

A New Story

I say to Her, "I would like a new story please. Mirthful and soulful and sad. Please."

"Ahhh....my child.

It's time for an old story.

As old as a dog whose whiskers turned pale,

As soft as a kiss on the brow where it fell,

As sharp as the knife held up by the male."

Thus, here is the story She wished me to tell. Please.

In the far kingdoms of the land there was once a child destined into priesthood. Ordained from birth, for it was the nature of the people of the place to stake early claims.

The child loved to meander and dawdle about, to linger in dreams and surrender to a deepening sense of belonging elsewhere, outside the stone temple with its statues and altars and too many candles.

The child kept company with storms and their rains. With the hollow of trees. With rocks and stones and pebbles and boulders and entire frightful mountains. Frightful only if you forget to breathe.

The child slid around requested priesthood training schedules, skirting expected responsibilities. Arriving to lessons, but only so. Always tardy, always first to rumble away, barefeet, fingers lightly fluttering on the air as they began to ascend the hill by the river by the temple of gods so old their names were never written to begin with.

The tall priest with the blank face fumed inside. First came the scoldings. Words mattered little in the child's ears. Then, came long ruby lines along the child's back. The child sat, oblivious

while meaningless pain streamed down in salty droplets. Nothing mattered if there was an outside to leap upon later on.

He knew, the tall priest, there was to be no taming of that one.

Not yet.

It happened on a day the child was out, as always. That was every day. But that was a different day. Lying strewn along a patch of moss in the meadows above the temple, the child rolled about, stretched all limbs, caressed shoulders and belly button, knees and feet.

Then, the child touched with curiosity the very centre. A caress. Nothing too unusual.

“But. This,” She tells me, “was a different day.”

Suddenly. Unexpectedly. A wave catapulted its way from there to up above, and down below. The child jumped on feet trembling with a wholly unfamiliar sensation. And, the child knew, a holy sensation. For the child was more well-practiced than any other child of these meadows in the sacred act of reverence. Of awe. Of curiosity. Of intensity.

The child stroked the place again. Gently. In wonder. In appreciation. Feeling the change of the body. Blossoming with blood. Fattened. Liquidy. A sense inside akin to a rare delicacy in the mouth, to a magicking of two rainbows expressing in the eyes, to the sound of flutes harmonizing near the camp fires over gentle autumn nights.

A while after, sweet saliva in the mouth, eyes closed to all but the inner sense of ecstatic joy, an explosion. A pulsation. An understanding:

Adulthood has come.

The newborn adult rushed down to the temple. The sense of an end, and, the child-no-more thought, of a new beginning.

“I promised,” She intervenes, in this salacious, barely appropriate story She's chosen to tell me today, “I promised you upon your own request a story soulful and sad. The mirth now ends.”

*Tragedies we've learned to inflict upon each other.
And specifically, on women.*

Right away, the tall priest knew. He has been hunting for signs. For the highlighted cheeks. For a breathing that has expanded, learned to come in and out in a new way, through soundings never heard before.

That night, under the lights of too many candles, the smell of Myrtle in the air, the tall priest with the blank face laid down the child that had been.

He unfolded her. She was afraid but willing. A kiss on the brow. An old dog that he was, whiskers turned pale. With a sharp knife he sliced off the tip of her delicate centre.

The woman screamed. And screamed. And screamed.

She did not know.

A ritual not disclosed to priestesses-to-be of the ritual. A ritual concocted by whom exactly? Gods? Men? Venus? Mars? The story that needs to be told?

Because see, I invented none of this. This is not of a myth I created. Just a story that asks to be told. It is old. So old. Yet, we cannot face it with the equanimity reserved for the atrocities of things that passed away, that moved along, that fell off the face of the earth as we moved forward, humanity, with its insatiable gods-given need to explore, to experiment, to see what is and what can be, and yes, to inflict pain and yes, to control...because this story is still being told.

I forgot. I forgot there are stories I do not like the telling of.

Even now, not too far from here, women scream and scream and scream.

“What is better,” I ask Her. “To know once and never again, or to not know at all?”

Gently, her arms wrap around my mind.

“My time with you for today for now for this sadness has come to an end. All I can add, my child, is that the priestess continued to visit her mountains and meadows, her trees and her caves each and every day. There, she found and revered the art of listening to those subtler notes of joy. Nuanced harmonies that can only ever be heard when the melody’s subdued.

There are gifts of a different kind. Gifts not meant for everyone.

And does this give you solace, child?”