the page — the lightest possible line, graphite lifting almost off the paper, so faint you have to slow down to see it at all. Do not bear down. Let the mark be as quiet as the cup, following the feeling with the smallest pressure your hand can make, staying with it, unhurried, not asking it to declare itself. This is not a faint version of a real mark; the faintness is the mark. Keep the pencil just grazing the page, and let the tea keep you company in the quiet.

As you follow it, notice what it asks of you to meet something this faint — how a whisper needs more attention than a shout, not less. The leaf that was left nearly whole offers almost nothing, and gives itself only to the one who slows enough to receive it. Some feelings, and some people, are tasted only by those willing to be quiet first.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What in your life is faint enough that you only meet it when you slow all the way down — and when did you last give it that?
- Who, or what, asks for more attention precisely because it does not demand any?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

Tieguanyin (light oolong) *The leaf caught in the middle, and fragrant there.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Imagine the leaf caught in the middle. Oolong is neither green nor black but the whole country between them — oxidation begun and then halted partway, deliberately, before it could finish. This one was stopped early, near the green end, and held there. What it kept by not resolving is a fragrance: orchid, cream, something floral that neither a green leaf nor a black one can make. The in-between is not a failure to arrive. It is where the flower lives.

Brew it in several short steepings from the same leaves, and watch the cup change with each. Then take up the pencil and begin to follow the feeling — but here is the discipline: do not finish the line. Let it stay partway. The moment a mark begins to resolve into a picture, into something you could name and complete, ease off and leave it unfinished, half-become. Come back to it the way you'd come back for a second and third steeping — adding another pass, never closing it. Graphite is generous with this; nothing is committed, everything stays open to revision. Keep the pencil on the page, keep the line a line, and let it remain in the middle of becoming.

As you follow it, consider the states you treat as unfinished — partway, not yet arrived, still deciding — as though they were only waiting to be resolved. The half-made line offers another reading: that some qualities exist only in the middle of a change, and vanish the moment it completes. You do not have to resolve in order to be fragrant.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What are you in the middle of that you are treating as unfinished — and what might exist only while it is still becoming?
- Where are you rushing to resolve something that is more itself unresolved?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Darjeeling second flush *The leaf made by its ground.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Turn your attention to the leaf made by its ground. This is the same kind as January — a black tea — and yet a wholly different world, because of where it grew: the thin cool air of the Himalayan foothills, the mist, the altitude that slows the plant and concentrates it. That place is in the leaf and cannot be lifted out. Drinkers call the taste muscatel, like a grape; really it is the taste of a particular weather, a particular slope.

Brew it and look for the note that isn't in an everyday black — the brightness that is really an elevation, a fog. Then take up the pencil and drag it lightly across the page, letting the paper's own grain come up through the graphite — the tooth of the sheet breaking the line into the texture of what it was laid on. Follow the feeling this way, on the flat of the lead, so the ground beneath the mark shows in the mark. You did not put that texture there; it was already in the paper, the way the mountain was already in the leaf. Keep following, unhurried, the tea beside you, and let where the line was made show up in how it looks.

As you follow it, consider how much of what you taste like is simply where you were formed — the air you slowed in, the ground that fed you — surfacing in you now whether you meant it to or not. The leaf carries its origin as flavour, not as burden. Place is not a limit. It is the whole reason this line, this cup, could have come from nowhere else.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- How much of what you taste like is simply where you were formed — the air you slowed in, the ground that fed you?
- What in you carries a place you can no longer stand in?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Jasmine tea *The leaf that lay beside the flowers, and kept their scent.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Consider the leaf that lay all night beside the flowers. Jasmine tea is made by laying a finished tea beside fresh jasmine blossoms as they open in the dark, so the leaf slowly drinks in their fragrance. Then the spent flowers are lifted away. The blossoms are gone; the scent stays — held inside the leaf, released again only when the hot water finds it. The leaf did not become jasmine. It became a leaf that carries jasmine.

Brew it and notice how the fragrance rises first, ahead of any taste. Then take up the pencil, and this month let the graphite do the thing it always half-wants to do: smudge. Follow the feeling in a line — and then draw the side of your hand across it, or a fingertip, and let it spread, one mark bleeding softly into the space beside it, staying where it wasn't put. Let marks lie next to one another and take on each other's grey. You are not keeping anything clean. You are letting what was near leave its trace on what comes next, the way the flowers left their scent — and letting the tea keep you company while it happens.

As you follow it, consider what remains in you from who you have lain beside. Nearness leaves its scent; people go, and something of them is released again, later, under the right warmth. The smudge is not a mistake to erase. It is how a porous thing holds what it loved. The flowers left. The fragrance — the grey on the side of your hand — is yours now.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- Who have you lain beside whose scent you still carry, released again under the right warmth?
- What in you was left by someone who is gone — and is it a haunting, or something you're glad to hold?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Wuyi rock oolong (yancha) *The leaf held over fire, and its late-returning sweetness.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Bring to mind the leaf held over fire. Wuyi oolong is oxidised further than June's, and then roasted — slowly, over charcoal, sometimes across days — until the flavour deepens into something mineral and dark, what drinkers call rock rhyme. There is a roughness to it at first, an initial bitterness. But wait: on the long finish, after the swallow, the bitterness turns, and comes back as sweetness. The fire did not only harden the leaf. It set up the return.

Rinse the leaves, then steep short and often, and stay for the finish. Then take up the pencil and build the dark slowly, the way the roast built the leaf — not one hard stroke but many, laid over the same place, deepening by return. Follow the feeling into that densest graphite, going back over a line again and again until the page there holds a depth no single mark could reach. Let it be a little rough at first. Keep returning to it. Graphite rewards the return; the deepest black is only ever built, layer on layer, by coming back.

As you follow it, consider what fire makes of a body over time: the depth in that worked-dark patch did not exist before you kept returning to it. And consider the sweetness that comes late — after the roughness, on the long finish, only for those who wait past the first bitterness. Some depth is not spared the fire. It is made by it, and it comes back.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What depth in you did not exist before some fire — and can you name what the heat actually made?
- Is there a sweetness in your life that arrived late, only after you waited past the first bitterness?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

Masala chai *The leaf that is never alone in the pot.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Turn your attention to the leaf that is never alone in the pot. Masala chai does not steep the leaf in quiet water; it boils it hard, with milk, with ginger and cardamom and pepper, with sugar, in a rolling company of others. And there is no single correct blend — every household makes it differently, and each is right. The leaf gives its strength into a crowd and takes on the character of whoever is making it.

Brew it the loud way, everything in the pot at once, until you can no longer find the tea by itself. Then take up the pencil and let the marks crowd — not one careful line following the feeling, but many, overlapping, crossing, none of them the whole of it. Let them build up the way voices build in a full room. Press some dark, let some stay faint; let them run into one another until no single mark is the mark. You are not composing a picture. You are letting the feeling be made of many marks at once, the way the cup is made of many things at once — and letting the tea, a whole pot of it, keep you company.

As you follow it, consider the parts of who you are that only come into being in company — carried, altered, warmed by what you are boiled with. No single line here is the tea, and no single mark is you. Some of who you are is not yours alone. It is what happens in the pot, with others, and it looks different in every house.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- Which parts of who you are only exist in company — carried, altered, warmed by what you're boiled with?
- Where have you mistaken being changed by others for losing yourself?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Matcha *The leaf given completely, and drunk whole.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Consider the leaf given completely. Most tea is steeped and then discarded — the leaf gives a little to the water and is poured away. Not this one. Grown in shade to deepen it, the leaf is stone-ground, slowly, to a fine bright powder, and then whisked into the water and drunk whole. Nothing is left in the pot. Nothing is poured off. You take the entire leaf into the cup, and into yourself.

Whisk it rather than steep it, and give the making your whole attention. Then take up the pencil and give the page the whole of the graphite — not the point alone but the full side of the lead, laid down broad and complete until the tone covers the page the way the powder fills the bowl. Let the graphite come off in dust; rub it into the paper with a finger; hold nothing back in the pencil. Follow the feeling with your whole hand and your whole attention — the few quiet minutes given over entirely to this and nothing else. This preparation, and this mark, asks for all of you.

As you follow it, consider what it is to be wholly given rather than partly spent — to keep nothing back, be taken in completely, met by an attention as complete as the giving. The whole leaf goes into the cup. The whole of the graphite goes onto the page. Some things can only be received by someone willing to be entirely present for them. This asks for the whole of you.

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What would it mean to give yourself to something completely, withholding nothing, keeping nothing back?
- What in your life have you only partly spent when it was asking to be wholly met?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

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Aged pu-erh *The leaf that time has been working on.*

Optional Creative Prompt

Bring to mind the leaf that time has been working on. Pu-erh is not finished when it is made; it is set aside — for years, sometimes decades — and slowly changed by microbes and air and patience, its young harshness mellowing into something earthy, deep and round. It is the most transformed tea of the whole year, and it did most of that changing while no one watched, in the dark, over time it could not hurry.

Rinse it first, then take many short steepers, and let it close the circle of the year. Then take up the pencil one more time — but before you begin, turn back through the journal, through all the months of marks, and find the places where you once pressed hard enough that the ghost of a line is still there in the page beneath: a trace that never fully lifted, however lightly you meant to hold it. Then follow today's feeling over the top of the year, letting this last line join all the others. Everything here was held in pencil, not ink — named lightly, allowed to be wrong, open to revision as the year turned. And still, look: what was there left its trace.

As you follow it, consider what time makes of a body when it is allowed to keep changing — how a young harshness became this depth, not by being protected from the years but by being given to them. Ageing did not diminish the leaf. It is the whole reason the cup is smooth. What has the year done to you, quietly, that you can only taste now — and what has it pressed into you that will not fully lift?

Tasting Notes

As you drink, note what you taste — aroma, body, sweetness, astringency, texture, and how the cup changes from the first sip to the last — in whatever plain words arrive, without reaching for the "right" ones.

Reflection

As you drink, sit with the questions below — not to answer them well, but to notice what rises as you consider them. Write as much or as little as you like, and follow any question that pulls you somewhere unexpected.

- What has time been quietly working on in you, in the dark, that you can only taste now?
- What roughness in you has mellowed into depth — not by being protected from the years, but by being given to them?

When the cup is poured, take up the pencil in one hand or both and let the feeling that's with you move onto the page as breath and rhythm rather than a picture — pressing dark where it asks, thinning where it eases, staying with any mark that feels good for as long as it does — not drawing anything, only keeping company with what's here. Begin in the space below, and carry on across as many pages as you like — take all the room you need.

A large, empty rectangular box with rounded corners, intended for drawing or writing. It occupies the majority of the page below the instruction text.

References

- Florence Cane. *The Artist in Each of Us*. Craftsbury Common, VT: Art Therapy Publications, 1983 (first published 1951).
- Resmaa Menakem. *My Grandmother's Hands: Racialized Trauma and the Pathway to Mending Our Hearts and Bodies*. Central Recovery Press, 2017.
- Resmaa Menakem. *The Quaking of America: An Embodied Guide to Navigating Our Nation's Upheaval and Racial Reckoning*. Central Recovery Press, 2022.
- Daisy Fancourt & Saoirse Finn. What is the evidence on the role of the arts in improving health and well-being? A scoping review. WHO Regional Office for Europe, Health Evidence Network synthesis report 67 (2019).