



Voices



The Cormorant

© Victor Walter

I'm a weaver, and I work in the dilapidated carriage house behind my home in Bookline, about three miles from Jamaica Pond. I spin yarns, weave tales, shape figments out of whole cloth. When I'm not working, I often stand at the window of my studio on the second floor, absorbed in birds at the feeders in my garden below. On a luminous day in October, late in the afternoon, an impulse reeled me away from my desk to walk around Jamaica Pond. My wife was in San Francisco, visiting the children. I put on a red jacket and a dark-blue Greek fisherman's cap, taking the binoculars. Last month at the Arnold Arboretum three crows had chased a red-tailed hawk right over my head, and I regretted having to watch them with the naked eye. As I tramped around the pond, I was hoping to see a falcon.

Two willow trees grow on the tiny island. One in the center stands up straight, as a willow should. The other, at the edge, strained by the wind, leans way over, its long trunk growing parallel to the water. From the tip of the trunk, an elbow drops almost to the water line. After heavy rains, when water rises to the elbow, I think



the tree must feel some relief because it can lean on the surface of the pond.

At first, as I stood at the edge of the pond, I didn't know what kind of bird it was, flapping in the crook of the elbow. The wet breast and lifted wings flashed in the setting sun. Like the legendary firehawk, I thought. Or, as the poet says, a hovering angel girl with golden wings.

Then through the binoculars I saw a long-necked waterfowl larger than a duck but smaller than a goose. I sensed distress and noticed on the breast, at the edge of the left wing, a dangling ball, bright yellow. Joggers made their rounds on the path behind me, oblivious to the bird.

The closest I could get to the island was a narrow strip of beach near Position Number 5 of the fitness course. The sign says, "Heart check. Jumping jacks."

The bird flapped its wings and gnawed at its breast. The yellow thing that looked like a ball was a plastic bobber. I guessed that the bird had snagged a hook, and that the yellow float hung from a piece of fishing

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The Pink Wizard

© Rebecca Laskowski (age 12)

Once there was a pink wizard who loved the color pink. He lived in a pink condo and wore pink clothing. He also had a pet owl that he had turned to the color pink with his wand. Ever since that day, the owl was trying to get revenge. This is where our story starts.

One day late in autumn, the pink wizard was sitting in his pink armchair with his pink remote control, watching his pink TV while eating pink cookies with pink lemonade. (This guy really loved pink!) His owl was sitting outside the window, looking mean. Then, while the wizard was absorbed in a commercial for pink sneakers, the owl sneaked in and grabbed the wizard's bright pink wand. He sneaked up behind the wizard, who at that moment was absorbed in a commercial for pink trousers. The moment the commercial ended, the owl slapped the wand down on the magician's head. He turned into a pink owl with a long, long beard! After the wizard got used to the idea of being an owl, he rented a pink tree and lived as a pink owl for the rest of his life... until he got a pink pet iguana!



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line caught in its wing.

Since it was after 5 and the boathouse was closed, there was no way to get a rowboat. Returning home, I phoned the Massachusetts Audubon Society. The offices were shut, but the operator took my information and gave me numbers to call: the Animal Rescue League, the SPCA, the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the Environmental Police. I called them all, repeated the information, and left my number.

Eventually, the phone rang: Patricia Nolan of the Environmental Police. She had seen the bird and identified it as a cormorant. It was tangled up in fishing line. "That's what I thought," I replied, "but I didn't see the threads." It was still managing to feed itself, she observed, despite the tangle. At least the bird was in a safe place. She wanted to get a rowboat and go out to it, but the boathouse was shut, and she had no boat of her own. "I love my job," she said, "but I don't always have the equipment I need." In the morning she had to be in court, but after that she would go straight to Jamaica Pond. A friend of hers had a canoe, and she would ask him to help. "But I can guess what will happen. They're diving birds, you know, and when I get close it will sink. They never really dry off. That's why you see cormorants perched on tree limbs with open wings. Hanging out to dry."

Underwater the cormorant devours fish, and rumors of gluttony have stained its reputation. Wise men claimed its appetite was as large as the hunger of Time, who swallows everything. I thought of the cormorant in *Paradise Lost*. Milton associates it with evil and with death. First the poet represents the fallen angel as a vulture. Then it becomes a cormorant who sits on the Tree of Life devising Death to them who live. Later it turns into a serpent. It's true both vultures and cormorants have snaky necks, but you can't judge a bird by its neck. Only fish would share Milton's view, because in their experience, cormorants are deadly killers. As far as the rest of creation is concerned, the cormorant is innocent.

Dark angels, gorged and motionless, drying and devising — what do they think

as they stretch their wings? Perhaps they dream.

All night, as the angel gnawed the web around its chest, I dreamed the cormorant. Like Hesse's character, Sinclair, under the influence of Demian, experiencing his dreambird — the soul caught in the tangles of its own threads.

In the dream, I was a weaver in a royal household, measuring the Master of the Cormorants for a tunic. Slate gray, the color of his office. "Cloth a gold at the edges," he suggested, "to brighten it up." A tall, brawny man with a long neck, he had a dark face with large white rings around the eyes and a red nose. A drop of moisture at the tip of his nose resembled the hook at the end of the bill. He looked like his birds. "Come, Textor, I'll take you fishing," he said. On our fists we each carried a double-crested cormorant, like the one on Jamaica Pond. We wore leather face masks to protect us from the beaks. Around the neck of each bird he adjusted a leather strap, which would allow it to hold fish in the gular pouch but prevent it from swallowing the catch. The barge master sailed us out, and we cast the birds over the side. The Master of the Cormorants cracked a whip and shouted, "Get away, ah!" They plunged, nosed around stones on the bottom, and in a moment shot out of the water, flapping back onto the gunwale. We removed red mullets from their throats and threw them off again. I held a long thread fixed to the neckstrap of my cormorant, so I could feel its movements underwater. Suddenly the thread jerked wildly, then went slack. Only one cormorant broke through the surface. We waited in vain. The huge eyes of the Master glared at me, and he screamed, "It's snared. The bird is dying."

I kicked my legs as if I were swimming underwater and woke in a sweat, the blanket tangled around my throat.

The Master of the Cormorants stayed in my mind, and I recalled where I had seen his face. It was an illustration of a giant bird, now extinct, the pallas cormorant, in that unforgettable book, *Voyage of the Rebound*, by Mendax of Narrenposse.

The heir of a Hanseatic fortune, Mendax took over a three-masted bark, the greatest ship of his father's fleet. He chris-

tened the vessel *Rebound*, and fitted it out for long exploratory cruises to follow his true vocation, the collection of dream-birds. He followed the track of famous explorations, collecting dreams left in their wake, retracing the Bering expedition and the voyage of Captain Cook as well as the Russian journeys of Pallas.

While naturalists published descriptions of daytime birds, many species were disappearing from the world of nocturnal imagery. The phoenix was rare, while the firebird, tufted moonleaper, and the goat-sucker were extinct. Not to speak of the Pegasus crane with a horse's head and those nameless birds of the Black Forest with feathers that shine like fires at night. Today, except for *Voyage of the Rebound*, we have no record of them.

That same night, I dreamed I sailed to Greenland in the bark *Rebound* with Mendax of Narrenposse, searching for the banker's cormorant (*Phalacrocorax argentarii*), a fanatical bird that feeds on gold. The Eskimos I met there told me about it. Just as the spotted trygona lives half the year as a cuckoo and the other half as a hawk, the banker's cormorant changes its nature. It turns into a pelican and gives its heart to its young.

First, it pursues *Chen ovumaureum*, the wild goose that lays solid eggs. When the banker's cormorant swallows a golden egg, the egg drops into a special chamber that opens to the heart. As the egg passes through the heart, the banker's cormorant turns into a pelican with a heart of gold. In turn, it lays an egg, and the chick that hatches emerges hungry for gold. The old bird pecks open its own breast, and the greedy chick eats out the heart of the parent bird.

We left Greenland behind, following a southern course. The bark labored through heavy seas in the North Atlantic and headed for New England. Sailing through a great barrier posted with a sign that said "No Barking," we slipped past the Environmental Police and entered Jamaica Pond. I studied the island through a telescope and spied a cormorant perched in the elbow of the leaning willow, a cormorant with a throat sack like a frigate bird's, but yellow instead of red. A bright-yellow throat sack shaped like the bobber of a fishing

line. Mendax looked over my shoulder as I sketched the bird in my notebook. I named it weaver's cormorant. "You've discovered a new species," Mendax said.

The next morning, cormorants stayed on my mind, and after breakfast I hastened out to the pond. Twenty-four rescuers in 10 boats were preparing to cross the water and release the cormorant.

Patricia Nolan and a friend stood by a red canoe. She handed him a silver net. Three of her colleagues in the Environmental Police had selected a rowboat. They were carrying two nets.

There were special police from the Animal Rescue League, technicians from the Massachusetts Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals, and policemen from the Metropolitan District Commission. Two Park Rangers slid their rowboat into the water. Three volunteers from the Massachusetts Audubon Society, holding binoculars as well as nets, launched a fold-boat with an electric motor. Two specialists in ornithological medicine from the Franklin Park Zoo carried black bags. There were agents from the Fish and Wildlife Service. Three students from the Tufts School of Veterinary Medicine launched the final boat. Oars and paddles lifted silver droplets that glittered in the sunlight. O slowly, like a ragged arrow pointing at the island, the armada left the dock.

Looking across the pond, the angel sighed, watching the rescuers approach. When they fanned out around the island, unfurling the nets, it dived, dropping like a stone. They spread out and searched. No use.

When the boats returned to the dock and the last rescuer departed, the cormorant swam back and forth under the elbow, then flapped onto its perch in the willow tree.

Jaime Martinez was on vacation and had fished all week. He was a short man, about 50, with a bushy black mustache. A paunch expanded his gray sweatshirt, and on his half-bald head he wore a canvas hat, which displayed his fishing license. Cynthia, who runs the boathouse and coffee shop, accepted his deposit and asked, "Which boat, Jaime?"

"The usual," he replied. "Number 9. I'm going after that bird."

Slowly, he rowed around the island, keeping his back to the leaning willow. He assembled his rod and opened the bait box. Through the binoculars I thought I saw him talking to the bird, and I imagined the conversation. As the boat drifted back toward the tree, Jaime slowly turned his head and whistled softly. "I see. The hook is in the web of the foot." He rummaged in the bait box for a pair of pliers. The cormorant shook its head and extended one wing, pecking at the fishing line wrapped around its neck.

"Bird, you crazy. You can't bite through nylon line." Then he coaxed in a soothing voice, speaking in Spanish. "Permit me to introduce myself. Jaime Martinez. A fisherman, like you. I live in Jamaica Plain. We have lots in common. I bet you got plenty of fish stories."

The bird flapped, watching the boat drift toward its perch. "You spread your wings like a peacock spreads his tail. Where I come from, my Aunt Berta has a peacock named Coco. Very friendly peacock, but crazy because he wants to fish. You remind me of Coco because you crazy, too. It's getting hot. I'm going to take off my jacket."

His back to the willow, Jaime stood up in the boat to remove his windbreaker. Instead of diving, the cormorant turned its tail to Jaime and hopped down the tree toward the island, impeded by the line tangled in its wing, stumbling as the fishhook pulled its foot. Jaime whirled, handling his jacket as a bullfighter holds a cape, and hurled himself on the bird, wrapping the cloth around its head to protect himself from the beak. The cormorant screamed, thrust out its wings, kicked, and stabbed the cloth with its bill. Jaime fell on his back into the boat, losing his hat over the side, but clutching the struggling bird to his chest. He wrestled with the cormorant.

As the sun passed behind a cloud, then came out again, Jaime strove with the cormorant. The angel thought, "Let me go, and I'll bless you." Jaime sat up in the bottom of the rowboat and extricated the bird's feet from the folds of the jacket. He reached into the box for the pliers. Holding the quivering bird against his body, he

spread the web of the foot, snapped the hook in two, drew it out, and grabbed the nylon line and yellow bobber. As he relaxed his arms, the bird flopped into the water. "Bless you, Jaime," the cormorant thought. "You let me go."

Jaime rowed back to the dock. He told Cynthia, "It soiled my jacket, and my hat's soaked, but the bird's OK. The foot will heal."

A few days later I returned and walked around the pond alone. When I stood on the little beach at Position Number 5, heart check, I saw a bird drying its wings in the elbow of the leaning willow, gazing into the water and devising death to fish. No sign of a yellow bobber. No threads that I could see. Reaching across Jamaica Pond, the italics woven on my loom ravel out of some deep invisible net that binds me to Jaime Martinez.



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The sunbeams stream forward, dawn boys, with shimmering shoes of yellow.

— Mescalero Apache Song

With all of mankind, towards the light
I shall raise the children
High, high, laughing for joy to the sun.

— Yang Lian

Lancelot's Lament

© Ric Giardina



I lie here on my back.
The soft, long blades of green grass
on the slightly inclined hill
caress my neck,
support my soul.
The sun has gone,
and I know not the hour.

The stars would draw me
through the branches of the trees
that arch above me
into an infinitude
and the mercy of oblivion,
But the scent of crushed sweet summer grass
and that of my own body
hold me to the earth
and to the pain.
It holds me to the memory of joy
that was
and is no more.
To her.
To him.
To all that was
and will not be again.

The fire crackles below me at my feet.
Fountains of flowing sparks rise up to join the stars
And disappear in magic that draws envy from my heart.
How could I, too, evaporate myself in such an instant?
No memory.
No past.
No pain.

Become like one of these small bits of glowing fire,
an ember dying to a cinder
too small to notice
against a vacant sky of black and pale pearl stars?

But here it is again, that past.
My past,
as fully now alive as when it breathed and lived.
I have brought it here
just as it's carried me through every day
since it and I were fresh and young.
As I will bring it to tomorrow,
and the next day
and the next
until forever.

In nearly thirty years, I've grown an old man
filled with strength,
and now regret,
and somehow, too, contrition
at the life that once was mine and cherished,
now still mine although I would get free.

The breeze stirs leaves in this small hollow
bringing me again back to this moment.
The sound is hushed as whisperings
carried on the wind from eons past,
that follow me like smoke from fires left unquenched
to fill my eyes and ears and gray my heart.

I close my eyes and listen to this song,
alert to anything that I might learn
to lift me from this plane of sadness.

There is nothing.
Only wind
and leaves
and stars
and pain.

Just that.

The horse stirs.
Is this the wind or something else?
What matter?
If danger came to take me, I would I could go willingly,
Not defending, an eager initiate into death and an ending.
But I will not.
For that is not my temperament –
my skill and nature such that I prevail in any contest.

Talent once used for him.
For her.
The dream.
But now it only serves to keep me
captive to my life
and prisoner to my memories.

The horse stirs once again.
There is someone or something there.
Slowly, rising to my feet and keeping low,
I grasp the sword that lies asleep beside me.
When drawn, the blade reflects what little dying light the fire still gives off.
I leave the clearing from the side opposed to that from which the sounds are heard
and hope to die
and leave behind
the memories of Camelot
and Arthur
and his queen.

Excerpts from

The Dragon of Foo Foo Forest

© Ross H. Spencer

By and large, Apathians were a contented people, this enviable state of mind welling not so much from the realization that they were *happy* as from the certain knowledge that they were not *unhappy*. There existed throughout that cozy realm a serenity, a warmth, a drowsy and idyllic sense of well-being, serving to lull Apathians into the euphoria of babes rocked in fireside cradles.

There was, however, a single sobering factor. Across the vast expanses of the Plains Without End there would sweep an occasional chill wind from the north, a gray, low-moaning wind filled with a thousand sadnesses, weaving dust into curious wraith-like patterns and clawing hungrily at the Apathian flag aflutter from the tallest tower of the castle.

As if in dark prophecy.



They are gone now, of course, all of them — all but Oxford, that is. Dragons live to be very old, and Oxford has been no exception to the rule. These days he sleeps a great deal and no longer does he uproot acres of foo foo trees, yet he is almost happy.

But they say that in Oktober, when the harvest is over, when the maples are orange and the foo foo trees burgundy, when a lavender haze hangs over the red-roofed white cottages of Apathia and old memories walk once more through sun-splashed forest glades, the old dragon lies with fading soft-brown eyes focused on the opening to his clearing.

They say that he waits for a tousle-headed youngster to dash into the sunlight, the boy who loved him much and taught him well, the boy with whom he shared the greatest moment in the history of the most pleasant little kingdom of all.

They say that Oxford waits and waits.

In Oktober.

And who would deny that on some bright blue Oktober morning the boy will come again? Who would deny that there will be joyful reunion heralded by flying foo foo trees and sky-splitting pillars of flame?

Who would deny that dreams come true — even the dreams of an ancient, toothless dragon?

Who, indeed?



Neil: A Fantasy

© Ed Jacobson

“Don't worry, Bro, we have plenty of time before your flight. We're ten minutes from JFK, you'll be sitting around waiting for your plane for more than a half hour. I'll have you there in a Flash, Gordon.”

“I know,” I said ruefully. “I'm looking at my watch because I hate to leave, I've had such a good time. I'm not worried. I'm sad.”

Without shifting his gaze from the highway, Neil smiled. No, actually, he beamed. “I'm glad you enjoyed yourself, I did, too. It's probably our best time together, ever. Except maybe when we saw Count Basie and Joe Williams at Carnegie Hall. Do you remember that?”

“Do I?” I blurted out, “I can remember Joe standing up tall and belting out the opening lines of ‘Going To Chicago,’ and the brass coming in behind him with that slashing sound of theirs. Tenth row orchestra, and I was ten years old. Ten and ten, I'll never forget it. That's 45 years ago, and you still remember, too. How about that!”

He laughed his gentle, signature laugh that pops out when my brother Neil is genuinely comfortable. Comfortable in the situation in which he finds himself, comfortable with whom he's with, comfortable in his own body, comfortable in...

well, comfortable in his life. “Of course I remember — maybe almost as vividly as you do. But then, I'm older, I'm losing more brain cells than you. Oh, well, what are you gonna do?”

“Well, you know,” I said, “I actually thought about it last night at the Vanguard, when we were listening to the Phil Woods band. As great as they are, I couldn't help but think back on Basie and Joe. What a combo. What an era. You know?”

We both fell silent, faces forward. Neil watched the road, thinking or feeling or going wherever he was heading inside, while we were heading towards the United terminal looming ahead. He was right about the traffic; at 2:45 on a clear, bright Wednesday afternoon, even New York traffic moves quickly. The drivers behind us seemed to restrain themselves from giving us the finger for causing them to expend the five seconds of effort required to come around us.

Neil surely must have been feeling comfortable. I always remember him driving like a madman, driving like he was... well, driven. Today, the first day I've ridden with him in maybe 15 years, he's laid back enough to piss off other drivers. You don't know what a reversal that is, with my brother becoming the cause of other people's anger. Proof positive that miracles can happen.

And where was I, at that moment? My eyes were looking out the windshield, but my mind's eye was gazing backward and I was seeing how far Neil had come in seven years. I was thinking about the immensity of his miracle, and feeling grateful that he has himself back. Or rather, that he has himself for the very first time in his 61 years. And that we truly now have each other for the first time - and not a decade too soon, either! At 61 and 55, who knows how much time we have in front of us? Hell, at seven and 13, who knows, right?

I grew pensive, as the time grew short. Seven years. Just think of all that had transpired in his life, to bring him — and me, for

that matter — to the point where we would both look forward to my spending a week with him in Brooklyn.

The seven-year era had opened with his second bypass operation. Imagine going through quintuple bypass at New York Hospital all alone, with just a written prayer from me, having a paranoid break during recovery, lucking into a consult by a psychiatric resident with whom he hit it off and who seemed to understand him and, more to the point, could communicate that understanding in a way that Neil could grasp. And having the shrink, as Neil now refers to him, stay on at the hospital, and follow Neil for both meds and counseling.

Dr. Lefferts seems to have miraculously found a combination of medications that actually place a floor beneath Neil's depressed mood, give him the energy to mobilize, and cut into his paralyzing obsessiveness and negativity! As if that weren't enough, he has created a supportive treatment relationship in which Neil can air his disappointments and his failed hopes and his despair, and recognize that no, he wasn't going to be John Coltrane or Liam Neesen or Jonathan Demme, or even Jackie Mason. Unlike his previous 54 years and unlike in his countless previous psychotherapies, he was able to look his psychiatrist, his past life, and

himself in the eye and conclude, “Okay, that's all very sad. Now, what can I build for myself, with what's left to me?” And work hard, really hard, with this therapist, to build a life for himself. Almost shoulder to shoulder with Lefferts, who seems to have treated him with respect and caring and, maybe more than anything else, served both as a coach in helping devise a game plan and a cheerleader who has authentically celebrated his succession of small steps, those tiny victories that, taken together, build a life.

I thought about the details of that modest but fulfilling life. Time was growing short, at least in terms of this visit. There would be more such times, I knew. But I wanted very much to say something, as a proud brother and, I suppose, as a cheerleader, and as a friend looking forward to a more satisfying bond with him.

“Neil, I just want to say something before we pull up to the terminal, and you leave for work right away. I know we both had a great time this week, and I've already thanked you. But I haven't really said how pleased I am that things are going so well for you these days. And how proud I am that you've done it. I wish I could've played more of a role, done more to help. Sometime, I want to talk with you about those seven years. I want to get your take on what your turnaround is all about, about how you did it. I want to understand the miracle. And I want to continue to celebrate it with you.”

He beamed again, this time incandescent. And there we were, two guys in a car that had just pulled up and parked in front of the United terminal at JFK, with dozens of people scurrying around, and with the din of their noise and the pulsing of their urgency in the air. Two guys, standing behind the open trunk of the car. Two guys, smiling through their tears, hugging each other good-bye. And hello.



DHARMA BUMS DON'T CRY

© Hal Zina Bennett

You gotta understand man like it was the sixties and this chick Ann needed a place to crash, a legendary lady already immortalized in a book by Jack and this cat Jack named Dean — who had another name in real life, him more legendary even than her.

Jack knew one side of her, me another. Dean neither. She was a spectacular comet blazing across the sky. Dharma Bum, beautiful in her own way. In her own way most of the time.

Sharing Mountain Red from a gallon jug, lounging in worn out butterfly chairs at my storefront pad up in Diamond Heights, she bled sad stories about Dean stealing off with her to the brand new world out there, believing every promise — ‘cause in our twenties we all believed. At twenty people will believe anything.

“My fondest dream,” she said, assuring me she had few left, “is to see my daughter, hold her in my arms. She's eight now, so beautiful, so sweet and innocent. My ex has a restraining order against me though. Last time I saw her was at her school yard — watched her playing with her friends at noon and glad she didn't see me through the chain link fence ‘cause later I noticed my fingers were bleeding and bruised from clinging to the wire too hard. Busted, too, they busted me. Spent that night and two more in jail. Dean bailed me out. That was sweet of him, don't you think? Really, wasn't it?”

I thought about this, told her that maybe we could pose as a respectable couple and visit together... this time maybe the principal wouldn't report her to the cops — fuzz — if she looked middleclass and married. She said, “I'll think about it.” I don't know if she did or not. She never mentioned it again.

Three, maybe four weeks passed. She had money again from stripping and dancing at gay parties, no sex, she said, just skin and tease. I said I didn't understand, and she said, “Doesn't really matter.”

Meanwhile, I was driving bus nights for Grayline, shuttling tourists around North Beach — Finnochio's, Bimbo's 365 Club, down sometimes to Fisherman's Wharf for fresh crab. Bleary-eyed at midnight or one, I'd straggle home for sleep, caught some before Ann at four AM slunk in soft-footed as a cat, horny as a two-peckered goat, whispered “wake up,” apologized that getting naked in a room full of guys, even gay, turned her on.

Somnolent, more anxious for sleep than yearning for sex, we made what passed for love

even as she made poetry about surfing gentle waves on a long board in Maui... Hawaii on her mind more than me, and that was okay, really, moaning and humping, digging fingers into my chest until we came.

(We slept sometimes in one-another's arms, children afraid of morning and light.)

Then one day Dean arrived... at 6 AM unexpected, unannounced, up for days, toothache so bad he could barely talk but talking non-stop anyway about Koolaid acid tests, throwing hammer and talking shit like he always did, while Ann tossed frilly things into pink Samsonite suitcases she said her folks gave her in 1951 for graduating high school. Somehow everything was fitting for this holy hippy stripper, more poet than I'd be some day. Maybe.

Dean swallowed the last of my Bufferin, about a dozen pills or more, washed down with brandy he'd found in my cupboard above the refrigerator with the big round condenser on top, which he said looked like a UFO perched on a fat white box, while Ann and I ate our last breakfast together, puffed wheat shot from guns, Nescafe lattes, silent, just once touching hands, saying, “Bye, it's been... well, a trip.”

They drove off into the San Francisco sunrise in a 1954 Chevy Ann had borrowed from my friend Jed Bounty up in Garberville. Dean was crazy for cars, especially Chevies, especially other peoples' Chevies.

I didn't give them a second thought until late that summer when Jed called, said would I pick up his car impounded at Triple A Towing out near Hunters Point. I found it on the back lot looking forsaken, betrayed, tires ragged and flat all around, fifty seven bullet holes — count ‘em — down the side shattered glass sparkling in the sun, scattered like diamonds on the seats, nothing salvageable. Iron for the crusher.

A year passed... I don't know, maybe more, and I ran into Ann at City Lights, down in the cellar reading poems from chap books in that dusky dark... bought her lunch in China Town. “I sort of remember you,” she said, adding, “Dean's dead. Stroke or something. They found him beside the railroad tracks outside Reno or Flagstaff or Lodi or somewhere like that. Not sure.”

She cried a little, was so sorry, she said, ‘cause they'd had a big fight over nothing and never said goodbye, and never made up. “We always made up,” she said.

Then as an afterthought, she asked, “Did you





Spirits of Enchantment

© Sonja Britton

Ancient ghosts haunt these canyons
While ships of space fly overhead,
And cities grow to house the millions
Upon the graves where lie the dead.

Valleys stretching to infinity
Divide haunted mesa dwellings,
And if we listen carefully
We'll hear voices so compelling.

Spirits of rock and adobe walls
Live in the dust that's lying,
And on and on their history calls
From in the wind that's flying.

Past centuries they've rested here,
Their voices calling in the wind,
And if we listen close we'll hear
Enchanting messages they send.

Projected from the mountains' peak
Over deserts to rivers grand,
Their voices luring us to seek
The magic of this land.

"A human being is a part of the whole, called by us 'Universe,' a part limited in time and space. He experiences himself, his thoughts and feelings as something separated from the rest — a kind of optical delusion of his consciousness. This delusion is a kind of prison for us, restricting us to our personal desires and to affection for a few persons nearest to us. Our task must be to free ourselves from this prison by widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty. Nobody is able to achieve this completely, but the striving for such achievement is in itself a part of the liberation and a foundation for inner security."

— Albert Einstein

The Wood Fairy

© Lee Prosser



When I was a young child, I used to take walks with my Uncle Willard. He had a sense of good magic about him always, and it rubbed off on me every time we were together. Uncle Willard was always able to explain things in a pleasant manner, understandable to both child and adult. He had a slow, easy way of speaking, and some thought he was from the south and others thought he was from the desert areas, but in reality, he was born and reared in the state of Missouri. He was a kind, gentle man.

One time, when nature was coming to life and there was the music of the spheres in the air, and the wind was a gentle breeze of quick kisses on the body, we went for a walk on my Grandmother's property. Then, there was much brush, trees, meandering pathways, hidden wild rose overhangs that concealed the woods creatures, and a creek whose water was clear and contained minnows and crawdaddies. Coming alongside the bank of the creek, I saw a bright splash of light on a tree limb.

I turned, curious, asking: "Uncle Willard, what is that?"

Uncle Willard gave me a slow smile, following my pointing finger. Already he was prematurely silver-haired. Around five-foot-four inches, he was a lean, wiry man who enjoyed the outdoors with a passion. "That, Lee," he said softly, "is a Wood Fairy. If you don't startle it, the Wood Fairy may come down and visit you!"

I was very quiet. I watched.

The Wood Fairy looked like a tiny girl figure, in white with wings. She watched me as I watched her. Then there was this little friendly whisper of a laugh, and she flew over my head, circled several times, touched and kissed my nose, and vanished into the woods. I looked back over my shoulder at my Uncle Willard who had settled down on the ground against a fallen log. He nodded no, and I took that to mean I was not to pursue the Wood Fairy. I came beside him, and he explained the nature of Fairies and their place in the human landscape — they are here to give humans a glimpse of the unknown and remind humans that there is more to life than simply existing, that there is good magic out there wherever you go, and all you have to do is open your eyes and let it kiss you on the nose with its friendliness and trust. A fairy kiss is a sign of trust and acceptance to a human! From that point on, I always knew there would be good fairies in my life!

Although I didn't see the Wood Fairy again, I came to understand their presence. I know even now when they are around me, for it is like walking into an invisible cobweb on a clear day in an open field with nothing in sight! When that happens, I enjoy their affection, and the sweet fairy kisses, and I remember fondly that time long ago with Uncle Willard, me, and the Wood Fairy, and I smile. Good magic is everywhere if only we will trust, open up our hearts and minds to it, and follow our intuition.

— from *Sweetwater Creek Remembrances* by Lee Prosser

Mask Construction

© Linda Voyles

One summer evening when I was about 12 or 13 years old, we were getting ready to go to an evening church service. Our family's entire social life was wrapped into the walls of the Lutheran Church Missouri Synod, on the corner of St. John's Avenue and 24th Street West. My four brothers and I were spread out in age over 16 years, with my place second to the youngest. The older two boys had recognized the stained glass prison bars around the family. They got married and were released. So my two remaining brothers and I, still unaware of any other options, were obediently preparing to attend yet another church service.

One redeeming attraction the church had for me at that time was the ever-present possibility that there might be some cute boy there who had also been forced to attend. With that in mind, I spent considerable time choosing a dress, ironing it, and grooming my hair. I came up with the idea that I might wear my hair *up* — in what they called a *French Roll!* I had no idea how to create this roll with my hair, so with a sandwich bag full of bobby pins and hair pins, I worked with my brush, my comb, and an extra mirror (to see the back) until my arms ached and my hands kept falling asleep.

Finally, I had an acceptable roll (though not a perfect one, I reminded myself), so I hairsprayed it enough to keep a dam from breaking and hurried out to the car to be off to church. As we paused in the back of the sanctuary, my eyes gradually adjusted to the dimness. Sure enough, there was Tony Kessler waiting in the back row with his parents and his little sister Annie. Dad went off to the choir room while Mom and the boys and I marched up near the front to find a seat near the pulpit. (I remember there being some sort of extra credit we would get from God if we sat near the front, so we could attentively hear and see every blessing and every ball of fire and raging brimstone being catapulted out toward us sinners.)

We got settled into our pew (my little brother Russ and I used to have such a time keeping our inaudible laughter from shaking the whole wooden bench whenever we heard that word: *pew*). We began the ritual of carefully marking our hymnals with the little satin ribbons or with inserts from the church bulletin. Then we dutifully located the Bible pages where lessons would be read, followed by folding our hands in our laps and respectfully waiting for the service to begin.

With nothing else to do, I began worrying about what Tony thought of my sophisticated new hairdo... I wondered if he'd even noticed... or if maybe he didn't recognize me because I looked so much older! I reached back to check the roll to see how it was doing, sliding my fingers along the edge to see if the pins were tucked in and if any of the hairs around the nape of my neck were springing out of the plastered masterpiece. So far so good, but as I had seen from experience with other women's

French Rolls, I knew it could get messed up or uneven or the pins could work their way out so people could see then, without them even *knowing!* That would be *so* embarrassing!

I sat back and enjoyed how well I must look, listening contently to the prelude. I spent the hour doing the usual standing and sitting, page turning and singing, and maintained my vigilance of the French Roll, checking it with my hand every now and then to keep track of its progress. Hoping, hoping, hoping that it looked good from where Tony was sitting.

Finally, the service ended. As the usher began dismissing us, one pew at a time (always from the front first), a woman sitting behind me (Mrs. Colter — she had been my Sunday school teacher when I was young) leaned over, tapped me on the shoulder, and said, "Your hair looks so pretty like that! Did you fix it yourself? I've been admiring it!"

Well. That's exactly what I needed to hear since our row was about to be dismissed, and I was about to turn around and walk down the aisle, facing Tony all the way out of the church! My heart soared with sophisticated confidence, and I noticed my mother leaning toward me in front of my brother. I guess I really hoped she had a compliment for me *too*, since I wasn't sure yet whether she'd even had a chance to

notice my hair.

But rather, I was stunned as I heard her say, "Listen young lady, you stop playing with your hair and thinking how hotsy-totsy you are! You have gotten nothing out of this service, and I'm ashamed of you! You won't be wearing your hair like that again. I hope you'll learn your lesson!"

I don't remember leaving church that night or whether Tony was even there. I just made sure I asked God's forgiveness for being so proud in His House. I told Him I would really try hard next time to get more out of the service, and that I certainly wouldn't ever wear a hotsy-totsy hairdo again...

Another layer of plaster goes on the holy mask.



"For a conscious person, to exist is to change, to change is to mature, to mature is to go on creating oneself endlessly."

— Henri Bergson

"Following your feelings will lead you to their source. Only through emotions can you encounter the force field of your own soul."

— Gary Zukav,
The Seat of the Soul

Cappuccino with Mr. X

© Andrew Kloak

The dark one walked up the steps to a two-story Antebellum home on a street lined with statues of Rebel heroes of the War Between the States. As he reached the white porch, he straightened his crooked tie and double-checked the Richmond address scrawled in red on the back of an envelope: 1734 West Monument Avenue. After taking one last inhale on his Camel cigarette, he flicked it into a mulberry bush over the wrought iron railing.

A Magnolia tree was flowering in the early June heat. He reached for the best looking blossom on the tree and when he touched it, the petals withered in his hand. A cursed laugh came from him. Turning his attention to the white front door, he pushed a button, and a bell rang inside. He saw the white marble lined parlor through the sidelight glass panels. He could see a watercolor painting of a blue uniformed U. S. Grant shaking the hand of a gray uniformed R. E. Lee inside over a table at Appomattox Courthouse to end the Civil War. Underneath, it was titled "Peace In Union." As he waited, he nervously stroked a black goatee growth on his chin. The dark one was a medium sized white man with an icy look on his reddish cheeks. Although he had a professional haircut in the Senate barber shop every other Tuesday, his hair still looked chaotic with black curls flowing in every direction. The head of his lobbying team for the defense contractor he worked for could not make it. His company, Allied Chemicals, produced nuclear and other chemical weapons. He was asked to take his boss's place and to drive down from D.C. on a Friday afternoon to make the acquaintance of a Mr. X over coffee. Mr. X was said to hold influence over several key Senators on the hill. "I hate doing other people's work, especially in Virginia. This better be worth it," was the mantra running through the walls of his mind.

After a few moments, a graying black man dressed in a black-and-white tuxedo answered the door.

"Can I help you?" said the butler in a British accent.

"I have a meeting here with a... Mr. X"

"And your name is...?"

"Lucifer Thomas."

"Yes, come right on in Mr. Thomas."

The butler shut the door slowly. The inside temperature was cool from a combination of blowing air conditioners and ceiling fans chopping away above him.

"I have a question for you. Who is it that I am meeting today?"

"You will find out very shortly. Come this way." The two walked from the parlor down a long hallway to a bright red door.

The butler opened the red door and led his guest in. "Mr. X will meet you in a few moments. Take a seat right here," he said, motioning to a cushioned brown chair with his hand.

He sat down and looked over the whole room. There were books everywhere. The chair he was in faced a huge bay window that looked out onto a shaded red brick patio surrounded by a high wall. The butler came back in.

"Would you like something to drink in this warm weather? Perhaps a sweet tea with ice?"

"No, I like things hot. I would like a cappuccino. You know how to make that?"

"Yes," he said flatly.

Within minutes, a frothy cappuccino was placed on the middle coffee table in front of him. On the other side of the coffee table was an identical seat for his mysterious contact. Lucifer was now more anxious than ever.

Just as the butler went out, a blond haired man in a white suit stepped in, holding a cup of steaming coffee in his hand. Lucifer knew right then this was a trap. This was the Almighty One. He stood up and bolted for the window to get out. An iron gate went down over the bay window looking out onto the patio. Lucifer's hope of smashing his way out was dashed. The door locked behind God with his magnificent blue eyes. The other door on the far wall locked, as well.

"It has been a long time," said God, who went by the name Dr. Rex Hunt.

"Let me out of here. I have nothing to say to you," Lucifer said with agitation.

"You are not going anywhere until we talk."

"What do you want with me?" said Satan.

"I just think it's time stop fighting this subterranean warfare. Can we work things out in the light of day?"

"We will never work things out. How did you find me?" said Satan.

"You are not the only one with cunning. I hired a private detective. She ran a FBI search and tracked you down up in Washington. Little did I know we were so close. Choosing the last name Thomas goes perfect with your doubting nature, Lucifer."

"What do you do on earth?"

"Teach history at Virginia Commonwealth University. This house is close to work."

"A professor of history. You must teach the history of God. Is that what you teach?" said the cackling devil.

"I teach world history and American history," said God, who also found great delight in this situation. He had the devil incarnate in his reading room. His plan to trap him for a meeting over coffee was successful. God wanted to change his policy of keeping the devil distant from him. He read in one of



books about the Mafia way of running an organization, which is to keep your friends close and your enemies even closer.

“My plan is working perfectly. I know you would never meet me outside earth so I came here to meet you.” said God.

“God, a college teacher is all wrong for you. You should have come back as a door-to-door Bible salesman. Not only that, you would pick Richmond to live in. This is the city of lost causes, but then your whole campaign on earth has been a lost cause. Nick, nick, nick.” said Lucifer. It was the strangest laugh God ever heard.

“Is that so, Luce. How is it a lost cause?” said God with a curious look on his bearded face.

“Richmond is the capitol of the old Confederacy and home to some of the biggest tobacco companies on the planet.”

“Since when have you cared about this planet, but answer this... How is what I am doing a lost cause?” said God.

“Many people don't believe in you anymore. If anything, I am starting to win out. The evil one will succeed in the end,” said Satan with his laugh.

“First of all, logic can overlook but not eliminate that I exist. Secondly, how can you succeed? I created you,” said God.

“I don't want to talk theology with you,” said Satan, knowing God did, in fact, create him. When God created his original angels, he had their names end with an L. There was Michael, Gabriel, Emmanuel, and Rachael. God had a star angel with the only name that was different than the rest. Lucifer. It began with an L. After creating the world, he asked Lucifer and the other angels to go down and bow to his newest creations, Adam and Eve. The first time Lucifer went down he could not bring himself to do it. God summoned him back to Heaven when he found out he did not do it.

“Why won't you do it?” said God.

“God, I cannot worship or serve anything less than perfect. You are the only one I will bow down to,” said Lucifer.

“Go back down there and do it,” said God, feeling anger rising in his voice.

Lucifer went back to earth and began to feel his own anger rising up. He would not bow to anything less than God. God summoned him a second time.

“Why won't you do it?”

“I can't do that, God.”

“Go back there and do it. I don't want to see you back here again,” God said with twice as much anger in his voice. Lucifer went down to earth feeling more anger in himself than ever. He refused to bow to Adam or Eve.

God summoned him a third time. “Lucifer, why won't you obey? I command you to do it.” said God, who was enraged.

“I will not do it. Damn you. You are wrong and are leading me in error,” said Satan as his voice exploded with anger.

“If you will not obey me, then you must leave,” said God.

“Fine, then I will leave,” he said, feeling hurt he was not needed. When he did not leave very quickly, God said “Depart.”

The other angels threw him out with haste. Thunder and lightning came from the sky.

Lucifer broke with God and left the heavenly court. He became the fallen star. The dark son of God. God is the totality of all things so if he is in the light, he is also in the darkness. Satan became God's silent dancer.

The dark one finally sat down, feeling there was no way out of this room. He and God sat face to face drinking their coffee. Satan looked tense the way his hands gripped the chair. God looked relaxed with his legs crossed, sipping his coffee.

“God, if it is true that you are in everything already, why would you come down in the form of a man?” said Satan with a sarcastic tone

“I spend so much time reacting, creating and responding that I never have time to consciously reflect. I like becoming specific,” said God. He didn't want to reveal too much about himself to the world right now during this test run. This time on earth as a human was to formulate a plan for his next incarnation sometime after the millennium. He was working out the details but he would never tell Satan his conclusions.

“God, you will never change,” said the devil.

“Wouldn't I become bored if I never changed? I have changed a great deal. I am the unity of all things and their opposites so I do change and I don't change. Lucifer, you have come a long way from the era of many desert demons. The Hellenists and the pagans believed in many of me, too. I started to win out with monotheism back when I was the desert God Yahweh. You and I have consolidated our operations and gotten popular culture to believe in both only two Gods — God and Satan.”

“That's only how people have worshiped in history. That has nothing to do with how you really are.”

“How am I?” said God, his blue eyes piercing with curiosity.

“You are the epitome of goodness. That's your problem. Have you ever noticed a person who is chronically virtuous? They have classic symptoms of irritability, bad moods and outbursts of affect. That is how you are. I entered the snake and poisoned your paradise with evil. You didn't like it so you tried to destroy the world?”

“Destroy the world? What do you mean?” said God.

“Like a science experiment that went bad, you tried to destroy the earth with the great flood. You drowned everyone and everything except Noah and his wife and the pairs of animals in an attempt to start over.”

“That's not true,” said God, raising his voice.

“Yes it is. The whole world is still a mistaken creation.”

“Lucifer, we have radically different attitudes about life. You have always tended toward pessimism. I have favored optimism.”

“You sent down Jesus because you felt guilty for almost destroying the world with that flood. You also sent Jesus for another more important reason because I was doing too good a

“I can have you bound in the shape of a star by your hands and feet and cast you in the abyss and destroy you,” said God with a taunt upper lip.

“You would not do that. The reason you won't use force against me is because you are all light. Even your own Gospel writer John said, ‘In God there is no darkness at all.’”

“That's not true because I created humans: the epitome of light and darkness.”

“In Jesus you incarnated your good side, but now you need to get some balance.” God felt the devil had a good point here but did not acknowledge it to him.

“I contain all opposites and everything in between but even I get out of balance.” God knew he could not constantly watch his back side. But he also knew it was impossible for the consciousness of a good God to produce evil deeds.

“We have had a good meeting today. It feels like we are just getting started. Maybe we should go have dinner,” said God, who stood up.

“I don't see what good it will do but I agree,” said Lucifer, who felt he really would go with God once he was freed because he sensed God was vulnerable and he might be able to trick God into helping him destroy the world.

The doors to the room unlocked. God led him out toward the front porch.

“I know just the place over near the University.”

When they reached the front door of God's house, God was surprised that Satan had the maturity to stay. They walked down the steps and got into Lucifer's black Mustang.

“Okay, God. Where are we off to?”

“Stonewall Jackson's Café. Go forward and take a right at the next light.”

When they got to the café, God and Satan were seated in the corner. It was a causal restaurant that served southern and Mexican fare

“Is this your hangout?” Lucifer said as his head bounced between the oversized menu and observing the relics and flags on the walls. It was a Civil War theme but seemed more like a sports bar.

“I come here once in a while.”

“You really are a salt of the earth type of guy.”

A waitress wearing a bandana over her blond hair came over.

“What will you have this evening?” she said.

“Two Dixie beers for my friend and me. Now as for the main entree, I will have the steaming beef fajitas,” said Lucifer.

“And you?” she said, looking at God.

“The catfish dinner.”

“Very well. Let me get those orders in right away,” she said.

“God, I have figured how you can solve your image problem. In Jesus, you sent the one of all light. Now it's time to get some balance and send the one of all darkness, the Anti-Christ on earth.”

“You've already done with your work on creating Anti-Christ figures like Hilter and serial killers.”

“They have no staying power because they get crushed out by your mostly good society,” said Satan.

“The force of God, goodness eventually wins out,” said God proudly.

“My proposal is that you and I team up together.”

“I think you are right. You need to join back up to side of good again. I know I can handle my own doubting thoughts internally,” said God as the waitress brought the drinks to the table.

“That's not what I have in mind at all. I think we both should work to create a human being that is the Anti-Christ so we can destroy the world together.” The waitress looked at Lucifer as if he were crazy.

“Pay no attention to him. He doesn't get out much,” said God to the waitress.

While they had their drinks and then dinner, they could both see that there was no compromising in their positions to join forces with the other side. Neither would do it.

God was appreciative to get together with Lucifer after all this time. God and the devil parted ways, but they agreed to meet again. The next week, God decided to go the devil's way and took the ninety-mile drive north to Washington.

They went to a Turkish bath that Lucifer said he went to once in a while. God and the devil went into the sauna together with nothing on except white towels wrapped around their waists. Steam was everywhere in this room surrounded with wood paneling.

“It's hot as hell in here,” said God through the steam.

“Just the way I like it,” said Satan laughing.

God and Lucifer continued their debate but could tell it would take a long time to work things out. It all started with that cappuccino that got God and the devil to meet every Friday afternoon.



Editor's note: Andrew Kloak is working on his first novel, *Czech Mate*, a coming-of-age basketball odyssey set in the Czech Republic. “Cappuccino with Mr. X” is his first short story since his recent move from Chicago to Santa Clara, California. Andrew's e-mail address is: akloak@yahoo.com.

Light the Darkness

© Alice Spencer

The forest animals could not remember a time when she did not live among them, probably because their life spans were so much shorter than hers. Jaëktor, the elder owl, told stories of her arrival long ago, but his failing memory was not entirely dependable. As far as most of them were concerned, she had always been there.

She was an odd creature by forest standards, walking erect on two legs and covering her body with long garments of various hues. She had brown hair, which was now turning gray. The animals knew her hair was long, for they had sometimes seen it flowing down her back, but it was normally arranged in a braid around her head. Her large, dark-brown eyes saw and understood a great deal. She was called Dahren, which meant *gentle* in the shared dialect of the forest. In their eyes, she was exceeding fair.

Dahren seemed content enough and lived comfortably in the largest cave they had ever seen. Unlike other caves, hers had a heavy wooden door, which stood open all day in warm weather. The inside of the cave was equally peculiar, outfitted with all manner of exotic furnishings. Rich tapestries softened the rock walls, and thick carpets covered a floor of rough wooden planks. She ate and worked at a long rectangular table, with bunches of dried flowers and herbs hanging overhead. In the evenings, she sat reading in a comfortable chair at her fire before going to sleep on an elevated, cloth-covered bed. As night descended, she lit candles in various parts of the cave. No one knew how she had established her home there or why she lived alone, remote from the rest of her species. They thought she must be lonely, but no one knew for sure.

They did know that Dahren loved them, and they loved her in return. She ministered to their sick and injured and provided comfort in hard times. When conflicts arose among them, she never took sides, but worked to restore harmony. She respected their traditions and included them in hers. In short, she was their good and trusted neighbor.

One fall, the animals realized that a change had come over Dahren. She was still kind to them, but did not smile very often. She spent most of each day in her cave with the door only partially open. She seemed withdrawn, and her eyes were full of sadness. At first, they thought she would be herself again quite soon, but as time went by without any change, they became concerned.

On a sunlit afternoon, as Dahren sat in her cave staring at nothing in particular, she noticed that the light streaming through her doorway was suddenly blocked. Eventually, she got up to investigate. When she stepped over her threshold, she came face to knee with an enormous white bear. Looking

up into his face, she smiled with delight. “Oh, it’s you, Tawny Bear.”

The bear looked embarrassed at this greeting. “I’m not a cub, anymore, Dahren. My tawny coat turned white long ago, and I am known as Rufel.”

“Yes, of course. Forgive me, but I always think of you as you were when you were little. I heard of your elevation to leader of your clan. I’m very proud of you.”

The bear inclined his head in polite acknowledgement. “Thank you. I have come to inquire into the nature of your illness.”

“My illness?”

“Word travels fast in the forest, Dahren. What’s wrong with you?”

“Well, I have been rather sad of late.”

“Why?”

“I feel an urgent need to visit my own land, but I have no way of making such a journey.”

“Why do you need to go back?”

She sighed. “It’s a very long story.”

“If it is that important to your well being, I will take you there and back. I would like to see the land you came from.”

At first, Dahren looked overjoyed at his offer, but anxiety soon replaced joy.

“If you take me, would you wait at a distance for me to join you for the trip home?”

Rufel looked offended at this. “Why don’t you want me to come with you?”

She laid her hand on his paw. “I would love to take you with me, but you would almost certainly be killed if I did so.”

Rufel rolled his eyes. “Has it escaped your notice that I now tower above you? I am ferocious in battle, and my roar alone has frightened intruders into rapid retreat.”

Dahren smiled. “I have heard your roar, and it is frightening indeed. But my people do not rely solely on physical strength in battle. They have weapons that can kill from a great distance. You would not be safe, and my heart would break if you were harmed in any way on my account.”

After some discussion, it was agreed that Rufel would take Dahren to a safe place within walking distance of her long-ago home and wait there for her return. She produced an ancient map and traced their route for him. Rufel was amazed to learn that there was so much to see beyond the huge forest he had inhabited all his life.

After his departure, Dahren prepared for her journey. After packing provisions and warm clothing to guard against the cold autumn nights, she sat up late weaving a wreath of dried herbs and flowers.



When Rufel returned in the morning, they tied Dahren's packages together and strapped them onto his back. Dahren sat in front, using the packages as a backrest, and they set off. Their progress through the forest was impeded by the anxious animals they met. Rufel had to stop repeatedly so that Dahren could assure them of her return. Fortunately, they arrived at the edge of the forest before he arrived at the end of his patience.

Over the next four days, they traveled through every imaginable terrain, stopping to rest at night. Rufel was persistent in his curiosity about Dahren's origins, so she told him her story in installments as they sat at their campfire each evening.

"I was Julia, the only daughter of a noble family. I had an older brother, Michael. Our parents died when I was 12, and I grew up under his care. I was very inquisitive and interested in the healing arts, so my brother arranged for me to study with a doctor who was a family friend. By the age of 18, I was very skilled, and my services were greatly in demand. A woman could not be a doctor, however, and the members of that profession became angry because I was consulted so often and provided treatment without requiring a payment. My family was wealthy, and I didn't need the money, after all. Eventually, they brought charges against me."

At that point, Rufel looked perplexed. "What did they charge you with?"

"With being a witch."

"What is that?"

"An evil woman."

"How could you be evil if you were healing the sick for nothing?"

"They said I healed them by using black magic."

Rufel looked even more confused, but said nothing.

"I was brought to court and ordered to end my work as a healer. I promised to comply. I was deeply in love with Nathaniel, a nobleman who had served in the King's army with Michael, and we were planning to marry. But one night, a neighbor came to plead for help. His wife was apparently dying in childbirth. Their doctor had announced that nothing could be done and left her to die. I knew I could help her, and so I went under cover of darkness. She and the baby lived, to our joy. But word spread, possibly by the servants. I was brought back into court and sentenced to death. My brother was ordered to present me in three days time, to be burned at the stake.

"Michael went immediately to the King, for whom he had won many battles. The King was sympathetic, but could not openly place his friends above the law. He offered a clandestine plan to replace death with exile. According to that plan, my brother would announce that I had taken my life in despair. A coffin would be buried, and I would never be seen again. Michael swore to his King that no one other than the three of us would ever learn of his intervention.

"Over the next 48 hours, carts laden with supplies left

our kingdom at intervals. On the morning of the third day, Michael announced that I had taken my own life. From a hiding place in the tower of our home, I watched my funeral procession. We knew that no one would venture to investigate a coffin buried in unhallowed ground. That night, we mounted Michael's horse, and I left my country forever."

"And a good thing, too," said the horrified Rufel.

Dahren continued. "I could not say goodbye to Nathaniel without endangering my brother, so he was left suffering tremendous grief. His grief was matched by my own — I knew I would never see him again.

"At morning's first light, we were spotted by some of the King's guard. Not knowing who we were, they gave chase, but we eluded them.



"By nightfall, we joined my brother's men, who had transported the supplies to our meeting place. I was by then disguised as a man, and no one asked any questions. We traveled for an additional three days until we came to a huge cave in a dense forest. The men spent several days furnishing my cave, constructing the fireplace and door, and storing supplies. They worked under the watchful gaze of a young owl. Finally, I bade my brother the saddest of goodbyes and began to forge a life for myself in the forest."

It was clear that Rufel did not hold Dahren's species in high esteem. "Why would you want to return?"

Dahren thought for a minute. "It's hard to explain. I suppose it has to do with my advancing age. I need to go back... to see my brother again, if he's still alive... to see my childhood home once more."

At the end of the fourth day, they came to a small overgrown, wooded area. Dahren made Rufel promise that he would not leave that area until she returned in two days. "If there are others with me, do not come out until they are gone."

In the morning, she disguised herself in odd clothing and left, carrying the wreath in a sack. The two days went by very slowly. Just as Rufel began to worry that something had befallen her, he heard her voice. Peering out of the thicket, he saw her coming toward him with several of her own kind, who were carrying large packs on their backs. They lowered the packs to the ground, accepted some golden pieces of metal from Dahren, and were gone.

She joined him again, looking much younger and happier than when she left. Over dinner, she told him of her adventure. She had knocked at the door of her old home and told the servant that Jules was calling to see Michael. Michael recognized *Jules* as his childhood nickname for her and came to the door immediately. They had a joyous reunion, and he introduced her to his wife and children. Secrecy was essential because the laws had not changed substantially and ignorance still flourished in the kingdom.

“Did you see Nathaniel?”

“Only from a distance. Michael took me to a vantage point from where we could see his house. I saw him ride up to his door on horseback, where he was greeted by his children. He looked happy and well, and that did my heart so much good.”

That morning, she had said goodbye to Michael and his family, presenting the medicinal wreath she had made for them. Her brother sent her off with many provisions, including bolts of cloth, books, candles, and foodstuffs not available in the forest.

As they loaded the packs onto his back, Rufel said, “These should last you forever.”

“They will last my lifetime,” said Dahren.

Their return trip was uneventful, though a bit slower due to the heavy packs of provisions. Excitement spread rapidly through the forest as they made their way to Dahren’s cave, and hundreds of eyes witnessed her arrival. When Rufel took his leave, he lowered his head, and she placed her hand on the side of his face in a gesture of affection and gratitude.

“Will you come to Light the Darkness?”

Rufel considered her invitation. “I never understood that ritual of yours,” he said. “I will be busy with the affairs of my clan after my absence, but I will be with you in spirit at the very least.”

After a long rest, Dahren spent some time unpacking and storing her supplies. Eventually, she began her annual preparations for Light the Darkness, the shortest day of the year. The animals were reassured by this indication that life had returned to normal.

On the eve of Light the Darkness, Dahren lit candles throughout her cave and all around it — on tree stumps, logs, and rocks. There had been an ice storm the night before, and the candlelight was reflected by the ice that coated every surface. The animals had never seen such a display. They knew she would also prepare a banquet for them on Light the Darkness morn.

In the morning, they arrived to find a breakfast unlike any they had enjoyed before. The favorite food of every animal was there, and some delicacies they had never seen before besides. As they came forward to meet Dahren, the forest was shaken by the most incredible roar they had ever heard, a roar so loud that twinkling musical tones issued from the icy branches overhead.

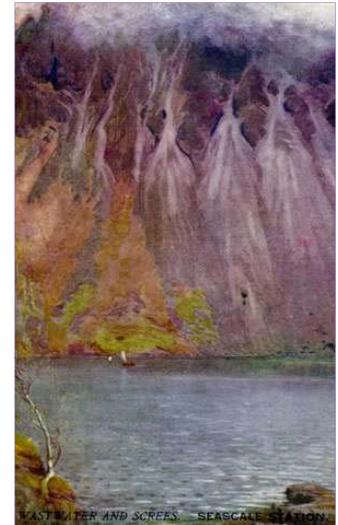
Dahren looked up and smiled. “Rufel is here in spirit,” she said. And with that, she joined her neighbors in lighting the darkness.

Two Rainbows in the Wind

© Lee Prosser



Strength, bright colors of magic,
love comes sweetly;
she is my beauty,
my love;
she is an image,
a love perished long ago;
when she and I were lovers,
we loved freely and tenderly,
our bodies lost happily
and found happily
together like lovers now
become as one when we were once
two rainbows in the wind.



Peace Spirits

© Sonja Britton

Those who’ve walked this way before
in spirit are touching my heart,
then call to me to search for more
and lead me to a world apart.

They live within the sand and rock
and have sisters in the sky,
they whisper now in spirit talk
of time and years gone by.

They walk with me among the thorns
to touch silk blossoms there,
and beckon me to what adorns
far mountains that look bare.

I cannot hear the noise of greed
or smell the stench of death.
When spirits call, I feel no need
but linger there short of breath.

The spirits of peace dwelling here
watch over this beautiful land,
and cast a spell on those who dare
encounter a magic hand.

“In a general sense, all artists are shamans, insomuch as they are channeling images or concepts on behalf of the collective.”

— Vicki Noble

“To create is to touch the spirit.”

— Michell Cassou and Stewart Cubley



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Themes: Each issue of **Voices** is focused on an announced theme, in addition to a seasonal theme. Content is not necessarily restricted to themes, however.

Next issue's theme: Spirit of the New Millennium

Submissions deadline: November 30, 2000



Editor's note: My apologies for this issue's long overdue arrival. With limited time at my disposal, I decided to make completing my book my highest priority, and it took longer than anticipated as all such projects do. *The Old Detective's Daughter* will be published soon. I'll keep you posted.

Voices will no longer be a quarterly publication because I can't promise to maintain that schedule. It will be published whenever I have enough material to warrant a new issue and enough time to put it together.

The Higher Point of View

© Bob Mason

Some sage once wisely defined flying as, "Hours and hours of pure boredom interspersed with moments of pure terror." A pretty accurate thumbnail description, I must admit. But if that covered the subject completely, why would anyone go to the expense and take the time and effort to learn? I can't answer for the rest of the world's flyers, but for me it was the exquisite sense of freedom and the sheer beauty that the aerial view affords. From a thousand feet, all things below appear neat and tidy. The dirt and the squalor just don't project that far, and even a grimy steel mill appears majestic with its immense size and its brilliant ribbons of molten steel pouring from the ladles into the molds to be turned into glowing ingots. Then there is the top side of a cloud layer, which from the ground looks dark and threatening. From above, it is snowy and as you soar smoothly over it, you can trace your path by the shadow of your airplane which races across the gleaming surface surrounded by a halo of light. If there are other planes in the sky near you, it is still easy to pick out which shadow is yours. None of the others will be wearing the halo... only yours. Even something as mundane as a miniature golf course takes on a special beauty when viewed from above at night. With the overhead lights shielded so that their rays are directed down, they are turned into jade jewelry on a black velvet backdrop. On clear nights, cities sparkle like precious jewels with their multi-colored lights. The New York



metropolitan area is a gigantic blaze of color, stretching out for miles. Denver, Colorado, though smaller, projects a fascinating image because there are no outlying rural areas where the light gradually dims at the edges. Instead there is an intense glitter that abruptly stops at the edge of the developed area, while for miles in all directions, the surrounding countryside is velvety black. The effect is that of a jeweler with a magnificent display of multifaceted diamonds, rubies, and emeralds... the whole spectrum of the rainbow spread out on a black velvet display cloth. From

higher altitudes, the heavens also put on quite a display at night. Above the polluted lower layers of the atmosphere, the stars have a clarity and sparkle that is rarely seen from the surface by mere earthbound mortals.

Probably the most interesting and unusual sight that it has ever been my privilege to see from the air was Lake Erie on a clear, bright, sunny day in early March.

There had been a thaw earlier in the year, and the ice had broken up into randomly shaped chunks which had then separated and refrozen. The chunks were thicker than the newly formed ice, and their color was a medium gray while the space between them was a deep blue. There was no snow on the lake, and the net result was the appearance of several hundred square miles of a beautiful blue-and-gray mosaic tile floor.

And you wonder why we fly.