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## When women must rest: Come then the spirits in white

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El Rio Debajo del Rio

There is a place in soul and psyche, *La selva subterránea*, The underground forest... a mysterious locus which acts as *El refugio*, a protected place where the exhausted spirit can safely rest... and where attracted by *La luz violeta* the violet light from worldly wounds, angels come to tend to souls with infinite tenderness.

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**Things are torn apart; Things need to be given rest ...** Perhaps you grew up in the forests, lake lands and farmlands like I did. There, lightning and hail storms were called "cutting storms," and "reaper storms," as in Grim Reaper, for the lightning, the whipping rain and wind cut down living beings all around: livestock, sometimes a woman trying to bring the sheets from the line, a man trying to turn the red tractor towards home.

But, most often harmed by these bellowing storms were the sources of solace and nourishment for others: the flower and food bearing-plants and trees.

Like us. Very like us after we've been through one sort of storm or another emotionally, spiritually, psychologically, physically. Broken to some degree in bearing ... thoughts ideas, hopes cut down or left on the ground unharvested or perhaps never having yet gone from flower to fruiting.

But, all is not lost.

In the woodlands and farmlands after a great storm, then, entire families would creep out from their root cellars and walk out over the land, bending to see what help the crops, the flowers, the trees needed.

The littlest children picked up the strewn boughs full of leaves and fruits. These fruits would be ripened on window sills or consumed right away. The older children propped up plants still living but slashed. The old people with their secret recipes for mud poultices would bind the broken limbs back up using kindling splints, and often enough, old polka-dot dress rag bandages.

Everyone would dismantle and bury that which had been struck down irrevocably.

These endeavors after the storm, were considered *rest* for the plants, creatures, *rest* for the land. An oddly spiritual rest for the human beings too.

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**Though we've been taught by modern culture to think of *rest* as 'doing nothing,'** we can see that resting a field, means enriching it with nutrients and opening its top layers to the sun and rain for a period of time; that resting the plants into more ease after a storm means harvesting and healing them, taking to the grave to be turned over into new soil that which cannot live... and all the while, watching over the land to see what else it may need in order to again thrive.

This is *rest* in the deepest spiritual sense of the word. Not idleness. Rather, considered thought, then actions that are reparative, regenerative, relevant.

**In our time together here in weeks past, we detailed the first three staves of the story 'The Handless Maiden,' the story of a gifted woman called to a great destiny as healer, restorer of souls and spirits, a transformative force in the making... but** this trajectory was interrupted when her father traded her to the Devil in return for great riches for himself.

Thus, she took another pathway to reach the fullness of her gifts; the pathway of suffering. Because she was so pure, the Devil arriving to claim her, could not consume her, and thereby orders the father to cut off his daughters arms to disfigure her, make her less pure. The father severs his daughter's hands, but the daughter is incorrupt. The Devil still cannot take her, and he exits enraged.

The father offers to keep her in luxury to offset his great spiritual crime. But, the handless maiden chooses instead to wander the wild roads where she is fed by fruit trees that bend down to nourish her. This orchard of living compassion belongs to a king who falls in love with her. They marry and soon the maiden is expecting a child, but the king is called away to battle.

When the queen-mother sends the king a letter telling him a wondrous child has been born, the Devil is waiting for the messenger, ensorcells him to fall into a deep sleep, and then changes the letter to one that says the handless maiden has given birth to a half-dog.

Though horrified, the king replies with a love letter, telling his old mother to protect the handless maiden and child. Again the Devil intervenes, changing the king's message to read, Kill the handless maiden and her horrible child.

Back and forth the letters fly between king and queen-mother, the Devil changing the loving messages to hideous ones each time... until the old queen believes her son has gone mad. The Devil finally changed

the king's last letter to his mother to read: Kill the handless maiden and child, and keep their tongues and eyes as proof to me.

It is then the old queen hastens to bind the newborn infant to the handless maiden's breast. Veiling them both, the old queen tells the handless maiden she must flee for her life. The women weep and kiss one another good-bye.

**The Fourth Stave: With heart full of a wild and bewildered faith the handless maiden wandered, stunned.**

So much lost: safety, security, regard, love, sense of self, a protected environs for raising up the new life of her sweet child.

Uncomprehending, she traveled onward with her little babe at her breast, nourishing her child even though in a famine herself... until she came to the largest, wildest forest she had ever seen.

It was daunting to think of entering this forest. "Wild animals may kill us," she thought. "Poisonous trees may trip me and break our bones. Evil spirits lurk and I shall be stolen from myself, and then there will be no one to provide nurture; my child will die."

She could have turned away from this dark tanglewood. Her own father who severed her hands had promised to keep her in riches for the rest of her life in compensation for what he had done to her. But, no, she could not go back to that, even though there was now a price on her head and that of her precious child's.

**Thus she chose the gyre she did not know:** the terra incognita, the other-worldly forest. With heart full of wild and bewildered faith, she stepped off into the unknown.

Picking her way over and through and around, trying to find her own pathway, stopping to nurse her child, then finding her way again under thickets and heavy limbs, deeper and more deeply still she traveled into the forest. Yet, for all its dark timber, all its thick plaits of canopy, the woods seemed far less threatening than who and what paced outside the forest wishing to harm the handless maiden and her child.

**Thence, near dark, the maiden and her child could be seen covered with burrs, their clothing torn by thorns,** hems muddy, hair disheveled... It was then that a spirit in white began to float before them, seeming to lead them first this way, then that way.

Sensing this apparition as a kindred spirit, the mother with her babe followed without asking who or why or how.

Came they then, handless maiden, little child, and angel in white, to a poor inn with green grass roof and great guardian trees on all sides. Over the door of the inn was deeply carved these sacred words: *Here, All Dwell Free.*

The inn run by woods people who wore woven garments and were exceedingly kind. Another maiden in white led the handless maiden into the inner rooms, and knew her by name. The child was laid down.

"How do you know me?" asked the maiden.

?We of this forest follow these matters, my queen. Rest now.?

And the young queen stayed seven years at this inn, taught and tended to by the spirits in white. Over time she was calmed, and her child grew beautifully.

**All was well for the handless maiden, except one matter. Her heart cried out for the king who once loved her so.**

You see, shortly after the handless maiden and her child fled the castle, the king returned home from battle. His old mother wept to him, ?Why would you have me kill two innocents?? and she displayed to him the eyes and the tongues of animals, pretending she had killed the handless maiden and the child.

Seeing these terrible proofs, the king staggered and wept inconsolably. His mother, seeing his grief was real, quickly told him these were the eyes and tongue of animals... that rather than following the dastardly orders, she had sent the young queen and her child fleeing for their lives.

The king, so brokenhearted, thus vowed to go without eating or drinking, and to travel as far as the sky is blue in order to find his handless maiden and their beloved child. Thus, he too, began to wander the unknown lands. His hands became black, his beard moldy brown like moss, his eyes red-rimmed and parched.

When finally he too came to the edge of the same massive forest he stepped into it hoping to die, to forget forever all the purity and hope he had so feasted on once. He felt his life bereft of all meaning now that his handless maiden was nowhere to be found.

**Soon hunters mistook his ragged and torn appearance to mean that he was merely a beast of the fields.** He was pursued and hounded by them relentlessly then... each hunter wanting to bring down the great beast, to be able to gloat that he had killed the likes of that which no one had ever before seen. Little did the marksmen realize, they were not hunting an animal, but a man of true heart gone mad with grief.

Thus, as years passed, the king who looked like and lived like a lonely animal baying in sadness, became scarred by thousands of flints that missed his vital parts, yet lodged painfully in his flesh, slowing his gait, causing him to breath poorly. But, still he kept on, looking, seeking any sign of his great love.

He kept on, that is, until one night. It was then, standing on a rise above the valley floor, that an archer with a steady arm and a strong eye, wounded the king with arrow after arrow. And the great hulk that was once the king fell side over side down the talus slope, thence lying still at the bottom, his mouth open in a stupor. And there he laid unmoving on the floor of the tanglewood forest.

Yet, for those who have eyes to see, soon a force greater than himself appeared and stood watch over the wounded king as he lay near death in *La selva subterránea*...

**Thus, you and I, dear reader, having entered *La selva subterránea* with all the souls in this story, will gather together again next time for the fifth and last stave of this ?initiation via endurance,? this love**

story of intuition and faith between soul and spirit...

**As in the tale, most of us arrive at *La selva subterránea* exhausted from being battered about by life.** Yet too, we are also utterly compelled into doing all we can to protect the "living child" of our callings and doings in this world. Think of Mary arriving in Egypt in such fatigue, she too having birthed a numinous Child whom she protected by fleeing a murderous Herod. What angelic forces might have been waiting for her and the Child there? What kinds of rest might she have sought and received?

When we think of the humble inn, we might also consider too Sarai's woven and billowing tent, open on one side only to the windy plains, but with all other tent walls held closed to shelter what? Just the cooking pots? More. Also a veiled room where likely "angelic" was spoken: Sophia, sapientia, concordatus, and *rest*-oration.

We too often find we can sometimes apprehend the meaningful sacred and not only the commonplace in such "enclosed spaces" where "all dwell free" ... especially, these kinds of free:

- *ingenuitas*, giving free birth to ideas without hindrance;
- and *ingenuitas* again, as in being born not indentured to an idea, realm or dictate.

Other kinds of "dwelling free" associated with rest and revivification:

- *excusatus*, being free from wrongful blame;
- *securus*, free from being one of "the worried-hurried" of the world;
- *solvere*, to free oneself, or to release another, to let go.

To dwell free can be understood as significant changes of attitude?but changes proposed by spirit.... a more effective trajectory, aim?but also, led by the angelic.

**Gaining real traction in the outer world, is often based on seeing from an entirely *eternal* point of view as opposed to a finite one only; seeing from an angelic point of view, rather than a merely egoistic one.**

The arrival at the simple inn with the words indicating that one will be freed from egoistic tangles here, is the threshold experience of learning to see that we have always carried a place of respite and revelation. That it is always there for us, inhabited by the angelic....

**And what do angels do?** Imagine they bend over us, as we once bent over the land after storm, harvesting from us, showing us what can yet be ripened even though broken in some part... showing us what can be nourishment even so. Mending, bracing, tending to.

You've met angels in disguise during your lifetime. You can see them clearly then. Like the spirits in white in this tale, they help what can be helped, prop what can be propped, staying with, bearing witness, remaining near, watching over, listening... and at the same time, letting die what must die -- and yet -- determining what new life can emerge next...

This too is our work in the garden, in the orchard, in the fields, in the forest, in any temenos.

**The old queen in the tale... old women see much, say little, but when they do say...**

No matter how much the Devil lies and tries to change the beautiful messages about a woman's real life

to mean-spirited, jealous, and life-draining ones, the king's mother truly sees... and refuses to sacrifice the daughter? -- the emergent gifted self -- one more time.

In modern terms, such a guiding old mother would not muffle her daughter, would not warn her to never speak her truth, would not encourage her to pretend to be less in order to manipulate more.

This wild old mother portrayed in the tale, would encourage and strengthen, reminding the daughters of the marauding forces loose in culture, but also outlining restoration, and the new high energy to be found in sanctity of thought... instead of merely mundane, repetitious, and nattering thoughts. The queen mother realizes that too much evil projection begins to murder the soul: Thus she tells the handless maiden to unfasten herself from that drama, and to flee elsewhere.

**The king of the psyche represents an attitude of stalwartness, endurance, an incandescent love of the true self and the soul that cannot be extinguished.** However, since this is earth and not heaven, this attitude of loving others, loving God, loving self will very often be tested.

I myself, like many of you perhaps, sometimes feel fatigued unto death from being "tested." When is this test going to be over? I ask God. Not just "over for now," but over-over? Fini. Done. Done, really really done? I seem to ask this very often. Possibility too often. Like a child with only one interrogative adverb to her name: When, when, when?

Wrong adverb. Better ones: What, Why and How? Thus, one of the most over-riding and patient answers that continues to rain down on my head in response to all this, is that Love never tested, like steel never hammered, may never grow truly limber and able.

The king in this tale is in the discernment battle of his life. He represents a sacred aspect of psyche that does not love the Life Force and Creator in merely pretty, romantic ways, but with a not-clean-shaven, gnarled roots kind of love which will not keel over at first blow, nor shrivel up when battered with hatred and retribution... as the Devil had hoped the King would do upon receiving the devil's lying letter.

The end of the fourth stave of "The Handless Maiden" tale, ends with the king near death, that is, one entire aspect of self that carries a huge outpouring of love, longing, memory, emotion and soma -- so much so that lesser people mistake him as an animal... rather than as what he is, fully and preciously human. And isn't that the mess of modern culture: that those very attributes are often thought of as subhuman rather than as sacred...

**For old believers like us, one of the most productive questions might go something like this:** Can the "I and Thou" stand together in resonance, despite whatever contravening forces try to pry them apart or try to alienate them from one another by spinning distortions, by attempting to quash all charisms, by attempting to murder pure Love? ....

The Handless Maiden tale proposes an answer -- and may we all hand-create such refuge whenever we have need:

Thus she chose the gyre she did not know: the terra incognita, the other-worldly forest. With heart full of wild and bewildered faith, she stepped off into the unknown... toward a place of rest where angelic viewpoints are offered to the soul, where the promise given, is kept: *Here, all dwell free.*

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